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## God and the Bodhisattva: A Buddhist Reading of Stranger Than Fiction

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## God and the Bodhisattva: A Buddhist Reading of Stranger Than Fiction

### Abstract

The recent movie *Stranger Than Fiction* features a main character that can be seen as an example of a bodhisattva, a type of messiah, or hero, in Mahayana Buddhism. A bodhisattva aims to liberate all sentient beings. The distinctive nature of the film's plot and characters make it more plausibly read in Buddhist terms than in Christian terms. The main character discovers that he is the main character in a novel. The Author can be seen as God, but certainly not the all-loving God of the Christian Trinity. This God is cruel, repeatedly killing Her novels' protagonists. But the Hero, by willingly sacrificing himself, brings about a change in the Author, a blossoming of compassion, consistent with the Mahayana Buddhist view that not only Buddhas but also bodhisattvas are more enlightened than Gods.

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## Introduction

The recent film *Stranger Than Fiction* taken at face value is an absurdist romantic comedy, a bildungsroman about an introverted IRS agent. However, there is a metaphysical layer to the story that points to a deeper significance. The film features a two-layer narrative structure – the main character, Harold Crick (Will Ferrell), discovers that he is the main character in a novel, and that the author intends to kill him. The *mis en scene* eventually implodes as the “narrator’s” world and her character’s world meet in the “real” person of Harold Crick. The central absurdist premise of the movie is that a character in a novel can be a real person, even a real person who meets and interacts with the author. The device of Harold actually hearing the Narrator is used very selectively. Why he suddenly hears the voice is not explained. The fact that all the other characters in the movie are logically creations of the Author is never addressed either. So the entire *mis en scene* is absurd. The fact that this is absurd might lead the viewer to wonder whether the Author and Hero are symbols for something else. Given that the Author has presumably created the Hero, one “logical” possibility is that the Author represents God. If so, what sort of God? If so, who is the Hero? These are the questions that this paper will pursue.

Many films have featured Christ-figures as heroes, drawing on the deep well of Western culture for their narrative structure.<sup>1</sup> The bodhisattva, like the Christ-

figure, is a variant of the more general category of the Messiah, or at a more general level still, the Hero.<sup>2</sup> *Stranger Than Fiction*, this paper will argue, can be plausibly read as a Buddhist story, a story about becoming a bodhisattva. Before analyzing *Stranger Than Fiction*, the Buddhist concept of the bodhisattva must be explained, drawing on writings from the Mahayana tradition.

### **The Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism**

“Traditional teachings about rebirth say that most of us are unwitting prisoners on the wheel of samsara; we keep returning because we have no choice. According to this way of thinking, there are also men and women walking among us who are here of their own conscious volition. These men and women are known as Bodhisattvas. Bodhi means awakening; sattva means being. This is a being who is ready for nirvana but whose compassion is so great that he or she remains on earth solely in order to reduce suffering and help free others. A Bodhisattva is someone with pure, impeccable intentions – a gentle, fearless spiritual warrior who strives unceasingly to help everyone reach nirvanic peace and enlightenment.” (Lama Surya Das)<sup>3</sup>

The bodhisattva is a central figure in Mahayana Buddhism. The term has multiple meanings, but of practical importance to the followers of the Buddha, it means taking the Bodhisattva Vow and attempting to live like the Buddha every day, practicing love and compassion toward all.

“The heart of the Bodhisattva Resolve, which the Mahayana practitioner makes in a formal liturgical ceremony, is the determination that one will lead all other beings without exception into final and complete enlightenment, into the end of all suffering for ever, before one allows oneself to attain complete enlightenment and the final end of suffering.” (Corliss p. 42) “A bodhisattva is one who puts others’ happiness before his or her own. In our usual ignorant state, we look after ourselves as ‘number

one` and concern ourselves with other sentient beings as a secondary matter. The bodhisattva practices the reverse of this.” (Corliss)<sup>4</sup>

Bodhisattva can also mean a completely enlightened being who could be released from rebirth, but instead voluntarily returns and is reborn as a human being to enlighten all sentient beings. Mahayana Buddhists believe that the historic Shakyamuni Buddha was such a bodhisattva, one of many such enlightened beings who have assisted and continue to assist us in our quest for an end to suffering. And Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are often portrayed in Mahayana imagery as existing, like Gods, in a timeless, perfect realm beyond samsara, the manifest world. “According to Mahayana, Buddhas are not really born and do not really die. Everything, in fact, is Buddha, but since unliberated beings do not see this, the Buddhas make a show of appearing in the phenomenal world: living, teaching and dying.”<sup>5</sup> This view and the fantastic imagery of numberless bodhisattvas are most famously and influentially found in the Lotus Sutra.<sup>6</sup>

Given this range of meanings of bodhisattva, it is entirely apropos to apply it to an ordinary human being who has resolved to put the happiness of others before his or her own, who has made a decision to act out of love and compassion. The Dalai Lama (His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama) describes “Generating the Bodhisattva Spirit” as follows:

“The first quality we need to generate in order to enter the Mahayana is the bodhimind. And as the bodhimind is a higher form of love and compassion,

we must generate these qualities as a prerequisite... Knowing that we are of little benefit to sentient beings for as long as we remain under the powers of delusion, we enter into meditation upon emptiness not solely in order to remove our own causes of suffering for our own sakes, but also in order to attain enlightenment in order to be of greatest benefit to others.”<sup>7</sup>

Is it necessary that a bodhisattva be concerned only with one’s ultimate enlightenment, with the attainment of nirvana and an escape from rebirth? No. According to the Dalai Lama, “After attaining enlightenment, one can manifest in many ways to benefit sentient beings... The scriptures contain a wealth of accounts of beings who have manifested their enlightenment in totally mundane ways in order to benefit beings.”<sup>8</sup> According to the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Lama Surya Das, “The moment you affirm that great intention – to work for the good of all living creatures – whether or not you are always able to follow it as perfectly as you might wish – you are called a Bodhisattva, a child of the Buddhas.”<sup>9</sup>

Now equipped with an understanding of the bodhisattva, the concept can be applied to *Stranger Than Fiction*. The story culminates as the Author/God and Hero open to one another with compassion, a process initiated by the Hero (Bodhisattva). Harold’s self-sacrifice to save the life of another spurs the surrender of control by the Author, who saves him and changes the ending of the novel out of compassion for her creation. The Mahayana Buddhist concepts of the Four Noble Truths, enlightenment, compassion and the bodhisattva are used to analyze the roles of the Author/God, the Hero, and the Guru/Omniscient Critic.

## **A BUDDHIST READING OF *STRANGER THAN FICTION***

### **Life is Full of Pain**

Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) is trapped at the beginning of the film. Whether trapped by his own neurotic habits or even an obsessive-compulsive disorder, or by an Omniscient Narrator, the result is the same. Harold's name suggests a "crick in the neck," a blockage preventing the full use of the mind, a state of arrested development short of Enlightenment. He is sleep-walking through life, and it is not much of a life. Harold has worked for the IRS for eight years. We are shown his routines – he uses his watch to meticulously count and time everything he does, from brushing his teeth, to catching the bus to work, to counting his steps. When he hears the Narrator, Harold becomes self-aware, the first necessary step toward awakening. When the Narrator announces that he is going to be killed, Harold confronts Death. Now he comes fully alive, as he fights for his life. In Buddhist terms, he has realized the First Noble Truth.<sup>10</sup> Life is full of *dhukka* (suffering, or dissatisfaction). Often interpreted as fatalistic, the real meaning is to live in the moment – be fully alive, fully awake, at every moment. The Buddha is the Awakened One. The Buddha teaches that confronting death is a necessary part of the path to Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Author/God**

We are introduced to the Narrator (Emma Thompson) before Harold, though we don't yet know her name. She is a novelist with writer's block. She is trying to figure out how to kill her character, and we see several sequences involving her jumping off a building and a car accidentally driving off a bridge that we come to learn are in her imagination. She chain smokes and looks like death warmed over. It seems clear that her condition is severe, that she herself is actually suicidal. She is sent an assistant (Queen Latifah) by her publisher to push her to finish her overdue manuscript. The names of the characters are certainly suggestive and can be read through the Buddhist lens. Karen Eiffel is in an ivory tower, an Eiffel Tower, looking down on her creation without compassion. In fact, in response to her assistant, who tries to get her to quit smoking, she says "I'm not in the business of saving people's lives, quite the opposite."

### **The Omniscient Critic/Guru**

Harold sees the IRS in-house psychologist, and then seeks out one on his own. He rejects the diagnosis of schizophrenia. He asks, if it really is a narrator, who might he turn to for help? The psychologist suggests a literature professor, and thus Harold lands at the doorstep of Jules Hilbert (Dustin Hoffman). The name Jules Hilbert contains the Three Jewels of Buddhism – the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha,<sup>12</sup> to which Buddhists turn for refuge. Harold turns to Jules/Jewels, and he appears to be wise, but in the end he is not. Harold explains his predicament, and



the arrogant and preoccupied professor is about turn him away when Harold quotes the Narrator using the phrase “little did he know.” This phrase catches Hilbert’s attention, who proclaims that he has taught an entire course on “little did he know.” So he invites Harold in and proceeds to grill him about his “life story.” By process of elimination he rules out Greek myths, fairy tales, and various other possibilities, including that Harold might be a golem. He narrows it down to contemporary authors, as the Narrator seems to have a good knowledge of the city. He leaves Harold with a central question, and that is whether he is in a Tragedy or a Comedy, explaining that in Tragedies the Hero dies, while in Comedies, the Hero gets the girl and lives happily ever after.

### **Harold Lets Go and Comes Alive**

Harold is worried about what is going to happen to him. Hilbert advises him to stay home and see what happens, as a test of the Narrator and its intentions. Harold is watching TV on his couch when a giant wrecking machine’s arm comes through the wall and nearly crushes him on the couch. He confronts the work crew, and they apologize, saying they have the wrong address. Harold is now convinced the Narrator’s intention is malign. All Hilbert can offer is the casual suggestion that he should just live his life, to do whatever it is that he has always wanted to do. So Harold takes up the guitar, and he sets out to win Ana, an anarchist baker. The

combination of the two works, as she is charmed by his singing and strumming, and they initiate a romance.

Harold is depicted as a gentle soul, and dutiful, fulfilling his work obligations and not seeking much beyond that for himself. He needs to “self-actualize” and come into contact with his own inner needs and drives, both for his own happiness and also in order for him to be able to do more to help others. So Harold falling in love, courting Ana, learning guitar, actively seeking guidance from Jules Hilbert, and confronting Karen Eiffel are all part of his rapid development, the blooming of his stifled inner potential.

This part of the film could be seen as running counter to Buddhism, to be an expression of a very Western individualism inimical to the selfless Bodhisattva ideal. It is the bildungsroman story, of course, the inner growth of the character as s/he confronts challenges or comes of age. But the Eastern worldview incorporates the idea of stages of growth. Just as a child is not expected to understand the adult world, the individual is not expected to reach the highest levels of consciousness right away – it ordinarily takes time and practice. In Hinduism, therefore, out of which Buddhism emerged, there are many types of yoga, all designed to bring spiritual growth.<sup>13</sup> The typical stages of life for the Hindu would be student, then householder, then retiree, and then an optional choice of renunciation. A renunciate is known as a sannyasin.<sup>14</sup> The Buddha challenged tradition by encouraging young

people to become bhikkus (monks), a type of sannyasin. Harold's development can be seen as learning to let go of his compulsions, an example of the Second Noble Truth taught by the Buddha that the cause of *dhukka* is attachment, or grasping.<sup>15</sup> Harold has been grasping his routines and refusing to change. Now he lets go and opens up to frightening and exciting new possibilities. His eventual choice to sacrifice himself is then made voluntarily after a period of personal growth and is not simply a product of an unfulfilled, unhappy, neurotic life.

### **The Earth Mother – A Bodhisattva of Compassion**

Harold meets Ana when he is sent to audit her bakery. Ana Pascal (Maggie Gyllenhaal) is an anarchist. She has held back part of her taxes as a protest against war, and she included a letter to the IRS with her return explaining why. A "Food Not Bombs" poster is displayed prominently in the bakery, reinforcing her political stance and principles. Harold is smitten with her. Ana is the most ethically advanced character in the film. She donates food to Food Not Bombs, an anarchist group that gives free food to the homeless. She is not perfect. Her initial reaction to Harold's audit is harsh. But she quickly shows compassion, baking for him after his first long day going through her deliberately disorganized files.

She is more than a love interest for Harold – she is an ethical role model. Ana might indicate *anatta*, or not-self, the key Buddhist doctrine that there are no

separate selves (Collins 1982). Ana Pascal also has the name of the famous theologian Blaise Pascal. The name Pascal signifies trust and faith. “Pascal’s Wager” is to bet on God, faced with uncertainty. According to Blaise Pascal, the prevalence of deathbed conversions among lifelong non-believers could be explained by people playing it safe just in case God exists.<sup>16</sup> The twist here is that Harold bets, not on God, but on Ana, breaking out of his routine and making himself vulnerable to her. His trust is not misplaced – she loves Harold despite his being an IRS agent and a nerd. Ana can be seen as a bodhisattva, acting selflessly in feeding the poor and having compassion for the government agent who comes to prosecute her for tax evasion. She is a powerful influence on Harold, and she assists his leap to the highest level of compassion, sacrificing his life to save that of another. He doesn’t do it alone – there is a chain of bodhisattvas spreading the message of selflessness. Before analyzing the climactic culmination of the film, it is necessary to explain the Buddhist view of gods.

### **Gods in Buddhism**

“A Buddha does not worship God or gods, they worship him. He is “Teacher of deities and humans.” (Corliss)<sup>17</sup>

“There is a hilarious story of a monk who wanted to know the answer to a philosophical question and by the power of his meditation, visited the gods to ask it. He is passed up the heavenly hierarchy (“We don’t know but our boss is sure to

be able to help”) until he reaches Brahma the Universal Ruler. At first Brahma tries to bluff his way out by reciting his magnificent titles, but the monk is not put off, and finally Brahma admits, pulling the monk aside and speaking in a stage whisper, that he does not know, and advises him to ask the Buddha.” (cited in Corliss)<sup>18</sup>

Buddhism is usually characterized as a non-theistic religion, but that is a potentially misleading characterization that takes the Western monotheism of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition as its starting point. In the Southeast Asian tradition of Theravada Buddhism, the Buddhism of the Pali Canon, the Buddha famously instructs a god (Brahma) about the impermanent nature of reality. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, editor of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, “[t]he Buddhists...asserted that Brahma was not a single creator God but a collective name for several classes of high deities whose chiefs, forgetting that they are still transient beings in the grip of kamma, were prone to imagine themselves to be the omnipotent everlasting creator.”<sup>19</sup> Gods, plural rather than singular, are often referred to, but not with the OMNI traits of the Western monotheistic God (ie, omnipotent, omniscient, all-loving, etcetera). This tradition, of course, arose in the context of Hinduism and its polytheism. But even Brahma, the Universal Ruler (the Godhead principle in Hinduism, the “monotheistic” element) is subsumed within this understanding, as in the story recounted above. “One tradition says that Shakyamuni had been previously born as King of Gods or Universal Ruler thirty-

three times, and so, when he became the Buddha, he addressed the present Universal Ruler by a human name that he who is now God had possessed in a former life.”<sup>20</sup>

In the Buddhist worldview, the gods are found in a higher realm than the human realm, but nonetheless a realm where *dhukka* (suffering), karma, and rebirth are in effect:

“All the realms of rebirth, being within *samsara*, are states of suffering. The realms of *devas* [peaceful deities] and *asuras* [wrathful deities], however, are (relatively) pleasant. They are often called ‘heavens’ since their description resembles that of the Christian heaven, although, unlike the Christian heaven, they are not outside of space and time... Rebirth as a *deva* or *asura* is the result of pride coupled with fortunate karma. The particular suffering of the *deva* realm is that known as ‘falling,’ that is, losing all the pleasant things one has...” “There are six *deva* realms. The [second] level ... is located on the flat summit of Mount Sumeru in the city (or palace) of Vishnu (or Indra, or Brahma) and functions as the realm of the ‘king of the gods’ in the Buddhist cosmology.” (Corliss)<sup>21</sup>

This view of God/gods is significant for our understanding of how God might be seen in a literary context from a Buddhist vantage point. A god is not more “advanced” than the Buddha, quite the contrary, and in fact a god may not be more morally advanced than a human being, either, if that human being is a follower of the Buddha, if s/he has taken the *Bodhisattva* Vow and is living for others, practicing love and compassion. The meeting and interaction between the Author/God and her Hero takes on a particular meaning in light of this Buddhist view of gods and *bodhisattvas*.

### **Harold Confronts Death, and Becomes a Bodhisattva**

The story's denouement begins with Harold, now living at a friend from work's apartment and spending lots of time at Ana's, happily thinking that he is in a Comedy. But then, standing at a bus stop, he hears the Narrator announce his "imminent death." Frantic, he again consults Hilbert. While in his office, an author is being interviewed on TV, and Harold recognizes the voice. She turns out to be Karen Eiffel, one of Hilbert's favorite authors, and the book she has been working on for several years is *Death and Taxes*. Hilbert informs Harold that she always kills her main characters. Harold sets out to find her – he goes to her publisher's office, but to no avail. In desperation, he looks up her IRS file, and locates her phone number. He reaches her just as she is finally writing the death scene.

Eiffel is amazed and overwhelmed by Harold's appearance as a real person. He appears at her office and confronts her about his imminent death. She has conceived, but not yet written, the death scene. She can barely write it, having met Harold, and when she does, she gives him a copy of the manuscript to read. He reads it in one sitting, on the bus. Hilbert has cruelly told him that he has to die, for literature, and Harold refused to accept this fate, but upon reading the ending, he finds Eiffel, and tells her not to change it, that it is a great novel. He makes his preparations, instructing Ana how to avoid an IRS penalty by totaling and deducting her large charitable donations, and he fulfills the life-long dream of his best friend

at work by giving him an adult trip to Space Camp. Then he heads off to work. As he approaches the bus, a boy swerves in front of the bus, and Harold grabs him out of harm's way, only to be run into by the bus and knocked to the pavement. We see Eiffel changing the ending, and we see Harold in the hospital, still alive. It turns out that a fragment of his watch – the *deus ex machina*!<sup>22</sup> – has lodged in a blood vessel and stopped Harold from bleeding to death. Ana visits Harold in the hospital, and they “live happily ever after.”

A character who sacrifices Himself for others might easily be interpreted as a Christ character, a far more common symbol in Western art than the Bodhisattva. But a Christ reading is made problematic because of Harold's relation to God. The Narrator, who has created Harold, can easily be seen as a God figure. But whereas God sends his Son to save humankind, and Jesus chooses to die because He is Perfect, Harold is not dying for anyone's sins. He is just being killed by a Narrator/God who has a fiendish habit and reputation for killing off Her protagonists. Harold does not choose to die, not at first. Only when he realizes that the chosen scenario involves him saving the life of an innocent does he willingly choose to sacrifice himself according to God's will. And with that commitment, he attains a higher ethical level than God, because while the Author/God is killing Harold, Harold is only giving his life, not killing anyone. Just as the Buddha, and bodhisattvas by extension, are higher than the gods, so Harold is now in a position



to be a “teacher of deities.” And Karen Eiffel is transformed through her encounter with Harold, exclaiming to Hilbert:

“It’s a book about a man who doesn’t know he’s about to die and then dies, but if a man does know he’s going to die, and dies anyway, dies – dies willingly knowing he could stop it, then I mean isn’t that the type of man you want to keep alive?”

This relationship makes perfect sense as an encounter between a powerful god and a Bodhisattva. God, in the Buddhist view, also needs to seek Enlightenment. To interpret this changeable God in a Western framework, would require something like process theology, based on Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

### **Sometimes the Guru Does Not Attain Enlightenment**

Ana has played a crucial role in Harold’s Enlightenment. Harold has provided the crucial example that moves Karen (God) toward Enlightenment. Karen, now radiantly happy and healthy, encounters Jules, bringing him her revised novel. She wants his approval and is clearly looking for a connection. Jules has counseled Harold to accept his Fate, but without the compassion that indicates awakening. He rejects Eiffel and the author’s decision to save Harold, to show compassion on her creation. He tells her that the new ending is merely “O.K.,” taking the position that what is important is the work of Art, not the suffering human being who meets a tragic death. So the symmetry is broken, and the second potentially happy couple is not realized. Eiffel leaves and we see the literary critic, in his role as faculty pool

lifeguard, jump into the pool and submerge. Hilbert submerging himself in the pool symbolizes his lack of Enlightenment – he has not transcended his daily ego-driven agenda. And so the end of the film is open, not a neatly closed totality. Rather than two couples living happily ever after, there is still a need for further growth, for the enlightenment of all sentient beings, including the Omniscient Critic, who only thinks he is a God and knows more than everyone else, including the Author/God. So Harold removes the “crick” that is blocking his enlightenment, and Karen “comes down from her Eiffel tower” and begins to act compassionately toward others, while Jules/Jewels Hilbert remains ironically unenlightened, still submerged in self-satisfied vanity.

### **Conclusion**

*Stranger Than Fiction* is, as it turns out, a comedy, not a tragedy. It is a light comedy and a star vehicle for Will Ferrell. But it is possible to see it as a more serious film than the New York Times critic, who said “...the final notes are more than a little false. Rather than jarring or deepening your perceptions of the world, *Stranger Than Fiction* settles into a cozy, comforting realm that really isn’t very strange at all.”<sup>24</sup>

There is no evidence that the writer, Zach Helm, is a Buddhist, or deliberately embedded the Bodhisattva theme in his movie.<sup>25</sup> But a Buddhist

reading seems to be altogether plausible. Whereas in the television series *Lost* there is a mysterious Dharma Initiative that doesn't have any obvious doctrinal connection to Buddhism, despite the use of the language, in *Stranger Than Fiction* a central Buddhist concept can be found embedded without the use of any Buddhist language.<sup>26</sup> Buddhism is spreading in American culture, and increasingly its symbolic universe is likely to be transferred to the American context, like it was in China and elsewhere, and cease to be necessarily embedded in Asian characters and stories like the recent film *The Forbidden Kingdom*, a re-telling of the Monkey King with Jackie Chan and Jet Li.<sup>27</sup> Given the universality of the Hero, it will be interesting to watch for further signs of the bodhisattva emerging in American culture.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); Matthew McEver, "The Messianic Figure in Film: Christology Beyond the Biblical Epic," *Journal of Religion and Film*: Vol. 2, No. 2: October, 1998) and Anton Karl Kozlovic, "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-figure," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Volume VIII: Fall 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, Joseph, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1945] 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Lama Surya Das, *Awakening the Buddha Within*. NY: Broadway Books, 1997: pp. 42-3.

<sup>4</sup> Corliss, Roger J., 1989. *The Vision of Buddhism*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1989: p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Corliss 32.

<sup>6</sup> Watson, Burton, translator, *The Essential Lotus*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Gyatso, Tenzin, *H.H. the Dalai Lama XIV, The Path to Enlightenment*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1982: p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> Gyatso 145.

<sup>9</sup> Surya Das 144.

<sup>10</sup> Surya Das 77.

<sup>11</sup> Gyatso 87.

<sup>12</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*. NY: Broadway Books, 1998: pp. 161 - 168. The Dharma is the Buddha's teachings, and the Sangha is the Buddhist community.

<sup>13</sup> Coogan, Michael D., ed, *Eastern Religions*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005: pp. 63-65.

<sup>14</sup> Molloy, Michael, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, Third Edition. NY: McGraw-Hill, 2005: p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Surya Das 82.

<sup>16</sup> Mackie, J.L., *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1982.

<sup>17</sup> Corliss 122.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Corliss 134.

<sup>19</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Introduction" to *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Third Edition. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications: p. 57. The passage cited refers to the Brahmanimantanika Sutta: The Invitation of a Brahma, MJ 49, pp. 424-430. The Pali Canon is accepted by scholars to be the oldest collection of Buddhist writings. The diverse Mahayana tradition develops later.

<sup>20</sup> Corliss 122.

<sup>21</sup> Corliss 143, 161.

<sup>22</sup> Literally "Machine of God." Realizing that the watch served as a Deus ex Machina opened up the insight that led to this paper.

<sup>23</sup> Sherburne, Donald W., ed., *A Key to Whitehead's "Process and Reality."* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, A.O. "Hearing Voices? It's Just Somebody's Imagination." *The New York Times*. 10 Nov. 2006. 12 Nov 2006.  
<<http://movies2.nytimes.com/2006/11/10/movies/10fict.html?pagewanted=print>>

<sup>25</sup> Phillips, Michael. "Stranger Than Fiction? For DePaul's Zach Helm, Success Is." *Chicago Tribune* Online Edition. 5 Nov 2006. 12 Nov 2006.  
<<http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/chi-0611040283nov05,0,3342184.story?coll=chi-leisure-hed>>

<sup>26</sup> Sluyter, Dean, "Are You Willing to Get Lost?" Beliefnet.com, reprinted from *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 12 November 2006. < [Http://www.beliefnet.com/story\\_1861/story\\_18617.htm](Http://www.beliefnet.com/story_1861/story_18617.htm)>

<sup>27</sup> Ian Harris, Ian, "A 'Commodius Vicus of Recirculation: Buddhism, Art and Modernity.'" Chapter 23 in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

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