

## Western and Middle Eastern Developmental Stage Theories<sup>1</sup>

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[Chapter 4, pp. 35-54, in Diessner, R. (2007). *Psyche and eros. Bahá'í studies in a spiritual psychology*. Oxford: George Ronald Publishers.]

*Similarities and contrasts between classic western developmental stage theories (Piaget's genetic epistemology and Erikson's psychosocial theory) and a classic middle eastern stage theory of adult development are examined in this paper. The middle eastern approach is represented by a classic seven-stage sequence of the development of the nafs (Arabic for the psyche or soul), as described by psychologically-oriented Islamic philosophers and the Bahá'í leader 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Aristotelian causal philosophy is utilized for the methodology of systematic comparison and contrast of the theories. The final 'cause' of the paper is to provide a bridge for western educated developmental psychologists to understand fundamental aspects of the 'developmental' world view of many middle easterners.*

Mapping various similarities and contrasts among influential stage theories in western psychology and middle eastern religious psychologies is the focus of this paper. The two stage theories that will represent the western approach will be Jean Piaget's (*Six; Structuralism; Genetic; Child and Reality*) genetic epistemology (cognitive development), and Erik Erikson's (*Childhood; Dimensions; 'Reflections'*) neo-psychoanalytic theory of psychosocial development. To represent a middle eastern approach, a classic seven-stage sequence of the development of the 'nafs' (psyche or soul), as described by psychologically-oriented Islamic and Sufi philosophers and by the Bahá'í leader 'Abdu'l-Bahá (b. 1844 -- d. 1921 CE; Momen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary') will be employed. This seven-stage sequence (to be described below) is commonly invoked by a host of Arabic and Persian authors; Trimmingham, in referring to As-Sanúsi's (d. c. 1859 CE) description of these stages, refers to them as the 'commonest diagrammatization of the Seven Stages . . . [being] widespread and found in other [Sufi] order manuals, though with variations' (*Sufi Orders* 154).

It may appear that this is an 'apples and oranges' comparison, as one approach represents 20th century 'scientific' thought in the West, whereas the other is based on religious psychologies, harkening from the 5th through 19th centuries CE, that originated in the Middle East. However, the religious psychology of Islam, especially as represented in Islamic Sufism, is making major incursions into the western press and psychological thought (Ernst, *Shambala*; Frager, *Heart*; Frager and Fadiman, *Personality* [viz. ch. 17]; Nurbakhsh, *Psychology*; Shah, *Learning*; Schimmel, *Mystical* [viz. ch. 4]; Shafii, *Freedom*; Wilcox, *Sufism*). And although the Bahá'í Faith began in the Middle East, a large percentage of its adherents live in the West (Barrett, 'Statistics') and Bahá'í-inspired psychological works are now being published there (Blumenthal, *To Understand; Way*; Cope, *Re-Thinking*; Danesh, *Psychology*; Diessner, 'Cognitive-Developmental'; 'Selflessness'; Ghadirian, *Nirvana*; 'Psychological'; Jordan, 'Becoming'; Khavari, *Spiritual*; Mustakova-Possardt, *Critical*; Penn, 'Journey'; 'Oedipus'; Penn and Nardos, *Overcoming*; Pezeshkian, *Merchant*). Therefore, this paper aims to look at similarities and dissimilarities among modern western psychological stage theories and a classic middle eastern religious psychology stage approach.

Following our brief presentation of these developmental stage theories, a comparison and contrast of their meanings will be presented, based on Aristotle's 'four causes' (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*; Moravcsik, 'Aristotle'; 'Aitia'). We have selected Aristotle (viz. Robinson, *Aristotle's Psychology*) as our arbiter between the West and the Middle East as his philosophy and psychology have had a major impact on both Islam and Christianity and on both European and middle eastern

thought (Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*).

### Description of a classic middle eastern stage development sequence

- 1) *nafs-i-ammára*: the commanding soul, the soul that incites to evil
- 2) *nafs-i-lawwáma*: the blaming or reproachful soul
- 3) *nafs-i-mulhama*: the inspired soul
- 4) *nafs-i-mutma'inna*: the assured or peaceful soul
- 5) *nafs-i-rázía*: the accepting or well-pleased soul
- 6) *nafs-i-marzíyya*: the accepted or well-pleasing soul
- 7) *nafs-i-kámila*: the perfect soul ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*; Momen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary'; As-Sanúsí in Trimmingham, *Sufi Orders*).

In both the Arabic and Persian languages, and in both Islamic and Bahá'í texts, the *nafs* is the primary 'unit of analysis' in human psychological development and is typically translated as 'soul'. Its meaning is very close to that of Socrates and Plato in their employment of the word 'psyche' (Burnet, 'Socratic Doctrine') and intersects with western psychology's use of the word 'ego' (Nurbakhsh, *Psychology*; Shafii, *Freedom*). The stage sequence that is described in the above paragraph originated in these Qur'anic verses (Arberry, *Koran*):

Stage 1: '... the soul of man incites to evil' [*nafs-i-ammára bis-sú'*] (12:53).

Stage 2: 'I swear by the reproachful soul' [*nafs-i-lawwáma*] (75:2).

Stage 3: 'By the soul, and That which shaped it and inspired it' [*nafs-i-mulhama*] (91:8).

Stages 4, 5 and 6: 'O soul at peace [4] *nafs-i-mutma'inna*, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased [5] *nafs-i-rázía*, well-pleasing' [6] *nafs-i-marzíyya*] (89:27B8).

The seventh stage, *nafs-i-kámila*, the perfect soul, is not directly mentioned in the Qur'an but was added later by Islamic philosophers. Also, in some formulations of this seven-stage sequence the seventh stage may be called the *nafs-i-sáfiya* (the pure soul; viz. Frager and Fadiman, *Personality*; Shafii, *Freedom*) instead of the *nafs-i-kámila*. It should be noted that there are significant variations in describing and interpreting this seven-stage sequence both among the Islamic and Sufi philosophers and between those philosophers and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And although there are distinct differences between the Bahá'í approach articulated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and an Islamic approach, they share much in common, such as their grounding in revelatory religion.

Variations in formulations and explications of the first four stages of this classic stage sequence can be found in the work of such psychologically-oriented philosophers as al-Tirmidhí (d. c. 892 CE; in Heer, 'Sufi'), Najm al-Dín Rázi (1177B1256 CE; *Path*), al-Ghazálí (d. 1111 CE), Sa'íd al-Dín Farghání (d. 1300 CE) and Jílí (c. 1365--1417 CE; viz. Nicholson, *Studies*). For example, Winter writes, 'The religious psychology developed [by] Ghazálí is rich with Platonic and Aristotelian elements . . . man's soul and essence (*dhát*), referred to as *ammára bi'l-sú*, *lawwáma*, or *mutma'inna* . . .' (*Al-Ghazálí* 233). Chittick, in analysing the work of Farghání, refers to how each 'human psyche can be analysed in terms of three fundamental tendencies: ascending, descending, and in-between. To these is connected the traditional distinction made among the three basic levels of the soul (*nafs*): the soul at peace with God [*nafs mutma'inna*], the soul that commands to evil [*nafs ammára*] and the intermediate, blaming soul' [*nafs lawwáma*] ('Spectrums' 211).

Mention of the classic seven-stage sequence goes back to at least the 12th century CE (5th century AH) in the work of the Persian scholar 'Abdu'l-Qádir-i-Jílání (d. 1166 CE), who taught in Baghdad (Radmehr, 'Samávát-i-sulúk'). This stage sequence was taken up by Sufis and Islamic-oriented philosophers throughout the Middle East. For instance, in the 16th century CE, Vahidi (Karamustafa, 'Seven'), writing in Ottoman Turkish in 1522 CE, provided a sequential account of the

development of the soul that is typical of the Halveti Sufi order. Karamustafa ('Seven') indicates that Vahidi explains that seven stages are traversed by the soul, through the guidance of a Sufi director (somewhat analogous to a psychotherapist [Shafii, *Freedom*): 'journey to God; journey for the sake of God; journey toward God; journey with God; journey in God; journey through God; and journey by God. The seven journeys correspond to the seven stages of the human soul's development: the commanding soul; the blaming soul; the inspiring soul; the pacified soul; the contented soul; the agreeable soul; and the perfect soul' (Karamustafa, 'Seven' 311). As Trimmingham (*Sufi Orders*) points out, this seven-stage sequence had become the most common one in 19th century CE Islamic Sufi psychology. It should be noted that there are significant variations in describing and interpreting this seven-stage sequence both among the Islamic and Sufi philosophers and between those philosophers and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And although there are distinct differences between the Bahá'í approach and an Islamic one, they share much in common, such as their grounding in revelatory religion.

In the late 19th century CE, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*; Momen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary') re-stated the religious--psychological importance of these seven stages. We have chosen to use 'Abdu'l-Bahá's version of these stages as He is an excellent bridge between the East and the West, as He lived in Iran and Ottoman Turkey, visited Europe and America in 1911--1913, and focused many of his writings on the unity of western science and middle eastern spirituality (viz. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá). A summary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description of these stages follows:

1. The commanding soul -- *nafs-i-ammára* B the soul that commands to evil -- is preoccupied with the trivialities of this world and is infatuated with materialistic and ephemeral desires.
2. The blaming soul -- *nafs-i-lawwáma* B from time to time becomes aware of the depths of its degradation and of its remoteness from its true goal. It awakes, on occasions, to a perception of its state, is filled with regret and blames itself for its unseemly acts.
3. The inspired soul -- *nafs-i-mulhama* B progresses out of the second stage and ascends to a more noble maturity as it is assisted by the confirmations of God. There comes to it the signs of inspiration and it begins to understand the causes of its elevation and development and its degradation and regression. It becomes averse to the things of the world that are perishable and inclines towards those things that endure. As a result of its efforts and striving, it discovers those beneficial things which will lead it to its purpose and goal of its development. It is then termed the 'the inspired soul'.
4. The assured soul -- *nafs-i-mutma'inna* B is the stage in which the soul exists in remembrance of its Lord and sees the signs of God throughout creation. As a result it is assured in its faith, its turmoil and unrest is calmed, it has quenched its thirst, soothed its torment; it has changed its darkness to light and unloaded its burdens.
5. The accepting soul -- *nafs-i-rázía* B reaches a station of submission and contentment, leaving behind its searching and neediness. It entrusts its affairs to God and is content with whatever God may decree for it. It will not see in this station anything that is inconsistent with its contentment. This is a happiness which is not followed by sadness. There remains no will, no rest, no motion, no destiny nor any fate except in God.
6. The accepted soul -- *nafs-i-marzíyya* B has left behind its passions and has accepted the decree of its Lord, is full of happiness and joy at the bounty and beneficence of God and is now known as 'the accepted soul'. In other words, on the account of its rising to this station, it is 'accepted' by God into the heights of being.
7. The perfect soul -- *nafs-i-kámila* B is characterized by divine perfections and comprised of godly attributes. All the illumined and lofty stations previously mentioned are collected in this stage. It thus becomes the focal point of inspiration and the dawning-place for the divine effulgences.

In terms of 'adult development' it should be noted that these stages have traditionally been applied in

the Islamic Middle East to adults. For example, it is not assumed that the first two stages, the commanding soul (*nafs-i-ammára*) and the blaming soul (*nafs-i-lawwáma*), are about childhood stages of development; rather they are assumed to apply to the adult developmental journey (but *may* also apply to children's development). These stages clearly fall into the category that Commons ('Introduction') refers to as positive adult development and include issues of hierarchical complexity and spirituality.

### **Piaget's genetic epistemology**

The most influential stage theory in the West (Modgil, Modgil and Brown, *Piaget*), at least concerning the development of cognition, is Piaget's genetic epistemology (Piaget, 1964/1972); *Structuralism; Genetic; Child and Reality*). Piaget (1896--1980) developed a theory concerning the structural development of the mind through four major stages. 1) Sensorimotor stage, which is generally considered by Piaget (*Child and Reality*) to be a pre-language stage of the development of thought and ending by the second year of life. Thought is primarily focused on integrating incoming sensory information with outgoing motor movements. 2) The second stage is typically called pre-operations or pre-operatory representations and commonly extends to about seven or eight years of age. In this stage the child develops the 'symbolical function' and can interiorize 'schemes of action in representations' (Piaget, *Child and Reality* 57). 3) The third stage is termed concrete operations, extends to about 11 or 12 years of age and allows the mind to coordinate two or more concrete variables, such as in Piaget's famous conservation tasks (*Conception of Number*), and to organize categories, relations and numbers. 4) The fourth stage is called 'formal operations', allowing abstract thought, inductive reasoning, hypothetico-deductive thought, combinative operations and the logic of propositions.

### **Erikson's psychosocial approach**

Erikson's (*Childhood; Dimensions; Reflections*) stage theory is neo-psychoanalytic; it moves away from Freud's focus on the psychosexual, to a focus on the psychosocial. Erikson's eight-stage sequence also extended beyond Freud's five stages, which ended at puberty, to propose that human development continues in three more qualitatively different stages beyond adolescence. The 'trust vs. mistrust' stage is the first and most basic stage of social development beginning at birth and persisting through the first year of life. If the infant is cared for in a reliable and dependable way the child develops a sense of trust; conversely, if the infant is not properly cared for it will develop a sense of mistrust. An infant that successfully resolves this stage develops the virtue of hope. The second psychosocial developmental stage is that of 'autonomy vs. shame and doubt'. The toddler in this stage struggles with its newfound ability to be in charge of its physical mobility. The toddler can either learn to restrain its actions, while retaining its sense of self-esteem, or it can fail to gain this ability and acquire a sense of shame for not measuring up to the social expectations of its environment. If the toddler is successful in this stage, it acquires the virtue of willpower (Erikson, *Childhood*). In the third stage, 'initiative vs. guilt', the child learns that it has the ability to plan, identify and execute goals. If the child chooses reasonable goals and is allowed to execute them the child attains the virtue of purpose (ibid.). On the other hand, if the child is ridiculed for the goals that it chooses it will learn to feel guilty. The fourth stage, 'industry vs. inferiority', is based on the child's struggle to learn the symbol systems and skills needed to function in its culture. If the child adequately learns the tools and systems of its culture the child will develop the virtues of competence and confidence; however, if the child fails to measure up to the educational expectations of its culture it will develop a sense of inferiority. The fifth stage, 'identity vs. role confusion', finds adolescents in the crisis of discovering who they are. If the adolescent successfully develops an identity she acquires the virtue of fidelity and if the adolescent fails to develop an identity she will suffer from role confusion (Erikson, *Childhood; Dimensions*). The sixth stage, that of the young adult, involves facing the developmental task of 'intimacy vs. isolation'. In this stage the individual seeks to form an enduring physical and emotional

intimacy with another. If successful, he acquires the virtue of love; if not, he will suffer from isolation. The mid-life adult encounters the seventh stage, the crisis between 'generativity vs. stagnation', which is primarily associated with child rearing but may also be conceptualized in the more generic sense of productivity. If she fails to experience generativity, she will fall prey to stagnation. The successful development of a generative social role procures for the individual the virtue of care. The eighth and final stage is 'ego integrity vs. despair', which takes place in the last years of life. The individual struggles with the meaning of his life, either accepting his life as a meaningful and productive existence or he experiences a deep feeling of despair at having wasted his life on less than meaningful goals and standards. The successful resolution of this stage confers upon the individual the virtue of wisdom (Erikson, *Childhood; Reflections*).

### Similarities and contrasts among the theories

We will compare and contrast these two western stage theories with the classical middle eastern stages using Aristotle's (*Metaphysics*) framework for understanding. Aristotle's framework is based on what is usually translated as 'causes': the material cause, the efficient cause, the formal cause and the final cause. As Moravcsik ('Aristotle'; 'Aitia'), however, has pointed out, it can be misleading to think of Aristotle as describing four types of 'causes' using the common meaning of 'cause' in English. Rather, the Greek word that Aristotle used for the 'causes' is *aitiai* and is better translated as 'understanding' than 'cause'. Therefore we will utilize Aristotle's framework to organize an understanding of various relations among these culturally different stage approaches. Aristotle is an ideal bridge between the West and the Middle East as his philosophy and psychology have had a major impact on both western (Robinson, *Aristotle's Psychology*) and middle eastern thought and psychology (Peters, *Aristotle*; Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*).

#### *Material Cause or Constitutive Factor*

Moravcsik ('Aitia') emphasizes that by 'material cause' Aristotle did not simply mean the physical make-up of something but rather that from which it is constituted, its contents. For instance, abstractions, such as an 'idea', can also have constituent 'parts' that are not material things. There are a variety of ways in which this could be applied to stage theories but we will focus on the 'content' of the stages.

Piaget's theory and his four stages emphasize cognition or genetic epistemology. Specifically, they focus on our developing understanding of the physical world. Each stage allows for a new type of 'content' of thought: 1) In the sensorimotor stage the contents of thought are patterns of the interaction of sensory input and motor output. 2) The contents of pre-operational thought add the ability to have symbolic and representational thoughts. 3) Concrete operations add the new content of categorical and reversible thought processes but only in regard to physical things. 4) Formal operations add the emergent content of abstract thought, including the ability to think about thinking and to mentally operate on propositions themselves, free from concrete restraints.

In contrast to cognition, Erikson's stages are constituted primarily by emotions, virtues and social relations. In relating this to Gardner's work (*Frames; Intelligence*) on multiple intelligences, the content of Piaget's theory is primarily concerned with logical-mathematical intelligence, whereas the contents of Erikson's theory are primarily based on interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Erikson's stages are more holistic than Piaget's stages of cognitive development, in that Erikson's concern is for the development of the self or the ego. 'The focus of each phase [of Erikson's stages] is upon the maturing person's self as he or she experiences new socio-cultural spheres and roles' (Snarey, Kohlberg and Noam, 'Ego' 322).

The contents of the classical middle eastern stages focus on the development of the *nafs*, which is the singular for 'soul' or 'spirit'. The Arabic word '*nafs*', like the Greek word '*psyche*', is commonly translated into English as 'soul' and also contains the connotations of 'personality' and 'self' (Shafii, *Freedom*), as well as generalized 'ego' (Nurbakhsh, *Psychology*). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition of the human *nafs* is similar to Socrates' description of the psyche (for Socrates' view, see Burnet, 'Socratic Doctrine'): the *nafs* is an 'essence within which arises the powers of the human being, the outer and inner senses, the divine perfections and knowledge, the heavenly sciences, the

eternal arts, and the hidden wisdom' (Momen, 'Abdu 'l-Bahá 's Commentary' 111).

### *Constituent factor contrast*

Therefore the contrasts in material cause, or constituent contents, of the three stage theories under consideration can be summarized thus: 1) Piaget 's focuses on logico-mathematical cognition, 2) Erikson 's focuses on affect, virtues and a socio-cultural ego or self and 3) the middle eastern focuses on a holistic spiritual self or soul. Piaget 's stage theory primarily emphasizes only one aspect of the psyche, i.e. the cognitive; Erikson 's stage theory aims to be more comprehensive and includes such various aspects of the psyche as affect, virtue, and a socio-cultural ego; and the middle eastern stage theory is the most holistic, dealing with human psyche as a whole.

### *Constituent factor similarity*

There is an epistemological similarity among these three stage theories in that they all emphasize a 'knowing' being. The content of Piaget 's genetic epistemology focuses upon knowledge of the physical world. This is a form of intelligence that Gardner (*Intelligence*) would refer to as logical/mathematical, spatial and naturalistic. Erikson 's psychosocial stages focus on knowledge of self and others; Gardner (ibid.) would term this intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. The middle eastern stage theories primarily address knowledge of spirituality and human purpose, thus focusing on existential and intrapersonal intelligences (ibid.).

### **The efficient cause or motion-initiating factor**

Moravcsik points out that the so-called 'efficient cause' has been mistakenly 'identified with the modern notion of mechanical cause' ('Aitia' 9), whereas it is much broader in Aristotle 's original meaning. Moravcsik prefers to call it the 'motion-initiating factor' and for the purposes of this paper it may be viewed as those forces that cause 'motion' or 'development' in the human being and thus contribute to advancing development through the stages.

Piaget is typically summarized as an 'interactionist' in the secondary literature on child development; he considers developmental motion to be caused by the interaction of genes and the environment. More specifically, Piaget posited the factors of cognitive organization, cognitive adaptation (assimilation and accommodation) and cognitive equilibration (and disequilibrium) as the major factors initiating growth and development (Miller, *Theories*).

Erikson 's major motion-causing factor for human development is the 'epigenetic principle'. This epigenetic principle is a metaphor that Erikson (*Childhood*) explicitly took from embryology. It indicates that the human being continuously unfolds in a pre-determined pattern. It seems Erikson did not intend this to mean only a genesis from DNA, as he posits the influences on development to be three: 1) 'processes inherent in the organism' (*Childhood* 34), 2) 'the second process', 'the organization of the experience of the individual ego' (ibid. 35) and 3) 'the third principle of organization, the social' (ibid. 36; emphasis in the original). Although Erikson accepts the biological influences on development as well as the psychosexual development of the ego from Freud, Erikson 's emphasis is upon the socio-cultural influences and thus his theory is best known as the 'psychosocial' theory of development.

In the classical middle eastern theory, the major influence on the developmental motion of the *nafs* is the grace of God, the mercy of Alláh. Within the context of being 'assisted by the confirmations of God' (Momen, 'Abdu 'l-Bahá 's Commentary' 112), the *nafs* must also exercise its own will in its development. The *nafs* must choose to turn 'its attention to those things that will cause it to ascend' (ibid.) to the next stage of development.

In Piaget 's work the concept of the 'will' is emphasized in his studies of moral development (*Moral*), in the movement from heteronomy to autonomy. However, in his cognitive stage sequence

the will may be implied but is not explicitly emphasized as a motion-initiating cause of cognitive development. With Erikson, the `will' is not given focal emphasis as a motion-initiating cause of psychosocial development but it is given more emphasis than in Piaget's theory, especially in Erikson's second stage, that of autonomy versus shame and doubt, and the influence that stage has on development through the latter stages. In the middle eastern theory, however, both the `will' and the mercy of God have central and explicit roles as *the* motion-initiating factors. In this sense the middle eastern stage theory is `interactionist', meaning the developmental motion of the individual is a function of the interaction between the `will' of the individual and the confirmation of God. The role of the `will', as the motion-initiating factor in the middle eastern theory, is therefore significantly different from the two western theories. Within the individual's psyche (*nafs*), the will becomes the most influential and determinative of developmental motion.

#### *Motion-initiating factor contrast*

The most obvious contrast among the western and middle eastern stage approaches is the explicit emphasis on the grace of God -- interacting with the human will -- as a causative factor in the developmental motion of the mind, the psyche or the *nafs*. In Piaget's work, mention of God as a cause of development is absent; and Erikson, although he addresses God and spirituality, does not explicitly focus on God as a cause of human development. Thus the central emphasis on God, interacting with the human will, as an efficient cause of human development is confined to the middle eastern theory in this three-way comparison of theories.

Other differences among these theories, which are tangentially related to the efficient cause, are a) the methodology of the development of these theories, and b) the descriptive-prescriptive continuum. Piaget's theory is the most `empirical.' That is, his stage theory is based on naturalistic observation, semi-structured observations, and the semi-structured clinical interview method. Erikson's theory is similar, in that it is based on his general observations of children and adults, also using such methods as naturalistic observation and clinical interviews, and also cross-cultural comparisons and psychohistories (Miller, *Theories*). The middle eastern theory is based on revelatory texts and the hermeneutic interpretations of those texts by various psychologically oriented philosophers, and does not claim validity based on systematic observational data, but rather on its source in divine revelation.

Piaget's cognitive stage theory is also, viewed from Piaget's standpoint, primarily descriptive and less prescriptive. That is, Piaget's work is intended to be an objective view of how cognition develops and is not explicitly prescriptive. There are subtle prescriptive issues involved, however, in descriptive stage theories; the interested reader is referred to Kohlberg ('Claim'; *Philosophy*; Kohlberg and Boyd, *Is--Ought*). Erikson's theory, like Piaget's, is primarily intended to be descriptive but tends to draw the reader closer to prescription through its indications of the virtues that are inherent in the resolution of any given stage and in its implied use as a guide in clinical psychotherapy. The middle eastern *nafs* stage approach, while being descriptive of the journey of the soul, is also explicitly prescriptive. That is, it is expressly intended by the developers of this stage approach to guide how our soul/psyche *should* develop.

#### *Motion-initiating factor similarity*

Although above we differentiate these three stage theories based on the human `will', they also share some common ground on this topic. Erikson emphasizes the importance of the will in his second psychosocial stage (age one to three years) and notes that a `favourable ratio' of autonomy over shame and doubt will result in the `virtue' of `willpower' (*Childhood* 274). Snarey, Kohlberg and Noam ('Ego') describe how all eight of the virtues (hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, wisdom) that parallel the successful resolution of Erikson's stages are each a higher level of `moral will' ('Ego' 325).

Piaget (*Six*) also relates the `will' to a sense of moral autonomy, although he posits that this

does not occur until his third stage of concrete operations, between the ages of about seven and 12. 'Will is a late-appearing function. The real exercise of the will is linked to the functioning of the autonomous moral feelings . . .' (Piaget, *Six* 58).

The will has a crucial role in the choices that the *nafs* makes towards higher stage development. It is central to both progress and stasis in the development of the *nafs*. This concept is also implicit in the name of the first stage of *nafs*, 'the commanding soul' or the 'soul that commands to evil'. 'Commanding' is a function of the will, to the degree that the will is involved in the decision-making and self-direction of the *nafs*.

### **Formal cause, essence or structural constituent**

Aristotle referred to that which binds together the parts or constituents of an entity as its essence or formal cause. Moravcsik refers to this *aitia* as the '*structural constituent*' ('*Aitia*' 9). The structure of an entity includes its shape, form or organization. One aspect of structure that all three of these stage theories share is that they are all 'stage theories'; that is, they all recognize the idea that humans develop through qualitatively different levels. These theories also hold in common that the structure of their stages are hierarchical and integrative.

#### *Structural constituent similarity*

In some way each succeeding stage is 'better' than the stages before it. This is obvious in Piaget's stages: each stage allows much greater understanding of the world. It is also obvious in the middle eastern theory of *nafs* development: each succeeding stage is qualitatively spiritually deeper, taking one closer to the goal of *faná'* (Arabic for 'annihilation' and in this context meaning 'selflessness'). Hierarchy is not quite as obvious in Erikson's psychosocial stages, as issues such as trust, autonomy and identity seem equally important. Erikson (*Childhood*) emphasizes, however, that each later stage holds within it the virtues gained from satisfactory resolution of the preceding stages and transforms the strengths from earlier stages into support for whatever current psychosocial stage crisis a person is experiencing. For example, Erikson states, 'in the last stage [integrity vs. despair], we would expect trust to have developed into the most mature *faith* that an ageing person can muster in his cultural setting and historical period' (*Childhood* 272).

Hierarchical structure goes hand in hand with the transformation and integration of earlier stages into the later stages. Kohlberg, a neo-Piagetian, writes, 'Cognitive stages are *hierarchical integrations*. Stages form an order of increasingly differentiated and integrated structures to fulfil a common function' (Kohlberg, *Psychology* 4). Piaget (*Child and Reality* 51) wrote, 'there is *the integrative characteristic*, that is, that the structures constructed at a given age become an integral part of the structures of the following age'. Erikson's view of his psychosocial stages is quite similar, 'earlier stages are not replaced, but . . . are absorbed into a hierarchic system of increasing differentiation' (*Dimensions* 206). 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the earlier stages of *nafs* as being 'collected within' the seventh stage, the *nafs-i-kámila* (the perfect soul): 'And when it (the soul) soared on the wings of holiness into the atmosphere of this paradise and tasted of the sweetness of the stations of reunion in the gardens of heaven, these illumined and lofty stations were collected within it (the soul)' (Momen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary' 113).

#### *Structural constituent contrast*

Although structurally these three theories have much in common, there are some differences in the structural relationships among stages within each theory. The main difference to be found is one based on the concept of 'invariant sequence'. Piaget's theory is the most illustrative of invariant sequence in that none of his four stages can be 'skipped'. The developing human cannot develop from the pre-operational stage to the formal operational stage without first having successfully structured his mind through the concrete operational stage. Erikson's theory is similar in the sense that one

cannot experience the adolescent identity stage without first having experienced the childhood stage of industry versus inferiority. A difference between Piaget's and Erikson's stages lies in that in Erikson's theory one continues on to the next psychosocial stage regardless of whether one has successfully resolved the current or past psychosocial stages. These psychosocial stages may not be 'resolved' before being biologically, culturally and socially forced into the succeeding stage crisis. For example, one can have a debilitating sense of inferiority and failed to have resolved the industry versus inferiority stage crisis and still find oneself in the next stage, the identity versus role confusion stage.

The middle eastern stages are the least susceptible to the demands of invariant sequence. It appears that through a combination of psychological detachment and confirmations from God the *nafs* can transcend the structures of the various stages. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's father, Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, has written in this regard:

These journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer -- if invisible confirmation descend upon him and the Guardian of the Cause assist him -- may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it. And this is of 'His grace on such of His servants as He pleaseth' [Qur'án 2:84] (Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven* 40--1).

### **Final cause, 'end,' *telos*, goal or function**

'The fourth type of *aitia* can be described as the *functional factor*. This type covers what would be described in modern terms by such different terms as end, aim, goal, and function. In some cases it is the realization of some potentiality of a substance' (Moravcsik, 'Aristotle' 9). To apply Aristotle's fourth cause, or *aitia*, to these stage theories, we must ask, 'What is the goal of the stage sequence? What is the purpose of rising through these stages?' Of course, it is likely there is a multiplicity of meaningful answers to that question and we will sketch a few.

The endpoint stage in Piaget's cognitive stages, formal operations, allows the human psyche to be able to think abstractly and to be able to perform the systematic induction and hypothetico-deduction that has caused the rise of modern western science. Piaget emphasizes that in formal operations the youth is able to transform her mind beyond the concrete to 'the ideational plane . . . without the support of perception, experience, or even faith' (Piaget *Six* 62--3). He notes that this comes about through 'reflection' and that the contents of thought can now go beyond the logic of relations, classes and numbers and can be guided by the abstract logic of hypotheses and propositions. The beginning of formal operations in the adolescent often leads to a 'belief in the omnipotence of reflection, as though the world should submit itself to idealistic schemes rather than to systems of reality', and thus Piaget considers this the 'metaphysical age *par excellence*' (ibid. 64). Equilibrium between the adolescent's flights of fancy and external reality 'is attained when the adolescent understands that the proper function of reflection is not to contradict but to predict and interpret experience' (ibid.).

Thus we can summarize the final cause of Piaget's stages as the attainment of scientific, abstract, reflective thought that accurately predicts and interprets experience.

Erikson's endpoint stage is based on working through the challenge of integrity versus despair; success in this challenge causes the development of the virtue of wisdom within a person (Erikson, *Childhood*; Erikson, 'Reflections'). The purpose of the Erikson's whole stage sequence is thus to arrive at an *integration* of all the previous stages, an ego-integrity, the fruit of which is wisdom. 'Wisdom is detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself. It maintains and learns to convey the integrity of experience, in spite of the decline of bodily and mental functions' (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, *Vital* 37--8). Erikson emphasizes that this culmination of development causes a 'post-narcissistic love of the human ego' (*Childhood* 268) but not a selfish love of the self. This type of love is an 'experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense' (ibid.). Additionally, Erikson has written of the transformation of hope, which is the virtue of the infant trust versus mistrust stage, into 'faith' during the last stage of life. He notes that religions worldwide offer a

faith in immortality through unification with a cosmic power that he names the 'Ultimate Other' (Erikson, 'Reflections'). Thus, in summary, the final cause of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of a person who has attained ego-integrity, is wise and is full of faith.

The seventh stage of the *nafs* sequence is the perfect soul, the *nafs-i-kámila* (or, in variant formulations of this stage sequence, the seventh stage might be called *nafs-i-sáfíya* [the pure soul; viz. Frager and Fadiman, *Personality*; Shafii, *Freedom*]. The purpose, or final cause, of the *nafs-i-kámila* is to achieve 'faná'. *Faná'* means 'passing away, vanishing, annihilation, and nothingness' (Shafii, *Freedom* 144). According to Rumi, *faná'* is annihilation in God, which is the goal of the mystic (Schimmel, *Mystical*). *Faná'* involves completely submitting the will of the individual to the will of Alláh; it is a total transcendence and disappearance of self, into a union with the divine (*baqá*) (cf. Chittick, *Sufism*; Nicholson, *Studies*; Izutsu, *Creation*). It is worth noting that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in contradistinction to some Sufis, declares that the individual human *nafs* can never reach complete union with the transcendent oneness of God but eternally progresses toward that goal ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions*; see pp. 146 and 237).

*Faná'*, as the goal, or final cause, of the soul's development, is explicit in Attar's medieval poem *The Conference of the Birds*:

Next comes that valley words cannot express,  
The Vale of Poverty and Nothingness [*faná'*]:  
Here you are lame and deaf, the mind has gone;  
You enter an obscure oblivion (Attar, *Conference* 203).

This theme was echoed, in the relatively modern work *The Seven Valleys*, a booklet length letter by Bahá'u'lláh (*Seven*) to the Sufi Shaykh Muh@yi'd-Dín:

This station [*faná'*] is the dying from self and the living in God, the being poor in self and rich in the Desired One. Poverty as here referred to signifieth being poor in the things of the created world, rich in the things of God's world (Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven* 36)

Thus the perfect soul (*nafs-i-kámila*), the seventh stage of the *nafs* stage sequence, has as its final cause the eternal process of annihilation of self and union with God.

#### *Functional factor contrast*

The endpoint of Piaget's stage sequence is to become a logically formal, abstract thinker. This is a fairly pure emphasis on a cognitive final cause. Erikson's sequence, however, is more holistic than Piaget's focus on cognition and is specifically about integration of the self -- integration of cognition, emotion and virtue, with the result being wisdom. This again differs from the final cause of the *nafs*, which goes beyond integration of the self to transcendence of the self. Whereas Erikson's final stage is about intrapersonal and interpersonal unity (integration), the middle eastern theory is about a mystical unity of the selfless self with the Godhead.

#### *Functional factor similarity*

In a certain sense Piagetian formal operations may be seen as necessary, but not sufficient, to have a successful resolution of the last four stages in Erikson's psychosocial theory. Erikson's adolescent stage of identity formation requires the formal operational ability to take as an object of consciousness such abstract entities as 'identity' and 'self'. This can similarly be said about the middle eastern stage theory: to be able to move to the third stage, *nafs-i-mulhama* (the inspired soul), a human must be able to understand non-physical, abstract concepts such as 'spirituality' or 'soul'. As mentioned above, Piaget considers the combination of adolescence and formal operational thought to provide the

`metaphysical age *par excellence*' (Piaget, *Six* 64). Thus, although we note above that the degree of emphasis on cognition is a contrast among these three theories, abstract cognitive ability is also a thread of unity among them .

The Eriksonian final cause seems to beg closer relationship to the final cause of the *nafs* sequence because integrity, faith and wisdom appear to parallel the developmental movement to the *nafs-i-kámila*. Erikson ' s statement, `Faith has been given cosmic worldwide context by religions and ideologies which offered to true believers some sense of immortality in the form of some unification with a unique historical or cosmic power which in its personalized form we may call an *Ultimate Other*' (^Reflections' 160), parallels the Sufi notion of the seventh *nafs* stage being engaged in immortal selflessness through some form of unity with the divine.

## **Conclusion**

It is hoped that this exploration has demonstrated the complementarity among the middle eastern and western stage theories as they elucidate both different and interrelated aspects of the human developmental journey. To conclude, we will highlight the `comparison and contrast' findings of this paper along the classic Aristotelian dimensions.

*Material cause/constituent factor:* In the middle eastern stage theory the content is primarily spiritual, non-physical, internal experience (relations between self and God), whereas the content of Piaget ' s approach is primarily concerned with external experience (relations between self and the physical world) and the content of Erikson ' s theory is based on relations between self and social other.

*Efficient cause/motion-initiating factor:* The western theories point to the interaction between internal and external factors whereas in the middle eastern stage theories the efficient cause is more internal to the individual. It depends largely on the individual ' s free will and the choices he or she makes towards spiritual development, as well as the grace of God. While both middle eastern and western theories are concerned with the concept of the `will', in the middle eastern theory the will as the efficient cause of development is more central and explicit whereas in western theories (especially Erikson) it is more the development of the will itself that is the focus of concern. An even more significant difference, however, is that in the middle eastern model the grace of God is a major motion-initiating factor in development and this is not mentioned in the western theories.

*Formal cause/structural constituent:* The greatest similarities between the middle eastern and western theories are found in the formal cause, in that they are all hierarchical and integrative `stage' theories. One difference is that the stages in the middle eastern theory may be `skipped' through the transcendental grace of God, whereas `invariant sequence' is required in Piaget ' s stages and to some degree as well in Erikson ' s.

*Final cause/functional factor:* The final cause of the Piagetian developmental stages is the attainment of scientific, abstract, reflective cognition that accurately predicts and interprets experience. In the middle eastern stage sequence the final cause is the holistic perfection of the soul through annihilation of self (*faná'*) and the process of union with God. The final cause of Erikson's psychosocial stages seems to lie between the Piagetian and middle eastern: the attainment of ego integrity, wisdom and faith.

The most engaging similarity among these theories is that they all regard the human psyche as a dynamic entity developing throughout the lifespan and moving toward human perfection -- a view that induces hope and brings meaning to the human adventure. In this regard perhaps the most meaningful similarity among these three approaches is their relational, or interactive, view of human development while their main differences are defined by that which interacts. Piaget's approach views cognitive development as taking place in an interaction between the organism (specifically the genetics expressed in the nervous system) and the physical environment; Erikson's interactionism is expressed through the dynamics of the individual psyche being engaged with the social environment, that is, a psychosocial interaction; and the middle eastern approach, as addressed in this paper, views human spiritual development as resulting from an interaction between the psyche's capacity to will and the divine grace of God.

The 'final cause' of this paper is to further the knowledge base of developmental psychologists who may not have been exposed to a middle eastern cultures' viewpoint of human development. As most western-educated counsellors will be familiar with the work of Piaget and Erikson, their theories were used as a bridge, via Aristotle, to elucidate a classic developmental sequence that influenced over a thousand years of middle eastern 'psychology'.

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### **Authors' note**

We thank Elena Mustakova, Lynne Yancy, Ian Kluge, Julio Savi and Wendy Diessner for their feedback on early drafts of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally written in 2002; unpublished previously.