

Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings

An Initial Exploration

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Dedication

In fond memory of Professor Reuben Bonney who introduced me to Whitehead so many years ago.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	110
Outline of Whitehead's Process World-View	110
Continuation and Break with Plato and Aristotle	112
Process Thought in the Bahá'í Writings: An Overview	114
Process at the Macrocosmic Level	116
Process at the Microcosmic Level	117
The Structure of "Actual Occasions"	119
Self-Actualisation	122
An Interlude on Freedom, Novelty and Responsibility	123
Atoms, "Actual Occasions" and the "Philosophy of Organism"	124
Causality and Self-Actualisation	127
The Implications of Causality	127
Causality and the Proof of God	128
Whitehead's Theory of God	119
God's Exceptionalism	133
Manifestations	134
The Correspondence Theory of Truth	135
Substance and Essence	136
Immortality of the Soul	137
The Bahá'í Writings and Teilhard de Chardin	138
Matter and Process	138
Direction in Evolution	140
The Expansion of Consciousness	141
The "Omega-Point"	142
A New Stage in Human Evolution	145
Spiritual Unification	147
The New Individual	148
Freedom	149
The Manifestations	151
Conclusions	152
Select Bibliography	153
Notes	155

*Panta rhei.*¹

Introduction

Process philosophy and its off-shoot, process theology, stand among the most important intellectual developments of the last century. Although process thought in the West has a long and distinguished history, beginning with Heraclitus and extending through Schelling, Hegel, Marx and Schopenhauer among others, it is Whitehead's and Teilhard de Chardin's versions that have particularly inspired modern and contemporary philosophers and theologians. This is especially true in the case of Whitehead whose broad-based and far-reaching theories, explicated with the rigour expected of a logician, mathematician and mathematical physicist, have originated an entire philosophical-theological movement personified by such distinguished names as Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin. Like Teilhard de Chardin in his own speciality of evolution, these thinkers have sought to harmonise empirical science and religion in what is called "natural theology." For this reason alone, process philosophy and theology are of great interest to Bahá'ís since the explicit teachings of Bahá'u'lláh commit them to a belief in the ultimate one-ness of all truth and the harmony of science and religion.² However, process philosophy, especially as espoused by Whitehead and Chardin, has other attractions for Bahá'ís. Among these are a thorough-going evolutionary vision of the natural

world; a willingness to draw data from all aspects of human experience and not just from the abstracted experience of mathematics and laboratory experiments; an ability to accommodate a variety of viewpoints within a logically coherent system; acknowledgement of the logical necessity of God and a recognition of humankind's unique status in the cosmos. On these grounds alone, it is clear that there are sufficient significant similarities between the Bahá'í Writings and process philosophies of Whitehead and de Chardin to make a comparison and contrast study worthwhile. However, this must not be misunderstood to mean that there is always a plainly obvious point-by-point agreement between the Writings and contemporary process philosophy. Rather, we must understand that they are often complementary, which is to say, they are like fellow travellers: going in the same direction, sometimes by the same and sometimes by different paths – but never so far apart that they lose complete sight of each other. In practical terms this means that Bahá'ís will eventually have to contribute their own version of process philosophy and theology.

An Outline of Whitehead's Process World-View

The fundamental idea underlying all varieties of process philosophy is the belief that the concept of 'process' or 'change' is basic to any ontological description of reality. Whitehead's first Category of explanation states that "the

actual world is a process, and that process is the becoming of actual entities.”³ ‘Change’ or ‘process’ includes, among other things, movement, growth, renewal, decay, emergence, actualisation or ‘concrecence’ in Whitehead’s language, creativity, transition, sublimation, dialectic, transformation, expansion, contraction, reception, causal action, adaptation, complexification, enrichment, augmentation, synthesis, catalysis and perishing. According to the process world-view nothing in the natural world – with the possible exception of some aspects of God – is exempt from one kind of change or another. Even apparent stabilities are to be explained as repetitions or regularities of change. In other words, unchanging ‘things’ are not what endure, but rather, patterns or regularities of change in small, micro-processes or large, macro-processes. An individual of any kind, be it an atom, a star, a virus or a human being, is a succession of states or experiences which constitute the reality of that individual. The concept of potentials also plays a significant role in the process world-view because each individual and kind or class of thing is defined by the changes which are possible for them. Everything in nature has potentials for only certain kinds of changes and these potentials help to define them as what they are. Furthermore, the process world-view sees the entire cosmos as a single, organically connected whole in which, directly or indirectly, everything exerts influence on everything else. In varying ways, most, if not all, process philosophers see God not

only as logically necessary in order to explain nature adequately, but also as taking some sort of role in cosmic developments, be it at the level of micro or macro processes.

Process philosophers reject metaphysical materialism insofar as they reject the notion that ultimately stable atoms or sub-atomic particles of whatever dimension are the final building blocks of natural reality. There are no final ‘building blocks’ in the sense of there being some final, indivisible physical entities; there are only “actual occasions,” “drops” or “units” of experience,” happenings or events of creativity and the relations between them. In the process world-view, the ultimate category of understanding ourselves and the cosmos is ‘creativity’.⁴ It is also evident that process philosophy is inherently social insofar as it sees all things, micro or macro, as involved in on-going relations essential to their constitutions or essential natures. Without getting bogged down in the details, or in the specialised terminology process philosophers have developed, we may say that each event arises, manifests its potentials in its inter-action with other events and then “perishes” after having attained “satisfaction,” that is, actualised its potentials. As noted before, what appears to us as a substantial entity is, in actual fact, a pattern repeating itself. Ultimately, the universe is made of ‘events,’ some of which manifest in patterns we identify with physical matter and others which manifest in patterns we identify with ‘mind’ or ‘soul’. In the

process view, 'mind,' 'soul' and 'body' are simply different patterns or configurations that events or "actual occasions" may manifest to human apprehension.⁵

The process world-view accepts the principle that reality from very simplest to the most complex entities is evolutionary although the amount of development undergone by some "actual occasions" is so minuscule as to be, for all practical purposes, non-existent, at least over relatively short periods of time. This evolutionary process has no end and is, for process theists, co-eternal with God, however He might be imagined. It is on the issue of evolution that a difference of focus appears among process philosophers; on one hand we have those who, like Whitehead, tend to focus on the basic metaphysical nature of the universe and the theological implications thereof, whereas, on the other hand we have those who, like de Chardin⁶, focus on human evolution and its possible developments in the future. In these works, Bahá'ís, prepared by the Writings, find themselves ready to encounter ideas that, at the very least, harmonise comfortably with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. This is especially true in the case of de Chardin whose vision of human evolution inevitably strikes Bahá'ís positively because of its emphasis on our spiritual development.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify an important issue lest it impede understanding. On the part of some, there is a temptation to say that process philosophies represent a rejection of the

concept of 'being' in favour of 'becoming'. It is imperative to resist such a simplistic conclusion. Whiteheadian process philosophy does not reject 'being' per se but rather explains our being in terms of becoming. As Whitehead says, "According to the Ninth Category of Explanation, *how* an actual entity becomes constitutes *what* that actual entity is. This principle states that the *being* of a *res vera* is constituted by its '*becoming*'.⁷" In other words, instead of saying there is a single enduring entity or substance called 'John Smith' which undergoes accidental changes, we say there is a process called 'John Smith' which repeats certain recognisable patterns and exhibits certain new ones. We have our being in or through our becoming, rather than in a single, changeless substance. Process philosophies clearly recognise the importance of both 'being' and 'becoming' as undeniable aspects of the cosmos and human experience; they differ from some other philosophies in how they understand and explain these terms.

Continuation and Break with Plato and Aristotle

From the foregoing, we may conclude that process philosophy both continues and breaks with an analysis of reality begun by Plato and Aristotle. It represents a continuation of Plato insofar as it accepts the concept of Platonic Ideas, now termed "eternal objects,"⁸ as the always available potentially real attributes that an "actual entity"⁹ might possess.

In other words, the Platonic Ideas have been transformed into potentials available for actualisation by real processes which participate in the “eternal objects” just as the earthly images or counterparts participate in Plato’s Ideas. It should be noted that Whitehead included Platonic Ideas because this was necessary to develop a logically coherent system. Plato, of course, thought of the Ideas as entities more real than their earthly, material counterparts, but Whitehead does not agree with this. To him, they are real in the sense of being available, but they are not actual insofar as they cannot take action on their own. Whitehead agrees with the Aristotelian notion that to be ‘fully’ real or actual means to be able to act, and potentials cannot do this; they must be realised by something that is already an actuality.

For Bahá’is, of course, the question that arises immediately is whether or not the Platonic Ideas or Forms have any correspondences in the Writings. There are three possible answers here. One is to infer their existence as constituents of the “First Mind”¹⁰ which is active in the world, and contains these Ideas as logically necessary pre-existents to its activities. Without them, it would be acting unintelligently and unconsciously, and, therefore, imperfectly. The second is to say that the Platonic Ideas are the names of God, such as “Creator,”¹¹ the “Resuscitator”¹² or the “Educator”¹³ whose activities imply all existences and processes. Third, we could combine the first two and say that the Platonic Ideas appear in the Writings as the names of

God as known by the First Mind. The last two options move the Writings in the direction of a form of process philosophy because the notions of being a Creator, Resuscitator and Educator imply activities and actions. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out, a Creator who has not created or does not create is inconceivable.¹⁴

The continuity between Whiteheadian process philosophy and Aristotle will become increasingly evident throughout this paper. For now it suffices to note that Whitehead makes use of the following concepts: essence and attribute, essential and accidental attributes, the realisation of potentials, substance which he identifies with actual entities,¹⁵ the nature of God and His action in the world, the correspondence theory of truth and the four-fold analysis of causality into material, efficient, formal and final causes. He also accepts the notion that entities may be understood as composites of form and substance. Naturally, Whitehead adapts some of these concepts to his own “philosophy of organism”¹⁶ but the transformations are not so extreme – and in the case of essence, attribute, causality, and potential are quite minimal – that we cannot fail to recognise their connection to the Aristotelian concepts. Indeed, Whitehead, who is quite conscious of his debt to his intellectual predecessors, goes to some lengths to point out where he agrees with and diverges from Aristotle. For example, Whitehead’s notion of ‘substance’ is superficially quite different from Aristotle’s, yet not so different

that Whitehead authorities such as William Christian cannot see significant similarities.

For Bahá'ís, the issue with Aristotle is important because the Bahá'í Writings appear to confirm or share correspondences with much of Aristotle's way of analysing reality¹⁷ – which, of course, is not to say that they do not modify and/or extend the basic concepts of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* in new directions. However, given the extent to which they confirm the Aristotelian analysis of reality, it becomes important that any philosophy claiming affinity with the Writings must be at least logically compatible with them and share certain fundamental outlooks. For example, given Aristotle's and the Bahá'í Writings' commitment to a correspondence theory of truth, it is difficult to see how any extreme form of scepticism could ever be compatible with the works of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.

Process Thought in the Bahá'í Writings: An Overview

The Bahá'í Writings contain a number of passages strongly suggesting a process world-view at both the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. The foundations for the microcosmic level is set in the following quotation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose—that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either

*coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence. So this flower, this hyacinth, during a certain period of time was coming from the world of nonexistence into being, and now it is going from being into nonexistence. This state of motion is said to be essential—that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn.*¹⁸

*Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining.*¹⁹

When we examine this statement, we note, first of all, its categorical nature, as indicated by the words “nothing,” “all things,” “everything,” “necessary” and “essential.” In other words, the phenomena described is applicable to all things without exception regardless of whether they are natural or man-made. Next, we notice the flat assertion not only that all things are in motion but that “movement is necessary to existence.”²⁰ Moreover, the concept of ‘movement’ and ‘motion’ is not restricted to a change of physical place as indicated by the reference to growth and decline which involve changes of augmentation, complexification, actualisation, transformation, reception, causal action, synthesis, catalysis, decay and perishing. More significantly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares, “all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence.”²¹ This change is an “essential requirement,”²² that is, an

essential attribute for the thing to exist as the *kind* of thing it is, for example, fire. These statements alone qualify the Bahá'í Writings as compatible with some form of process philosophy since change or movement is regarded as an essential, absolutely necessary quality and not as an accidental or contingent attribute that may or may not be present. In short, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration fully agrees with Whitehead's declaration that "the actual world is a process, and that process is the becoming of actual entities."²³ The process world-view embedded in the Master's statement becomes even more clear if we focus special attention on the categorical words, "all things," "everything" and "nothing" because these words allow us to apply the concept of change to the soul,²⁴ religion,²⁵ history, atoms²⁶ and sub-atomic entities, the earth,²⁷ human evolution and all its implied sub-areas as social, intellectual²⁸ ethical, political, scientific and cultural evolution.²⁹

Strengthening the process world-view implicit in the Writings is the following statement by Bahá'u'lláh:

*Verily, the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world—a world which is adorned with the splendours of the Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times. Immeasurably exalted is the God of Wisdom Who hath raised this sublime structure.*³⁰ [emphasis added]

Again we note the categorical nature of this statement which asserts that at *all* times, that is, without exception, cre-

ation is being "renewed and regenerated."³¹ This re-enforces the notion that change is an essential, not accidental attribute of existing things, that simple existence unavoidably involves change of some kind. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expresses a similar idea when He says, "Note thou carefully that in this world of being, all things must ever be made new,"³² after which He focuses on the specific ways in which the human spiritual and cultural world has been renewed under the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh. What is especially noteworthy in this quotation is the use of the categorical "ever" which may be read as functioning like the phrase "at all times"³³ in the statement by Bahá'u'lláh. We also note that one of the names of God is the "Resuscitator,"³⁴ which does not necessarily imply resuscitation only at the transition from one age to the next but may also imply 'resuscitation' on a continuous basis as suggested by the other divine name, the "Sustainer."³⁵ Seen thus, we have yet other indications of a perpetually on-going process of change which reaches a crucial and decisive revolutionary peak with the arrival of a Manifestation. This subject of on-going change is also emphasised in the Writings by the references to renewal in the world.³⁶ Whereas on one level such passages may be read as referring only to the 'human world,' many of them may also, without contradiction, be read as referring to a renewal of creation as a whole. This second reading accepts the term 'world' in the larger sense of both the natural and the human world. There are also numerous passages throughout

the Writings that refer to change or progress specifically at the atomic level.³⁷

Process at the Macrocosmic Level

The Writings also make clear their adherence to a process world-view at the macrocosmic level. At the most basic level this is evident in the physical evolution of the earth which is not stable but rather, as the matrix of life, has itself undergone long evolutionary development.³⁸ Furthermore, the Writings clearly accept the concept of evolution of all life-forms in general and human evolution in particular. In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that human evolution is a fact and that human beings have changed outward form over time, though He rejects the notion – most specifically in the case of humankind – that species change. He explicitly rejects the claim that that human beings were once a different kind of creation.³⁹ In other words, He accepts what is sometimes called “micro-evolution,” that is evolutionary change *within* a species while rejecting “macro-evolution” (sometimes known as ‘saltation’) which is the change of one species into another.

However, the emphasis on progress found throughout the Writings makes it clear that humankind is also intended to evolve at the higher, psycho-social and spiritual levels. Bahá'u'lláh, for example, tell us that “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”⁴⁰ and 'Abdu'l-Bahá promises,

“From the standpoints of both material and spiritual civilization extraordinary progress and development will be witnessed. In this present cycle there will be an evolution in civilization unparalleled in the history of the world.”⁴¹ The concept of spiritual evolution cannot fail to remind us of Teilhard de Chardin’s “noogenesis,”⁴² the “noosphere”⁴³ and the spiritual “Omega” point⁴⁴ towards which, according to this Jesuit paleontologist, all evolutionary developments converge. It is also obvious that progressive revelation, one of the foundations of Bahá'í theology, presents a process or evolutionary view of human intellectual and spiritual development. As circumstances change and our capacities grow, God provides guidance by means of Manifestations Whose Teachings, adapted to our better-developed intellectual and spiritual capacities, lead us forward to still higher levels of achievement and civilization.⁴⁵ These Manifestations arrive when human development reaches a critical juncture requiring a revolutionary infusion of divine energy in order to continue its forward motion. In the Bahá'í view, there is no end to this growth, neither for humankind collectively nor for individuals who, by virtue of being human, will continue their spiritual evolution after their physical death.

The general overview provided above shows that the Bahá'í world-view is a genuine process world-view in which no created being can escape change and development. That much established, it now remains to show how closely the Bahá'í Writings on process relate to the

philosophies espoused above all by Alfred North Whitehead – the best known and most systematic process philosopher of the 20th Century – and, to a lesser extent, by Teilhard de Chardin whose theories of human development have spread their influence beyond the Catholic world. We will find that the affinities are much closer than a first glance might suggest, especially in the case of Whitehead.

Process at the Microcosmic Level

According to Whitehead, the most fundamental entities in the universe are “actual occasions” or “actual entities”⁴⁶ which come into existence, actualise their potentials or attain “satisfaction” and then perish. Each actual occasion comes into existence from a previous one from whom it inherits the entire history of the preceding line of “actual occasions”; it then perishes and bequeaths itself to its successor. Like quanta in physics, “actual occasions” exist only as discrete, discontinuous entities; we cannot have $\frac{1}{2}$ or $1\frac{1}{2}$ “actual occasions”: the whole thing is either there or it is not. Moreover, as we shall emphasise at various times throughout in this paper, all ‘things’ or “enduring objects”⁴⁷ are simply the patterns made by collections or “societies” of “actual occasions” as they inter-act while passing into and out of existence. In Whitehead’s view, even an ‘atom’ is a “society” of “actual occasions,” one which seems to endure as it is because the potentiality for actualising new develop-

ments of “novelties”⁴⁸ is so minimal. More complex organisms such as humankind are not just “societies”⁴⁹ of “actual occasions” but societies of societies, co-ordinated by a ‘line’ or historical route of a dominant occasion which in human beings is called a soul. All of these “actual occasions” are being constantly renewed by God, Who, in Whitehead’s system, is not merely the Creator but also the Sustainer and the source of cosmic order.

On the subject of change at the most fundamental level, the degree of affinity between Whitehead and the Bahá'í Writings depends on how we choose to read the latter. In other words, how much similarity we see between the two depends on how we interpret ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements that “nothing which exists remains in a state of repose”⁵⁰ and that “all things must ever be made new”⁵¹ as well as Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration that the world is being “renewed and regenerated at all times.”⁵² Indeed, He declares that the “process of His creation hath no beginning and can have no end.”⁵³ This, of course, can be read to mean that creation is a constantly on-going process, that is, constant re-creation throughout the entire universe, even among those things that already seem to have been created. If we remain at the macrocosmic level, these are simple declarations of universal mutability. However, if we choose to apply these statements at the microcosmic, atomic and sub-atomic levels, then a radical vision emerges which is startlingly similar to Whitehead’s portrayal of micro events. According to

Whitehead, it is “fundamental . . . that notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject of change is completely abandoned.”⁵⁴ As asserted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, change is essential, not accidental. Furthermore, in Whitehead’s metaphysics, everything from atoms to trees, stars and humans, are made of “societies” of “actual occasions” or actual entities each of which comes into existence from a predecessor, actualises its potentials, then bequeaths its data to its own successor in whom it is “renewed and regenerated.”⁵⁵ To illustrate what this means, we might imagine “actual occasions” or actual entities ‘flashing’ into and out of existence, thereby creating a historic route that makes up the life history of one particular occasion.⁵⁶ The patterns set up by these processes constitutes the familiar, seemingly enduring entities we call ‘things’. However, because their constitutive “actual occasions” are processes, it follows that, in effect, these enduring ‘things’ too are constantly changing albeit in ways we usually find too small to notice. They, too, are flashing into and out of existence, creating thereby the patterns by which we recognise them. Neither atoms nor the larger objects of everyday life are the stable substances they appear to be for they, like everything else in creation, are being “renewed and regenerated at all times.”⁵⁷ Whitehead says that everyday things are a “reiteration” of a pattern formed by “actual occasions.” There is no question that he fully intends this consequence of his analysis of reality since he approvingly repeats Descartes’

claim that “endurance is nothing else than successive recreation by God.”⁵⁸

In effect, Whitehead supports a theory known as continuous creation, that is, the belief that creation is never-ending, that God is always both Creator and the Sustainer⁵⁹ because He sustains by creating and ‘renewing and regenerating’ “at all times.”⁶⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that the “creation thereof [the universe] is without beginning and without end”⁶¹ and Bahá’u’lláh says, “Endeavour now to apprehend from these two traditions the mysteries of “end,” “return,” and “*creation without beginning or end.*”⁶² If we read these statements as referring to time and not merely to endless space, then the embedded idea of continuous creation becomes evident. Moreover, reflection on the divine Name of “Creator” also suggests this conclusion. If God only created once, He would be subject to an imperfection in the present, something which cannot be. One might argue, of course, that He is creating other worlds, and this is, no doubt, the case but given the previously noted passage on renewal and regeneration, it seems equally likely that He is also manifesting His perfection and power as the ever-creating ground of all being everywhere at all times. This is suggested by the following:

Glory be to Thee, O my God! The power of Thy might beareth me witness! I can have no doubt that should the holy breaths of Thy loving-kindness and the breeze of Thy bountiful favor cease, for less than the twinkling of an eye, to breathe over all created things, the entire creation would perish, and

*all that are in heaven and on earth would be reduced to utter nothingness.*⁶³

Furthermore, our Whiteheadian reading of the Writings provides a metaphysical ground to such statements as the following about the loyal servant of God who will “regard the world even as a shadow that vanisheth swifter than the twinkling of an eye.”⁶⁴ With our understanding enriched from Whitehead’s perspective, it becomes evident that the notion of the world vanishing “swifter than the twinkling of an eye”⁶⁵ is not simply a metaphor but a profound metaphysical truth meant to be taken literally. It is no mere hyperbole expressing the shortness of life. It also provides a further metaphysical ground for understanding the contingency of all creation and our complete dependence on God from one moment to the next. In fact, a Whiteheadian reading adds special poignancy to all the passages alluding to the fleetingness and fragility of the world which turns out to be truer than we tend to imagine. The same may be said about references to the ‘shadowy’ or delusive character of the world: because all things are, at bottom, patterns woven by “actual occasions” instead of stable, enduring substances, statements about the tenuous nature of reality have a metaphysical not merely rhetorical basis. Finally, we are able to discern yet another reason for the wisdom of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that death should be a messenger of joy to us. We literally die and are reborn or resurrected at every moment; as beings endowed with free will, we are

given the opportunity to make ourselves new from moment to moment without ceasing. Such a metaphysic cannot help but encourage an attitude of tolerance and open-ness towards the cosmos in general and all human beings in particular.

It may be objected that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specifically refers to the fact that “single or simple elements are indestructible”⁶⁶ for which reason “atoms but are single, simple and, therefore, everlasting.”⁶⁷ But this does not necessarily contradict the ‘Whiteheadian’ reading provided above: because it sums up all of its predecessors and bequeaths to its successors, each actual occasion is a phase in the everlasting life-history or historical route of events that we summarise under the name of ‘atom’.⁶⁸ Each “actual occasion” that makes up an atom carries the entire life-history of all its ancestors within it and is, thereby, a summary of all that has gone before. Nothing has been lost and for that reason the history which, in toto is the “actual occasion” or atom, is stable and enduring. In short, we may see a particular line of constantly regenerated atomic events as one atom which lasts for all time. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is simply expressing the truth from the macrocosmic point of view but this in no way undermines His declaration that nothing is in repose or that all things are ever made new.

The Structure of “Actual Occasions”⁶⁹

According to Whitehead, all “actual occasions,” and, in effect, all enduring

entities are “dipolar,”⁷⁰ that is, they have a “physical”⁷¹ and a “mental”⁷² pole. To understand Whitehead’s metaphysics accurately, it is important to overcome the biases inevitably created by this highly unfortunate choice of terminology which is often taken – erroneously – to suggest that atoms, stones or tables have a mind. In the “philosophy of organism”⁷³ as Whitehead calls his metaphysics, every actual occasion is influenced by all other “actual occasions” but especially those in its vicinity. Whitehead calls this being influenced a “prehension.”⁷⁴ Because every actual occasion represents a distinct and unique route of development, each one receives or experiences or “feels” this influence in a slightly unique way. Herein lie the roots of distinctness and individuality at the subsequent higher levels of complexity. What all this means, according to the philosophy of organism, is that every actual occasion has a subjective side, a way of receiving influence that is uniquely its own and which belongs to it alone. In Whitehead’s view, even this extremely rudimentary subjectivity is inaccessible to any other being except God because it represents, so to speak, the inner essence of an actual entity. It is the ‘within’ which is the necessary complement of the outside or physical pole of the actual occasion which is how the actual occasion projects itself and influences other “actual occasions” in its environment. This is the objective or “physical” pole of the “actual occasion” which is how it is objectively, externally perceived or ‘prehended’ by other “actual occasions.”

For Bahá’ís, two questions arise in regard to “actual occasions.” The first concerns whether or not the Writings refer to such a concept in any way and the answer is not clear.

On one hand, the smallest entity the Writings explicitly refer to are atoms and these are not to be confused with “actual occasions” insofar as for Whitehead, an atom is a “society” of “actual occasions” and is, therefore, already quite complex. Of course, the individual members, and this “society” as a whole continuously come into and go out of being and, thereby, establish the single pattern of repetitions we call an ‘atom.’ According to this reading there is no Bahá’í concept corresponding to “actual occasion.” On the other hand, one might argue that a non-literal reading of the word ‘atom’ in the Writings as being the simplest element of reality whatever they might be does provide some room for relating them to Whitehead’s “actual occasions.” These “actual occasions” are simple, single and immortal insofar as each is carried on by its successor in a line of development that has no end. Thus they meet the requirements set for them by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.’⁷⁵

Another question for Bahá’ís concerns whether the Writings actually support the notion of a subjective aspect to atoms or other simple material things? The answer will depend on how one interprets the Writings and what one chooses to regard as evidence. Take, for example, the following selection of quotations:

*To this every atom of the universe beareth witness, and beyond it the inmates of the realms on high . . .*⁷⁶

*. . . within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.*⁷⁷

*Then will the different planes of meaning be learned, and then within every atom of the universe will be witnessed the signs of the oneness of God.*⁷⁸

*. . . and the light of divine knowledge and heavenly grace hath illumined and inspired the essence of all created things, in such wise that in each and every thing a door of knowledge hath been opened, and within every atom traces of the sun hath been made manifest.*⁷⁹

In addition to these quotes, we might also reflect on the following:

*. . . every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by its influence.*⁸⁰

*Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity . . .*⁸¹

Are these statements merely intended as rhetorical devices or poetical embellishments — or are they signposts pointing out a truth about the nature of atoms? If the latter, then we have a clear indication that, rudimentary as it might be, even

atoms have an inner, subjective aspect, or “mental pole.”⁸² While their range of experience is limited, they do, nonetheless, reflect and express the Names of God.⁸³ Moreover, it is evident that each atom does so on its own and for itself and, in that sense, possesses a certain subjectivity and individuality. Indeed, this is true of any influence upon an atom: each atom receives and transmits or expresses external influences in its own way because each atom is at least numerically unique. Thus, nuclear science itself encourages us to accept the notion of a rudimentary subjectivity and individuality at the atomic level.⁸⁴ We must remember, of course, that this is not to say that such simple subjectivity is conscious; nothing in the Writings suggests that it is and Whitehead explicitly denies the doctrine that *all* experience is conscious.⁸⁵ For this reason it is erroneous to assume that because “actual occasions” and enduring entities have subjective experience they somehow think. In Whitehead’s view, receiving and transmitting influence to successors is not necessarily a conscious process.

Since “actual occasions” or such enduring entities as atoms are capable of perceiving and expressing the Names of God, it is permissible to claim that there is a basic agreement between the Writings and Whitehead about the functioning of the unfortunately named “mental pole.” Indeed, one might take this basic agreement further in two steps. First, according to Whitehead, the “mental pole” of an “actual occasion” ‘perceives’ what he calls “eternal objects”⁸⁶

which are eternal potentials functioning like Plato's Ideas. The Writings tell us that every created thing reflects the Names and attributes of God in its own degree.⁸⁷ In other words, for both the Bahá'í Writings and Whitehead, all material things exist by incorporating or exemplifying qualities or ideas that are, in some sense, abstract or 'super-natural'. This means that Whitehead and the Writings share a Platonic type metaphysics in which the physically real exists by virtue of its participation in everlasting realities. Second, without bogging ourselves down in the details of the theory, it bears noting that each enduring object, be it an atom, a chair or a star, is constituted by the combination of "eternal objects" it receives or "prehends." That combination makes up its essence. In a similar vein, the Writings tell us that all things have the capacity to reflect the Names and attributes of God in their own degree with humankind pre-eminent among them. This capacity of whatever degree it is, constitutes their essence as the kind of entities they are. In short, Whitehead and the Writings agree on what fundamentally constitutes the essence of the things of this world.

Another significant similarity between the Writings and Whitehead is that both assert the presence of God's power in all things. 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs us that all things reflect the Names and attributes of God, though humankind reflects them to a pre-eminent degree among ordinary created things.⁸⁸ In Whitehead's view, God is always present within each thing because God provides every actual occa-

sion its initial "subjective aim" which controls the becoming of a subject,"⁸⁹ that is, controls how the subject will develop. Thus, in most direct way imaginable, Whitehead's philosophy agrees with the statement that "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it."⁹⁰ Indeed, in Whitehead's philosophy God is also present or 'immanent' insofar as all created things feel the "lure"⁹¹ of God as their "object of desire." Consequently, as Whitehead writes, "the immanence of God gives reason for the belief that pure chaos is intrinsically impossible."⁹² The universe, in other words, possesses an inherent order and is not simply a chaotic aggregate functioning by chance.⁹³ Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms that "Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart."⁹⁴

Self-Actualisation

Process philosophy and the Writings also agree that the particular kind of becoming an actual entity undergoes is the self-actualisation of its potentials; as Whitehead puts it, "Self-realization is the ultimate fact of facts. And actuality is self-realizing and whatever is self-realizing is an actuality."⁹⁵ All other kinds of change are, in the last analysis, only aspects or phases in the process of this kind of change. What it realises or actualises are the potentials it inherits from its immediate ancestors which it will

develop within the parameters allowed by the kind of thing it is and with the appropriate degree of freedom and creativity. Having successfully self-actualised or attained “satisfaction,”⁹⁶ it then perishes, that is, bequeaths its actualised self as the data from which, with God’s action, a new actual entity emerges.⁹⁷ This new entity includes the essential data from its predecessor. In the Writings, the concept of actualising potentials is central, since the whole purpose of the physical sun or the spiritual Sun is to bring hidden and latent potentialities into fruition.⁹⁸ Thus, while there is no explicit agreement, there is at least logical compatibility between the Writings and Whitehead’s assertion that an actual entity goes through four stages of development, namely a “datum”⁹⁹ or what is inherited; a process of self-actualisation in accordance with the divinely provided “subjective aim”; actualisation or “satisfaction” and “decision,”¹⁰⁰ or how the actual entity adds itself to the “future beyond itself.”¹⁰¹ Whitehead’s work simply provides a detailed examination of the details of a process that both agree is essential to all that exists.

An Interlude on Freedom, Novelty and Responsibility

One might, at this point, discern a possible conflict between the Bahá'í Writings and Whitehead over the issue of freedom. According to the “philosophy of organism,” all “actual occasions” possess a certain amount of freedom in the actualisation of their God-given sub-

jective aim.¹⁰² This must *not* be misunderstood to mean that they exercise a conscious or deliberative freedom of choice; rather it means that within the bounds of its essential nature and the laws of nature, an actual occasion – or an atom – confronts a range of possibilities for development. It is impossible to predict which of these possibilities a specific actual occasion will realise. That is why, at the quantum level of reality, we must use probability calculations in making predictions about the behaviour of large numbers of sub-atomic entities. We are able to predict what an average number of them will do, but we cannot predict the ‘choices’ made by any specific individual entities. Even under the same influence they do not all necessarily react in the same way because various innate differences make them susceptible to nature’s laws in different ways. Stated in more ‘Whiteheadian’ terms, each “actual occasion” (or atom) has its own peculiar history which makes it particularly sensitive or insensitive to certain influences¹⁰³ and which is the basis of that diversity of unpredictable action we call ‘freedom’.

Closely related to freedom is the notion of “novelty,”¹⁰⁴ that is, the phenomenon of unpredictable newness or divergence from usual action. Novelty means that an actual entity actualises hitherto unseen and unexpected potentials that are the products of its individual life route and/or its interaction with its context. According to Whitehead, all “actual occasions” have at least the potential to exhibit novelty or creativity

albeit always within the bounds of their essences and of natural law. Within these limits, a certain amount of freedom, novelty and creativity is found even at the level of “actual occasions” and societies of “actual occasions” such as atoms. If – and only if – we do not misunderstand or exaggerate Whitehead’s claims on these issues there is no conflict with the Bahá’í Writings because Whitehead’s philosophy makes no claims about breaking natural laws and the limits established by an “actual occasion’s” nature or essence. Moreover, it outrightly repudiates the notion of consciousness at this level. There is no question that *Process and Reality* goes into far more detail than the Writings do, but there is no fundamental incompatibility between them because of that.

Finally, it must be noted that because they have a certain amount of freedom, all “actual occasions” and all societies thereof bear some responsibility for the kind of thing they have become, though of course, in the case of an atom that degree of responsibility is negligibly small. However, it is essential at this point to allow for Whitehead’s distinction between responsibility and culpability. An “actual occasion” is responsible for what it becomes and bequeaths to its descendants simply because it is part of a route of development but it is not morally culpable in the sense of having consciously willed a certain outcome. Thus, the roots of responsibility and what eventually becomes culpability in conscious beings extend into the deepest structures of the cosmos.

Atoms, “Actual Occasions” and the “Philosophy of Organism”

At this point, the question arises whether or not the Bahá’í Writings sanction endowing primitive entities, be they “actual occasions” or atoms, with the kind of powers of self-realisation discussed above. It is, after all, one thing to show that the Writings and Whitehead are not contradictory or even complementary and quite another to show that the Writings directly support Whitehead’s claims. I believe it possible to show that the latter is the case. Take, for example, the following quotation:

Therefore, each atom of the innumerable elemental atoms, during its ceaseless motion through the kingdoms of existence as a constituent of organic composition, not only becomes imbued with the powers and virtues of the kingdoms it traverses but also reflects the attributes and qualities of the forms and organisms of those kingdoms. As each of these forms has its individual and particular virtue, therefore, each elemental atom of the universe has the opportunity of expressing an infinite variety of those individual virtues. No atom is bereft or deprived of this opportunity or right of expression. . . . It is evident, then, that each elemental atom of the universe is possessed of a capacity to express all the virtues of the universe. . . . From this point of view and perception pantheism is a truth, for every atom in the universe possesses or reflects all the virtues of life, the manifestation of which is effected

*through change and transformation.*¹⁰⁵ [emphases added]

This passage says that an atom has the ability or potential to *acquire and express* the virtues, the “attributes and qualities”¹⁰⁶ of the kingdom into which it has been transferred during the course of its existence. These include, in potential, “all the virtues of life”¹⁰⁷ which are manifested, that is, made evident and active, “through change and transformation.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, an atom is not simply a dead lump of stuff and nothing more; rather, it is a context-sensitive and context-responsive complex of potentials to be actualised in the appropriate circumstances. In short, within the bounds of their essences and natural law, atoms – like Whitehead’s “actual occasions” – are able to respond appropriately to their contexts and, by extension, express new virtues in new contexts. As Whitehead puts it,

*The concrete enduring entities are organisms, so that the plan of the whole influences the very characters of the various subordinate organisms which enter into it . . . Thus an electron within a living body is different from an electron outside it, by reason of the plan of the body. The electron blindly runs either within or without the body; but it runs within the body in accordance with its character within the body.*¹⁰⁹

In other words, atoms and “actual occasions” are capable of responding flexibly to their environments; they are able to adapt by actualising the appropriate attributes as necessary. Such an

ability suggests that in new, never-before-seen contexts, they will be able to express wholly new responses. This, in turn, supports the notion that they are capable of at least minimal freedom and creativity. According to Whitehead, the possession of such responsive and creative flexibility is one of the criteria of living things,¹¹⁰ which is why for him, there is no clear dividing line between the living and non-living. Insofar as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “*every atom in the universe possesses or reflects all the virtues of life*”¹¹¹ at least in potential, He would seem to agree with Whitehead’s view.

The belief that an actual occasion can make itself an integral part of its context by expressing the virtues of that context is one of the foundation stones of Whitehead’s “philosophy of organism.”¹¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggests the same idea when He tells us that “each elemental atom of the universe is possessed of a capacity to express all the virtues of the universe.”¹¹³ What we see at work in both cases is the concept of an integral, mutually reflective relationship between whole and parts, which for Whitehead is the sine qua non of organic unity as distinct from mechanical unity. In the former, parts and whole show internal relationships, whereas in the latter, the relationships between parts and whole are external, as in for example an automobile engine.

Organic unity requires ‘mutual immanence.’ In some sense or other, this community of actualities of the world means that each happening is a factor in the nature of every other happening.¹¹⁴

Of course, the Bahá'í Writings do not embark on a detailed exploration of this issue, but, as we can see from the foregoing quotations, the principle of organic unity is firmly established even at the atomic level. This idea is further reinforced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration that

*all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association.*¹¹⁵

Directly or indirectly, all beings are connected and influence each other; they are involved in a web of mutual cosmic influences and interactions that join them in the same way that the constituents of an organism are joined and in communication. In short, the universe is an organic and not mechanical unity because it functions like a unified organism. From this it follows that we cannot understand any event or actual occasion in isolation from its cosmic context, something that Whitehead makes clear when he writes, "no entity can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe."¹¹⁶ Although the Writings do not explicitly agree to this notion, it is an inescapable logical consequence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "all beings are connected together like a chain."¹¹⁷

Whitehead supports his claim that the

universe is an organism by pointing out that it has an ultimate subjective aim¹¹⁸ provided for it by its dominant actual occasion, God, Who co-ordinates its activities in order to achieve a universal intensification of experience. This intensification can only be achieved if all things actualise their potentials to the maximum degree possible within the bounds of their essences and natural law. In effect, this is what transpires in evolution. According to Whitehead, God achieves this goal not by coercion but rather by persuasion,¹¹⁹ by being the "object of desire"¹²⁰ towards which entities strive. "He is the lure of feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act . . . constitutes him the initial 'object of desire' establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim."¹²¹

These ideas are strongly reminiscent of what we find in the Bahá'í Writings which also posit a universal subjective aim reflected in all entities, namely, the desire to return as close as possible to God. The nature or essence of each entity is constituted by the manner in which it engages in the process of achieving this subjective aim. Just as in Whitehead, God is the "object of desire"¹²² or "lure"¹²³ for all things, an idea which the Writings reflect in four ways. First, it is implicitly present in references to God as "the Object of the adoration of the entire creation!"¹²⁴ Second, it is implicit in the prime mover argument used by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá: God, Who is beyond change and motion is, nonetheless, the source of all movement, a feat

that can only be accomplished by being – to borrow a term from fractal geometry – the Great Attractor towards which all beings strive, though only humans may do so consciously. Third, the notion of God as the Great Attractor is also seen in the belief that all beings seek their own perfection, that is, their final cause which can ultimately be found only in God Who is the ultimate goal of their endeavours. They strive to reflect God's bounty more adequately and, thereby, perfect their own existences. Their varying capacities constitute the diversity and very order of the universe from the mineral up through the angelic. Fourth, the concept of attraction to God is implicit in the Teaching that all things in their own degree reflect the perfections of God, that is, are essentially identified by their capacity to manifest, reflect or turn themselves to the Divine. Such reflection is also a return to the Divine and Its bounties. Humankind is no exception to this; as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "God has created all and all return to God."¹²⁵

Causality and Self-Actualisation

This agreement between Whitehead and the Writings becomes even broader when we note that, like the Writings, Whitehead agrees to the Aristotelian concept of final causation¹²⁶ as vital to understanding how an actual entity develops, be it a chair or an atom. "Process is the growth and attainment of a final end."¹²⁷ He then adds, "final causation expresses the internal process

whereby the actual entity becomes itself."¹²⁸ It is the goal towards which the actual entity strives. According to the Bahá'í Writings, for human beings, this process of self-actualisation is so important that it does not even stop at physical death but continues for all eternity at the spiritual level.¹²⁹ This means that in the Bahá'í Writings and in the philosophy of organism all entities, albeit many to a minimal degree, are goal-oriented, seek self-actualisation and are, therefore, teleological in nature. This goal defines them as the kind of entities they are, or, as Whitehead says, "The ideal, itself felt, defines what 'self' will arise from the datum."¹³⁰ Because every actual entity develops itself into the kind of thing it becomes, it is, in Whitehead's view, *causa sui*.¹³¹ It creates itself not from nothing but rather develops itself from its God-given subjective aim and the data provided by the preceding actual occasion.

The Implications of Causality

Not only do Whitehead and the Writings agree on the existence of final causes, they also agree on efficient causes.¹³² According to Whitehead, "efficient causation expresses the transition from actual entity to actual entity."¹³³ In other words, as in Aristotle, efficient causality is the means by which one thing acts on another in some way, whether it be to hammer a nail or to provide data for further development or action.¹³⁴ This is significant for two reasons. First, the acceptance of efficient causation reveals another area of agreement

between Whitehead and the Writings, namely, the fact of causality, an issue that has been of some philosophical dispute since Hume. The Scottish philosopher notwithstanding, Bahá'u'lláh tells us "All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause."¹³⁵ This agreement is of enormous philosophical significance because it establishes the groundwork for the First Mover argument for God's existence which both the Writings¹³⁶ and Whitehead accept, the latter in the form of God as "the principle of concretion."¹³⁷

The acceptance of efficient and final causality is of great philosophical significance. This becomes clear when we comprehend that by accepting final causality, Whitehead, like the Writings, has also at least implicitly accepted formal causality.¹³⁸ An entity cannot be struggling to achieve a final cause without having a particular form engaged in that struggle. Its form is part of what it needs to develop its potentials. Moreover, by accepting efficient causality, Whitehead, like the Bahá'í Writings,¹³⁹ also accepts the Aristotelian notion of material causality though 'material' must not be misconstrued as being 'physical'. For example, ideas are the material from which this essay is made as I work – exert efficient causality – to provide it with a coherent form to achieve my envisaged end of a final presentation. 'Matter' in this context simply means something that is to be given form. In other words, both the Writings and Whitehead accept Aristotle's four-fold analysis of causality. This is extra-ordinarily important

because it means that they envisage a natural world in ways sufficiently similar to allow it to be subjected to the same kind of causal analysis. Both of them implicitly agree on the nature of the physical universe, a fact whose importance grows when we recall that Whitehead explicitly formulated his philosophy to be compatible with and in harmony with quantum theory. This means that a Whiteheadian reading of the Bahá'í Writings allows us to specifically identify an area in which there is harmony between religion and science on an absolutely fundamental issue for modern physics.

Causality and the Proof of God

Having accepted, like the Bahá'í Writings, an Aristotelian analysis of causality, Whitehead also accepts the resulting argument for the existence of God as the First Mover or, as he prefers to call Him, "the Principle of Concretion."¹⁴⁰ For reasons that will be clearer by the end of this paper, he says that we must accept the Aristotelian argument in a new form because his and Aristotle's metaphysics are "similar"¹⁴¹ and lead to problems requiring similar solutions. In a nutshell, his argument runs as follows: all existent things are individuals and individualisation requires limitation or borders imposed on 'matter' or the universal process. A thing cannot bring itself into existence because to do so would be to order itself before it exists. Since this is impossible, God is required as a 'limiter' Whose actions create a 'concrete' individual entity of some

kind. Hence, God is the “Principle of Concretion.”¹⁴² For His part, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms the validity of Aristotle’s First Mover proof for God’s existence:

*... we observe that motion without motive force and an effect without a cause are both impossible: that every being hath come to exists under numerous influences and continually undergoeth reaction. These influences, too, are formed under the action of still other influences ... Such a process of causation goes, and to maintain that this process goes on indefinitely is manifestly absurd. Thus such a chain of causation must of necessity lead eventually to Him Who is the Ever-Living, the All Powerful, Who is Self-Dependent and the Ultimate Cause.*¹⁴³

Regarding the nature of the physical universe, there is yet another fundamental similarity between the Bahá'í Writings and Whitehead, namely, the rejection of the notion that something can ever come from nothing. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures us that “absolute nonexistence cannot become existence. If the beings were absolutely nonexistent, existence would not have come into being.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, everything needs a preceding entity to cause it — which cause ultimately is God. Whitehead concurs: “According to the ontological principle there is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere. Everything in the actual world is referable to some actual entity”;¹⁴⁵ indeed, being defined as an entity means simply to be able to cause an effect on another actual entity.

Whitehead’s Theory of God

God is an integral part of Whitehead’s cosmology not because of any pre-existing beliefs or religious commitments but because God is a logically necessary part of any complete and adequate description of the universe and its operations. He believes that we cannot devise a scientifically and logically satisfactory explanation of the cosmos without in some way, directly or by implication, invoking a supreme being. On this point he is in complete agreement with the Writings because they too hold that no explanation of the universe can be adequate without reference to God. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes, a complete causal explanation of any reality must include a final cause¹⁴⁶ from which it follows that as the Prime Mover of the universe, God is the final cause of creation. The full explanation of any actual occasion leads ultimately to God, which is precisely Whitehead’s view insofar as God provides each and every actual occasion with the initial subjective aim without which it could not develop.

That said, two points must be noted immediately. First, God as envisioned by Whitehead is not the God of any particular religion but rather a ‘philosopher’s God’ whose attributes are known by empirical experience and logical deduction, not by divine revelation through Manifestations. We shall deal with this issue in more detail later. Second, Whitehead’s theory of God is the least developed aspect of his philosophy and, perhaps for that reason, subject to more

interpretation and controversy than any other part. Primarily through such thinkers as Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, it has sparked the development of “process theology,” which, especially in the case of Hartshorne, has led to radical conception of an ‘evolving God’ Who, in some ways, is relative and not absolute in the so-called ‘classical’ manner.¹⁴⁷

The root of the controversy lies in Whitehead’s concept of the two aspects of God, which he refers to as God’s “primordial nature”¹⁴⁸ and His “consequent nature.”¹⁴⁹ This is not, as some might think, a division of God into two or a belief in two gods. Rather, this concept refers to the two main ways in which human beings are forced by logic and experience to think about God despite the inevitable inadequacy of such thinking. The distinction between these two aspects of God is “a distinction of reason,”¹⁵⁰ that is, a distinction that can be made mentally but does not indicate actual separability. The form and content of a poem are a common example of such a distinction; the two can be thought about and treated as distinct, but in the poem itself, they are never separate but rather two aspects of the complete work. Together they make the whole. The same is true of Whitehead’s concept of God, for which reason readers must be extremely careful not to jump to conclusions about one aspect or the other in isolation.

According to Whitehead, “viewed as primordial, [God] is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute

wealth of potentiality.”¹⁵¹ This is similar to the Writings’ claim that God is the “all-knowing”¹⁵² or “omniscient”¹⁵³ insofar as He not merely has but *is* the conceptual knowledge of all potentials and all potential beings, or “actual occasions.”¹⁵⁴ Because of His conceptual knowledge of all possible beings, God provides the ground of being to all possible entities, or, as Whitehead puts it in his own peculiar-sounding terminology, God “is the unconditioned actuality of conceptual feeling at the base of things.”¹⁵⁵ For Whitehead, when God is seen in “abstraction,”¹⁵⁶ that is, seen in isolation from His consequent nature, He is “deficiently actual,”¹⁵⁷ which means that the knowledge possessed by God is “only conceptual and so lack[s] the fulness [sic] of actuality.”¹⁵⁸ God’s primordial nature only knows possibilities whereas actualities are known by His consequent nature. In His primordial aspect, God’s conceptual operations are entirely free creative acts because these operations are not yet limited or constrained by the nature or essence of any previously created actualities. In Whitehead’s view, God’s primordial or “conceptual nature”¹⁵⁹ is also changeless and immutable because of its “final completeness”¹⁶⁰ and because it ‘contains’ no actual entities which can take any action to which God might respond. Because all possibilities that might unfold through time are already inherent in it, God’s primordial nature is also complete, timeless and utterly transcendent to all created things. It is also “infinite [and] devoid of negative prehensions”¹⁶¹ which means

that God, in His primordial nature, excludes nothing that could possibly be. In this aspect, God is completely free, as well as independent of all things which obviously depend on Him for their potentiality to be known, and thereby, to exist as possibilities. God, in His primordial aspect, is 'eminently' real, that is, more real than any of the potentials because He is actual. However, *viewed in isolation*, God's primordial nature suffers three major deficiencies: it is unconscious because, in Whitehead's view, consciousness can only be the consciousness of "actual occasions" and not merely possibilities. Moreover, it is "actually deficient"¹⁶² because this aspect of God has not created any actualities. Finally, it has no personal nature or personality.

God's other aspect, according to Whitehead, is His "consequent nature"¹⁶³ wherein He is "the end and the beginning"¹⁶⁴ insofar as He is final cause that is established in the subjective aim of every actual occasion and the "lure"¹⁶⁵ that draws it on in its evolution. This also makes God immanent because His power and creativity are present in all things. In His consequent nature, God creates the world "in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom"¹⁶⁶ and responds to the cosmos He has created. Such a response requires consciousness because it concerns the "actual occasions" that God has brought out of potentiality into actual existence or, as the Writings say, "called into being."¹⁶⁷ The consequent nature feels the world "in a union of immediacy,"¹⁶⁸ which

allows it to perceive "every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system – its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy . . ." ¹⁶⁹ This aspect of God is associated with "infinite patience,"¹⁷⁰ harmony, love and the preservation of all "actual occasions" in a manner appropriate to their nature.¹⁷¹ In this aspect God is not only a personality but, for Whitehead, above all, "the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands."¹⁷² Because in his consequent nature, God responds to His creation, He must, in some sense be amenable to change.

Initial reflection upon Whitehead's doctrine of God's primordial and consequent natures reveals that they seem to contradict themselves on some issues. For example, the primordial nature is immutable, but the consequent nature is not since it responds to "actual occasions." Furthermore, the primordial nature is unconscious, non-personal and transcendent whereas the consequent nature is conscious, personal and immanent through its actions. One way of resolving this conflict is to declare that because God's nature is beyond human understanding, this admittedly self-contradictory description of God is the best we can do and that the conflict between the descriptions reflects the shortcomings of our understanding and not any bifurcation or contradiction in God. Moreover, in a sense, the conflict is a mirage since the primordial nature is a description of God from the *point of view of the abstract intellect* while the consequent nature is a description from

the viewpoint of our existential, historical and emotional experience. Different viewpoints yield different descriptions. The two viewpoints are not contradictory but rather complementary, necessitated by the inherent limits of our ability to know God. They reflect no inherent limitation in God Himself Whose final truth is beyond human comprehension.

However, resolving an apparent conflict within Whitehead's thought does nothing to resolve a serious difficulty with the Bahá'í Writings which categorically assert that God is utterly immutable and impervious to change.¹⁷³ Yet this Teaching presents its own puzzle to Bahá'ís. If God is immutable in the sense of being completely unresponsive to creation, what is the point of prayer, especially petitionary prayer? How can Bahá'u'lláh assure us that "He is wont to answer the prayers of all men"?¹⁷⁴ How can we be told that "God will answer anyone"?¹⁷⁵ or that we should "[p]ray to be forgiven"?¹⁷⁶ How could 'Abdu'l-Bahá promise that he will "pray that the Almighty will succour those holy souls with His Invisible hosts"?¹⁷⁷ If God answers our prayers then there is a 'before' when we had not yet prayed and He had not yet responded and an 'after' when these actions were taken. This seems to suggest – in blatant self-contradiction to other Writings – that there is change of some kind in God. The easiest way to resolve this difficulty is to adopt the Bahá'í belief that God is timeless; creaturely concepts such as 'before' and 'after' simply do not apply to Him. Consequently, there is no contradiction

in saying that God changes in response to prayer and that He is immutable inasmuch as these concepts are meaningful only in reference to time from which God is exempt. In some way, God is able to reconcile responsiveness with immutability. What seems like a contradiction *from the human point of view* is not, therefore, a contradiction from God's point of view; rather, the apparent contradiction is merely a reflection of our human epistemological limits and not any reflection on the nature of God Himself.

From a Whiteheadian perspective, it is also possible to argue that statements about God's immutability refer to God's primordial nature and statements about petitionary prayer refer to God's consequent nature. Because they refer to different aspects of God, they are not contradictory but complementary. However, what matters most is that we do not lose sight of the fact that if we take Whitehead's vision of God *as a whole* – as, indeed, we should lest we inadvertently lapse into the polytheism he rejects – we encounter a Being Who is eternal, all-knowing, immutable, creative, free, compassionate and responsive, the "object of desire," complete, personal, all inclusive, independent (self-subsisting), transcendent, timeless and universally present and active. Furthermore, God is essentially unknowable insofar as He cannot be explained in causal terms, which is to say, cannot be explained at all; rather, God is the basis from Whom ultimately, all other explanations are derived. "The given course of history

presupposes his primordial nature, but his primordial nature does not presuppose it.”¹⁷⁸ In other words, God is not causally dependent on the history of the cosmic process. These characterisations of God do not differ from the Bahá'í Writings in any significant respect.

God's Exceptionalism

Notwithstanding Whitehead's attempt to make God the exemplar of “metaphysical principles,”¹⁷⁹ that is, the origin and primary model of cosmic order and not an exceptional Being, Whitehead's description of God's attributes clearly shows that he did not succeed in this goal. Although God shares some attributes with “actual occasions,” He differs from them in so many significant respects that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that there is a “categorical difference”¹⁸⁰ between Him and the rest of creation. Unlike other “actual occasions,” God has no origin in time,¹⁸¹ that is, He has no beginning and no end, and this alone makes Him different *in kind* from other “actual occasions” all of which have definite starting points and endings. Furthermore, among “actual occasions,” only God envisages *all* possibilities¹⁸² and, therefore, His conceptual experience and knowledge have no limits in space or time, which is to say, He is “all-knowing.”¹⁸³ Because His envisagement is non-temporal, He cannot ‘develop in time,’ that is, He cannot actualise any potentials since, in Whitehead's system, actualisation involves the *sequential* envisagement of possibilities. From this

it follows that God does not attain satisfaction of His subjective aims in the same manner as other “actual occasions.” In Whitehead's terms, the divine satisfaction would consist of one continuous “complex integral feeling”¹⁸⁴ which is free of all disharmonies. In other words, God is unified, or “one.” Furthermore, unlike other “actual occasions” no matter how sophisticated, God is able to ‘prehend’ or know every actual occasion from the viewpoint of its own subjective aim. Here, too, God has privileged knowledge. He is also an exception by being the final cause of all “actual occasions” instead of simply the final cause in a single line of development. Finally, God is the only actual entity to possess a primordial and consequent nature.

This survey of some of the major differences between God and other “actual occasions” makes a strong case for concluding that, intentions to the contrary, Whitehead's God is not just an actual occasion like all the others. He is clearly different not just in degree but in kind. Indeed, from a Bahá'í perspective, Whitehead's vision God may not be different enough because He still shares some attributes with the created “actual occasions.” This would appear to contradict Bahá'u'lláh's declaration that “no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute.”¹⁸⁵ However, the contradiction is not genuine because Bahá'u'lláh's statement refers to God's Essence which is completely unlike anything else, and, therefore, unknowable, whereas created things may resemble the

divine attributes as revealed by the Manifestation. We cannot know God in Himself, but, through the Manifestation, we can, at least analogically,¹⁸⁶ know some of His attributes. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "as things can only be known by their qualities and not by their essence, it is certain that the Divine Reality is unknown with regard to its essence and is known with regard to its attributes."¹⁸⁷ For example, one of God's attributes is creativity – He is, after all, the Creator – but unless that word bears at least some analogical resemblance to what humans understand by 'creativity,' nothing the Manifestation says about it would be meaningful to us.¹⁸⁸

From a Bahá'í perspective, a similar solution can be used to explain the similarities between God and other "actual occasions" in Whitehead's philosophy. In the first place, these similarities refer only to God's attributes and not to God Himself, and, in the second place, they refer to God's attributes analogically and not univocally. On the basis of evidence already presented, it is possible to argue that given the enormous differences between God and all other "actual occasions," similarities between God's attributes and "actual occasions" can at best be analogical. While Whitehead does not make this point explicitly, such a view would be in keeping with his belief that God is beyond all causal explanation and understanding.

Manifestations

Although there is nothing in the philos-

ophy of Whitehead to suggest the existence of Manifestations of God, the existence of such a Being is not excluded by his metaphysical system. Indeed, his system allows us to devise an almost naturalistic explanation of Manifestations that coincides remarkably with the Bahá'í teachings.¹⁸⁹ It would run as follows. According to Whitehead, there is a particular process which characterises all natural entities: God establishes each "actual occasion" with its unique initial subjective aim, this aim develops, attains satisfaction, perishes and bequeaths its data to the next actual occasion which has its own subjective aim and will use the inherited data appropriately.¹⁹⁰ By establishing the initial subjective aim of each "actual occasion," God continuously intervenes not just in natural processes but also in history. Thus it is well within the framework of Whitehead's thought for God to establish a particular "actual occasion" with the special initial subjective aim of revealing or reflecting God's attributes and will to creatures whose capacities are limited in this regard. This special "actual occasion" and its successors constitute a unique society of "actual occasions" functioning as a single 'life-route' that appears at critical junctures in human evolution. To Bahá'ís, the various historical appearances made by this special society at different points in its 'life-route' are known as the Manifestations of God, all of Whom – outward aspects notwithstanding – are equal. Bahá'u'lláh says they are "but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation."¹⁹¹

The Correspondence Theory of Truth

The Bahá'í Writings and Whitehead agree on a correspondence theory of truth. As Whitehead says, “[t]ruth is the conformation of Appearance to Reality”¹⁹² to which he adds, “A proposition is true when the nexus [relationships] does in reality exemplify the pattern which is the predicate of the proposition.”¹⁹³ Truth is found when human perception corresponds to what is really there. This means that human beings discover the already existing truth about things and *do not construct it*; reality is given by God and not made by us. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements consistently support the contention that human beings discover – and do not construct – truths about the spiritual and material realms. Indeed, humankind is distinct from the rest of nature and animals because it possesses “the intellectual characteristic, which *discovereth* the realities of things and *comprehendeth* universal principles,”¹⁹⁴ an idea that is widely scattered throughout the Writings in a wide variety of contexts. He also informs us that “When we carefully investigate the kingdoms of existence and observe the phenomena of the universe about us, we *discover* the absolute order and perfection of creation.”¹⁹⁵

The power of the rational soul can discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelli-

*gence of the rational soul. There was a time when they were unknown, preserved mysteries and hidden secrets; the rational soul gradually discovered them and brought them out from the plane of the invisible and the hidden into the realm of the visible. This is the greatest power of perception in the world of nature, which in its highest flight and soaring comprehends the realities, the properties and the effects of the contingent beings.*¹⁹⁶

This allegiance to a correspondence theory of truth has enormous significance because it means that both the Bahá'í Writings and Whitehead espouse metaphysical realism, a position that asserts that the world is really independent of human perception and conception. Once again, the idea that we somehow ‘construct’ reality – as distinct from interpretations or conceptions of it – is completely denied. “We can, therefore, intelligibly affirm the existence of a real world to which our ideas [conceptions, constructs, interpretations] may or may not correspond.”¹⁹⁷

The question remains, do the Bahá'í Writings support a ‘naïve realism,’ that is, do they maintain that the world exists exactly as it appears to sensory perception? For reasons we need not explore here, Whitehead rejects naïve realism¹⁹⁸ and it seems clear that the Bahá'í Writings do as well, not because we construct reality in any way but because what is revealed by sensory perception is simply not all there is. Reality has many aspects and ‘worlds,’ not all of which can

be known by sensational knowledge. Such knowledge is, for example, provided by revelation whose truth – often known only in the heart – has no sensory basis whatever. Indeed, although they do not go into this subject in any depth, the Writings would support Whitehead's attack on all sensationalistic theories of knowledge¹⁹⁹ as utterly inadequate to explain some of the simplest facts of human existence such as memory. A memory is not a sensation yet it is as clearly known as any sensation can be.

Substance and Essence

Because Whitehead's thought is a process philosophy, it is natural to question its compatibility with the Writings which make considerable use of the concept of substance in its philosophical sense. The following quotation is a typical example:

Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.²⁰⁰

It may be objected that a 'process philosophy' and a 'substance philosophy' are inherently incompatible. However, such is not necessarily the case. Whitehead does not so much reject the notion of substance as reform it because he does not, as first impressions may mislead us to think, reject the notion of perma-

nence; “[f]or Whitehead permanence is one of the fundamental characteristics of the world.”²⁰¹ We need both permanence and flux to explain reality so it is not a question of eliminating one or the other but rather of explaining one – in this case, permanence – in terms of the other. This we have already seen in the discussion of repetition of patterns by the 'life-history' of “actual occasions.” Such repetition provides the endurance and permanence which is otherwise explained by the traditional notion of substance.

William Christian, in his classic *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics*, writes, “Whitehead says, ‘The notion of substance is *transformed* into that of ‘actual entity.’”²⁰² In other words, the role of substance as the basis for endurance is now played by the “actual occasion” whose patterns of development and action – coming into being, actualising and achieving satisfaction, perishing and providing data for successors – constitute what we perceive as enduring or permanent. The “actual occasions” do not endure but the 'life-history' which is preserved in each successor and the patterns of development they collectively display in an evolutionary line do, in fact, persist. This persistence is exactly what the original notion of substance was intended to explain.

When we recall that the notion of 'substance' is also traditionally used to explain the individuality of things, it becomes apparent how this concept is related to that of 'essence'. “Actual occasions” develop in patterns or repetitions

which must have identifying characteristics or attributes which make them the particular kind of patterns and individual patterns they are and which allow us to recognise them at different times. In short, they have an 'essence,' a complex of attributes that identify them as what they are and distinguish them from other classes or kinds. Furthermore, individuality can only be established by possessing attributes that differentiate a thing from others in its class, just as its class is differentiated from other classes by a particular set of attributes. In each case, such attributes make up the 'essence' of a thing, both as an individual and as a member of a class, possessing as it does a class essence within which the individuating attributes are found. From this analysis, it is clearly evident that process philosophy does not negate a 'substance-attribute' analysis of reality such as we find in the Bahá'í Writings.²⁰³

Immortality of the Soul

One of the key teachings of the Bahá'í Faith is the immortality of the soul; indeed, its notion of the soul's progress after death is the logical outgrowth of its evolutionary view of all existence. Although Whitehead makes no explicit commitments to the immortality of the soul, he recognises that his system leaves room for that concept.

How far this soul finds a support for its existence beyond the body is another question. The everlasting nature of God... may establish with the soul a peculiarly intense relationship of mutual imma-

nence. Thus in some important respect the existence of the soul may be freed from its complete dependence on bodily organization.²⁰⁴

However, there was really no need for Whitehead to be so diffident about this issue since his own philosophy provides clear logical reasons to believe in the immortality of the human soul. According to him, souls are "actual occasions" or actual entities²⁰⁵ or, as he puts it elsewhere, "high-grade occasions"²⁰⁶ which dominate and co-ordinate the personal society of "actual occasions" that we call a 'person'. He identifies this with the "soul of which Plato spoke."²⁰⁷

The bottom line in Whitehead's system is that there is no inherent logical reason why any 'life-route' of such "actual occasions" should necessarily pass out of existence instead of being transformed in other contexts. Thus, from within the philosophy of organism, there can be no logical objection to the claim that some societies of "actual occasions" with peculiarly human subjective aims and consequent 'life-routes' maintain their individual consciousness even when no longer associated with or 'prehending' another group of "actual occasions" with certain physical attributes, such as a brain.²⁰⁸ Indeed, since these special "actual occasions" continue their 'life-route,' it is likely that they will develop and transform in new contexts. In short, Whitehead's philosophy provides a naturalistic, scientifically viable way of explaining the Bahá'í belief about immortality and our personal evolution

in the future.

The Bahá'í Writings and Teilhard de Chardin

Whereas Whitehead's approach to process philosophy is rooted in his speciality as a logician and mathematician, Teilhard de Chardin's approach is based on his work as a palaeontologist. Indeed, even if he had never written any of his philosophical works, he would still have his place in the history of human palaeontology as a co-discoverer of Peking Man in China. However, it was precisely his palaeontological work that inspired his philosophical reflections about the nature of the universe, about evolution as a cosmic phenomenon and about human evolution in particular. This led him to conclusions that both resemble certain Bahá'í teachings on some points and complement them on others.

Matter and Process

Like the Bahá'í Writings²⁰⁹ and Whitehead, de Chardin holds that the universe is in ceaseless transformation, thereby clearly aligning himself against the "immobilists"²¹⁰ who profess a static view of creation. For de Chardin, it is axiomatic that matter is constantly changing, that "from its most distant formulations matter reveals itself to us in a state of genesis or becoming . . ." ²¹¹ In his "Hymn to Matter," he describes matter as the "reality ever new-born."²¹² This is a poetic way of suggesting that

matter is continuously evolving, somehow being re-continuously re-created in new forms which "shatter our mental categories, [and] force us to go ever further and further in pursuit of the truth."²¹³ There is always something new to discover about matter because it is ceaselessly actualising new previously hidden potentials or "dormant seeds."²¹⁴ He exclaims, "You I acclaim as the inexhaustible potentiality for existence and transformation . . ." ²¹⁵ and later sums up his entire outlook succinctly by saying, "The world is a-building."²¹⁶ Moreover, like the Writings, he believes that matter exhibits a "pre-life,"²¹⁷ which is a potentiality to express life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá alludes to a similar idea when he says, "From this point of view and perception pantheism is a truth, *for every atom in the universe possesses or reflects all the virtues of life.*"²¹⁸ He makes this point in more general terms as well, saying that "each elemental atom of the universe is possessed of a capacity to express all the virtues of the universe"²¹⁹ and is able, therefore, to express all the virtues of the particular kingdom of which it may be a part. The concept that in their own degree and capacity, even atoms reflect the Names and signs of God suggests that they have potentials that are not necessarily obvious.²²⁰ Given such vast potentials, it follows, as de Chardin says, "life is not a peculiar anomaly, sporadically flowering on matter – but an exaggeration, through specially favourable circumstances, of a universal cosmic property."²²¹ This makes clear not only that matter possesses at least the potentiality

to express life, but also that life is no mere accidental epiphenomenon but rather an essential and, thereby, inevitable actualisation of a universal latency. The production of life is an essential consequence of the cosmic process for which reason, the notion that the arrival of life is a fortuitous accident is a fundamental misunderstanding which science, and especially biology, must overcome.²²² The Writings lend support to this view by declaring,

*it is evident that this terrestrial globe, having once found existence, grew and developed in the matrix of the universe, and came forth in different forms and conditions, until gradually it attained this present perfection, and became adorned with innumerable beings, and appeared as a finished organization.*²²³

In other words, the potentiality for “innumerable beings” including life was already present in the matter of the terrestrial globe and required only the right conditions to actualise. This suggests that the development of life was inevitable as global conditions changed and new potentials were realised.

Although neither the Bahá'í Writings nor de Chardin see matter as the highest level of existence as materialists do, they are both quite willing to take a ‘noble view’ of matter as a sign of God’s power. As Bahá'u'lláh tells us,

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every

*atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.*²²⁴

If atoms were wholly bereft of any value whatever, they would not be able to reflect the “Most Great Light” and would be – as evil is according to the Writings – a lack of something instead of being actually existent. We must not over-value matter, as materialists have done, but we must not under-value it either as was done by some of the ancient Gnostics. Similarly, de Chardin tells us that “the Universe is illumined from within”²²⁵ by which he means that matter bears signs of the Divine within it. Indeed, he felt so strongly about the nobility of matter that he actually wrote a “Hymn to Matter” as part of an essay entitled “The Spiritual Power of Matter” in which he praises, among other things, matter’s ability to “reveal to us the dimensions of God.”²²⁶ From a Bahá'í point of view, there is nothing unseemly in this statement as long as we do not take it in a literal and/or material sense and read it as a revelation of God Himself, instead of His signs.

As we have seen earlier in this paper, Whitehead, and the Bahá'í Writings in one interpretation of various metaphors, believe that there is an inner or subjective side to all atoms which allows them to feel or experience the influences to which they are exposed. De Chardin would concur completely. He maintains that there is a “double-aspect”²²⁷ to matter, that matter possesses a “within”²²⁸ which is where we find for each atom, an

appropriate amount of freedom for development. Here again, we cannot help thinking again of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "every atom is possessed of a capacity to express all the virtues of the universe."²²⁹ This statement suggests – and Whitehead and de Chardin would agree – that merely external, physical and mathematical descriptions cannot do full justice to the being of an atom: "within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light."²³⁰ This "within" is, of course, the 'repository' of the potentials that each atom possesses as well as its own existentially unique standpoint – neither of which cannot be measured scientifically from the outside.

Direction in Evolution

According to de Chardin, the cosmic process is not merely random and directionless change but rather displays a clearly identifiable pattern, namely, "the complexification of matter."²³¹ In *The Phenomenon of Man*, he writes "Historically, the stuff of the universe goes on becoming more concentrated into ever more organised forms of matter."²³² De Chardin also refers to this as the "radial energy"²³³ of the universe "which draws [the cosmos] towards even greater complexity and centricity – in other words forwards."²³⁴ Both Whitehead and the Bahá'í Writings would agree, Whitehead because the drive of universal creativity and novelty makes the development of complexity

inevitable and the Bahá'í Writings because they envisage a universe hierarchically organised into levels of increasing capacity from the matter, through the vegetable, and animal to the human.²³⁵ As with de Chardin, these levels of capacity are expressed in differing, increasingly complex, combinations of matter. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes,

*Then these elements became composed, and organized and combined in infinite forms; or rather from the composition and combination of these elements innumerable beings appeared.*²³⁶

In de Chardin's view, "[s]piritual perfection (or conscious 'centricity') and material synthesis (or complexity) are but the two aspects or connected parts of one and the same phenomenon."²³⁷ The Writings agree with this view: "If the elements were not assembled together in affinity to produce the body of man, the higher intelligent forces could not be manifest in the body."²³⁸ In other words, the human spirit, the rational soul, cannot appear in bodies less complex than the one we currently possess. For his part, de Chardin advocates what he calls the "Law of complexity and consciousness"²³⁹ according to which different levels of material complexity allow the appearance of differing "aspects of spirit"²⁴⁰ such as the vegetable, animal and, ultimately in nature, the human.

For both the Writings and de Chardin, humankind stands at the head of the cosmic developmental hierarchy. According to Bahá'u'lláh, "in him [man] are potentially revealed all the attributes and

names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed”²⁴¹ while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “This world is also in the condition of a fruit tree, and man is like the fruit; without fruit the tree would be useless.”²⁴² For de Chardin, humankind is the ‘spearhead’ of cosmic development, whose task is to “complete cosmic evolution.”²⁴³ Humankind “flourishes on the leading shoot of zoological evolution.”²⁴⁴

From the foregoing discussion several ideas follow logically. First, the cosmic process is teleological in nature because it has an inner hierarchical structure and a goal towards which it strives. This means that cosmic evolution is progressive; it exhibits a qualitative, not just a quantitative advance, something that the Writings affirm in Their teachings about the increasing capacities of various kingdoms and the evolution of humankind. Second, insofar as they are involved in a goal-directed process, all entities, from atoms to human beings are, in a significant sense, incomplete. There are always more, and new, potentials to express which means that all things in some way experience a tension between what they are and what they could be, between their actual and possible selves. This tension is inherent in being part of a universe in constant process. It is the root of the self-dissatisfaction and ‘yearning for more’ that is felt by the majority of human beings. Third, the fact that all things are in process also means that in a certain way all entities, but especially human beings, are inherently “unstable”;²⁴⁵ this increased instability is, of

course, a consequence of the increased freedom of capacity which we observe as we rise in the evolutionary hierarchy. We humans have more freedom than other beings but the resulting instability makes freedom existentially problematical for us: “man is given to himself as a problem of *freedom*.”²⁴⁶ As the Bahá'í Writings show, freedom is a problem for us because it is often difficult to solve moral quandaries correctly. Such is the case because it is frequently difficult to balance a freedom or a “true liberty”²⁴⁷ that is appropriate to our human nature with ‘licence,’ that is, the freedom due to an animal. It hardly needs saying that if freedom were not somewhat problematical for us, there would be no need for a Manifestation to guide our individual action and collective development.

The Expansion of Consciousness

Both the Bahá'í Writings and de Chardin characterise the cosmic process as an expansion of consciousness as we rise from lower to higher forms of being. In the Writings, we see this expansion of consciousness as we ascend from the mineral, through the vegetable and animal to the human kingdom. At each level, new powers are added, such as augmentation, sensation, locomotion and abstract thought.²⁴⁸ The higher an entity stands in this hierarchy, the more important will be its powers of sensation and thought; at the human level these powers reach their acme in the rational mind or soul which is able to transcend its material conditions.²⁴⁹ De Chardin calls this

expansion of consciousness “cerebralization,”²⁵⁰ which means that at the physical level, more and more nerve ganglions concentrate and begin to inter-act; as a result of this, spontaneity increases,²⁵¹ “instincts become more complex,”²⁵² “socialisation”²⁵³ becomes increasingly important and consciousness increases. “Life is the rise of consciousness”²⁵⁴ says de Chardin in a statement that sums up his views quite succinctly. Elsewhere he calls this process “psychogenesis.”²⁵⁵

The teleological nature of the world-process means that it is focussed or unified not from any efficient causes from below but rather from the final cause above. As de Chardin says, “The world does not hold together from below but from above.”²⁵⁶ In the Bahá’í Writings, the idea that God unifies the world by being the “object of desire”²⁵⁷ is, as we have already seen in our discussion of Whitehead, evident in three ways: the unmoved Mover moves others by attraction; the quest for self-actualisation is ultimately a quest for the final cause which is God; all things are identified by their capacity to manifest, reflect or turn themselves to the Divine. For his part, de Chardin turns the concept of unification “from above”²⁵⁸ into the distinctive idea for which he is best known, namely, the “Omega-Point.”²⁵⁹

The Omega-Point

According to de Chardin, evolution and human evolution in particular is focused on a final mystical goal, the “Omega-Point” which is his interpreta-

tion of the resurrection of the world and the final triumph of the spirit or mind.²⁶⁰ The process by which this is to happen involves de Chardin’s belief that in humankind, evolution has become conscious of itself. He writes that “the consciousness of each one of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting upon itself. . . . Step by step, from the ‘juvenile earth’ onwards, we have followed *going upwards* the successive advances of consciousness in matter undergoing organisation.”²⁶¹ The evolution of human consciousness is part of the natural history of the world insofar as through us, matter is raised or sublimated to the level of consciousness and spirit. In humankind, “the eternal groping of life burst out in conscious reflection.”²⁶² This sublimation of matter into consciousness occurs not just in the individual but in humankind as a whole, in its social development and culture, both of which have cosmic, not merely local, significance.

Man is not the centre of the universe as once we thought in our simplicity, but something much more wonderful – the arrow pointing the way to the final unification of the world in terms of life.²⁶³

Humankind is “the head (terrestrial) of a Universe that is in the process of psychic transformation.”²⁶⁴ “Mankind represents the culmination of the whole movement of matter and life”²⁶⁵ because through us planetary evolution has transcended the lithosphere and the biosphere and has developed a “noosphere,”²⁶⁶ that is, a distinct layer of cos-

mic development in which conscious thought and spirituality are the primary scene of evolutionary advance. This development was a potential that lay waiting in all matter throughout the universe. Thus, the arrival of humankind represents the highest stage of cosmic evolution: "man emerged from a general groping of the world. He was born a direct lineal descendent from a total effort of life . . ." ²⁶⁷ As more and more of the universe is 'cerebralised' in humankind, psychological and spiritual factors begin to play an ever larger role in the actualisation of the cosmos itself. Our social, economic, political, intellectual, artistic and spiritual history are "*still* natural history." ²⁶⁸ As de Chardin puts it, what we observe is a progressive "psychic interiorisation" ²⁶⁹ in which the world will be 're-born' or sublimated at a higher level. ²⁷⁰ Ultimately, this process will culminate in a perfect spiritual unity that he identifies with the God as incarnated in Christ:

Nevertheless, however efficacious this newly born faith of Man in the ultra-human may prove to be, it seems that Man's urge to *Some Thing* ahead of him cannot achieve its full fruition except by combining with another, and still more fundamental aspiration — one from above, urging him towards *Some One*. ²⁷¹

Elsewhere he writes:

Unless it is to be powerless to form the keystone of the noosphere, 'Omega' . . . can only be conceived as a *meeting-point* between a universe that has

reached the limit of centration, and another, even deeper, centre — this being the self-subsistent centre and absolutely final principle of irreversibility and personalisation: the one and only true Omega. ²⁷²

In other words, when humankind, which is involved in a dialectic relationship with matter and life, reaches its last stage of psycho-spiritual development, the noosphere — and through it, the sublimated cosmos — will reach a stage of mystical union with the ultimate person, God in his incarnation as Christ.

It is important to recognise a significant difference between de Chardin's and the Writings' vision of the cosmic process. Although de Chardin's vision is not entirely clear and not without troublesome questions, this much is certain: he envisages a final 'apocalypse' in which humankind's spiritual development will reach a maximum of concentration in the "Omega-Point" and sublimate itself into a new form of being and spirit that in some way will become 'one' with God.

At that moment, St. Paul tells us (1 Cor. 15.23 ff) when Christ has emptied all created forces (rejecting in them everything that is a factor of dissociation and superanimating all that is a force for unity), he will consummate universal unification by giving himself, in his complete and adult body, with a final satisfied capacity for union, to the embrace of the Godhead.

Thus will be constituted the organic complex of God and the world . . . the Pleroma. ²⁷³

Attaining this condition will require humankind not only “to abandon its organo-planetary foothold”²⁷⁴ but also to detach itself from matter, that is, from “its material matrix.”²⁷⁵ Humankind will evolve purely ‘noogenically,’ “upstream against the flow of entropy”²⁷⁶ until it achieves some kind of ultimate ‘mystical’ union with God in which both are distinct and separate yet somehow one. What happens beyond this point, de Chardin does not say, but his words, imagery and tone strongly suggest that human history or evolution will come to an end.

Nothing in the Bahá’í Writings suggests such an ‘end to history’ either collectively or individually. According to Them, the human soul continues to evolve after death, gradually actualising its infinite potentials and becoming more pure just as carbon may become diamond without changing its essential composition.²⁷⁷ In other words, our evolution never stops, and there is no final individual or collective state of any sort. For Bahá’ís, the apocalypse is not the end of the world in any ultimate sense, but simply a transition point from the world-order established by one Manifestation to the world-order established by Another. At that moment, when the “carpet of belief has been rolled up, the tokens of certitude blotted out;[and] the whole world has fallen into error,”²⁷⁸ the world will be “revolutionized,”²⁷⁹ ‘made new’ and be infused with new energies to continue its endless evolution. The concept of an end to evolution, even of material evolution, is simply foreign to

the Bahá’í Writings. Moreover, the concept of the Pleroma as described by de Chardin and Christian theology would require some major re-interpretation to become compatible with Bahá’í Writings which categorically reject any notion of creation actually becoming one with the Creator. Finally, it should be pointed out that insofar as they see no end to individual and collective human evolution, the Bahá’í Writings are more consistent in their commitment to process philosophy than de Chardin.

As this brief outline shows, there is no doubt that de Chardin’s views are a species of process philosophy, providing a magnificent vision of cosmic and human development that begins with mainstream empirical science and ends in sheer poetry and mysticism.²⁸⁰ We are, however, left with several questions. To what extent does de Chardin’s process view overlap with the Bahá’í teachings? Or, to put it another way, to what extent do Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá anticipate de Chardin? To what extent are They and de Chardin merely compatible fellow-travellers in the same direction albeit, sometimes at least, on a different road?

First of all, the Writings and de Chardin agree that the history of the planet, including human history, represents a progress from the simple and unconscious to the complex, conscious and spiritual. Viewed as a whole, evolution displays a distinct hierarchy of forms and capacities. This becomes especially evident in humankind in whom evolution, now raised from the physical

to the cultural and spiritual realm, has diversified and accelerated. This rapid progress in humankind explains the need for Progressive Revelation, that is, a periodic renewal and expansion of our spiritual beliefs and practices as our capacities for understanding and action grow. Although de Chardin explicitly rejects the idea of a new revelation, he explicitly recognises the need for a religious renewal to meet our spiritual needs in this new situation. He recognises the necessity of “a new type of faith”²⁸¹ which he, as a Jesuit, did not identify with a “new temple”²⁸² but with the “laying of new foundations to which the old Church is gradually being moved.”²⁸³ Curiously enough, he does admit that humankind’s new evolutionary situation seems “at least by implication, to be heralding the appearance of a religion destined to supplant all earlier creeds.”²⁸⁴ Obviously, he senses the need for a new kind of spirituality. The Bahá'í attitude towards human progress is summoned up succinctly in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”²⁸⁵

A New Stage in Human Evolution

The Writings and de Chardin agree that the modern world represents a new and decisive development in evolution. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá assures us that “Now the new age is here and creation is reborn. Humanity hath taken on new life.”²⁸⁶ Bahá'u'lláh writes, “the world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating

influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System – the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.”²⁸⁷ Similarly, de Chardin says, “There is now incontrovertible evidence that mankind has just entered the greatest period of change the world has ever known.”²⁸⁸ In short, the Writings and de Chardin agree that a critical, but positive threshold has been crossed in human development. This is especially true from the Bahá'í point of view since Bahá'u'lláh represents not just the culmination of the Adamic cycle of human history but also the beginning of a new cycle of development.

The Writings and de Chardin also agree on the nature of this critical threshold, namely, what de Chardin calls the “planetisation”²⁸⁹ of humankind. Having reached into all corners of the globe,²⁹⁰ humans are now the decisively dominant life-form on the planet, and face the challenge of taking the next step in their evolution which must begin with explicit and conscious recognition of the ‘planetary situation’ of humankind. Bahá'u'lláh makes this clear in a single succinct statement: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens”²⁹¹ to which He adds, “It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world.”²⁹²

According to de Chardin, one result of this “planetisation” is that humankind is now going through “a phase of compression”²⁹³ in which there are not only more people but in which diverse cultures, reli-

gions and systems of governance encounter each other directly and, despite their profound differences, have to find a *modus vivendi* to share the same 'living space'. De Chardin calls this the "twofold influences of planetary compression and psychic interpenetration"²⁹⁴ which creates new tensions or energies²⁹⁵ that must be used creatively. The Bahá'í Writings suggest a similar idea by exhorting us to overcome racial, national and religious prejudices in building of a new world order in which all peoples will have a rightful place.²⁹⁶ According to de Chardin, an inevitable result of this compression of humankind is the need for human unification in some new whole: "the planetary forces (geographic, demographic, economic and psychic) [will] sooner or later compel us willy-nilly to unite in some form of human whole organised on the basis of human solidarity."²⁹⁷ He speaks of "this inevitable unification of the human species."²⁹⁸ Because of this global compression "[n]o one can deny that a network (a world network) of economic and psychic affiliations is being woven at ever increasing speed which envelops and constantly penetrates more deeply within each one of us."²⁹⁹ There is no need to elaborate this point from a Bahá'í perspective because this insight about the necessity of unifying human kind is the very reason of the Bahá'í Faith's existence.

What is happening, in other words, is that humankind is being re-socialised in a new way to adapt to life in a radically new environment. This requires the for-

mation of new institutions and new forms of governance to meet the needs of the emerging global community. The old forms of organisation are no longer adequate, for which reason "Mankind seems to be approaching its critical point of social organisation . . . Our species, let us accept it, is entering its phase of socialisation; we cannot continue to exist without undergoing the transformation which in one way or another will forge our multiplicity into a whole."³⁰⁰ In other words, de Chardin foresees the rise of what the Bahá'í Writings call "collective centers"³⁰¹ adequate to the needs of the new age. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that the national, religious and cultural "collective centers" of the past must be replaced.

*With the appearance of great revolutions and upheavals, all these collective centres are swept away. But the Collective Center of the Kingdom, embodying the Institutes and Divine Teachings, is the eternal Collective Center. It establishes relationship between the East and the West, organizes the oneness of the world of humanity, and destroys the foundation of differences. It overcomes and includes all the other collective centers.*³⁰²

From a Bahá'í perspective, these new "collective centers" are the various institutions from the local spiritual assembly at the grassroots level, to the national spiritual assembly and finally the Universal House of Justice at the global level. We also find other branches such as the Counsellors, the Institution of the

Learned and Auxiliary Board Members each with their own rights and responsibilities. From a Bahá'í perspective, these are the centers around which the future governance of the world will be organised.

Spiritual Unification

One of the consequences of the “compression” of humankind is that people will become more inwardly or spiritually unified with each other. Evolution leads to unification not just outwardly but inwardly as well. According to de Chardin, we are “no longer [in a phase] of physical expansion and exteriorisation but of psychic interiorisation – and it is in that direction that the terrestrial noosphere in process of concentration (through complexification) seems to be destined.”³⁰³ We are developing, as he puts it elsewhere, a global “atmosphere of active sympathy.”³⁰⁴ Because this leads to an “intensification of reflective life”³⁰⁵

... the elements of Mankind [will] succeed in making effective a profound force of mutual attraction, deeper and more powerful than the surface-repulsion which causes them to diverge. Forced upon one another by the dimensions and mechanics of the earth, men will purposefully bring to life *a common soul in this vast body*.³⁰⁶

Reading this, no Bahá'í could fail to remember Bahá'u'lláh's statement that “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.”³⁰⁷ Nor should we forget His exhortation,

Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.³⁰⁸

Both de Chardin and the Bahá'í Faith also agree that the evolution of humankind is not just an individual affair but something which has a social aspect, especially now in the global age. De Chardin writes that “no elemental thread in the Universe is wholly independent in its growth of its neighbouring threads.”³⁰⁹ In the next stage of the evolutionary process, “the social element subtly enters to take the place of the ‘anatomical’”;³¹⁰ resorting to metaphor, he states “[t]o reach the sun, nothing less is required than the combined growth of the entire foliage.”³¹¹ In short, no one in this new age can make progress in isolation from his fellow human beings, because it is now more true than ever that “no man is an island entire of itself.”³¹² Once again, this idea is something that Bahá'ís readily recognise. The reason for the Faith's enormous stress on taking an active part in community life no matter how challenging that might be, is the recognition that no human being can develop fully and completely in isolation and retreat from others and the world. That is why Bahá'u'lláh enjoined monks to leave their cloisters and to

actively contribute to the world:³¹³ without facing the challenges of life with others, inner growth cannot help but be impoverished, stunted and, therefore, of limited value in a unified world.

The New Individual

This is not to say that the Writings and de Chardin are somehow 'against' the notion of individualism. Rather, they would both have us transform our concept of what it means to be an individual away from the isolated atomic individualism that has dominated modern civilization during the last three centuries. De Chardin writes,

If there is any characteristic clearly observable in the progress of Nature towards higher consciousness, it is that this is achieved by *increasing differentiation*, which in itself causes ever *stronger individualities* to emerge.³¹⁴

He then enunciates what is surely one of his most original insights, namely, that "true union"³¹⁵ increases diversity. De Chardin arrives at this concept by distinguishing between "an aggregate, a 'heap'"³¹⁶ as exemplified by modern forms of collectivism as seen in communism and fascism, and "true union" which

does nothing to eliminate differences. On the contrary, it *exalts them* . . . In every practical sphere true union (that is to say, synthesis) does not confound; it *differentiates* . . . Evidence of the fact that union differentiates is to be seen all around us — in the bodies

of all the higher forms of life, in which the cells become almost infinitely complicated according to the variety of tasks they have to perform . . .³¹⁷

This is because "[i]n every organised whole, the parts perfect themselves and fulfil themselves."³¹⁸ This augmentation of individuality is especially pronounced in conscious beings because the range of relationships in which they are involved, and, consequently, the range of possible individual development, are enormously expanded and enriched. At de Chardin's Omega-Point, this degree of individualisation would reach the "Hyper-Personal."³¹⁹ At that point, the range of our sympathies will become universal. Though they express themselves in more restrained language, the Bahá'í Writings share de Chardin's belief that union does not threaten individuality, and, in fact, enhances it. That is why they urge us to become as "one soul"³²⁰ and admonish us to "consider every one on the earth as a friend; regard the stranger as an intimate, and the alien as a companion."³²¹ It is obvious, of course, that becoming "one soul" is the Writings' way of referring to de Chardin's concept of being "ultra-personalise[d]"³²² through a richer network of relationships or, "psychic interpenetration"³²³ The Bahá'í Faith's commitment to the preservation not extinction of individuality is also evident in its commitment to "unity in diversity"³²⁴ and is further emphasised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's metaphor of the best garden being that which includes the greatest diversity of plants and flowers.³²⁵ It is clear that

both de Chardin and the Writings see the individual, not as a 'social atom' in magnificent isolation but rather as part of a potentially cosmic net of relations each of which represents a new avenue of personal enrichment.

In *The Phenomenon of Man*, de Chardin warns us not "to confuse individuality with personality."³²⁶ The difference between the two is that individuality is the result of separation and atomising from others; it results from creating barriers between elements and thus prevents them from joining into a greater, all-inclusive whole. A universal struggle for existence is the inevitable result of individualising. Personality, on the other hand, can only be found by "uniting together"³²⁷ in a way that does not vitiate differences but rather integrates them in a whole that exhibits "unity in diversity."³²⁸ The challenge for humankind is to evolve a social structure that can actually achieve this goal which de Chardin believes must be reached if we are to evolve as a species. For their part, the Bahá'í Writings do not make a formal distinction between the individual and the person, but the same idea is, nonetheless, implicit in them. They frequently remind us that it is necessary to overcome our selfish desires or ego in order to reach a higher state of being or "higher self"³²⁹ which de Chardin would identify as the 'person'. Shoghi Effendi, for example, writes,

The only people who are truly free of the "dross of self" are the Prophets, for to be free of one's ego is a hall-mark of perfection. . .

The ego is the animal in us, the heritage of the flesh which is full of selfish desires. By obeying the laws of God, seeking to live the life laid down in our teachings, and prayer and struggle, we can subdue our egos. We call people "saints" who have achieved the highest degree of mastery over their egos.³³⁰

Although he does not say so explicitly, Shoghi Effendi is implicitly describing a state of being that has transcended the 'animal' struggles involved in 'individuality' and has attained a fuller and richer mode of being in 'personality' in de Chardin's sense. In this sense too, we see a sign of a Nietzschean element in the Bahá'í Writings as well as in de Chardin insofar as both urge humankind to embark consciously and wilfully on the evolution of a 'super-man' or higher form of humanity. Both see humanity in its current form not as a final and finished product but as a transitional stage to something higher and more noble.³³¹

Freedom

Because they believe in "unity in diversity," the Writings and de Chardin are committed to freedom which they both see as rooted in the consciousness of humankind. The roots of freedom lie in the fact that we are able, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, to "be emancipated and free from the captivity of the world of nature"³³² which allows us to access the "Ideal Power"³³³ which will free us from the "ferocious"³³⁴ struggle for existence through rational co-operation. There is

an interesting idea implicit in this line of thought. It suggests what we might call 'evolutionary freedom.' Locked in the struggle for existence, humans are able to actualise only a very limited portion of their capacities and are, thereby, confined in their freedom of growth and thus, in a significant sense, not free. In other words, freedom must not just be seen as political freedom but also as the opportunity to actualise one's potentials. Lack of opportunities to actualise one's potentials is, therefore, a significant loss of freedom, one that is often overlooked in discussions of this subject and in reflections on how much freedom a society or culture actually possess.

De Chardin has a similar idea, though he approaches it differently, asserting that humankind represents a "Lamarckian' or human zone"³³⁵ — as opposed to a 'Darwinian zone' — in which conscious and rational goals predominate over unconsciousness, chance and blind instinctual drive. As the cosmic process unfolds, the "Lamarckian zone" of freedom grows dramatically with the arrival of consciousness, with expanded opportunities for conscious self-actualisation and with increased power of rational choice. De Chardin, too, is implicitly sceptical of any one-sided bias that freedom only refers to 'political' or 'social' freedom — which is often tinged with ideas of competition and struggle — and fails to recognise the enormous importance of the freedom or opportunity to self-actualise.

However, this new, expanded vision of freedom must not be interpreted to mean

that the Writings do not support the notion of freedom in the sense of a right to independent thought and self-expression. In fact, the opposite is true: the Bahá'í Writings unequivocally support a high degree of personal freedom as a necessary condition for continued evolutionary process:

*When freedom of conscience, liberty of thought and right of speech prevail—that is to say, when every man according to his own idealization may give expression to his beliefs — development and growth are inevitable.*³³⁶

For his part, de Chardin tells us that "[e]volution . . . charges itself with an ever-increasing measure of freedom."³³⁷ Without freedom, it would be impossible to establish what he calls "a harmonised collectivity"³³⁸ since a lack of freedom would undermine the essential attribute of harmony. Bahá'ís can only wholeheartedly agree with de Chardin's statement that "God has made good will the basis upon which our super-natural growth is founded. The pure heart, the right intentions, are the organs of the higher life . . ."³³⁹ This declaration cannot help but remind us of Bahá'u'lláh's admonition in *The Hidden Words*: "My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting."³⁴⁰ In other words, both the Writings and de Chardin see personal freedom and evolution, or the cosmic process, as advancing together in tandem.

This is not to say, however, that freedom, as the Writings and de Chardin see

it, is license, a mere ego-driven 'power trip' through our natural and/or social environment. With capacity for choice arises the power of *rational* freedom which is not in conflict with being a part of a genuine community, that is, a "community of desire"³⁴¹ based on "free consent."³⁴² Both de Chardin and the Writings recognise that "unification through coercion leads only to a superficial pseudo-unity"³⁴³ which by its very nature is incompatible with genuine, that is, rational freedom in which the freedom of one individual is harmonised with the freedom of all. For example, as Shoghi Effendi writes,

The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.³⁴⁴

De Chardin makes the same point by saying, "If there is a future for mankind, it can only be imagined in terms of a harmonious conciliation of what is free with what is planned and totalised."³⁴⁵ In other words, freedom is not an absolute either for the individual part or the whole community but a matter of dialectical balance among the various goods involved in a situation. This freedom is enriched, not impoverished by relationship, because each relationship represents an opportunity to develop one's potentials and possibly to actualise new ones. Our active participation in a community of consent is an unavoidable part

of our evolutionary development.

The Manifestations

Unlike the Bahá'í Writings, de Chardin's cosmic vision has room for only one historical Manifestation of God. As a Jesuit priest, he was committed to the belief that Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God is not only our evolutionary guide as we are drawn by "God's magnetism"³⁴⁶ but is also the "Omega-Point" of our final destination. His works contain no explicit recognition of other Manifestations such as the Buddha, Muḥammad or Bahá'u'lláh and, given his life-long dedication to the Church, it is doubtful that he would consciously have admitted them to be more than extra-ordinarily wise men and allies in the project of human evolution. However, the Catholic Church was uneasy about de Chardin's theology³⁴⁷ and the reason is not hard to understand: de Chardin's vision of Jesus Christ is highly abstract and far-removed from the Jesus of Nazareth Who was born in a stable, crucified and, according to Church teachings, physically resurrected. Rather, de Chardin's Christ is more like a cosmic force than a 'personal saviour'; he talks about 'the Universal Christ,' about 'Christ the Evolver,' about 'the Christic.'³⁴⁸ In contrast to the Thomistic world-view that is the official philosophy of the Church, de Chardin adopted a "Scotist interpretation"³⁴⁹ according to which "Christ is held to be the goal and crowning point not only of the supernatural but of the natural order."³⁵⁰ In

the case of the Church, there is now an uneasy alliance between the two. This leaves us with the question of the extent to which his vision of Christ is compatible with Bahá'í teachings.

The Bahá'í teaching about the two stations of the Manifestation eases acceptance of de Chardin's views about Christ because it allows us to distinguish between the Manifestation in "the station of pure abstraction"³⁵¹ in which They are all one are function very much like the life-giving Christ in de Chardin:

*Nay, all else besides these Manifestation, live by the operation of their Will, and have their being through the outpourings of their grace.*³⁵²

Regarding the Manifestations, Bahá'u'lláh also writes:

*The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Through them the clouds rain their bounty upon men, and the earth bringeth forth its fruits. All things must needs have a cause, a motive power, an animating principle. These souls and symbols of detachment have provided, and will continue to provide, the supreme moving impulse in the world of being.*³⁵³

Thus, we may conclude that if we regard the Manifestation in His "station of pure abstraction"³⁵⁴ and in His cosmic function, de Chardin's vision of the

'cosmic Christ' Who draws all beings upward and Who also manifests his power within them is not unlike the Bahá'í vision of the Manifestation articulated in the previous two quotations. In both cases, the Manifestation functions like a 'world-soul' that suffuses all being with its power.

When we regard the Manifestation in His "station of distinction,"³⁵⁵ in other words, when we regard Christ in His historical appearance as Jesus of Nazareth, there are no significant differences between the Writings and de Chardin's view. Bahá'ís accept Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible. Of course, de Chardin would reject the notion that Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God and this is obviously a significant difference between de Chardin and Bahá'í teachings. However, this difference does not compromise some essential similarities in "the station of pure abstraction."

Conclusions

As a result of this initial exploration of the Bahá'í Writings and modern process philosophy, we are in a position to draw four major conclusions. First and most important, is that the Bahá'í Writings may be interpreted as a species of process philosophy offering a dynamic interpretation of the universe. Indeed, our exploration of Their relationship to the work of Whitehead and de Chardin strongly suggests that once explored from this point of view, the Writings will make Their own unique contribution to the development of process philoso-

phy in new directions.

Second, we may conclude that by studying other process philosophies such as Whitehead's and de Chardin's, we will discover new ways to enrich our understanding of the Writings Themselves. For Bahá'ís this is valuable as a deepening of their knowledge of their religious faith; for non-Bahá'ís, this is valuable as shedding new light on a relatively unexplored aspect of humanity's intellectual history.

Third, this initial exploration shows that the Bahá'í Writings possess an extraordinary range of affinities to philosophies that seem, at first glance, to be utterly dissimilar in content and general outlook.³⁵⁶ This suggests that the Writings are extremely rich in their implicit as well as explicit content and merit further in-depth philosophical exploration to bring more of this richness to light. On the basis of this paper, one of the most obvious areas of such exploration would be to follow Whitehead's discussion of Buddhist metaphysics with an exploration of how a process interpretation of the Writings relates the Bahá'í Faith to Buddhism in regards to metaphysical doctrines such as 'dependent arising' and their ethical implications. From a Bahá'í viewpoint this would be especially significant because of the teaching of the essential agreement of all religions.

Fourth, the close affinities and compatibilities with the work of Whitehead are significant because they establish a bridge between the Writings and one of

the most important developments in scientific history, a quantum understanding of cosmic processes. This has incalculable ramifications for a based understanding of physical processes as well as issues related to psychology and spirituality such as the mind-body problem and the question of immortality and the proofs of God. It also helps the Bahá'í Faith to meet its commitment to overcome the conflicts between science and religion.

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Notes

1. Gr. "Everything flows." Attributed to Heraclitus.
2. The importance of harmonising religion and science is clear early in *Process and Reality*, where Whitehead writes that the highest task of philosophy is "fusing the two, namely religion and science, into one rational scheme of thought." *Process and Reality* 19.
3. *Process and Reality* 27.
4. "Creativity is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact." *Process and Reality* 25.
There is some debate among process philosophers as to whether or not 'creativity' is, in effect, the ultimate source of all entities, and, therefore, the Godhead Who manifests God.
5. Thus, process philosophy is not handicapped by all the difficulties associated with the 'mind-body' problem, nor does it – at least in Whitehead's version – find the existence of the 'soul' scientifically troubling. In Whitehead's view, a human body is a "society" of actual occasions co-ordinated by a "dominant occasion" called a soul.
6. Peter Russell is perhaps the most famous among them.
7. *Process and Reality* 193. The Ninth Category of Explanation states, "That how an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is . . . Its 'being' is constituted by its 'becoming'." (*Process and Reality*, 28)
8. *Process and Reality* 26.
9. Ibid. 23.
10. *Some Answered Questions* 203.
11. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 377.
12. Ibid.
13. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 52.
14. *Some Answered Questions* 281.
15. *Process and Reality* 23.
16. Ibid. vi.
17. Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings."
18. The importance of this teaching is seen in the application to which it is put in the immediately following section: it is the basis of the Master's proof of the spirit's continued development after death.
19. *Some Answered Questions* 233. See also *Foundations of World Unity*, 83, 57; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 160, 284, 285.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. *Process and Reality* 27.
24. *Bahá'í World Faith* 337.
25. *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 140. See also *Bahá'í World Faith*, 224.
26. Ibid. 284.
27. *Bahá'í World Faith* 351.
28. *Foundations of World Unity* 12.
29. Ibid. 85.
30. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141, italics added.
31. Ibid.
32. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 52
33. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141.
34. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 272, 272.
35. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.
36. As in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, 32. See also *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 34; *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 12, 14; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 277; *Bahá'í World Faith* 350.
37. For example, in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 88, 160, 284, 285, 350; *Foundations of World Unity* 52.
38. *Some Answered Questions* 182.
39. *Some Answered Questions* 191–194. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 357–359.
40. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 215.
41. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 37.
42. *The Phenomenon of Man* 201–204.
43. Ibid.
44. *Man's Place in Nature* 116.
45. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 37, 59, 125.
46. *Process and Reality* 22.
47. Ibid. 39–40.

48. Ibid. 26.
49. Ibid. 39.
50. *Some Answered Questions* 233.
51. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 52
52. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141. The same idea is also suggested in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 160.
53. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 61.
54. *Process and Reality* 34.
55. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141.
56. Whitehead requires some interpretation on this issue. Does an actual occasion only exist once? Since each actual occasion inherits its data from a particular predecessor and bequeaths its data to a particular successor, the answer to this question depends on whether we focus on the one occasion or on its 'whole line'. If we focus on the latter, as I think we should, it is evident that an actual occasion and its predecessors and successors are phases of a single life-history. The actual occasion perishes, but only in a sense.
57. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141.
58. *Adventures in Ideas* 206.
59. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 144
60. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141.
61. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 378.
62. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 168; italics added.
63. *Prayers and Meditations* 90.
64. *Prayers and Meditations* 15.
65. Ibid.
66. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 260.
67. Ibid.
68. Each present occasion contains its entire past and anticipates its future. "The past has an objective existence in the present which lies in the future beyond itself." *Adventures of Ideas* 193. Later in *Adventures of Ideas* 194, Whitehead writes that each actual occasion re-enacts its predecessors and anticipates its successors.
69. It must be realised that in a paper of this length, only the barest essentials necessary for the author to make his point can be included on this matter.
70. *Process and Reality* 128.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid. vi.
74. *Process and Reality* 22.
75. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 260.
76. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCIV, 192.
77. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, 177.
78. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 58.
79. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 30.
80. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* V, 7.
81. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 62.
82. "These contrasted aspects will be called the physical and the mental poles of an actual entity." *Process and Reality* 280.
83. *Bahá'í World Faith*, 310 -311.
84. One might think of the Pauli Exclusion Principle here, which states that no two electrons, or other fermions, can exist in identical energy states. This too is a rudimentary form of individuality.
85. Whitehead denies that all experience is conscious. This denial is the basis of his criticism of Hume's theory of perception which assumes that all is not only sensory but conscious. Whitehead points to our memory of what we did a minute ago as an example of non-sensory perception.
86. "If the term 'eternal objects' is disliked, the term 'potentials' would be suitable. The eternal objects are the pure potentials of the universe . . ." *Process and Reality* 173.
87. *Bahá'í World Faith* 310- 311.
88. *Bahá'í World Faith* 310-311. The Manifestations, of course, reflect the divine perfections to a pre-eminent degree.
89. *Process and Reality* 30. See also 262, 285, 286.
90. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, 178.
91. "He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act . . . constitutes him the initial 'object of desire' establishing the

- initial phase of each subjective aim.”
Process and Reality 406.
92. *Process and Reality* 131.
93. *Some Answered Questions* 129.
94. *Ibid.* 1.
95. *Process and Reality* 260.
96. *Process and Reality* 173.
97. *Ibid.*
98. See *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 17, 51, 53, 69, 74, 91, 97, 129, 302, 309, 352, 452; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 65, 67, 68; *Bahá'í World Faith* 262, 267; *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 14 under the headings of ‘potential’ or ‘latent’.
99. *Process and Reality* 173.
100. *Ibid.*
101. *Ibid.*, 174.
102. Freedom of development in Whitehead
103. Whitehead calls this sensitivity or susceptibility “experience” or “prehension” but this must not be taken to mean conscious experience such as enjoyed by animals and humankind. Experiencing and prehending in Whitehead is simply the ability to be affected or causally influenced by other actual entities. All higher forms of *conscious* experience are based on such susceptibility. Whitehead calls it the “blind perceptivity” of actual occasions. *Process and Reality* 338.
104. *Process and Reality* 26.
105. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 285-286; italics added.
106. *Ibid.*
107. *Ibid.*
108. *Ibid.*
109. *Science and the Modern World* 79. See also “In this theory [organicism], the molecules may blindly run...but the molecules differ in their intrinsic characters according to the general organic plans of the situation in which they find themselves.” *Science and the Modern World* 80.
110. *Process and Reality* 121.
111. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 285-286.
112. *Process and Reality* 179.
113. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 285-286.
114. *Modes of Thought* 164.
115. *Some Answered Questions* 178-179.
116. *Process and Reality* 6. See also 10, 24.
117. *Some Answered Questions* 178-179.
118. “. . . the subjective forms of the conceptual prehensions constitute the drive of the Universe, whereby each occasion precipitates itself into the future.” *Adventures of Ideas* 196.
119. Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics*, 307.
120. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a,b.
121. *Process and Reality* 406.
122. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a,b.
123. *Process and Reality* 406.
124. *Prayers and Meditations* LX, 115. See also LXX, 115; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* C, 200; CLXIII, 341.
125. *Foundations of World Unity* 73. See also *Prayers and Meditations* CLX, 252.
126. *Some Answered Questions* 280.
127. *Process and Reality* 174.
128. *Ibid.* See also *Process and Reality* 105.
129. *Some Answered Questions* 233-234.
130. *Ibid.*
131. *Ibid.*
132. *Some Answered Questions* 280.
133. *Ibid.*
134. *Process and Reality* chapter V and *Science and the Modern World* provide in-depth and detailed analysis of the various analytical and logical flaws in Hume's arguments against causality.
135. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXVII, 162. See also *Some Answered Questions* 280,
136. *Prayers and Meditations* 262. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 308 and *Science and the Modern World* 174.
137. *Science and the Modern World* 174. See also *Process and Reality* 286, 406.
138. *Some Answered Questions* 280.
139. *Ibid.*
140. *Science and the Modern World* 174.
141. *Ibid.*
142. *Ibid.*
143. Tablet to Dr. Forel in *Bahá'í World Faith* 343.

144. *Some Answered Questions* 180. See also 204, 225, 281.
145. *Process and Reality* 285.
146. *Some Answered Questions* 280.
147. See *The Divine Relativity* by Charles Hartshorne.
148. *Process and Reality* 408
149. Ibid.
150. *Process and Reality* 405.
151. Ibid.
152. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 12.
153. Ibid 66.
154. That God is his knowledge ensures the unity of God; as Bahá'u'lláh says, "He, verily, is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes." *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCIII, 187.
155. *Process and Reality* 405.
156. *Process and Reality* 405.
157. Ibid.
158. Ibid.
159. Ibid, 407.
160. Ibid.
161. Ibid.
162. Ibid.
163. Ibid.
164. *Process and Reality* 406.
165. Ibid.
166. Ibid. 407.
167. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 61.
168. *Process and Reality* 407.
169. Ibid. 407-408.
170. Ibid.
171. Ibid. 407.
172. Ibid. 413.
173. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIX, 46.
174. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 39.
175. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 246.
176. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LII, 105.
177. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 182.
178. *Process and Reality* 58.
179. *Process and Reality* 405. "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."
180. *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* 288.
181. Ibid.
182. Called "Eternal Objects" which are a revival of Plato's Ideas.
183. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 12.
184. *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* 295.
185. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVII, 66.
186. Our understanding of the divine attributes is at best analogical because God obviously possesses all attributes in way that is utterly superior to all human understanding. In the language of traditional theology, He possesses these attributes in a 'pre-eminent' manner.
187. *Some Answered Questions* 220-221; italics added.
188. It might be objected that "these attributes, names, praises and eulogies apply to the Places of Manifestation" (*Some Answered Questions* 149) and not to God. But this does not change the situation.
- In order to understand the Manifestations and follow God's instructions, there must be some kind of resemblance between our understanding of the attributes and the attributes themselves. Whether this resemblance is inherent by analogical similarity, or whether it is simply a result of divine fiat is, ultimately, of no consequence.
189. By a 'naturalistic' explanation, I mean, an explanation in terms of processes that are already evident elsewhere throughout nature.
190. "The initial stage of the aim is rooted in the nature of God." *Process and Reality* 285.
191. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXII, 54.
192. *Adventures of Ideas* 240.
193. Ibid. 243.
194. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 61-62; italics added.
195. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

- 79; italics added.
196. *Some Answered Questions* 217 –218.
197. Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, 332.
198. Ibid. 332.
199. *Process and Reality* chapters V and VI.
200. *Some Answered Questions* 239. See also, for example, 89, 90, 134, 146. The subject of substance in the Writings is discussed in greater detail in my “The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings.”
201. *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* 113.
202. Ibid. 116.
203. See “The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings.”
204. *Adventures of Ideas* 209.
205. *Process and Reality* 164.
206. *Adventures of Ideas* 209.
207. Ibid.
208. David Ray Griffin relates this to the notion that “each occasion of the soul's existence might not necessarily need to include prehension of a brain.” *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism* 239.
209. *Some Answered Questions* 233.
210. *The Future of Man* 11.
211. *The Phenomenon of Man* 53.
212. *Hymn of the Universe* 63.
213. Ibid. 64.
214. *The Prayer of the Universe* 63.
215. *Hymn of the Universe* 64.
216. Ibid. 84.
217. *The Phenomenon of Man* 62.
218. Ibid. 286, italics added.
219. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 285–286.
220. *Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.* *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, 177.
221. *Man's Place in Nature* 18.
222. Ibid. 19.
223. *Some Answered Questions* 182–183.
224. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, 177, italics added.
225. *The Future of Man* 95.
226. *Hymn of the Universe* 64.
227. *The Phenomenon of Man* 61.
228. Ibid. 59.
229. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 285–286.
230. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, 177.
231. *Man's Place in Nature* 19.
232. *The Phenomenon of Man* 54.
233. *The Phenomenon of Man* 70.
234. Ibid.
235. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 29.
236. *Bahá'í World Faith* 298. See also *Some Answered Questions* 143, 144, 179.
237. *The Phenomenon of Man* 66.
238. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 207. The whole talk deals with the subject of combinations of matter.
239. *The Phenomenon of Man* 67.
240. *Some Answered Questions* 143.
241. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 101.
242. *Some Answered Questions* 201. See also “For in [man] are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree no other created being hath excelled or surpassed.” *Bahá'í World Faith* 116.
243. *The Prayer of the Universe* 62.
244. *The Phenomenon of Man* 200. See also 210, 247.
245. *The Thought of Teilhard de Chardin* 101.
246. Ibid. 118.
247. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLIII, 92. See also CLIX 335–336.
248. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 29.
249. *Bahá'í World Faith* 242. See also 317.
250. *The Phenomenon of Man* 159.
251. Ibid. 167.
252. Ibid. 160.

253. Ibid.
254. Ibid. 169.
255. Ibid. 201.
256. De Chardin quoted in *The Thought of Teilhard de Chardin* 80.
257. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a.
258. De Chardin, quoted in *The Thought of Teilhard de Chardin* 80.
259. *The Phenomenon of Man* 286.
260. *The Phenomenon of Man* 316.
261. *The Phenomenon of Man* 244.
262. Ibid. 226.
263. Ibid. 247.
264. *The Future of Man* 70.
265. *Building the Earth* 50.
266. Ibid. 200. In *The Future of Man* 180, he calls it “a stupendous thinking machine.”
267. Ibid. 210.
268. Ibid. 230.
269. *Man's Place in Nature* 116.
270. In *The Future of Man* 137 he also calls this “the super-organisation of Matter upon itself.”
271. *The Future of Man* 302.
272. *Man's Place in Nature* 121.
273. *The Future of Man* 323. Significantly, this chapter is entitled “The End of the World.”
274. *The Phenomenon of Man* 315.
275. Ibid. 316.
276. Ibid.
277. *Some Answered Questions* 223-224.
278. *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 56.
279. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXX 136,
280. The similarities to Hegel to name another prominent process philosopher are difficult to miss.
281. *Building the Earth* 111.
282. *The Future of Man* 23.
283. Ibid.
284. Ibid. 22.
285. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CIX, 215.
286. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 252.
287. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXX, 136.
288. *Building the Earth* 49.
289. *The Future of Man* 120. See also 130.
290. *The Future of Man* 182, de Chardin notes, “The greatest empires in history have never covered more than a fragment of the earth.”
291. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXVII, 250.
292. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLIII, 95.
293. *The Future of Man* 238. See also *Man's Place in Nature* 113, “the compressive phase of civilization.”
294. Ibid. 249.
295. Ibid. 183.
296. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 287- 288. See also *Foundations of World Unity* 35.
297. *The Future of Man* 206.
298. Ibid.
299. Ibid. 177.
300. Ibid. 42.
301. *Bahá'í World Faith* 419.
302. Ibid.
303. *Man's Place in Nature* 116.
304. *The Phenomenon of Man* 315.
305. *The Future of Man* 287.
306. *The Future of Man* 76.
307. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVII, 214, italics added. See also CXXII, 260.
308. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Arabic) #68.
309. *The Future of Man* 87.
310. *The Future of Man* 287.
311. *The Phenomenon of Man* 269.
312. *John Donne Meditation XVII*.
313. *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, 95.
314. *The Future of Man* 53, italics added.
315. Ibid. 55.
316. Ibid.
317. Ibid., original italics. Obviously de Chardin means ‘synthesis’ in a Hegelian sense in which the thesis and the antithesis are combined in a new form that encompasses both at a higher, sublimated,

- level.
318. *The Phenomenon of Man* 288.
319. Ibid., 286. See also 190: “union does not restrict, but exalts the possibilities of our being.” See also *The Future of Man* 266 where he says evolution will “ultra-personalise us.”
320. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVII, 214. See de Chardin's reference to “a common human soul” in *Building the Earth* 80.
321. *Bahá'í World Faith* 215. See also 296.
322. *The Future of Man* 266.
323. Ibid. 249.
324. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 42.
325. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 291.
326. *The Phenomenon of Man* 289, original italicised.
327. Ibid.
328. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 41.
329. *Paris Talks* 179. See also *Dawn of a New Day* 218.
330. *Unfolding Destiny* 453.
331. In *The Prayer of the Universe* 68, de Chardin mentions that a “super-mankind is emerging” as the human spirit increasingly liberates itself its earlier, that is, more animalistic, evolutionary conditions.
332. *Foundations of World Unity* 30.
333. Ibid.
334. Ibid.
335. *The Future of Man* 213.
336. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 197.
337. *The Future of Man* 75.
338. *The Phenomenon of Man* 276.
339. *The Prayer of the Universe* 85.
340. *The Hidden Words* (Arabic) # 1.
341. *The Future of Man* 300.
342. Ibid.
343. Ibid., 77.
344. *Bahá'í Administration*, 87.
345. *The Phenomenon of Man* 310.
346. *Hymn of the Universe* 77.
347. See for example, *The Thought of Teilhard de Chardin*.
348. *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin* 140.
349. Ibid. 131.
350. Ibid.
351. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXII, 51.
352. Ibid. XC, 179.
353. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXI, 157, italics added.
354. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXII, 51.
355. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXII, 52.
356. For relationships to other philosophies in the past and present, see “Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Metaphysics” by Nima Hazini; “Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Ontology” by Mark Foster; “The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings” and “The Call into Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism” by Ian Kluge.
