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COMMENTARY ON *THE GOD DELUSION*

Recently friends loaned me *The God Delusion** by the British biologist Richard Dawkins, which I immediately began reading and enjoying. Much of what I have firmly believed during my adult life, like the great harm that religions have caused humankind, the fallacy of the word “God” (irrevocably linked to christianity), the violent and vindictive Old Testament, the sheepishly dishonest New Testament, have been corroborated in this book. The mass delusion of religion even infects secular governments who are by law required to remain unaffiliated with the church. When Dawkins writes that in time of war conscientious objector status is unexplainably granted by governments on religious grounds, but not taken seriously if you may be “a brilliant moral philosopher with a prize-winning doctoral thesis expounding the evils of war,” I am reminded of my struggles as a “draft-dodger” during the Vietnam war. Nor do personal conviction and the eloquence of a poet condemning war help to gain conscientious objector status in the USA. One is obliged to keep silent and go underground or risk years of imprisonment.

As happens in even my most favorite books, there can come a moment in my reading when suddenly agreement comes to a full stop and disagreement takes its place. The first time that this occurred was reading Dawkins’ declaration, “Being an atheist [...] is something to be proud of.” A few pages later he condemns the God of the Old Testament for his pride. Just as “God” and “religion” have caused great harm to human beings for thousands of years, so has *pride*. Dawkins’ pride is the core of my

* *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins, Bantam Press, London 2006.

disagreement with certain of his ideas in *The God Delusion*. By declaring myself the enemy of pride (along with sloth, wrath, gluttony, avarice, envy and lust), I offend just about everyone. From all corners, from people whom I greatly admire to those whom I despise, pride is prevalent. Where my family, your family, everyone's family were mistakenly fostered with the notion that the vice of pride is a virtue, the sage admonishes: "Extinguish pride as quickly as you would a fire." (Herakleitos) On a mass scale pride becomes nationalism and fosters the idea "we are right, they are wrong." The scientist Dawkins proudly declares, with absolute certainty, that the only truth about the universe is scientific truth – we are right, they are wrong.

Dawkins' belief that the only truth about the universe is scientific truth reveals similar "passionate certitude" as he sees in religious people: "If we are talking about the universe, about what reality is, about what life is, then truth means scientific truth." (video interview on "The Hour") Among his silly comparisons like "pink elephants" and the "Flying Spaghetti Monster" (which only detract from his argument) is the vain boast: "Indeed, wouldn't the designer of the universe *have* to be a scientist?" That is, if God exists, wouldn't he *have* to be like me, the scientist Richard Dawkins?

Yes, religions are fairy tales and human beings created God in their likeness, not vice versa. But why define oneself by what one is not, as does an atheist? An atheist must first acknowledge the idea of "God" in order to deny it. If the idea is so ridiculous, why define yourself in relation to it? I am not a motorcycle mechanic like Robert Pirsig, and I do not define myself as a non-motorcycle mechanic, nor as any of the other many things which I am not. To then be proud of one of the many things which one is not (a believer in God) strikes me as arrogant. The wisdom of sages like Socrates, Lao Tzu and Buddha comes from an entirely

different brotherhood than that of science. (Socrates was *not* of the same brotherhood as Plato.) However, Dawkins implies that the (unscientific) things that these sages had to say about the universe, reality and life were devoid of truth because they were not scientists.

To maintain that there is only scientific truth to be perceived in the universe, reality and life is an example of the scientists' spiritual scotoma ("blind or dark spot in the visual field" according to Webster's Dictionary). The blind spot is the lack of comprehension for Art, which also afflicted one of the greatest physicists of all time: Isaac Newton. According to his contemporary Conduitt, Newton was uninterested in Art. His vast library had none of the classics of poetry – neither Chaucer, Spencer, Dante, Shakespeare nor Milton. He never went to the theater and had no appreciation for music and painting (aside from the many portraits of himself that he commissioned during his long life). The thoughts and theories expressed by Newton, Dawkins and other scientists are only possible because of the mystery of language. Language is not a scientific phenomenon and it predates science by tens of millennia. Its origins are to be found in Art.

In universities Art is referred to as one discipline among others, ranked equally with philosophy, science, mathematics and theology. This is an error. Art is not the sibling of the above disciplines, but their mother. Through Art – the most ancient manifestation of human knowledge – all other knowledge was born. These very same alphabetical signs on this page are the vehicles of our knowledge, twenty-six drawings that have evolved from the most distant depths of Palaeolithic times. This modern alphabet is still linked to the mystery 30,000 years ago when what were believed to be humanity's earliest known drawings were scratched into a bone by an artistic hand to record the phases of

the moon. Decades after this discovery, in 2002, archaeologists in South Africa discovered geometric stone carvings on red ochre from Blombos Cave thought to be 77,000 years old. Here are the earliest known traces of the subtle and enduring art of painting. Over millennia prehistoric artists plucked forth symbols from their souls that contained the power of image and sound in concentrated form. They doodled in the clay of river banks, on wood, stone and bone, inventing letters and numbers. This accumulated knowledge tens of thousands of years old has as its vessel today the creation of stone-, bronze- and iron-age artists: the alphabet and numbers which Einstein would eventually use to formulate his theory of relativity.

Whatever the epoch, Art has been the pathfinder, and its main function has always been to promote the spiritual health of the society at large. Considering Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, Fukushima and the general despiritualizing influences of modern science, assuring spiritual health to the society at large is not among its accomplishments. Spirit, spiritual – these are non-religious terms predating religion, just as Dawkins sees morality as predating religion. If he and other scientists take these words seriously, then the question remains: what is Spirit and what does science know about it? What spiritual energy if any pervades the universe, and what relation does it have to the spiritual force in plants, animals and minerals? The idea that intelligence permeates the universe Dawkins would seem to think refers to a deity. He believes that intelligence is something only to be found in a tiny corner of the universe on earth in humans and certain animals.

Science is unable to tell us what happens in the everyday occurrence when a person dies, what the difference is between a cold cadaver lying in the morgue and a standing, warm, vital person. On the natural phenomenon Death, scientists have zero

truth to provide. They speculate as do the rest of us. The most memorable words on the subject come from the poets. The arts need not refer only to such crafts as poetry, music, painting, drama and dance. Ideally the arts can also include government, economy, education, defence, commerce, science, mathematics, and just about everything human beings do. Art is in fact a person's doorway to knowledge. Everyone experiences drawing and painting as children. This is our introduction to the alphabet and all the accumulated knowledge of our species at our disposal today, the first steps on the way to highly specialized professions, whether astrophysicist, molecular biologist or symphony orchestra conductor. The Greek word *mousiké*, the Art of the Muses, referred not only to music, but to all the countless "arts." Art is the "way" with a lower case "w", just as the artist is the "creator" with a lower case "c". Art is the "way" as applies to human creation, Tao is the "Way" as applies to all Creation. Taoism is not a religion and contains no god. Tao can be said to be the manner in which the universe functions. The Taoist classic *Wen Tzu* refers several times to "the arts of the Way." This can be shortened to "the arts" and even further to Art. In this context, Art signifies the best way to do something. A common expression for the highest level of excellence in a given practice is: "He makes an art of it." In the *Wen Tzu* it is written: "Of the energies of the universe, none is greater than harmony. Harmony means the regulation of yin and yang, the division of night and day."* The artist is the student of Harmony. His creative intelligence is a tiny part of a bigger whole predating life, the solar system, the universe. Here is where my difference with Dawkins is deep and irreconcilable. He firmly believes that creative intelligence "*comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual*

* *Further Teachings of Lao Tzu (Wen-Tzu)*, tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala, Boston, 1991.

evolution." (his italics) The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb *create*: "to bring (something) into existence" from late Middle English in the sense "form out of nothing", from Latin *creat-* "produced", from the verb *creare*. From nothing there was a universe, "created" or "produced", "conjured" or "born". Hamlet believed that the universe is a "pestilent congregation of vapours." (He was having a bad day.) Dawkins has a different theory: "Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it."

Dawkins' reasoning is quite understandable when we examine the *Works* of Shakespeare. This is the culmination of a gradually evolved creative intelligence that evolved with life on earth. Prior to that, according to Dawkins, intelligence was nil in the universe. However, if we examine the periodic table of the elements on the walls of our science classes, we see an intelligent organization of the elements and their relationships that surpasses the intelligence of Shakespeare or Einstein by light years. This intelligent organization of the elements is very obvious and real, not the abracadabra of a "supernatural agent" which evokes Dawkins' scorn. Not being an *unintelligent* organization of the elements, Dawkins is obliged to consider the source of this non-human Intelligence emanating from the periodic table, totally unaffiliated with any religion or anything else human. It is important to acknowledge that there *is* a source of this Intelligence and equally as important to leave "it" unnamed. To give it a name is to waste words. To call it "God" is to mock it, for it is neither masculine nor feminine. The Name which is beyond the scope of language cannot be uttered. To call it "God" is as ridiculous as calling it "Jim."

Alan Watts also expressed "the suspicion that the world view of modern science may itself have been a peculiar form of myth. [...] For it does indeed seem that many scientists have a

religious fervor and a vested interest in demonstrating that nature is only a rather inefficient machine – to which they must paradoxically ascribe their own boastfully superior intelligences.”^{*} One perceives Dawkins’ “religious fervor” in this very strange sentence: “[T]here are very probably alien civilizations that are superhuman, to the point of being god-like in ways that exceed anything a theologian could possibly imagine.” Dawkins’ imaginary gods are greater, more powerful than the gods of the theologians! Is he a scientist or a writer of science-fiction? Probability is a two-edged sword. What is very probable may never happen, and what is very improbable (life) may happen only once in the universe. The ancient words concerning the origin of the universe in the *Tao Te Ching* reach me with more lucidity than the words of science on the subject:

*Nonbeing is called the beginning of heaven and earth;
being is called the mother of all things [...]
These two come from the same source but differ in name;
both are considered mysteries.***

The scientific fixation on the Big Bang is another type of myth as that of God or Zeus which also requires a leap of faith – in science – an explanation that explains nothing. Scientists speak of the “Big Bang” as if it is so. “Even if ‘so’ is actually so, the difference between ‘so’ and ‘not so’ is as yet undefined.” (Chuang Tzu) For a sage like Chuang Tzu, knowledge is a by-product to attainment. What good is knowledge without attainment? Buddha’s life is an example of knowledge being used as a tool for spiritual attainment. Science does not consider Spirit in its calculations. The step-by-step explanation of the creation of the

^{*}*In My Own Way*, Alan Watts, Jonathan Cape, London, 1973.

^{**}*Tao Te Ching*, tr. D.C. Lau, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1963.

universe at intervals of hundreds-of-millionths of a second before and after the hypothetical “Big Bang” does not take into account Spirit. “How do we know that what we call not knowing is not knowledge?”* Chuang Tzu is considered the second sage of Taoism after Lao Tzu. He continues:

*Our lives are finite but knowledge is infinite. To follow the infinite by means of the finite is perilous; thus those who still invent knowledge will only perish.***

The alphabet and numerical signs are finite symbols used to express the infinite, and therefore a scientific explanation for the origin of the universe using these signs cannot be thorough or accurate. “There is that which explanation does not explain. [...] So we know that to stop at what we don’t know is as far as we can go.” This statement by Chuang Tzu is echoed by Goethe:

Man’s loftiest experience is that of awe; and if the phenomenon as such can awe him, let him be satisfied. He will get no higher, and should not seek to go behind the experience.

The most unfathomable mysteries are made as familiar as a tea cup simply by labeling them with an “e” or an “m” or a “c²”. (The ancient Greeks named them Uranos, Kronos, Zeus, etc.) Human minds do not possess the capacity to know the universe as, say, a man knows his wife. There is another cosmic truth other than the interaction of particles. Plutarch made this complaint nearly 2,000 years ago: “The men who came after early poets and who are called physicists have turned away from the beautiful and divine cause, and seen everything in terms of bodies and

* *Chuang Tzu: Inner Chapters*, tr. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, Vintage Books, New York, 1974.

** *The Essential Tao*, Thomas Cleary, Harper San Francisco, 1991.

behavior of bodies, their collisions and movements and combinations.”* The “divine cause” mentioned by Plutarch does not come from a spokesman for religion, but for Art. Plutarch daily walked the road between his village Caeronea and his workplace at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, when Greece had become a colony of Rome. If *spirit* ever should be of consideration to a scientist, then the adjective “divine” used in Plutarch’s sense is unaffiliated with religion and should not be taken lightly.

Dawkins distinguishes between the “three Abrahamic religions” (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Buddhism and Confucianism, which he sees as “ethical systems or philosophies of life” rather than religions, as can also be said of Taoism. He continues by distinguishing theists from deists, the former believing in the “psychotic delinquent” of the Old Testament who meddled with everyday life, and the latter believing in the “apotheosis of designers” who created the universe and then withdrew to let it function like a clock without his intervening. Deists (among whom were early Americans like Ben Franklin), aroused some sympathy in Dawkins, even though they insisted in believing in “a supreme intelligence *who* created the universe.” (my italics) My objection here is linguistic. In English we do not say the intelligence “who” is lacking in George W. Bush, but “that” is lacking. Intelligence goes by the pronoun “it” and not “he” or “she.” *It* is as impersonal as “light,” “wind,” “water” and other natural phenomena.

In the depths of the universe, permeating all of its parts, distant and close by, is the intelligence visible in the periodic table in our science classrooms. A star, a galaxy, matter, anti-matter – we would use the pronoun “it” to refer to each, as the universal intelligence is “it”. *It* belongs to those things in the realm of the

**The Passing of the Oracles*, tr. Louise Ropes Loomis.

Unknown – not the realm of “the-unknown-now-but-later-to-be-revealed-by-science, but *unknown, unknowable*.

In Nature there is a Knowable and an Unknowable; we must distinguish between them, reflect upon them, and have respect for both.

– Goethe

The word “tree” is the correct word denoting the correct thing: a tree. “God” is the incorrect word denoting the incorrect thing. The word is incorrect because of the cultural baggage attached to it: judaism, christianity, male deities who respond to prayers, Biblic fictions, etc. The thing being denoted is incorrect because it is not real, but a fictional product of wishful thinking and the above-mentioned cultural baggage. Meanwhile, the very real *Intelligence* behind the universe with absolutely no cultural affiliation, is being overlooked by both atheists and religious people alike. Instead, something else is being denoted by the word “God,” something fictitious and male like a bearded patriarch on Olympus, or on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Equally so, the word “atheist” is the wrong word denoting the wrong thing. It is like being proud that you do not believe in Tom Sawyer.

There is a *spiritual* truth about the universe that cannot be grasped, comprehended, observed, verified by experiment, nor expressed in any scientific or mathematical formula. Dawkins quotes Einstein who believed that in the universe “there is something that our mind cannot grasp. [...] In this sense I am religious.” Dawkins can only “trivially subscribe” to Einstein’s spiritual belief, “with the reservation that ‘cannot grasp’ does not have to mean ‘forever ungraspable.’” I have no idea if Einstein would have agreed, but the difference between an artist’s concept of the universe and that of a scientist is that, being a mystery, there are aspects of the universe that *never* can be grasped by our mind,

which also seems to have been Einstein's belief. I believe that what is known by science is a miniscule part of a very big, unknowable universe. Science believes it knows the bigger part. Pride makes one believe the universe is knowable. Humility makes one content never being able to know.

If the departure of a spiritual essence at the moment of death is a phenomenon accepted by Dawkins and other scientists, then his pride over scientific monopoly of truth about the universe, reality and life is on shaky ground. Why can't science explain Death after centuries? How big in fact is this gap in the accumulated knowledge of science? I would imagine pretty big. Tibetan Buddhists see science as having made "major contributions to minor needs." Major needs – needs of Spirit – receive no attention from science. And after all, the universe is above all other things a *spiritual* phenomenon. The spiritual content of the universe is simply not considered by science, because there is no proof that it exists, no more than there is proof that there is a spirit in me that will depart when I die. Dawkins writes that religion makes the universe much smaller and less wondrous than the universe portrayed by science. A mystery is unknowable, and the universe, being unknowable, is much more profound and wondrous than even science recognizes.

Scientific thinking does not represent the most lucid thinking of our age, as the French poet St. John-Perse clarified after receiving the Nobel Prize:

*As far as science extends its frontiers, and from beyond the entire arched expanse of these frontiers, they will still hear running the poet's hunting hounds.**

* Saint-John Perse, from his speech given at the Nobel Prize banquet, December 10, 1960, as printed in *Saint-John Perse, Oeuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1972. tr. T.R.

Although science dominates our society, when the Nobel Prizes are awarded, the poetry prize is the most remembered. This prize evokes a different form of knowledge – poetic knowledge – no less valid than that of science (despite Plato’s banishment of poets from his Republic). “The poet’s hunting hounds” can be seen as non-religious concern for the spiritual nature of the universe – Einstein’s “something that our mind cannot grasp.” The poet’s credo “know thyself” is an impossibility, for knowing oneself is to know the universe – to know that our intelligence is a quantum of a maximum quantity of *non-human* intelligence. Just as pre-Copernicus humans saw themselves as the center of the universe, some atomic age scientists now see humans as the unique source of intelligence in the universe. If they consider non-human intelligence, it is the science fiction of “extra-terrestrial intelligence” on other hypothetical earth-like planets. The fact that stars and galaxies are ordered in an intelligent fashion cannot alter their rigid belief that intelligence must be gradually evolved in an organism in outer space if it is to be considered existing in the universe elsewhere than on earth.

Logic and reason are not the perfect tools for confronting an illogical universe. The French poet Paul Eluard expressed the illogical nature of existence in these terms: “La terre est bleue comme une orange.” (“The earth is blue like an orange.”) Art deals with the illogical, with dream, with darkness. There is a flexibility and suppleness to Art that is not present in science. The profound spiritual benefits of Art can conceivably permeate science and initiate what Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming calls “spiritual science.” As mentioned in my essay “Anthropology Answerable” above (page 72), Yang writes that spirit “has not yet been understood by today’s science,” when it has been the subject of intelligent study in China for thousands of years. In this respect, “the East has developed far beyond the West.” The result has been

centuries of intolerance to creative individuals which has plagued the occident since its beginning. The church is not the only culprit. This *besserwisser* attitude so common to the church is seen today in the incomprehension of western science for spiritual realities which Dawkins can't explain away as mindless superstition.

In his book *The Intrinsic Energies of T'ai Chi Chuan* Stuart Olson describes the Chinese term *shen ming* as "realm of the divine," and as applied to tai chi, "clear mind" or "spiritual clarity." He alludes to the idea "gods" as in Greek mythology. Considering that spirit, like blood, is universal to humanity, that which is contemplated by the sages in different cultures (spirit) is one and the same phenomenon seen in different ways. The idea "spiritual clarity" is evident at the core of western civilization as symbolized by Apollo, also called Phoebus, "radiant." Two gods of ancient Greece come close to corresponding to the taoist idea of Original Spirit (Dionysos) and Conscious Spirit (Apollo). Although Dionysos is dark, he too is too radiant. Although Apollo is radiant, he too is dark. The two are symbols of the same eternal Spirit – one primordial, the other conditioned. Unfortunately, visualizing symbols people focus on the symbol, not the spiritual essence to which they point. In the treatise *Compass Center Directions*, the taoist sage Ch'en Hsu-pai (1278-1368) wrote:

*The symbols used by sages appear in the alchemical classics. Some call [the Mysterious Female] an elevation in the center of the mystery shaped like a jar, closed and sealed, with the spirit operating within. [...] If students do not find out the underlying mystery, when they meditate they concentrate on it as a jar. [...] Depicting such forms, they cling to them as actually there, and their spirits enter into illusion. Is this not a serious error?**

* *Vitality Energy Spirit*, A Taoist Sourcebook, tr. and edited by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala, Boston, 1991.

Developed in China over centuries, the practice of qigong brings the practitioner a gradual understanding of the connection between sexual energy (*ching*), vital energy (*chi*) and spiritual energy (*shen*), all forms of one and the same universal energy. Progress comes very slowly and requires discipline and perseverance. Qigong, meditation and tai chi involve a process of energy refinement. During training *ching* is transformed into *chi*, which can be circulated through the eight channels when it combines with the breath. The circulation of the *chi* purifies it, ultimately transforming it into *shen*. An example of this is when training produces a state of being alert and vitalized instead of being sluggish and depressed. The connection can be likened to the three forms of water: solid (ice), liquid (water) and gas (steam), all forms of one and the same essence. Dr. Yang Jwing-ming emphasizes: "Qigong is a science. It is not a religion or a superstitious belief."* Unfortunately, this important knowledge is often dismissed as superstition by western scientists because it is inaccessible to them via traditional scientific methods. The deep study of this art reveals that *chi* is not only confined to the human sphere, but to the "earthly" and the "heavenly" as well. "Heaven" to the Chinese can mean very simply "sky." (Weather in Chinese is "heavenly chi.") The following quote by the ancient Chinese sage Mencius describes this universal energy:

It [chi] is exceedingly great and exceedingly strong. Nourished by rectitude, it fills up all between heaven and earth.

At the core of this teaching is the enigmatic word "energy," much as it is at the core of Einstein's teaching. *Chi* understood at this universal level is the energy of the universe, as symbolized by

**The Root of Chinese Qigong: Secrets for Health, Longevity and Enlightenment*, YMAA Publication Center, Wolfeboro, NH, 1997.

the “e” in $e=mc^2$. *Chi* crosses into an area of knowledge which western science does not take seriously, since *chi* cannot be observed or measured. The serious study of qigong – the study of *chi* – reveals the natural link between *energy* and *spirit* that is not considered in occidental culture. Quantum physics continues to obsessively dissect matter further and further, seeking the ultimate elementary particle. It has finally reached a point where it now questions the stability of matter itself, arriving at a concept in which elementary particles are seen as mere perturbations “on the surface of an endless sea of energy” which some scientists call “zero point energy” or “torsion fields.” Sacred knowledge of *chi* which has been accessible for thousands of years in works like the *Tao Te Ching* is presented by quantum physicists as new discoveries – minus the sacred, which apparently can never be integrated into western science.

Because the eye gazes and catches no glimpse of it, it is called elusive; because the ear cannot hear it, it's called rarified; because the hand cannot feel it, it is called infinitesimal; it's rising brings no heat, it's sinking no darkness. It is called chi. (Tao Te Ching)

Thus, in opposing prayers, priests, religions and deities (as does Richard Dawkins and as do I), it is important not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Although Johann Sebastian Bach was deeply religious, there is unquestionable intelligence of the highest order in his music, whether religious (the masses and cantatas) or secular (*The Well-Tempered Clavier*, *Brandenburg concertos*). I am deeply moved by *the B-minor Mass*, not for Jesus' sake but for Bach's, as I am moved by the non-religious *Art of the Fugue*. In my writing I frequently use the word “sacred,” which can erroneously lead the reader to believe that I am religious. Even Richard Dawkins may acknowledge the intrinsic value of this word and that to which it refers. If not, I would refer him to the

arrival of a new-born child to loving parents and with no embarrassment call it a *sacred* event, as opposed to, say, the arrival of a new armchair. The sacred is not restricted to one group of people, one culture, one geographical region as are religions. The sacred encompasses flora, fauna, minerals, air, water, light and other natural phenomena. There are no Christian flowers, no Buddhist clouds, no Hindu bees, no Jewish pebbles, nor Muslim rainbows. None of these things are religious – all of them are sacred. “Religious” can no longer be used as a synonym for sacred. Its meaning has been tainted as has that fine word “gay.” If gay is the right word (as in Yeats’ “gay poets” or *gai saber*), I must nonetheless discard it and instead use “happy,” “cheerful” or “glad” so as to avoid being misunderstood. The same with “religious.” To avoid being misunderstood, I say *sacred*.

The inability of many scientists to comprehend the sacred can make them cold and indifferent to the suffering of animals in their laboratories, animals who are often tortured to death to obtain unimportant data. To understand that animals have souls, that the soul is a sacred thing (even if it can’t be scrutinized under a microscope) would perhaps make them less eager to mistreat and torture lab animals to death. In the same regard, archaeologists might have been less eager to dig up thousands of skeletons from Native American cemeteries if they had comprehended the very real nature of the sacred. Such misconduct on the part of scientists illustrates Plutarch’s words, “to see wrongly or to be quite blind to things of the greatest moment [spirit] is a disaster to the soul.” (“The Passing of the Oracles”) The spiritual blindness that led scientists to develop chemical, biological and atomic weapons for the mass-annihilation of human beings; malfunctioning nuclear reactors like Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima; as well as genetic manipulations of our food sources and dubious bio- and geo-

engineering, also illustrates Plutarch's conviction that the soul lacking art and grace is subject to be maladjusted, disturbed, unruly and lawless. (One automatically thinks of "the father of the hydrogen bomb," Edward Teller.) Nietzsche believed that human "intelligence" is in fact the final stupidity with which we will destroy ourselves.

Dawkins agrees with the atheist writer Julian Baggini that there is "only one kind of stuff in the universe and it is physical." As a layperson I may be ignorant wondering if light is "physical", or the "dark energy" being discussed by cosmologist today. Whatever the case, Dawkins thinks it foolish to believe that there is a "soul that outlasts the body." Since the only truth about the universe is scientific truth, and since no one has produced evidence of a soul or of its passing out of the body, then science acknowledges no such thing. Dawkins' belief that the scientific creation myth is right and all other beliefs wrong evokes the Islamic fundamentalist who says that there is only Allah's truth. Dawkins protests that it is "tiring" to hear repeatedly from his critics that "a scientist's belief in *evidence* is itself a matter of fundamentalist faith." He parries this criticism by emphasizing: "I am no more fundamentalist when I say evolution is true than when I say it is true that New Zealand is in the southern hemisphere." However, the origin of species (Dawkins' area of expertise) is one thing, the origin of the universe another. His view on the latter is founded on his personal interpretation of what he surmises to be evidence. Even though he would abandon his belief in evolution "overnight" if scientific evidence were produced to disprove it, his interpretation of the evidence concerning the origin of the universe indeed resembles fundamentalist faith based on speculation and learned guesses.

We learn in high school that matter cannot be destroyed, only transformed. The body does not disappear after being dead

for many years, its matter is gradually transformed into its basic components. Why is the idea of a soul being transformed after death in a similar manner as a dead body so hard to accept? The Taoists believe in *hun* and *p'o* – “heavenly spirit” and “earthly spirit”, one “evaporating” at death, the other sinking into the earth, neither being destroyed – only transformed. The Iroquois and the Algonquins of North America also believe that humans have two souls: one of a vegetative character, giving bodily life and remaining with the corpse after death, and another soul of a more ethereal nature which goes directly to the Land of the Spirits at death.

That a similar belief exist in all parts of the world of course does nothing to help verify it, and scientific proof does not seem possible. In the early 1900s Duncan MacDougall, a doctor working in Haverhill, Massachusetts spent part of his career on an obsessive hunt for scientific evidence of the soul. He thought that if humans had a soul, it must exist in the body as some kind of physical material. And that material must weigh something. Today his claim that a body loses 21 grams of its weight at the moment of death is not taken seriously. He intuited a soul, but was unable to scientifically prove its existence using reason. Although human societies are founded on logic and reason, they are revealed to be unreasonable and illogical, as are human beings in general. This gray zone between order and chaos is where Art is most at home.

Dawkins expresses admiration for Thomas Jefferson’s scientific approach and “homage of reason” very common in his Age of Enlightenment. And yet, there is no reason to trust reason unconditionally. We go from day to day treading on the thin crust of reason that has cooled over the volcanic crater of our impulses, convinced we are in control of things. But is the flash between two consecutive nights’ sleep that we call a day filled with our

awareness? Or are we really walking around in a stupor of self-delusion, carrying around a very precise argument detailing our mental clarity as the world breaks to pieces with “reason” and humanity goes insane counting the yoctoseconds (septillionths of a second) since the Big Bang? We were all born amnesiacs, with indecipherable impulses rising to us occasionally from the darkness whence we have come, and whence we shall return. Even after thousands of years of civilization, our awareness is like a small reef in the ocean of eternal night, which, at low tide, is briefly exposed as it is sporadically covered by waves the source of which dwells in the deepest depths of the universe, depths into which the reef again sinks at high tide. The pride of the homo sapiens makes him casually accept the yearly miracles and daily wonders that sustain his life and the narrow margin of climatic conditions imperative for his survival. And this pride makes him incapable of gratitude.

Reality interests very few people. What is considered reality is often wishful-thinking, whether that of deeply religious people or atheists. We have evolved into beings who maintain an anthropocentric myth which denies the extreme limitation of our knowledge about the universe; the myth of controlling our own lives to an extent far greater than we actually do; the myth of our consciousness extending much further than it actually does. A man who has lived to be seventy-five years old has slept twenty-five of those years, twenty-five years unaccounted for, a sojourn of one-third of his life in a completely unmapped, unknown terrain, in oblivion, dissolved. One third of his life in a state that much resembles death.

Duncan MacDougall’s *intuition* that there is something called “soul” is the opposite of reason, and yet, intuition cannot be intelligently dismissed. Intuition led Darwin to his theory of natural selection. Dawkins does not believe that he has a spirit

that will eventually “depart” at his death – as will the atoms comprising his physical body – for parts unknown. He writes that he is a “monist” (as opposed to a “dualist”) and that believing in a spirit that departs at death is an immature aspect of the dualist “child mind.” He believes that spirit is “integrally part of the body,” inseparable from it. It is hard to take this view seriously when confronting a cadaver. Just as energy departs from a dry log thrown into a campfire, so does energy (spirit) depart from the body at death – the enigmatic “difference” between a cadaver and a living human being, impossible to prove, impossible to deny. When I say that I don’t believe in God, but am not an atheist, I am met with, “But Theo, then you *are* an atheist.” No, I do not belong to the group of people called atheists anymore than to the group of people called motorcycle mechanics. At times I hear of atheists being just about as stupid, or more so, as religious people. I belong to neither group. Dawkins criticizes such a view as “fence-sitting.” As a visual artist who does not paint representations of recognizable things, I am told by non-painters that I am an “abstract” painter, although this word also is incorrect. Language cannot express every nuance of personal belief in concrete terms, nor can the universe be explained in concrete terms. What good is an explanation that explains nothing?

While many scientists don’t believe in God, some, like Steven Hawking, believe in extra-terrestrial life, equally as improvable as God. How is it that in one case blind faith is ridiculed, and in the other it is seen as valid because a renowned scientist expresses it? As Alan Watts stated above, scientists have replaced one creation myth with another... and another. Indeed, two quite different “creation myths” come from the physicist Stephen Hawking and the biologist Richard Dawkins. The latter believes that “the designer himself (/herself/itself) immediately raises the bigger problem of his own origin... Who designed the designer?”

Dawkins believes that “natural selection is a better alternative [to a designer].” But this specific “creation myth” is restricted to biology, and is irrelevant to astrophysics. That a “designer” could create itself is a “monstrosity of improbability” to Dawkins, who categorically dismisses “the absurd notion that such complexity could spontaneously self-assemble.” And yet Stephen Hawking, not exactly an ignoramus, believes in this “absurd notion”: “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist.”*

Although he does not believe in God, Stephen Hawking uses the verb “create” (avoided by Dawkins) and thus believes in a Creator: the universe itself created itself by parthenogenesis, “virgin birth” or “self-begetting,” a recurring idea in the world’s creation myths, as in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. The title of his co-written book *The Grand Design* reveals that Hawking’s belief is very different from Dawkins’, who does not accept the word “design.” With similar unwarranted certainty as that of a theologian believing in God, Dawkins believes only in the “*appearance of design*” (my italics), that Darwinian evolution “shatters the illusion of design within the domain of biology, and teaches us to be suspicious of any kind of design hypothesis in physics and cosmology as well.” And yet this “illusion” is what Stephen Hawking chose as the title of his best-selling book *The Grand Design*, arguably with no sarcasm intended. Thus even Stephen Hawking may quietly believe that between nothing and something, between non-being and being, there is a disembodied awareness emanating from what he calls “the grand design” – an

* Stephen Hawking, “God was not needed to create the Universe”, Laura Roberts. The Telegraph. September 2, 2010.

enigmatic “it” that has nothing to do with religion, science nor any other human speculation. It is not a “supernatural agent” because it is Nature itself. It has no name. To name it is to waste words. According to Taoists, “it” was never born and never dies.

In the end, whatever Hawking, Dawkins or other scientists believe concerning the origin of the universe, they are educated guesses colored by their respective branches of science, as the world’s creation myths are colored by their respective cultures. It is like the fable of the blind men and the elephant, one guessing what an elephant is by its toenail, the other by its trunk, and so forth. Dawkins’ belief that truth about the universe “means scientific truth” is scornful of different perspectives. An overview of the entire phenomenon known as the Universe in all of its microcosmic and macrocosmic details – absolutely *everything* – is not within the grasp of the human mind, as Einstein humbly stated. Reality is beyond our perception. Everything in the universe is vibrating. Darkness is vibrating. Light is vibrating. Various frequencies of light vibration give us the various colors; various frequencies of sound vibration give us the different notes in an octave. But there are frequencies that are not accessible to humans. If you compare light energy to musical scales, we can visibly perceive only one octave, right in the middle. The other frequency bands that the senses cannot perceive represent a very big *hole* in our perception of what is really there. This very limited data from the senses is the only thing that allows us to be in touch with the world around us. Thus, our consciousness and our limited senses create a perceptual handicap. There are of course instruments to measure these inaccessible frequencies, but their function in the universe is perceived piecemeal, as if Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony were seen as a mere graph of wave-lengths and amplitudes, a miniscule fraction of the entire splendid mystery which goes unperceived:



Graph of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, beginning of 3rd movement

This very limited data picked up by our senses means that we are essentially blind in the universe. However much scientists attempt to be "objective," this small amount of information is processed through the filters of their emotions and pre-conceptions, whether those of a Christian or of an atheist, whether those of Dawkins or Hawking. This leaves scientists studying the universe with a very inaccurate illusion of reality presented to us with absolute certainty as knowledge.

Even when scientists speculate, it is presented as knowledge. "Dark matter," "dark energy," "dark flow" (of galaxies) are some of the current scientific speculations about the universe that do not mesh with the big bang theory. That is, the entire theory of the universe presented to us by science at the present moment is still under debate by the experts themselves, demonstrating that it is one creation myth among others that does not provide any concrete explanation of the mystery. "Dark energy" could be another way of saying "Hades," or "Kali" or other equally as vague mythological deities.

Considering that the most profound utterances of any language are poetic, the weakness of the utterances from scientists and mathematicians will always be due to a narrow use of language that is neither universal nor infused with the power of poetic eloquence. Something is lost in translation between advanced mathematical formulas that are incomprehensible to

most people, and the explanations by physicists in ordinary language illustrated by questionable computerized animations that are in fact mere science fiction. One need not be a poet to understand Rilke, but one must be a scientist/mathematician to truly understand Einstein.

Unexplainably, Dawkins thinks it "sad" that we will never hear Mozart's opera *The Expanding Universe* nor Haydn's oratorio *Evolution* instead of his *Creation* (so that Haydn need not be confused with a "creationist"). Here is about the same level of comprehension of Art as that of Isaac Newton, which was next to nil. It is not superstitious to view the beginning of the universe as "Creation" as did Haydn and as does even Hawking. Western scientists are strangers to the discipline of Art. Human creators – artists – are students of harmony, the same harmony which organizes the universe. One way in which science investigates the function of esthetics in nature is the phenomenon called *fractal*. A fractal is "a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole," a property called self-similarity.* Fractals are amazing phenomena, both natural and computer-generated. The mathematically rigorous treatment of fractals can however detract from the esthetic visual harmony of this phenomenon. The intrinsic potential for pleasing combinations of colors and forms in sand dunes, snow drifts, clouds, cauliflowers, ice crystals, veins, river systems, reflections on watery surfaces, and other natural phenomena can also be observed in an artistic frame of mind, resulting in a deeper sensation of beauty. Dawkins has a special fondness for the giant redwood, a sapling of which he has in his garden. He mocks the idea of its cause being "intelligent design," which he would replace with "natural selection" – *his* god.

* Mandelbrot, B.B., *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*. W.H. Freeman and Company, 1982.

Dawkins asks his readers to make a great leap of faith to transpose this theory confined uniquely to biology to the domain of astrophysics and cosmology.

The ancient Greek ancestor of modern physicists, Thales, was preoccupied his entire life with abstract explanations of the cosmos based on mathematical computations which proved utterly *beside the point*. And thus, physics was born. Hesiod's poetic metaphor of the birth of the universe has more value for us today than Thales mathematical "explanation." The latter's disciple Anaximander developed a different theory of the universe. He taught that the earth was a flat disk the height of which was one third its diameter, floating, not in water as his teacher Thales believed, but in the substance *απειρου* (infinity), at equal distance from everything in the universe (that is, the moon was at an equal distance from the earth as the sun).

These ancient physicists evoke their modern colleagues speculating like science fiction writers on events in the first "yoctosecond" of the universe, "worm holes," interstellar voyages, many universes ("multiverse" or "megaverse") the "big bang" followed by the "big crunch" followed again by the "big bang" in 20 billion year cycles (or... maybe not) – being just about as clear on the subject as Anaximander with his *απειρου*. Craving an ordered universe, these primitive physicists could not accept the thieving, adulterous, sadistic, murderous, sexually depraved and fickle gods of Olympus created by the bards as metaphors for essences in the universe and the human psyche (like Freud's "super ego"). Zeus was the personification of supreme mind, dominating all the subordinate psychic emotions, or "gods." The gods were "all too human" for Thales, who attempted to explain natural phenomena without reference to poetry and mythology. Almost all of the other pre-Socratic philosophers followed him in attempting to provide an explanation of ultimate substance and

the cosmos. Thales' rejection of mythological (that is, metaphorical) explanations became an essential idea for the scientific revolution, and the turning away from Art – the discipline for which ancient Greece is most remembered today.

And so science invented a universe that would better fit its theories and hypotheses, while the real universe, impregnated with Spirit that never enters into scientific theories, remains unknown to them even today, despite their yoctoseconds, worm holes, nuclear fission, space probes and satellites. One pre-Socratic thinker – Xenophanes of Colophon – was not as scientific-minded as Thales, and showed due respect for the bards, “since all from the beginning were taught by Homer and Hesiod.” The vital teaching of the bards – Eloquence – is the foundation for proper use of language today, even for the syntax, grammar and diction present in all of Richard Dawkins' books.

For the Taoists (who believe in no deity) creative intelligence is the catalyst for the birth of the universe. For Dawkins, creative intelligence was non-existent at the creation of the universe, but slowly evolved with life on earth to find its fullest expression in the homo sapiens. Here cause is confused with effect. Creative intelligence (as emanating from the periodic table of the elements) is the cause, not the effect. The Taoist philosophy of Yin and Yang (the principle of opposites) emerging from Tai Chi (Supreme Ultimate) which in turn emerged from Wu Chi (Nothingness) are the most lucid words I have ever read concerning the origin of the universe. These words are poetic rather than scientific. In *The Grand Design* Stephen Hawking writes of something (the universe) emerging from nothing, a thought congenial to Taoism.

In this discussion about the “God delusion” the limitations of language reflect the limitations of our knowledge. To assume that the universe is knowable in increments of millionths of a second before and after the Big Bang up to today, January 21, 2011, is

about as far-fetched as Plato's mathematical proofs of the celestial spheres surrounding the earth in *Timaeus*. Does even the earthbound time frame "year" have relevance billions of "years" before the earth began rotating around the sun, not always in the same number of days, which in turn were not always the same number of hours? Dawkins criticizes the idea that there can be "questions that can never be answered, no matter how much evidence we gather, because the very idea of evidence is not applicable." But his belief in extra-terrestrial life resembles something like religious faith. The evidence is not there, but he believes in it nonetheless, even though, like the theists' beliefs which he criticizes, the possibility of extra-terrestrial life lies "beyond the zones where evidence can reach." The knowledge of science comes to an abrupt halt at this question. This is itself evidence that science is limited as it confronts an unlimited universe. Dawkins alludes to the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who in 1835 wrote that we will never be able to study the chemical composition of the stars, even at the moment when the spectroscope was being used to analyze the chemical composition of the sun. Yes, Comte was wrong. But Goethe is still correct after 200 years when he said that certain things are knowable, certain things not, and that we must learn to distinguish between the two.

Dawkins does however finally concede: "Perhaps there are some genuinely and meaningful questions that are forever beyond the reach of science. Maybe quantum theory is already knocking on the door of the unfathomable." Thus, his statement above that there is only scientific truth about the universe is not quite accurate. The truth that is permanently unknowable by science, which even Dawkins admits "perhaps" can exist, is not scientific, not religious, beyond the capacity of the human mind altogether. Even Einstein believed this. My intuition tells me that the unknowable part of the universe, the spiritual part, is much bigger

than that part which is knowable via scientific inquiry. Being content not knowing is the essence of Keats' term "negative capability" which in Taoism is called Yin. Despite all the knowledge accumulated about the galaxies, quasars, stars and our solar system by scientists, I still look up at the starry night sky in ignorance. I am comfortable with my ignorance of this mystery. Scientists, however are very uncomfortable *not* knowing. They gather knowledge as a means of alleviating this discomfort, and strive to explain the unexplainable as their colleagues did in ancient Greece.

The argumentation in the *God Delusion* is precise and thorough and brings to mind Plato's style of argumentation in the *Dialogues*. If we can say that the universe is a mystery, "something that our mind cannot grasp" as Einstein believed, then being precise and thorough serves no purpose for clarifying the mystery. It is a very good thing to help people awaken from religion and the "God delusion." However, one of Dawkins' main arguments as to why God does not exist, namely the "monstrosity of improbability" that a supreme being could create himself, is ambiguous. He himself wrote that the origin of life from inorganic matter is "improbable," and therefore "improbability," even if it be a "monstrosity," is not a very good argument considering such a blatant exception to this mathematical law as Life itself. With the understanding that humans created God (as they created Zeus) in their own likeness, and not vice versa, arguments against "his" existence become unnecessary. Dawkins' hypothesis that religion is "a by-product of something else" – "a misfiring of something useful" – is a much more solid argument. He gives as examples the "gullibility of the child mind" and its eagerness to obey useful as well as useless information passed on from their elders, and the irrationality of falling in love, whether with Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Marilyn Monroe or a future wife.

The unwillingness of many scientists to consider Spirit in their evaluation of the phenomena they study is likely due to their immediately associating Spirit with religion. Religion is a fallacy, thus Spirit is a fallacy, and only the interaction of particles and Darwinian evolution need be considered. Natural selection is the best description of the evolution of life that we have. But this description is not an explanation of the cosmic motion through billions of years from the hydrogen atom to the helium atom, through the transformations of the elements into matter, stars, solar systems, planets, and finally life. With certainty Dawkins sees the day coming “when we finally reach the long-hoped-for Theory of Everything.” This has a familiar ring to it, a prophecy repeated in academic scriptures since Thales and Anaximander, awaited with “religious fervor” like the Promised Land or the Second Coming.

The Californian poet Robinson Jeffers wrote in “Carmel Point” of the need to “uncenter our minds from ourselves.” As an “inhumanist” he believed that our consciousness is an evolutionary error that separates humans from a sense of Oneness with all Creation, just as religion separates. Jeffers’ bold spirituality is an example for religious people who have considered leaving religion to do so, and find spiritual teachings that do not deceive and pervert, as does the church. He believed that there is a *non-human* Intelligence behind all phenomena in the universe, not an anthropomorphic male “god” with many cultural identities in a variety of religions and sub-religions. That is, where religious systems are restricted to the short histories of human beings, Jeffers’ non-religious spirituality is centered in the System which has been ever-present in the universe since its beginning, indifferent to prayers, unaffected by human wishful-thinking and contradictory ideas. Taoists call this “system” Tao – the Way. When I first encountered this word in the *Tao Te Ching*, something

which for my whole life had been a firmly rooted, wordless presence in my soul was given a name. And I immediately understood that this name was in excess – there is one word too many in Tao. Lao Tzu’s words about the Way corroborated intuitive sensations I had experienced since earliest childhood, sensations of the Way which an artistic gift had made obvious from the start. However, giving it a name results in an artificial abyss between the individual and the universe.

The light of a star that is millions of light years away strikes my retina and activates neurons, in turn stimulating my soul. Faster than the speed of light my mind voyages to the star. After millions of years to arrive, the return trip is done in an instant with thoughts and imagination. What is the nature of this extremely intimate relationship between me and the universe? The relationship between the awareness of the observer and the universe has not been established by science. If he or she may be a biologist, chemist, poet, musician or meditating sage – like the blind men and the elephant – there are different understandings depending on who is the observer. Science is only one of them.

*There was something perfect and
formless before the universe was born.
It is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging.
Infinite. Eternally present.
It is the mother of the universe.
For lack of a better name I call it*

道 (Tao)

– Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*