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MESSAGES FROM THE EDITORS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Starting with the Spring 2011 issue, the *Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal* will publish two numbers a year, Spring and Fall.
- Starting with this present issue, all published work is peer-reviewed. Submissions are refereed by doctorally-prepared academics or other specialists in the pertaining subject-matter.
- Beginning this year, the executive committee seeks to complete its database of email addresses. Please notify the DES national office to update your mailing or email address (DESNational@stthomas.edu).

CONTENTS**ARTICLES**

Religion and Morality: Private or Public? [Part II] <i>Theophilus Okere</i>	4
Richard Dawkins' Problem of Improbability in <i>The God Delusion: A Valid Argument for Atheism or an Error in Mathematics?</i> <i>Robert E. Drury</i>	12
Contemporary Bhiksunis [Buddhist Nuns] of Taiwan as Eco-Feminists <i>Szuyun Yang</i>	24

POETRY

Profession <i>Sr. Robin Stratton, O.C.D.</i>	33
Grandfather's Watch <i>Richard J. Londo</i>	34

ANNOUNCEMENTS

An Invitation to Potential Contributors	35
The Distinguished Lecturers Program	35
The DES Web Page	35
The Undergraduate Competition in Creative and Scholarly Writing	36
DES Scholarships and Fellowships	36
The National Undergraduate Student Award	37
Insignia Available to Members	38

RELIGION AND MORALITY: PRIVATE OR PUBLIC? [PARTII]*

THEOPHILUS OKERE**

The Privatization of Morality

Deeper and older than the privatization of religion is the phenomenon of the privatization of morality itself. Not only was religion denied the right of citizenship in public and put under house arrest in the world of the individual believer, but even there the Christian morality deriving from it seemed fatally designed to have no effect on public life. By its own historic option all Christian morality has ever been targeted on the individual conscience. Its laws and its commandments are for the individual to obey; its sanctions, rewards and punishments go to the individual. It is conceived to make the individual holy, not to make society just. In the received tradition of Christian morality, the group cannot posit a human act, cannot sin, cannot go to heaven or hell. The group does not exist. And if the major actors in public life today tend, as we have seen, not to be individuals but rather corporate bodies, governments, cabinets, alliances, cartels or multinationals, it becomes clear that the acts of these bodies even though carrying enormous consequences for the destinies of millions, may even be regarded as outside morality, perhaps even as “acts of God.” In that case, Christian morality, which is at least useful to the individual in his private religion, proves doubly irrelevant to the events of public life.

Thus these events seem both to lack their own specific morality and also to lie beyond the reach of the privatized Christian morality. They are beyond good and evil. From this position it is but one step to bracketing out from morality even the

*Permission to reprint granted by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), Catholic U. of America, holder of the copyright: T. Okere, “Religion and Morality: Private or Public?” in G. McLean et al., eds., *Religion, Morality, and Communication Between Peoples: Religion in Public Life* (RVP, 2004), pp. 205-220. Some textual alterations have been made to accommodate the *DES Journal*'s house style. Part One of Msgr. Okere's paper was published in this past Fall 2009 issue of the *DES Journal*.

**Rt. Rev. Msgr. Dr. Theophilus Okere is Director of the Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture, and Society, Owerri, Nigeria. He was the first president of the Catholic Theological Assoc. of Nigeria and first Rector of the Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri (557 seminarians as of 2009).

public aspects and consequences of our private life. For instance, the authors of *Ethics in a Business Society*, commenting on the behaviour of businessmen could say:

The part religion plays in decisions taken in business is precious little at least at the conscious level It was not that they were irreligious. Many of them were churchgoers. It was simply that their religious experience did not seem to be relevant to the problems confronting them in making their living. Religion is something to one side, a social experience that is sometimes consoling and pleasant, but one that does not strike very deep.¹

The privatization of morality itself is a more serious problem than the privatization of religion. The latter is something to which religion has been subjected by historical circumstances and seems reversible if those circumstances themselves are reversed or significantly modified.

But the privatization of Christian morality has been embedded in the pedagogy that transmits this morality from one generation to the next. Aristotle's philosophy of Ethics and philosophy of Politics, which have contributed immeasurably in shaping the moral thought of Christendom, keep ethics within the realm of personal individual behaviour and virtue while politics becomes a discourse on the various forms of constitution for civil government. As to the merits or demerits of the acts of collectivities and whether those acts can be moral or immoral, or even whether these categories have any meaning at that level, Aristotle leaves no clue at all, and no one seems to have bothered to address this lacuna in his thought. The very existence of communal or corporate personality or self-hood which could be the subject of responsible acts was barely even articulated in this tradition, except in legal fiction through the concept of moral personality. Now and again popular notions like the guilt of the Jews or that of the Germans or that of the Americans gained some currency and in fact the Germans have followed this up with reparations to Israel, but the ethics of corporate action and responsibility has never developed as such.

The result has been a lopsided development of the Christian moral conscience—a sensitive and often guilt-ridden individual conscience side by side with a collective conscience that is more or less amoral and insensitive. It was especially in this atmosphere that the national sovereign states of the Christian West developed, defining their goals as the pursuit of national self-interest while cultivating a sovereignty not accountable to any power beyond themselves. Within these states *raison d'état* made them infallible while interstate relations were marked by rivalry and *Realpolitik*. Inevitably, war became the means of settling between

right and wrong, and brute might came to be identified with right. It is this morality or the lack of it that explains most of the negative events that mark the history of Christendom.

Against this background I wish to present a different approach to the problem from the point of view of African religion and I wish to suggest that if Christianity could graft this element of corporate responsibility into what is a very impressive heritage it could exert greater influence for good in the public life of the world community.

Unfortunately, the history of Christianity in Africa has been only a one-sided history of giving and a disdain of receiving. But as John Taylor has well observed:

There are many who feel that the spiritual sickness of the West which reveals itself in the divorce of the sacred from the secular, of the cerebral from the instinctive, and in the loneliness and homelessness of individualism, may be healed through a recovery of the wisdom which Africa has not yet thrown away. The world church awaits something new out of Africa.²

Now if Christianity would open itself up more to other religions and cultures, it could learn from elements in other religions and adopt/adapt these elements in a way which would widen Christianity's appeal *and also* help improve Christianity's ability to meet the problems of relevance to public life. In Africa, religion contains such an element.

Christianity in Africa

The currently surviving Christianity came into sub-Saharan Africa in the 19th century. The historic circumstance was the drive for colonies, the scramble for Africa by European powers in search of raw materials and markets in the wake of their industrial revolution and following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. After agreeing on a peaceful partition of the continent in Berlin in 1884 the colonial powers dispatched to their respective colonies their administrators, their traders and their missionaries. French, British or German missionaries even of the same religious congregations followed their own national flags and *cuius regio, eius religio* came into operation once more. The missionaries themselves came simultaneously with or immediately following the brutal military expeditions which were frequently necessary to subjugate a recalcitrant tribe. This compromising political association of the missionaries, in addition to their conceptual baggage, viz., the reigning evolutionary philosophy and the sense of "a civilizing mission among savages," weighed heavy on their missionary work.

Nonetheless, Christianity generally got a sympathetic hearing from and made a significant impact on the African people, and here I may use the example of the Igbo of Nigeria. This success Christianity owes especially to the para-missionary strategies it adopted, such as investment of its men and resources into the educational and medical fields. This caused a veritable revolution. Education gave literacy which gave power—the power of book knowledge, of new jobs, of new status. Modern medicine was even more dramatic in its short-term result of restoring good health and checking epidemics, and even more effective in the long-term result of surreptitiously undermining the religious theory of disease by the introduction of the germ theory.

Of course Christianity also relied on its own intrinsic appeal as a new message of hope to humanity, but the people were not persuaded by arguments that Christianity offered a better account of the meaning of life or a better way of relating to God and their ancestors or a better technique for coping with life than their traditional religion did. The adult male population remained on the whole faithful to their old religion, while conversions were more numerous among women and children. The schools which were popular as the key to a place in the new dispensation became also the missionaries's paramount instrument of evangelization as they looked forward to Christianizing the future, having despaired of converting the present adults. By and large the Igbo mission became, numerically at least, perhaps the most spectacular success story of the African missions in the 20th century.

The mutual suspicion between missionaries and the adult population meant that there was no dialogical encounter between the two religions. Rather, the missionaries finally took refuge in the massive condemnation and rejection of the traditional religion, with all that this implied for the culture with which traditional religion had lived and symbiotically interacted for so long. The religion-to-religion encounter that never was, would have shown that African traditional religion was not all witchcraft and sorcery, or the work of the devil.

African Traditional Religion (of the Igbo Peoples)

It is part of the lot of Africa that even its traditional religion, which is the fruit of ages of complex development, is often passed over in silence like another empty leaf in the book of world religions. But this oblivion, caused by prejudice and ignorance, does not in the least deprive African religion of its religious and cultural reality.

“African Traditional Religion” is the home-grown religion of the black race in Africa. Since the religion lacks a scripture it has developed many variant local

features, but the basics seem to be the same. The core-beliefs of the system are: (1) one supreme God supported by (2) an array of created spirits, God's powerful agents, and (3) the ancestors or the spirits of dead forebears. Furthermore, there is belief in God's authorship of life and belief in his providence and his guidance of human destiny. There is a theory of reincarnation and a moral code which punishes bad behaviour and rewards the good here in this life.

In Igbo traditional religion God himself is remote but frequently uses the spirits to intervene in human affairs and is particularly present in every individual by the in-dwelling of the *chi*, God's double or man's guardian spirit and personal spirit of destiny.

A priesthood takes care of worship, sacrifice and festivals. A divination system interprets the wishes of the spirits when they intervene and this is perfected in the oracles that pronounce hidden knowledge and adjudicate justice among litigants where the oath swearing system proves inconclusive.

Morality which almost invariably has a social dimension is in the control of the earth goddess, *ala*,—who is also the goddess of the major social group, the village. She provides the sanctions of the moral code punishing offenders, and there are certain special offenses which are offenses against *ala*.

Morality

The moral code consists of a limited number of prohibitions—murder, incest, marriage within any traceable degree of consanguinity, adultery, theft, sorcery (poisoning), and witchcraft. Positively, the moral code is enunciated in the well-known and oft-quoted Igbo equivalent of the biblical golden rule:

Egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwaaya.

“Let the kite as well as the eagle have the right to perch (on the branch). A curse (a broken wing) on whoever denies the right to the other!”

This code is protected by the earth goddess and serious infringements are regarded as abominations requiring ritual cleansing and involving the community whose well-being is thus threatened. Sin and guilt are not seen as the concern of the individual alone. He is the really guilty one but one also *in quo omnes peccaverunt*.

The Dialectic of Individual and Community

The individual is always and in the first place a member of his community,—

first that of the extended family, then that of kindred, the village, the town, and eventually the clan, tribe and nation. Though the Igbo is an extremely republican society having no feudal-type rulers, and though direct democracy reigned in Igbo hamlets for centuries before white colonial rule, the Igbo is nonetheless a man defined by his community. He understands his identity in and through his community and realizes his fulfillment within it. Reciprocally the community regard the individual as their own. They do not leave him alone. His successes and failures are theirs.

John Daly has justly pointed out the relatively recent origin of the exaggerated individualist-personalist thinking which ever more and more seems to characterize Western and Christian philosophy and theology. By contrast, he writes:

The great majority of the peoples of the world think in collectivist rather than in personalist terms. It is characteristic of people in collectivist societies that they regard the individual as a differentiated part of society, while the West sees society as a plurality of individuals. "If the foot were to say 'I am not the hand, and so I do not belong to the body' would that mean that it stopped belonging to the body?"

Up to the sixteenth century, even in Europe, writers on society saw it, and not metaphorically, as a body. In Asia and Africa today, man as an individual finds his meaning and identity rather as a member of a group than as an individual. In collectivist societies the life of the individual is so inseparably bound up with that of society as a whole that it has little claim to independent validity. Thought and conduct are to a large extent determined by the community, by its laws and customs. A man tends to be guided by the collective conscience of his group. He is not as conscious of personal guilt as he is of shame. He is less dependent on personal moral decisions and more on the laws and sanctions of the community.³

Without derogating from the uniqueness or the personality of the individual, it is fair to say that the community is part of his essential dimension. But it would be as untrue to conclude that the individual thereby loses his identity as to think that the community has no identity at all.

It is in the light of this dialectic between individual and community that Daly reports that in contrast with the practice of secret, auricular confession which the missionaries introduced into the Igbo community, there are traditional public shaming rituals designed to expiate for sins of incest, theft, adultery, etc., with public admission of guilt followed by a sacrifice of reconciliation.⁴

A "modernized" version of this shaming ritual was used in the late fifties in Owerri Division when sins of theft, and robbery, poisoning and homicide which

had been committed in secret even several decades earlier were now voluntarily and openly confessed. This would take place under oath to the *Ofo*, the symbol of truth believed to instantly kill any perjurers and before the entire community numbering several hundreds. This was how the ritual acquired the curious name of *îme vote*, ‘voting someone’: a crowd gathered as for someone’s election to office but really to be witnesses of his disgrace. At the end, however, the culprit/penitent would pay a fine to become finally reconciled to his community. But the government saw fit to order a stop to this most effective and purifying law and order institution.

Collective Sin, Guilt and Punishment

Guilt is therefore not only an individual personal affair, but is shared. The proverb says that if one finger gets dipped into palm oil, all the other fingers are inescapably involved. A community would quite possibly expiate with sacrifice some guilt, incurred long ago by a dead ancestor. The Igbo would have no particular problem with the idea of original sin. Furthermore, group communal punishment was meted out to communities that have either collectively offended or condoned serious crimes or were incorrigibly crime-ridden. Ostracism of such a community (or village) by the larger community (town) is not unknown and indeed it is such group excommunications that forced a number of communities to migrate and seek new homes well away from their ancestral homeland.

Conclusion

The example of the Igbo has been provided here to give some hint about the working of a non-individualist religious morality. What is important in my example is not the details, but the idea of collective sin and collective guilt committed and incurred by a collectivity, a community that has a selfhood transcending that of its component individuals. And because it alone and not the individual performs certain acts in the public arena, it must be equipped with a conscience to be able to take responsibility for those acts.

Christianity has not exerted the good influence it might have had on public life essentially because as a religion it has been absent from public life. This absence has been partly due to the increasing privatization to which it was condemned by a series of historical events and its subsequent devaluation as a factor in society. But it was also due to a self-imposed silence in-built into its moral code regarding the public zone, whereas in fact morality was precisely the one single Archimedean

point whence it could have most effectively gotten a hold on public life. The basic flaw of Christian morality has been the absence of the public sector. By its one-sided preoccupation with personal, individual holiness and salvation—owing to its individualist conception of man—and by its own individualistic morality, Christianity already abdicated its responsibility to public life long before it was chased out of it by the agents of privatization.

However, reflection since Vatican II has brought to the fore the concept of structured social sin. It is designed to help morality to include those institutions, structures and systems of social organization whose very functioning works to the detriment of some elements in society. Still it remains to locate responsibility for such social sin and to articulate the type of selfhood⁵ that is able to carry the weight of this moral responsibility. After the recognition of structural sin, it is time also to recognize collective sin as more than just a metaphor: collective sin involves real sins in politics and economics, sins committed by governments and companies in the name of peoples and shareholders. It is time to acknowledge collective guilt over past crimes and then to build up a collective conscience that would inhibit the future recurrence of these crimes.

The concept of corporate responsibility or corporate conscience can help Christian morality offset the extreme moral individualism which leaves the most heinous crimes on earth today—most of them corporate crimes—with no acknowledged authors.

NOTES

¹ M.W. Childs and D. Cater, *Ethics in a Business Society* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 175.

² John Taylor, *Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 108.

³ J. Daly, CSSp, "Caught between Cultures," *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 17 (No. 2: 1975), p. 94.

⁴ See J. Daly, "Incarnation of Christianity in a Local Culture," *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 17 (No. 6: 1975), pp. 328-329.

⁵ See Karen J. Torjesen, "Public Ethics and Public Selfhood, The Hidden Problems" in *Ethics, Religion and the Good Society*, ed., Joseph Runzo (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 110.



RICHARD DAWKINS' PROBLEM OF
IMPROBABILITY IN
THE GOD DELUSION: A VALID ARGUMENT FOR
ATHEISM OR AN ERROR IN MATHEMATICS?

ROBERT E. DRURY*

In *The God Delusion*, the prominent evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, cites the problem of improbability in three instances: (1) the improbability of God, (2) the improbability of random biological evolution in a *single, one-off event*, and (3) the improbability of the random origin of life on earth. Dawkins claims there is no solution to the problem in the first instance, but there are solutions to the latter two. However, the problem itself, as well as the latter two solutions, are based on Dawkins' misunderstanding of mathematical probability.

Dawkins defends the proposition that God is very very improbable on the basis of theology, philosophy, science and history. In evaluating quotations from sources he identifies as theologians, Dawkins believes he has disposed of all theological objections. Similarly, he disposes of philosophy by refuting his interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas' five proofs of the existence of God. He is a prominent scientist, whose views are popular among scientists and many in the media who share a comparable scientific world-view. His interpretation of history, and especially the role of religion in history, is widely held. In his judgment those who oppose his view have been taught falsehood from childhood and cannot think critically for themselves. It is apparent that for him there is no point in listening to another opposing argument from theology, philosophy, pseudo-science or history from someone who can't think clearly and scientifically. *A Clear Thinking Oasis* is the self-identification of his website, richarddawkins.net.

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Dawkins presents his position as solidly based on mathematics. (1) The improbability of God is clarified when one “takes the spectrum of probabilities seriously.” (2) The improbability of God cannot be rescued from improbability, in contrast to random biological evolution, in which “the problem of improbability” is solved by natural selection in Darwin’s theory. “Natural selection is a cumulative process, which breaks up the problem of improbability into small pieces.” This is illustrated in the parable of “Climbing Mount Improbable.”

If it were to be demonstrated that Richard Dawkins does not understand the mathematics he invokes, it would be a criticism that he himself could hardly ignore as another restatement of the stale arguments he has already refuted.

The three points of confusion, based on three different meanings of probability¹

Before looking at Dawkins’ applications of mathematical probability more closely, consider the three fundamental confusions in Dawkins’ understanding of mathematical probability. First, he confuses the mathematically *random selection* of an element from a mathematical set with *coming into existence*. He sees no distinction between mathematical probability and the probability of existence. Yet, the mathematical probability of existence can have no meaning because existence is not a suitable nominal identification of an element of a mathematical set. Oblivious to the lack of meaning, he falls into the next confusion. Second, he confuses mathematical probability with the casual use of probability, in which the word, “probability,” expresses the absence of certitude. Certitude is a subjective characterization of one’s knowledge of reality. It is not a characterization of reality. However, if one mistakenly thinks that certitude characterizes reality, then the degree of certitude is “the probability of existence,” once again giving the phrase an apparent meaning. Third, he confuses mathematical probability with its homonym in the grammatically antonymic pairing of probability and improbability.

Having confused mathematical probability with the probability of existence and with certitude, Dawkins succumbs to the intuition that grammatical improbability must be incompatible with mathematical probability. He thereby creates “the problem of improbability.”

Mathematical probability is not certitude, envisioned falsely as the probability of existence

Mathematical probability is a mathematical variable with a numerical range of 0 to 1 (or 100%, if you prefer). Certitude is not a mathematical variable. However, if one were to illustrate it with a numerical range it would be from -1 to +1, where -1 is complete certitude of the truth of the negative form of a proposition and +1 is full certitude of the truth of the positive and opposite form of the proposition. Notice that -1 is the opposite of +1, but 0 is not the opposite of +1. Since truth is the conformity of human judgment to reality, one could easily err by mistaking certitude for a characterization of reality rather than a subjective characterization of thought.

In taking “the spectrum of probabilities seriously,” Dawkins appropriately defines the spectrum as 0 to 1. However, he then identifies these two end points of the spectrum of probability as the “two extremes of opposite certainty”! If the two extremes were of opposite certainty, then the end points would be -1 and +1, not 0 and 1. Having made this blunder of confusing mathematical probability with certitude, he proceeds to describe five intermediate demarcation values of **certitude** within the continuous spectrum of **probability**. But what is his point, his goal? He wants the reader to mistakenly believe that this illustration of a purely logical, mathematical variable, namely probability, confused with subjective “human judgments about the existence of God,” in the context of certitude, not probability, has some relevance to the existence of God! Dawkins wants the reader to believe that a discussion of subjective certitude, confused with mathematical probability, is actually a discussion of existence.

Dawkins’ characterization of the probability of God is that God is very very improbable. Yet, in taking the spectrum of probabilities seriously, he not only demonstrates that he cannot distinguish between mathematical probability and human certitude; he is so confused that he doesn’t realize that he has presented the antithesis of his position as mathematical probability. Dawkins identified “100 percent probability of God” with the value 1 of probability, atheism with the value 0 of probability and his own belief as “very low probability, but short of 0.” Of course, we should excuse Dawkins when he placed his own belief in the range of improbability, i.e., near 0, rather than placing the probability of God in the range of improbability. Dawkins simply got confused. When he thought he was taking the spectrum of probability seriously, he just happened to be thinking that certitude was probability. In the absence of such confusion, Dawkins routinely identifies a segment of the spectrum of mathematical probability near 0, as improbability. This

typical identification leads to the third misunderstanding listed above. In labeling a segment of the range of probability close to 0, “improbability,” Dawkins confuses the pairing of that segment of the range and the remainder of the range of mathematical probability with the grammatical antonymic pairing of improbability and probability.

The genesis of the problem of improbability

When Dawkins describes the probability of God as very very improbable and when he proposes that natural selection rescues random biological evolution from the problem of improbability, he is really facing a problem of his own making, namely thinking that a segment of the range of mathematical probability near 0, is not probability.

There is nothing wrong with labeling a segment of the range of probability arbitrarily close to 0 as improbability, as long as we recognize it as a label of a segment of the range of probability and not the opposite of probability. Improbability IS mathematical probability.² However, labeling it improbability and then claiming on that basis that such numerical values of probability cannot be accounted for by randomness, is a self-contradiction.³ To postulate randomness, and then to deny it, based on the numerical value of probability, is a self-contradiction. Yet, this is exactly what we would be doing, if we postulate randomness and then claim that there is a “problem of improbability” with low values of probability.

There is no difficulty accepting extremely low values of probability in the context of mathematical randomness

In games of chance, it is imprudent as a rule of thumb to bet on low probabilities. However, to deny the postulation of randomness just because an outcome is of low probability is a self-contradiction. We rationally accept an extremely low value of probability as probability every time we play a round of cards. It is generally and appropriately recognized that shuffling a deck of cards is an emulation of randomization, that is, if the sequence of the deck is mathematically random (the product of a random numbers generator), then the particular sequence obtained by shuffling has the same probability as every other sequence. Granted this, then the top card of the deck has an equal probability of being (“being,” not in the sense of existence, but in the sense of mathematically random selection) any specific one of the 52

cards in the deck, a probability of $1/52 = 0.019$. No one would feel squeamish about admitting that the probability that the top card is the three of diamonds is 0.019. That the third card in the deck is a specific card similarly has a probability of 0.019. The same is true of the tenth, the thirty-fifth, the forty-seventh and every other card located in the deck due to shuffling. This, of course, means that the entire sequence of the deck is a random sequence, the product of a random numbers generator. The probability of any particular sequence is one divided by the total number of sequences, just as the probability of any specific card is one divided by the total number of cards, 52. The total number of different sequences of 52 elements is 52 factorial ($52!$). The probability of any specific card, $1/52$, is interdependent with the probability of the specific sequence of the 52 cards obtained as an emulation of randomness by shuffling. You can't have one probability without the other. We readily have an appreciation of 1 out of 52. But how could we have an appreciation of the **necessarily equally valid ratio** of 1 out of $52!$, the probability of the specific sequence of the deck?

This will help to provide some appreciation of the size of the number, $52!$ The number of molecules of hydrogen ($MW = 2$) equal to 52 factorial, would have a mass somewhat larger than thirty thousand trillion times the mass of the earth. The mass of the earth is six grams times ten to the twenty-seventh power. It would be obviously imprudent to bet on a specific sequence of a deck of cards, but that is not to invalidate the postulation of randomness because of this extremely small value of probability, which is admittedly very, very close to zero. To deny randomness, based on the value of probability being so small, would be a self-contradiction. To bet on such a probability would be imprudent, i.e., a foolish act, but accepting its validity would not be a logical error. Having postulated randomness, it would be a logical error to reject its consequence, namely a value of probability. It would be irrational to claim that there can be a "problem of improbability." To make such a claim is to confuse mathematical probability with its homonym in the pairing of the grammatical antonyms, probability and improbability.

[Would it be rational to reject a given selection ratio as random and then accept that very selection ratio as non-random?]

Dawkins' need for a problem of improbability

Dawkins is faced with the "problem of improbability" of his own making, namely, rescuing low values of probability from his identification of them as

irrational rather than recognizing them as perfectly compatible with randomness. If he didn't create this problem for himself, he would have no basis for criticizing as irrational the probability of God, which is "very, very improbable."

We should abhor betting on low values of probability. Also, let us say that, although not a question of rationality, we would intuitively feel more comfortable with higher values of probability. In other words, for the sake of argument, let us see if natural selection in Darwin's mathematical theory of evolution does increase the value of mathematical probability as Dawkins claims.

Dawkins' first solution to the problem of improbability: random biological evolution

To illustrate how natural selection extricates random evolution from irrationality, i.e., improbability, Dawkins proposes a parable, "Climbing Mount Improbable." To look at the end product of biological evolution and then at its starting point, and attribute the result directly to one mathematically random selection from a set of very many elements, would place the value of probability too close to 0 for the change to be due to random selection. The value of probability would be improbability and therefore irrational. (So the reasoning goes.) Natural selection breaks the overall random result into a sum of random segments punctuated by natural selection. This reduces the number of elements in each set from which a random selection is made, thereby increasing the value of probability for each random selection such that the individual values of probability are not in the segment labeled improbability, the segment of irrationality. The parable is that a single random selection is like leaping up the cliff side of Mount Improbable in a single bound, whereas natural selection produces the slope on the other side of Mount Improbable leading gently in small stages of ascent to its summit. Instead of one random selection from a gigantic set of elements, natural selection provides a succession, namely one random selection, from each of many small sets of elements.

There is a fatal flaw in the parable of Climbing Mount Improbable. The probability of selecting a specific element from a set of distinct elements is inversely proportional to the number of elements in the set. Decreasing the set size proportionately increases the probability. For a set size of n , the probability of selecting a specific element in one random selection is $1/n$. If the set size is decreased by $1/2$, the probability is increased by a factor of 2. The probability is $1/(n/2) = 2/n$. When we are at the base of the cliff side of Mount Improbable, we intuitively acknowledge that no way can the summit be reached in a single random

selection because the probability would be improbable and irrational due to the sheer size of the precipice, i.e., the number of elements in the set from which a random selection is to be made. When we go around to the gentle slope punctuated into small stages by natural selection, we recognize that, due to reduction in set size, the probability of each random selection has been transitioned from irrational improbability into a reasonable value of probability. Enter the fatal flaw. If it is set size reduction, which affords the transition from irrationality to rationality, then after the single **RANDOM** selection of any stage, there is no more selecting left over to be performed by natural selection.

Although the staging of natural selection does reduce set size, it is not the reduction in set size in Darwin's theory of random mutation and natural selection which transitions the value of probability from low to high (from irrational improbability to rational probability according to Dawkins). Rather, it is multiple random selections. But the transitioning process of multiple random selections works the same for large sets as it does for small sets. It can be used and is **necessary** in each stage up the gentle slope, if the slope is to be punctuated by natural selection. It can be used in exactly the same way in ascending Mount Improbable from the cliff side in a single bound⁴ by resorting to multiple random attempts (mathematically random selections), thus increasing probability to a value arbitrarily close to 1. Since Dawkins' explanation of the parable is incompatible with natural *selection* (It includes only random selection.), the parable fails.

Not only does the process of multiple random selections transition the value of probability to a value arbitrarily close to 1; it provides a set which contains the star element at a probability arbitrarily close to 1, the set from which natural selection *can select* non-randomly the "star" (the fittest) element.

The probability of selecting a specific element from a set of n unique elements is $1/n$. However, the probability of selecting a specific element from a set of n unique elements can be made arbitrarily close to 1 by multiple random selections. The probability of one random selection is $1/n$. The probability in n random selections is 0.63. The probability in $2.3n$ random selections is 0.9. The probability in $4.6n$ random selections is 0.99. This transitioning process to values of probability arbitrarily close to one not only accomplishes the transition; it forms a set of elements with a high probability (e.g., 0.63, 0.9, 0.99) of containing the star element for non-random selection by natural selection. It is essential to a scheme employing natural selection. However, it works for sets the size of the precipice of Mount Improbable as well as sets the size of the stages of the gentle slope side of Mount Improbable.

Overall probability, the product of probabilities, each < 1 , is necessarily less than any of its factors. Division into stages (set size reduction) cannot increase overall probability. By increasing the probability of each stage by multiple random selections, Darwin's theory increases the probability of each stage arbitrarily close to 1. Consequently, overall probability, though less than that of any stage, may be made arbitrarily close to 1. Dawkins denies the mathematical fact that the overall probability of stages of probability is the product of the individual probabilities. He states that creationists, in upholding such mathematics, simply don't "understand the power of accumulation."

Dawkins' second solution to the problem of improbability: the random origin of life itself

Even after his fortuitous division into the small sets of the gentle slope, which appears to solve a self-invented problem, Dawkins sees another objection to a theory of evolution based on randomness. Dawkins claims that natural selection applies only once life gets started. The origin of life, he claims, still requires a single random selection from a set of too many elements to afford a value of probability outside the segment of improbability. He solves this problem with the "anthropic principle." The anthropic principle is Dawkins' fairy godmother, who grants him one, but only one, wish, a single reprieve from rationality as Dawkins defines it. We are allowed one irrational improbability before the non-random, rational solution of natural selection takes over. One exception to rationality is not too much for which to ask. After all, we are here and we know that we got here by randomness. If our being here requires one exception to rationality, the exception must have occurred:

The anthropic principle is impotent to explain the multifarious details of living creatures. We really need Darwin's powerful crane to account for the diversity of life on Earth, and especially the persuasive illusion of design. The origin of life by contrast, lies outside the reach of that crane, because natural selection cannot proceed without it. Here the anthropic principle comes into its own. We can deal with the unique origin of life by postulating a very large number of planetary opportunities. Once that initial stroke of luck has been granted – and the anthropic principle most decisively grants it to us – natural selection takes over; and natural selection is emphatically not a matter of luck.

Of course, just as one exception to the rules of logic would destroy logic in its

entirety, one materially random event would destroy the possibility of experimental science in its entirety. Similarly, one improbability equated with irrationality would destroy rationality in its entirety. Never mind, we are granted one stroke of irrationality.

Elsewhere Dawkins estimates the probability (or improbability) which is allowed by the anthropic principle as one in a billion or 10^{-9} . By contrast, the probability of a specific random sequence of a deck of 52 cards is $10^{-67.9}$. The ratio of these probabilities is $10^{58.9}$ or 79 billion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion. Yet no one has any qualms of claiming that shuffling a deck of cards emulates the production of a random sequence. No principle must be invoked to allow for such a low probability or as Dawkins would say: such an irrational improbability.

Notice also that the duration of time required by the emulation of a random selection is not a function of the value of probability. The amount of time to randomly roll a pair of dice is a constant. It is not a function of probability, whether the probability is $1/6$ in rolling a seven or $1/36$ in rolling snake eyes. Notice too, that in the example of cards, everyone could accept any value of probability arbitrarily close to 0 as compatible with randomness and as probable and rational, except for Dawkins. He can't, simply because he has invented the club of "the problem of improbability" in order to bludgeon as irrational the belief in the existence of God, which is "very, very improbable." Dawkins also fails to realize that the "probability of God" cannot be mathematically defined, except trivially.

In understanding the mathematics of randomness and probability, there can be no problem of improbability

Actually, I have calculated the probability of God as well as the probability of fairies at the bottom of the garden. Dawkins is fond of comparing belief in God with belief in fairies at the bottom of the garden. In order to do so I had to list the elements of the sets containing these elements. The set I defined containing the element, "God," had a total of twenty elements. Eleven elements were God, four were horses and five were dogs. The probability of God is 0.55. The second set contained fairies at the bottom of the garden as a single element. It also contained nine other elements, four centaurs and five gryphons. The probability of fairies at the bottom of the garden calculated out to be only 0.1. Neither of these values is in the range of probability, which is labeled improbability. Consequently, acceptance of the probability of God and fairies at the bottom of the garden is completely rational in the context of Dawkins' problem of improbability.

The concepts of randomness and probability are mathematical, purely logical concepts having no relevance to existence. The concepts of randomness and probability restrict consideration to the properties of enumeration of the elements of sets. The result is that, in context, the identification of the elements of sets is **purely nominal**, having no significance other than the mathematical logic of enumeration. This can be seen in the following three examples of sets of twenty elements. The first set is that of playing cards consisting of 10 hearts, 3 clubs and 7 diamonds. The second set is of 10 pig hearts, 3 golf clubs and 7 baseball diamonds. The third set is of 10 angels, 3 groks and 7 humans. The randomness and probability relationships of these three sets are identical because in the context of randomness and probability the sole significance of the identities of the elements of sets lies in logical enumeration. Randomness and probability have nothing to do with the existence of anything. For these three sets the probability of a playing card club equals that of a golf club equals that of a grok, which equals 0.15.

Of course, one might ask, “What is a grok?” The answer is a grok is the name of each of three elements of the above set having the same randomness and probability characteristics of the element of a set by any other name. Such also is the significance of the elements, “God” and “fairies at the bottom of the garden” in the sets I defined above and in any sets that could be subjected to mathematically random selection, which sets Dawkins or anyone else could possibly define. Notice that the above sets containing God, fairies and groks are no more artificial than the set of 52 playing cards or the set of 52! sequences of playing cards. The random and probability relationships of a set of 52 elements are the same for every set of 52 mathematical elements. The same is true of all sets of 52! elements. The validity and rationality of a probability of $10^{-67.9}$ is the same as that of every other properly calculated value of probability, whether even closer to 0 or nearly equal to 1. The problem of improbability is a fiction.

Dawkins’ successes

In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins sets out to demonstrate “that God, though not technically disprovable, is very, very improbable.” He succeeds in demonstrating (1) that he doesn’t understand the mathematics of randomness and probability and (2) that he doesn’t understand the mathematics of Darwin’s theory of random evolution and natural selection.⁵

So What?

If mathematical probability is irrelevant to the existence of God, and if the probability of existence simply expresses a degree of human certitude, that still leaves us with the question, “Does God exist?” Or does it? If the acquisition of knowledge begins with a blank slate and if we acquire the knowledge of the natures of things through experience, then the question, “Does God exist?” is undefined as an initiating question. We can ask, “Does X exist?” only in the sense of “presently exist” assuming we know the nature of X through past experience of its existence.

However, based on that which does exist and which is within our experience, we might reason to the necessity of the existence and nature of something, not within our direct experience, which we then suitably call God. Frequently, we reason in a way analogous to this, e.g., in accepting the existence of atoms. Atoms of the elements of the periodic table are not within our direct experience, but we reason to their existence based on indirect experience. (Personally, I have no such indirect experience. I take the existence of atoms on faith. I simply believe in the authoritative testimony of chemists, as a group, to their professional, technology-assisted experiences and conclusions in this case. Their testimony is self-consistent and in agreement with what little of my ordinary experience is pertinent, as well as with my professional, technology-assisted experiences using material derived from biological sources.)

We do acquire the knowledge of the natures of things through experience of them. We don't sit back and conceive of the natures of A and B and C, and then go on a trek about the world to determine if A or B or C exists. We do not possess the intellectual power to initiate the concept of any being, A or B or C. We must experience each and in that experience perceive its nature in order to define it. It would have to be in recognizing the nature of something such as A in our apprehension of A's existence, that would lead us to the conclusion that another being must exist, whom we do not experience, but whose nature must be _____. We then apply the name, “God,” to the being whose nature is _____. Notice that such a line of reasoning is immediate. It is not a regressive series. Traditional arguments (e.g., those of St. Thomas Aquinas), which lead to the conclusion of the existence and identification of this being, whose act at the level of existence is immediate, claim that the being **must** be perfectly simple in nature and existence.⁶

Two distinct philosophies

There are two major philosophies prevalent today. Perhaps their only agreement is that each of us intellectually starts with a blank slate. One philosophy would identify the fundamental question of human knowledge as: What is the source of the intelligibility of things? The other would identify the fundamental question of human knowledge as: What is the source of consciousness?

Each philosophy might accuse the other of asking a leading question. To adherents of the first philosophy, the answer to the fundamental question is: Things, because things are inherently intelligible in their existence. To adherents of the second philosophy, the answer to the fundamental question is: The self. Consciousness is fundamentally self-consciousness.

NOTES

¹ There are three meanings of probability. (1) In mathematics, probability is the ratio of the number of elements in a subset to the number of elements in a main set, where the subset is the source of a randomly selected element. It is fundamentally a logical concept that is only analogically applicable to reality. (2) In casual conversation, probability refers to the absence or to the degree of certitude. Certitude is a subjective characterization of one's personal knowledge, not a characterization of reality. Statistical probability, which concerns confidence limits, is an aid in characterizing human certitude. The method employs mathematical algorithms, based on conventional assumptions of variability among measurements in order to characterize the human certitude of man-made measurements. (3) In grammar, probability is the antonym of improbability. In mathematics, that A is probable and that A is improbable are not incompatible opposites. Rather, the probability of A and the improbability of A are arithmetic complements equaling one. E.g. the probability of seven in dice is $1/6$, while the improbability of seven is $1 - 1/6 = 5/6$.

² In Dawkins' view, the range of probability, less than some arbitrary numerical value close to 0, is not probability at all, but improbability. This is evident in his synonymous designations of an outcome in this range of probability, close to 0, as: *very very improbable*, *prohibitively improbable* and *far beyond the reach of chance*. Such is the nature of the problem of improbability (p. 121 of *The God Delusion*). However, to postulate randomness (chance) and then to deny it, based on the value of probability, is a self-contradiction.

³ Some arguments for the existence of God are based on this error. It is the basis of the argument of irreducible complexity. It is the basis of the argument that the combined probability of the conditions necessary for life on earth is so low, that the combination of those conditions cannot be due to chance.

⁴ Dawkins' problem of improbability designating values of probability close to 0 as improbable, gives the intuitive impression that outcomes of such low probability are impossible, e.g., leaping up the cliff side of Mount Improbable in a single bound. No matter how many irrational or impossible attempts one makes, each must fail. That is not the case in randomness and probability, no matter how low the probability. In randomness and probability, all outcomes are logically possible. The "problem of improbability" is simply confusion in thought. It is essentially a self-contradiction due to taking too seriously the misleading label of a portion of the range of probability close to 0 as improbability.

⁵ My monograph, "Counting on Darwin, The Exponent of Randomness," is a more thorough assessment of Darwin's mathematical theory. A few desktop-printed copies are available free on request (rdrry@rochester.rr.com).

⁶ In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins argues that God must be the end of a regressive series and also that God must be more complicated than the materially complex product, which, as the designer of such material intricacy, he is alleged to explain. Dawkins rejects the existence of a God whose nature is (a) the first in a regressive series and (b) complex. However, the "perennial philosophy," as exemplified by the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, similarly rejects the existence of a God of such a nature.

CONTEMPORARY BHIKSUNIS [BUDDHIST NUNS] OF TAIWAN AS ECO-FEMINISTS*

SZUYUN YANG**

In what way is Buddhism related to ecology?

In his speech delivered at Tamkang University, the environmental philosopher Holmes Rolston explained that philosophy for him is the philosophy of and for “life.” Ecological criticism, in both the philosophical and practical senses, deals with issues that aim to be in the service of life. Likewise, Buddhism is in the service of life. The spirit of Buddhism is to enhance the actualization of life-potential involving human beings and non-human beings, and such enhancement is realized through the cultivation of the heart and mind, and through putting compassion into practice. Buddhist nuns in Taiwan have made efforts aimed at inspiring life’s potential. In this paper, I try to discuss the Buddhist nuns in Taiwan from the viewpoint of eco-criticism. I start from diverse theoretical aspects which include various discussions of ecology. Next I discuss the Buddhist idea of transcending dualities and this idea’s possible connections with eco-feminism. In the last part of the paper, I look into how the Buddhist nuns are putting into practice what can be associated with eco-feminism.

Are there theories and practices of the Buddhist nuns in Taiwan which can be discussed from an eco-critical perspective?

A number of Buddhist monks and nuns in Taiwan have made contributions to

*In the interests of inter-religious dialogue, this paper exposes American Catholics to the vitality and social commitment of Taiwanese Buddhist nuns, whose life-style (vows, austerity, service) much resembles that of many Catholic congregations of Sisters in the U.S.A. The paper was originally presented at the Conference of the Assoc. for the Study of Literature and Environment, U. of Victoria, B.C., Canada, June 6, 2009.

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the island.¹ Among the Buddhist monks and nuns, many a contemporary Buddhist Bhiksuni plays an active role in social affairs.² The most prominent of these include Ven. Hiu Wan, the founder of Hua Fan University; Ven. Cheng-yen, the founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation; Master Wu Yin, the founder of the Luminary Buddhist Institute; Ven. Kwan Chian, the founder of the Chue-feng Buddhist Artistic Cultural Foundation; and Ven. Chao Hwei, the founder of the Buddhist Hongshih Institute. While some Bhiksunis make great efforts in the teaching of Dharma through educational institutions, others are engaged in helping to save the environment. Living in an age in which human beings and non-human beings are under ecological threat, the Buddhist Bhiksunis are implementing a way of living which is worthy of discussion from a critical and an eco-critical point of view.

What critical perspectives are pertinent for Buddhism? How are Buddhist Bhiksunis involved from a theoretical and critical point of view?

1. In "Eco-feminism: Intersection for Christian-Buddhist Dialogue," Gerri Noble-Martocci proposes a definition of eco-feminism which combines ecology, deep ecology, and feminism:

Eco-feminism brings together the insights of ecology, deep ecology, and feminism. From ecology, it takes the understanding of the earth and its system as a network of independent relationships; from deep ecology, it takes the insight that humans are not the hierarchical apex of the entire ecosystem but are one of its many integral parts; from feminism it takes the insight that the oppression of women and the oppression of the environment are connected.

An eco-feminist view involving Buddhist Bhiksunis thus should put emphasis not merely on the feminist level but also on the ecological level. Gerri Noble-Martocci indicates the key elements that are emphasized by Buddhists:

Within the Buddhist tradition, Gross focuses on practices. She draws out the concept of interdependence and of the interconnectedness of all life forms. She speaks of the importance of compassion and of developing non-harming habits of thought, speech, and action. She reminds us to practice self-restraint and detachment and to ground those practices in the spiritual disciplines of contemplation and meditation.

2. Publications by Buddhist nuns in Taiwan address issues of ecology and environmentalism. For example, the Buddhist nun Chao Hwei discusses ecology and environmental ethics in her book.³ Lin Chao Cheng has discussions of deep ecology and ecofeminism.⁴

3. Another theoretical, critical argument is made by Wei-yi Cheng, who regards Buddhist Bhiksunis as feminists. In her essay "Luminary Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Taiwan: A Quiet Feminist Movement," Wei-yi Cheng argues that the Luminary Buddhist nuns can be seen as feminist on the grounds that "the basic aim of feminism is to identify the problems of women as a class and to promote their interests as a class." In feminist discourse, the critique of patriarchy and oppression of women is emphasized. According to Cheng, "Whenever the situation allows, women might have grabbed the opportunity to seek a life outside the traditional and patriarchal social arrangements." That the Luminary nuns have their female gurus and lineage holders makes the Bhiksunis themselves "an active agent rather than a passive agent." Also, the Luminary nuns have treated monastic education as a way to attain self-reliance. In a word, Cheng's example of the Luminary phenomenon regarded as a feminist movement is one effort to connect Buddhist Bhiksunis within the discursive context.

Cheng admits the fact that the Luminary nuns may not "adopt the feminist label," and thus she calls the phenomenon "a quiet feminist movement":

...more importantly, it is notable that I am seeing the phenomenon of Luminary nuns as an outsider, from an academic perspective. Naturally, my concerns may be different from Luminary nuns themselves who are insiders of the phenomenon and the spiritual practice. While my concern might be to find women's voice in the phenomenon, theirs might be to transcend male/female duality.

Cheng indicates two difficulties which arise when feminism is placed in the Buddhist spectrum. One difficulty with the claim that Buddhist Bhiksunis are feminists lies in whether or not the practicing nuns themselves will associate themselves with feminism. Elise Anne DeVido points out the following:

The nuns distinguish the Taiwanese experience from "Western" feminist notions of "self-awareness" and "fighting" for gender equality or the androgyny of liberal feminism. Nor, at least yet, do the nuns' missions converge with the content and goals of the Taiwanese feminist movement: the nuns work for the good of Taiwanese society overall, and do not particularly highlight women's issues, except of course, the quest to realize women's higher education, and helping women realize their individual potentials. So far, few are the nuns like Chao Hwei and Shing Guang who have called themselves Buddhist feminists.

While both Cheng and DeVido indicate that Buddhist nuns may not be advocates articulating feminism on the public level, their actions have revealed themselves as women who clearly exempt themselves from forms of oppression.

Buddhism and eco-feminism: where to begin?

From another viewpoint, there is also a difficulty concerning how the teachings of Buddhism intersect with male/female duality. While there seems to be a belief, based on some sutras, that the Buddhist nuns, compared with their male counterparts, require a longer length of time to attain Buddhahood, there is also Buddhist teaching which transcends such separation of females and males. In fact, Buddhist ideas tend to focus on the non-dualities of men and women. The issue of duality in Buddhism and the transcending of such duality needs further discussion.

While Cheng treats the nuns as advocates for women trying to escape from patriarchy, my focus here is on something else, namely, that the Buddhist nuns transcend the traditional dualistic boundary separating women from men. To prove this, I use both theoretical exposition and some concrete examples. First, on the Western side, in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous argues that the distinction between femininity and masculinity can be transcended:

...Bisexuality; that is, each one's location in self (*repérage en soi*) of the presence—variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female—of both sexes, non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex, from this “self-permission,” multiplication of the effects or the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body. (354)

The French school feminist philosopher indicates that masculinity and femininity coexist. By writing about themselves, women are able to state their own femininity and masculinity. As for a man, “it is up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at” (348). Such a feminist path argues for the blurring of the distinction between male and female. Femininity could exist in masculinity, and vice versa. On this level already, the dualities of male and female can be intermixed and blurred.

Whereas in terms of this level, there is intersection and bi-location of both male and female, in Buddhism the dualities can be even treated as non-existent. Take Hua-Yen Buddhism's “Realm of Dharmas,” for example. There is a stage in the Hua-Yen paradigm which could be understood as the dissolution

of the masculine-feminine duality:

The Realm of Dharmas (*Dharmadhatu*) connotes the whole universe, which in the belief of the school, is fourfold. It involves the Realm of Facts, the Realm of Principle (*Li*), the Realm of Principle and Facts harmonized, and the Realm of All Facts interwoven and mutually identified. Principle is static, spaceless, formless, characterless, Emptiness, the noumenon; while facts are dynamic, have specific forms and specific characters, are in an unceasing process of transformation, and constitute the phenomenal world. They interact and interpenetrate and thus form a Perfect Harmony.

The basis underlying this perfect harmony is the simple idea of interpenetration and mutual identification. It is based on the theory of the Ten Mysterious Gates, according to which all things are coexistent, interwoven, interrelated, interpenetrating and, mutually inclusive, reflecting on another, and so on. (407)

The third and fourth layers of the fourfold view, i.e., the Realm of Principle and Facts harmonized, and the Realm of All Facts interwoven and mutually identified, reveal an even more complete transcendence of dualities. There is no clear distinction between female and male because the world-view in this respect looks upon everything as in harmony. Such a transcendence of dualities goes beyond gender; it is also inclusive of human beings as well as non-human beings. Another explanatory example includes the images of Bodhisattvas (e.g., Kuan-yin), which are an incarnation of both male and female and therefore have no clear distinction.

In some eco-feminist discourse, females are inseparably related to nature. In "Ecofeminism: An Overview," Val Plumwood indicates the link between women and nature as well as their instrumental role and their "usefulness to others" (120). Kate Soper also points out how women are "naturalized." Because of their role in procreation, women are treated as providers in the domestic context, serving as agents for the nurturing of the "raw materials, i.e., animal-life children who await being nurtured into culture" (139-140). In "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature," Soper describes how women are tied in with nature and are also providers of culture. Quoting Sherry Ortner, Soper indicates that women are the 'go betweens' who stay closer to nature because of their preparatory function as producers of the culture (140). On the other hand, there are concepts concerning a spatial sense in which nature is feminized and functions as a provider. Nature is "allegorized as either a powerful maternal force, the womb of all human production, or as the site of sexual enticement and ultimate seduction" (Soper 141).

The dichotomy of male and female is affirmed in some eco-feminist discourse, because one of the general aims is to overthrow patriarchy and another aim is to

emphasize the “otherness” of women and the otherness of nature. From the Mahayana Buddhist point of view, there should be transcendence of gender distinction and also, transcendence of any duality between humans and nature, because all beings are, on the level of the *Dharmadhatu*, equal.

Eco-feminist philosopher Karen Warren maintains, in “Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections,” that “a transformative feminism would involve a rethinking of what it is to be human, especially as the conception of human nature becomes informed by a non-patriarchal conception of the interconnections between human and nonhuman nature” (19). Karen Warren, in “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” calls for ecological feminism, which “provides a distinctive framework both for re-conceiving feminism and for developing an environmental ethic which takes seriously connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (322).⁵ Calling for an ecological feminism which takes into account not only feminism but also environmentalism, Warren stresses the interconnectedness of human beings and non-human beings. Eco-feminism opposes anthropocentric and androcentric positions and aims to “raise consciousness” so that the dominating, male-centered, human-centered forms of conceptions and practices are cut-off.

Therefore, one of the possible connections of Buddhism and eco-feminism is the breaking off of the dualities so one goes beyond human and non-human beings. In “A Root of Ecofeminism: *Ecofeminisme*,” Barbara T. Gates mentions a number of beliefs that are shared by eco-feminists, among which is “an end to dualisms like male/female, thought/action, and spiritual/natural.” Barbara T. Gates indicates that:

...inherent in eco-feminism is a belief in the interconnectedness of all living things. Since all life is nature, no part of it can be closer than another to “nature.”⁶

Gates’ idea can be associated with the Buddhist idea of interconnectedness of all sentient beings. Such a view is also parallel to the idea of “Indra’s Net” in Hua-Yen Buddhism, which reveals that everything is interconnected and dependent on each other.

To a certain extent, the transcending of the duality of male and female in the Buddhist spirit can be extended, in an ecological sense, to what eco-feminists assert is the transcendence of the dualities between human beings and non-human beings. In Buddhism, the notion of “sentient beings” includes both human beings and non-human beings. It transcends dualities and moves further into the world of compassion, in which all sentient beings are interconnected. The notion of compassion goes beyond an anthropocentric world-view: it acknowledges the

sufferings of human and non-human beings. Along with the Buddhist teachings on compassion, a Buddhist education emphasizes “vegetarianism” and “avoidance of the harm of the three poisons [greed, hatred, delusion],” for all of these teachings, together, are related to the peaceful coexistence of humans and non-humans.

Moreover, Buddhism emphasizes a simple life, which to a certain degree helps raise ecological consciousness. Buddhism’s teaching on the three poisons avoids the excessiveness of mere “mind-work,” which is the source of external human behavior and of environmental threat. Buddhist communities have in reality demonstrated a simple life, and such an emphasis on simplicity may help to deal with the current environmental challenges, which rise from the human desire for materialistic consumption, and result in the degradation of the earth, etc.

Barbara T. Gates stresses that eco-feminism is concerned with a number of issues, including social transformation which requires less management of the land, an appreciation of nature’s intrinsic value, a bio-centric rather than an anthropocentric viewpoint, a trust in process, and an end to dualism (21). A western eco-feminist does not discriminate or oppress the other on grounds of race, class, species, or gender. A Buddhist eco-feminist stresses the equality of all life forms and treats all sentient beings without discrimination. A Buddhist eco-feminist point of view also looks upon human beings as just one participating constituent of the environment and aims at constructing a resourceful and ecological community in which human and non-human beings harmoniously co-exist. Through the cultivation of positive thinking and deeds, a Buddhist eco-feminist plays a role as a member of the Dharma world, in which everything is mutually connected and dependent on each other.

How do Bhiksunis in Taiwan prove to be Buddhist Eco-feminists?

In the sections above, I discussed the possible connections of Buddhist thinking and eco-feminism, especially with respect to transcending dualities, and the interconnectedness between human and non-human beings. I also described the acting out of compassion and the practice of a simple way of life. The challenge, then, lies in whether and how Bhiksunis in Taiwan, as females who are also situated in the contemporary world in which environmental crises have posed an increasing threat, put into practice the Buddhist teachings on life. In the following, I use Ven. Chao Hwei of the Buddhist Hongshih Institute and Master Cheng-yen of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation as two examples to demonstrate what Buddhist Bhiksunis can do for the human and non-human environment.

An example related to activism for the environment is the Buddhist Hongshih Institute, in which Ven. Chao Hwei, a Buddhist Bhiksuni, plays an active role. Chao Hwei has written and spoken for animal rights and has taken on a more social activist role on environmental issues. In her book, *Buddhist Normative Ethics*, Chao Hwei claims that she writes in order to discuss such contemporary issues as sexual liberation, political engagement, animal ethics and ecological philosophy (9). In terms of social and political engagement, Chao Hwei has made efforts to help protect the non-human sentient beings. During her tenure of office in the Republic of China Life Conservationist Association, Chao Hwei had helped promote animal rights and helped produce the Wildlife Conservation Law and Animal Protection Act.⁷ Besides, together with local groups in Penghu, she has worked against the government's effort to pass the Offshore Islands Construction Act, which is one of the government's efforts to allow the construction of casinos on the Penghu Islands.⁸ As a Buddhist nun, she had once called for the abolishment of "the 'Eight Chief Laws' that place nuns in an inferior position to monks" (DeVido). Ven. Chao Hwei claimed:

...as women, we actually have been able to come closer to understanding the Buddha's teachings, and practice accordingly. Therefore, compared to men, women are actually closer to the path to Buddhahood.⁹

Another effort is made by Ven. Cheng-yen, the founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. Ven. Cheng-yen has roused a cross-the-island network of followers who recycle used materials, help the poor, and cooperate with the community. The Tzu Chi institution, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, has a TV Channel and has published works which address the issue of environmental pollution. Cheng-yen already "called for environmental protection by the sorting of trash, and the collection of recyclables" as long ago as 1990 (Liang 103). Ven. Cheng-yen believes that natural calamities are caused by man. It is the greed and ignorance of human beings that pollute and damage the earth. We each should awaken to this truth, restrain our desires and purify our hearts. Instead of continuing to create pollution, we must work together to protect the environment and thus create a pure land on earth (Liang 106). Ven. Cheng-yen tries to build an ecological community via programs of recycling and through her efforts to encourage social engagement, thus creating and maintaining a clean environment.

To sum up, the Buddhist Bhiksunis in Taiwan have made sustained efforts to raise deep ecological consciousness, to help environmental protection, and to promote a simple life-style, thus helping to cure social ills. Through the educational institutions founded by the Buddhist Bhiksunis, the teachings of compassion and

concern for all sentient beings help to raise ecological consciousness in the physical, phenomenal, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. The social engagement, the teaching, and the various forms of practice of the Buddhist nuns in Taiwan not only help with the development of the society, but also demonstrate how they as women firmly rooted in a religious tradition can be ecologically engaged in the world.

Notes

- ¹ See introductions to Taiwanese Bhiksunis in <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/formosa/index-people.html>
- ² Elise Anne Devido indicates that the nuns in Taiwan outnumber monks and play an important part in the society. See <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-NX012/nx059177.htm>
- ³ *Buddhist Normative Ethics* (My translation).
- ⁴ Lin Chao Cheng, "Ecofeminism and the Environmental Concern of Socially Engaged Buddhism."
- ⁵ In *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*.
- ⁶ *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, p. 20.
- ⁷ "Buddhist Hongshih College: An Engaging Buddhist School for All." In *A Brief Introduction to Buddhist Hongshih College*. May 5, 2009. Buddhist Hongshih Institute. May 13, 2009. <http://www.hongshi.org.tw/>
- ⁸ Lao Iok-sin, "Groups Slam Penghu Casino Plans." *Taipei Times*. 23 Jan. 2009. 14 May 2009. <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2009/01/13/2003434425>
- ⁹ <http://www.lca.org.tw/hongshi%20pic2/182.htm>

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PROFESSION

SR. ROBIN STRATTON, O.C.D.*

I was but a girl of twenty—
 placing my hands in the hands of
 another
 on a bright May day
 heart leaping
 voice strong
 I spoke my future in my word:
 “I vow to Almighty God...”

Through the years
 mystery grows on me
 like ivy clambering
 walls of an old house
 like wrinkles on a face.

Mystery wears me like a garment
 like a wedding ring
 or scars turned beauty marks.

Passion lures me
 I long to be
 the mirror image
 of Him who wooed me.

Today
 A bright and cloudless morn
 I watch you walk securely
 Into other folded hands—

When you are sixty-five
 Or eighty-five
 may you know the joy I felt
 in seeing you
 and
 naming you
 God’s own—
 my sister.

[11 September 2005]

*Sr. Robin Stratton, O.C.D., is a Discalced Carmelite nun cloistered in the Carmelite Monastery, Baltimore, Maryland. She is a former Reviews Editor of *Spiritual Life*, has authored many articles and poems, and composes music.

GRANDFATHER'S WATCH

RICHARD J. LONDO*

He always sat the morning out
upon an old, unpainted bench
forgotten in the backyard shade
by busy folks who moved about
the outer world. We watched him wrench
the ashes from his pipe; he made
the jackknife blade twist out the stench
from blackened bowl as if his stout

old pipe were memory clogged with burned
out youth. We thought his battered hat
and gray suspenders made him look
quite laughable, and when he turned
his pocket down to glance at that
old Roman-numbered watch he took
such pride in, everyone just sat

and grinned, for we had somehow learned
it had no stem, and hadn't worked for over
twenty years. Now that the watch is mine,
the only things unusual I find
are locks of hair held neatly in the cover.

*Richard J. Londo (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin) was a Professor of English, emeritus, St. Norbert's College, Wisconsin. He passed away sometime before we could bring this beautiful poem to print, but with his wife's blessing we are pleased to publish it in his honor.

AN INVITATION TO POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Submissions to *Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal* are peer reviewed by doctorally-prepared academics or other specialists in the pertaining subject matter. The Journal is open to a wide variety of topics and genres. Particularly welcome are submissions addressing issues of concern to Catholic colleges and universities:

- What is the impact of new technology such as the Web or distance learning on higher education, and how can we best manage its advantages and risks?
- What strategies are most useful in encouraging the development of student leadership and the integration of academic work and campus social life?
- What are the most promising directions for service learning and for the development of the campus as community?
- What is the identity and mission of the American Catholic liberal arts college in the era inaugurated by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*?
- What are the implications of globalization in relation to Catholic social and economic thought?



THE DELTA EPSILON SIGMA DISTINGUISHED LECTURERS PROGRAM

Delta Epsilon Sigma offers each year an award of one thousand dollars for a speaker at a major meeting sponsored or co-sponsored by a chapter of Delta Epsilon Sigma or by a Catholic professional society. Application for this award must be filed with the National Secretary-Treasurer one year in advance.

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Delta Epsilon Sigma sponsors an annual writing contest open to any undergraduate (member or non-member) in an institution which has a chapter of the society. Manuscripts may be submitted in any of four categories: (a) poetry, (b) short fiction, (c) non-fiction prose, and (d) scholarly research. There will be a first prize of five hundred dollars and a second prize of two hundred fifty dollars in each of the four categories. No award may be made in a given category if the committee does not judge any submission to be of sufficient merit.

The first phase of the competition is to be conducted by local chapters, each of which is encouraged to sponsor its own contest. A chapter may forward to the national competition only one entry in each category. Editorial comment and advice by a faculty mentor is appropriate as an aid preparatory to student revision, so long as all writing is done by the student.

Prose manuscripts should be typed or word-processed, double-spaced, 1,500-5,000 words in length. Scholarly papers should attach an abstract, should include primary research, and should present some original insight. Documentation should follow one of the established scholarly methods such as MLA (old or new) or APA. A long poem should be submitted singly; shorter lyrics may be submitted singly or in groups of two or three. Moderators should send all entries to the National Secretary-Treasurer by December 1.

Final judging and the announcement of the result will take place not later than May 1st of the following year. Winners will be notified through the office of the local chapter moderator.



DELTA EPSILON SIGMA SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Delta Epsilon Sigma sponsors an annual scholarship and fellowship competition for its members. Junior-year members may apply for twelve Fitzgerald Scholarships at \$1,000 each, to be applied toward tuition costs for their senior year. Senior-year members may apply for twelve Fitzgerald Fellowships at \$1,000 each, to be applied toward tuition costs for first-year graduate work. These scholarships

and fellowships are named after the founder and first Secretary-Treasurer of DES, Most Rev. Edward A. Fitzgerald of Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa. The awards will be made available on a competitive basis to students who have been initiated into the society and who have also been nominated by their chapters for the competition. Applications may be obtained from the Office of the National Secretary-Treasurer.



THE DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

Delta Epsilon Sigma has a national award to be presented to outstanding students who are members of the society and are completing their undergraduate program. It is a means by which a chapter can bring national attention to its most distinguished graduates.

The National Office has a distinctive gold and bronze medallion which it will provide without cost to the recipient's chapter for appropriate presentation. Names of recipients will be published in the *Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal*. Qualifications for the award include the following:

1. Membership in Delta Epsilon Sigma.
2. An overall Grade Point Average of 3.9–4.00 on all work taken as an undergraduate.
3. Further evidence of high scholarship:
 - a) a grade of “A” or with the highest level of distinction on an approved undergraduate thesis or its equivalent in the major field,
 - or
 - b) scores at the 90th percentile or better on a nationally recognized test (e.g., GRE, LSAT, GMAT, MCAT).
4. Endorsements by the chapter advisor, the department chair or mentor, and the chief academic officer.
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The emblem of DES contains the motto, the name, the symbols, and the founding date of the society. Delta Epsilon Sigma is an abbreviation constructed from the initial Greek letters of the words in the motto, *Dei Epitattein Sophon*. Drawn from Aristotle and much used by medieval Catholic philosophers, the phrase is taken to mean: “It is the mission of a wise person to put order” into knowledge.

The Society’s Ritual for Induction explains that a wise person is one “who discriminates between the true and the false, who appraises things at their proper worth, and who then can use this knowledge, along with the humility born of it, to go forward to accept the responsibilities and obligations which this ability imposes.”

Thus the three words on the *Journal’s* cover, Wisdom · Leadership · Service, point to the challenges as well as the responsibilities associated with the DES motto. The emblem prominently figures the *Chi Rho* symbol (the first two Greek letters of the word Christ), and the flaming lamp of wisdom shining forth the light of Truth.

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