A Simplified Four-Stage Model of Human Transformation Incorporating Individual/Collective, Subjective/Objective and Scientific/Religious Perspectives

Rodney H. Clarken

School of Education
Northern Michigan University

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Abstract: Individual/collective and subjective/objective stages of human development will be compared and these scientific-rational theories examined using a simplified four-stage model of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood, including the following: cognitive (Piaget), moral (Kohlberg, Gilligan), ego (Loevinger), needs (Maslow), socio-emotional (Erikson), self sense (Cook-Greuter), faith (Fowler), cultural (Beck & Cowan), social/cultural/economic worldviews (Wilber) techno-economic (Lenski), sociocultural (Gebser), religious systems (Bellah), epochs (Habermas) and others. These theories will be compared with the Bahá’í teachings to determine areas of agreement to see what we might use to guide or processes to improve education.

Humans individually and collectively go through subjective and objective developmental stages that can be studied from both scientific and religious perspectives. A comparison of these patterns will be presented using a simplified four-stage model that considers various aspects of individual, collective, subjective and objective transformation. The four stages of development and transformation considered are those of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This model is considered simplified in that most of the theories discussed in this paper have more elaborate and refined stages. These four stages are general categories in individual development that will be considered analogous stages to collective development. Because of the preliminary nature of these theories, a simplified four-stage model allows greater ease to make comparisons that are not exact correlations, but may be useful for further study and understanding.

Human development and transformation has both subjective and objective qualities that also correlate to one another. Some aspects of these developments will be briefly explored in this paper using major theories representing the best thinking in these fields of study. A Bahá’í perspective will be presented to explore what light they might shed on these theories. Much of this work is very preliminary, seeking to gain insight into problems that are still being explored from both scientific and religious perspective.

That ontogenetic (individual) and phylogenetic (collective) development go through analogous stages had been proposed by some philosophers in the past, but has not been in favor for over a
century. Recently some scholars and researchers in evolutionary and developmental theory such as Neumann (1955), Piaget (1977), Habermas (1979) and Asimov (1984) have identified patterns that demonstrate many similarities between ontogenetic and phylogenetic development. Wilber (1995) has done an admirable job of bringing much of this research together to identify unifying patterns and propose some universal principles. For humanity these processes may have taken centuries or millennia to pass through, whereas an individual may go through an analogous stage in a matter of days, months or years.

For centuries, individual and collective physical, mental and spiritual development have appear to go in fits and starts, in a random or unpredictable pattern, but an order and system are beginning to be uncovered by modern day evolutionary and developmental theorists.

Ontogenetic and phylogenetic parallels of development will consider the following areas fitting them into the four stage model of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood: cognitive (Piaget), moral (Kohlberg, Gilligan), ego (Loevinger), needs (Maslow), socio-emotional (Erikson), self sense (Cook-Greuter), faith (Fowler), cultural (Beck & Cowan), social/cultural/economic worldviews (Wilber) techno-economic (Lenski), sociocultural (Gebser), religious systems (Bellah), epochs (Habermas) and others (see Table 1). Implications of this research on how we might help facilitate human development individually and collectively will be presented.

**Stage Theory**

Developmental stage theory is relatively new in our understanding of individual and collective development and is not universally accepted. The idea that individuals and societies go through developmental stages is central to the B teachings. In addition, this principle applies to all created things, not just human development.

All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing. The maturity of a plant is the time of its blossoming and flower. The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the lights of intelligence have their greatest power and development.

From the beginning to the end of his life man passes through certain periods or stages each of which is marked by certain conditions peculiar to itself. For instance during the period of childhood his conditions and requirements are characteristic of that degree of intelligence and capacity. After a time he enters the period of youth in which his former conditions and needs are superseded by new requirements applicable to the advance in his degree. His faculties of observation are broadened and deepened, his intelligent capacities are trained and awakened, the limitations and environment of childhood no longer restrict his energies and accomplishments. At last he passes out of the period of youth and enters the stage or station of maturity which necessitates another transformation and corresponding advance in his sphere of life-activity. New powers and perceptions clothe him, teaching and training commensurate with his progression occupy his mind, special bounties and bestowals descend in proportion to his increased capacities.
and his former period of youth and its conditions will no longer satisfy his matured view and vision.

Similarly there are periods and stages in the life of the aggregate world of humanity which at one time was passing through its degree of childhood, at another its time of youth but now has entered its long presaged period of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere visible and apparent. Therefore the requirements and conditions of former periods have changed and merged into exigencies which distinctly characterize the present age of the world of mankind. That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race could neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day and period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former degrees of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moralities, new capacities. New bounties, bestowals and perfections are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and graces of the period of youth although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of the world of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity. The playthings of childhood and infancy no longer satisfy or interest the adult mind.

From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a re-formation. The laws of former governments and civilizations are in process of revision, scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena, invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of re-formation. Old trees yield no fruitage; old ideas and methods are obsolete and worthless now. Old standards of ethics, moral codes and methods of living in the past will not suffice for the present age of advancement and progress. (Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity, p. 9-10)

**Simplified Four Stage Model**

The stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood are generally recognized in science, religion and culture. What these stages are and mean varies somewhat from theorist to theorist and culture to culture. For our purposes in this paper we will divide these stages into about five to seven year spans. In other words, infancy will cover roughly from birth up to five to seven years old, childhood from then until ten to fourteen, adolescence from the end of childhood until fifteen or twenty-one and adulthood from then on. These terms are generally used throughout the B literature to name stages of individual and collective development.

His [Ba] mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood,

(Shoghi Effendi, Summary Statement - 1947, Special UN Committee on Palestine)
Piaget’s Cognitive (Individual Subjective)

Abdu'l-Baha states that “man reaches his maturity when the lights of intelligence have their greatest power and development. (Foundations of World Unity, p. 10)

Social Cultural (Collective)

The Bahá’í Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or selection of an auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

(Shoghi Effendi, Summary Statement - 1947, Special UN Committee on Palestine)

Religion (Collective)

This is the cycle of maturity and re-formation in religion as well. Dogmatic imitations of ancestral beliefs are passing. They have been the axis around which religion revolved but now are no longer fruitful; on the contrary, in this day they have become the cause of human degradation and hindrance. Bigotry and dogmatic adherence to ancient beliefs have become the central and fundamental source of animosity among men, the obstacle to human progress, the cause of warfare and strife, the destroyer of peace, composure and welfare in the world. Consider conditions in the Balkans today [1912]; fathers, mothers, children in grief and lamentation, the foundations of life overturned, cities laid waste and fertile lands made desolate by the ravages of war. These conditions are the outcome of hostility and hatred between nations and peoples of religion who imitate and adhere to the forms and violate the spirit and reality of the divine teachings.

While this is true and apparent, it is likewise evident that the Lord of mankind has bestowed infinite bounties upon the world in this century of maturity and consummation. The ocean of divine mercy is surging, the vernal showers are descending, the Sun of Reality is shining gloriously. Heavenly teachings applicable to the advancement in
human conditions have been revealed in this merciful age. This re-formation and renewal of the fundamental reality of religion constitute the true and outworking spirit of modernism, the unmistakable light of the world, the manifest effulgence of the Word of God, the divine remedy for all human ailment and the bounty of eternal life to all mankind. 11

(Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity, p. 10)

The aim of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon -- He whose advent fulfils the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'án regarding the coming of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment -- is not to destroy but to fulfill the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergences of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present-day society.

His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills and perplexities, of the age in which we live. His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.

(Shoghi Effendi, Summary Statement - 1947, Special UN Committee on Palestine)

Human development, both individual and collective, is a gradual, predictable and necessary process. By understanding the evolutionary quality of development, we can better appreciate and evaluate past contributions to present conditions and make future plans for further progress, making adjustments based on an analysis of the data available. We can accept our past and build on it, carrying with us those qualities that will further our advancement and leaving behind those characteristics that are no longer suited to present or future needs and conditions.

Development is a universal principle that can be seen as part of the natural order. In the mineral kingdom we see the joining of atoms to form simple molecules that form cells to make substances. On the vegetable level of matter, the seed becomes a sprout, grows, flowers, bears fruit and creates seeds for the next generation. The development in the animal is similar to that of the human body going through comparable stages in their physical life cycle. Like the human
being, the physical world possessed all its potential attributes and perfections from the beginning, but only when conditions were right were they manifested. Every cell (individual, part) affects and is affected by the body (collective, whole) of which it is a part.

Physical, Mental and Spiritual Perspectives

Developmental stages can be viewed from the perspective of the three natures of a human being: physical (body), mental (mind) and spiritual (soul). These qualities unfold in similar ways to one another, and ontogenetically and phylogenetically, as will be further explored in the paper. We learn to develop our physical perception and sensory capacities, just as we learn to develop our mental and spiritual insight and competence. It is only after our eyes and our perception have developed that we can make out shapes and our minds can identify them without any apparent effort. We are also able to mentally make out concepts and principles and spiritually identify virtues such as truth and justice only after some development.

Though the body, mind and soul stages have parallels, they do not necessarily occur in concert with one another. As the mind is largely situated in a physical organ, the brain, some mental and psychological functions have organic requirements, and therefore can not develop until the brain has adequately developed. The soul, though being completely non-organic and not composed of matter, uses the body and mind as vehicles for expression and development, and therefore also develops in relation to them. Only when the person reaches maturity are the full capacities of the body, mind and soul able to be realized.

The developmental process can be seen as stages of increasing autonomy, differentiation and integration, resulting in more complex, higher order wholes, identities, articulations and unities in diversities. We see these patterns in the physical, mental and spiritual worlds. As physical cells divide (differentiating) and combine into body parts (integrating), so do mental (images) and spiritual cells (virtues) forming greater unity and diversity (integrity) and capacity (autonomy) in more complex networks. The identity of the body is going through constant change, as is the mind and soul. They are always active, though more or less so at different times. Certain developments can mark or be used to identify different stages, but the process is continuous. Unlike the body in which a stage of growth is reached and then maintained until that body experiences a gradual decline in physical health and capacity until death, the mind and soul have the capacity to continue to grow and develop. With age, the brain, as part of the body, will begin to lose some capacities, and therefore the part of the mind we directly associate with the brain also declines.

The mind and soul exist in potential, something like the body does in our DNA. All require interactions with and within environments to actualize those potentialities. Given the proper environment, the body capacities unfold or come into existence naturally. With proper diet, exercise and physical care, the body develops naturally to its full capacity and powers. The skills and functions of the body can be consciously used by the mind and soul.

Consciousness grows to differentiate self from non-self and then to differentiate from and integrate with all the various non-selves it encounters. The first sense of self is identified with its body. As awareness of our body increases, we are able to begin to exercise and develop some control over it. We can gasp things, make sounds and move. Gradually consciousness discriminates feelings and mind as being separate from the body and begins to shift some of its
identity to them. With this it can begin controlling some of its body discharges and functions that previously were beyond control and consciousness. After it has developed a healthy body, feeling and mind self, it begins to develop in interactions with others, differentiating and integrating their ways of being, feeling and knowing with their own. As they become absorbed in this rich world their focus shifts from a largely individual self focus to a group focus, as they come in contact with wider groups of others, differentiating, selecting and integrating their views and ways using capacities and criteria developed at earlier stages. Their sense of mind self is expanded, altered and influenced by these forces. Eventually it will subsume and incorporate all those forces into themselves as their minds expand until they can see all these outside cultural influences together and begin to be able to reflect and act upon them moving from their predominately ethnocentric thinking to a more individually defined and chosen view (see Table 1).

Body

The initial one-celled fertilized egg which constitutes the unified and integrated body at conception begins the process of dividing itself, beginning a process that will continue until full physical maturity, and then maintain itself until the decomposition of those cells at the death of the body. Though we have a one-celled body at conception, it contains all the potential to develop our body parts and mature features, waiting only to be realized through a natural growth and development process. The physical development a fetus goes through in nine months parallels the changes our species has gone through in millions of years.

At the earliest stages, the baby has no control over bodily functions. Its body actions are initially directed by impulses and instincts. In fact most psychologists agree that initially the baby does not have a sense of differentiation of itself from the surrounding world. In the womb, the fetus is in many ways one with its mother. It is inside of, connected to and affected by its mother.

Mind

On the mind level, humanity has also gone through various stages individually and collectively. The mind has many aspects or qualities that can be examined to determine patterns of evolutionary development analogous in both individual and collective development. At the lowest levels of development the human shows signs of development starting with instincts, moving to sensations and then perceptions. Mental development progresses from body centric to egocentric, ethnocentric, and world-centric orientations. Potentially higher levels should be forthcoming in the future. The world is currently at the stage of moving from predominately ethnocentric to a world-centric outlook, which will eventually lead to more transcendental and universal world views.

Historically social developments have roughly progressed from family units, clans, tribes, feudal state, city state, nation state to the now emerging world state. Humanity has passed through social developments connected with hunting and gathering, horticultural, agricultural, industrial ages which have led to the present information and emerging globalization age. In the same way that biological genetic endowments have been passed on and future evolution has built upon them, so has the emotional, cultural, mental and other developments connected with the human mind (see Table 1). Each higher stage allowed for greater individual and collective expression of and opportunities for development of capacities.
We have also seen an evolutionary development in the areas of spirituality and religion. Religions have evolved, building on preceding religions and introducing necessary adaptations according to the spiritual demands of each successive age. These religious teachings have covered spiritual matters, but also addressed social, cultural and physical matters as well. The influence of these religions on human development in all areas has been well established. Their evolutionary relationships are less accepted and understood, partly because of the ethnocentric mentality of their adherents and the nature of the physical, mental and spiritual development of the times these religions were revealed. The paternalistic and mythological aspects of religion that were appropriate for a less developed humanity, need to be replaced by standards and approaches more suited to the current age. Each age has different needs and requirements which religion must address if it is to be relevant and useful.

Conclusion

A part of our reexamination and reevaluation of our individual and collective pasts is to look at the attitudes and assumptions that have guided our thinking and actions. These are often called world views or paradigms. They are hard to change. We do not let go of them easily. We either need to be presented with a world view that is superior to ours and that works noticeably better than ours, or we need to have a failure of our worldview, usually in the form of a major life-threatening or life-changing crisis, similar to the social-emotional crises individuals go through (Erikson, 1950, 1959). Those who do so successfully are able to advance to a higher level of functioning, and those who do not are forced to stay at a less developed level. It seems challenge and crisis are the normal route to growth. We do not discard something until it becomes very clear it does not and will no longer work for us. And sometimes we need overwhelming evidence.

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Table 1. Simplified Comparison of Onto and Phylogenetic in Four Broad Stages (Adapted in part from Wilber, 2000)
Table 2. Comparing Ontogenetic and Phylogenetic