NEXT:

VOLUME 4 SPRING 2011

EMERGING VOICES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP

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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Describing the role of religious studies scholars in higher education, Jonathan Z. Smith has written,

> *"What we honor, above all else, are playful acts of imagination in the sense stipulated by Wallace Stevens when he wrote, 'Imagination is the power of the mind over the possibility of things.' We are, together, in the joyous business of enabling such power…'If not by us, then by whom? If not now, then when?'"[1]*

Since first reading Smith's 'Playful Acts of Imagination' a few years ago, I have found it increasingly imperative that this dictum be taken seriously, not only in order to fulfill Smith's request for engaged and contextual interpretation, but in the continued effort to effect change outside of the university setting. Questioning both our chosen subject, and who our scholarship benefits is not only of critical import in bridging the gap between the academy and public space, but might at this point in time be absolutely necessary in the struggle against the corporate infiltration of academia. In the absence of clear answers to either question, it seems that a timely reconsideration of the aims of the discipline of religious studies is long overdue.

In this spirit, Angela and I are pleased to present the 2011 edition of *NEXT: Emerging Voices in Religious Studies Scholarship*, Volume 4. This year, the journal is being published exclusively in an online format in order to provide wider accessibility, as well as conserving a bit of paper. We hope you enjoy the thought-provoking essays carefully selected for their contemporary relevance and creative playfulness. The work included in this volume ranges from poetry to essays from both theology and the academic study of religion. Our goal this year has to expand on the traditional academic journal format, and it is our intention that the next volume will include an even more diverse selection of imaginative interpretations. We hope you enjoy!

Kaira Schachter and Angela Nilles

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[1] Smith, Jonathan Z., "Playful Acts of Imagination," in Liberal Education, v. 73 n .5, p. 14-20, Nov-Dec 1987.

"Romanticizing the Hybrid: Understanding and Overcoming Biological Essentialist Dialogue via Donna Haraway's Cyborg Imagery"

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How can we understand nature through the eyes of a cyborg? Donna Haraway presents society with a possible answer to this question with the ultimate creation of her cyborg in her article "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." Cyborg imagery establishes a dialogue that ecofeminists can use to combat the current environmental crisis. Such imagery suggests a way out of the maze of oppressive dualisms that aid in the destruction of the planet, body, and spirit by creating a new way ecofeminists and humanity can successfully navigate away from biological essentialist rhetoric.

Haraway's cyborg is not a destructive ecological force but an opportunity to understand the dominion of women and nature and how to break free of dualistic rhetoric such as male/female or women/Earth.

> The cyborg is not caught up in oppressive psychological and social rhetoric, but it exists in a realm completely free of patriarchal and earthly dominance.

Haraway's cyborg skips unity with nature and adapts to the current environment it is in. If we use the cyborg as a way to understand our current ecological climate, the cyborg thrives and exists in the completely capitalistic and hegemonic culture we see today. As Haraway states:

> The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense … The cyborg skips the step of original unity of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as star wars.[1]

The cyborg already exists in our over-consuming culture. While ecofeminists try to combat a society and culture that inhibits the destruction of the earth, feminist socialism romanticizes Haraway's cyborg as a way to understand and thrive in the environment ecofeminists fight against. Socialist feminism focuses on both the public and private spheres that subjugate women's oppression. Haraway's cyborg utilizes feminist socialism to overcome women's oppression by broadening the role of capitalism and stating that it will aid women in overcoming patriarchy and gender inequality. More specifically, Haraway's cyborg exists in a post-gender world, because it thrives in a capitalistic society free of constricting social binaries that links the dominion of the earth to women as well; if the world it existed in were to change, so would the cyborg.

The cyborg is not directly linked to the same biological essentialist dialogue that is shown within the ecofeminist community. Instead of trying to fight back, ecofeminists and humanity need to adapt and create their own "cyborg," free of biological essentialist rhetoric in order to survive and renew a rapidly depleting world. Cyborg imagery allows ecofeminists the chance to overcome Haraway's statement, "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" by creating a world in which the goddess is just as strong and free of social stigma as the cyborg.[2]

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The Adaptive Cyborg: From Capitalism to Ecology, an Ecofeminist Cyborg

In Haraway's article, the cyborg thrives in a capitalist world. Without any origin story, the cyborg destroys machines, identities, and social categorical relationships bent on the domination of the body and mind.

Carolyn Merchant in her book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* states that women have been socially entrapped within biological essentialist rhetoric that links the dominion of the earth to the dominion of women based on the image of the nurturing Earth mother. Although Merchant tries to evade this type of dialogue, she alludes to how the goddess can combat the onslaught of dominant imagery if we examine the opposing image of nature as female.

> Central to the organic theory was the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe. But another opposing image of nature as female was also prevalent: wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos. Both were identified with the female sex…The metaphor of the earth as a

nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalize the worldview… Two new ideas, those of mechanism and of the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world.[3]

The opposing image of nature as wild and uncontrollable, or to Haraway, the cyborg, is the object that does away with dominant images, because it exists and thrives beyond the world of socially oppressive dualisms.

Male/female, earth/woman, god/goddess do not apply to the cyborg. Cyborg imagery is key to understand Merchant's *The Death of Nature*. Ecofeminists live in a world in which the dominant imagery of the scientific revolution influences popular society and images of the goddess fail to seek the same type of attention. However, Merchant offers humanity and the ecofeminist community the chance to understand and create their version of the cyborg by embracing both nurturing and wild side of feminine imagery that is embedded within social norms. Where motherly and nurturing feminine imagery fails, the wild and uncontrollable succeeds. In order to combat the dominant rhetoric created by patriarchal society, ecofeminists have to blend the uncontrollable and the motherly together in order to create the same type of cyborg imagery that exists and thrives in our current patriarchal and capitalistic society. The hybrid that is created as a result of this blend allows ecofeminists the chance to succeed and thrive in the world as their own special hybrid: a cyborg goddess.

The malleability of Haraway's cyborg makes it the perfect tool to use as a way to combat dualism that link women and nature together. Although cyborgs are traditionally created from man, Haraway's ecofeminist cyborg lacks placement in a historical, teleological, and religious narratives. Lacking a creation story allows the ecofeminist cyborg to combat gender separation because it exists in a post-gender world. In *Gaia and God*, Rosemary Ruether makes it a point to explain these societies and their importance to creating a post-gender world, much like the one Haraway talks about her cyborg living in:

> While the female role is built into the process of

life reproduction and food gathering, the male role has to be constructed socially. Societies that fail to develop an adequately affirmative role for men, one that gives men prestige parallel to that of women but prevents their assuming aggressive dominance over women, risk developing the resentful male, who defines his masculinity in hostile negotiation of women. The symbolic negation of women in conflicting societies provides the myths through which actual dominance over women is promoted and justified.[4]

In societies where the negation of women has played a significant role in the construction of societal norms, men and women heavily used essentialist dialogue to socially and culturally define themselves. Essentialist dialogue therefore promotes a world in which men have control over nature and women as a way to reaffirm male dominance and masculine identity.

Investigating societies that combat patriarchal norms is key to understanding and developing a world that exists outside male-centric rhetoric.

Specifically, a form of gender equality and fluidity already exists in developing cultures like the pygmies that have constructed and developed gender constructs historically outside of Western influence. As Ruether pointed out in her book *Gaia and God*, these societies already exist and are working to create a post-gender world:

> The societies that have achieved gender parity in Sanday's study were societies that either had elaborately structured mutual acknowledgement of male and female prestige and power, where women conceded power roles and men acknowledged that they received these from women, or else societies

of considerable gender-role-fluidity. The Mbuti (pygmies) are an example of the first type. In the *Molimo* ceremony, undertaken periodically to awaken the powers of life in the forest, the all-giver of life, an old woman scatters the fire and men gather the embers together again. Later an old woman ties the men together. When men acknowledge their defeat and give gifts to the woman, they are untied by the old woman and blessed. The (traditional) Balinese are an example of role fluidity. Every child was seen as male-female unity.[5]

In these examples both male and female participants negotiate gender. Whereas Ruether states men in the early example are socially constructed to gain dominance over women and ultimately the earth, men and women in these two examples understand and respect gender equality and fluidity. However, their existence is only a small fragment in a considerably large web of patriarchal gender/earthly dominance. Particularly, these small societal fragments are where ecofeminists and humanity need to start searching for their cyborg goddess in order to reverse essentialist rhetoric. A variation of the cyborg already exists and thrives in these indigenous societies regardless of Haraway's idea that the cyborg is born out of capitalism. When Haraway wrote her manifesto, she created a new way of examining dominating rhetoric and binaries but also created a possible solution to over them. Cyborg imagery can be used by multiple disciplines to overcome essentialist rhetoric. More specifically, the ecofeminist version of the cyborg would be born out of ecology and free of gender narratives as a way to overcome patriarchal dualisms linking the earth and women together.

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Our Bodies, Ourselves: Understanding the Ecofeminist Cyborg

Investigation into the ways cyborg imagery questions Western identity would allow ecofeminists the ability to free themselves from not only essentialist language but also male-dominated rhetoric:

Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting that structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.[6]

Haraway uses dualisms as a way to point out how man and woman are created to appease Western identity. Utilizing cyborg imagery in contrast to Western identity offers ecofeminists the chance to free themselves of essentialist rhetoric that would link their dominion to Earth's as well. Cyborg imagery allows ecofeminists who are caught up in combating essentialist dialogue the chance to break free of it and create a new identity free of dominating binaries.

Kaira Schachter

Feminist socialism is vital to understanding how women become integrated into a world system of exploitation. Integrating theory and practice together allows feminist socialism the ability to reconstruct how humanity views gender binaries and the ways in which they are used to exploit women and as a way to reaffirm male social dominance. Haraway states that the cyborg is a kind of "disassembled and

reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (Haraway 163) that breaks away and exists outside the social systems of dominance while maintaining a sense of self regardless of gender. Haraway continues her argument by showing how feminist socialism allows for the possible reconstruction of gender by incorporating both theory and practice together via the cyborg:

> The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically. The actual situation of women is their integration/exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination. The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself— all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others … One important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice addressed to the social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations.[7]

Science and technology allow the cyborg to reconstruct how we view essentialist language that is created out of myth. The cyborg helps to blur the lines of the integration/exploitation of women into a world system in which they are traded and sold to appease a masculine identity. Incorporating theories like Haraway's cyborg, with actual practice creates the need for humanity to respond and ultimately do away with essentialist language that keeps women trapped within rhetoric that links their dominion to Earth's as well.

The ecofeminist cyborg gives women and men the skills they need to navigate their way out of essentialist rhetoric that has become a part of both social and personal embodiment. If society starts relying on the ecofeminist cyborg as a way to free themselves from social norms that tell women to be mothering or men to exploit nature, then society no longer has to rely on the patriarchal machine that has dictated and defined our personal lives. Ecofeminist cyborg imagery gives society the tools they need to embrace a world that is constructed and not

discovered and in doing so ultimately determine that the patriarchal machine that is destroying the world as well as our lives is based on our embodiment of constructed social norms that continually dictate essentialist rhetoric:

> The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. Up till now (once upon a time), female embodiment seemed to be given, organic, necessary; and female embodiment seemed to mean skill in mothering and its metaphoric extensions…Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth.[8]

The cyborg does away fixed identity, and in doing so breaks down the socially binary that women have to be nurturing or motherly. As a result of breaking down essentialist rhetoric, the link between the earth and women begins to fade away. The cyborg frees women from gender as a global and historical identity and allows them to create and therefore implement new ways in which to save the world; plainly put, the cyborg abolishes gender identity and in doing so creates a fluid environment where power and responsibility are cared for and shared by men and women equally. Whereas societies like the pygmies have been implementing strategies of how to achieve a post-gender world, as Ruether previously states, Western societies need to start doing the same exact thing in order to overcome the deeply entrenched gender hierarchies.

Especially within Western colonization and modern scientific technology, gender hierarchies are abundant and lead to the subordination of women and the Earth.

In her book, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* Ruether and other ecofeminists call for the same revolutionary transformation of world that the cyborg goddess would give them. Ruether states in order to overcome the "5,000 year process of domination" humans must reconnect with nature as a partner.[9] Ecofeminism's cyborg presents humanity with the opportunities to reconnect with nature because systems of gender and patriarchy are abolished. Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic is crucial to furthering the need for humanity to integrate all narratives:

> The basis for this ethic of partnership draws upon new scientific and philosophical developments of quantum mechanics and chaos and complexity theory that have come to recognize that nature is not passive or mechanical, much less composed of "dead" matter. Rather nature is alive, holistic, and interconnected … Humans need to connect with nature, not as dead objects to be exploited, but rather as active subjects with which they must learn to partner.[10]

The ecofeminist cyborg would overcome oppressive narratives and allow humans to reconnect with nature not as an object to be exploited but one to be partnered with. The ecofeminist cyborg allows for a renewal of life because it thrives in the environment in which it is constructed. Overcoming gender binaries and social systems of dominance would allow the ecofeminist cyborg to celebrate life rather than consume and destroy it.

<p style="text-align:center">✶</p>

Crossing Borders: A Celebration of Hybridity

The creation of a hybrid cyborg goddess would allow the ecofeminist community and humanity the chance to cross borders and negotiate the importance of riding the world of essentialist rhetoric. Examination of how borders or boundaries separate different communities as a way to deconstruct how humanity views gender as simply male or female presents us with the ability to create and live in the same post-gendered world that Haraway's cyborg does. As Caren Kaplan state in "The Politics of Location," Haraway and Gloria Anzaldua's description of borders are where we need to start examining how to create and apply social change in the world:

> Donna Haraway's description of borders as "productive of meanings and bodies" encourages us to think about boundaries as specific kinds of location, as places where the spatial-temporal tension can be examined in its full complexity… As Gloria Anzaldua's works shows us, "borderlands" generate the complicated knowledges of nuanced identities, the micro-subjectivities that cannot be essentialized or overgeneralized.

Essentialist rhetoric prohibits the negotiation that humanity needs in order to overcome the domination and dominion of the earth and women. Haraway presents humanity, specifically the ecofeminist community, with the cyborg as a way to overcome essentialist rhetoric that recapitulates that the dominion of the Earth together with women's subordination.

Haraway's cyborg offers humanity and the ecofeminist community a chance to reexamine what they are doing to save a world that is being drastically overused. In order to create and inspire change, communities need to band together rather than break apart. Creating and incorporating an ethic of partnership into how humanity views and uses nature is vital to overcoming essentialist rhetoric that links the Earth and women together. If essentialist rhetoric connects nature with women, an ethic of partnership is a crucial starting point in creating a new way for humanity to view the ways in which it exploits nature and women together. An ecofeminist cyborg would aid in changing the ways in which humanity views and exploits the earth and women. Living outside a world of gender and socially constructed norms that influence the ways in which humanity lives, the cyborg is a symbol for theory and practice being integrated into each other. An ecofeminist cyborg goes beyond activism and creates change, because its body is free of historical borders that entrap it within social and gender stigmas. The ecofeminist cyborg successfully navigates itself out of the maze of

dualisms because it incorporates both an ethic of partnership with humanity and the environment equally.

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[2] Ibid., 116.

[3] Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. US: HarperOne, 1990, 2.

[4] Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. US: Harper San Francisco, 1992, 167-8.

[5] Ibid., 167-8.

[6] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 112.

[7] Ibid., 163.

[8] Ibid., 115.

[9] Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. US: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, 122.

[10] Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, 122.

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Can self-concern actually be considered an ethical activity? This paper applies Foucault's work on the care of the self to Chögyam Trungpa's Shambhala training in demonstrating how, for these thinkers, engaged social activism can paradoxically be grounded entirely in exercises of self-concern. In unpacking the Foucauldian relationship between catharsis and politics that we find with Trungpa, I will also bring Mohandas Gandhi and Aurobindo Ghose into the conversation to highlight salient aspects of the interface between self -concern and how one is concerned for others, such as issues of truth-telling, ideas of the body, renunciation, rulership, and the prioritization of proximate vs. distant engagement. Additionally, the unique relationship between sovereignty and the common good which Trungpa anchors in an ontological "natural hierarchy" will be cross-examined with the work of Giorgio Agamben to suggest that the *telos* Trungpa presents is resonant with Foucault's attempt at escaping the bind of bio-political subjection. Restated, in Trungpa's model, the image of sovereignty is entirely inverted: one becomes a sovereign only when the value of life is discovered in oneself for the sake of the common good, that exercising power over others can only be assumed after exercising power over oneself in terms of self-care. Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate that much can be gained from understanding ethics as a highly personal affair, critiquing normative assumptions to appreciate how a more just ethics begins not with the other, but with the relation one has to oneself. For Foucault and Trungpa, working for others entails working on oneself.

In his 1981-1982 lectures at the College of France, Foucault takes up the notion of "care of oneself" (*epimeleia heautou*) in analyzing the relations between the "subject" and "truth." Although the *epimeleia heautou* enjoyed a long-life throughout Greek culture, he points out that the historiography of philosophy had hitherto attached little importance to it, instead opting for the Delphic prescription of *gnothi seauton* ("know yourself") as the founding expression of the question of relations between the subject and truth. Foucault's lectures convey his stance that the *gnothi seauton* did not originally enjoy the status it later came to acquire. Besides it being incorrect to understand "know yourself" in the philosophical sense of the phrase,[1] whenever the Delphic precept appeared in philosophical thought it clearly appears within the more general framework of the *epimeleia heautou*, that is, the exercise of self upon the self to transform one's mode of being. Though it clearly emerged in the life and figure of Socrates during the fifth century B.C., Foucault demonstrates that the notion of *epimeleia heautou* remained a fundamental principle permeating the philosophical attitude from the first Platonic dialogue to the major texts of the later Stoics, its meanings multiplied and modified to eventually provide the matrix of Christian asceticism up to the fifth century A.D.

"Generally speaking," Foucault remarks, "the principle that one must take care of oneself became the principle of all rational conduct in all forms of active life that would truly conform to the principle of moral rationality"[2] *Epimeleia heautou* thus constitutes both a general cultural phenomenon and an event in thought, "a decisive moment that is still significant for our modern mode of being subjects."[3] Care of the self, in sum, has radically permeated all ethical thought. But if, as Foucault claims, it is one of the main threads in the history of practices of subjectivity, why has it been forsakenly suspect in Western thought and philosophy's reflective reconstruction of its own history for the *gnothi seauton*?

And why does devoting oneself to oneself, turning in on oneself to offer service to oneself, initially signify to us either extremity in egoism or withdrawal?

Foucault hypothesizes that the strict morality and austere rules arising from the egoism of "care of oneself" have been transposed into a very different ethical context of non-egoism, either that of Christian obligation to salvation via self-renunciation, or a "modern" obligation towards others (other people, collective, class, and so on). Concern with oneself has become incompatible with such a morality of asceticism, for the self has become that which one has to reject in order to be moral. Additionally, a process of disconnecting and concealing the necessity of spirituality (the subject's work on himself, the transformation of himself and his being) from the knowing subject's access to truth did not take place with the advent of science, but had its origins in theology; a slow process culminating in the "Cartesian moment." Philosophy since Descartes thus posits a modern, thinking subject who is intrinsically capable of truth, rendering the deciphering of thoughts or eradication of false views as primary and fully-sufficient, and care of the self practically irrelevant. For the modern subject, knowing oneself then renouncing that self for the sake of objectivity or collectivity trumps an ethics that demands the care of the self to arrive at truth in one's own being.

The aim of Greco-Roman philosophy in classical and late Antiquity was to arm the individual in conducting themselves with mastery in all circumstances of life. For Foucault, the primary element of ethics in antiquity was towards this end—making one's existence into an object for knowledge and values by way of the perfect governance of the self. Even as a philosophical principle, the care of the self was an active undertaking, an occupation, not just awareness or attention focused on the self, but complex and regular activities. "We can say that for all of ancient philosophy," he writes, "care of the self was a duty and a technique, a fundamental obligation and a set of carefully fashioned ways of behaving."[4]

Extremely fascinating here is that Foucault locates ethics as the reflective part of freedom, with extensive care of the self as its prerequisite.[5] Freedom for the Greeks was an ethical problem: ethos was the visible mode of being and acting in the world, a conscious act of resisting slavery to oneself and one's appetites. Unlike the Christian or modern models where a self-renunciatory obligation to care for others is put before the care of the self, Foucault argues that "Care for others should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior."[6] Exercising power over oneself thus regulates abuses of power over others. Salvation of the self (the cathartic) is thus inextricably linked to salvation of the city-state (the political), with particular emphasis placed on the necessity of the former's priority for the latter. Ethical preoccupation for Foucault—the deliberate practice of freedom in knowing and improving one's self—is therefore not a matter of self-renunciation, but a cathartic affair of self-governance with inherent political ramifications; spirituality intersects with philosophy, politics, and self-stylization.

Beginning in 1976, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche began presenting a series of teachings that used the image of the mythical kingdom of Shambhala to represent a model of secular enlightenment and enlightened society that begins with the individual. Like the figure of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, he believed that in teaching and encouraging citizens to take care of themselves, he was also teaching them to take care of society itself. Care of the self in his new Shambhala tradition revolved primarily around a meditation practice that he distanced from Buddhism as being "something very basic and simple that is not tied to any one culture."[7] He considers it to provide a means of accessing a sense of appreciation for being alive by developing a sense of gentleness towards

ourselves and appreciation of our experience. It aims at an unconditional experience without expectation or preconception; thoughts are not suppressed, nor are extraordinary states or abilities sought. Instead, Trungpa proposes meditation as a way to become more open and honest with ourselves so that this can then extend outwards into our relationships with others. He utilizes the regal imagery of a "king or queen on a throne"[8] striking a "royal pose"[9] to appeal to the dignified pride available in exercising the simplicity and precision of taking a properly erect posture. The body is key here, both as the premier reference point for the practice, and that only through synchronizing the mind with the body are we truly able to access an *extra*-ordinary sense of being genuinely human. Ultimately, it is a method of "rediscovering ourselves and our basic goodness, the means to tune ourselves in to a genuine reality."[10] Echoing Foucault, truth is found in one's being by training the body; only then "we can work with the rest of the world, on the basis of the goodness we discover in ourselves."[11]

But what is this truth? For Trungpa, the nature of being is what he refers to as "basic goodness." "Our being is good," writes Trungpa, "because it is not a fundamental source of aggression or complaint."[12] The divisiveness that arises from hope and fear are taken to be secondary and conditional, whereas what is immediate is unconditional, neither for nor against what we experience "in the same way that sunlight is not 'for' or 'against.'"[13] He acknowledges that this is "very closely connected" to the traditional Buddhist concept of *bodhichitta*, a term he glosses as "awakened heart."[14] Its experience is described as the feeling of a "sad and tender heart," a sense of being "raw and tender" from fearlessly exposing your entire being to both yourself and others.[15] Fear is depicted as the root of our personal and collective problems, the primary source of anxiety, inadequacy, nervousness, concern, and recklessness. Foundationally, what is feared is being itself, the fear of vulnerability or insecurity in experiencing one's own sadness and exposing it to others.

Placing fearlessness as ontologically prior is crucial for this system, underpinning his ethos of "warriorship." Essentially a warrior (Tib. *pa bo*, Skt. *bodhisattva*) is a renunciate, but Trungpa makes a key move in shifting the meaning of renunciation. Renunciation is not of the body but of privacy, one's "cocoon" of an egoic private world:

> What the warrior renounces is anything in his experience that is a barrier between himself and others. In other words, renunciation is making yourself more available, more gentle and open to others. Any hesitation about opening yourself to others is removed.[16]

In this conception, people are encouraged to experience the world directly without the added limitation of a constant reference point. Because the basis of one's existence is an egoless basic goodness, warriorship entails maintaining the balance of a grounding or resting in that experience.

Honesty is a key element of working with that basic goodness, similarly framed by Trungpa as renunciative in quality, but his vision of renunciation differs radically from how a figure like Gandhi approaches the subject. Truth involves a letting-go, but once again it is a renunciation of deceiving yourself and misleading others, not of the self itself. Trungpa aligns dishonesty with the manipulation involved in preserving or protecting a particular image, an inherently fear-based process. "But," he asserts, "telling the truth does not mean that you have to bare your innermost secrets and expose everything that you are ashamed of. You have nothing to be ashamed of! That is the basis for telling the truth."[17] Telling the truth, and warriorship in general, is therefore a process of adhering to a state of unconditional confidence "free from competition or one-upmanship."[18] Trungpa explains that "This is an unconditional state in which you simply possess an unwavering state of mind that needs no reference point."[19]

Alexis Glenn

Truth-telling is thus not a condition for salvation, but an ontic activity—not the procedure of confession indispensable for salvation that we find with Gandhi and pastoral institutions, but the lived expression of an always-accessible teleological reality. Falsity is a condition of phenomenological confusion rather than a concealed fault that must be confessed in order to produce truth in one's being.

Self-discipline also takes an unexpected shift in meaning from what Trungpa calls "artificial willpower" to an appreciation of basic goodness, the engagement of every situation as an opportunity to express a dignified, confident, and elegant rejoicing in life. As we saw in Foucault, care of the self involves reflecting one's freedom. Cooking, driving, changing diapers, and even arguing reflect this open-ended awareness. Most importantly, the body itself is an extension of basic goodness. "It is the closest implement, or tool, that you have to express basic goodness," Trungpa writes, "so appreciating your body is very important. The food you eat, the liquor you drink, the clothes you wear, and getting proper exercise are all important. You don't have to jog or do push-ups every day, but it is important to take an attitude of caring about your body."[20] Warrior training is about "learning to treat yourself better, so that you can help to build an enlightened society."[21] Training oneself to develop self-control and proper etiquette in everyday rituals is important to overcome arrogance, thereby enabling one to extend themselves more fully to others. Care of the self allows one to more fully care for others.

Trungpa's encouragement to care for the body in caring for the self—to resynchronize the distinction normally made between disembodied wisdom and a corporal form rendered insignificant or problematic thereto—is rather striking when contrasted with Gandhi and likened to Aurobindo. Gandhi found nobility, honor, and truth in the suffering body, directing it as a method of total self-effacement for political and religious ends. His relationship with his body was one of violent struggle, and not surprisingly we see this played out in his relationships with others when his temper overwhelms him while dealing with seemingly trivial incidents of insubordinancy, such as unruly children at his ashram. Gandhis's reflections on the *Bhagavad Gītā* are also emblematic of his inner

struggle, particularly his repeated usage of metaphors of war to describe struggling against undesired intrusion, however that might be configured. Though we might consider this more of a strategical concern in galvanizing support in his political endeavors, nevertheless it is reflective of his care of the self, constantly guarding against an extruded other that must be conquered and defeated to maintain an ideal state of subjectivity.

Interestingly, Aurobindo critiqued Gandhi on grounds parallel to Foucault's critique of Christianity's ethic of privileging self-renunciation to access truth and moral relations with others. Recall that in Foucault's analysis, Christian and modern subjects engage in indefinite endeavors of self-knowledge that strives only to reduce the gap between what one is and what one truly thinks themselves to be, with performed actions only having value insofar as they help one to know themselves better.

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Aurobindo rejected Gandhi's ideas as "built on a basis of one-sided reasoning and claiming for a limited truth a universality which it cannot have.

Such theories will always exist so long as the mind is the main instrument of human truth-seeking."[22] He further identifies Gandhi's emphasis on low status, service, and suffering as "Christian rather than Hindu—for the Christian, self-abasement, humility, the acceptance of a low status to serve humanity or the Divine are things which are highly spiritual and the noblest privilege of the soul."[23] Similar to Trungpa, Aurobindo's integral theorization located the notion of

an enemy as an internal rather than an external issue: "Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism"[24] In the eyes of Aurobindo, a non-violence of "suffering love" was only one of many methods available to political struggle, no more valuable, moral, or traditionally Hindu than violent means of resistance. Just as he did in his cathartic approach to personal liberation, Aurobindo likewise affirmed a multiplicity of means and methods towards political liberation. Once again, we see not only that these two poles interface, they are thought to form a reciprocal relation: the relationship with oneself is determinative of the relationship with others.

Trungpa also strongly resembles Aurobindo in that both emphasize the importance of avoiding habitual patterns that lean too heavily on external authorities. In Trungpa's Shambhala vision, living in accordance with what he calls natural hierarchy, or one's place in the world, is "not a matter of following a series of rigid rules or structuring your days with lifeless commandments or codes of conduct. The world has order and power and richness that can teach you how to conduct your life artfully, with kindness to others and care for yourself."[25] An open-ended approach to life with the care of the self as one's central preoccupation is invested with the authority of discovering modes of behavior that should be abandoned or adopted. Trungpa asserts that the "discovery of natural hierarchy has to be a personal experience,"[26] locating structures and patterns that promote dignity based on one's inherent being. Just as it was in Foucault's depiction of the culture of the self, Trungpa's encouragement to discover natural hierarchy in one's being presents that idea that by acting correctly according to true principles, one makes the uprightness of their philosophy legible in his actions, rather than the other way around.

Here as well we see a contrast with the Gandhian approach that advocates the necessity of renouncing the self and deciphering its truth. Remarkably, this time Trungpa makes the connection himself, praising Gandhi's self-sufficiency campaign, but criticizing that his positive messages of austerities and nonaggression for political ends can easily lapse into "extreme asceticism."[27] To find one's inherent

wealth, "it is not necessary to renounce all material possessions and worldly pursuits. If a society is to have a sense of command being ruled, then someone has to wear the three-piece suit at the negotiating tables; someone has to wear a uniform to keep the peace."[28] Renunciation of the world to Trungpa is radically misguided, a destructive and irrelevant act that fails to recognize that committing to live in the world as "ordinary but fully human beings" is realized within the world, not beyond or outside of seemingly disagreeable circumstances. The warrior works on him or herself to project that underlying abundance of basic goodness to and for others, exerting oneself to bring that fundamental wealth of riches into the lives of others. Trungpa assures us that "There is no doubt that, if you do so, the next step will come naturally." Without putting one's individual life in order first— ruling your immediate world—further chaos would be the only contribution.

"Ruling," "becoming a king or queen of one's world," and establishing oneself as "universal monarch," are curiously recurrent motifs in a self-described "secular" vision of enlightenment. Trungpa anticipates the response: "ordinarily, we think of a king in the negative sense, as someone who holds himself apart from others, hiding in his palace and creating a kingdom to shield himself apart from others."[29] Here it is intended as the polar opposite, actualizing or reflecting one's own ontological freedom or "authentic presence" to bring those qualities of abundant goodness, dignity, gentle flexibility, and respect into the lives of others. Although recurrent rhetoric of rulership and regal imagery initially seem odd in Trungpa's Shambhala vision, juxtaposing it with Foucault's analysis of ancient Greek models of self-concern makes it seem almost expected. Within Plato's *Alcibiades*, Socrates counsels Alcibiades that, despite the aristocratic privilege he enjoys, if he truly wants to take destiny of the city in his hands and enter political life, he must first learn to exercise power by exercising it over himself in terms of self-concern.

Governing others well is inextricable from governance of the self, and the former was often expressed in a similarly juridico-political model. Foucault summarizes that "One cannot govern others, one cannot govern others well, one cannot transform

one's privileges into political action on others, into rational action, if one is not concerned about oneself."[30] Why not read this backwards? By governing oneself, working on it, transforming it for the sake of knowledge and quality of life, one occupies the position of a governor, a ruler, a king or queen of one's world. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why Trungpa leans so heavily on images of royalty to convey the seemingly contradictory qualities of simplicity and powerful presence of one who is concerned with their basic goodness.

For both Trungpa and Foucault, concern for the welfare of others cannot result merely from an abstract injunction or philosophical ideal -

Concern for the welfare of others must be brought about through a change in one's person.

Trungpa believes that it must begin with the proximate relations of one's own domestic situation, writing that "an important step in becoming a warrior is to become a family person, someone who respects his or her everyday domestic life and is committed to uplifting that situation."[31] "Otherwise," he continues, "you have a huge gap between your grand vision for society and the reality of everyday existence."[32] Here we find another key difference from the life and thought of Gandhi, who would often relegate the interests of his wife and children as secondary to his own grand vision of India's independence from British rule. Trungpa's ethical resemblance to Aurobindo also breaks at this point, for Aurobindo as well once wrote in a letter to his father-in-law: "I am afraid I shall never be good for much in the way of domestic virtues. I have tried, very ineffectively, to do some part of my duty as a son, a brother and a husband, but there is something too strong in me which forces me to subordinate everything else to it."[33] Furthermore, along similar lines, Trungpa insists that respect for one's ancestry and cultural heritage should not remain stuck in a veneration of the past, but be brought into the immediacy of "newness." Vision and practicality have to be joined together to resist idealizing a perfect past or neglecting present circumstances while working towards some future utopic vision, movements away from what's actually happening that inadvertently narrow one's existence.

In fact, Trungpa does not lay down any concrete utopic vision, which is quite surprising in a book about building an enlightened society. But this is totally in line with an ethic of self-concern. Perhaps Foucault pursued this arena of study for similar reasons, a potential way to think himself out of the matrix of bio-political regulation of populations that exercises power in the service of maximizing life. Here as well the two line up against Gandhi's ethics, who with a well-known statement—"there is no wealth besides life"[34]—virtually demonstrates Foucault's hypothesis that renouncing the state of the body leads to formation of the body of the state.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben thinks through Michel Foucault's notion of bio-power or bio-politics—the growing inclusion of natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power—to unpack how the transformation of politics into biopolitics is characterized by the convergence of two faces of power: the integration of subjective individualization ("technologies of the self") with procedures of unprecedented objective totalization ("political techniques"). Agamben explores what Foucault never explicitly stated, namely the hidden point of intersection between these two models of power. His work takes up the thesis that the "inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power."[35] Agamben relates that the Greeks had no word for "life." Instead, two distinct words were used: *zoe* (natural or "bare" life) and *bios* (politically qualified life).[36] Life exposed to death acted as the originary political element, as bare life thereby became implicated in politically qualified life, "politicized through its very capacity to be killed."[37] The magistrate's sovereign power over all citizens—an extension of the *vitae necisque potestas*, the unconditional authority of the

father over the sphere of the home (including the power of life and death) is most strongly evidenced in its ability to exercise a right of exception (*arcana imperii*) that dispossesses *zoe* of *bios*, producing biological life stripped of its political significance. *Homo sacer* is thus a figure doubly excluded from both *ius humanum* (human law; sphere of the profane) and *ius divinum* (divine law; sphere of the religious), a life that may be killed and yet not deemed worthy of sacrifice.

If *homo sacer* is a figure who can be killed without condemnation, yet cannot be sacrificed by ritual practices, Agamben asks in what does the sacredness (outside both human and divine law) of the sacred man consist? For Agamben, the sacred is a juridico-political fiction, serving a function that allows a particular community to establish itself against an Other they choose to define as *homo sacer*, a hybrid human-animal that occupies a zone of indistinction.[38] It therefore allows the sovereign to declare lives as devoid of value for the sake of the common good. Agamben asserts that "The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment."[39]

However, in Trungpa's model, that image of sovereignty is entirely inverted: one becomes a sovereign, a universal monarch, *only* when the value of life is discovered in oneself for the sake of the common good. A sovereign ban thus becomes entirely foreclosed from possibility with a care of the self that aims at dissolving bare life's implication within politically qualified life. In other words, life cannot be declared as devoid of value for the sake of a common good when the ethical and ontological priority of basic goodness subverts any and all attempts at secondary qualifications; imposed hierarchies cannot trump the natural hierarchy discoverable in one's direct experience of self-care.

Maybe Foucault's attempt at escaping the bind of bio-political subjection actually finds its articulation in Trungpa's teleology that fleshes out how self-concern can be the crux of both ethics *and* a secular soteriology. Approaching ethics as a highly personal affair that begins not with the other, but with the relation one has towards oneself, has much to offer in thinking through social and political engagement. When paired with Trungpa's *telos* of alternative sovereignty, the notion of working on oneself as a means of working for others, which we find in Foucault's study of the Greco-Roman culture of the self, provides an invaluable resource for escaping the circuit of moral asceticism and bio-political manipulation.

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[1] Foucault, following the scholarship of W.H. Roscher and J. Defradas, alternatively suggests that the Delphic precepts should either be read as ritual rules and recommendations connected to the act of consultation itself. See Foucault, Michel, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*., New York: Picador, 2005: 45.

[2] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* 9.

[3] Ibid., 9.

[4] Ibid., 493-494.

[5] See the January 20, 1984 interview with Foucault entitled "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" in Rabinow, Paul (ed), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault* 1954–1984, Vol 1. London: The Penguin Press, 1997.

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[7] Trungpa, Chögyam (Carolyn Rose Gimian, ed), *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007: 26.

[8] Trungpa, *Shambhala*, 27.

[9] Ibid., 28.

[10] Ibid., 26.

[11] Ibid., 30.

[12] Ibid., 32.

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] Ibid., 33.

[15] Ibid., 34.

[16] Ibid., 52.

[17] Ibid., 65.

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[22] Minor, Robert N., "Sri Aurobindo's Dismissal of Gandhi and His Nonviolence," In HG Coward (ed) *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, Albany: SUNY, 2003: 88.

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[24] Ibid., 90.

[25] Trungpa, *Shambhala*, 108.

[26] Ibid., 113.

[27] Ibid., 117.

[28] Ibid., 117.

[29] Ibid., 128.

[30] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 36.

[31] Trungpa, *Shambhala*, 74

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[33] Heehs, Peter, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008: 56.

[34] Cited in the Douglas Allen edited volume, *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the 21st Century*, 26.

[35] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998: 6.

[36] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2.

[37] Ibid., 89

[38] Ibid., 104.

[39] Ibid., 8.

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"A Comparison of Process Theodicy and the Hindu Doctrines of Karma and Rebirth"

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This paper will endeavor to compare Process theodicy with the Hindu doctrines of karma and rebirth as solutions to the "problem of evil." Such a comparison is no simple task; both doctrines would be problematic enough on their own as subjects for analysis in a short paper. Process philosophy and theology – arising from the thought of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) – is not part of the Christian tradition, but arises partially in response to what Whitehead and Hartshorne thought to be the absurdities of traditional western theism, so that any explication of a Process theodicy requires reference to traditional Christian theodicy. Moreover, as a philosophical movement, Process thinkers have no sacred texts to call their own, while the Hindus, by contrast, have a bewilderingly large corpus of sacred writings in support of their positions, writings which provide not a single, unified philosophical position regarding evil, but a wealth of alternatives, so that no one doctrine can properly be called "orthodox."[1] Even the doctrine of rebirth itself is not universally accepted by the Hindus.[2] Nonetheless, and despite the problems in comparing two such disparate and complex ideas, Process theodicy and Hindu karma and rebirth possess some striking similarities that provide a fertile ground for comparison.

The paper will be divided into four sections. Section one will analyze Process theodicy as an alternative to more traditional western solutions to the problem of evil, with a special focus on the formulation of Process theologian David Griffin, who has written extensively on theodicy. As a theodicy is really only one part of an overall theological position, this will require some explication of the Process tradition as a whole, although (due largely to space restrictions) the amount of technical detail regarding

Process metaphysics will be kept to a minimum. Section two will analyze the Hindu doctrines of karma and rebirth as possible solutions to the problem of evil. The focus on this section will fall mostly on the

karma solution's theological and philosophical merit, given that the object of comparison is itself a philosophical movement, although it must be acknowledged that the theory described herein is hardly the monolithic Indian response to evil, but only one among many. Section three will endeavor to compare the two theories more directly, explicating their key differences and similarities. Section four will conclude with an analysis of the degree to which both theories succeed or do not succeed, both in the sense of being an appropriate rational/theological response, as well as a psychological/emotional one.

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Process Theodicy

The "problem of evil" in the narrow sense of the western philosophical tradition is at least as old as Christianity itself, and poses the seemingly paradoxical attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence to God. If God wants only the best for us, and has all the power necessary to eliminate suffering from the world, why does God not do so?

The Process response to this question is that the concept of "omnipotence" is itself a logical absurdity; it would not make sense no matter what the empirical facts might be.[3] The primary reason that it *must* be an absurdity is that individuals themselves cannot be called "individuals" without some sort of power, and some capacity to perform free actions.[4] To say, for instance, that all events of the world and all human decisions are ultimately decreed by God, is to say that there is really nothing apart from God, not really any creatures at all. Nor does power and freedom only apply to human beings, or even human beings and animals, but to all actualities – freedom for Process is the absolute principle revealing the social structure of existence.[5] The limits of my freedom are determined precisely by the free decisions of the other beings in the universe.

Traditional theists often suggest in response that it seems a perfectly coherent idea that God in fact does

have all the power, and either makes all the decisions while only seeming to provide freedom, or perhaps has the power to intervene but decides not to use it.[6] Process theologian David Griffin's response is that firstly, the idea that there are actualities totally devoid of power is pure inference, since all must admit that we *seem* to have such power.[7] Freedom is one of the "hard-core common sense" notions which we may deny verbally, but not in practice. Moreover, supposing that we in fact have no power leads to the conclusion that we do not exist as real entities in any meaningful sense – our actions cannot be meritorious if they are ultimately performed by an alien hand.

Griffin notes that great lengths have been taken to expound upon and define the notion of perfect goodness, but almost no attention has been given to defining the concept of perfect power with philosophical precision.[8] Power is a relational concept; it is not exerted in a vacuum, but always by some entity *A* over some other entity *B*. As such, the notion of power requires analysis of both the being exerting power, and the being that power is being exerted upon.

In order for a being to have the sort of power that traditional theism has asserted God possesses, the entity over which power is exerted must be *totally* determinable by some other entity. In the case of a lifeless object like a billiard ball, this is indeed the case -- when it is hit by a second billiard ball, it has no choice in whether or not it moves. But in the case of decision-making individuals, the case is quite different. Consider the following example: a child is told by his parent that he must go to bed. The child, as a self-conscious, decision-making individual, can always make the decision to *not* go to bed. The parent may then respond by picking up the child bodily and carrying him to his room, but nothing can force the child to alter his decision to resist the parent's directive.

It is only the *body* of the child that can be coercively controlled by

the body of the physically stronger parent; the child's free will remains intact.

With this understood, Process thinkers assert that *persuasion* is the primary form of power, while *coercion* is the derivative form.[9] Even the act of self-motion is an instance of persuasive, rather than coercive, power. Consider the human decision to move an arm. The fact is that this arm may not respond in the way the person wants it to – it may be broken, or asleep, or otherwise unable to perform the action we want it to. It is only after the persuasive act of self-motion is successful that we can even *begin* to exercise coercive power over physical objects, and even then, coercive power can never be effective in altering the *decisions* of other free entities, however much we may control their physical bodies. In any case where one or both entities are individuals in the true sense of being decision-makers, there can only be persuasive power.[10] Coercion requires a finite, localized body.

It is for this reason that Process theology asserts that God's power is fundamentally persuasive rather than coercive.[11] Moreover, God does not voluntarily limit itself to this persuasive power; rather, it is necessarily the case that God cannot have coercive power, because God does not have a body. Or, Griffin suggests, it may be more precise to say that God's body is the entire universe. But even in this case, God has no finite localized body with which it could, for example, stop a falling rock from killing an innocent bystander, any more than we could temporarily inhabit one of our white blood cells and stop it from killing a bacterial invader.[12]Thus it may be said that in the very simplest terms, Process theology solves the problem of evil by denying the coherence of one of its premises, the notion of divine power.[13] Thus, God cannot prevent all evil from happening.[14] But more importantly, the *possibility* of evil is necessary. *Evil as such* is not necessary, because there is always the possibility that creatures will make the best possible decisions, actualize the best possible outcome, but the bare *possibility of evil*, of actualizing

a less-than-ideal outcome, is metaphysically necessary to existence.[15]

The question then becomes, "why did God create creatures with such high degrees of freedom, since it obviously causes so much suffering?" The answer is that trivial freedom can only yield trivial value, while only higher degrees of freedom allow for higher degrees of value, even though they also entail the possibility for greater suffering.[16]

Precisely the same conditions that allow us to enjoy those experience which we value most highly and would not want to live without are the conditions which lead us to suffer so intensely. Cats enjoy experience far beyond the reach of lowly amoebae; but amoebae are not susceptible to the variety and intensity of pain that can be undergone by cats. Human beings can enjoy riches of experience far beyond the wildest feline dreams; but cats have no inkling of the depths of suffering undergone by those fellow creatures who share their dwelling and give them milk – few cats commit suicide.[17]

In other words, the richness of human experience is inexorably tied to the possibility of greater suffering. Yet the aim of a moral being is better stated positively rather than negatively – that is, a moral being's aim is to produce good, rather than avoid suffering, since the only way to guarantee lesser suffering is either to eliminate or reduce the freedom of the suffering creatures.[18] God, as the supreme being, aims at a maximization of good (rather than the minimization of suffering, although this is a secondary goal), not only for the creatures themselves, but for its own enrichment – the God of Process is not a static absolute, but a being which grows and changes as it experiences the free decisions of creatures. Thus, evil for Process theology is an unavoidable part of the freedom that is metaphysically necessary to existence of creatures, freedom which allows them to meaningfully contribute to the divine experience.

As might be expected, the Christian objections to such a theodicy were many, although most of them were either directly or indirectly criticisms of the revised notion of divine power. Some of these were simply absurdities about power, such as John Roth's protest that no freedom would be lost if we were unable to commit murder,[19] when the fact is that the same power used to pull someone out of a raging river and save his life is the same power that can be used to push him back into it; for us to be "unable to commit murder" could be nothing else than a form of mind control. Some reflected an inability at critical self-evaluation: Frederick Sontag accused Process theodicy of being "overly optimistic" in thinking that humans could eliminate evil by themselves,[20] to which Griffin blithely responded that "To expect, after all that has happened which any decent being with

controlling power would have stopped, that God is going to act differently than ever before, bringing about a complete change in the structure of existence, seems the height of unrealistic optimism."[21]   And some criticisms reflected a blatant worship of power for power's sake, such Stephen Davis' statement that the God of Process "cannot directly deflect moving rocks, bullets or automobiles" (as if this were really a problem in itself), and John Roth's vicious assertion that "a God of such weakness, no matter how much he suffers, is really pathetic" and that "God's best is far from enough."[22] Griffin's best response to all of these protests regarding divine power can be summed up in the following extended passage:

> One of the stronger complaints from Sontag and Roth is that, given the enormity of evil in the world, a deity that is doing its best is not worthy of worship. The implication is that a deity that is *not* doing its best *is* worthy of worship. For example, in reference to Auschwitz, Roth mocks my God with the statement that "the best that God could possibly do was to permit 10,000 Jews a day to go up in smoke." Roth prefers a God who had the power to prevent this Holocaust but did not do it! This illustrates how much people can differ in what they consider worthy of worship. For Roth, it is clearly brute *power* that evokes worship. The question is: is this what *should* evoke worship? To refer back to the point about revelation: is this kind of power worship consistent with the Christian claim that divinity is decisively revealed in Jesus? Roth finds my God too small to evoke worship; I find his too gross.[23]

Ultimately the only way that these other Christian theologians have "solved" the problem of evil is to deny that genuine evil exists – that no matter what happens, it will ultimately, somehow, turn out for the best.[24] But if this is the claim, it seems to go against our "hard core common sense" notions that evil is real, that some things really happen that do not ultimately make the world better, and that to deny this idea is only to verbally deny what we affirm in practice.[25] While the Process notion of divine power is often called a "weakened form of theism," the Process claim is that the traditional notion is simply incoherent, and that, as a logical impossibility, such an incoherent notion cannot be used as the standard to judge a coherent

one.[26]

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Hindu Karma and Rebirth

The first thing to note about karma theory is that it is not really intended as a "theodicy" in the sense of being an apology for God; the presupposition of an omnibenevolent, omnipotent deity is hardly a universal assumption in Hinduism.[27] In fact, Wendy Doniger argues that the greater part of Indian mythology chronicles antagonism between gods and men rather than beneficence.[28] Further, the gods themselves are not necessarily seen as the arbiters of justice – in many cases, the analogies used suggest that the Hindus regard the workings of karma as a natural and impersonal form of cosmic justice.[29]

However, the "problem of evil" need not be confined to such a specific theological formulation; it can also be regarded as simply the problem of explaining human suffering, an "existential rather than theological problem."[30] In this sense, the theory of karma clearly does serve as a purported solution to the problem of suffering.[31] Still, there are limitations – some deliberate – on what karma can explain:

> The karma theory is not usually put forward by its proponents as a complete and systematic explanation of human suffering. Rather, the karma theorist wishes to reflect   our ignorance in the face of the complexity of reality by offering only a sketchy account as to why humans suffer, one that is based on the unargued assumption that the universe   is ultimately just. At a number of important points, for example, the account is deliberately left vague or incomplete: few details, in particular, are provided on the inner workings or mechanics of the karmic process.[32]

Even with these limitations, the karma theory is often viewed as brilliant in its simplicity and straightforwardness.[33] All suffering can be explained through deeds performed in previous lives, so that there can be no arbitrary or meaningless suffering in the world, and ultimately no bad deed that will go unpunished.[34] Even so, this does not make Hindus completely fatalistic; the theory of karma is often combined with other beliefs that suggest that one *can*

escape karmic retribution – for instance, through devotion.[35]

The simplicity and neatness of karma theory may be what led Arthur Herman to assert that classical and medieval Indian philosophy did not show any particular concern about the problem of evil in any of its theological forms, and that concern was focused on a more practical level of "how do I escape evil?" rather than "who did this to me?"[36] After all, there was comparatively less agreement over the attributes of God than in western theism, and the gods themselves were often considered as bound by karma as anyone else.[37] Herman argues, in fact, that the doctrines of karma and rebirth were so fundamental to Indian thinking that they were as basic as logic and natural law.[38] Doniger would take issue with this statement in asserting that neither doctrine is quite so universal,[39] but it seems safe to say that they are fairly pervasive in the Indian consciousness. Yet even though karma seemingly explains some types of suffering that western theists have traditionally had trouble explaining (such as congenital illnesses[40]), the fact that it did not stop Indian attempts to solve the problem speaks to some of the problems which remain.[41]

For instance, Kaufman notes that the inability to remember the bad deeds of past lives leaves us unsure of exactly *why* we are being punished, thus failing to fulfill an important moral teaching function.[42] Yet Chadha and Trakakis rightly point out that we do not need to commit crimes to learn that murder is wrong or that rape is despicable; in concert with a faith in the ultimate justice of the universe, memories of our specific past deeds are not needed.[43] Instead, punishments serve as a general spur for re-doubling our efforts toward moral goodness.

Another argument – though not a particularly impressive one – is the problem of infinite regress. This is the idea that karma cannot explain the first wrong, the actual origin of suffering, and thus simply pushes the problem back into an unknowable obscurity.[44] The reason this objection is unimpressive is that it assumes a hard deterministic view of the universe, and a total lack of free will. Any evil may be explained by a past misdeed, "but the past misdeed itself need not be explained as the inevitable outcome of some event further in the past of one's life."[45]

> The free choices of an agent may be influenced by the agent's internal state of mind and their external environment, but these do not determine the choices the agent freely makes. Therefore, no matter how many antecedent causal conditions one isolates, these will not suffice to explain why the agent chose to go one way rather than another way.[46]

Kaufman also criticizes karma's lack of ability to explain what he calls the paradigmatic case of innocent suffering: death itself.[47] But this is a difficult claim to make stick, since death is usually not regarded as intrinsically evil in Hinduism.[48] More often death in Hinduism is closely related to – or even identified with – the concept of time, without which the world would become overburdened.[49] The point, in any case, is that death for the Hindus is more often an intrinsic truth than an arbitrary evil.

Finally, one might argue that without the idea of a one-shot life, leading to either heaven or hell, karma theory may lead to

moral complacency, since all mistakes can be rectified in future lives.[50]

Beyond the rejoinder that it seems just as likely to remove anxiety and stress as to breed moral complacency, Chadha and Trakakis point out that Christianity is hardly better in this regard, for the view is becoming more and more prevalent that hell may not actually exist, and that really all people are saved.[51]

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Comparing Process Theodicy and Karma Theory

Despite arising in wildly different cultural situations, Process theodicy and karma theory share a number of striking similarities. One such similarity – which is applicable beyond merely the problem of evil – is a rejection of the traditional western notion of creation *ex nihilo*.[52] As Herman notes, this assumption gets western theists such as Augustine and Leibniz into trouble;[53] after all, how can a perfect creator create an imperfect universe? This rejection of creation *ex nihilo* speaks to both the Process and Indian skepticism regarding both the supposed "omnipotence" of God and the mere contingency of "the world" as such.

Another similarity is the ability of both theories to explain the suffering of superhumans, humans, and subhumans, by extending the "soul theory" throughout all three realms.[54] Their theories of soul themselves are different, to be sure – Hinduism allows the possibility of the same soul occupying both humans and animals, for instance, while Process views "souls" as a purely natural phenomenon, the decision-making power of an individual. Yet both theories recognize a wider variety of beings as being "ensouled" than is usually the case in traditional western theism.

One feature of Process theism that is decidedly different from the idea of Hindu rebirth is that it holds the concept of both an afterlife and/or rebirth as an essential part of a theodicy to be a fundamental weakness, due to its sheer unbelievability.[55] It is true that the concept is not empirically verifiable or falsifiable, and many people in the western world have recently found the concept of an afterlife to be incredible. Yet Process thinkers are not unified on this front – Hartshorne has come out as unambiguously critical of subjective immortality, but Whitehead, Griffin, and John Cobb have stated that they remain largely neutral in this regard. Still, the idea is that a theodicy should not need to *rely* upon a theory of post-mortem rewards and punishments in order to be effective.

Part of this protest by Process thinkers has to do with the very nature of rewards and punishments. Herman notes that under karma theory, "there is no (moral) pure chance that can befall man in the sense that some evil acts will go unpunished or some good acts unrewarded."[56] Yet Hartshorne in particular finds the very concept of punishments or rewards for good and bad deeds to be repugnant, calling the idea of heaven and hell "the most disgusting morality every conceived."[57] For Hartshorne, human dignity itself is undercut by the idea that we are good or bad for fear of some divine or karmic retribution, or because we hope for some reward. "Unless being loving is its own reward," Hartshorne insists, "it is not really loving."[58]

Another contrast is what the two theories expect of God. For Process thinkers, the expectation is that God serves as the trustworthy hope in the triumph of good over evil.[59] In Hinduism, however, the opposite is quite often the case. Doniger notes that the Gods are often conceived as having created evil in order that men would rely upon them for protection, and that the antagonism between Gods and men "underlies the major corpus of Indian mythology."[60] However, the contrast is slightly more difficult when one considers assertions that Indians believe karma to be the instrument of some type of "impersonal justice" of the universe itself.[61] Both theories clearly hold out some hope for a better world.

But probably the most interesting and fruitful point of comparison between these two theodicies is the idea of evil as a metaphysical necessity, a claim which Herman says is often made by Indian philosophers.[62] The comparison with Process here is obvious, since Process theodicy holds that the possibility of evil is necessary in order to create truly

free individual creatures. The whole discussion gets even more interesting given Doniger's statements that little distinction is made in Indian mythology between the idea that the gods creates evil willingly or unwillingly; the universe just *does* contain evil – it is both what *is* and what *ought* to be.[63]   Consider the following statement:

> Both of the ideas contrasted here (that God creates evil of necessity, and that he creates it willingly) may, together, be in turn contrasted with the belief that God is not responsible for the origin of evil at all, a concept that occurs far less often in Hinduism. The first of the original pair is more prevalent than the second, but Hindus frequently and facilely combine it with the second: *because God recognizes that evil is necessary, he willingly creates it.*[64]

Taking the Process account into consideration, the "facile" combination of willingness and necessity may not be so facile as it appears. In the Process view, God could theoretically have created no free creatures at all, but this would have led to a total lack of value to the universe. But when God did begin to create free beings, the possibility of evil was a necessary element. In this case, Process theists and Hindus alike can claim both that God created evil willingly (in the sense that the creation of free creatures itself was not required), and necessarily (in the sense that the possibility for evil is a necessary part of any free creature).[65]

The Hindu idea that evil is simply a fact about the way things are is reinforced by the fact that the gods themselves are often seen as beholden to karma.[66]   In this sense good and evil are somehow above the control of even the gods themselves – evil is simply a brute fact about the way things are.[67]   The only real difference that might be considered significant between Hinduism and Process in this regard is the idea of evil as a positive, dynamic force.[68]   Process would assert that evil is bad by its very definition, but that only the *possibility* for evil can be considered a good, being a necessary factor for freedom. But this may reflect simple philosophical imprecision – it seems evident enough that, at least on a subconscious level,

Hindus value evil for the same reason that Process does: it is a necessary element of the good.

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CONCLUSIONS ~ IS EITHER THEORY AN ADEQUATE SOLUTION?

If it is not already evident by now, I believe both Process theodicy and Hindu karma theory to be adequate philosophical solutions to the problem of evil. Both have been heavily criticized on many fronts, but I believe all such criticisms are ultimately answerable; both are philosophically tight solutions that follow quite naturally from their premises, as long as one is willing to accept those premises. However, it has been noted that the theological/cognitive aspect of the problem of evil is not the only one; there is also the emotional/psychological aspect.[69]   And I believe that on a psychological level, both theories ultimately fail, or at least leave their adherents with serious doubts.

In the case of karma theory, Doniger has noted that the simple fact that the Hindus told so many different myths about evil, and suggested so many possible solutions, speaks to the difficulty they experienced in trying to solve the problem, and that no theory – including karma – was ultimately satisfactory.[70]   For one thing, karma provides no guide for what one can expect in the future: "anything could happen to me; sudden changes or alternations of fortune are to be expected, for my present existence is determined by past *karma* regarding which I know nothing".[71]   It is also unlikely to be a comfort in the extreme case of the death of child – "God can't help it," or "It's just the way things are" is not likely to provide much comfort to grieving parents.[72]   And Kaufman's criticism of the "proportionality problem" strikes the theory with full force: "It is certainly hard to stomach the notion that the inmates of Auschwitz and Buchenwald did

something so evil in the past that they merely got what was coming to them – but the rebirth theory is committed to just this position."[73]

Process does not do any better. For one, it generally denies that personal immortality is even possible, making the prospect of death all the more frightening. It does hold that we become "objectively immortal" in the mind of God, in the sense that our experiences are eternally cherished by a loving God, much in the way we cherish a book whose last page has been completed – but Griffin rightly doubts that this will provide much comfort to the majority of persons.[74] Further, we find much of our meaning in our contribution to other people. Once again, in the case of the death of a child, the parents are far more likely to be comforted by the idea that their child will go on to have some other kind of experience, rather than have his infant experiences merely "cherished eternally by God."[75] Moreover, the notion that God can never directly intervene on our behalf – however philosophically valid it may be – can certainly be a depressing one for those who have an ultimately pessimistic view about the prospect of humans eradicating evil on their own.

Perhaps the key difference in the psychological regard is that Hinduism allows one to blame malevolent deities, while Process theism provides a fully loving and sympathetic God who suffers with us. The one provides a scapegoat, the other a companion – neither is better or worse, they are simply different approaches to answering a question that is ultimately, psychologically unanswerable. Both theories have great merit, and should not be casually dismissed, but the truth is that there can never be a rational answer to an irrational question. As the Hindus say, evil *is*.

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[1] Wendy Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 376.

[2] Ibid, 4.

[3] Charles Hartshorne, "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," in *Current Philosophical Issues: Essays in Honor of Curt John Ducasse*, ed. Frederick Dommeyer (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1966), 202-3.

[4] Ibid, 204.

[55] Ibid, 211.

[6] David Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen Davis (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 127.

[7] David Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 267.

[8] Ibid, 265.

[9] Ibid, 9.

[10] Ibid, 6.

[11] Ibid, 276.

[12] Ibid, 8; see also David Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 25.

[13] Arthur Herman asserts the following in his book *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*: "The not all-powerful solution does not solve T.P.E. [The Problem of Evil] and for the simple reason that it refuses to play the T.P.E. game according to the rules laid down for that game. It patently refuses to recognize the rules

which establish the theological theses… On these grounds alone the not all-powerful solution should be rejected. Thus our three criteria cannot even be applied to test out an attempted solution, for what we have before us is really a spurious solution to T.P.E. and not a *bona fide* solution" (128). In effect, Herman is dismissing the solution by asserting the inviolability of one of the premises. Of course, this argument is really a non-argument. To dismiss a solution to the problem of evil because it rejects one of the premises is a totally illegitimate dismissal, for in some cases an attack of the premises is the only reasonable way to attack the conclusion – sometimes if an argument does not seem to make sense, or seems paradoxical, it is because it in fact *does not* make sense, and *is* paradoxical. Herman can perhaps be excused on the grounds that he is trying to wrestle with the problem on the grounds that most Christians have wrestled with it, but rejecting an argument based on the supposed inviolability of the premises remains a poor philosophical practice.

[14] Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 268-9.
[15] Ibid, 269.
[16] Ibid, 292.
[17] Ibid, 294.
[18] Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," 110.
[19] Ibid, 120.
[20] Ibid, 124.
[21] Ibid, 132.
[22] Ibid, 132.
[23] Ibid, 135.
[24] Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 253.
[25] Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," 129.
[26] Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 272.
[27] Whitley Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," *Philosophy East and West* 55 (2005): 17.
[28] Wendy Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 56.
[29] Monima Chadha and Nick Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil: A Response to Kaufman," *Philosophy East and West* 57 (2007): 538-9.
[30] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 2.
[31] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 17.
[32] Chadha and Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil," 534.
[33] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 18.
[34] Ursula Sharma, "Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma," *Man* 8 (1973): 351.
[35] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 2; also Sharma, "Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma," 351.
[36] Arthur Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000), 235.
[37] Ibid, 236-7.
[38] Ibid, 237-8.
[39] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 4.
[40] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 19.
[41] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 3.
[42] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 19.
[43] Chadha and Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil," 536.
[44] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 22; also

Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 17.
[45] Chadha and Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil," 541.
[46] Ibid, 541.
[47] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 24.
[48] Chadha and Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil," 539. Kaufman responds to this statement with the following rejoinder: "If death is unequivocally not an evil, then why should killing be considered a moral wrong?" A more specious and insulting argument can hardly be imagined. There is a rather large difference between viewing death as a natural process and viewing murder as morally acceptable. See Whitley Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil: A Reply to Critics," *Philosophy East and West* 57 (2007): 558.
[49] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 212.
[50] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 24.
[51] Chadha and Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil," 545.
[52] Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," 101.
[53] Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, 273.
[54] Ibid, 288.
[55] Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, 17.
[56] Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, 290.
[57] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 97.
[58] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 99.
[59] Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 10.
[60] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 55-6.
[61] Chadha and Trakakis, "Karma and the Problem of Evil," 538-9.
[62] Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, 248.
[63] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 46.
[64] Ibid, 47. Italics mine.
[65] It should be noted, however, that for Process philosophy God is not regarded as independent from the world; rather, the two require each other. In this sense it is difficult to assert that God "willingly created evil" in the strictest sense, since for Process philosophy "it is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God." However, it certainly *is* true that for Process thinkers God willingly creates greater freedom than is metaphysically necessary, and in doing so willingly creates the capacity for greater evil. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 348.
[66] Ibid, 17.
[67] Roy Perrett, "Karma and the Problem of Suffering," *Sophia* 24 (1985): 7.
[68] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 47.
[69] Sharma, "Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma," 348.

[70] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 376.
[71] Sharma, "Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma," 349.
[72] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 5.
[73] Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," 21.
[74] Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, 36.
[75] Ibid, 37.

Kaira Schachter

"No Magic, No Mystery: A Critique of Chapter Two of the Dalai Lama's Ethics for the New Millennium"

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In *Ethics for the New Millennium,* His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents what he suggests are universal principles for ethics. He describes a "spiritual revolution" which, he claims, transcends the boundaries between traditional religions and appeals to universal human nature and aspirations. He wants "to show that there are indeed some universal principles which could help everyone to achieve the happiness we all aspire to."[1] While espousing religious pluralism, he makes frequent reference to Tibetan Buddhism. This paper will examine Chapter Two, "No Magic, No Mystery," wherein he lays out his basic argument about ethics being universal and religions and people being essentially similar. I will argue that he makes use of a wide array of rhetorical moves in describing and advocating a particular form of Buddhist modernism, moves that are particularly appropriate given his target audience. Moreover, the philosophy he espouses here is particularly well-suited to that audience.

Francese Parcerisas, contemporary theorist of translation, makes an interesting and very useful distinction about linguistic, and cultural, translation. Discussing translation of Native American poetry into English, he states that rather than "Anglicizing" the original text, translators should aim to "Navajoize" their readers. In other words, there are two approaches to translation. One is to translate, paraphrase, and explain the original text, idea, or cultural assumption in such a way that the reader can easily understand in terms of her own language and culture. This is "Anglicizing," in which a text from a usually subaltern, colonized, "exotic," or third world culture is translated into the language of the empire, first world, modern, or presumed-normative culture. "Navajoizing" does nearly the opposite. While translating words into the target language, it shows the

reader how different the source culture and its assumptions are. This could have the effect of alienating the reader, or of opening up new understandings.[2] I find this distinction very applicable here, since the Dalai Lama clearly opts for "Anglicizing." This will be a consistent motif in the interpretations which follow.

Since he presumably considers himself the political head of the Tibetan government-in-exile, I assume that the Dalai Lama has larger political aims in mind. While this book doesn't deal explicitly with the political situation in Tibet, one of the aims of his published work is to garner political support for independence. Also, since he is a lama and the head of a particular school of Tibetan Buddhism, I assume that he is, to some degree and perhaps unconsciously, religiously biased. There is not much textual evidence for these assumptions here, although there are some hints, which I will discuss. To prove my assumptions, one would perhaps need to look at all the Dalai Lama's writings and talks, as well as biographies. I am on firmer ground with my third assumption, which is that this book is targeted for a Western audience. The preface acknowledges a translator and a redactor.[3] *Ethics* was a best-seller in the U.S. There are strong indications, discussed below, that the intended reader is, more specifically, a somewhat liberal, educated American who is disillusioned with orthodox Christianity.

The primary philosophical move in *Ethics* is an attempt to describe and prescribe a universal principle of ethics. In doing this, the Dalai Lama distinguishes between religion and spirituality. This is a good example of appealing to the segment of the U.S. population that is disillusioned and frustrated with established, dogmatic Christianity. The rhetoric of "spiritual, but not religious" is well-established with this demographic of eclectic seekers. I will quote this

key passage at length.

> Actually, I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality….Connected with this are religious teachings of dogma, ritual, prayer and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring happiness to both self and others….There is thus no reason why the individual should not develop [these inner qualities]….without recourse to any religious or metaphysical belief system. This is why I sometimes say that religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we cannot do without are these basic spiritual qualities.[4]

Having thus divided the essential from the inessential in terms of ethics, he is free to claim that all religions are essentially the same. "If we consider the world's major religions from the widest perspective, we find that they are all…directed toward helping humans beings achieve lasting happiness. And each of them is…capable of facilitating this."[5]   In fact, even non-believers are capable of ethical concern and behavior.[6] He calls for a "spiritual revolution" consisting in a "radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self."[7] This is to be replaced with *shen pen kyi sem* (roughly, compassionate loving kindness).

The key to acting lovingly is cultivation of *kun long*, which means intention, motivation, disposition, or the "overall state of heart and mind."[8]

So "the aim of spiritual and, therefore, ethical practice is to transform and perfect the individual's *kun long*."[9]

In making the religious/spiritual split, the author simply asserts three ideas that require much more argument and evidence. I believe all three assertions are, in fact, false. First, he argues that all religions are primarily and essentially concerned with ethics, and that doctrine, ritual, ecclesiastical structure, and mythology are all secondary and dispensable. I hold it self-evident that their beliefs, cosmological myths, and practices are held to be unique and important by most religious adherents. Moreover, the ethical underpinnings of different religions differ, and many are not universal in nature. Many have different rules of behavior when dealing with insiders and outsiders, for example. Nor is the quest for happiness or the avoidance of suffering primary to all religions—it may be obedience to a god or the proper performance of rituals. Second, he argues throughout that all humans are basically the same. Everyone desires happiness and the avoidance of suffering and, since human nature is essentially loving, we have a tendency to behave in ways that make others happy. But there are enormous differences in the way people from different times and cultures perceive and understand the world, themselves, and the aim of living. Third, he implicitly assumes that an ethically pure world would automatically lead to happiness. It is a hidden premise in his claim that happiness for all would result from people acting ethically. This assumption is not made explicit, but there is a lengthy discussion of the world's social problems and their root in uncompassionate behavior.[10]

This argument is based upon a misrepresentation of basic Buddhist teachings as traditionally understood. Traditionally, suffering is understood to be caused automatically by clinging to outcomes based on desires, ignorance, and aversions; it is integral with the samsaric cycle of dependent origination. This is the Second Noble Truth, common to all schools of Buddhism—suffering is *inherent* in the way the world and the mind are, not *dependent* on how others behave or on social conditions.

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One of the two major rhetorical moves the Dalai

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Lama consistently makes points to an implicit chauvinism. This supports my earlier claim that he is probably biased (understandably) in favor of Tibetan Buddhism due to his position. Although he writes in terms of universals and is arguing for universal ethical principles, Tibetan Buddhism is portrayed as being closest to those universals. One way he does this is by introducing Tibetan terms, such as *shen pen kyi sem*[11] and *kun long*.[12] I do not see this as an example of "Navajoizing," but rather as appealing to American fetishization of the exotic. It sounds novel to American ears, but the concepts they represent are surprisingly familiar, since he frames his explanation in terms already familiar to his audience. It is "Anglicizing" disguised as "Navajoizing." Closely linked to the hidden promotion of Tibetan Buddhism are implicit criticisms of the West and of Christianity. Chapter One is largely a critique of Western-style modernity. The marginalization of doctrine and ritual would probably be understood by his intended audience as a criticism of the Christian tradition. He argues that "we must find an ethics which avoids the extremes of crude absolutism on the one hand, and of trivial relativism on the other."[13] This could be seen as targeting Old Testament and conservative Christian morality on the one hand, and postmodernism on the other.

The second major rhetorical move is what I think of as His Holiness's personal touch. The Dalai Lama is surely aware of his iconic status in the West, and that his writings have a certain authority just because he is the author. There are frequent demonstrations of his humility. For example, "many have unrealistic expectations, supposing that I have healing powers or that I can give some sort of blessing. But I am only a human being."[14] I do not argue that these are examples of *false* humility. But they are included in the text, and given his stature, they would make him more likable and credible for the intended audience. Another thing that makes his writing seem more personal is the inclusion of details of his life and anecdotes. In themselves, these do not add to his argument, so they must serve another function. This strategy is more noticeable in *The Universe in a Single Atom,*[15] but it is present here as well. Finally, he frequently resorts to "plain common sense."[16] This is evident in his easy assertion that he aims to speak

for the ordinary millions, the "silent majority."[17]

What generalizations can be made about the Dalai Lama's rhetorical strategies in *Ethics for the New Millennium*? Is he translating Buddhism for Western readers, or describing something universal? Both, I think.

For the Dalai Lama, the presumed ethical core of Tibetan Buddhism *is* essentially universal.

In making this case, in describing this core, he uses language palatable to his intended American audience. He uses different means of this project of "Anglicization." Primarily, it is cultural translation—describing Tibetan Buddhism in terms contemporary Americans will understand. The basis of this cultural translation is his project of spiritual revolution based on a presumed ethical essence to all religions and the similarity of all humans. To accomplish this, he appropriates aspects of his religion very selectively. He stresses the ethical teachings of the tradition, and hardly mentions meditation, monastic life, rituals, cosmological myths. Also, in some instances, there are undeniable misrepresentations that help make his case for universal ethics. For example, he denies that he can heal or bless,[18] when in fact those are traditional functions of a lama, who is understood to be an avatar of Avalokiteśvara. The very title of the chapter, "No Magic, No Mystery," is misleading as to what Tibetan Buddhism is like.

Ethics for a New Millennium, far from being representative of traditional Tibetan Buddhism, is an example of Buddhist modernism. What makes it an example of Buddhist *modernism?* To begin with, obviously, it is written by an Asian describing an Asian religion to the West. He appeals to several modern ideas such as religious pluralism and human rights. Also modern is the quest for rational, non-religious, universal principles that avoid the extremes of absolutism and relativity. Although the author

would probably dislike the term, there are definite similarities to his program and "civil religion," another modern idea. Finally, and most significantly, is his appeal to, and consistency with, modern science. In *The Universe in a Single Atom,* he sometimes questions the philosophical assumptions of, and limitations of, science, but he never challenges the methodology or findings. Therefore, his discussion of Tibetan Buddhism and religion generally is shorn of all metaphysics and superstition.

I conclude by reiterating my main point. In the chapter under consideration, the Dalai Lama opts for a strategy of cultural translation by "Anglicization." He does not risk alienating his audience by making Tibetan Buddhism seem too unfamiliar or challenging, or by trying to stretch their minds into appreciating it. Both his philosophical program of universal ethics and his various rhetorical moves are geared toward being easily understood and appreciated by his American audience.

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[3] Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*, xiv.

[4] Ibid., 22.

[5] Ibid., 20.

[6] Ibid., 26.

[7] Ibid., 23.

[8] Ibid., 30.

[9] Ibid., 32.

[10] Ibid., 24-27.

[11] Ibid., 23.

[12] Ibid., 30.

[13] Ibid., 28.

[14] Ibid., 4.

[15] Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Fourteenth. *The Universe in a Single Atom.* New York: Morgan Road, 2005.

[16] Ibid., 28.

[17] Ibid., xiii.

[18] Ibid., 4.

"Jump at De Sun! A reading of Ruth alongside a womanist reading of Zora Neale Hurston"

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This reading of the character of Ruth is indebted to womanist readings, specifically the work of Katie Geneva Cannon.[1] Working in the field of ethics, Cannon has identified virtues for African American women as illustrated by the life of Zora Neale Hurston. Cannon describes Hurston's example as a "prophetic paradigm" because she survived and resisted white supremacy, male superiority, and economic poverty.[2] Operating from within and in spite of systemic oppression, Hurston thus provides a unique model of virtue. Cannon writes:

> What Hurston makes clear is that it is the quality of steadfastness, akin to fortitude, in the face of formidable oppression that serves as the most conspicuous feature in the construction of Black women's ethics…Hurston portrays this moral quality of life not as an ideal to be fulfilled but as a balance of complexities so that suffering will not overwhelm and endurance is possible.[3]

My reading of the Book of Ruth lifts up the title character in a similar way to which Cannon understands Hurston. Ruth was a Moabite widow in a foreign land and suffered gender, race, and class persecution like Hurston. Ruth's intelligence, cunning, and guile were the primary tools she employed, and yet, both Christians and Jews remember her story as another testimony that suffering will not overwhelm and endurance is possible.

This essay is laid out in three parts. First, I highlight Ruth's "clinging" (dabaq) as one of her virtues. Specifically, Ruth's clinging is her own conscious volition as one suffering under external factors and systemic oppression in order to survive. Then, I read Ruth's initial relationship with Boaz as an example of Ruth's pragmatic personality. She is able to use her contact with a person of privilege for her own protection. Finally, Ruth's engagement with Boaz on the threshing floor at night moves beyond

pragmatism and represents a remarkable risk. Borrowing a phrase from Zora Neale Hurston's mother, I contend that Ruth's "jump at de sun" is her cunning response to Boaz, which transforms a dangerous situation into a lasting bond of protection. While conceding an important caveat, I then conclude that Ruth's story, as found in Hebrew scripture, is a depiction of a God who cares for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed.

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Clinging to survival as a prophetic paradigm

The Hebrew verb, dabaq, occurs in over fifty other places in the Hebrew Bible and describes a rich array of relationships: the action between a hand and a sword in 2 Samuel 23:10, the attachment of the tongue to the roof of the mouth in Lamentations 4:4, even the folds of a crocodile's belly in Job 41:15.[4] Amy-Jill Levine has noted that the term echoes the ideal marriage relationship in Genesis 2:24.[5] In addition to its diverse physical references, dabaq can function as a metaphor for the close relationship between a husband and a wife. In the Book of Ruth, "clinging" carries a literal and a metaphorical connotation. This loaded nuance owes its gravitas to the sinister forces outlined below that frame Ruth's life.

In the pivotal scene of the opening chapter of Ruth, dabaq is used to describe Ruth's clinging to her mother-in-law, Naomi. As Cannon reminds us, we need to seek "a concrete frame of reference" for understanding characters as moral agents.[6] Therefore, it is necessary to consider the events preceding Ruth's clinging to Naomi. A famine is the driving force of the plot in the Book of Ruth, as it causes the movement from Bethlehem to the fields of Moab. (1:1) After the death of her husband and two sons, Naomi turns to travel back to Bethlehem, literally "the city of bread", because she heard that Yahweh had

remembered the people in order to give them "bread." (1:6) This Hebrew wordplay is full of irony and cues the reader that the search for bread impacts the entire narrative. Fundamentally, this is a story about seeking food in order to survive in a hostile environment.

Our introduction to Ruth comes amidst this backdrop of hunger and migration. It is only through this lens of survival that we can properly consider the scene of her clinging to Naomi. (1:8 – 18) On the heels of the death of all three of their husbands, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their own land while she travels back to Judah. Initially, both of them protest by loudly weeping and refusing to go away. Naomi presses her case, insisting that she is too old to bear sons and thereby provide for their livelihood. Quite logically, the other daughter-in-law, Orpah, kisses Naomi and obeys her command. But Ruth clings to Naomi.

Naomi reiterates that Ruth should return with her sister-in-law to her people and her God. Yet, Naomi must know that her proposal involves risk.

Marriage in the ancient world was an outright financial transaction.

While we are not given information about Ruth's family of origin, it is entirely logical to assume that they would have refused her. As a widow, she represents an additional financial burden on a family system already depressed by the famine. Accordingly, some scholars question the motivation of Naomi's words to her daughters-in-law.[7] It is quite possible she is primarily concerned with her own survival, as some suggest: "At the heart of Naomi's speech is Naomi."[8]

But, if Naomi's motives were sinister, why would Ruth cling to her and utter the famous pleas of loyalty (1:16 – 17)? By way of answering, consider Cannon's characterization of Hurston:

> Hurston's life serves as a prophetic paradigm for understanding the modes of behavior and courses of action that are passed from generation to

generation by the most oppressed segments of the Black population…(Hurston) understood suffering was not a moral norm or as a desirable ethical quality…Virtue is not in the experiencing of suffering, nor in the survival techniques for enduring. Rather, the quality of moral good is that which allows Black people to maintain a feistiness about life that nobody can wipe out.[9]

I view Ruth as a similar "prophetic paradigm" for marginalized women. She too faces a dire situation. In our scene in question, this Moabite woman is between the proverbial rock and a hard place: return to her family (who might not accept her) or remain with her mother-in-law (who could not easily provide for her and might be singularly concerned for herself). The looming threat of famine amplifies this bleak situation. As hard as it was to survive as a widow in the ancient world, it was presumably even harder during times that were difficult for all.

Despite the threat of imminent peril, Ruth is unambiguous and unwavering in her decision. The dabaq of Ruth will ultimately lead to her survival, but as Cannon points out, survival is not virtue in and of itself. Rather, like Hurston, Ruth showcases "a feistiness about life that nobody can wipe out." Regardless of our interpretation of Naomi's intentions, it is clear that Ruth's words and actions that constituted her clinging were more powerful and coercive. Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to come with her and she stopped speaking against her. (1:18) Ruth made up her mind and she changed Naomi's mind. Thus, she displays a feistiness that is also prophetic: she witnesses to the truth of the desperate situation yet speaks into existence a way forward: "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16, NRSV)

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Part II: A pragmatic personality who makes up her own rules

Ruth remains with her mother-in-law and accompanies her to Bethlehem. Our second episode to investigate begins with Ruth's own initiative to

glean food from the fields. (2:2) She is obviously willing to work within the modes of Israelite society that are available to her.[10] At the juncture of Ruth's initiative to glean the fields, we are introduced to the central male character, Boaz. Previously in the story, Boaz was introduced as a man in charge and in control. At the beginning of the chapter, he was introduced as, "A man abundant in wealth." (2:1) Upon first seeing Ruth, he asks a servant about the identity of this strange woman gleaning in his field. (2:5) Clearly, Boaz has considerable economic means in the form of land, crops, and servants. But, he is also portrayed as a decisive man, who wields cultural clout. Such people garner respect in the community, which relates to the multiple meanings of "wealth" (chayil) as "power" and "honor." Boaz interacts with Ruth from this dual role of economic privilege and social capital. The power dynamic between a land-owning man and a foreign widow gleaning in his fields could not be more pronounced. Yet, Boaz wields his power for good, offering Ruth a measure of safety. He tells her to "keep close" to his female servants. (2:8) Boaz clearly understands that she needs protection as a woman, a foreigner, and a widow.[11] But, this scenario involves more than a passive acceptance of Boaz's beneficence; Ruth exercises her own agency as well.

In order to understand this agency, I refer to a characterization of Zora Neale Hurston by Joyce O. Jenkins: "Hurston's personality was one carved out of a pragmatic philosophy of life, wherein she made up her own rules, refusing to be bound by what she ought to do and think."[12] Ruth acts with similar pragmatism. First, note the translation "keep close" to the servants; as in the pivotal scene of the opening chapter (1:14), Ruth acts with the same Hebrew term, dabaq which means "to cling, cleave, or keep close." As previously demonstrated, Ruth's clinging is not an act of helplessness, but an act of her feistiness and part of her prophetic paradigm. Accordingly, her response to Boaz's instruction is not submissive as it is often portrayed. She does fall on her face and bow before him (2:10), but, prior to embarking into fields, Ruth informed Naomi of her intention "to find grace in his eyes." (2:2) Ruth did not have in mind the specific person of Boaz. When she spoke her intent, she was referring to any male, well aware that finding favor in the eyes of man was a means towards

survival. Certainly, she was grateful that Boaz would offer her protection and a means of survival. But according to what she had previously said, securing this kind of response was exactly her plan.

We see further evidence of Ruth's pragmatism in the proceeding dialogue with Naomi. Ruth takes the grain she received from Boaz to Naomi and tells her mother-in-law all that happened to her, especially the favor she received. (2:19) Naomi praises Yahweh for steadfast love because Boaz is her kinsman. (2:20) Once again, we question Naomi's motives; why would she allow Ruth to put herself in harm's way without previously informing her of a potential protector?[13] However, Ruth seems unfazed and immediately discerns the implications of a relationship with Boaz: "This is why he said to me, 'You will keep close to the servants, who are mine, until they have completed the entire harvest.'" (2:21) Boaz's words are the first promise of security that Ruth has received in the entire narrative. So, it is no surprise when the narrator states that Ruth continues to cling to the female servants of Boaz until the end of the harvest. (2:23) By comprehending the value of keeping close to the other female servants, she is, as Jenkins noted in the above quotation, making up her own rules for her own benefit.

I found intriguing parallels to such pragmatic behavior in the life of Zora Neale Hurston. Cannon tells a story of Hurston's encounter with wealthy novelists, Fannie Hurst and Annie Nathan Meyer, at an Urban League dinner in 1925. From these encounters, Hurston was able to gain employment as Hurst's live-in secretary and chauffer and a full scholarship to Barnard College from Meyer.[14] Hurston was able to advance her career through her relationships with people of privilege. Ruth exhibits a similar pragmatic personality, as she too is able to provide for her own and Naomi's interests through the beneficence of other people.

Ruth's gleaning occurs from the beginning until the end of the harvest. (1:22; 2:23) The end of the harvest also marks the end of the possibility of gleaning as a viable means of procuring food. As Hurston worked odd jobs until she could pursue writing, Ruth will need to find a new means of securing sustenance.

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Part III: Jump at De Sun! She gets off the ground

At the beginning of Chapter 3, Naomi claims to be acting in the best interests of her daughter-in-law. Her plan for Ruth's future involves a visit to Boaz on the threshing floor at night. When he is full of food and drink, Naomi advises Ruth to "uncover his feet," and lie down next to him. (3:1 – 4) Ruth is to anoint herself with perfume, put on her best clothes, and present herself before a man presumably intoxicated. There is little doubt that this sexually charged plan is full of danger. In fact, Naomi's words are loaded double entendres, particularly "feet" (regelim) which are used as a euphemism for male genitalia elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[15] (Exodus 4:25; Isaiah 6:2; 7:20)

Many commentators focus on this scene in a variety of different ways. I, however, want to bring in another comparison to Hurston's life, specifically the advice of her mother, Lucy Ann Potts.[16] Potts was well aware of the dangers of growing up as a black woman in the segregated South amidst rape and lynching. Yet, Potts exhorted her daughter to "jump at de sun!" In doing so,

"We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground."[17]

Naomi and Ruth were related by marriage and not by blood as the case with Hurston and Potts. Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that Naomi had Ruth's best interests in mind based upon the doubts concerning Naomi's motives that have been raised previously in this essay. But, I nonetheless want to stress Ruth's agency: she saw an opportunity in Naomi's plan. This characterization does not make the plan less dangerous. Earlier, I noted that Cannon understands virtue, not as enduring suffering or even as survival techniques, but as a type of moral feistiness that is indicative of a prophetic paradigm. While Naomi's plan can certainly be critiqued, the principle point is that Ruth truly did "jump at de sun" and get off the ground. This famous scene on the threshing floor is another example of Ruth's agency

and part of her prophetic paradigm.

For Ruth does not follow Naomi's advice to the letter, despite her pledge to do so. (3:5) She follows the instructions to wait until Boaz is filled with food and drink before uncovering his feet and lying down. (3:6) However, the last piece of instruction Naomi gives is that Boaz will then declare what Ruth will do. (3:4) As the situation unfolds, however, it is Ruth who dictates Boaz's response. In fact, Ruth's actions illuminate another side of Boaz.

Up to this point in the narrative, Boaz has consistently been presented as the man in charge. Whether he was commanding servants or protecting Ruth by placing her among his female servants, he was fundamentally a man abundant in wealth. (2:1) But, in the middle of the night on the threshing floor, Boaz is actually afraid.[18] (3:8) Boaz's fearful response contradicts his normal modus operandi. By daylight in his fields, he asked his servant about Ruth: "To whom does this young woman belong?" (2:5) In the dark, scared awake, he only manages a most basic phrase, literally "Who you?" (3:9) Far from telling Ruth what to do, as Naomi had predicted, Boaz is frightened and at a loss.

At this point, Ruth is in imminent danger; Boaz's fear could have easily manifested itself in violence. But once again, she acts decisively and shrewdly: "I am Ruth, your maidservant! Spread out your garment wings over your maidservant because you are next-of-kin."[19] (3:9) Her response is perfect for the situation. She clearly identifies herself, thereby abating the fear of Boaz and putting herself out of immediate danger. Then, Ruth recalls a theological claim that Boaz himself used in their first encounter when he invoked the refuge under the God of Israel's wings. (2:12) On one level, the repetition of "wings" reminds Boaz of his own words, thereby instilling recognition and trust. Ruth reminds Boaz she had previously found favor in his eyes. These are important words for a man of stature to hear when startled in the darkness. But, in a deeper and more profound sense, Ruth the Moabite is able to connect herself to Yahweh of Israel.

This religious affiliation has concrete ethical injunctions.   While many commentators have interpreted the Book of Ruth through the law of levirate marriage, most have stopped short of crediting Ruth's actions for applying this statue to her own

situation.[20] But, as is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 25: 5 – 10, such commands to marry applied to Israelite women. The practice was intended to protect Israelite families and their property.[21] Under a strict legal interpretation, Boaz would not have been compelled to honor a foreign woman as his next-of-kin.   But, Ruth makes the connection clear by referencing God's wings, a well-known image of Divine protection. (Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4) In other words, she not only reminds Boaz of who he is, but she recalls the One in whom he believes and what this God commands.

The rest, as they say, is history. Boaz marries Ruth, securing the livelihood of Naomi as well, and Ruth gives birth to a son, Obed. This lineage will eventually lead to King David. (Ruth 4:17) Ruth is also mentioned by name in the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth. (Matthew 1:5) In terms of canonical attestation, Ruth's great jump at the sun on the threshing floor has certainly gotten her off the ground. From a Judeo-Christian standpoint, one might even say that it landed her among the stars.

Kaira Schachter

Conclusions:

Genealogical implications of canonical considerations aside, the theological implications of Ruth's example serve as evidence that the poor and marginalized do find refuge under the wings of God. This God is not an abstract deity nor far removed from the worshippers, but is incredibly close at hand, found in the determination and the daring of those who cling to survival, pragmatically assess situations towards their own survival, and are willing to take risks, to "jump at de sun."   As was noted, the key interpretation is that Ruth consistently acted of her own free will.   Despite dangerous and oppressive situations, she exercised agency.   The insights of the womanist approach affirm the actions of Ruth and ultimately lead to the conclusion that the Book of Ruth has a profound message of hope for those struggling to meet the basic necessities of life in adverse situations and oppressive contexts.

With this conclusion, however, it is necessary to acknowledge that crediting God with the positive results in Ruth's life is potentially a problematic and even dangerous correlation.   Well-intentioned readings can actually serve to hurt women, even as their proponents believe to be assisting the female cause. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld has convincingly proven this tragic reality.   She documents the experience of young girls in Thailand and the Philippines who were unwittingly sold into sexual slavery based upon the promise of male patronage as cited in the Boaz and Ruth model.[22] These women were exploited through the correlation that divine assistance was given through the money and influence of men. For victims that Sakenfeld encountered and undoubtedly countless more women worldwide, such interpretations end in misery, deprivation, and death.

Therefore, Sakenfeld calls for the end of the "fairy tale" image of the Book of Ruth.   Instead, she validates the struggle of the female characters through the narrative by understanding the role of the Divine in relation to human action: "The call for blessing invites God to act, but the work that brings change is very much the work of faithful persons…God is at work in us."[23]   In conjunction with Sakenfeld's reading of the Divine role with human agency, she is led to analyzing the role of Boaz.[24] This places her in line with commentators like John Calvin, who saw Boaz as nobly fulfilling his duty and thereby serving

as an agent of God's will in the world.[25] Accordingly, these interpretations emphasize the actions of Boaz at the gate as a fulfillment of a Divine plan. (4: 1 – 10)

Without refuting the importance of such public forums, the talk of men in the light of day must not outshine the covert actions of Ruth at night. As a Moabite woman, Ruth operated in the sphere of the threshing floor in which she could exercise influence despite considerable risk. Though she was forced creep away before the light of day so as to escape notice (3:14), Ruth's actions were not shameful. In accordance with the womanist reading of virtue, they are indicative of her quick, clever, and decisive thinking. She asserted herself in a way that could be heard and secured her viable future despite her marginalized status.

The key to preventing abuse of this interpretation, as Sakenfeld documents, is to reclaim the importance of the character of Ruth. Boaz himself claims that, "at the gate of my people, it is known that you are a woman of honor." (3:11) Remember that "honor" (chayil) was the same term initially used to identify Boaz as a man abundant in wealth, but in this case, no one would think of Ruth as financially rich. Instead, like Boaz,

> Ruth is a person who exhibits qualities of being in charge and in control. She is not a weak-willed woman, who is fortunate enough to find a man to rescue her.

In the eyes of the community, Ruth was already respected before her marriage to Boaz and she attained this social capital through her own actions largely by her own agency.

In conclusion, I want to briefly justify the rationale for such a womanist reading. In other words, why is it important to lift up the agency of Ruth? Why should anyone endeavor to frame virtue from the perspective of those marginalized by race, gender, and class? I begin by pointing to another significant early or proto-womanist thinker. In 1851, Sojourner Truth uttered these famous lines:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody every helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or give me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?[26]

I understand Truth to underscore the experience of double oppression of being black and being woman. She attacks the unfavorable notion that white women are weak and inferior, but not so as to negate any gender difference. Rather Truth upholds her womanhood ("Ain't I a woman?") in such a way that portrays her strength in her own right. Notice that she stresses her agency: she has labored in the fields, even beyond the ability of men. She is a woman but different from white women. Therefore, she demands that she be considered according to different categories ("Look at me! Look at my arm!"). Yes, Truth is a woman; but, as a black woman, she is virtuous in different ways than white women. In 1851, Truth was not advocating the same position as Elizabeth Cady Stanton so neither should we consider Ruth with the paradigms of behavior that are normalized in white women's culture.

I believe that this focus upon race, class, and gender provided by the womanist perspective clarifies the role of the character of Ruth in the following ways. While this essay does not assert that every woman in Ruth's position will achieve similar outcomes, the suggestion that Ruth is merely a benefactress of Boaz's charity is likewise akin to "fairy tale" outcomes that Sakenfeld highlights as dangerous and destructive interpretations. I do not accept interpretations that fail to credit Ruth as a moral agent in her own right. Aided in my interpretation of the biblical text by Katie Geneva Cannon's analysis of Zora Neale Hurston, I have sought to understand the feistiness of Ruth as indicative of a prophetic paradigm of her own agency.

Against the forces of systemic oppression, Ruth witnesses to a deity who provides refuge for those struggling to survive. But her story is not one of simple and pious acquiescence to any kind of Divine plan or providence.

For Ruth testifies that those victimized in these social struggles are not necessarily passive. They demonstrate their own agency in order to survive and, along the way, prove themselves to be people of remarkable virtue. The key, however, is that they may not appear to our privileged perspective as individuals defined by characteristics that we normally associate with virtue. But, this admitted cognitive dissonance should not excuse us from recognizing and appreciating the agency of the marginalized and oppressed. We all wait for the day in which injustices either by human or natural causes are obsolete and societies ensure that the basic necessities for life are met for every person. Until that day comes, we can all find inspiration in the feistiness of those who exhibit strength, fortitude, and indomitable will to live despite dangerous and death-dealing circumstances. Ruth is ample evidence that minority women have experienced racism, classism, and sexism across millennia. In a sense, Ruth asks modern interpreters, "Ain't I a woman?" The task, then, is to interpret the Book of Ruth in light of the virtuous battle for survival in the face of multiple factors of oppression. Only then can we understand Ruth as a moral agent who is representative of womanist virtue.

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[1] Dr. Cannon is currently the Annie Scales Rodgers Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. In the introduction to her work, she defines "womanism" according to Alice Walker's definition of "a black feminist or feminist of color." Walker further defines the terms through analogy: "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." (*Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*)

[2] Cannon, p. 91

[3] Cannon, p. 92

[4] Brown-Driver-Briggs, p. 179

[5] Amy-Jill Levine, "Ruth." *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition* eds. Carol Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, p. 86

[6] Cannon, p. 79

[7] Levine, p. 86. In fact, Levine is quite suspicious of Naomi throughout her commentary.

[8] Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "'A Son is Born to Naomi!' Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth." *Women in the Hebrew Bible* ed. Alice Back, p. 235

[9] Cannon, p. 91

[10] For the role of gleaning as the ancient equivalent to modern welfare, see Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Ruth and Naomi:

Economic Survival and Family Values." *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today*, pp. 27 – 48

[11] In noting the danger of a woman who is alone, Fewell and Gunn draw a comparison to Song of Songs 5:7 in which a woman is beaten by watchmen (p. 238).

[12] Cannon, p. 81

[13] Levine, p. 88

[14] Cannon, p. 81

[15] Frank S. Frick also believes that an audience familiar with the Hebrew narratives would quickly draw a comparison to the strategy of Lot's daughters, who got their father drunk in order to have sex with him in Genesis 19: 30 – 36 (*A Journey Through the Hebrew Scriptures*, p. 468 – 469)

[16] Granted, Naomi is Ruth's mother-in-law, but she does refer to Ruth as "my daughter" before giving her advice in this scene (3:1). Therefore, in addition to the claims I have already cited between the social location of Ruth and Hurston, I feel that a comparison is justified.

[17] Cannon, p. 79

[18] The Hebrew root for "startled awake" carries the connotation of fear and even terror (Brown-Driver-Briggs, p. 353)

[19] Levine points out that "cloak" is also an euphemism for male genitals and believes that the reference to "wings" continues the sexual subtext (87).

[20] "[The levirate marriage] law allowed an Israelite widow without heirs to mate with her deceased husband's brother to produce an heir. The custom was intended to preserve Israelite families and property (Bellis, p. 207)."

[21] For this point and its ramifications for the Book of Ruth as subversive literature, see Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 206 – 210. In contrast, Gale Yee holds that Ruth is a Jewish convert par excellence and thereby serves as propaganda to affirm the nation ("She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn." *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, pp. 45 – 65)

[22] Sakenfeld, p. 27 – 30

[23] Sakenfeld, p. 47

[24] Sakenfeld, p. 48

[25] John Calvin, *The Institutes*, 2.8.27

[26] As quoted in J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), p. 189 – 190.

Kaira Schachter.

'Abd Allāhi An-Naʿīm on the Islamic Theory of Abrogation (Naskh): Prospects for the Reformation of the Sharīʿah's Public Law Content"

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The overlap between the two stages of Mecca and Medina led to the gradual rather than an abrupt change in the content of the message. In the same way that the use of force was sanctioned in a gradual, progressive manner, sanction for non-compulsion and the use of peaceful means continued to appear in the Qur ān during the early Medina period. For example, verse 2:256, "there is no compulsion in religion, the right path has been determined and set aside from the wrong path," was revealed in the early Medina period. Nevertheless, the overwhelming impact of the Qur ān of Medina has been to sanction, if not to positively command, the use of varying degrees of coercion on non-Muslims to induce them to convert to Islam.[1]

The above passage from Abd Allahi Ahmed An-Na'īm's book *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* stems from a discussion on the use of force in the religious textual sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and traditions of the Prophet (the Sunna). Na'īm is alluding here to his belief that the message of the Qur'ān as it was revealed in Mecca undergoes a gradual transition in the Medina period, suggesting that the differences found in the revelation's two periods reflect what we may refer to as an 'epistemological break' in the Qur'ān's normative content. This claim is very central to Na'īm's thesis, as he argues that the Qur'ān's message throughout the Medina period reflects a far more restricted approach to morality when compared to what he describes as the universal appeal of its message in the Mecca period. Consequently, Na'īm contends that the message of the Qur'ān is prone to internal contradictions that have historically made the interpretation and application of its message to the prevailing social conditions a recurring challenge for Muslim jurists. As such, he argues that the exercise of *naskh*, the abrogation or

repealing of the rulings found in earlier revelations by later ones which are deemed to supersede them, has been a valuable tool to the early jurists in building a systematic and coherent body of Islamic law.

Na'īm's recurring theme throughout his book is that modern Shari'ah law, as it currently stands, is fundamentally at odds with the needs and dictates of contemporary international relations; if such a law were to be strictly applied in its current form, it would be in serious breach of the civil liberties and human rights of non-Muslims and women, posing immense difficulties for the successful modernization of Muslim societies. This is particularly so with regards to the field of public law under the Shari'ah and its incompatibility with the modern norms of international law and human rights. As such, Na'īm briefly surveys the historical efforts of Muslim intellectuals in their attempts to modernize Islamic law through the concept of independent legal reasoning (*ijtihād*), only to conclude that such reform is of no avail due to the Shari'ah's strict reliance upon clear and controversial texts in the Qur'ān and Sunna.

According to John Voll, three main themes of renewal-reform (*tajdīd-islaḥ*), have been identified in the major eras of pre-modern and modern Islamic history.[2] These are as follows: i) a return to a strict application of the Qur'ān and; ii) the right to exercise *ijtihād* rather than *taqlīd* (the strict following of an established juristic school of thought); and iii) the reaffirmation of the authenticity and uniqueness of the Qur'ānic experience. In either case, historical attempts at reform have tended to reject any foreign influences. As Na'īm explains with the view of Ustadh Mahmoud Taha Ahmad, "*ijtihād*, to be legitimate, is to be solely an interpretive effort rather than an effort to supplement an already complete guidance framework [of the Qur'ān and Sunna]."[3] Thus, Na'īm suggests that even the more tolerant and dynamic Sufi mode has been traditionally somewhat constrained due to its subordination to the strict

dictates of clear passages within the primary Islamic texts. He, therefore, concludes that all past attempts at *ijtihād* have been historically limited by this criterion.

Despite the clear criterion of subordinating the practice of *ijtihād* to the framework of the Qur'ān and Sunna, however, what is authentically 'Islamic' may not be so clearly delineated within these original sources. This is primarily due to the internal contradictions which Na'īm ascribes to the Qur'ān and Sunna:

> For example, whereas the earlier Qur'ān of the Mecca stage instructs the Prophet and his followers to practice peaceful persuasion and allow others freedom of choice in accepting or rejecting Islam, the Qur'ān and Sunna of the Medina stage clearly sanctioned, and even required under certain conditions, the use of force to compel the unbelievers either to embrace Islam or to suffer one of the options provided for under Shari'ah, which included death, enslavement, or some other unpleasant consequence.[4]

Consequently, as he suggests,

All attempts at reforming the Shari'ah's public law through the process of *ijtihād* are ultimately fruitless, as they are unambiguously founded upon clear and problematic passages from the Qur'ān and Sunna.

This perceived problem leaves Na'īm with a dilemma that he must resolve: Muslims must either apply the current body of Shari'ah law in its totality, including its concomitant disadvantages for the status

and rights of women and non-Muslims residing under the jurisdiction of Muslim states, or they are to completely abandon any idea of Islamic law, in favor of aggressively institutionalizing secular reforms aimed at meeting modern standards of democracy and international law. Given these two options, Na'īm concludes that neither is completely viable in the long-run; to ignore the application of Shari'ah law, although beneficial in terms of its human rights implications, is not a feasible option given the mounting "Islamic resurgence" in the Muslim world.[5] Furthermore, secular reforms are likely to be rejected as neo-colonialist impositions of Eurocentric values on the rest of the Muslim world.

Given the complexity of the challenges presented by this dilemma, there needs to be an 'Islamic' solution to the problem that successfully attempts to contain or circumvent the harmful effects of the controversial verses and prophetic traditions which Na'īm deems to be harmful to the field of public law. In light of these considerations, the same concept of abrogation (*naskh*) that has been traditionally used to solidify the Qur'ān's controversial treatment of non-Muslims under Muslim rule seems to also be an attractive option, albeit in a surprisingly novel form, for attaining the desirable end of Shari'ah reform.

As he explains:

> What makes the early process of *naskh* so final and conclusive? Why should modern Muslims be denied the opportunity to rethink the rationale and application of *naskh* so they can implement verses of the Qur'ān which have hitherto been deemed abrogated, thereby opening up new possibilities for developing alternative principles of Islamic public law?[6]

Na'īm, thus, expends a great deal of effort in exploring the concept of *naskh*. In particular, he is very much intrigued by Ustadh Mahmoud Taha Ahmad's views on *naskh* and his "evolutionary approach" to the Shari'ah. According to Ustadh Ahmad's argument, the message of the Qur'ān and Sunna was revealed in two levels or stages[7]: i) the earlier message of Mecca, which was the fundamental and true message of Islam, "emphasizing the inherent dignity of all human beings, regardless of gender, religious belief, race, and so forth"; and ii) the more practical and restricted message of Medina,

sanctioning the use of force against non-Muslims and distinguishing between the rights and duties of men and women. As Na'īm sees it, "both the substance and the message of Islam and the manner of its propagation during the Mecca period were predicated on *ismāḥ*, freedom of choice without any form or shade of compulsion or coercion", whereas this situation was later modified under the stricter revelations of the Medina period.

According to Ustadh Ahmad's evolutionary argument, when the superior message of Mecca was "irrationally rejected" by the pagans of Quraish, the more "practical" message of Medina needed to be implemented.[8] In order to understand this approach, an overview of the social context of the period is necessary. During the first 13 years of Islam (610 to 622 A.D.), the Prophet Muhammad preached his message through essentially peaceful means, as can be seen from verses such as 16:125, which commands the Prophet to approach the disbelievers in an enlightened and amicable manner, and verse 18:29 stating that those who choose to disbelieve ought to be allowed to do so, among other similar verses.
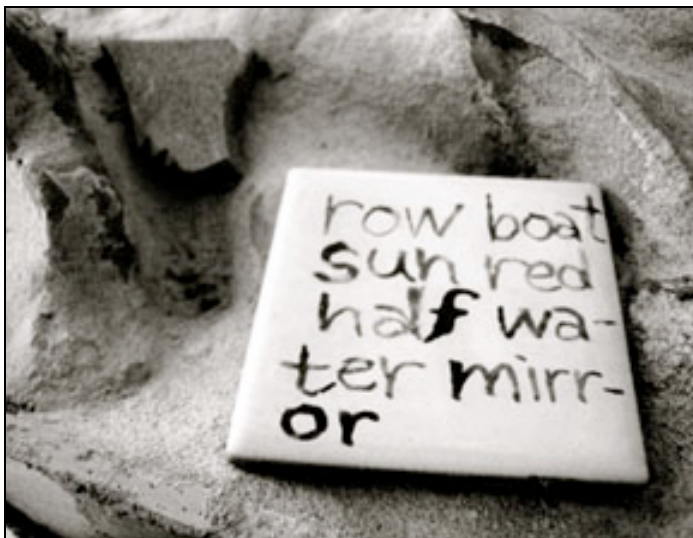
Alexis Glenn

Under this early period of Islam, the Prophet underwent heavy persecution, and the revolutionary nature of his universal message, which appealed to all the "children of Adam," was met with harsh resistance in favor of the Arabs' prevailing tribal and polytheistic customs.[9] However, following the *Hijra* of the Prophet and his Companions, the Muslim community's historic migration to Medina, Na'īm

suggests that the content of the Medina period gradually shifted to addressing the Muslims as a community of "believers," first in self-defense "and subsequently in propagating Islam and spreading the domain of the Muslim state."[10] According to Ustadh Ahmad, this shift in audience from "O humankind" in Mecca to "O believers" in Medina "was dictated by the violent and irrational rejection of the earlier message."[11]

Na'īm argues that it is this historical background that has led to the modern tension between the public law aspects of the Shari'ah and the norms of modern international law and human rights. The problem essentially arises from the fact that, currently, Islamic law is partially based on the abrogation of some early Meccan verses by later ones from the Medina period. As such, he is very supportive of Ustadh Ahmad's call for the need to reintroduce the concept of *naskh* in order to re-correct this unfortunate nullification of the more tolerant Meccan message. As Ustadh Ahmad suggests, the process of "reverse abrogation" is not only a rationally plausible option but an imperative one; the earlier Meccan verses cannot be left "inoperative for posterity" because "if that were the case, there would have been no point in having revealed the earlier texts." In short,

> the evolutionary principle of interpretation is nothing more than reversing the process of *naskh* or abrogation so that those texts which were abrogated in the past can be enacted into law now, with the consequent abrogation of texts that used to be enacted as Shari'ah...Since this proposal would found modern principles of public law on one class of Qur'ān and Sunna texts as opposed to another class of those texts, the resultant body of law would be as Islamic as the Shari'ah has been.[12]

Consequently, the suspended aspects of the Meccan message could not have been lost forever; they were simply postponed for their later implementation under the more sophisticated and tolerant society of our modern age. If the Meccan verses were to be completely nullified by the later verses of Medina, "the superior and eternal aspects of Islam would have been irredeemably lost."[13]

Na'īm's views on *naskh* in Islamic law are highly problematic for many reasons. To begin with, his opinion is based on the strict assumption that the

Qur'ān exhibits a clear epistemological break between its universal and tolerant content of Mecca versus the more restricted and practical message of Medina. This compartmentalization of the Qur'ān's normative principles into two distinct categories can be argued to be rather inaccurate as will be shown below. As will hopefully be proven in the proceeding arguments, the existence of such a sharp break in the Qur'ān's normative content is not only a debatable position, but it can be easily confused as such due to an inability to properly contextualize the significantly different social dynamics prevailing between the two periods of the Prophet's career. As a living book of moral guidance, the Qur'ān needed to constantly address the Muslim community's shifting concerns as it faced new and evolving challenges. Accordingly, the paper proceeds to comment on the Qur'ān's contents in question with this multi-dimensional perspective in mind, as opposed to the application of a single binary logic towards the entirety of the Qur'ānic text.

It is the contention of this paper that there remains significant space to interpret the later Medinan verses through the prism or lens of the ethical norms and standards established in the early Meccan period, suggesting, contrary to Na'īm's assertion, that the Qur'ān exists as a coherent moral code. This realization may not be so readily apparent due to the drastically different social settings and circumstances of revelation, the unique manner of its compilation, and the scattered nature of its injunctions, making any comprehensive analysis of its spirit a more difficult endeavor to pursue. As such, differences in the tone and content of the Medina period are attributable to the new challenges of forming an Islamic state and the need to confront a belligerent enemy determined to eradicate Islam's politically dangerous message of revolutionary social reform.

To bolster his argument, Na'īm devotes a large section of his book to a discussion of the Medina verses, which he argues have been rightly interpreted to abrogate or nullify the earlier emphasis on "non compulsion" found in the verses of Mecca. He argues that unlike the previous tolerance exhibited towards the disbelievers of Mecca, the Qur'ān of the Medina period emphasized the cohesion of the Muslim state and defined relationships with non-Muslims in mainly antagonistic and hostile terms, advising Muslims to not take them as friends or allies (*awliya'*).[14] He

proceeds to provide the following Medina verses as evidence of such problematic hostility towards non-Muslims: 3:28; 4:144; 8:72; 73; 9:23, 71; and 60:1.

Upon a closer analysis of the mentioned verses, one can well argue, however, that their overall thrust is a general warning to avoid befriending the enemies of Islam as allies over Muslims. These verses are clearly restricted towards groups that are hostile towards the message of Islam and its freedom to operate with dignity in an unhindered social environment. Verse 60:1, for example, is specifically in relation to those who persecute the Messenger and the believers for "their belief in God." Verse 9:23 is referring to maintaining an allegiance to parents who have joined the enemy camp of disbelievers. Interestingly, contrary to what may be implied here, this verse is by no means an injunction to shun one's disbelieving parents, as verses 29:8 and 31:14-15 of the Qur'ān﹐ explicitly exhort Muslims to continue their amicable relations with their disbelieving parents so long as they are able to maintain their faith in spite of their parents' protests. As for the remaining verses, 3:28, 4:144, and 8:72-73, once again, they primarily deal with allying one's self with the enemies of the Muslim community.

By failing to take the prevailing social context into consideration, one can easily misrepresent the verses in question.

To properly contextualize the Qur'ān's Medinan verses is, thus, to realize that their revelation took place during a period where Arabian society was undergoing a highly polarized ideological war over the future of the Arabian peninsula.

Under a tribal and communitarian society, where the group or tribe was the vital source of one's identity and belonging, to declare oneself a 'Muslim' was a radical departure that essentially entailed declaring one's opposition to the prevailing order and values of Arabian society. In such a politically charged social setting, a proclamation of belief would have arguably had far more threatening repercussions to the social fabric of society than it would, say, under the context of a pluralistic secular society that highly prizes the values of 'individualism' and 'freedom of religion.'[15]

To declare one's belief in the context of early Islamic society, therefore, was to immediately mark one's position under the enemy camp. Remarkably, despite these prevailing social dynamics of the period, the Qur'ān left room for exceptional cases, favoring to lean towards peace whenever the opportunity arose. A good example is the following Medinan verse which openly restrains the Muslims from fighting those disbelievers who pose no direct threat to the Muslim community:

> [4:90] Except those who arrive at a people with whom you have a (peace) treaty, or those who approach you with hearts that are reluctant to fight you or to fight their own people. If God had willed, He could have made them overpower you, and they would have fought you. Therefore, if they withdraw from you and choose not to fight you, while sending you guarantees of peace, then God gives you no right over them (to wage war against them).[16]

In addition to verse 4:90, verse 60:9 is even more emphatic in the permissibility of befriending disbelievers, while outlining which category is to be strictly considered as the enemy. As the verse declares:

> [60:9] God only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong.

Furthermore, verse 2:190-191 of the Medina period are also explicit in summarizing the conditions under which fighting is to be sanctioned:

> [2:190-191] Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not aggress; for God loves not the aggressors. And, evict them as they have evicted you; for surely, oppression is worse than killing . . .

If abrogation as a theory is assumed to be a faulty or unreliable medieval accretion, then such Qur'ānic verses, some of which are revealed in Medina, can be easily brought in to regulate all of the aforementioned verses on war that Na'īm finds to be troublesome.

A problem arises when Na'īm proceeds to list the following verses as sanctioning the use of force in the restricted sense of self-defense: 2:190-93; 22:39; 4:90; and 8:39, 61. Some of these verses have been quoted above for their placement of strict restrictions against the fighting of non-aggressing disbelievers. Here he argues, however, that these verses have been abrogated by the following Medina verses which sanction the use of force against disbelievers without qualification: 9: 5, 12, 13, 29, 36, 73, and 123. In particular, he singles out verse 9:5 as having abrogated "over a hundred preceding verses of the Qur'ān which instruct Muslims to use peaceful means and arguments to convince unbelievers to embrace Islam."[17] Furthermore, verse 9:29 is a clear verse sanctioning the use of violence against the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*). Such verses, he maintains, are clear and unambiguous references from the Qur'ān that Muslims ought to sincerely address if they are to achieve any genuine reform on the treatment of non-Muslims under Shari'ah law.

Once again, Na'īm exhibits remarkably poor skill in his ability to contextualize the verses in question. For example, he mentions 9:5 while failing to discuss the preceding verse 9:4 which establishes the purpose behind the sanctioned use of force in the verses to follow. Verse 9:4 commands the believers to preserve their peace treaty ('ahd) with the pagans who wish to do them no harm. Hence, the use of force in the following relevant verses is unambiguously directed towards the repelling of foreign aggression. As for verse 9:29, this is a reference to the People of the Book under Muslim rule. The verse states the following:

> [9:29] Fight those who believe not in God, nor in the Last Day, nor seek to forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, nor

acknowledge the religion of Truth, even if they are People of the Book, until they agree to pay the *jizya* and feel themselves subdued.

As the influential British academic Tim Winter (Abdal Hakīm Murād) suggests, the key term for 'subdued' in this verse (*ṣāghirūn*) is contested in meaning; according to the leading political theorist of classical Islam al-Māwardī, the term was simply taken to mean being 'subject to the laws of the Muslim government.'[18] The verse instructs non-Muslim minorities under Muslim rule to pay some form of tax or *jizya* in return for their protection and exemption from military service. Unlike Muslim subjects, non-Muslims (*dhimmis*) were exempted from the Islamic poor tax of Zakāt and were not obliged to fight in defense of the Muslim state. Furthermore, as Winter notes, the early Muslims (*salaf*) were quite their Christian Arab subjects from the *jizya* in cases where they were willing to fight.[19] Accordingly, given these recognized realities, it is surprising to note Na'īm failure to acknowledge that verse 9:29 by no means compels non-Muslim *dhimmis* to change their faith, and that they were historically provided with the freedom to develop their own beliefs and associated institutions in accordance with other verses guaranteeing freedom of religion (see verses 2:256, 88:22, and 109:1-6 among other such verses). Indeed, the Prophet's position is known to have been clearly stated in a hadīth narration, "Whoever harms a member of a *dhimma* community shall have me as his adversary on the Day of Resurrection."[20]

As has already been discussed, central to Na'īm's case for the use of *naskh* and the need to urgently reform modern Shari'ah law is the argument that the late Medina verses were used by the early jurists to abrogate preexisting verses that limited the use of force, thus establishing a permanent state of war between *dār al-Islām* (abode or territory of Islam) and *dār al-ḥarb* (abode of war). Peace treaties were only of a temporary nature lasting of no more than 10 years according to Shāfi'i. Furthermore, the purposes of such treaties were purely for strategic considerations: "to permit Muslims to resolve their internal differences or to prepare for the next round of fighting with the non-Muslims."[21]

Such an account as the above is highly simplistic and inaccurate for several reasons.

Contrary to the impression given by Na'īm, there was no consensus by the early jurists (*fuqaha'*) over the perpetual use of force against disbelievers.

In fact, quite the contrary, there was considerable diversity of opinion in existence amongst the established schools of jurisprudence on the topic. As AbūSulaymān confirms:

> Besides Abu Hanifah's favorable position toward peace, al-Sarakhsi puts forth the position of al Thawri, shared by many other juristic authorities...: "Fighting the idolators is not an obligation unless the initiative comes from them. Then, they must be fought in fulfillment of His (Allah's) clear instructions: 'If they fight you, kill them,' and His saying: 'And fight all the idolators as they fight you.'"[22]

AbūSulaymān also indicates that the strictly held view on the duration of a peace treaty as lasting 10 years was mostly restricted to the personal preference of Shafi'i:

> Ibn Qudamah and Ibn Rushd attributed to Malik, Abu Hanifah, and Ibn Hanbal (in one of several opinions attributed to him on the subject) the notion that the duration of a peace treaty could be unlimited depending on the interests of the Muslim state. This illustrates the diversity of among the jurists. In such matters, no one opinion could be singled out as representative of Islamic law.[23]

More importantly, the Qur'ān, as the primary source of Islamic injunctions, sets no restrictions on the use of peace treaties and their duration; it seems to leave such issues to the pragmatic dispensation of politicians.

From the preceding discussion, it can be

argued that the emphasis on *naskh* and its prominent role in the Shari'ah as evidence of its indispensable nature for the development of a coherent body of Islamic law tends to be quite problematic. To begin with, the historical validity of *naskh* as an authoritative Islamic practice that can be traced back to the earliest generation of Muslims, namely the Prophet and his Companions, is a highly debatable matter that is not without its share of controversy. As AbūSulaymān correctly observes, "Although jurists and scholars quote the Companions of the Prophet on the abrogation of this or that verse, they do not quote the Prophet himself specifying any verse abrogating any other verse."[24] In fact, even Na'īm himself has had to concur with this assessment of the historical facts as he states:

> Whereas the principle of *naskh*...had already appeared toward the end of the first century of Islam, its status and role during the earliest period are not clear. It seems, for example, that it had a limited sense for some of the Companions of the Prophet, who took the subsequent verse of the Qur'ān as creating an exception to, particularizing a meaning of, or clarifying the earlier verse rather than totally abrogating it. More significantly, it is clear that the theory of *naskh* as developed and applied by the jurists cannot go back to the Prophet because we do not find any information from the Prophet as to the existence of the abrogated verses in the Qur'ān in this sense.[25]

Also significant to note here is the presence of Qur'ānic verses which can arguably be used to preclude the possibility for abrogation such as verse 6:115 stressing that nothing shall "abrogate the words of God" and verse 4:82 insisting on the consistency of the Qur'ān's message and proclaiming the absence of any internal contradictions within it.

Another deficiency in Nai'īm's perspective on *naskh* is his lack of equal concern for the motives used by the early jurists in justifying its use. What if the concept was abused under a climate of political expediency as the domain of Muslim rule continued to expand? As AbūSulaymān seems to suggest, given the prevailing hostile political environment and regional developments of the time, the early jurists limited the interpretation of the Qur'ān on waging war or *jihad* by enforcing the principle of *naskh* through

verse 9:5 for politically expedient ends:

> Those [jurists] who stressed the aggressive nature of *jihad* could only do so by applying abrogation to a wide category of Qur'ānic verses. Instead of being concerned with reviving human consciousness for erecting an egalitarian society, this attitude reduced the Islamic mission to a kind of spiritual totalitarianism. Using abrogation in this manner has indeed narrowed the Qur'ānic experience.[26]

This view is also shared by the influential Muslim scholar and academic Muhammad Hashim Kamali. As Kamali points out, though the doctrine of abrogation remains a regular theme in many classical works of Qur'ānic exegesis, it has largely failed to gain a serious following amongst classical and modern jurists alike, owing in part to its controversial nature and to the extensive disagreements over its scope and application. Indeed, he suggests that there appears to be an emerging consensus amongst contemporary Muslim scholarship that is critically refuting this doctrine's problematic implications.[27]

One further problem posed by Na'īm's support for abrogation is the lack of a consistent methodology in its application and any reliable criteria for distinguishing the abrogating from the abrogated. By reintroducing this concept, there is potential for its abuse at the discretion of individual scholars and their personal legal opinions or proclivities, running the real danger of making a mockery of the entire enterprise of Quranic exegesis and tradition of Islamic jurisprudence. Indeed, as AbūSulaymān explains:

> Although they [the early jurists] give great importance to the definition of abrogation, even contemporary scholars pay no attention to the framework of abrogation. What we can deduce from their lengthy arguments is that their framework is static, that abrogation is the result of an act which occurred once in history, and that Muslims are trapped in a single position decided by an accident during a course of events that took place some time back in history.[28]

In addition, from a purely pragmatic and practical standpoint, it is highly questionable that re-introducing a form of 'reverse abrogation' would sit well with orthodox Muslims, as this modification of

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naskh is without precedence in the history of Islamic law and is, thus, quite alien to the Islamic tradition itself.

In conclusion, it can be seen that much of Naʾīm's work appears to be driven by a political agenda that is quite generalized and inaccurate in its assertions. Furthermore, much of his critique of the allegedly problematic Medina verses has been shown to lack an appreciation for social and historical context, thereby distorting their overall thrust and spirit. He, therefore, exerts an unworthy amount of energy on a topic of doubtful relevance to the successful reform of Shari'ah law. Not only is the theory of abrogation found to be historically based on spurious claims with no established precedence for its use originating from the Prophet of Islam, but this paper has also attempted to show that by allowing for a greater appreciation of context, this would be a sufficient mechanism for the successful harmonization of the allegedly 'belligerent' Medina verses with the more 'universal' and 'tolerant' principles established in Mecca.

Indeed, the topic of *naskh* could arguably be a step backwards for the project of Islamic law reform. As AbūSulaymān lucidly warns concerning the dangers of abrogation and its detrimental uses:

> Seeking to narrow the Islamic position to a purely defensive, peaceful and tolerant position, the liberal modernists found that the methodology of abrogation is not always helpful and is, in practice, at times a double-edged weapon. In fact, abrogation ends in conceptual confusion. We have to settle the issue of abrogation, especially the particular cases mentioned and discussed in the Qurʾān, and show the significance of the internal structure of the Qurʾān. Otherwise, the Qurʾān and, for that matter, all Islamic theology, and institutions will appear as no more than a traditional and outdated way of life.[29]

Perhaps of greater importance to the success of Naʾīm's project is the absence of any similar attention devoted to the field of traditional *ḥadīth* criticism and its relevance to the development and flexibility of Islamic law. He fails to study the potential for reassessing the relevance of the Sunna's content in light of its overall consistency with the Qurʾān or to critique its historic development and proper role within the Shari'ah. For example, no effort is made to study the prevailing social, sectarian, and political contexts under which various *ḥadīths* were propagated and defended. He therefore, fails to provide an informed opinion on the role and place of the prophetic narrations as the key repository of Islamic tradition in the overall body of Islamic law. Arguably, this would have been a more fruitful endeavor for Naʾīm to pursue, given his declared objective of seeking solutions to the challenge of Islamic reform that remain conceptually 'Islamic'.

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[1] ʿAbd Allāhi Ahmed An-Naʿīm, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990). Dr. Naʾīm is Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law at Emory Law School and the Director of the Fellowship Program in Islam and Human Rights. As a human rights activist and an internationally recognized scholar at Emory University, his views on Islam, democracy and human rights have generated significant discussion within academic circles and the public domain more generally, particularly following the publication of his latest book, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Harvard University Press, 2008). This essay is an attempt to critique his ideas on the reformation of Islamic public law through his novel attempt to reconstruct the classical theory of abrogation (*naskh*) in Islamic jurisprudence.

[2] Naʿīm 46-47.

[3] Naʿīm 47.

[4] Naʿīm 49.

[5] Naʿīm 58-59. The idea of a conservative or reactionary Islamist 'resurgence' throughout the Muslim world that is antithetical Western democratic values is a recurring theme found in many contemporary works on Islam. This generalization appears to be rather unsubstantiated empirically, however. As the largest study of its kind, a recent groundbreaking multiyear research study on Muslim perceptions conducted by Gallup World Poll concludes otherwise. With tens of thousands of interviews of residents from over 35 nations that are either predominantly Muslim or that have significant Muslim populations within them, the study suggests that while many Muslims continue to value the Sharī ʿah as a source of law and despite the high percentage of orthodox religious practice in many Muslim jurisdictions, a majority of Muslims continue to prefer constitutional democratic forms of governance that afford greater rights and religious freedoms to theocratic regimes. See John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Gallup Press, 2008).

[6] Naʿīm 59.

[7] Naʿīm 52.

[8] Naʿīm 52.

[9] Naʿīm 53-54.

[10] Naʿīm 54. While a detailed exposition of this historical narrative is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief mention is in order. Central to Naʿīm's thesis on *naskh* is a belligerent account of the early Muslim state in Medina, as Muhammad gradually began to expand and consolidate his political authority. This claim is rather unsubstantiated, however, as the 'spread of Islam by the sword' hypothesis has been largely discredited by several leading historians; see, for instance, Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (Gatway Editions, 1996) 59. More importantly, as Sherman Jackson cogently reminds us, apart from the exceptional instances where peace treaties were signed, a perpetual state of war between one's tribe and all others was assumed to exist as the day to day *modus vivendi* of pre-Islamic Arabia. With this in mind, he argues that

> 'far from the depicting of the early Muslims as a brave and warlike people, one of the most consistent Qurʾānic criticisms of them is directed at their unwillingness to fight . . . What the early Muslims had trouble accepting was not fighting in general (to which they were used to as anyone else in Arabia), but fighting that pit them against kith and kin. From the Qurʾān's perspective, however, this could not be done without lending support . . . to the very forces whose existence and way of life included an active ideological and military opposition to Muhammad. Thus, the Quran sets out to break the early Muslims' emotional, psychological, and even material dependency on the 'old order' by forcing them to affirm their commitment to Islam by way of willingness to fight in accordance with the existing norm – for the life and integrity of the new religion.' Sherman Jackson, "Jihad and the Modern World," *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 7:1 (2002): 10-13.

[11] Naʿīm 55.

[12] Naʿīm 56.

[13] Naʿīm 53.

[14] Naʿīm 144.

[15] This social dynamic, ignored by Naʿīm, is the inevitable result of introducing any revolutionary ideology to a communally conservative society. Given this reality and the incompatibility between the values of the new Islamic faith and the prevailing tribal beliefs of the time, it is not surprising to find that early on in Mecca, the Qurʾan attempts to offer a truce of mutual respect and acceptance to no avail. As Muhammad is exhorted to say:

> [109:1-6] Say: O you who disbelieve! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. Indeed, I will never come to worship that which you worship, nor will you come to worship what I worship. Thus, to you is your religion and to me is mine!

Along a similar line, see also verses 15:85 and 43:89 commanding the Prophet continue preaching his message to those who would hear it and to turn away from the polytheists with benign neglect.

[16] All references to Qurʾanic verses in this paper are my own translation, with consultation from the following popular translation: Abdullah Usuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran (*Amana Publications, 2004).

[17] Naʿīm 147. Despite the many clear verses on religious freedom interspersed throughout the Qurʾān, several pre-modern exegetes held that all such verses have been abrogated by verse 9:5, the so called 'Verse of the Sword' (*āyat al-sayf*), which according to the most embellished estimates has come to repeal over a hundred verses of the Qurʾān on religious freedom. For one such typical example, see the following pre-modern work of Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) by Abī Qāsim Ibn Juzay al-Kalbī (d. 471 AH), where he lists in his introduction no less than 114 verses advocating religious tolerance which are deemed to have been abrogated (*nusikhat*) by verses 2:117 and 9:5 : Abī Qāsim Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Juzay al-Kalbī, *al-Tashīl li ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad Sālim Hāshim, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- Ilmiyya, 1995).

[18] Abdal Ḥakīm Murād, "Qurʾānic Truth and the Meaning of 'Dhimma'", *Kalām Research & Media* (June 2010) 10, http://www.kalamresearch.com/component/content/article/43-quranic-truth-and-the-meaning-of-dhimma.html (accessed September 2010).

[19] Murād 17.

[20] Ḥadīth in the *Musnad* of Imam Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. Quoted in Murād 10.

[21] Naʿīm 150.

[22] ʿAbdulḤamīd A. AbūSulaymān, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993) 20-21.

[23] AbūSulaymān 23.

[24] AbūSulaymān 116.

[25] Naʿīm 57-58.

[26] AbūSulaymān 45.

[27] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Religion in Islam*

(Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society. 2007) 88. For other examples of modern works attempting to exhaustively refute the doctrine of *naskh*, see Aḥmad Ḥijāzī Saqqá, *Lā Naskh fī al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.); Israr Aḥmad Khan, *The Theory of Abrogation: A Critical Evaluation* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University, 2006); and Jawād Mūsa Muḥammad ʿAfānah, *Al-Raʾy al-Sawāb fī Mansūkh al-Kitāb* (Amman: Dār al-Bashīr lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 1992).

[28] AbūSulaymān 116-117.
[29] AbūSulaymān 115.

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