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Darwin, Bryan, Raman, and the Dalai Lama Re-Create the World

By Rachel Anderson

Written for Science and Religion: Historical Perspectives

Alas! The weary world was struck
And who was asked to pull it from the muck?
Four men (for women are too wise)
Were called to build a world that satisfies
All human kind (though kind humans may be rare)
And the world they had to work with was not bare.

Present on this globe—we'll call it Earth—
Humanity of strange and varied birth¹
Did sniff and scratch and scurry and bemuse
For what purpose² their humanity could use.
And all humanity did surely have the thought
That there must be some place to find the 'ought.'³
The template revealed vital nature all around
Encas'd in plant and animal and ground.⁴
Upon this stage these four men sought to build
A planet that would leave mankind⁵ fulfilled.

First Charles Darwin, frail of form, but keen of mind,
Approach'd the map to scrutinize design.⁶
Then William Jennings Bryan poised to seize
On Darwin's every God-denying sneeze.
The Dalai Lama and Raman exchanged a look
In which centuries of nondual knowledge spoke.
For all four men saw life in different terms,
Perhaps each view holds something we could learn.

As Darwin surveyed what the template held
His muddle of theologies began to meld.⁷

¹ This section of the poem acts as the thesis. The first part of the thesis addresses the question of diversity and shows how each individual's historical, social, global, and political context is analyzed within this poem.

² The second part of the thesis addresses human purpose and teleology and hopes to address the questions regarding the status and destiny of humanity.

³ The final part of this thesis addresses questions like, "how do you decide on morals?" and questions the validity of drawing normative messages from nature. It poses the question: If not from nature, then from where?

⁴ In discussions of modern science and religion, the fossil record plays a prominent role.

⁵ Technically "humankind", but "mankind" preserves Erasmus Darwin's poetic meter.

⁶ In this case assuming a literal template and blue-prints, but also punning off the phrase "Intelligent Design," because the arguments made by this more modern group parallel the Natural Theology arguments Darwin criticized.

On the original Earth, there was not a sign,
That chance alone creates what some might call design.
Darwin liked to think himself benevolent,
And why from kind creators all that suffering descend?⁸
On his travels with Fuegians, Darwin saw
That humans always bent to nature's law.
That environment was more likely the face
Of any disparities within the human race.
And the dignity of all men⁹ ought to be
Humanity's highest priority.¹⁰

“These humans,” Darwin started, “ought to know
That from one source do all of their kin grow.”¹¹
This, he thought, would end all slavery
And challenge Paley's¹² cruel, white deity.
“And furthermore, let's teach them not to waste
Their energy on Godly theological tastes.¹³
For the God of all these faithful Anglicans
In Nature does not seem to have a plan!
Ignore Christian calls to ‘self-mortify’
And seek the path that frees humans inside.¹⁴
I think that Natural Selection does explain
Why humanity is rife with so much pain.
With humanity does the organism peak,
But even higher teleologies we can seek!¹⁵

Instead let's let them all delight

⁷ Frank Burch Brown, “The Evolution of Darwin's Theism,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 19 no. 1 (1986): 25. Quoting Darwin's letter to Thomas Hooker in 1870 which read, “My theology is a simple muddle; I cannot look at the universe as the result of blind chance, yet I see no evidence of beneficent design, or indeed of design of any kind, in the details.”

⁸ One of Darwin's biggest problems with the Natural Theology arguments of John Ray and William Paley was that a benevolent creator could allow human suffering of the kind he saw on his voyage. Kristin Johnson, “Darwin's Ideology,” University of Puget Sound, Fall 2015, STS 370 Lecture, October 29, 2015.

⁹ Again, this should be humanity, but Darwin was a product of his Victorian times and thought of humanity in terms of “men.”

¹⁰ Kristen Johnson, Lecture, Technology, and Society 370, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington October 27, 2015.

¹¹ Ronald L. Numbers, “Science Without God: Natural Laws and Christian Beliefs,” from *When Science & Christianity Meet*, (University of Chicago Press, 2003) 279.

¹² William Paley, author of *Natural Theology*, argued that purposeful parts within creation acted as proof of an intelligent designer.

¹³ Brown, “The Evolution of Darwin's Theism,” 27.

¹⁴ Brown, “The Evolution,” 14. “He [Darwin] dissented from what he took to be the New Testament's emphasis on future life and present self-mortification.”

¹⁵ Brown, “The Evolution,” 41. Citing Darwin regarding humans, “having risen to ‘the very summit of the organic scale’ with ‘a still higher *destiny* in the distant future.’”

In the knowledge that even nature is not right.
For wouldn't our world have a brighter shine
If law-bound nature and not God divine
Did cause the suffering all our people—see—
With this all humans from God could be free.¹⁶
So let us set aside all earthly strife,
*There is grandeur in this view of life!*¹⁷

“Hold it, Charlie, your *atheism* is not free,”
This from the voice of William Jennings B.
“I've seen what ‘Evolution’ does to man,
It makes them *crazy*, you can't even understand.
Take Andrew Carnegie, who at your altar knelt
And made *Origins* into the ‘Gospel of Wealth.’¹⁸
Or worse, take Marx, or Hitler who both saw
Their own values in your so called ‘Natural Law’
You mean well, but your *hypothesis* is a menace
To any moral man—New York to Venice.¹⁹
You think your deist descent²⁰ will surely work
To free man from the sin they've had from birth?

First, you are wrong, and let me tell you why.
My eyes are two, not one or three or five.²¹
Where are my fins, if my mother was a fish?
And how does ‘sexual selection’ lead to the ‘fittest’?²²
The Bible's not a story book, you know,²³
It's a moral guide to how to act and where to go.
When you remove the faith from Christianity
You start the bloodiest war in history.²⁴

¹⁶ Brown, “The Evolution,” 38-39. He cites Darwin: “It has always appeared to me more satisfactory to look at the immense amount of pain and suffering in this world as the inevitable result of the natural sequence of events, i.e. general laws, rather than the direct intervention of God.”

¹⁷ Brown, “The Evolution,” 20. Citing the closing line of Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species*.

¹⁸ Kristin Johnson, Lecture, Technology, and Society 370, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, October 26, 2015.

¹⁹ William Jennings Bryan, “In His Image,” Speech, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922): 1. “I believe there is such a menace to fundamental morality.”

²⁰ Punning off Darwin's work *Descent of Man*.

²¹ Bryan, “In His Image,” 6. “How long did the ‘light waves’ have to play on the skin before the eyes came out?”

²² Bryan, “In His Image,” 7. “...but ‘cousin’ ape is as objectionable as ‘grandpa’ ape.”

²³ Bryan, “In His Image,” 11. “Darwinism transforms the Bible into a story book and reduces Christ to man's level.” Bryan isn't entirely historically right as the practice of “higher criticism”—analyzing the Bible as a historical texts and Jesus as a historical figure—was the threat William Paley was responding to with his publication of *Natural Theology* in 1802. Johnson, Lecture, “The Higher Critics or, the Challenge to Orthodoxy *within* Theology,” October 26, 2015.

The moment you put Intellect on top of Soul
You steal the very heart of human morals.²⁵
Without God what will stop man from eugenics
For, “knowledge of heredity” won’t condemn it.²⁶
I’m afraid you misread the Bible, Charlie D.
It calls for love and morals eternally.²⁷
So I propose on New-Earth we create
A world of Christians, ‘made obedient through faith’
A Lord Preserver, Creator, Heavenly Father
Closer and more personal than your daughter.²⁸
We waste our time ironing Evolution’s kinks
And searching the fossil record for the missing links
The answer’s simple—It is God—go home
And far away from Jesus do not roam.”²⁹

“And what of Nature,” Charles asked. “Do we ignore
The gift of life She has left at our door?”
“It’s only God,” William retorts, “So there.
Pack up your science kit and say a prayer.
You’re *guessing*, Darwin, and you’re guessing wrong.”³⁰
It’s from one Creator that all nature comes.
On Second Earth, I’d have all men *believe*
And to the pages of the Bible cleave.
It’s rational to think that every flower
Was created in terms of Divine Power.
We’re wasting precious time on mysteries
That God and God alone has the right to see.³¹
Science could not a peaceful planet make
Because no one wants a ‘Water Puppy cake.’”³²

²⁴ Bryan, “In His Image,” 16. “To destroy the faith of Christians and lay the foundation for the bloodiest war in history would seem enough to condemn Darwinism...”

²⁵ Bryan, “In His Image,” 17.

²⁶ I imagine Bryan would *hate* E.O. Wilson, who wrote, “we are justified in considering the preservation of the entire gene pool as a contingent primary value until such time as an almost unimaginably greater knowledge of human heredity provides us with the option of a democratically contrived eugenics.” From Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, Harvard University Press 1978, 198.

²⁷ Bryan, “In His Image,” 19. “Darwinism enthrones selfishness; the Bible crowns love as the greatest force in the world.”

²⁸ Bryan, “In His Image,” 19.

²⁹ Bryan, “In His Image,” 20. “What time has he to waste in hunting for ‘missing links’ or in searching for resemblances between his forefathers and the ape? In His Image—in this sign we conquer.”

³⁰ Bryan, “In His Image,” 3. “The eminent scientist is guessing.”

³¹ Bryan, “In His Image,” 7. “Is it not more rational to believe in God and explain the varieties of life in terms of divine power than to waste our lives.”

³² Bryan, “In His Image,” 7. “...in order to join with the whole world in celebrating ‘Water Puppy Day’.” In context, Bryan means to satirize Darwin’s atheism, suggesting that Christian religious holidays like Christmas and Easter are

“I might,” the Dalai Lama interjected.
“All of creation is in every part reflected.³³
That must include the cake, and Eucharist.”
“You’re Catholic?” Bryan asked.
“No, I’m [definitely] Buddhist.

My goal is simple: pure compassion now.
I believe both science and religion have the ‘how.’³⁴
You two have heard of ‘quantum physics,’ no?
It’s the theory of how sub-atomic particles go.
Heisenberg and Einstein kicked it off,³⁵
And it has influenced a great deal of modern thought.³⁶
Science and technology have power
And before this force, religion should not cower.
But science’s cruel features I well know
Modern bombs chased me from home not long ago.’³⁷

“But doesn’t your God advise you to be true?”
William Bryan asked, from the Christian view.
“Buddhist texts do not have revelation,
We’re free to critique nature through observation.³⁸
While Christians think in terms of God and soul,
The Buddhist mindset tends to be non-dual.
I asked my friend, the expert physicist,
‘What is wrong with thinking separate things exist?’³⁹

more meaningful than secular holidays. Also, Bryan’s argument is more complex than the choice of cake. But it rhymes...

³³Kristin Johnson, “The Quantum Physics Revolution (use this to navigate the Dalai Lama’s book, too)” from *Technology, and Society 370*, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, November 10, 2015. “Quantum Physics thus seems to be on the LEFT side of the following dichotomy: 1. HOLISM vs. REDUCTIONISM 2. PROBABILITY vs. CERTAINTY 3. POTENTIALITY vs. DETERMINISM.”

³⁴ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 209. “Today in the first decade of the twenty-first century, science and spirituality have the potential to be closer than ever, and to embark upon a collaborative endeavor that has far-reaching potential to help humanity meet the challenges before us.”

³⁵ This is debatable, but the study of quantum physics is usually attributed to them and Niels Bohr at least in part.

³⁶ John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 335. “The belief that reductionist accounts of natural phenomena must always be complemented by holistic perspectives has gained ground recently, largely through an awareness among the public of ecological interdependencies.”

³⁷ Kristin Johnson, *Technology, and Society 370*, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, November 19, 2015.

³⁸ Pinit Ratanakul, “Buddhism and Science: Allies or Enemies?” *Zygon* 37 no. 1 (2002): 116. “Not being based on revelation, Buddhism has no divine commandments to be obeyed. Buddhism has a free and open spirit of enquiry and encourages the search for truth in an objective way.” This also speaks to the three problems (texts, ideology, and meaning) religion often faces when confronted with science. Buddhism does not need to address texts.

He answered, ‘Thinking separately divides
Races, countries, classes, even lives.’⁴⁰
So what unites all people, big and small?
It’s *consciousness* that gives meaning to us all.
This is where I think science falls short⁴¹
And understanding falls to religion’s court.⁴²
I agree with Darwin, nature is not fair
There is suffering and sorrow everywhere,
And if all people had access to education,
Science could unite disparate nations.⁴³

But, like Bryan, I can’t help the fervent thought
That science often loses sight of human “ought.”
Of knowledge and beneficence I commend
Science’s work for suffering to end,⁴⁴
But compassion isn’t what motivates our science.
To make this learning whole, we need *alliance*.⁴⁵
Buddhism can teach the world compassion
And science teaches wisdom (in a fashion).
Together, and I hope you hear my plea,
We can make one human family.
United by our moral obligation
We can collaborate through quantum meditation.”⁴⁶

“I like your style,” agreed V.V. Raman.
“But Buddhism’s just *one* of our options.
Hinduism might also fit this form.
Quantum ideals work in Vedantic norms.⁴⁷
My context is much the same as Dalai L’s
But Hinduism has written texts as well.
That might explain Hindu conservatives⁴⁸

³⁹ Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, 51. “...apart from the question of misrepresentation, what is wrong with the belief in the independent existence of things?”

⁴⁰ Dalai Lama, *Universe*, 51. “He said that if we examine the various ideologies that tend to divide humanity, such as racism, sexism, extreme nationalism, and the Marxist class struggle, one of the key factors of their origin is the tendency to perceive things as inherently divided and disconnected.”

⁴¹ Dalai Lama, *Universe*, 131. “But assuming mind is reducible to matter leaves a huge explanatory gap.”

⁴² Dalai Lama, *Universe*, 134. “Buddhism’s approach has been primarily from first-person experience.”

⁴³ Dalai Lama, *Universe*, 198. “One partial solution is to ensure that a larger segment of the general public has a working grasp of scientific thinking and an understanding of key scientific discoveries, especially those which have direct social and ethical implications.”

⁴⁴ Ratanakul, “Buddhism and Science,” 117.

⁴⁵ Dalai Lama, *Universe*, 200. “First, we have to check our motivation and ensure that its foundation is compassion.”

⁴⁶ Dalai Lama, *Universe*, 209. “May each of us, as a member of the human family, respond to the moral obligation to make this collaboration possible.”

⁴⁷ Varadaraja Raman, “Science and the Spiritual Vision: A Hindu Perspective,” *Zygon* 37 no. 1 (2002): 88.

But doesn't diminish valid alternatives.

The goals of science and Vedanta may divide
Vedanta apprehends, science describes.⁴⁹
Science doesn't recognize what's 'intuitive.'
But neither can science claim to be truly objective.⁵⁰
Where science upholds skeptical wonderment
Religion values supernatural reverence.⁵¹
But both value the spirit of inquiry⁵²
And science needs Vedantic methodology.
(They're having trouble with neurobiology,
Might want to consider neurotheology!)
The purpose we should give our Earth.²
Is to reach beyond the physical anew.

What I prescribe to settle out this case
Is more complex than Water-Puppy-cake.
We know that human thought is more than sparks⁵³
And human feelings go beyond our hearts.⁵⁴
Would you let science name you 'cosmic dust'?
Transform your grand experiences to rust?
Or will you be a photon from Big Bang
Awake with song that through the Universe rang?⁵⁵
The moral way is in the search for truth
And truth is not in scientific proof.
The Dalai Lama proposes compromise
But spiritual vision is where the real depth lies."

⁴⁸ Mackenzie C. Brown, "Hindu and Christian Creationism: 'Transposed Passages' in the Geological Book of Life," *Zygon* 37 no. 1 (2002). This article outlines a conflict that a conservative Hindu group sees between Hinduism and Darwin's theory of evolution.

⁴⁹ Raman, "Science and the Spiritual Vision," 87. "The goal of the spiritual quest is not to describe the world but to apprehend its inner essence."

⁵⁰ Raman, "Science and the Spiritual Vision," 88. "This is because science is based on concepts that are products of the human mind."

⁵¹ Kristin Johnson, Discussion in Technology, and Society 370, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, November 24, 2015.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Neural synapses use electrical signals to communicate in the brain. When recorded, thoughts can look like tiny sparks. Raman argues that human thought encompasses much more than electrical signals could account for.

⁵⁴ Raman, "Science and the Spiritual Vision," 91. "The compelling evidence of experience is that the human being is much more than a biological entity, for there is in each of us the magic of thought and feeling, the glory of art and music, the excitement of love, and the ennobling of ideas."

⁵⁵ Raman, "Science and the Spiritual Vision," 92. "We are all miniature lights that have emanated from that cosmic effulgence, like photons from a glorious galactic core, destined for the terrestrial experience for a brief span on the eternal time line, only to re-merge with that from which we sprang." I am also punning off the fact that the word "Universe" literally means "one song."

The four men stood around the globe, dismayed
For all across the board their thoughts did range.
There had to be a purpose for mankind
And there had to be some morals in their mind
Were morals found in nature, or in faith?
And for which view did morality have base?
Darwin said, "I wish that people knew,
How to behave just *ethically* and true."
Raman agreed, "These rules don't need much rhetoric,
Don't steal, don't rape, don't kill, etcetera."
Bryan sighed, "Original sin's a beast."
The Dalai Lama shrugged, "Have faith, at least."

"You know," chimed in a new and age-worn voice,
"You could choose to give humanity a choice.
Place science and religion in all corners
Let science and religion choose their own order."

The four creators paused in their deliberation
And gave this new suggestion due consideration.
"Atheism leads to war," Bryan complained.
"Ah yes," Darwin returned, "Christians are surely saints."
The Dalai Lama mused and scratched his neck.
"Science does get very cruel, unchecked."
"We won't agree," Raman observed, fatigued.
"There's too much difference in what we each believe."

"Let them decide," the new voice pressed again.
Said all creators, "Do you *want* the world to end?"
"It ends, so what, it doesn't have to be appealing.
I just know that I would miss *cosmic religious feeling*"⁵⁶

"I want a movement," Bryan said. "So people will ignore,
The work of Charles Darwin, that atheistic bore."
Darwin scoffed, "You could call it 'Brilliant Design.'"
The Lama mused, "I'll write a book, with all my views outlined."
Raman knew that Hindu thought would always be diverse
So he smiled and declared, "Science, do your worst!"
"Or best," added in Darwin, "Science is really quite good."
The Dalai Lama noted, "but religion has the 'should.'"

⁵⁶ Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science," *New York Times Magazine* November 9, (1930): 1. "It is very difficult to elucidate this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it, especially as there is no anthropomorphic conception of God corresponding to it."

The conversation flowed to Earth Part 2
And infiltrated human kind anew.

Alas! The weary world was struck
And who was asked to pull it from the muck?
All human kind (though kind humans may be rare)
And the world they had to work with was not bare.
In every corner science and religion took a place
And settled in the thoughts of all the human race.

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