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# New College

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## Review



DEVELOPING IMAGES OF THE MILLENNIUM

ESSAYS ON A CHANGING WORLD

Volume 9  
Spring 1998



*Still there are moments when one feels  
free from one's own identification  
with human limitations  
and inadequacies.*

*At such moments, one imagines that  
one stands on some spot of a small  
planet, gazing in amazement at the  
cold yet profoundly moving beauty of  
the eternal, the unfathomable:*

*life and death flow  
into one and there is neither  
evolution nor destiny;  
only being.*

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

# New College Review

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*Students do the work from conception to distribution, proving again that education is experience in the imaginative application of theory.*

*Contributions to the New College Review are open to all students at The University of Alabama. Interested contributors should submit a one paragraph proposal outlining their essay to New College Review editors at the above address.*

*Deadline for submissions is December of the year preceding publication. Prospective contributors are encouraged to contact the editors regarding appropriate topics, writers' guidelines, and specific deadlines.*

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# Table of Contents

Volume 9 • Spring 1998

## Essays

- 4 **The Dangerous Dream of a Fair to Middling Millennium**  
Pedaling Into The Future  
*Tim Mizelle*
- 8 **Giving Birth to the 21st Century**  
The Rebirth Of Midwifery  
*Emily Bates*
- 12 **Toward a Reclamation of the Spiritual**  
Finding God In The Next Millennium  
*Lori Herring*
- 18 **Melting Pot of Values**  
Immigration As A Convergence of Values:  
A Recipe for Tolerance  
*Jill Kail*
- 24 **Transactions Beyond 2000**  
Will Technology Pave The Way For A New Currency?  
*Rob Roden*
- 28 **Power and Inequality**  
A Close Look At Global Inequality  
*Brett Smith*
- 34 **Deconstructing Power Hierarchies**  
Regarding Earth As Self  
*Gwendolyn Griffin*

## Art

- Cover **Two Hands / photography**  
*Beth White*  
**Leaves / photography**  
*Noriko Minami*
- 1,48 **Leaves / photography**  
*Noriko Minami*
- 5 **Tower / photography**  
*John Morrow*
- 9 **Pregnant Woman / drawing**  
*Bronwyne Carr*
- 11 **Baby / photography**  
*Beth White*
- 13 **Burned Church / photography**  
*John Morrow*
- 15 **Two Crosses / photography**  
*John Morrow*
- 19 **Church / photography**  
*Jill Kail*
- 21 **Costa Rican Market / photography**  
*Michael Florence*
- 22 **Man with Scales / photography**  
*Jeffrey Smyly*
- 27 **Stone Coin / photography**  
*Jeffrey Smyly*
- 29-31 **Guatemalan Girls / photography**  
*Jeffrey Smyly*
- 36,37 **Sipsey Swamp / photography**  
*John Morrow*
- 40 **Sally ♥ The World / drawing**  
*Evan Gunter*

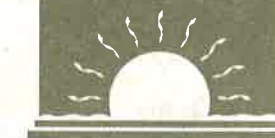
# Editors' Note

With the publication of our 1998 issue, the *New College Review* continues our publishing tradition while we also experience change. After 15 years of advising the *New College Review*, Dr. Robert McKenzie, New College professor of social science, departed from The University of Alabama to work with the Kettering Foundation. We wish Dr. McKenzie well and thank him for his many years of guidance. This year, we welcome another talented adviser, Mrs. Rebecca Florence.

When we began the 1998 issue, we considered a variety of editorial approaches. A recurring theme in our discussions was the millennium. How are we changing? What will a new century bring? This theme allows us to examine a number of aspects of the changing world and, in this way, reflects the philosophy of New College – to achieve the greatest learning experience through a broad, multi-faceted examination of a topic. This is the type of academic review we wanted to publish – a discovery of ideas and alternatives within a broad theme. We face an exciting period full of change, anticipation, and, yes, fear. We wish to share with our readers the same excitement we feel with the coming of the year 2000. We thank everyone who has helped to make our effort a reality. Our thanks especially to the New College faculty and to staff members Beverly Smith and Margaret D'Souza whose assistance made the *Review* possible.

— The Review Staff —

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By Tim Mizelle

# The Dangerous Dream of a Fair to Middling Millennium

## *Pedaling into the Future*

“Behold Belacqua an overfed child pedaling, faster and faster, his mouth ajar and his nostrils dilated, down a frieze of hawthorn after...” opens Samuel Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Convention provides that Beckett's sentence should have been quoted in its entirety, but I do not apologize for ending it abruptly: I must be ready to break with convention, just as you must, for we are merely two years away

We must not overlook the flawed manner in which we speak of the coming millennium, for such an oversight may cost us the chance at progress in the present...

from the year 2000; and you must be prepared, just as I must, uninformed as we are of what the future holds, for anything, including sentences, especially imperatives, whose endings have been left to mystery. We, in 1998, trapped in our own incomplete sentence, pedal, much like Belacqua, seemingly faster and faster, toward a goal as yet intangible to us. We refer to it as Millennium, carelessly uncertain of its meaning, speaking of it as though its thousand years hold a single physical reality, pre-

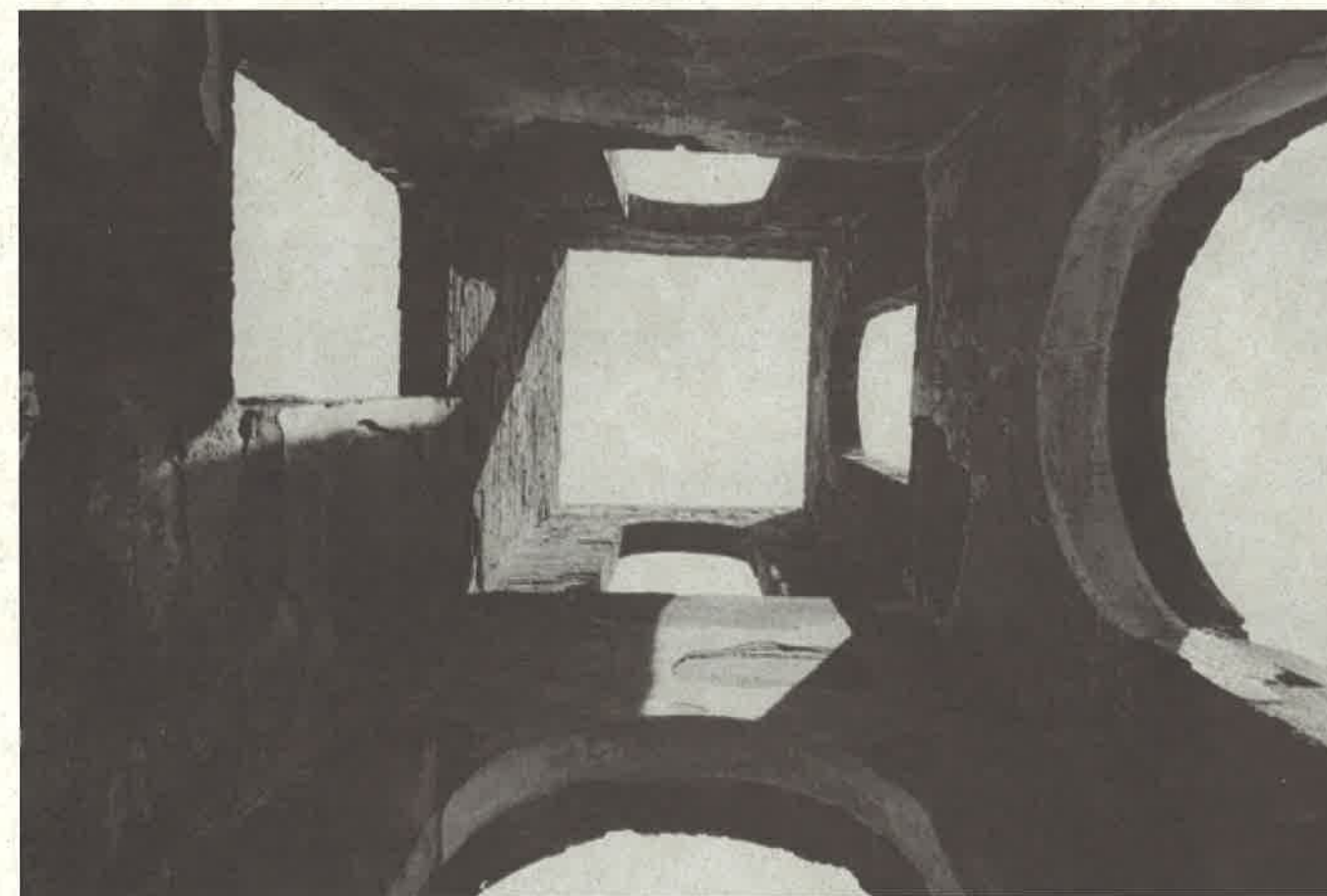
## *The Dangerous Dream of a Fair to Middling Millennium*

cisely because they cannot.

Behold, then, to familiarize yourself with our present dilemma, Beckett's incomplete sentence; behold, as the sentence commands, Belacqua pedaling. In its rightful place, opening Beckett's novel, the sentence offers a specific goal, a physical goal, after which Belacqua fiercely pedals. Devoid of its ending, though, the quote may still be read – Belacqua exists, beheld, as he pursues his goal.

There are two vastly different ways to interpret this incomplete sentence; both can inform one pondering his or her present relationship to the

coming millennium. Having read the incomplete sentence the first way, the reader has beheld Belacqua frozen in pursuit of his goal, and continues to behold him, in this static state; this reading, if applied to our position in 1998, leaves us frozen in 1998, helplessly awaiting the inevitable next two years to pass, awaiting the year 2000, the object of our pursuit, to present itself. One who accepts this reading will find himself or herself in the same position of futility in the year 2000, and the next two years will have passed uneventfully, as will the years 2002, 2004, and so forth.



John Morrow

One who accepts this first reading does so with little doubt that such a frozen moment is possible, without realizing that physics, that science as he or she should understand, does not allow for Belacqua to balance his bicycle, suddenly halted from its headlong race, frozen, as it were, in motion. This first reading is like the viewing of a snapshot or photograph. In this snapshot created by the lack of an ending to the sentence, the motion of Belacqua has halted, all motion has halted; thus, he does not fly over the handlebars of his bicycle. Time is frozen, as well. We can easily interpret Beckett's half sentence this way, for we are familiar, in this age of reproduction, with such frozen moments. Any one of us can remember, with ease, viewing a photograph; few of us realize, though, the lie inherent in such ease.

This ability of our human memory allows us to cheat ourselves: we must acknowledge here that if we read the sentence in the first manner, we are

refer to the millennium as though it were a physical fixed goal, remain frozen, awaiting the completion of the sentence, and we have attempted to stop time. This incomplete moment, this race held to be beheld, is impossible outside of the realm of imagination, yet we speak of the millennium as though it is a frozen moment, as though a fixed moment in time awaits us, and as though we have the duty to race toward it, or, like Belacqua, to chase after it.

Speaking of the millennium in these terms is like speaking of it in the same limited terms we use to discuss eternity. But a millennium, coming to a close, already includes us, just as eternity already includes us. The flaw of this reading is its futility. If we think of ourselves as trapped alive at the end of one millennium and the beginning of another, we refer to 2000 as though we, dreaming of eternity, could somehow see the end of the whole of the next millennium in its beginnings.

Perhaps we forget that eternity does not lie beyond us: its beginnings preceded us; its end will not be possible for us. Likewise, who among us, without reducing the millennium to refer to the year 2000, can escape the actually brevity of his or her relationship to the next thousand years? The paradox here is that a thousand years are reduced to one, as though by the reduction,

a thousand years are implied within one. We reduce a thousand years, so that we can conceive of experiencing them, which is, of course, impossible.

To speak of the coming millennium in these terms, we disregard our relationship to the mil-

---

*If the millennium is a fixed point,  
why not let it begin today, or  
tomorrow, or let's get to it by Friday.*

---

equating time and motion – we are allowing ourselves to believe, with ease, that time can be halted, and that time can be referred to in static terms. Just as without a physical end goal after which Belacqua chases, his motion halts, we who read our present in this manner, those of us who

lennium quickly drawing to a close; and we give no deference to either millennium, nor to our present. We affix ourselves to a moment in time, while simultaneously removing ourselves from time. We, who read our present position in this first manner, will experience nothing in 2000 that differs from what we are experiencing in 1998, for we will not think of our future in terms of our past. We will be dreaming of a future, without learning from our past how to move forward toward our eternal goals. By doing so, we rob ourselves of the present and fail to act; we stand in check within our photograph, perhaps discontented, but inactive nonetheless.

Having read the incomplete sentence a second way, the reader notes the slope of the frieze, and beholds Belacqua rolling downward, pumping his legs, as the wheels of his bicycle carry him toward an unnamed end goal. In this latter reading, Belacqua's motion has not been frozen. Applied to our position in 1998, this reading leaves us barreling forward into the unknown toward a goal; this goal, which will outrun us, will never become physically attainable for us; the millennium is not the year 2000; it is the next thousand years. Not all of us will even see the latter half of its first century. The danger in this reading is similar to that of the first: again the past is left unregarded, and our responsibility to the present is erased.

The reader who finds himself or herself beholding a Belacqua in perpetual downhill pedal,

creates a length for the frieze, extends this frieze to accommodate the implied time added to the sentence by the very lack of the sentence's closure. In simpler terms: the reader who reads the unfinished sentence in this manner, and his or her relation to the coming millennium likewise, extends the present, simply to do away with it.

We must not overlook the flawed manner in which we speak of the coming millennium, for such an oversight may cost us the chance at

---

*If it is a fixed point, of the utmost  
importance, let's jog our memories a bit  
and tell one another one event that took  
place in the year 1000.*

---

progress in the present; we must not think of the millennium as an end goal that could complete our sentence from Beckett, or we may be disappointed by its utter unattainability. If the millennium is a fixed point, why not let it begin today, or tomorrow, or let's get to it by Friday. If the millennium is a fixed point, of the utmost importance, let's jog our memories a bit and tell one another one event that took place in the year 1000. Since the millennium is not a fixed point, go forth, right now, and...

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*Tim Mizelle is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in the Department of English. He presently looks forward to his limited time in the next millennium, the wonders of which he will share with his wife, Sara, and their daughter, Celia Breslin.*

# Giving Birth to the 21st Century

*Midwifery may experience a rebirth if childbirth can return to a natural setting.*

**T**he table was extremely narrow and hard. It was like lying on an ironing board. She lifted up silver stirrups for my heels, and drew loose white cotton stockings over my legs, over my thighs. There were other people in the delivery room then. I was unable to recognize them; they were robed in green, masked and gloved. (Ashe 335-384)

Imagine a woman's body remaining in harmony, in sync with the cyclical rhythms of her pregnant body, without

answering the demands of pregnancy while the advances of science and technology quietly linger to be utilized if and when the necessity arises. Imagine an America in which legal discourse does not mandate that a woman be forced to comply with birthing regulations that prevent her from determining a delivery that incorporates and validates her autonomy and control.

A reality quite identical to this may await us in the next millennium. Women will return to listening to their bodies for nourishment and strength,

*The midwife believes in the ability of a woman's body to move toward health, to compensate for irregularities, and to overcome pain.*

the intrusion of an enema, an episiotomy, or epidural anesthesia. Imagine a trusting, holistic delivery method that does not regulate pregnancy, a method that does not confine delivery to a particular time or place. Imagine the natural strength of a woman's body

focusing upon birth as a fundamental, natural aspect of life. No longer will women and families be forced to comply with a prescribed birthing method, but will be able to choose alternative birthing styles. Midwifery will satisfy images of women embracing birth as a healthy, familial experience.

The birthing ritual is an ancient practice that is an authentic representation of natural, holistic, female embodiment. Midwifery revolves around the literal and philosophical understanding of woman 'with woman' as the guiding force in health care, as a continuum existing prior to, during, and after pregnancy. The realm of midwifery focuses upon the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of a woman during pregnancy and symbolizes female autonomy in a society plagued by a health care system that often hushes alternative birthing methods.

Midwifery evolved throughout the centuries to meet women's maternity needs. It originated during the Neolithic period as "experienced women" came to fulfill the role of midwife and continued to flourish throughout the biblical era into the first century, becoming synonymous with a woman's individuality (Towler, Bramall 3). Prior to and during slavery in the United States, African-American women who were past middle age and known as "granny midwives" were the primary care givers during a woman's pregnancy. Historically, women made the choice to utilize the health care offered by midwives because they had no other alternative. Presently, many women choose to receive obstetrical care because public

policy legally binds them to the medical community.

The movement towards obstetric care began during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when "the medicalization of women's bodies occurred . . . as medicine became professionalized

and men came to be in control of women's bodies and their processes" (Happlin 1-6). In the twentieth century, local health departments began regulating traditional midwives as "doctors called for the elimination of midwives and the growth of obstetrics as the only way to impose standards for the care of pregnant women and newborns" (Clark xi). Professionalized medicine in the 1920s created an atmosphere in which obstetricians "argued again and again that normal pregnancy and parturition are exceptions" (Cook 1-4). Early twentieth-century America witnessed the downfall of midwifery and the destruction of a supportive, communicative, and prosperous component of a female's right to determine the birthing experience she desires.

Contradictory points of view regarding birthing methods reveal a striking philosophical dichotomy between obstetricians and midwives. Technological advancements have created a delivery method that promises precision and anti-



Bronwyne Carr

pates medical problems, yet hospitals often do not distinguish between low- and high-risk pregnancies. Instead they opt to treat all laboring women identically. The *American Journal of Public Health* reports that in "many maternity units pubic shaving, enemas, artificial rupture of the membranes, electronic fetal monitoring, and episiotomy were applied in almost ritualistic fashion" (Rosenblatt 344-351). Laboring women are often denied access to food, water, and the opportunity to walk around as the labor progresses. The focus is on the laboring process as a medical event rather than as a natural occurrence. This preventive philosophy may offer the prescribed security and medicated comforts of a hospital, but the emphasis on birth as a natural, successful experience that does not depend upon technological intervention is often overlooked.

Midwifery-guided deliveries, however, emphasize nourishment throughout labor and invite the

*support, and very occasionally intervention, whereas some believe that the physicians' paradigm views pregnancy and birth as a pathological process requiring a specialized, technical cure". (813-835)*

This suggests that the medical establishment does not emphasize the woman's body meeting the demands of labor, but, rather, focuses upon a more preventive, technological method of delivery.

While obstetricians primarily rely upon the use of medical tools and anesthesia, sometimes inducing labor to hurry the birthing process, midwives allow labor to develop at a natural pace. A 1997 study of low-risk patients conducted at the University of Washington found that 71.8% of births attended by nurse midwives proceeded spontaneously versus greater than 55% by obstetricians and family physicians. This study also

found that there is less use of fetal monitoring, anesthesia, and episiotomies by nurse midwives than by physicians. The

researchers also report that "the average certified nurse midwife in this study had a cesarean sec-

tion rate of 8.8%, versus 13.6% for obstetricians, and 15.1% for family physicians" (Rosenblatt 347). Most significantly, 83.5% of vaginal deliveries by nurse midwives did not use forceps as compared to 65.0% by obstetricians and 70.4% by family physicians. Considering this data, one can conclude that the greater the degree of medical specialization, the greater reliance on medical instruments for vaginal deliveries of low-risk women. One can further conclude that the greater amount of medical intervention is accompanied by a greater cost of delivery.

Assuming that health care continues to pattern itself upon the guidelines of Health Management Organizations (HMOs), midwifery should experience a reawakening in the upcoming millennium.

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### *The birthing ritual embodies what is natural and holistic in the female.*

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expectant mother's family to participate in the birthing process. Midwifery embraces a female-oriented philosophy that supports "the belief that the passage through the birth canal is a healthy experience for mother and baby. The midwife believes in the ability of a woman's body to move toward health, to compensate for irregularities and to overcome pain. She sees birth as an expression of spirit in a physical act" (Boston Health Women's Collective 409). This woman-centered ideology is juxtaposed with the point of view often heralded by obstetricians. Chris Hafner-Eaton writes:

*The midwives' parturition paradigm views birth as a normal biological function requiring*

HMOs are designed to manage the services of hospitals in order to create cost-effective health care. The average price of a midwife-attended birth costs less than the fees charged by hospitals for a physician-performed vaginal birth. The percentage of midwife-directed births is increasing and may be partially the result of economic incentives. The rise in midwifery-performed deliveries is evident in a 1997 *Statistical Bulletin* report: "In 1994 there were 218,466 births attended by midwives in the United States, more than seven times the number in 1975" (Clarke, Martin, and Taffel 9-18). Midwifery is slowly infiltrating itself into American culture as a healthy, economically feasible delivery option for low-risk pregnancies.

It is imperative that we educate the public on the health benefits of midwifery in order to procure legal birthing alternatives in the twenty-first century. While Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs) are recognized in all fifty states, only thirty-five states legally certify lay midwives. Lay midwives differ from CNMs in that they are trained through an apprenticeship program rather than being educated through the American Nurses Association. Although regulations differ in each state, legislators tend to advocate laws that validate and maintain the medical establishment, while opposing lay midwifery. If we were to offer lay midwifery nationally as a legal birthing option, maternity care could become more readily available. This would provide better services to the indigent and members of rural communities because lay midwives would not be confined to the location of a supervising physician. We must reconstruct existing laws to include lay midwives as competent care givers. Building a well-respected, professional alliance between nurse midwives, lay midwives, and the medical community will help foster open communication and create a dia-



Beth White

logue that encompasses all realms of birthing practices. It will also procure a system that provides women a guaranteed right to determine for themselves a birthing ideology.

The millennium encourages a reevaluation of our value system and fosters thoughts of positive change. It is a manifestation of our expectations for improvements within our lives and culture, providing ample opportunity for midwifery's rebirth into mainstream America in the coming years. The twenty-first century will witness a change in attitude that will embrace midwives as competent care-givers. The millennium offers opportunity to balance the medical community's preventive ideology with the optimistic doctrine exemplified by midwives. The upcoming millennial change offers the potential for an attitude of tolerance that may support inclusion of midwifery's holistic philosophy with the technology of medicine. This movement toward growth and betterment provides the ideal atmosphere for women to regain control over birthing techniques. We, as Americans facing the twenty-first century, should choose a more intuitive, natural approach toward delivery, providing maternity care that is both healthy and harmonious with our bodies.

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*Emily Bates is a New College senior from Birmingham, Alabama. She majored in Twentieth Century American Literature and is currently studying at the University of Glasgow in Scotland.*

By Lori Herring

# Toward a Reclamation of the Spiritual

## *Finding God in the Next Millennium*

In our secular world there is no longer room for the spiritual. The temporal pervades our lives. We are supersaturated with a barrage of images: advertisements flash by us – on billboards, the Internet, television – telling us which products will make our lives bet-

value meals to our "all-terrain" automobiles. In our age all sorts of data are available when our fingers do the walking. We even have more abundant and better information, causing us to mistake facts for knowledge and knowledge for wisdom.

*"What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down?"*

- Friedrich Nietzsche

ter, which ones will make us more beautiful, which ones will put us "in touch" with ourselves. We work hard to come home and sit before "home theatres" with our families – often the only time the family is gathered – for "quality time." Everything is bigger, better, faster, more – from our deluxe

Where does God lie in this? In our culture? Our lives? Where can we find God in the future?

The 1950s are remembered by theologians as the last years of mainline religious confidence. After the mass devastation of Auschwitz and Hiroshima in World War II, many

## *Toward a Reclamation of the Spiritual*

wondered where to find God; they wondered how such atrocities could happen before the face of a caring God. Ironically, the technologies borne out of that war improved our communication and mobility. We began to learn about other cultures and beliefs due to cheaper travel, which made us realize the diversity of the world's religions.

Now we have a global technological village from which to see our multicultural world. In

church. But information is not understanding. We have lost our sense of identity. We certainly don't want to end up like our parents, but there is nothing in society for our youth to hold onto. Michael Ventura, a columnist for the *LA Weekly*, notes that perhaps this is a reason so many of our youth turn to gangs. Gangs present a clear identity, one that can be grabbed off the streets by anyone who wants it. Gangs have secrets, rituals,



John Morrow

this village we do not learn of one another as true villagers do – through close association, long-term relationships, and shared experiences – but through the fleeting images and sound bites of our all too shallow media. We rely on the media to explain the world to us, telling us through that barrage of transitory images how to live, how to act, and what to say. The media functions as our

and symbols: the "village" is real. In our computer-driven, increasingly media-driven society, everything is accessible, but nothing is mysterious or secret. Even our symbols have lost their mystery, their meaning. This is true of our language, the symbol system by which we communicate. What does "God" mean to us now? Karen Armstrong notes that there is no one unchanging



notion contained in the word "God." When we say, "I believe in God," what do we mean? It is not necessarily the same thing your neighbor means. (It certainly is a lot different from what Copernicus or Luther meant, or what a Bosnian Serb or a Catholic in Northern Ireland would mean.) God is not an objective identity; our ideas of God are instead defined by subjective experi-

supposition that the physical world possessed an intrinsic deeper meaning (Tarnas 434). According to Descartes, we could not accept anything as being true unless we could clearly and distinctly perceive it – we should question everything, including the existence of God. Kant later taught us that human knowledge is interpretive; that what I see is not necessarily what you see; what I

*God is not an objective identity;  
God is subjective experience.*

ence. We are no more able to objectively realize God than we are able to objectively realize reality, which is, after all, only that which is conjured up from our perceptions, which includes the words that make up language. When certain symbols cease to function, we are left with a feeling of uncertainty, left unbalanced. Will we reinvent new symbols or will we find ways to put meaning back into our old ones? What is the future of religion in America?

How did we come to this turning point of religion? If the Information Age has bled the last dregs of meaning from our symbols, then the first blood was drawn in the Scientific Revolution.

#### A CHANGING WORLD VIEW

Religion provided explanations for the mysteries of the natural world until figures like Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, and Freud helped establish science as the intellectual authority. We realized that we weren't at the center of the universe, that we're not divinely ordained. Human reason and empirical observation rivaled and beat out theological doctrine and spiritual revelation (Tarnas 417). We felt ourselves powerful, able to manipulate forces in nature; much of the mystery of the natural world was erased and with it the

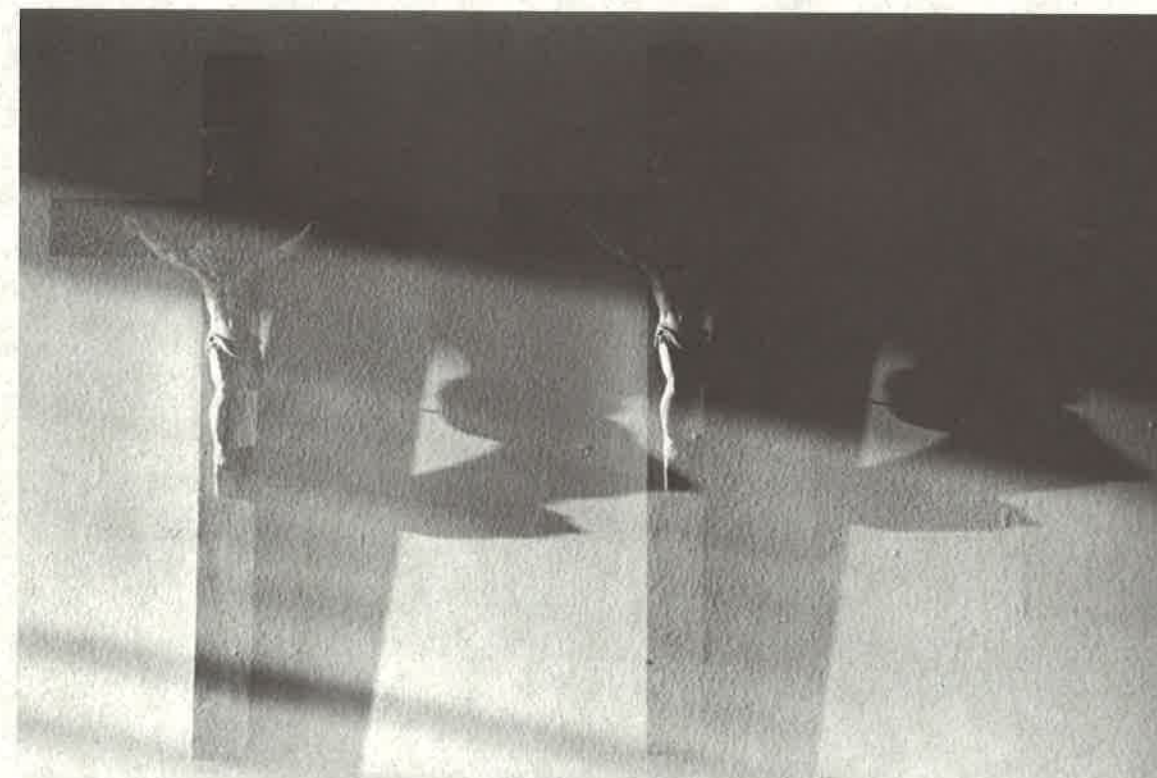
see is ordered by my own previous experiences and knowledge. The objective world, according to Kant, can never be known by the subject.

Nietzsche later told us that there are no facts, only interpretations, that there is no universal Truth, and through the lips of the madman in *The Gay Science*, that we killed God; and to become worthy of this "deicide," we must become gods ourselves (Nietzsche 96). Nietzsche died at the birth of the twentieth century, having proclaimed that "some are born posthumously" (568). The 1950s saw the proof of his prophesy of the death of God, and Nietzsche himself was reborn. The atrocities of World War II – namely, Hitler's extermination camps and the destruction of two atomic bombs – caused people to wonder how God could permit such horrors. After the war, the airplane allowed for more and more convenient travel, which made us increasingly aware of different cultures' systems of beliefs, and the television let the media and a barrage of images into our homes. In short, technology that had been developed in war became available to the public.

How could an omnipotent God allow six million Jews to die simply for the sake of their Jewishness? Many were left with the feeling that God is not present, that we are left alone, responsible for our own fates, waiting for Godot who

will never, as we know, appear. The twentieth century has seen many instances of genocide since World War II in Armenia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, and Uganda, to name a few. We are not just inflicting the atrocities on ourselves. We are also threatening our environment more and more; the world's six billion people are

it a critical juncture, the crescendo of humanity, or whatever you please. This is not an embracing of atheism; rather, this is a declaration that our traditional experience of God has ended, that the substance which we utilized to mean God has dissipated before our eyes under the hands of not only science, but culture and society.



John Morrow

using Earth's nonrenewable resources at such alarming rates that scientists predict disaster unless we change our wasteful ways. The survival of our species is at stake. In this century, we have acquired the knowledge and experience through literature, philosophy, art, psychology, and technology to understand and even control what is going on around us, yet still we allow pressing environmental problems to go unsolved; massacres of millions to take place without intervention. Crime is rising at an alarming rate. There are higher numbers of mental disorders, suicides, broken homes, depression, and despair. We are in the midst of a spiritual crisis – God is dead. Call

Giving up God is a frightening possibility. We are giving up divine protection, security, some sense of an eternal end to our earthly strife. If our old notions of God are dead, what does this mean for us? Where does this leave us? We cannot take our language at face value; in other words, we cannot say and write and speak the word "god" and expect others to understand. How can we, in Nietzsche's terms, become gods ourselves? How can we replace spiritualism in our increasingly secular world and in our lives? ~~We all need something to believe in, whether we call it God or not.~~

RE-DEFINING GOD: SPIRITUALITY AS HUMAN  
TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE

Karen Armstrong, in the introduction to her book *A History of God*, writes

*There is no one unchanging idea contained in the word "God"; instead, the word contains a whole spectrum of meanings...When one conception of God has ceased to have meaning or relevance, it has been quietly discarded and replaced by a new theology...if we look at our three religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), it becomes clear that there is no objective view of "God": each generation has to create the image of God that works for it. (xx)*

It is heartening to know that the idea of God, the unseen mystery which the word God symbolizes, has been felt by so many throughout history, from the early prophets of all religions to the present. We may have something special inside us after all. Religion holds the same power as art or poetry: it serves to unite humanity to this mystery. Poet Wallace Stevens, among others, pointed out that the role of the artist is to sanction the

*Religion is not something we can live without – a deep-rooted anxiety is part of the human condition.*

chaos of life into some understandable order; similarly so, the role of religion is to provide symbols, or a conceptual framework, for the mysterious human experience of the transcendental. Really, what we call God is beyond human language, beyond human reason, beyond human expression, and, more and more, many of us are simply striving to make contact with this thing we call God

without the aid of traditional religion. Robert Bellah wrote that "All we have finally are symbols, but...there is an enormous difference between the dead letter and the living word" (Tarnas 415).

How are we to rewrite God into a living word? Paul Tillich wrote that religion is that which concerns us ultimately – that it doesn't necessarily relate back to God, but asks questions about the meaning of our existence. Religion is our "ultimate concern" (Tillich 64). Spirituality is therefore a mode of human feeling that can be found in any human experience that prompts an encounter with the "mystery" of existence. Can we find the spiritual? Most of us are looking for an experience of God: Harvard theologian Harvey Cox points towards Pentecostalism, which includes speaking in tongues and direct encounters with the Spirit, as a growing trend, one of many, in which we are reassessing the life and person of Jesus and finding him to be a different person than we thought before. We are also combining Western religion with Eastern spirituality to create a new hybrid. We are practicing yoga, meditating, remembering to breathe. We are even combining the bells and whistles of the information age with this need for the mysterious.

Matthew Fox, founder of Creation Spirituality, supports a "Planetary Mass" which combines multimedia imagery and techno-ambient music, very similar to a rave. According to Fox, it is a spiritual

experience: a mode of "expression of spirituality for a postmodern age" (Schienin 25).

Joseph Campbell speaks of the transcendent as "that which is beyond all concepts." He states further that "the ultimate thing (which is no thing) that we are trying to get in touch with is not...enclosed. We enclose it as we try to think of it" (Campbell 75). We are trapped in a finite

world, using a finite language to describe the infinite. God does not have an objective personal identity: he is not a white-bearded man sitting on the edge of the cosmos, dangling his feet in the waters of creation. God is subjective; God is experiential.

We can no longer continue to reach for a prepackaged, microwavable, easily consumable God. In our age of speedy gratifi-

cation, in our age of computers and fax machines and e-mail and McDonald's, we must somehow find the time to locate the spiritual ourselves; to find the mysterious Being in our everyday lives.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Whatever method we use to cross into a new sense of spirituality in our global technological age, it is helpful to remember one of the recurring themes in all mythologies: that out of the darkest moment comes the light. Jesus had to be crucified in order for us to be saved. We must descend into the grave in order to be resurrected. It is a question of whether we can find the will to make the imaginative effort to resurrect God from the depths of our secularized culture, whether we can find our own truths in a world where lie passes as truth. In the words of Nietzsche,

*Truth is...not something...that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end – introducing truth, as a process ad infinitum, an active determining – not a becoming-conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the "will to power". (Nietzsche 202)*

We must learn that our individual search for truth may never arrive at any one universal Truth. We must develop our own ways to find God. We must learn to find the experience of God in our daily lives, to take time out to recognize the sacred and mystical in everyday life. We must utilize ritual in our lives to embellish our search

for the spiritual. As Michael Ventura puts it, ritual helps us to "enact the metaphor;" ritual extracts the physical experience from the abstract symbols we create to make it something we can rationally comprehend.

How are we to find God? That is a question that each of us must answer individually. We might begin by rediscovering the miraculous within the ordinary, the magical experiences that happen everyday, underneath our noses. We might try really seeing the beauty of nature that encompasses our asphalt planet – the trees, reaching upwards as if to God; sunlight, illuminating a friend's face; the beautiful intricacies of a bird, a plant, a smile. There is a rhythm that resonates throughout life; we can create our own beat within it. We should become our own priests and priestesses, divining rituals that keep our physical life in groove with that rhythm. We should not believe in a god that does not dance, in a god that is any less spirited and alive than ourselves.

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# Melting Pot of Values

## *Immigration as a Convergence of Values: A Recipe for Tolerance*

As the United States has hosted wave after wave of immigrants, the symbol of the "American melting pot" has expanded to have many facets. The melting pot has, shall we say, re-melted. As this nation approaches the millennium, this concept of an ever-changing mixture will become even more relevant. Some believe that the melting pot symbolizes the complex and diverse cultures and ethnic groups that are present in the United States. Others picture immigrants jumping into the melting pot and then returning a "full American," nicely assimilated. The image of the melting pot moves: David Quixano described the melting pot as "roaring, bubbling, stirring, seething, melting,

and fusing" (Gleason 7). He is describing the values of different minority groups, how they conglomerate, how priorities juxtapose and, yes, clash when different groups of people with different values come together. Looking at a few cultural and ethnic groups will help us better understand how the ingredients of the melting pot mix together. This is a simple analogy, but it describes the phenomenon of the diversity of values in this country in a basic way, and it illustrates the fact that not everyone's values will mix perfectly to cook up a single, cohering dish, one that conforms to the Anglo-Saxon cookbook. Why is a melting pot of minority

A major factor in making political choices is to understand why a group prioritizes its values in a certain order.

values important to public issues? The answer lies in the different life values that were instilled in America's minority groups in their countries of origin. Granted, we are all human and hold such things as food, shelter, and clothing valuable and essential, but what about values in political issues? Values are an integral part of the choice-making process when dealing with an issue. Three people may share the values of ambition, freedom, and security. Differences and complexities come through when the people present their values in order of importance. The strongest values will most likely vary, and so the individuals do not then share the same order of valuable feelings. This prioritizing takes place individually for all people but also among assorted minority groups in the United States. Their different origins and backgrounds instill different values.

Backgrounds and cultural origins determine social norms and are based on deep motivations about what a group holds valuable. When we consider

the many ethnic and cultural groups that now make America home and consider, also, their equally diverse histories and customs – all very different from America's Anglo-Saxon majority – we begin to understand the immense diversity of values they contribute to our country.

The most important factor in making political choices is to understand why a group prioritizes its values in a certain order. When this involves many minority groups, it is helpful to understand the underlying factors that influence this priority setting.

Consider one religious minority, the American Catholic, who places high importance on stability in the family and on community, wisdom, and obedience. It is important to realize that the religious values of the American Catholic take precedence in prioritizing basic values (Suttles 45).

Family stability is grounded on the fact that divorce is condemned by the church, and a divorced person cannot remarry inside the Catholic church. Togetherness is also important and contributes to the sense of strong obedience within the American Catholic family. One Catholic woman reports, "Infidelity and fornica-



Jill Kail

Above: A church in Austria.

tion are strictly prohibited in the Catholic church, which places importance on the value of obedience within the family" (Louviere). Thus the value of loyalty to the family and to the spouse is deeply held in Catholicism. Wisdom is a key value to the American Catholic because the faith is taught by Catholic schools and thus education, in a Catholic school, is emphasized. Others may place financial stability or another value as a first priority, but as a whole these values have ranked among the top in the Catholic minority (Gittler 17-32).

The American Jew usually has another set of values. American Jews typically hold a double minority status. They practice Judaism and represent an ethnic minority in this country. Today there are many German and Eastern European Jewish descendants living in America. The Jewish population as a whole considers security and freedom as priority values in their somewhat new homeland of America. Because so many American Jews are descendants of Holocaust victims, they deeply value the security and civil rights that were absent in Hitler's Germany. Six million Jews were

killed in the Holocaust, and Jews are deeply dedicated to ensuring that their people will never suffer mass extermination again. Harassment by the Ku Klux Klan has made many Jews live in fear, even in America. So, again, security is valued deeply in everyday life as well as in choice-making. Many Jews are immigrants from Russia and other Eastern European countries that were formerly Communist. One Jewish woman states, "My grandmother was a victim of communism until she escaped. I do not ever want to fear communism in the land of the free - America" (Moskovitz). Freedom of speech and choice is a new concept to some Jews, and they value freedom tremendously when choice-making. The simple freedom to make a choice about an issue is not taken for granted. The American Catholic and the American Jew illustrate how religious minorities can have different priorities in their set of values (Gittler 58-69).

Native American Indians are usually forgotten when discussing minorities. Justice and stability are deeply valued by them because they were taken from their land and forced to move to inhospitable reservations throughout the West. Stability is important because throughout history Native Americans have been repeatedly relocated. In Native American culture, the tribe stays together and does not separate. Thus, the fear of forced separation, such as that which is remembered from the Trail of Tears, causes a strong need for stability. Therefore, Native Americans exhibit yet another distinct set of values.

As the victims of slavery and

*We are all human and hold food, shelter, and clothing valuable and essential, but what about values in political issues?*

intense segregation, African Americans are deeply motivated by the values of freedom and equality. They tend to emphasize these concepts above all others when making choices. African Americans were enslaved for approximately 300 years in this country. This long history of being considered, by law, property to be moved and sold at the wishes of others, has instilled the importance of freedom and equality. More recently, harassment by the Ku Klux Klan and segregation laws further jeopardized the equality and freedom of African Americans and reinforced these values. One young African American girl states, "Yes, I do value the economy and intelligence, but the deepest felt value to most are equality and freedom for all African Americans" (Jackson). This statement demonstrates that, while other commonly held values are also recognized by African Americans as important, as a minority group, most see equality and freedom as their deepest motivators in choice-making (Gittler 70-82).

A completely different set of values is seen in a large, but relatively unpublicized minority, Puerto Rican immigrants. Because the need for workers continues to grow in the United States, the migration from Puerto Rico to the United States is known as the "pull." And because Puerto Rico cannot support its people on the tiny Caribbean island, it is said that the commonwealth "pushes" its workers north to the United States. Economic prosperity and financial stability motivate the Puerto Rican migration. Puerto Ricans that migrate to the United States do so for employment opportunities. Ambition, then, is also a priority value and the stereotype of a lazy and poor ethnic group is unfounded (Suttles 94).

The Puerto Rican is born into a social status from which he seldom changes unless he moves off the island. Spanish ancestry and American



Michael Florence

Above: Open air market, Costa Rica.



Jeffrey Smyly

Above: Guatemalan man weighs sundries.

money are the two chief determinants of the upper class. Strata lines can be crossed through migration to the United States and the pursuit of the American dream. The migrants bring to the United States a deep loyalty to their Spanish language. They feel a great sense of pride and love for their native language. This is a problem for some that do not speak English, but Puerto Ricans learn to speak English quickly. English is seen as necessary to compete, yet the love of the Spanish language remains. This sense of loyalty also continues into family life. When interviewed, a Puerto Rican woman stated, "It is very common for family members outside of the immediate family to all live in the same house. Personally, my grandmother and sister live with my husband and my children right now" (Thompson).

There is no doubt why the immigrants hold their values so close. The values of the Puerto Rican minority in the United States reflect those that are strongly held on the island. The commonwealth of Puerto Rico has a choice to become a state, but because of the priority values that the Puerto Ricans hold, they vote otherwise. This is a prime example of how values contribute to the choice-making process. So close is the Puerto Rican loyalty to their language that the pro-statehood party cannot obtain the majority vote for statehood. The migration to the United States has only served to strengthen and popularize these values in a growing group. Puerto Ricans will soon be the largest minority in the United States, outnumbering African Americans. This is one important reason why the majority should be aware of the values of minority groups. Minority groups are usually the first people to be in line at the voting poles, and they vote based on issues. The melting pot has become aware of its Puerto

Rican ingredient (Gittler 109-123).

Where do these different values that various minorities hold dear fit into the larger fabric of American life? In the workplace, one Puerto Rican may come to work early to receive extra pay, even if he has to walk; whereas a Catholic employee may miss work due to an appointment with a marriage counselor. These are highly hypothetical situations, but they illustrate how we encounter the priority values of minority groups everyday. In today's society, understanding and tolerance of other people's values are crucial to communication. Millions of dollars are spent to help businesses and organizations understand the values of different generations of employees and employers. But with today's increasing number of immigrants and descendants of immigrants, acceptance should expand to the understanding of and cooperation with the values of immigrants and minorities.

The different sets of values discussed in this essay are typical for the minorities but are not stereotypical. For example, when asked to name their priority values, we can expect Anglo-Saxons as a group to name economy, intelligence, and courage. All Anglo-Saxons may not hold these values, but they are typical of the group. We can better understand the choices, particularly political choices, of all people when we also understand group tendencies.

So, we can see the diversity in prioritized values by various cultural, religious, and ethnic minorities, and the dissonance that results when

*If America is to remain America in the*

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*re-melt the melting pot.*

these values come into play with one another. How is a group of diverse people ever going to make decisions and tolerate diverse values? Through a process of learning about each other, and through understanding, tolerance, and an appreciation of both shared and disparate values. The melting pot first roars when the values first come into conflict. Then, gradually, the melting pot blends ideas. Finally, the melting pot produces a tolerance of ideas and an agreement about issues and choice-making. Economic and population trends indicate that immigration to the United States will not slow in the coming years. Indeed, as transportation throughout the world becomes even more accessible, migration will likely increase globally. If America hopes to remain America in the next millennium, it must continue the precious recipe that enables it to re-melt the melting pot.

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# Transactions Beyond 2000

*Digital currency services will face challenges in opening new markets, but if they succeed, the possibilities are endless.*

Just a few years ago the idea of a cashless economy would have meant a society where people practiced a policy of exchanging goods. As the millennium approaches, however, the arrival of technologies enabling secure communication over the Internet is opening avenues for new types of electronic currency. By the year 2050, it is not likely that we will barter goods or exchange written "promises" in the form of currencies for those goods. Instead, it is more likely that we will buy our hamburgers and our houses with the equivalent of electronic promises for equivalent value. Such digital currencies will offer the advantages of today's currencies and more.

The usefulness of currencies as a method of exchange is measured in three ways: the cost to produce it, the amount of delay it causes in the transaction, and the risk of theft and fraud. One hurdle to using digital currency involves the still-common difficulties in its implementation. While automatic teller machines (ATMs) and computer

banking may now seem ubiquitous in our world, they, and the technological infrastructure needed to support such cashless transactions, are still rare in much of the world. For producers of digital currency services, the high cost of implementation in underdeveloped countries with an insufficient electronic infrastructure is the first hurdle they must overcome to open receptive markets. There are others. Many people still do not trust money they cannot hold in their hand. And laws governing electronic transfers are still being hammered out by banks, regulatory agencies, and commercial services. Nevertheless, when the new digital currencies are measured based on their relative usefulness to conventional currencies, it is clear that they offer a wealth of new possibilities.

Different currencies have different types of costs. For example, according to the U.S. Treasury it costs about four cents to print a dollar bill, and it must be replaced after an average of 17 months (Caskey 78). The total cost of

printing a year's worth of dollar bills is estimated at \$140 million. There are costs for money currency transactions as well. For example, mass transit companies in the United States spend an average of \$124 million a year handling one dollar bills (Caskey 79).

The high cost of transporting paper currency reduces its usefulness for larger transactions.

Instead of using large amounts of money for transactions, financial institutions use a system called "notational currency." These exchanges require debiting one party's

account and crediting another's. This practice is superior in one very practical way, it eliminates the cost of transporting actual currency. In addition, notational currency can be transacted over different mediums. For example, a check is a form of notational currency. Essentially, a check is a contract that authorizes the exchange of money from one account to another.

Although notational currency eliminates the cost of transporting money, it still has production and transaction costs. Banks charge customers for the cost of printing checks. Once a customer writes a check, the check has to be transported to a bank. Then it has to be sorted and recorded by the bank and finally mailed back to the customer.

Credit card transactions, another type of notational currency, decreases the cost of transporting transaction receipts, but they still have costs. To process credit card transactions, merchants must invest in hardware and a network connection with a bank. When a customer presents his card for purchases, the merchant sends the transaction to his bank, which sends it to the customer's bank. The customer's bank returns information and

authorization to the merchant's bank, which returns it to the merchant. The phone network substitutes for physically transporting written information, but the costs of phone lines and customer accounting still impose significant margin-

*Digital currency has the ability to change the way we shop, pay our bills, entertain ourselves ...*

al costs on credit card transactions. As a result, credit cards are not useful for purchasing items of small value.

Some digital currencies are similar to money but they have different costs. For example, Digicash is an electronic money system that uses a technology called public key cryptography to provide secure transactions over the Internet. Under Digicash, both customers and merchants maintain an account at the "digicash electronic bank" (Camp 2). Since Digicash can serve customers and merchants at the same bank, Digicash reduces marginal costs by reducing bank transactions. Costs are reduced further because all the transactions of Digicash are transmitted over the Internet, a more cost efficient method than phone networks. Financial transactions over the Internet are growing thanks to the cost-effectiveness of such services as Digicash. In the future, we are likely to see an equally warm reception for digital transactions by vendors and the public in non-Internet transactions.

Currency transactions can experience delays for a number of reasons, the most common of which is the authentication and/or processing of a

currency. Cash has a very short transaction delay because it can be authenticated first-hand. Currencies that can be authenticated first-hand



All Digicash transactions will involve a short delay because all transactions must go through their server. Like credit cards, network congestion at the server might cause delays.

Every form of currency has different risks associated with it and electronic currency is no exception. We risk losing or misplacing our currency. We risk attempting to use the wrong currency in a

## A future of finger scanning...

are called "offline." Currencies that must be authenticated by a third party are called "on-line" (Carver 3). Checks are an example of on-line currency because they have to be authenticated by a bank. This usually causes a delay that begins when a customer writes a check and ends when the check amount is debited from the account.

Credit cards, another form of on-line currency, differ from checks in that they are authenticated at the point of sale. The speed of using the phone network practically eliminates delays with credit card transactions, but not completely. Credit card transactions do experience short delays because the issuing bank server must process them. If many customers use their credit cards at the same time, phone lines and issuing bank computers can become congested, causing further delays.

Like checks and credit cards, electronic forms of money are also authenticated on-line and have delays that are very similar to credit card transactions. For example, the Digicash server must verify Digicash tokens before a transaction can occur.

country; francs in China, for example. Historically, fraud has been one of the greatest risks associated with every currency transaction. Each year, millions of dollars are lost to currency fraud. To prevent fraud, different forms of currency use different methods of security. Producers of paper currency, for example, try to prevent fraud at the point of production by printing them on special paper designed for authentication. This is done in the hope that when a bill is presented to a merchant, it can be distinguished from a counterfeit bill. However, technological improvements in copying and printing have made it increasingly easier to counterfeit currency. For example, in 1992, \$44 million in counterfeit currency were seized in the United States (Caskey 122).

Anyone that has had a check stolen knows the effects of fraud. Checks, unlike money, require a signature to authenticate them. Despite this precaution, check fraud still occurs. The merchant can verify the authenticity of the check, but cannot verify the status of the account, like whether or not the check has been stolen. Banks verify check transactions after the sale. This method is risky for merchants because they cannot be assured of payment at the point of sale, since they have no way of knowing the status of the account and if the bank will honor it.

Credit card users experience fraud despite security measures. Unlike checks, authentication of credit card transactions occurs at the point of sale. Merchants receive authentication about the transaction from the issuing bank before the transaction takes place. This decreases the merchants' risk by allowing them to verify customer payment before the transaction occurs. Credit card issuers also protect customers from fraud. Credit card customers maintain security because they control payment after the transaction occurs.

To prevent fraud, electronic curren-



Jeffrey Smyly

## ... or more stone coins?

cies over the Internet use an encryption technology called public key cryptography (Chaum 2), invented by Whitfield Diffie and Martin Hellman in 1977 (Gates 109). This technology can assure the authenticity of a document through the use of transaction specific codes. Anyone who sends a message using this system can be sure who sent it because the messages are locked using a private electronic key. A public key is used to unlock them. Variations of this technology are used by Digicash to secure its transactions over the Internet.

Under the Digicash system, fraud is prevented as long as Digicash's private encryption key remains secret. However, if the key is ever violated, the damage could be severe. This is one risk that might limit the value of electronic money as a currency.

We have seen some of the advantages of digital currency in relation to other conventional forms of currency. But digital currency offers intriguing new possibilities as well. How will our sense of self-worth change when the work we do every day is automatically "credited" into an account that automatically pays our bills, leaving

us, as it were, out of the middle? Will we experience a further sense of loss of control and individuality, a malady that has plagued us in the twentieth century? What happens when our account is inadvertently shut off? How will we view individuals who do not wish to participate in the system? Or will they have a choice not to participate? If so, who decides that? Will the nature of theft change? Or will bank robbing simply require less expertise with a weapon and more with cryptography? Can whole nations pool their charitable donations and electronically "donate" or transfer wealth to needy populations with the flip of an electrode? In a short period of time, digital currency has the potential to transform the way we do many things. The potential of digital currency relies upon the decisions we make in the coming millennium. The implementation of digital currencies, however, rests with merchants and entrepreneurs of today.

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# Power and Inequality

## *A Close Look at the Origin and Implications of Human Suffering.*

The approach of the new millennium provides a good opportunity to step back and take a look at humanity's current situation. In all but the last few millennia of its existence, humanity consisted largely of bands of hunter-gatherers. With the development of civilization came increased specialization and division of labor. With the growth of the nation-state came stratification into socio-economic classes. This phenomenon can be seen both within and between nations. Also associated with the modern world are many problems that exist in a global context, and citizens of these modern developed nations are often forced to confront these matters. The possibility of global warming, ozone depletion, environmental pollution, the loss of biodiversity and natural habitats, the human impact of technological developments, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, unchecked population growth, and the widespread material poverty and

extreme economic inequality suffered by the great majority of the world's inhabitants are among these global dilemmas. It is apparent that this last feature of the modern world, extreme material poverty and economic inequality, is inextricably bound up with most other social problems, and often is the fundamental cause of many social problems.

The inequality of modern nations based on economic and military power, or lack thereof, often sets the stage for many of the world's problems. When one examines the current state of the world, one prominent feature should become clear: the United States and the other rich nations exert considerable influence, directly or indirectly, on the rest of the world. The U.S. as judged by military strength and, to a lesser extent, economic might is the superpower, and it has been so since the second World War. Any sensible discussion of contemporary world affairs should, then,

include a correct diagnosis of the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world. Since World War II, the U.S. has exerted significant influence over the political events of much of the Third World. Americans generally think of U.S. foreign policy as benevolent, noble, and even altruistic. However, a closer inspection of what the actual effects of policy have been suggest that this is not often the case. In fact, the United States, far from being benevolent, frequently implements policies which benefit a few and have direct negative consequences on the bulk of Third World populations. The effects of these policies, namely horrible working conditions and repression of human rights, in turn exacerbate other social and environmental problems.

The United States and the other rich countries enjoy tremendous material wealth as compared to other nations of the world. The degree of this difference is often not appreciated. The United States alone, making up approximately six percent of the world's population, uses 40% of the world's resources. Adding the other wealthy nations, this extreme inequality becomes even more pro-

nounced. Considering the relative standards of living between the First and Third World nations, it becomes clear that the richest members of humankind live quite differently than the poorest.

The Third World is composed of the poorest nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is more or less dominated economically, politically and culturally by the First World nations, especially the United States. Debilitating poverty is commonplace and malnutrition and even starvation is widespread.

Consider the following statistics concerning the Third World. Over 30 million people die of starvation and famine each year. About 10,000 people each day lack medical care (Simon 106). The average child does not see a doctor before age 5. A billion people (30 per-

cent of the population) are unemployed. More than 700 million adults are unable to read, and half of all school age children do not attend school. About 60-90 percent of the wealth is usually owned by 3 percent of the population (Simon 106). The average per capita income in 1991 ranged from less than \$350 a year in Ethiopia and Kenya to under \$3000 a year in Mexico, Turkey, and Chile (while the U.S. per capita income in 1991 was nearly \$22,000) (*The World Almanac* 742, 752, 778). In pointing out figures such as those above, public officials and mainstream commentators sigh and immediately reiterate our sincere commitment to human rights, democracy, and the unassailable virtues of the free market. The U.S. is the leader of the Free World, we are reminded, and the idea that our influence could



Jeffrey Smyly

*Above and on the following two pages: Girls in Guatemala offer to paint curbs for pennies in a rich neighborhood.*



be anything but noble is utterly inconceivable.

One way to evaluate the validity of such self-adulation is to examine what sorts of human rights abuses occur in Third World countries whose governments, often military dictatorships, receive U.S. support such as foreign aid, training of military officers, weapons, and capital investment by American-based multinational corporations. A few examples from Latin America are illuminating. Take Guatemala, for instance. In 1954 the government of Jacobo Arbenz was toppled by a CIA directed

coup after the Eisenhower administration labeled Arbenz a communist. He had planned to implement a land-reform program which would have forced the United Fruit Company to sell land not under cultivation. Arbenz was replaced with a U.S. Army-trained officer, Carlos Castillo Armas, who put forth a decree giving himself all executive and legislative functions. He stopped the land reforms and cancelled the registration of more than 500 labor unions. Between 1963 and 1993 the United States supported Castillo Armas's successors who are reported to have tortured and killed 150,000 Guatemalan citizens and kidnapped 50,000 more. The Bush administration was forced under congressional pressure to suspend aid in 1990, but claimed in 1991 that the human rights record was improving, contrary to the evidence provided by human rights groups that between January and September 1991, 730 citizens were killed and 100 more disappeared (an average of three a day).



Jeffrey Smyly

Some \$77 million in aid was provided by the Reagan and Bush administrations to the government of Guatemala between 1982 and 1991 (Eitzen 201).

Another well known example is the coup that ousted the government of Chile in 1973. Salvador Allende, the democratically elected leader, was murdered in the overthrow. There is no dispute that the CIA played a role here as well, and there is widespread suspicion of its direct role in Allende's murder. He was replaced by General Augusto Pinochet who managed to arrest and detain one of every 125 Chilean citizens by the end of his second year in power, many of whom were tortured. A diverse array of methods were reported, including rape, shocks applied through electrodes on the knees and genitals, sleep deprivation, mock

execution, submersion in water, and live rats shoved into victims' mouths. During his reign, Pinochet personally enriched himself and built a 15,000-square-foot house with an infrared security system and a private security force of eighty guards (Brown, Neier 17-20). Incidentally, he finally gave up power in March by handing over the presidency to a like-minded official, but not before creating the office of "Senator for Life" and placing himself in it. In El Salvador, the United States has supported the government and thus the right-wing "death squads" which are reported to have killed more than 40,000 people and forced 800,000 people (20 percent of the population) to become refugees between 1978 and 1993. Also

included in this list of achievements was the rape and murder of four American nuns, which prompted Amnesty International to declare the death squads' activities grotesque violations of human rights. The widow and children of the former head of the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, who was killed by government troops, were fired upon by the same troops. A United Nations mission in 1992 reported 105 assassinations, 15 kidnappings, and 281 illegal captures by Salvadoran security forces (Johnson 10-13). To take advantage of the low labor costs, freedom from strikes, and lack of pollution control, multinational corporations such as Texaco, Chevron, and Kimberly-Clark have invested more than \$100 million in El Salvador (Kwitney 10-11).



Jeffrey Smyly

Similar stories could be told for many countries throughout the Third World, largely in Southeast Asia and Latin America. The issue of human rights comes up not only in discussions of our relationship with smaller Third World countries, but with respect to our major trading partners as well. Principal among these is China. Every year there is a lengthy discussion over China's trade status as Most Favored Nation (MFN), which it receives every year. Members of both U.S. political parties argue every year that trade with China will, indeed, bring about democratic reforms (funny that this is never said for Cuba), regardless of what new revelations come to light concerning suppression of political dissidents and working conditions. Such reforms are

hardly forthcoming.

In the case of Latin America, a general pattern emerges. Brutal civilian or military governments come to power. Military or police forces are employed in the intimidation, harassment, and outright elimination (using techniques mentioned earlier) of labor unions, grass roots organizations, small farming cooperatives, civic and church groups, alternative political parties – any sort of serious political involvement by peasants. Under such conditions politicians representing

the interests of large landowners, factory owners, and American investors are usually able to dominate elections, and U.S. commentators are able to extol our undeniable commitment to democracy, human rights, and the miracle of the Free Market. Peasants often work in factories,

many of which are owned by American, European, and Japanese companies. The familiar scenario of 14 hour days at pennies an hour applies here, with many of these products going to the developed countries. Another livelihood is work on farms owned by large landowners, growing specialty crops or beef for American markets and those of other rich countries and it is no secret who keeps most of the profit. Many of these families are not merely desperately poor but are starving, or at least severely malnourished, and yet food from these countries continue to flow to the markets of the rich nations.

This is not without historical precedent. During the Irish potato famine, when a significant fraction of the entire population starved to

death, there was a constant export of food to Britain.

If popular forces are able by some accident to get a favored candidate elected, the United States and other wealthy nations typically complain about real or imagined atrocities of the newly elected leader, and enact measures to undermine, as with economic sanctions, or, as we have seen, encourage the overthrow of this unacceptable government by military means. In the old days it was sufficient merely to use the threat of encroaching communism to guarantee public support for American interference in Third World politics. Nowadays genuinely democratic governments are said to be insufficiently democratic in some way, which in reality means they conflict with powerful private interests.

This sort of power structure remains pretty much unchallenged and, in fact, seldom discussed in the First World. All

the while the overwhelming bulk of the Third World lives in a condition of overwhelming impoverishment and political powerlessness.

If anything like the political structure I have described exists, then it should have a profound impact on how we discuss various global problems such as unchecked population growth and environmental destruction.

Take the example of overpopulation. The natural humanistic impulse, which is noble enough, would be to increase both knowledge about reproduction and access to safe and convenient birth control. Would this solve the problem? Only in part. What really drives a high reproductive rate in poor countries is the need for couples to have as many children as possible in hopes that one or a few of them can support them in old age. Children are so forthcoming because they provide a kind of pension fund. This is seen explicitly in parts of Africa and East Asia.

China's one-child policy, harshly criticized (perhaps justifiably) in the West, is an attempt to merely treat the symptom of the more fundamental illness of material inequality. Birth control is available, and often, as is the case with medical abortion, provided at state expense. Has this ameliorated the problem? Not really. There is wide-spread violation of the one-child policy,

especially in the rural areas (Hertzgard 105-108). Furthermore, the insufficiency of birth control as a singular solution to the population problem is illustrated by a particularly grotesque phenomenon: the selective abortion of female fetuses, which are thought of as a kind of low yield pension investment. This example, I believe, forcefully demonstrates that the solution to unchecked

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*Military or police forces are employed in the intimidation, harassment, and outright elimination of labor unions, grass roots organizations, small farming cooperatives, any sort of serious political involvement by peasants.*

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population growth is not, simplistically, the grand light of knowledge and reproductive technology brought to these pitiful backward peoples, but rather the knowledge that they will not starve in their old age. The rich nations, not incidentally, have very low population growth rates, and in some cases, even have negative growth rates!

Similar relationships between poverty and other social and environmental problems often exist. Deforestation is directly related to the need to clear new expanses of forest in various tropical regions for fuel so that a few meager crops can be grown a couple of years before the soil loses its arability. Discussion of the global warming and the emission of greenhouse gasses, and the possibility of a global treaty to address it, turns directly on the realities of how global resources are distributed: who has them, and who wants and needs them (witness the recent summit in Japan and the conflict between

the rich and developing nations). Such can be said for crime, depletion of other natural resources, and so on.

The effects of this global political structure are not limited merely to the Third World. In fact, there are direct domestic consequences as well. Of course, the United States and other rich nations often receive cheap products as a conse-

quence of this new "global marketplace." But, the flip side to this is that American manufacturing jobs are lost as factories pick up and move to places with lower labor costs, the unlikelihood of labor organization, little or no environmental reg-

ulations, and so forth. This process has been greatly facilitated with the development of international trade agreements. Unfortunately, displaced American workers have little genuine political recourse when their jobs are lost as a result of such actions.

It is important to remember that while a great deal of human suffering is seemingly intractable and beyond human control, as with natural disasters, another great deal of it is not, and is directly or indirectly the result of human actions. This brings it well within the domain of things that can be examined, understood, and even ameliorated, and, if meaningfully addressed, would possibly represent the

greatest triumph and accomplishment of humanity's journey through the millennia.

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*Manufacturing jobs are lost as factories pick up and move to places with lower labor costs, the unlikelihood of labor organization, little or no environmental regulations, etc.*

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By Gwendolyn Griffin

# Deconstructing Power Hierarchies

## Regarding Earth as Self

In the current age of technology, industry, and continued "development," human beings have, generally speaking, been mindless toward how their actions affect our Earth. This has resulted in a mass deterioration of Earth's sustaining systems. Specifically, I am speaking of the land, the rivers, the oceans, the air, and all the beings (human and non-human) that inhabit these places. I posit that factors of social domination – hierarchies of male over female, rich over poor, white over black, (and other ethnic/color-based dominations), human over non human, domestic over non domestic, and so on – are the primary causes for this current disregard toward and destruction of the Earth.

Stephanie Lahar supports this multifaceted hypothesis, saying that phenomena are composed of multiple factors "rather than one primary factor that others derive from or are secondary to" (42). The particular phenomenon of our Earth crisis is likewise composed of multiple factors. All oppression is related; the myriad fac-

tors of racism, classism, sexism, anthropocentrism, and other "isms" are intertwined, are all related to the problem of Earth's destruction. Illustrating oppression as interwoven, Lahar cites as examples sexism and heterosexism, and racism and ethnocentrism. She explains that "conceptual dichotomies" such as masculine and feminine ("insider" male, "outsider" female [Code xiii]), mind and body, public and private, and nature and society help to maintain oppression. Lahar postulates that it is this dichotomization, this objectification, that causes people to lose touch with the value of both human and non-human nature (29).

I propose that all these factors are organized under the heading of hierarchical relationships. The subject/object dichotomy is particularly problematic; in conjunction with this is the problem of who is given space to speak. Val Plumwood refers to the problem of power-over relations as the "master-slave dualism." She equates the master with the "colonizer identity,"

wherein

*The master's main project is the rational colonization of the lower order of nature represented as a void inviting occupation . . . the concept of master-subject defines a determinable subject place which can take a range of determinable forms; the concept of master stands to anthropocentrism, eurocentrism/racism, etc., much as the concept of color stands to red, blue, green, etc. (2)*

In the "colonization" (by the "master" in any given situation) of any determined "lower order of nature," the issue is subordination. If one is able to posit a being as "below," then naturally one assumes the position of "above." Hence the reason for the dualistic notions of order which translate easily into power hierarchy.

Plumwood asserts that her "master-slave" theory encompasses all the other dualisms, in which one part is given "master" status. She explains that "the theory of master-subject provides a way to drop rank reductionism privileging a unitary oppression model and substitute a concept of multiple, intersecting, and interlocking oppressions and fractured identities" (Plumwood 4). Plumwood's theory shows the way hierarchies operate. Hierarchies of one over the other provide a feeling of identity which claims superiority by way of maintaining another being

## Deconstructing Power Hierarchies

as subordinate.

Ideas of domination (perpetrated by unrecognized "masters") permeate Western society. There is the ongoing notion of self improvement through the degradation of another. The limited self feels "better" (higher on the power ladder) if there is a correlative "worse." Similarly, technology assumes a continual "betterment" of society, based on the myth that the lives of our ancestors were less desirable, and that our lives will continue to be an improvement over theirs (Armstrong 7). Corporations are continually "bettering" the production of goods by using more machinery and fewer people (downsizing). Yet the reasoning in this is lacking. Paul Hawkins points out that using "more of what we have less of (natural capital) to use less of what we have more of (people)" doesn't make logical sense. The outcome of continual down-

sizing is that "nearly one-third of the world's workers sense that they have no value in the present economic scheme" (49).

It has been hypothesized that this message, that people are not needed, is an underlying reason for the increased risk factor in many lives. People who depend on industry-related jobs may be trying to let themselves out of a world that repeats it does not need them. This is asserted both in the industry itself, and in its by-products. Minority communities have tended, not coinci-

*Industry has the habit of  
thwarting or ignoring ... the  
effects of their actions on  
natural systems.*

dentially, to house the by-products of industry, "the waste and pollution no longer acceptable in the White communities" (Hamilton 215). In the very short term, dumping is the cheapest thing for businesses to do and downsizing is the most profitable short-term solution. Dumping and downsizing are simplifications that give the illusion of efficiency . . . but not for long. Looking to the history of monoculture, one can see that the benefits reaped from simplification are severely short sighted.

Kinsley informs the reader that our "global resource use" is doubling every 13 years (4). And we are not giving the resources time to replenish themselves. While the number of people continues to increase, need continues to increase, and resources continue to diminish. Again, the problem arises from



John Morrow

Western society's fixation on dominance/power hierarchies. The false social assumption is that humans are at the "top of the planetary spinal cord" (Williams 35). We have assumed superficial power; we claim dominance over nature. Granted, the producer/consumer relationship is a symbiotic one; yet the lack of responsibility which the "master" industry takes for its by-products leaves members of society, especially those who are already on the lower end of the economic hierarchy, feeling powerless in the face of environmental degradation. Those in the dominant power position fail to assume the responsibility

that comes with a position of authority.

Industry has the habit of thwarting or ignoring the facts of nature and/or the effects their actions have on natural systems. Its management escapes responsibility by failing to take responsibility for the damage done. Much of the knowledge presented by corporations and industries is presented as if it existed in a vacuum. Whereas a

timber company might present a picture of economic benefit gained through logging the Bankhead National Forest, what it fails to present are the environmental ramifications, as well as the economic ramifications, that would follow. What it fails to present are capital gains and expensing

which are granted through the U.S. government.

As this example shows, whomever is presenting knowledge does so with a particular end in mind. "The value of natural capital is masked by a financial system that gives us improper information" (Hawkins 46). We do not see the real "cost" of our actions, we only see distorted monetary figures. The timber industry is subsidized through capital gains treatment and immediate deductions (expensing). Through expensing, companies are allowed "to write off costs of machinery and equipment faster than the timber is harvested. . . this gives timber producers an interest-free loan

from the government and effectively reduces their tax rate on investments to zero. No sustainable forestry practices are required to receive these tax benefits" (Friends 1). The U.S. Forest Service's timber program has lost \$5.6 billion over the past decade" [1980's]," reports the Native Forest Council. Over the years, the government continues to lose billions of dollars on timber sales.

In the Bankhead National Forest, the Forest Service broke contractual agreements made with the Blue Creek Indians and logged land which is both sacred and historical. Their irreverence was made possible by Western society's capitalistic frame of thought which attempts to see all things in terms of economic value – and yet, in reference to the information presented earlier, the "economic value" is nonexistent. In the



John Morrow

framework of the current system, logging the forests – especially public lands – makes little to no sense. Aside from the value the forest has in and of itself, the sacred and historical values are also ignored. Not only that, but logging causes loss of biodiversity, the elements of which are so

many we cannot enumerate them from our limited human view. Obvious detrimental effects of logging include erosion and the siltation of rivers, and hence the loss of life there as well as on the logged land. A single action does not have a single result. The intricacies are unknown to humans beyond the obvious, and even the obvious is blatantly unrecognized. At a recent talk at the

University of Alabama at Birmingham, Paul Watson illustrated this fact with a short anecdote. He explained that a tree, *Calveria major*, needs its seeds to pass through the Dodo bird in order for the seeds to grow. When the Dodo bird was exterminated, the fate of the *Calveria*

*major* was likewise doomed. A fungus that grew on *Calveria major* then became extinct, followed by a bacteria that depended on that fungus. In many cases, we have no idea of the consequence of our actions.

In regard to empowered knowledge presenters (such as the U.S. Forest Service), the problematic issue is that representatives of industry, as well as others in "power" falsely simplify the complexities of their subjects. They exploit the common, academically honored, method of objectification to their own ends. Lorraine Code reminds her

Above left and right: Sipsey Swamp on Highway 69 as one drives south into Tuscaloosa.

readers that "subjects who are treated like objects of knowledge are assimilated to physical objects, their subjectivity reduced to interchangeable, observable features" (104). Jerry Mander points out, in "The Rules of Corporate Behavior," that

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*"factors of social domination – hierarchies of male over female, rich over poor,*

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*Corporations require that subjective information be translated into objective form – that is, into numbers. This excludes from the decision making process all values that cannot be quantified. The spiritual aspects of forests, for example, cannot be quantified and so do not enter into corporate equations. Forests are evaluated as "board feet." Production by-products that pose a danger to public health or welfare – pollution, toxic waste, carcinogens – are translated into value-free objective concepts such as "cost-benefit ratio" and "trade off." (18)*

Nonhuman nature is continually "translated" into objects for use by humans. In Western society, it is common to objectify "indigenous peoples, Natives, hunter-gatherer civilizations, and in general, people with less economic and military power than more dominant civilizations" (Armstrong 7). One specific example of such objectification (and successive exploitation) is Shell Corporation's exploitation of Nigeria. The issues of racism and classism are inherent in this exploitation of a "third world people" who are monetarily poor. Not only is Nigeria "third

world," and therefore "other," but its people are black, hence a secondary determinant of otherness. Since 1958, Shell has mined over 900 million barrels of oil from Nigeria. Not only has the land been exploited for the purposes of serving Western needs, but Shell's methods of oil extrac-

tion have been less than responsible. Shell flares off the natural gas from the oil mined, polluting the air with

toxins which make it difficult to breathe, and which are a direct cause of acid rain. Furthermore, the flares are often located near homes. In addition to these day-to-day contami-

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*white over black,*

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nations, Shell has had numerous oil spills in the Nigerian area. On top of their blatant irresponsibility, Shell has silenced by death those who would dare speak out against their inhumane, exploitative practices.

In November 1995, Shell was responsible for the death of Nigerian author and environmentalist Ken Saro Wiwa, as well as his fellow Nigerian activists. At the time, energy companies in Nigeria, including Shell, occupied Nigeria on their own terms, that is, they were not nationalized. Ken Saro Wiwa wanted to nationalize these companies so that they would have to follow the environmental regulations of Nigeria. He was doing an admirable job in the movement to get this accomplished – and Shell management was threatening to pull out. Shell did not want the environmental regulations of Nigeria imposed on

it. As long as Shell continued to pay the Nigerian government a fee for unrestricted oil search and recovery, the Nigerian government was willing to step out of its way. The Nigerian government did not want Shell to leave. In order to stop Saro Wiwa's nationalization movement, the Nigerian government arrested Saro Wiwa and convicted him of treason and conspiracy.

The havoc wreaked on individual lives as a result of the irresponsible actions taken by Shell is hidden from view. The destruction of land integral to people's lives is scarcely acknowledged. The deaths of environmental activists are rarely heard about. The entire situation is reduced to "exploiting a third world nation." By objectifying, the corporation obscures the truth, and the possibility of reaction by the public is greatly lessened.

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*human over nonhuman*

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Many people simply do not see the environmental problems that are cropping up as a result of irresponsibility, disconnectedness, and failure to recognize Earth as a greater being of which we are a part. Most people do not call into question

how we get  
from one  
place to  
another;  
how we get  
refrigeration,

light, heat, running water, or air conditioning; nor do they question the ramifications such use might entail. Focused on the limited perception of self, the primary concern remains getting needs and wants met. Humans, seeing themselves at the top of a hierarchal structure, are all but oblivious

to the fact that "we are all embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature" (Capra 6). The media within our society feed human self-concern and perpetuate consumerism through constant messages that money and goods equal power. This makes it all the more difficult for the shift in social interaction with nature to occur. "The shift in paradigms," says Fritjof Capra, "requires an expansion not only of our perceptions and ways of thinking, but also of our values" (9).

In order for a shift in human values to occur, there must also be a shift in humankind's conception of our position relative to the earth. The power structure of humans over nature, in control as opposed to being a part of nature, must be recognized as a socially created myth. Daniel Quinn reminds us

*Not only is the world a sacred place, but we belong in it. We're not alien monsters here . . . we have to begin to think of ourselves as members of the world community, rather than as rulers of the planet. Our old vision of ourselves as the despots of the world, snapping our whips and making nature obey, might have thrilled us, but it's not working out. (Swift 12)*

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*– are the primary causes for this current disregard toward and destruction of the Earth."*

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In order to transform the ways in which we interact with the Earth, in order to transform the ways in which we meet our needs from limited methods to sustaining ones, we must reconstruct the way energy happens; the ways in which we produce food, water, clothing, and shelter; and

the ways in which waste is thought of and dealt with. Simple responses include shifting to a primarily solar-fed energy system and shifting our methods of agriculture. Other needed steps are to modify how we obtain water and to apply more conservative methods in its use. Moreover, we need to reduce the amount of waste we are creat-

ing and implement innovative solutions such as composting biodegradables and transforming nonbiodegradables into building materials. Another key change would be for humans to consume less, for our society to stop the infatuation with getting and using, with the only consideration being the happiness of the individual self. The broader solution, which encompasses these changes, is to

undo the dominant systems which oppress, for that is the root of the problem. The arrogant claim that humans have both the knowledge and foresight to "man" the helm of earth, or the arrogance of any dominant group to assume control over other beings of the Earth, maintains a structure which is unstable and ultimately nihilistic.

We are all part of the same ecosystem. Human beings are not separate from nature, not the

"rulers" of nature, regardless of the social constructs that suggest such. All beings and their actions are interconnected, and there is "intrinsic value in all life forms, regardless of their [apparent] usefulness to human beings" (Burch 3). We must realize that ultimately, every life form is "useful" to human beings – the earth depends on diversity to survive, and we depend on the earth.

Because our society has created hierarchies between humans and nonhuman nature and between humans and humans as well, we have eased away from interaction with the web of life and fail to recognize the larger Self, Earth. Because of the socially created hierarchy which depicts us as having power over nature, it is not commonly acknowledged that we *are* nature. We are intrinsic parts to the functioning of a

larger Self called Earth.

In recognizing the Earth as Self, we come full circle, to an alternative power, through "the experience of . . . being acted 'through' and sustained by something greater than oneself." In realizing the magnitude and the diversity of Earth, there is empowerment in recognition that humans are part of that diverse, magnificent body of Earth. Furthermore, we empower ourselves by function-



Sally ♥ The World

Evan Gunter

ing as a part of Earth, rather than in opposition to, as a so-called "master" of Earth. "The web of life," says Fritjo

*Consists of networks within networks. At each scale, under closer scrutiny, the nodes of the network reveal themselves as smaller networks. We tend to arrange these systems, all nesting within larger systems, in a hierarchical scheme by placing the larger systems above the smaller ones in a pyramid fashion. But this is a human projection. In nature there is no "above" or "below," and there are no hierarchies.*(35)

The forces which oppress in our human communities, as well as those which oppress nature are permeated by the same patterns of thought – hierarchies of better and worse which place the white male human at the top. Though conservation efforts are important, in order to ultimately end oppression for the Earth, for women, for minorities – in order to end all oppression, we must change the paradigms of thought that got us into the mess in the first place. Radical restructuring of our current social systems requires that we break out of the limitations of personal self, expanding our perception to include the entire Earth as our greater Self. In doing this, we will create a ripple effect that will transform our communities and our world.

*Gwendolyn Griffin is a senior in New College from Tuscaloosa. An ecofeminist, Gwendolyn is seeking to establish networks of people who are interested in altering our current social structures and creating a society which is more aware of its actions and their consequences. Anyone who has questions about ecofeminism, or who wants to join the eco-lution is encouraged to contact Gwendolyn at:*

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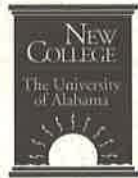


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And heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity within the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.*

- William Blake