Natural Stirrings at the Grassroots:
Development, Doctrine, and the Dignity Principle*

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Abstract

Grassroots-led initiatives are the centerpiece of development efforts in the global Bahá'í community as well as those of other practitioners. This paper provides an overview of modernization, Marxian, and civil society paradigms and how these frameworks explain "stirrings at the grassroots." A new approach, development with dignity, is presented, supported by principles evident in the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith and other religions, as well as recent research in a number of disciplines. The paper concludes with historical lessons from the three main paradigms and the experience of the Bahá'í community, and suggestions for further investigation of the "dignity principle."

Résumé

Dans la communauté internationale bahá'íe, tout comme dans d'autres organisations, les initiatives venant de la base sont la pierre angulaire des efforts de développement. L'article brosse un tableau des paradigmes du modernisme, du marxisme et de la société civile, et explique comment ces écoles de pensée interprètent les « manifestations spontanées de la base ». Une nouvelle approche, le développement dans la dignité, est présentée, laquelle se fonde à la fois sur des principes énoncés dans les Écrits sacrés de la foi bahá'íe et ceux d'autres religions, et sur des études récentes menées dans diverses disciplines. Enfin, l'article présente les leçons historiques à tirer des trois grands paradigmes examinés, montre l'expérience de la communauté bahá'íe à cet égard et suggère des pistes pour approfondir la recherche sur le « principe de dignité ».

Resumen

Las iniciativas fundamentadas a nivel de comunidad son el enfoque de los esfuerzos del desarrollo en la comunidad bahá'í global al igual que las de otros ejercitantes. Este artículo provee una visión general de los paradigmas tanto modernista, Marxista como de sociedad civil, y examina cómo estas estructuras explican las "movimientos a nivel de comunidad." Se presenta una nueva aproximación, el desarrollo con dignidad, respaldada por los principios

evidentes en los escritos sagrados de la Fe Bahá'í y otras religiones y por investigaciones recientes en varias disciplinas. El artículo concluye con lecciones históricas aportadas por los tres paradigmas principales y por la experiencia de la comunidad bahá'í, con sugerencias para una investigación más amplia del "principio de la dignidad."

Introduction

In 1983, the Universal House of Justice, the internationally elected administrative body of the global Bahá'í community, offered the following guidance to the Bahá'í world on social and economic development activities initiated by the Bahá'í community: "Progress in the development field will largely depend on natural stirrings at the grassroots, and it should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top" (*Messages* 379.6).

The importance of this principle has been reiterated in subsequent statements issued from the Bahá'í World Centre: ". . . grassroots action must begin simply and in a way that can be managed by the community itself" (*Bahá'í Social*); "Bahá'í social and economic development focuses on increasing the capacity of the friends to make decisions about the spiritual and material progress of their communities and then implement them" (*Evolution*).

Although the present focus on development within local communities has tremendous implications for how the Bahá'í world approaches the challenges of development at this time, it has a broader significance as well. If we view the global and ethnically diverse Bahá'í community as a microcosm of humanity, then the principle of stirrings at the grassroots referred to by the Universal House of Justice is important not only for development in the Bahá'í community; it has implications for development in the world at large.

In 1983, when the Universal House of Justice released its first letter on social and economic development, the ineffectiveness of many projects and programs in the developing countries, which were planned and carried out from a distant capital or foreign country, was already making itself known. Similarly, in industrialized countries such as the U.S., the U.K., and Canada, government investment in programs over the previous two decades intended to quickly eradicate problems such as poverty and crime had met only limited success, along with growing political opposition.[1] Anecdotal accounts of practitioners and the academic literature abounded with stories of the misallocation of precious government revenues and international agency funds for projects and programs that either bypassed those people most in need or did not achieve the anticipated success. This is not an excuse for the ongoing retreat of governments, their

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1. For lack of better alternatives, the terms *industrialized* and *developing countries* are used throughout this paper, but this in no way implies that the industrialized countries represent a model for development.

bilateral aid agencies, and multilateral agencies from collective responsibility for problems such as poverty, illiteracy, poor health, and a deteriorating natural environment within their own countries and elsewhere. But it does explain why nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have become major actors in development, since they are seen as having closer links with people at the grassroots. In parallel fashion, attention in the industrialized countries has been turning to the nonprofit sector as a significant agency of change in the social and economic development field. These major shifts underscore a single overriding lesson that has been learned from the decades of failure: engagement of people at the community level is fundamental to addressing development problems.

Yet despite the widespread acceptance at the policy level by governments, NGOs, and international agencies that involvement of people at the grassroots level is critically important to "success" in development, little attention has been paid to how community-based development fits conceptually into overall development processes. What factors account for people choosing to initiate, organize, and direct their own development? On the surface, this would seem to be a question having an impact on only a small area of development policy. But the answer to it is actually central to development theory itself.

For some time, development theory has been described as being in a crisis. Expressions like "post-development," "the end of economics," "beyond the impasse" are becoming commonplace in the academic literature (Rahnema; Buarque; Schuurman). Along with the inability of theoretical models to account for the lack of success of many development programs of all ideological persuasions over the last century, the crisis has also been attributed to a few other factors. First is the failure of development theory to predict or provide a viable alternative to the current unsatisfactory patterns of globalization, the subject of much debate. A second cause of the impasse is the world environmental crisis and the acknowledgement that if the goal of development is to attain the lifestyle currently practiced in the industrialized countries, then it is clearly not viable on a global scale. Finally, for some time feminists have criticized the dominant models of development for leaving women out of the process altogether. The latter two critiques have gained wide support and significance over the past few decades.

There is yet another challenge for development theory. If theoretical frameworks cannot provide a viable explanation for why and how development is practiced at the community level, then they are deficient in accounting for a phenomenon that is not only important for the Bahá'í community, but that is documented in empirical research and widely accepted in practice and policy.[2]

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2. Realization that work was needed in this area this arose out of the author's twelve-year experience conducting empirical research on community-based housing in both the developing and industrialized countries, during which it became apparent there was no macro-level theoretical framework in which to place the findings.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: to investigate how or whether current development theories account for natural stirrings at the grassroots and to offer a framework for an alternative explanation based on an understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation that might represent the foundation of a new theory of development. The paper first provides a tentative definition for stirrings at the grassroots. This is followed by a description of the three main paradigms of development theory and how each explains stirrings at the grassroots. An alternative theoretical framework derived from the Bahá'í Revelation is then sketched out, including a new organizing principle of development, a new engine for development that is the force behind it, three potential challenges to this development framework, and a brief description of the model as it is practiced in the Bahá'í community. Following this is a discussion of lessons learned, prescriptions for action, as well as a series of propositions applying this new principle to all three paradigms.

Several operating principles were used in writing the paper. First, the paper uses a historical method to present the evolution of thought on development, with the proposed theory derived from the Bahá'í Revelation presented as building on what has come before. Concepts drawn from the Bahá'í writings are used as a lens for understanding the past and looking to the future. The paper is not, strictly speaking, a detailed textual analysis of the Bahá'í writings pertaining to development, nor is it primarily an explanation of development as it is applied within the Bahá'í community, although both these features are included. Second, development is assumed to be a global challenge focused on more than the developing countries. Knowledge and empirical examples are therefore drawn from both the First and Third Worlds. Third, although development theory has traditionally been dominated by the field of economics, there is an attempt in the paper to move past this. The discussions therefore draw on a number of areas of scholarship, all with long traditions that could only be very briefly summarized. Fourth, the paper includes an attempt to anticipate and address major criticisms that might arise from what is being proposed. Finally, the paper refers to the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith as one, if not the primary, source of legitimacy for a new theory of development, but it is hoped that the case being presented at the very least offers food for thought or is convincing without this.

"Natural Stirrings at the Grassroots": A Definition

It is possible to propose a working definition based loosely on the Universal House of Justice's statement on stirrings at the grassroots, with the hope that it helps discriminate between what may or may not be grassroots development while at the same time incorporating the maximum range of possible activities. Three things about community-based development can be deduced. First, the initiation of change occurs at the community level ("natural" and "grassroots").

Second, the change is collective, involving some degree of organization beyond the individual or household level ("stirrings"). Third, ongoing direction of this change involves people at the grassroots ("the driving force"). While we are proposing that for an activity to be considered as grassroots development all three attributes should probably be evident, they may not all hold in the strict sense for every case. For example, looking at the first factor, community-level initiation, although a child vaccination campaign must involve people at the community level at the implementation stage, it would not often be initiated by them and requires a high degree of centralized planning. On the second attribute, collective organization of community-based development, micro-enterprises (or small-scale businesses) are examples of grassroots development, but many subsist for long periods with only a loose, informal type of organization. Finally, on communities being the driving force of change, education reform might be initiated by an individual community but requires a higher-level coordination of activities for the purposes of funding and curriculum development. Thus, if grassroots development is to be a useful concept, care must be exercised in imposing too rigid or narrow a definition.

Despite the ambiguities, if we apply these three indicators as the basis of a definition, the phenomenon of natural stirrings at the grassroots has a long history. Numerous examples can be found in both the developing and the industrialized countries. A growing body of literature has documented the efforts of people in poor urban communities in the developing countries—with or without the help of governments, foreign development agencies, and NGOs—who form community-based housing organizations to engage in new housing construction or rehabilitation, or improve the physical infrastructure in their communities (Vakil, "Problems and Prospects"; Arrossi et al.; Turner). Although not without its problems, this experience clearly demonstrates the capacity of people to contribute to their own development within the constraints of very limited resources and sometimes even political opposition. In the rural sector, a powerful example of grassroots development is one in Bangladesh that began as a community-level experiment with small-scale lending to rural women for launching microenterprises, an approach which has spread not only to other developing countries but to North America, Europe, and Scandinavia as well (Holcombe).

Other examples of community-based development can be found in the industrialized countries. In North America, community development corporations have been in existence for several decades and, with some government and private foundation assistance, have built and rehabilitated housing and substantially reduced crime in inner-city urban neighborhoods despite the enormous psychological challenges of hopelessness, racism, and public apathy (Vidal; Perry et al.; Medoff and Sklar). In rural and First Nations regions, people at the grassroots level have initiated nonprofit economic

development organizations, cultural development projects, and healing circles in the face of fierce challenges such as persistent poverty, substance abuse, long-standing oppression, and colonial domination (Douglas).

In the world Bahá'í community, the roots of community-based development extend back to the latter half of the nineteenth century with the founding of primary schools in Iran (Momen). In more recent times, primary schools, radio stations oriented to development processes, and race unity education projects are some examples of sustained development at the grassroots level.

From this description, it can be seen that grassroots development is not a minor, regionally concentrated, or recent set of activities. It is therefore essential that a theory of development provide an explanation for it.

Development Doctrine and Stirrings at the Grassroots

Development theory has been in existence for centuries, but within the last century it has focused almost exclusively on what are now known as the developing countries. Consequently, the theories discussed below make little reference to the industrialized regions, rendering justification to the frequently held notion that these regions are already "developed." A bit of inspection reveals that much of this theory also applies to the industrialized countries. The following sections provide brief descriptions of the most important of these theories, many of them economic, and their explanations for stirrings at the grassroots. They fall within three main categories: modernization, Marxian, and civil-society-based paradigms.[3]

The Modernization Paradigm: For Profit

We begin with the theoretical perspective that has the longest history: the neoclassical or modernization approach to development. Its roots stretch back to the ideas of the philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Voltaire and Diderot, who proposed that humans are rational and that progress involves processes that are objective and universally applicable. The neoclassical economics tradition has continued to be influenced by the work of the famous Adam Smith, who investigated the nature of the market economy and the "invisible hand"; Thomas Malthus, who focused on the role of population growth in development; and David Ricardo, who formulated the notion of comparative advantage in trade. In the first half of the twentieth century, this tradition was further developed by Joseph Schumpeter, who emphasized technological innovation, and later by Walt Whitman Rostow, who formulated his universal theory of stages of economic growth using nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe as a historical model.

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3. A useful, unbiased, and thorough tracing of the historical evolution of development theory can be found in Martinussen. Also helpful is the review by Hettne.

After World War II, the earliest "structuralist" approaches to development focused on the role of saving and capital investment in economic growth, which led to the notion that development could be planned. Later, other considerations were taken into account such as the barriers to industrial development, which was regarded at the time as the principle engine of progress. The notion of "worlds" emerged, with a center-periphery model that placed the industrialized countries at the center and the developing countries at the periphery. Others such as Gunnar Myrdal began suggesting that development involved not only the industrial sector of the economy, but agriculture and social equality as well. Additional areas of study that emerged were "new institutional economics" (an examination of the structures and strategies within firms as an important determinant of market dynamics) and the "informal" (or small-scale petty commodity) sector of the economy which was viewed as connected to traditional societies and would eventually be replaced by modern economic practices. Still others concerned themselves with how productivity in the agricultural sector might be improved by exploring such factors as technology, rural policy, and land reform.

Although the modernization tradition has been the domain of the discipline of economics, contributions have also been made by sociologists such as Max Weber, who delved into the relationships between individual behavior, bureaucratic institutions, and the economy. Another important sociological notion was that of a dualistic society, in which it was proposed that the social patterns and habits of poor people become entrenched in what has been called a "culture of poverty."

Political scientists' role in the evolution of the modernization approach began with the work of David Easton, Almond and Powell, and Lucien Pye, who explored the importance of Western-style democratic institutions as a necessary condition for modernization. Other factors considered by political scientists were the role of military dictatorships, the phenomenon of the "soft state" characterized by weak legal and administrative institutions, and development planning as one of the roles of the state. Some have focused on the state's potential role in disarmament that would result in the freeing up of economic resources for development.

In 1976, the International Labour Organization (ILO) produced a report which stated that economic growth in industry and other modern sectors, while necessary, was not adequately addressing issues of unemployment and poverty. Based on a growing understanding of the nature of poverty, the ILO along with others argued that interim measures such as improving employment, health care, and education should be taken to accompany growth-oriented strategies. Following on the heels of this "basic needs" approach was the "human development" school. Championed by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, along with Paul Streeten and Amartya Sen, the human development approach

acknowledged the importance of economic growth but claimed that this could not occur without public sector leadership in ensuring that the poor and disenfranchised in a society have access to the basic services which sustain life. This thinking was very influential and resulted in the UNDP's annual publication of the widely distributed Human Development Report. Although the human development approach has not contributed significantly to development theory, it represents an early reference to moral standards.

Over the past twenty years, the modernization view has enjoyed a major resurgence through an approach called "neoliberalism." Based on the work of Lal; Balassa; and Little, it involves a much-reduced role for the state in development and has been strongly promoted by powerful international agencies such as the World Bank. This strategy is more or less parallel with the renewed conservative economic agenda in industrialized countries such as Britain, the U.S., and Canada, which have continued to promote a similar reduction in the role of governments. Heavy justification for this approach was gleaned from the "East Asian miracle" of the 1980s and early 1990s in the countries of South Korea and Taiwan. But it has since come under fire with the unpredicted "Asian meltdown" of 1997. What we might notice in this general trajectory of ideas falling within the modernization tradition is a preponderant emphasis on the role of the market—and less recently the state—and how these larger processes affect and define development.

How does community-based development fit into this? One of the strengths of the modernization approach lies in the internal logic of its theory, which includes an attempt to account for individual agency. The explanation can be found in the body of theory generally known as microeconomics, a subfield of economics which proposes a role for the individual in modernization processes. According to this approach, the individual is viewed as a materialist being, based on John Stuart Mill's nineteenth-century notion of *homo economicus*, which is an extension of the ideas of Adam Smith. This concept has evolved to refer to rational behavior motivated by the desire to maximize "utility" or satisfaction. In simple terms, this refers to making a profit. Drawing on ingenuity, creative problem solving, and a willingness to work hard, the individual establishes an enterprise that provides a good or a service, and builds up that enterprise. The result is that the enterprise benefits the individual's family, its own employees and consumers, and ultimately the entire society. This is essentially an explanation for grassroots development based on entrepreneurship.

What is missing? First, as commonly cited as this process is in describing the formation of most businesses, the projects that many community-based organizations engage in—schools, health education, self-help housing, collective farming—cannot be classified as enterprises since they are often not profit generating. And although they rely heavily on the initiative of several

individuals and hard work, grassroots-led development is frequently motivated not by profit but by a desire to provide a basic service to the community. Even microenterprises are often driven by incentives other than simple profit generation. Second, these activities may be launched initially by individuals, but they often become collective undertakings at the community level. Consequently, the individual entrepreneurship model does not account well for grassroots development initiatives.

Potential responses to this assertion are essentially twofold. First, community-based development motivated by factors other than profit can be seen as a transitional phenomenon. Communities are forced to provide necessities until the market "inefficiencies" in these areas and in the overall economy are remedied. (A fully functional economy would generate tax revenue to pay for some of these services.) The problem with this approach is that despite decades of intervention of various kinds, market inefficiencies have not been fixed. In some parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, they have actually worsened. This deterioration is due to the failure of a longstanding mechanism claimed by proponents of the modernization approach, that benefits to the prosperous will "trickle down" to those less fortunate—a claim now rejected even by those who might wish otherwise. In the industrialized countries, a dual phenomenon has emerged. As mentioned above, the state has not been efficient or successful in resolving problems resulting from market inadequacies. Second, taxpayers have become increasingly unwilling to fund some of the services not provided by the market. Unless one assumes that future solutions will eventually address these inadequacies, it seems likely that community-based development is more than a temporary stopgap solution.

There is another explanation for community-based development as a transitional phenomenon. Notwithstanding innumerable training programs and the creation of incentives by both government and the market, the skills of Western-style individual entrepreneurship have not been successfully learned by the vast majority of the world's peoples (which would in turn resolve market inefficiencies). Consequently, they must often resort to other kinds of activities to meet their basic needs. Now it could be claimed that these peoples are incapable of learning such skills, a belief with serious ethnocentric and class-laden implications, held more often than one would suspect since it is rarely expressed openly. It could also be argued that the important attributes of most of the world's cultures, such as kinship and other norms and values of a collective nature, are inconsistent with individual entrepreneurship. The solution would therefore lie in eliminating or otherwise redirecting these cultural attributes. Even if this were accurate, given the scale of the project—which would have to target most of the human population on the planet—it is an unrealistic proposition. Core cultural values and practices like kinship are enduring phenomena.

We do not imply that because individual entrepreneurship cannot adequately explain community-based development it is therefore a useless notion. Entrepreneurship, economic competition, and the profit motive have been responsible for much progress and positive change in the quality of life of many people. The history of the industrialized nations over the past hundred years illustrates this fact. Profit has also been an important incentive in the success of microenterprises and microfinance institutions. Indeed, community-based development is quite happily accepted within the modernization paradigm since it is seen as an indicator of people's ability to "pull themselves up by the bootstraps" and a justification for reducing the responsibility of government. Regardless of one's opinion on that, individual entrepreneurship is probably a *necessary* element of development. However, because it cannot adequately account for grassroots-led development, it is an *insufficient* mechanism for explaining overall development processes.

What can be learned from the experience of this model? An important contribution of the modernization approach in the search for a development theory lies in its emphasis on providing a social, economic, and political environment that fosters individual initiative and creative problem solving. As its proponents claim, this environment creates the conditions necessary for the formation of individual enterprises. But at the same time, it creates some of the necessary conditions required for community-based development. For example, changes in policies in the housing sector, such as improving the accessibility of financing and the removal of cumbersome regulations and unnecessary procedures associated with purchasing land, not only better enable the private housing market to function more effectively, but they also facilitate the formation and effective functioning of community-based organizations that build housing for their members. Identification of the importance of access to small loans has enabled millions of people worldwide to benefit from microenterprises. Because of the significance of these conditions in stimulating individual and collective initiative, the modernization approach to overall development processes sheds light on *development with freedom*.[4]

The Marxian Approaches: For Power

Despite the long history and dominance of the modernization approach in development, still employed by most of the world's governments and influential development agencies, other approaches have been formulated over the past 150 years or so. The most compelling and historically significant among them have been the Marxian approaches.

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4. "Freedom" here refers to the commonly accepted meaning of freedom from interference. For a full discussion of the Bahá'í perspective on how this concept is currently understood and practiced, see the Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*.

Similar to the modernization paradigm, Marxian approaches to development are an outgrowth of a fundamental understanding of how the market economy works. In like fashion, the ideas of Karl Marx also follow from those of the Enlightenment philosophers since he viewed human beings as rational, and progress as an objective and universal process. However, his view of society, derived from the philosophy of Hegel, was a historical one. Marx's ideas on the economy were a reaction to the appalling living conditions of urban industrial workers in mid-nineteenth-century Europe and centered on the role of capital and the value of labor. According to Marx, there was an increasing divide between those who controlled capital and those who sold their labor for wages. The capital-controlling classes (or "bourgeoisie") were able to continually accumulate capital through profits resulting primarily from the "surplus value" of wage labor, which led to perpetual exploitation of, and a degrading life for, the working classes. The solution, according to Marx, was expropriation of capital from the bourgeoisie by the state, which would then manage the affairs of the economy on behalf of the entire society. This was a historical process evolving out of the "natural" progression from feudalism through capitalism to socialism, and would be achieved by force.[5] The necessary condition for the move to socialism was the working classes (the "proletariat") attaining "class consciousness," or solidarity gained from a collective awareness of how they were being exploited. How the state should manage the economy once it achieved this has been the cause of ongoing disputes among Marxists for many decades (Tucker).

In the mid-twentieth century, several theorists applied and adapted Marx's view of the economy to development. Building on the structuralist notion of core and periphery, Paul Baran extended the concept of surplus value of labor in industrial production to the entire economy as a way of explaining why some economies remained underdeveloped. Andre Gunder Frank, a Latin American economist, formulated his well-known dependency theory of development in which the dynamics of the global system of capitalism, particularly unequal exchange and trade, continually enrich the core of the system (the industrialized countries) while at the same time draining resources and wealth from the periphery (or the "underdeveloped" countries). Others have since focused on factors such as a distorted production structure within the underdeveloped countries, undervalued labor, and the degree to which the bourgeoisie was able to exert control over the state, which could then be used as a tool to further enrich the bourgeoisie. Developments within the neo-Marxist tradition contributed by sociologists include a focus on social class and "modes of

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5. Although not often acknowledged, the evolution of the welfare state and welfare programs in many nonsocialist countries was a direct result of the impact of socialist thinking.

production" in the agricultural and industrial sectors within the developing countries and the growing internationalization of the labor market resulting primarily from the emergence of transnational corporations.

Political scientists have examined the impact of colonialism on political institutional development, and the national and ethnic conflicts that have resulted. Other areas of study include the impact of geopolitical conflicts resulting from the Cold War; the reasons nondemocratic institutions, particularly military regimes, have flourished in many developing countries; patron-client relations within political systems; and the role of democratic institutions in enhancing human rights, legitimacy, and participation (Sandbrook).

It might be noticed that, like the modernization discourse, the Marxian tradition also places heavy emphasis on both the market and the state as principal actors in development processes. Despite the rapid fall of the Soviet-bloc regimes over a decade ago, the Marxian tradition has remained a convincing critique and descriptive tool because it grew out of a concern for social and economic inequality that continues to remain only an afterthought within the modernization paradigm. This partly accounts for its enduring popularity.[6] Indeed, for many, the term *progressive* denotes some connection with Marxian analysis or practice.

Turning to the question of grassroots initiatives as a form of development, Marxist theory is of limited usefulness as an explanatory tool. It is not clear what Marx actually thought about the individual, since most of his writing focused on the societal level. Many have criticized the disjuncture between Marx's early and later writings, the former sometimes described as humanist, motivated by a deep concern for the human condition and almost verging on a transcendent view of human nature (Fromm; Avineri). His portrayals of individual behavior are nonetheless confined to the materialist terms of the relationship between individuals and their work. According to Marx, labor relations in the capitalist system produce alienation in the individual. One reason for the need to remove the capitalist system is to rid the individual worker of this alienation. In Marx's later writings, however, his description of society itself becomes quite mechanistic and he makes little mention of the individual, who appears as an atomized version of class consciousness and a tool for collective action.

In contrast to modernization theory, which exalts the individual and provides no role for collective undertakings, the Marxist view promotes the opposite by defining human beings primarily as instruments for collective action. However,

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6. The Marxist interpretation of the collapse of the socialist states is that global capitalism has only temporarily won the struggle. Modernization proponents, on the other hand, claim victory because they perceive they have been right all along. Both positions are without much basis.

collective action in the Marxist sense consists of resistance by the working classes to the exploitation they face, where the goal is to build a mass political movement that will eventually overthrow the capital-controlling classes. This is quite different from the type of collective activities undertaken in community-based development, where the principal aim is to provide goods or services to the community. So, like the modernization school, Marxian approaches to development do not account well for grassroots-initiated development.

As with the previous model, there are some potential criticisms of this claim that must be addressed. Like the proponents of modernization, Marxists view community-based development as a temporary phenomenon. Grassroots development activities are seen as resulting from a lack of consciousness of the working classes, who have not yet recognized their own alienation or built solidarity with other, similarly exploited people. Because of this, according to the logic, they do not realize that the real solution to the problem lies in gaining control over capital on a large scale. As a result, collective action employed in grassroots development initiatives is misdirected because it focuses on development rather than resistance.

In order to address this allegation, it is easiest to focus on those areas or countries where political organizing has been taking place for several decades. One of two things has happened. First, many people have given up on the promise of a better life offered as an incentive. Although Marxist states are now few in number, there are nonetheless some regions where Marxist-oriented policies are currently in place or have been historically, such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. While there is a broad range of approaches to Marxist social and economic policy (partly because these were never clearly specified by Marx himself) and it is somewhat unfair to lump them together, the record with most is fairly consistent. In countries like Cuba, Nicaragua, and Tanzania there were substantial initial gains in the quality of life, but these were often reversed. Alternatively, life has remained the same or even worsened, as in Ethiopia. Second, the self-perpetuating violence often resulting from the resistance struggle has either worn people down or is seen by them as an unjustifiable means to an end.[7]

The notion of change achieved through force is adhered to primarily by hard-line Marxists, who argue that capitalist structures need to be abolished altogether through revolution. Many supporters of the Left, however, adopt a "softer" version of this position by advocating that the purpose of resistance by

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7. Marxists propose that the reason socialist regimes such as those in Nicaragua and Tanzania failed is that they were conspired against by the more powerful capitalist bloc countries. This is difficult to *dis*prove and is another explanation for the enduring faith of a great many people in the Marxian view. For a Bahá'í perspective on comparing capitalism and Marxism as social ideologies, see Hanson, "Bahá'í Development Strategy." For a comparison between the Bahá'í Faith and Marxism, see *The Bahá'í Faith and Marxism.*

exploited peoples is to change institutions and structures in some way. Indeed, many Marxists would see community-based development in a positive light since it represents proof of market failure and the desire among exploited people to establish economic structures such as nonprofit organizations outside the free market system. In stating that the grassroots activities in question focus on development rather than resistance, we are not saying there is no place for institutional change. This is needed, and there is no doubt that much injustice has been historically addressed in this way. But there are serious limits to the positive effects of institutional change alone, as the case of racial inequality in the U.S. demonstrates. Although not motivated by Marxist philosophy, the civil rights movement in the U.S. of the 1960s is a good example of a resistance-oriented movement aimed at institutional change. As a result, policies and practices explicitly discriminating against African Americans in housing, employment, and education have been considerably reduced. But residential segregation based on race in U.S. cities has increased, and poverty in African American communities has worsened (Wilson). Therefore institutional change, although necessary, seems insufficient.

Despite the shortcomings, what can be learned from the Marxist view? An important contribution of the Marxist approach to development theory is that it directly addresses the exploitation and suffering experienced by ordinary people that has been exacerbated by modernization policies, or created by them. Although incomplete in theory and proven not very successful in practice, it nonetheless continues to satisfy a deep longing among many people who believe no other approach to development addresses these same issues. Because of the Marxist view's emphasis on the inequalities of the human condition, its principal contribution to overall development processes is that it offers a perspective on *development with justice*.[8]

The Civil Society Paradigm

The third and final approach we will examine in some detail is civil-society-based development, a loose collection of theories that has shifted the discourse from abstract concepts like the state and the market to the role of civil society, or people's organizations and activities not affiliated with either the market or the state. The origins of this development paradigm might be traced back to the liberal philosophy of John Stuart Mill or the direct democracy promoted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

A word needs to be said at this point on a subgroup of these theories, espoused primarily by anthropologists and other scholars and practitioners.

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8. "Justice," as it is used here, refers simply to the basic concept of fairness as most people understand it. Despite its problems, Marxism is still able to appeal to this sense of fairness. For a fuller treatment of the subject of justice from a Bahá'í perspective, see Lerche.

Culture-based approaches to development derive from the early nineteenth-century German Romantic philosophers such as Schleiermacher, who proposed that humans are products of specific cultures and that progress is not a universal process, but one that can only be defined within a particular society. Examples of these approaches are found in the work of anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz and Paul Brass, who focus on the relationship between development and ethnic identities and nationalities. Culture-based approaches have made a significant contribution to the overall development debate, since they have placed the important element of culture at the center of the discussion. Saiedi presents two major problems associated with these approaches, derived from the Romantic or "historicist" view of development. First, the emphasis on cultural uniqueness eventually results in assertions of cultural superiority and can manifest itself in intolerance toward ethnic minorities within a particular society. Second, culture itself can become a static concept defined merely by tradition. A recent derivative of culture-based development is postmodernism, which has gained a considerable following in the past decade. Based on the writings of Michel Foucault, postmodernists place great importance on the analysis of language and discourse in understanding developmental processes. However, a postmodern view of development entails some problems. First, the postmodern approach represents more of an analytical tool than a theory describing or prescribing the processes of development. Saiedi claims that postmodernism is "trapped in a fundamental contradiction" (20), since on the one hand it rejects objectivity, yet at the same time it promotes the objective value of tolerance. For these reasons, in addition to the relatively weak impact culture-based approaches have had on development theory, we will focus on the work of three individuals within the civil society paradigm that has been particularly influential: Paulo Freire, John Friedmann, and David Korten.[9]

We begin with the work of the Brazilian educator-priest Paulo Freire, whose rural literacy programs of the 1960s earned him exile during Brazil's years of military dictatorship. For Freire, the critical problem of development related to poor people's inability to understand the causes and nature of their oppression. He saw education as the primary means of addressing this problem. Using the medium of literacy education, Freire worked on the assumption that the rural poor already possessed a reservoir of knowledge and that the educator's role

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9. Another very recent approach that deserves brief mention is asset-based community development (ABCD), intended to address problems of poverty in the inner cities of the United States. Grounded in the notion that community change should be based on identification of assets rather than enumeration of deficits, ABCD is gaining a large following in North America, but because it does not offer a theory of development, it is not included in this discussion. See Kretzmann and McKnight.

was to facilitate the process of building on this knowledge base. As opposed to the "blank slate" approach of traditional pedagogy where the teacher "deposits" information into the mind of the learner—a model Freire saw as a convenient instrument of neocolonial regimes—he promoted a pedagogy of dialogue. The means by which the rural poor could improve their quality of life, according to Freire, was the process of "conscientization": coming to an understanding of the causes of oppression. This, in turn, was realized through "liberating" education whereby, with the help of facilitators or animators, the poor could come to understand the social forces shaping their lives and believe in their ability to change these forces. The end result of the conscientization process was individual and community-level empowerment.

Freire not only had tremendous influence on the development of liberation theology in Latin America, but his focus on the central role of education in development processes caused his ideas to have a significant impact on a number of areas of development practice including education reform in the developing countries, "informal" or "popular" (non-classroom-based) education, training programs of various kinds, primary health care, rural extension, participatory rural appraisal, the promotion of indigenous knowledge, and participatory research. Further, much of the current work of NGOs at the grassroots level, which often includes a significant training component, can be traced to Freire's model of pedagogy.

It is probably unfair to comment on Freire's work as a theory of development, since he did not propose one; however, a few observations can be made about his ideas in the context of other approaches to development. First, Freire did not attempt to explain politics or economics at the national level; rather he was concerned primarily with oppression at the local level. Consequently, he made little reference to either the state or the market. Second, there is an apparent logical affinity between his notion of conscientization among the "oppressed" and Marx's concept of class consciousness. However, Freire did not claim that his idea of empowerment constituted political power. Rather, it was an empowerment resulting from knowledge and understanding. No clear direction was provided as to what individuals or communities should do at the collective level once they became empowered and attained conscientization. Nonetheless, his work essentially filled in the missing piece of the Marxist model since it provided a role for both the individual and the community as well as an educational methodology for building collective political action.

As a response to the modernization approach with its foundation in utility-maximizing behavior of the individual, John Friedmann, an international urban planning consultant and university professor based in the U.S., has articulated a theory of alternative development using as its point of departure the "basic needs" approach (characterized by him as "political claims") for eradicating

poverty, which he sees as the central development challenge. Friedmann states that the operational principle for eradicating poverty is power. In this way, although he reformulates the class-based Marxian concept of power, there is nonetheless a link between the two concepts. He refers to three kinds of power: psychological, social, and political. Psychological power is associated with self-confidence and an "individual sense of potency" (Friedmann 33). Social power refers to capacities at the household level such as knowledge and skills, financial resources, social networks, and surplus time. The use of these capacities is motivated, according to Friedmann, by reciprocity and mutual obligation for the purpose of increasing the productive wealth of the household. Finally, political power is the ability to access critical decision-making processes and have a collective voice.

Drawing on much of what has been learned in the past decades about development, Friedmann goes on to state that development occurs when the social power of poor households is used to assert political claims. These claims can be realized in a number of ways. First, poor households must be included in democratic processes. Second, they must participate in and benefit from "appropriate economic growth," which should include the informal sector of the economy (mentioned above). Third, referring to the important work of Maxine Molyneux, Friedmann states that the "strategic" and "practical" political claims of poor women must be met. Women's practical claims arise from lack of education, inaccessibility of credit, poor health, early and numerous pregnancies, and the child-rearing responsibilities and domestic confinement associated with them. Strategic claims refer to the legal and institutional changes that must take place in order for many of the practical claims to be fulfilled. Finally, Friedmann incorporates environmental issues by stating that development must entail allocating real prices to products and processes involving external environmental costs, environmental accounting mechanisms which ensure that environmental damage is adequately monitored, food security, and the building of energy-conserving cities. For Friedmann, community-based development is at the front and center of development processes. Development must "build on people's own initiative" at the community level, and "mutual learning, patient listening, and a tolerance for contrary views" (160) must be part of the experience.

Unlike Freire, Friedmann's approach includes the state and the market along with many other factors in a more holistic fashion, and is therefore one of the more comprehensive and informed approaches that have emerged in the past decades of the debate on development. Unlike either the modernization or Marxist models, its focus on the household recognizes that most of the world's peoples belong to communal rather than Western-style individualistic cultures. It acknowledges that people are "moral beings" motivated by more than simply making a profit. Because it incorporates much of what has been learned about

development, it is a useful descriptive model for understanding development processes.

However, this approach has some basic shortcomings. We will make mention of two issues on the descriptive side, both acknowledged by Friedmann himself (46). Unlike the Marxist approach, which focuses exclusively on collective action, Friedmann's model focuses on the household as the unit of analysis. However, this still does not resolve the dilemma of how to account for the individual's role in the whole process. It creates, as Friedmann suggests, a "black box" at the household level. Also, the strength of a household-centered approach, with its emphasis on sociocultural relations accurately reflecting the life conditions of many of the world's peoples, is also its weakness. It may not be so helpful in understanding development in the industrialized countries due to the high proportion of single-person households in those populations. Despite these shortcomings, Friedmann's model will likely have a significant impact on both the theory and practice of development.

Roughly twenty years after Freire wrote down his thoughts on education for development, David Korten began sharing his reflections on what he had learned during his many years as a development consultant in southeast Asia for the U.S. Agency for International Development. In contrast to the previous two alternative approaches to development, Korten's ideas have fewer parallels with either the modernization or the Marxian model. Korten outlines the basic principles of what he calls "people-centered development," which he defines as "a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations" (*Getting to the 21st Century* 67).

Drawing heavily on the language of the environmental crisis, which he contends was created largely by centralized states and private corporations, Korten proposes that it is voluntary organizations (VOs) that will eventually bring about development. He outlines a typology of VOs and describes how the voluntary sector itself has evolved through this typology since the 1950s and 1960s. Korten goes on to state that it is "fourth generation," or "people's" organizations (POs) that hold the greatest potential to effect positive change. According to Korten, POs have three characteristics: they serve their own members, they have a democratic structure, and they are self-reliant. He argues strongly against centralized top-down development, and in favor of approaches grounded in the experience of communities.

In Korten's view, POs must comprise global citizens or "citizen volunteers," who through "critical consciousness" are able to "transcend institutional and cultural conditioning for the larger good of the society" (*Getting to the 21st Century* 107). He emphasizes the role of education in bringing about this change in consciousness, but also the role of religion:

Religion, which commonly presumes to be society's primary arbiter of the values that govern human behavior and relationships, must surely play a central role. While religion is all too often invoked as the rallying cry of the intolerant and hateful in the cause of violence, the basic message of all of the world's great religious teachers has been one of love, brotherhood and tolerance. Those who follow in the tradition of these great teachers are among the most important development workers of our day because they are attacking a root cause of human suffering. (*Getting to the 21st Century* 189)

Korten's work has been widely read by development practitioners and scholars, particularly those working in the NGO sector; however the lack of reference to power dynamics has made it vulnerable to criticism from the Left.[10]

Although the three civil-society-based approaches to development theory included here are somewhat different, what links them in terms of a new perspective on community-based development not previously provided by neoclassical or Marxist theory is that they all openly acknowledge the importance of moral factors in describing the existing and potential human condition. Korten's theory even prescribes a role for religion. Second, they focus explicitly on a locally based process either at the community or the organizational level and, in describing this process, make an attempt to reconceptualize power. Finally, Korten's approach in particular identifies a new concept of global citizenship as a critical variable for change. The main new contribution of civil-society-based approaches to development theory is that they introduce the notion of *development with empowerment*.

A Bahá'í Framework for Development Theory

The next sections outline a framework, derived from the texts of the Bahá'í Faith, for a new theory of development. The basic theoretical principles of this framework are presented as well as an attempt to address criticisms that might arise. In doing so, similarities and differences between the new approach and the three existing paradigms discussed are drawn out. Emerging knowledge from a number of disciplinary traditions is used to support these principles. Also included is an explanation of how they are put into practice by the Bahá'í community.

Dignity as an Organizing Principle

Although John Stuart Mill's notion of *homo economicus* comes closest to it, none of the approaches so far discussed provides a comprehensive theory of

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10. For example, it has been claimed that the approach is "unable to replace the accumulated insights into the structures, processes, and power relations that constitute the context of human action. . . ." (Martinussen 341).

human nature that might represent a philosophical foundation for a theory of development. Both the modernization and Marxian frameworks are based on an essentially mechanistic view of human nature not shared by most of the world's ordinary people. Civil-society-based models have so far not provided a clear alternative. What is needed, then, is a revisiting of some basic assumptions about what it is to be human.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, provides a foundation for an approach to development in which He claims that the essence of humanity is spiritual: "O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created" (Hidden Words, Arabic no. 22).

> O Son of Spirit!
> I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge, I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting. (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic no. 13)

Although the full meaning and implications of these passages would require a lengthy treatise, two important things can be gleaned that are relevant for this discussion. The first is that Bahá'u'lláh's explanation of human nature is described in nonmaterial terms. This is important for development theory, since the two main perspectives previously described (modernization and Marxism) operate on an implicit assumption that development can be measured with money. They therefore tend to focus on that (large) sector of the world's population lacking in material wealth. The solutions provided by these paradigms suggest that once the world's material wealth is more evenly balanced, development has been "achieved." Other than in the environmental sphere, there are few suggestions for changes that need to be made by the wealthy minority. One implication of Bahá'u'lláh's universal description of human nature is therefore that the balancing of material wealth in the world, as challenging and vital as that might be, is neither sufficient nor achievable as the sole goal of development.

The second fact that can be gleaned from Bahá'u'lláh's statements quoted above is that the central feature of human nature is nobility. Although not exactly synonymous, the term *dignity* is used here, as it is more easily utilized in discussions about development within the social sciences and humanities.[11]

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11. *Nobility,* according to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, includes some attributes not listed in the definition for *dignity:* moral qualities, distinction, and excellence. This is an important difference, but we prefer the term *dignity* at this time since it is already gaining usage in several fields.

Dignity as it is defined in Webster's dictionary is associated with nobility, honor, worth, loftiness, and self-respect. These are somewhat intangible attributes, which means that dignity cannot be viewed in a useful or practical way as an end state, but must be seen as a process. It can therefore be deduced that, based on Bahá'u'lláh's description of human nature, striving for dignity is the most important positive process underlying individual and collective human behavior. The same inference can be made from the Sacred Texts of all the world's major religions in stark contrast to the profit motive and the quest for power on which other theories of development are based.

The process of striving for dignity is not a simple one. According to Bahá'u'lláh, although the central feature of humanity is nobility, human beings actually possess a dual nature. On the positive side is the quest for dignity just described. On the negative side is the lower aspect of human nature: greed, lust, temptation by the material:

> 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. . . . The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 60)[12]

Everyday life consists of a continuous tension between these two natures. This is why the process of striving for dignity is more like a struggle. Indeed, struggle is intrinsic to the very concept of dignity itself. But in both of the passages quoted above, Bahá'u'lláh states that humans *abase themselves*: "Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself"; "Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself?"

Many other passages express a similar notion. This does not mean that the lower nature of humanity is somehow imaginary. Nor does it necessarily mean that the lower manifestations of human behavior are inevitably dominant. It does mean that overcoming the lower nature is a difficult task that must be addressed by everyone every single day. *We therefore propose that a new theory of development must have as its foundation the fostering of the struggle for human dignity.* From Bahá'u'lláh's claim that dignity is the most important potential human attribute, other related truths can be deduced: all humans need to live a dignified life; all humans have a right to a dignified life; and all humans contain within their nature the capacity to strive for dignity. The notion of human dignity as an organizing principle for development can be inferred from a number of different areas of study that relate to these corollary truths.

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12. A fuller discussion of a Bahá'í perspective on human nature can be found in Lerche, "Human Nature and the Problem of Peace."

Exploration of the need for dignity among humans would advance significantly the discussion on basic needs, referred to above, that took place several decades ago. If one accepts that all humans need to strive for dignity, then clearly the meeting of basic needs is necessary but insufficient. The need for dignity also casts Friedmann's model of political claims in a new light since it moves the discussion beyond the issue of poverty. Coming to terms with the struggle for dignity as a central feature of human nature would help address issues related to, but not normally associated with, development from a policy perspective. For example, if one examines the problem of urban gangs in the cities of Europe, North America, and elsewhere, it can be seen that the members of these gangs often live in poor neighborhoods with concentrations of minority or otherwise excluded populations, where violence, crime, and substance abuse are endemic and opportunities for education and upward mobility extremely limited. These individuals have effectively been stripped of the possibility of a dignified life. The only option they perceive that preserves their dignity is the gang, in the security of which they are able to attain some sense of importance and respect. Currently, the main policy in place for dealing with this problem is the construction of more incarceration facilities, the fastest growing "industry" in some parts of the U.S., for example. Not only is this an extremely expensive solution, its effectiveness is highly questionable since it achieves nothing with respect to the root causes of the problem, particularly the deprivation of dignity.

Human dignity as the basis for human rights has been proposed by Radin and others who argue that people have a right to conditions which make "human flourishing" possible. This has also been clearly asserted by the Bahá'í International Community in the following statement: "Recognition of the oneness of humanity gives rise to an elevated concept of human rights, one that includes the assurance of dignity for each person and the realization of each individual's innate potential. This view differs markedly from an approach to human rights that is limited to preventing interference with the individual's freedom of action" (*Right and Responsibility*).

In discussing the Bahá'í view of human rights from a historical perspective, Weinberg suggests that a focus on human dignity having a "transcendent basis" in a "universal identity" that can "fuse diverse peoples together into a universal community" represents a "new generation" of human rights (272).[13]

The struggle for dignity as a conceptual framework for development is a potentially useful one. It is universal and not culturally bound or driven by Western philosophy. Neither is it inimical to notions of justice or freedom. Human dignity as a core attribute of human nature and the foundation for real development is an idea on which there can be agreement among both the leaders and followers of the major religions.[14] In contrast to the primary focus of

13. In addition to Weinberg, a comparable treatment of this subject can be found in Nicholson.

14. An example of this line of thinking from a Christian perspective is Reeve, *God and the Market*.

development theory on the mechanics of greed, self-interest, and lust for power as the sole motivations explaining the evolution of human society, the struggle for dignity accounts for positive behaviors such as service to the community, which most people recognize and acknowledge. At the same time, the lower aspect of human behavior is not wished away or left unacknowledged. This latter point will be returned to below. Further, a focus on dignity is consistent with recent discussions that have taken place within a new field known as ethical development. Qizilbash reviews some newly proposed ethical foundations for development that include "capabilities" and basic needs, and concludes that it is an approach based on a concept of well-being (Griffin, *Well-Being*; "On the Winding Road") that is most promising. The struggle for dignity is an example of such an approach.

A New Engine for Development: The Human Will
The primary resource drawn upon to fuel the struggle for dignity can be inferred from the same passages by Bahá'u'lláh quoted above. In the first passage, Bahá'u'lláh, after pronouncing that nobility is the distinguishing feature of human beings, states : "Rise then unto that for which thou wast created." In the second passage, words like "turn" and "find" are used in referring to how people should attain nobility: "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting." These are action words. Rising and finding are acts of will. It is the human will that is the primary resource to be drawn upon in the struggle for dignity. Indeed, there remains no other resource left upon which to draw, an assertion made by Bahá'u'lláh: "Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition" (*Gleanings* 149).

The human will—its nature, functioning, limits, and potentialities—is at the present time a poorly understood phenomenon; however some insight can be gleaned from the Bahá'í Revelation. One of the eternal paradoxes of individual spiritual life is that the highest, most effective, and productive use of the human will is its subjugation to the Will of God. Referring once again to the short passage by Bahá'u'lláh already provided, He states in relation to achieving nobility: "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting." There are a great many passages from the Bahá'í writings as well as the Sacred Texts of other major faiths that communicate a similar idea. The notion of detachment, one of the central principles of all religions, refers to the act of allowing the human will to become a channel for the will of God. From time immemorial, all the great religions have taught that without divine assistance, it is difficult to achieve much.

Other passages from the Bahá'í texts reveal further insights into the nature of

the human will. Consider the following, which refers to the power of volition as one attribute that distinguishes humans from other beings in the natural world: "Nature is without volition and acts perforce, whereas man possesses a mighty will. . . . Man can voluntarily discontinue vices; nature has no power to modify the influence of its instincts" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 178). Volition is affected positively by certain beliefs such as the eternal life of the human soul, a truth promoted by all the great religions:

> . . . it behooves man to abandon thoughts of nonexistence and death, which are absolutely imaginary, and see himself ever-living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. . . . If he dwells upon the thought of nonexistence, he will become utterly incompetent; with weakened willpower his ambition for progress will be lessened and the acquisition of human virtues will cease. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 89)

In the field of philosophy, the question of "free will" has been debated by Western philosophers for centuries. At the center of the debate has been the question of how much of our existence is determined by free will, and what can be accounted for by destiny (cause-and-effect relationships). Also central are the roles that reason and intelligence (science) on the one hand, and morality and the divine (religion), have played in both. In brief terms, toward one end is the view, espoused by the Pythagoreans and Saint Augustine, as well as Thomas Hobbes, Spinoza, and most of the Enlightenment philosophers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that human behavior is subject to laws and has a cause. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that our lives result primarily from choice. An early presentation of this view was made by Plato and Aristotle, supported much later in the eighteenth century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the great Immanuel Kant as a reaction to the Enlightenment, followed by Hegel, William James, and John Dewey in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Somewhere in between lie the contributions of philosophers like Rene Descartes, John Locke, David Hume, and John Stuart in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Setting these controversies aside, we can say that most people would accept that free will or the human will exists to some degree. This is because most of us believe that we make choices.

Understanding the human will in the context of individual behavior is a task that falls within the realm of psychology. Some of the groundwork for this effort was laid by Daniel Jordan in his discussion of knowledge, volition, and action. Drawing from the Bahá'í writings, he refers specifically to goal setting, perseverance, patience, and resisting the temptation of "vices" as powers of the human will. Hossain Danesh, in his book linking psychology with spirituality, observes that in the context of psychotherapy, "there is a tendency to reject the primacy of the role of will and to place much greater importance on forces that are beyond the reach of our volition such as instincts, drives, the unconscious and childhood experiences" (71). This is perhaps a major reason so little

attention has been given to the agency of volition in many areas of human endeavor.[15] Yet despite this, the enormous popularity of self-help books now available on every conceivable subject is a testimony to the enduring belief people have in the power of the human will to overcome difficulties.

It seems that attention is paid to the human will only in highly exceptional cases where an individual conquers impossible odds in order to achieve something. An example provided by Friedmann is the "one-legged octogenarian who climbs Mount Whitney" (168). William Hatcher refers to the exaggerated attention (and salaries) paid to individuals with exceptional abilities in sports, such as Michael Jordan or Wayne Gretzsky, as the "supervaluation of the special" (18). More ordinary acts of will that are just as heroic are habitually ignored. For example, it is often assumed that parenting is instinctive behavior. However, most people who have had any experience with parenting would have to agree that sacrifices, struggles, and other acts of will are required every day in the raising of a child. Quite obviously, parenting involves far more than programmed behavior.

The Bahá'í texts also make reference to the human will when it is exercised at the collective level. Volition breathes life into the human collectivity, as illustrated in the following passage: ". . . for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 111–12). Humans, when deciding collectively to take actions, must first attain knowledge about the problem they wish to act upon:

> Mere knowledge of principles is not sufficient. We all know and admit that justice is good, but there is need of volition and action to carry out and manifest it. For example, we might think it good to build a church, but simply thinking of it as a good thing will not help its erection. The ways and means must be provided; we must will to build it and then proceed with the construction. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 121)

In order to be most effective, collective volition must be based on the identification of principles that can be agreed upon, as described in the following passage by the Universal House of Justice: "The essential merit of

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15. Another reason why the human will has received little attention as a subject for study is that research in this area presents some methodological problems. The root cause of these problems is the philosophical dilemma referred to above. Strictly speaking, the human will lies beyond the realm of cause and effect. If the human will is entirely "free," then predicting it is inherently impossible, a fact originally asserted by Immanuel Kant. For this reason, the scientific method, at least as it has so far been applied, is not a tool well suited for understanding the human will. This problem can be seen in the growing need to predict the future behavior of certain types of criminals such as child molesters. While predictions of specific individual actions may remain forever impossible, it is conceivable that understanding the faculty of the human will—its nature and functioning—is within reach. However, scientific research in this area will probably entail major changes in the way human behavior has traditionally been studied.

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" (*Messages* 438.37). Volition must be linked with vision: "The effort of will required for [global peace] cannot be summoned up merely by appeals for action against the countless ills afflicting society. It must be galvanized by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term—an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being now brought within grasp" (Bahá'í International Community, *Prosperity of Humankind* 273–74).

In describing the prerequisites for world peace, the Universal House of Justice states in a letter to the peoples of the world that humanity faces a choice between "unimaginable horrors" or an "act of consultative will" (*Messages* 438.2) that could launch a process leading to world peace. In other words, humanity can, of its own volition, choose peace. If it makes that choice, there is an intimate connection between collective volition, the power of human thought, and consultation,[16] as referred to in the following passage from that letter:

> The courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another—all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. And it is towards arousing the necessary volition that earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely his thought. To understand the relevance of this potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process. (*Messages* 438.47)

Scholarly study of the dynamics of the human will as it is manifested at the collective level can be found primarily in the literature on mass social movements. More recent examples would be the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the antinuclear movement, and the indigenous people's movement. Although they involve a wide range of activities, these often include actions that take place within the political arena and therefore involve, to a certain extent, power dynamics at the collective level. Scholars have tended to focus almost exclusively on this conflict aspect of social movements as the main substantive area for study (Richard Thomas). While in the past this view has found theoretical justification in Marxist doctrine, more recently it has been

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16. The complete process of seeking knowledge, identification of principles, creating a vision, consulting on it, and taking action is actually a framework for planning. See June Manning Thomas for a description of how the Bahá'í texts further inform this process.

based on a looser concept of counterhegemony, or resistance to the dominant power structure (Carroll).

The rather narrow focus by scholars on conflict has obscured the importance of other aspects of the exercise of collective will, primarily those areas of activity that either do not involve conflict or entail overcoming it. It is these very areas, involving such things as building a common vision, identifying operating principles, and fostering consultation skills mentioned in the Bahá'í texts excerpted above, that are relevant to understanding the collective struggle for dignity. The pervasive focus on conflict has affected topics chosen for study, theoretical frameworks employed, methodologies used, and conclusions drawn when observing collective human activities. Indeed, perhaps because of this emphasis on conflict, some believe that collective will applied to anything other than power struggles does not exist at all. However, a different approach is also emerging. In connection with the antiracism movement, for example, a recent study conducted in Atlanta found that a far larger proportion of citizens than is commonly assumed (three-quarters of Caucasians and two-thirds of African Americans) are involved in interracial contacts and friendship. It was concluded that "there are reservoirs of interracial good will and amity in the United States that are both unstudied by scholars and underutilized by agents of social change. It suggests that conflict models of race relations need to be placed in a broader context, for they do not fit many day-to-day relationships between whites and blacks" (National Spiritual Assembly 19).

Three Challenges

Three important issues must be addressed in any attempt to propose a new approach to development theory. The first has to do with the implications of human nature itself that have already been mentioned: the challenge of profit and power. The other two are longstanding critiques of development in theory and practice: the environmental crisis and gender inequality.

Profit and Power Revisited. What of those who choose to exercise their will for the sole purpose of pursuing profit or wielding power over others? History teaches us that only a handful of individuals with control over vast resources or power over large numbers of people are capable of creating misery on a massive scale. Consequently, any new approach to development must attempt to address these issues. There are no quick-alternative fixes for this problem, but the basis of a solution can be gleaned from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings. We deal with the power issue first.

From a policy perspective, there are two ways of addressing the thorny issue of individuals or groups who wish to wield power over others. The first is the twin factors of religious faith and education: "Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity

and disorder, is the people's lack of religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 18).

This suggests an interesting reason why, during the 1980s and 1990s, many of the world's most notorious and seemingly intractable dictatorships in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have crumbled or given way to democratic regimes of various kinds. Some of these national despots have been apprehended by an emerging international justice system and brought to trial. A strong message is now reverberating around the globe that the days of gross abuse of power with impunity are numbered. Even though on the surface this development seems quite miraculous, there has been little attempt to explain it. Of the two factors of religious faith and education mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the above passage, it would seem that education—although still grossly inadequate for many—may be the reason many despotic regimes have collapsed over recent years. In one sense, this has been an unintended consequence of education. It is very difficult to subdue a growing educated population for long periods of time. Education eventually leads to the exercising of collective will to bring about the struggle for dignity and, ultimately, positive change. It might even be stated that as long as education levels in a population are continually rising, as they are now in most regions of the world, this creates a self-correcting feature in political systems that acts to prevent totalitarian regimes from taking hold.

Arthur Lyon Dahl, in a book on environment, ecology, and the economy, makes a strong case for the power of education to transform a population by referring to the historical example of the educational reforms put into place in France in the late nineteenth century by Jules Ferry, who was in charge of the ministry of education. Faced with dramatic social and political changes that had come about as a result of the French Revolution, Ferry's task was to mold the educational system so that the people were better able to live harmoniously in the new republic. His efforts were a fantastic success, referred to often in history books. Pertaining to the task at hand at this time, important work has been done by Kavelin Popov, McLaughlin Nogouchi et al., Ayman, and others in integrating moral education into the curriculum in North America and elsewhere.

Education is the most effective way to bring about lasting change, but there are also certain structural changes at the institutional level that, once in place, can prevent or seriously limit the capacity of individuals to have power over others. Such changes include many of the features of the Bahá'í administrative system which is designed to reduce or eliminate individual power. The situating of authority squarely within the framework of elected institutions rather than with individuals is one of these features. Arthur Lyon Dahl suggests that another is the separation of inspirational (individual) leadership from legislative and administrative aspects of governance. Other features of the Bahá'í administrative system include the absence of political parties, nominations, and political campaigning (and with it a distorted campaign

finance system), which are increasingly corrupting electoral systems in many countries. A few of these changes have already been instituted in a limited sense in some countries. One recent stellar example is the official elimination of political parties in Uganda.

Limiting the blind pursuit of profit is possibly a longer endeavor than preventing the emergence of individuals or groups who hold power. This is because, for many people, accumulation of material wealth is tremendously alluring. In extreme cases, the fantastic profits realized by some transnational corporations have created vast wealth for the individuals who control those corporations. This situation may persist for some time. Even if there were a colossal crash of the world's financial markets, it is likely that, as in the past, the most wealthy would emerge fairly unscathed. Eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty is one of the basic principles of the Bahá'í Revelation, and the Bahá'í texts mention two main ways that this can be achieved. The first is conscience—a deep and heartfelt understanding of the link among all people, rich and poor. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "Is it possible that, seeing one of his fellow-creatures starving, destitute of everything, a man can rest and live comfortably in his luxurious mansion? He who meets another in the greatest misery, can he enjoy his fortune?" (*Some Answered Questions* 277). This kind of change can only come about as a result of a profound transformation of the peoples of the world, particularly among those who are currently wealthy. Education can play a significant role in bringing about such change.

Associated with a growing consciousness of the oneness of humankind would be a desire by people to exercise their responsibility, realized through the second and related principle of voluntary sharing: "And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is voluntary sharing of one's property with others among mankind. This voluntary sharing is greater than [legally imposed] equality, and consists in this, that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 302). Once again we see the role of human volition—in this case voluntary sharing of wealth as part of a strategy for eliminating poverty—in development.[17] While at first glance it might be tempting to dismiss voluntary giving as too altruistic for humanity to achieve, we hope that previous discussions about human nature and the general lack of understanding of the faculty of the human will might cast this pessimism in a new light. Indeed, the kind of transformation referred to here is already underway, as can be seen by recent reports of some of the world's wealthiest individuals offering to contribute large sums of money to the United Nations or to fund international programs of the World Health Organization.

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17. This does not mean there is no role for taxation. In fact, the Bahá'í writings specify a type of progressive taxation as one means for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty. For a recent discussion of this, see Mohtadi.

Environmental Conservation.   The most compelling question posed by the environmental movement that needs to be tackled is how a theory of development based on *human* dignity can possibly resolve the *environmental* crisis. Although a thorough review of the literature on the environmental crisis and the collective response to it is not appropriate here, we will draw upon a few threads that are essential to supporting the dignity principle of development that we are proposing. Much of the environmental crisis has been attributed to the faulty workings of the now-dominant capitalist economic system, since the real and long-term environmental costs have simply remained unaccounted for as "externalities." But those countries which adopted a Marxist approach have an equally dismal record (starkly demonstrated by the catastrophic demise of the Aral Sea in the former Soviet Union), as a result of the fact that both the modernization and the Marxian approaches to economic development are based on Western constructs that have promoted undiscriminating extraction of resources and unfettered growth. It is partly for this reason that the environmental movement has remained largely aloof from both paradigms.

Since roughly the mid-nineteenth century, there have been a number of attempts to reconcile humanity's distorted relationship with nature. These include deep ecology, social ecology, ecofeminism, the Judeo-Christian tradition, North American native spirituality, and bioregionalism.[18] Although there are considerable differences among the means proposed by these various movements for change, they are more or less united in their ultimate goal, which is to reestablish a much-needed balance between humans and the natural world. Some common themes that are relevant to this discussion can be gleaned from these movements. First, all agree that there is an interdependence and interconnectedness between humans and the rest of the natural world. Second, most propose small, locally based systems of management and governance. Social ecologist Murray Bookchin's "libertarian municipalism" is a good example of this (Biehl). This notion of locally based environmental management fits conceptually within the civil-society-based paradigms such as Korten's and Friedmann's, both of which make considerable mention of environmental issues. Other marriages of environmental concerns with human-based activities that focus on the North American context include frameworks applied specifically to city planning such as those of Wackernagel and Rees, and Marcia Nozick. Third, aside from some deep ecologists, there is agreement among most of these approaches that although humans are an integral part of creation, they are in some way different from other species and therefore have special responsibilities. Although the Bahá'í writings present a "hierarchical"

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18. For a fuller description of these movements and how they relate to a Bahá'í perspective, see Lalonde; White; and Sours.

view of creation which asserts that human beings have attributes distinguishing them from other creatures, the only logical interpretation of this is that humans carry the commensurate responsibility of caring for the earth, a responsibility of stewardship.[19] (Although we apparently share 98 percent of our genetic material with apes, they will not help us much with this). The notion of stewardship or trusteeship is also shared by most of the environmental perspectives referred to above.

What, then, does environmental stewardship mean? In addition to implementing individual lifestyle changes such as recycling, composting, consuming less, carefully evaluating what is consumed, utilizing solar energy, and relying on alternatives to the car, some with a deep commitment to resolving the environmental crisis have chosen to work directly in the field. A few have focused their attention on advocating to politicians and the public and private sectors for change, others on the formulation and enforcement of environmental regulations, the development of environmental planning frameworks, the design of alternative low-impact technologies and production systems, and the education of the public.

A few have taken on the task of developing alternatives to economic theory that address the imbalances. It is out of this process that some of the most stinging and soul-searching criticisms of the current economic system have sprung. The Asian NGO Coalition, for example, sharply criticize the notion that money has become "the arbiter of values and the motivating force of nearly all human institutions and activities" and set forth a new approach based on "spirituality, community, and a bonding to place or habitat" ("Economy Part I" 79). Lamenting the "dysfunctions of conventional development," they propose a community-based economy directed by the organizations of civil society, with households and communities (instead of enterprises) as the basic units of analysis and a "community balance sheet" that takes stock of natural resource accounts as well as money accounts. Arthur Lyon Dahl offers a similar criticism in his book, referred to earlier, that presents a theory of "ecos," an application of ecological principles to human systems. He claims that many problems within human ecos are rooted in the overvaluation of money and the undervaluation of people, and therefore that any new accounting system must also incorporate knowledge and information, the most important attributes of human ecos.

While individual and collectively based environmental activities such as these are essential to achieving the ultimate goal of a more balanced relationship between humans and nature, we propose they are insufficient. Others, such as Dahl, have come to a similar conclusion. There are two main

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19. For a fuller explanation of this reasoning, see Sours.

reasons for this, both related to the notion of stewardship. The first is that environmental stewardship is a sacred responsibility. Bahá'u'lláh writes the following:

> . . . 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. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. (*Tablets* 142)

This view elevates the responsibility of caring for the earth above many other responsibilities, and associates it directly with the very essence of the human spirit. Caring for the earth can therefore be seen as one aspect of human dignity. Combining the notions of interdependence and stewardship, it can be proposed that one way humans fulfill their highest purpose is to act on the conscious recognition of their oneness with the natural world. In this way, the basic principles of kindness to animals, preservation of species diversity, protection of delicate ecosystems, regard for as-yet unborn generations, and appreciation for the beauty of nature all become components of the human dignity principle.

The second reason environmentally based activities alone are insufficient is that environmental stewardship is a collective human responsibility. A deep concern for, and willingness to act on behalf of, the earth quickly leads to intense interaction with other people. Resolution of the environmental crisis is squarely in the human arena, subject to all the current limitations and challenges of collective decision making, organizational functioning, institution building, and governance. Specialists in several fields, such as city planning, have already recognized that environmental issues cannot be dealt with in an effective manner separately from issues related to governance. On the global level, the organizational and decision-making challenges faced are enormous, as can be seen in the increasingly regular global meetings on environmental issues where the developing countries are seen to be doing too little about population control and lax environmental regulations while the industrialized countries stall on limiting greenhouse gas emissions and exporting toxic waste.[20]

All of the skills associated with collective human will must be drawn upon in order to address the root causes of the environmental crisis, one of the gravest signs so far seen of human civilization gone awry. Environmental issues, while they are of an admittedly urgent nature demanding immediate attention, will

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20. Some who are of the Marxian persuasion have recognized this problem and have, with limited success, attempted to unite the "green" (environmental) and "red" (leftist) causes. Evidence of this was seen during the Seattle protests of late 1999 associated with the World Trade Organization meetings.

ultimately be resolved only when they are fully integrated with human development issues. It is in this way that the struggle for dignity as the driving principle of development directly addresses the environmental crisis.

Gender Equality.   The notion that development consists of the collective process of striving for dignity drawing upon the faculty of the human will is not inherently inconsistent with what the women's movement has been trying to achieve within various development paradigms. On the surface, it is obvious that any approach with the aim of promoting human dignity must include half of the world's population. Nonetheless, this assertion requires some explanation.

Although the women's movement has been in existence in the world in some form for at least a century and a half, the movement has historically traveled different paths in the industrialized and the developing countries. Conceptually, Western feminists have been primarily concerned with sexual equality in terms of opportunity and status. In the developing countries, women's persistent subordination to men in all areas of life has been the greatest concern. However, growing poverty among women and children in the industrialized countries and increasing worldwide recognition of violence against women have been powerful uniting forces. In addition, there have been attempts to "wed" feminism with other schools of thought. One is ecofeminism, mentioned earlier, which promotes the view that environmental destruction is the result of male domination over nature. Recognition of the subordinate status of women all over the world as a social justice issue has led to attempts to merge feminism with Marxism.[21] Some have referred to this as an "unhappy marriage," since the promise of improved status for women in socialist countries was not fulfilled. The distinction between modernization and Marxism has therefore not been a very useful one in addressing the gender question.

On the policy side, following the early struggles for voting rights, the focus in North America has been on improving the status of women in the work force relative to men, and on women's legal, reproductive, and property rights in the private sphere of the household. As a result, many hard-won legislative changes have been made in pay equity, human rights law, and property law. These changes have resulted in considerable improvements in women's lives, particularly with respect to economic independence. European women's groups have, along with these concerns, tended to place a heavy emphasis on the societal responsibilities associated with childcare, as reflected in public policy in many countries which now provide subsidized, accessible daycare and flexible work arrangements.

Moser has characterized policy approaches to the gender question in the

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21. For an opposing viewpoint, see Adkin.

developing countries as having evolved very much in parallel with general trends in the modernization paradigm outlined earlier. *Welfare* approaches were associated with the growth-oriented strategies of the 1950s and 1960s. Consisting mainly of emergency and food aid given out mainly to women because of their roles as mothers, the welfare approach led later to population control through family planning programs. It was at this time that Esther Boserup, in her famous book published in 1970, observed that although women constituted an enormous resource for achieving development goals, they were essentially invisible in the process. This insight led to an approach known as Women in Development (WID) that consisted of programs focusing on employment and credit to assist women to better integrate into the development process. A second response to the realization that women matter was the collection of statistics on women as part of the regular process of reporting on development, a practice now well established but which still needs improvement. During the 1970s, WID caught on in many of the bilateral aid agencies, which initially adopted a Western-style goal of achieving *equity* for women relative to men in the development process. But there were inherent difficulties in defining equity that led to a lack of consensus within the aid agencies as well as among women's groups on how to implement it. Consequently, equity was dropped in the mid-1970s and replaced with an *anti-poverty* WID approach, which arose from a growing concern, within the modernization paradigm, for basic needs. But the small-scale "income-generating projects" intended to reduce women's poverty that were the main thrust of this policy proved more difficult to implement than anticipated. It was found that even if women's incomes rose, their quality of life did not necessarily improve, as long as the work had to be done by extending the working day or if the income they earned came under the control of men. Parallel with the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s, the third and current WID approach has become part of a larger thrust toward *efficiency,* promoted primarily by international agencies. Reduced funding in health, education, and other social services promoted by these agencies has had a disproportionate impact on women and children, who rely upon them more, and it is women who are often the major participants in the voluntary organizations that are expected to shoulder these responsibilities.

Empowerment, the final approach, is firmly based on a different perspective called Gender and Development (GAD) that arose from criticisms of WID as an add-on to the modernization paradigm and its preoccupation with efficiency. GAD addressed the relationship between men and women as an inherent component of the problem. What this meant was looking beyond women as a category or special target group for development programs and policies, to the social and historical construction of how and why women tend to be subordinated to men in a particular society. GAD, while it is considered to be largely outside of the mainstream, has been practiced by many non-Western

Third World women's groups since the 1980s. This perspective is exemplified by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a loosely structured network of Third World women's organizations which, in a paper prepared for the 1985 World Conference of Women in Nairobi, stated that its vision of the new era was one where "each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his potential and creativity, and women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships" (73). The means for achieving this, according to DAWN, was empowerment through organization from the bottom up, as well as the fulfillment of practical and strategic gender needs.

It will be recognized that the empowerment approach to women and development is affiliated closely with the civil-society-based paradigm discussed earlier. Like David Korten's approach, the active agent is seen to be the people's organization. Of all the approaches so far discussed, the women's perspective on empowerment comes very close to addressing the need to reformulate the concept of power as a tool in development. Moser writes that the empowerment approach "acknowledges the importance for women to increase their power. However, it seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others (with its implicit assumption that a gain for women implies a loss for men), and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength" (74). What this implies is that the emancipation of women entails a struggle not between women and men, but for the ultimate triumph of the human spirit—the struggle for dignity.

Two other important additional aspects of the dignity principle as it relates to the gender question can be mentioned. One is the balance between the masculine and feminine in society, mentioned in the DAWN statement, but also found in the Bahá'í writings: ". . . the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals. . . ." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, qtd. in Esslemont 149).[22] Another is the participation of men in the emancipation of women, without which their own potential cannot be fulfilled: "As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable

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22. The concept of balance referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, contains the clear assumption of a distinction between men and women that goes beyond reproductive functions. Consequently, the Bahá'í writings refer to equality based on complementarity, not uniformity. While this is acceptable to most women as well as many feminists, it is an understanding not shared by some Western feminists who believe that the case for equality of women with men must be presented as one based on a presumption of sameness. This position springs from fear that any mention of gender differences (whether real or apparent) will be used as proof of inferiority and as a justification for preventing the advancement of women. While this fear is understandable, the position taken may not be necessary. It also entails some dangers, particularly if scientific evidence indicating biologically based distinctions that affect functions other than reproduction begins to accumulate. This subject is also addressed by Khan and Khan in *Advancement of Women*.

to achieve the greatness which might be theirs" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 133).[23] "When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights!" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 163).

Theory in Action: Development and the Bahá'í Community

While not a major force in thinking on development at this time, since the late nineteenth century Bahá'ís have been putting into practice principles for carrying forward "an ever-advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 215) enunciated by the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh. Although these principles do not spell out a specific theory, the history of the Bahá'í Faith over more than 150 years itself exemplifies a unique approach to development. One of the distinctive historical features of the Bahá'í Faith, the most recent of the world's great religions, is that the period of revelation of the authoritative texts containing these principles lasted more than seventy-five years, including the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest son and designated interpreter. It was in 1921 that Shoghi Effendi, grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and appointed leader of the Faith, was entrusted with the herculean task of building the foundation for Bahá'u'lláh's "world order," a spiritual democracy comprising elected councils (or "Spiritual Assemblies") at the local and national level. These institutions were responsible for leading the growth of the community, encouraging individual development, and establishing an essential pattern of internal practices at the local level such as regular consultative and spiritual meetings and religious anniversaries, the education of children, and annual elections. In 1983, the Universal House of Justice, the internationally elected institution of the global Bahá'í community, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and established twenty years earlier, issued the letter to the Bahá'í world quoted at the beginning of this paper. This letter stated that "although it [had] hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of [the] Faith." It announced the establishment of an international Office of Social and Economic Development, and the National Spiritual Assemblies were invited to "consider the implications of this emerging trend for their respective communities," but the emphasis from the outset was, as stated earlier, on "natural stirrings at the grassroots." The letter advised that "the steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í Community itself...." The aim of the Bahá'ís was "to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant," and their efforts toward this end would "conduce to the preservation of human honor so desired by Bahá'u'lláh." It was anticipated that "in the process and as a consequence, the [Bahá'ís] will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole. . . ." (*Messages* 379.2, 6, 3).

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23. See Mahmoudi.

Since then, development projects and programs have been established in local Bahá'í communities all over the world. Many of these focus on education, an endeavor of great importance to Bahá'u'lláh, which is itself expected to have enormous ramifications; others focus on development communication, health, the environment, agriculture, and rural development, as well as race unity, cultural development, and development of women. Although some have evolved to become larger-scale projects and are carried out in collaboration with other institutions and agencies, most are small and have received little or no outside funding assistance.

This history itself illustrates some basic principles, three of which are shared with other empowerment perspectives on development. The first is the centrality of grassroots development; the second is building local institutional capacity; and the third is self-reliance. Other principles are unique: the explicitly stated significance of "human honor" or dignity, the establishment of patterns of community life as prerequisites for development, the supporting role of higher-level institutions in this process, and the importance of Bahá'í communities learning how to experiment in their own communities before the natural process of outreach beyond the Bahá'í community. Perhaps the most striking feature about this history is that while stirrings at the grassroots is the central principle, the entire process—from the directions of Shoghi Effendi to the letters of the Universal House of Justice—was planned. This is a result of the uniqueness of the Bahá'í administrative system, with its interrelated parts extending from the local to the international level. In order to understand how stirrings at the grassroots can be guided from above, one must appreciate that the Bahá'í community is not a social or political movement, but a religious community. At the core of Bahá'í belief is obedience to what is understood to be in the Bahá'í texts, which represent a vast resource for study. Unlike policy documents, internal memos, or even manifestos, these texts are considered by Bahá'ís to be authoritative truth. Understanding and acting on them is not optional. Equally important is obedience to Bahá'í institutions. Although there is not always agreement among individuals about appropriate steps to take in responding to guidance from higher institutions or in identifying and solving problems at the community level, the willingness to be obedient to local and national institutions is a powerful unifying force.

Other principles pertaining to development are mentioned in the Bahá'í texts. They include the importance of individual rectitude of conduct, particularly trustworthiness; the preservation of unity in all endeavors; a spirit of selflessness and service; consultation; building of local capacity; a learning framework consisting of study of the texts, consultation, action, and reflection; development of human resources; universal participation, especially by women; and the building of institutions, particularly the elected Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. All of these and others are referred to in letters from the

Bahá'í World Centre[24] and many are elaborated on by Holly Hanson Vick (*Social and Economic Development*).

These principles, acted upon by community members striving for personal betterment and collective unity with a shared vision and belief in the authority of the texts and the Bahá'í institutions, provide a powerful force for development and change. They work in tandem with certain structural features of the system already mentioned, such as the separation of inspirational and legislative/administrative functions and absence of electoral campaigning. In addition is a mechanism already in place within the Bahá'í community for redistributing wealth known as Ḥuqúqu'lláh, an obligatory annual monetary donation by adults of approximately one-fifth the value of marginal savings.[25]

For these reasons, it could be stated that the Bahá'í model, with its emphasis on civil society, organization building, education, and morality, is centered on development with empowerment. However, a neat classification is not so easy. The model also has elements of development with freedom. Profit-making enterprises, although they are not currently emphasized in Bahá'í development, are not prohibited. Private property and the creation of wealth are also not proscribed, if the pursuit of either is exercised in moderation and in a spirit of sharing. The Bahá'í model shares the goal of development with justice—the elimination of oppression—but the means for achieving it is not through conflict, but the power of the collective human will in striving for dignity and unity.

In terms of grassroots development within the Bahá'í community, Bahá'u'lláh's explanation of human nature as it affects this process has already been described. Bahá'ís, like others, collectively strive for dignity and, in so doing, improve the quality of their lives. But for Bahá'ís, there is a deeper meaning to the concept of dignity. True fulfillment of human potential involves not only aspirations related to self-respect, but two other very important elements: acting upon the recognition of the oneness of the human race, and service. The principle of oneness is related to David Korten's idea of "global citizenship" and "critical consciousness" and is, in fact, the central teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, enunciated over a century ago. A complex subject dealt with extensively by Bahá'u'lláh, it arises out of the diversity of the human race. Not only is the global Bahá'í community diverse, but most local communities are composed of people with widely varying class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. The central purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to forge these diverse

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24. Sources include *Bahá'í Social and Economic Development*; material for a seminar on social and economic development, Toronto, 12–15 August 1999; and *The Evolution of Institutional Capacity*.

25. Ḥuqúqu'lláh is, strictly speaking, an obligation, but like other fund contributions in the Bahá'í community it cannot be solicited.

peoples into one unified human race, a unity similar to that found in the human body constituted by its functional component parts: "He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 214).

A concise explanation of this concept can be found in the writings of Shoghi Effendi:

> Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, [the principle of the oneness of humanity] seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It 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. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity. (41–42)

The second aspect, service, is more than simple volunteerism; it is a much higher calling, enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh Himself: "That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth" (*Gleanings* 250). Service is a form of worship and prayer: "Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 176–77). Service is nearness to God: "For service in love for mankind is unity with God. He who serves has already entered the Kingdom and is seated at the right hand of his Lord" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 186). Reflecting on these lofty ideals and striving to enact them in individual and community life creates an energized atmosphere for transformation.

Because the Bahá'í community is a religious community, a new dimension reinforces the potential of the human will in striving for dignity. It has already been mentioned that all the great religions teach the submission of the human will to the will of the Creator. Believing this means believing in having access to a power much greater than what resides within human beings: "By the righteousness of God, should a man, all alone, arise in the name of Bahá and put on the armor of his love, him will the Almighty cause to be victorious,

though the forces of earth and heaven be arrayed against him" (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi 106).

Accessing this power, however, is essentially a mystical process that involves abandoning all self-interest: "O SON OF MAN! If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee" (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic no. 7). For the Bahá'í community, the belief that divine power can be harnessed for the betterment of human life on this planet is tremendously inspiring both on an individual and a collective level, and is a galvanizing force for positive action far beyond what the human will, unaided, can achieve.

Stirrings at the Grassroots and the Dignity Principle: Lessons, Prescriptions, and Propositions

Contributions to understanding the descriptive dynamics of the dignity principle at the grassroots level have been made by all three paradigms—development with freedom, justice, and empowerment. This gives rise to some very basic theoretical propositions as well as some prescriptions for action in implementing this principle.

The profit motive may be evident in many grassroots development efforts. To the extent that making a profit is one of the objectives of a development project or program, there is much that has been learned. This is the primary contribution of development with freedom. Lessons learned about stirrings at the grassroots within this model include the need for access to finance, effective financial management, market analysis, and an efficient distribution infrastructure. In cases where profit-making enterprises are being utilized as a tool for development, there is growing evidence that lessons learned about business development and management must be combined with other factors. This point has been explained persuasively by Barbara Rodey in a series of reports on microfinance. In one of them, she refers to five basic principles which can be seen as components of the underlying dignity principle being discussed here: building capacity, involvement of women, reinforcement of traditional ways of life, ownership at the grassroots, and building a sense of community. The connection of these factors with success in microfinance projects lends support to the proposition that *the pursuit of profit results in development with freedom if it is based on the struggle for dignity.*

In formulating projects and programs at the local level, people will often be faced with lack of assistance or even resistance from higher authorities, either in the public or private sectors. This may from time to time necessitate advocacy activities on the part of the project participants. Some understanding of how these higher authorities have evolved historically and how they might be approached can be gleaned from the Marxian perspective on development with justice. In confronting justice and equity issues, adherence to the dignity

principle for grassroots development organizations would mean that in taking necessary actions with higher-level institutions, the dignity of individuals and the integrity of organizations is not compromised. For example, a community-based organization might need to meet with government officials to secure land for a housing project. Following the dignity principle means that offering bribes, making a proposal that might place other similar organizations at a clear disadvantage, agreeing to political or electoral support of any kind in exchange, or engaging in other actions that compromise the basic virtues of honesty, forthrightness, and trustworthiness would not be entertained since they jeopardize the dignity of individuals involved and that of the organization as a whole. This is a difficult path to tread, and the appropriate steps to take under the changing and unique sets of circumstances all organizations encounter would not always be clear. Holding to the dignity principle might also sometimes involve difficult short-term sacrifices.

A word needs to be said about structural change including at the global level. Institutional change among agencies, authorities, and governments, although of vital importance, is not a reasonable primary role for organizations geared to development activities at the community level. It has already been stated that the long-term means for assuring social justice are education, certain structural changes in governance that militate against totalitarianism, and an infusion of the dignity principle throughout societal processes from the ground up, but other factors come to bear as well. The Bahá'í writings outline three main actors in the broader process of societal change—individuals in key positions, governing institutions, and the people themselves: ". . . when the pure intentions and the justice of the ruler, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of the governing authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people, are all combined; then day by day the effects of the advancement, of the far-reaching reforms, of the pride and prosperity of government and people alike, will become clearly manifest" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 108).

National- or regional-level civil society organizations, as organs of "the people" can play an important role here.[26] They comprise part of a process that is essentially an organic one, where interplay among all three components—leaders, institutions, and the people—results in change. Such an organic view of societal development is found in the Bahá'í writings:

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26. For a discussion of a typology of NGOs and their various current roles and functions, see Vakil, "Confronting the Classification Problem." Appropriate roles for these higher-level organizations in transforming themselves and other institutions such as government and international aid organizations represents a very important subject for research. A potential case study of strategies and practices associated with the dignity principle as they pertain to higher-level NGOs can be found in the Bahá'í International Community, the representative agency of the world Bahá'í community with nongovernmental status at the United Nations.

> The world of politics is like the world of man; he is seed at first, and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and foetus, acquiring a bone structure, being clothed with flesh, taking on his own special form, until at last he reaches the plane where he can befittingly fulfill the words: "the most excellent of Makers." Just as this is a requirement of creation and is based on the universal Wisdom, the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 107)

However, for all three actors—key individuals, institutions, and people at large—the struggle for dignity must permeate their efforts if these are to be rendered successful: "The spiritually learned must be characterized by both inward and outward perfections; they must possess a good character, an enlightened nature, a pure intent, as well as intellectual power, brilliance and discernment, intuition, discretion and foresight, temperance, reverence and a heartfelt fear of God" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 33–34).

The ultimate achievement of social justice is therefore not a simple process, and only a part of it pertains to stirrings at the grassroots. This leads to the proposition that, at all levels, *it is the struggle for human dignity that results in development with justice, not the struggle for power.*

Much has also been learned from development with empowerment. Indeed many of the tools associated with the dignity principle were identified through this approach. Among the lessons learned are the importance of tapping into the resource of indigenous culturally based knowledge, utilizing cultural forms of expression as inspirational and educational tools, and acquiring the skills needed to build effective organizations. Much has been written within this paradigm on these factors. It is also within an empowerment paradigm that traditional notions of power involving domination and the assumption of win-lose outcomes, have been questioned. This is most clearly acknowledged in the Bahá'í model: "At the heart of the matter here is the empowerment of the masses of humanity. This must of necessity occur at the grassroots level. For Bahá'ís, the manner in which authority is collectively exercised by local and national Bahá'í administrative institutions provides a glimpse of how power can be constructively tapped and channeled for the benefit of individuals and communities."[27]

The Bahá'í community offers some interesting examples, some of which are not well known at this time, of how the dignity principle can be applied within an empowerment framework. We will refer to only two of these. *Planning Progress,* June Manning Thomas's book on what can be learned about community-based planning from Shoghi Effendi, describes the historical growth and development of the global Bahá'í community by providing an outline of his plans, communications, and leadership style that can be seen as a blueprint for

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27. Bahá'í International Community to Anna C. Vakil, 18 November 1998.

positive change in many contexts. Thomas initially provides some guidelines derived from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá that include features not normally associated with planning, such as inspiration and encouragement, faith, love and unity, and detachment from materialism. She then goes on to describe Shoghi Effendi's unique approach to systematically fostering human dignity through creating a vision, developing goals and strategies, and monitoring implementation of plans. The attributes of Shoghi Effendi's approach have significant implications for moral leadership in community-based development.[28] Among other things, they include constant reference to the vision for change, the nurturing of the individual, generous use of praise and encouragement, and strong commitment to the plan through personal example.

Another example that has attracted some attention in the field of development communication is an extremely successful Bahá'í radio station in Ecuador described in a case study by Kurt Hein. Its programming, conducted mostly in the Quechua language and aimed at an indigenous listening audience in the Andean region of Ecuador, includes traditional music, locally based news and public announcements, as well as education in agriculture, health, sanitation, and nutrition. Hein describes the success of the station as being related to the following factors: direct access of the listeners to the station and its programs, participation that involved extensive training of local people as staff and volunteers, locally based management, fostering of local leadership, commitment to local culture and language, radio as an appropriate technology for the region, appropriate technical standards suitable to the listeners that included indigenous radio voices, low cost (including the construction of the station which relied on local resources), and a spirit of service.

There is a vast reservoir of knowledge on effective methods of implementing the dignity principle in stirrings at the grassroots that can be used in development, drawing from all three traditions of freedom, justice, and empowerment. This is only a preliminary list:[29]

- use of cultural symbols and practices as powerful tools for effecting change
- use of beauty both in the arts and in nature as an inspirational tool
- advocacy skills in interacting with higher-level agencies and authorities
- consideration of environmental impact and long-term sustainability of all activities
- conscious acknowledgement and development of virtues such as trustworthiness, perseverance, patience, and humility
- fostering of moral leadership

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28. This topic has also been pursued extensively by Anello.

29. In addition to those sources previously mentioned, two others were used: Bahá'í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development*, and Mottahedeh Development Services, *Developing Patterns of Community Life*.

- use of consultation and associated skills
- free and open exchange of information
- building capacity in decision making and organizational functioning
- creation of a shared vision that is continuously invoked
- building a sense of community based on service, reciprocity, and responsibility
- heavy use of praise and encouragement to support the individual
- mining the knowledge that already resides within the community
- conscious acknowledgement of equity and justice in all collective decision making
- universal participation in decision making, particularly among minorities, women, children and youth, and other disadvantaged groups
- identification of relevant spiritual and moral principles

Conclusion

The prevailing approaches to development with respect to stirrings at the grassroots have fallen lamentably short of their stated goals since they lack the appropriate foundation in a theory of human nature that is based on human dignity. Neither the profit motive alone nor the quest for power—the driving forces within modernization and Marxism, respectively—has resulted in real and sustainable development, and both have inherent dangers. Development with freedom has focused on economic freedom, with the paradoxical end result that all have become enslaved by the economy. Transnational corporations are free to move wherever labor costs are low and environmental regulations are lax.[30] Meanwhile in many communities, people go hungry when there is more than enough food to feed everyone. Even those who care deeply about this disparity are powerless to do much. This is not freedom. Development with justice has resulted not in justice but, at best, a temporary façade that masquerades as justice. Even when movements acting on behalf of the people manage to seize power, the force and violence they have used to achieve power often lead to their undoing. This is a far cry from justice. Development with empowerment incorporates many of the processes and methods necessary for human dignity to flourish, but it needs to be disentangled from traditional notions of power.

As the elements of the dignity principle at the grassroots level are explored, experimented with, and developed, it may eventually be seen that, along with other mechanisms at higher levels, this new foundation helps fulfill the goals of all the current models as we have described them here—freedom, justice, and empowerment. Theory and action centering on the struggle for dignity can eventually result in these seemingly contradictory approaches converging into a

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30. For a lengthy but dismal description of the negative consequences of the modernization paradigm, see Korten, *When Corporations Rule*.

single theory and unified set of policy tools, unencumbered by false distinctions between industrialized and developing nations, unconfined by the barriers that divide the different scholarly disciplines, freed from the confines of political and economic ideologies, unrestrained by misleading conceptions of expertise that ignore the wisdom and knowledge of masses of people and prevent them from having input into the decisions that affect them, and released from the confusion and disillusionment created by a notion of human nature that has so far focused almost exclusively on the lower aspect of what it is to be human.

This paper began with an examination of stirrings at the grassroots as the current emphasis of Bahá'í development and an empirical phenomenon now widely documented in research and practice. The recognition that this phenomenon is not adequately explained by the dominant theories of development is essentially a window for questioning the viability of development theory in general. Additional windows—or, better stated, holes—in these major perspectives can be found as well. Two were briefly dealt with in this paper and have been extensively addressed by others—the challenge posed to development processes by environmental conservation and the persistent inequality of women and men. A third was touched on: globalization. A fourth was initially stated as an assumption: that development is a universal process but one that, due to historical contingencies, has been splintered into separate analyses of what applies to the industrialized countries and the developing countries. This is a false dichotomy that needs to be addressed, since there is very little work in this area. Finally, the field of ethical development represents an excellent opportunity for discourse about human nature and values in development. All five need more exploration from the perspective of how the Bahá'í teachings can inform a theory of development.

The framework proposed here, with the struggle for dignity as the organizing principle and the human will as the force that propels it, is a potentially useful one. It is firmly grounded in a theory of human nature that can be applied at both the individual and collective levels. It can be understood and analyzed from a number of different disciplinary perspectives. It acknowledges what has been learned from the past. It is consistent with basic ideas about human nature taught by all the major religions. At the same time, it is comprehensible by ordinary people on a rather common-sense level. People know they can strive for a higher state, and they know they can exercise the will to achieve it if they choose to. This point is of vital importance. If people everywhere are to become intimately involved in, and to direct, the development process, it is essential that the basic dynamics of that process are comprehensible to them.

It is also important that development workers in various areas of practice can identify with the principles. Currently, there is a major disjuncture between what most people working in the development field at the grassroots level accept as experiential knowledge about community-based development

processes, and paradigms that are incapable of incorporating this knowledge (principally modernization and Marxian approaches). Experiential knowledge referred to here includes such things as community participation, consultative skills, and involvement of women. Profit and power as the sole attributes of human motivation are clearly inadequate explanatory and prescriptive tools. When the notion of the struggle for dignity is incorporated, this experiential knowledge begins to fall into place.

What has been presented in this paper is a skeleton that needs more flesh. There are implications for a number of areas of scholarly study that were only superficially touched on in this discussion. One is a more thorough textual analysis of Bahá'í and other religious texts on the basic principles of nobility and volition, as well as the relationship between volition and the will of God and how these concepts relate to development. This is an area appropriate for those interested in religious studies and philosophy. Implications for psychology include the need for a greater understanding of the dynamics of the human will and how it influences human behavior.[31] The mobilization of collective will, usually studied by sociologists, is an area that needs major reexamination. The historical concentration on conflict has likely been exhausted and needs to give way to a new exploration of how people can effectively work together and overcome conflict on a collective level in order to resolve problems. Related to this, also, is the rapidly growing applied field of conflict resolution, which has implications far beyond individual disputes in the courts,[32] as well as small group consultation, where a significant contribution has been made by Bahá'ís in particular due to the extraordinary emphasis placed on consultation in the Bahá'í writings.[33] An increased understanding of the dynamics of development processes has direct implications for further study and application in the field of human rights.[34] The study of social change as it affects national and global development, only briefly touched on in this discussion, would be significantly advanced by a thorough textual analysis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Secret of Divine Civilization*, an exercise begun by Saiedi. There are also enormous implications for the field of education, especially moral education, some of which were referred to in this paper.

The framework for development outlined in this paper has the largest implications for the field of neoclassical economics. The implications are twofold. The first has to do with the need to incorporate the notion of human dignity into the technical aspect of economics, particularly theories of value and

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31. An additional implication of understanding the human will is for the study of science itself and the possible existence of laws other than cause-and-effect. See note 15.

32. For an assessment of conflict resolution from a Bahá'í perspective, see Gonzalez.

33. For an example of how some of the Bahá'í principles of consultation can be tested, see Kolstoe.

34. See note 13 on human rights.

utility within microeconomics.[35] Whether it will be possible to do so remains to be seen, but effort needs to be expended toward this end nonetheless. The establishment of the Society for Socio-Economics[35] is an encouraging development in this regard. The second implication, related to the first, has to do with the place economics has historically occupied relative to other actors within the domain of development "expertise." Economists have held dominion here because, of all the social sciences, the "dismal science" deals the least with variables relating to humans. While this may seem paradoxical, it has enabled them, in the words of economist Gregory Dahl, to "take refuge in self-consistent theoretical worlds of highly simplified models or in empirical, mechanistic worlds of regression analysis and statistics, all comprehensible only to themselves" ("Economics" 1–2). Reverence for the rarefied world of numbers by powerful decision makers in governments and international agencies involved in development needs to give way to a more balanced process where economists might take their place alongside other professionals, NGOs, religious and spiritual leaders, as well as ordinary people. Economists, on their part, need to actively work toward this outcome as well. Happily, such movement is already happening, as shown by the recent Dialogue on World Faiths and Development organized by the World Bank in London in 1998. Interestingly, the motivation comes not only from the extraordinary recognition that development needs to be informed by the accumulated knowledge of the world's great religions, but it also springs from the realization that establishing efficiency as the sole goal of development within the modernization paradigm, with its concomitant underutilization of most of the human resources on the planet, has itself proved to be inefficient!

Putting into practice the principle of fostering the struggle for dignity that draws on the power of the human will is a necessary step toward a development that is real and sustainable. However, these mechanisms become fortified and much more potent when they are permeated with belief in God. The Bahá'í community's history with development illustrates how much more powerful this model becomes when it is infused with the conviction that individual and collective efforts operating according to a divinely revealed set of principles within the framework of a spiritual democracy are reinforced by the Primal Will. The framework proposed in this paper can be understood without acceptance or belief in a Creator. Concepts like dignity and the human will are digestible without this. However, it is interesting to note that the reason people understand these ideas is the accumulated impacts throughout time of the great

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35. Work has already been done on a joint utility function, based on Becker, primarily as a response to the identification of the household as an economic unit, but the basic assumptions of value and utility are maintained.

36. The significance of this development is discussed in Gregory Dahl, "Evolving."

religions, which are themselves the source of this understanding. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

> There are some who imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and insure his spiritual and material perfection. That is, that an individual who is characterized with natural intelligence, high resolve, and a driving zeal, will, without any consideration for the severe punishments consequent on evil acts, or for the great rewards of righteousness, instinctively refrain from inflicting harm on his fellow men and will hunger and thirst to do good. And yet, if we ponder the lessons of history it will become evident that this very sense of honor and dignity is itself one of the bounties deriving from the instructions of the Prophets of God. (*Secret* 97)

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