ESSAY ON RELIGIOUS HUMANISM

By Charles W. Vail

> Human flourishing is at once an activity, an actuality, and an end. It comprises altogether those activities which actualize what it means to be distinctly human—namely, to be self-conscious and rational, intentional, and social... Human flourishing, in turn, requires the possession of certain basic goods and virtues, the goods being freedom and well-being and the virtues being those qualities that allow one to be true to one's own human nature. .

"Spinoza's best-known recommendation for achieving a life well lived came in the form of a system for ethical behavior and a prescription for a democratic state. But Spinoza did not think that following ethical rules and the laws of a democratic state would be sufficient for the individual to achieve the highest form of contentment, the sustained joy that he equates with human salvation. My impression is that most humans today probably would not think so either. Many people appear to require something more out of life beyond moral and law-abiding conduct; beyond the satisfaction of love, family, friendships, and good health; beyond the rewards that come from doing well whatever job one chooses (personal satisfaction, the approbation of others, honor, monetary compensation); beyond the pursuit of one's pleasures and the accumulation of possessions; and beyond the identification with country and humanity. Many human beings require something that involves, at the very least, some clarity about the meaning of one's life. Whether we articulate this need clearly or confusedly, it amounts to a yearning to know where we came from and where we are going, mostly the latter perhaps. What purpose greater than our immediate existence could life possibly have? And along with the yearning, there comes a response, in sharp focus or soft, and some purpose is either gleaned or desired."[1]

Religion likely has existed as long as modern humans have walked the earth. Ian Tattersall cites a 28-thousand-year-old Cro-Magnon burial site as "the most ancient incontrovertible evidence for the existence of religious experience."[2] More recently, in 2005, more than 5½ billion people, nearly 86 percent of the earth's population, counted themselves as adherents to one form of religious faith or another.[3] Truly, religious faith is very nearly ubiquitous among humans throughout the ages and across the face of the earth.

Julian Huxley writes that religion "may be thought of as confronting the external world with an inner life of values, and attempting to harmonize the two."[4] John Dewey tells of the power of religion "to introduce perspective into the piecemeal and shifting episodes of existence."[5] Erich Fromm describes religion as offering "a picture of the world and of one's place in it that is structured and has inner cohesion."[6] George Beach writes that religion provides "a vision that enables us to make sense of the world, a vision in which all the parts come together, ideally in a seamless whole."[7] All convey a sense of coherence and harmony.

Huxley also refers to religion as applied spiritual ecology. He describes it as "a whole intellectually, strung together upon a consistent theology; a whole morally, based

upon a coherent moral philosophy and a recognized scale of values; and a whole emotionally, related to an aesthetic sense which demands the fullest beauty and rejects unworthy feelings."[8] As with the others, Huxley's emphasis is a consistent, coherent, and harmonious whole.

Huxley's systematic definition of religion, claims it "always possesses what we may broadly call an ideology, a morality, and a ritual—an intellectual framework of beliefs, myths, and theological principles, an ethical framework of moral codes and injunctions, and an expressive framework of actions expressing or enhancing religious emotion."[9] This definition is used as the structure for this essay: the intellectual framework is an account of the human nature that we all share; the ethical framework is a moral code that makes living together possible; and the expressive framework consists of religious practices and beliefs that bind us all together.

In the first section of this essay, three traits are identified that make us distinctly human. We are rational and self-conscious, more or less able to comprehend the world and our place in it; we are intentional, more or less able to discover and pursue our own purposes; and we are social, more or less able to enter into community with other people. In the second section, three virtues are identified that help us to be more fully human: mindful, to be more rational and self-conscious; purposeful, to further our own intentions; and trusting, to help us be more social. These virtues, in turn, are the foundation for a system of morals based on Alan Gewirth's Principal of Generic Consistency. In the third section, the practice of faith helps us to remain mindful; the practice of hope helps us remain purposeful; and the practice of charity helps us to be more trusting. In the end, the religious emotions help us to transcend our own selfish interests and petty circumstances.

An Intellectual Framework of Beliefs

This section addresses the first element of Huxley's definition of religion, the intellectual framework of beliefs. William Murry[10] and Chet Raymo[11] offer comparable definitions of religion, where they specify a cosmology for what Julian Huxley[12] and A. Eustace Haydon[13] identify as a theology. Neither a theology nor a cosmology, what follows, constitutes, rather, a modest anthropology. Though far less grand in scale, it nonetheless is an attempt to compile a consistent body of facts and interpretations to be used as an intellectual framework of beliefs.

What is it about us that makes us distinctly human? Information from the natural and social sciences has been assembled here to formulate a three-part answer, that humans are self-conscious and rational, intentional, and social animals. Ludwig Feuerbach suggested as much in 1841 when he wrote: "What, then, *is* the nature of man, of which he is conscious, or what constitutes the specific distinction, the proper humanity of man? Reason, Will, Affection. To a complete man belong the power of thought, the power of will, the power of affection…Reason, Will, Love, are not powers which man possesses, for he is nothing without them, he is what he is only by them; they are constitutive elements of his nature."[14]

The Human Self

Human beings (*Homo sapiens*) are bipedal primates belonging to the family Hominidae; which is to say, we are, in phylogenic order, firstly and more generally mammals, then

primates, and lastly and more specifically hominids, as are the great apes—chimpanzees (and bonobos), gorillas, and orangutans. From an evolutionary point of view, our closest living relatives are the chimpanzees, their and our respective lines of descent having diverged about five million years ago. We are distinctive among the hominids for our upright posture, freeing our hands for manipulating tools, and for our larger, more highly developed brains, capable of language and analytic thought.

Mammals, in general, have episodic memory—that is to say, they are able to recall discrete episodes in life along with the sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and tactile sensations specific to those episodes. The great apes exhibit an advanced form of episodic memory—the chimpanzees being the most advanced—with an increased capacity for self-representation and better problem-solving skills. Given the existence of episodic memory more generally in mammals, its more advanced development in the great apes, and human's close evolutionary relationship to chimpanzees, it is likely that our earliest hominid ancestors (*Australopithecus afarensis,* who lived from about 4 million to about 1½ million years ago) also were capable of episodic memory.

Modern humans are a relatively recent consequence of biological evolution, the result of an accumulation over time of a number of evolutionary changes. Three sets of cumulative changes during the past 5 million years stand out as major transitions in the evolution of the human mind and human culture: the appearance of *Homo erectus* about 1½ million years ago; the appearance of the direct ancestors of modern humans about 250 thousand years ago; and the cultural innovations of modern humans about 50 thousand years ago. Each transition is associated with a significant advance in human cognition, each advance in cognition overlaying the previous one, building on and complementing what came before.

In contrast with more ancient hominids, *Homo erectus* migrated widely throughout Europe and Asia, making and using a variety of tools along the way. "Their systematic tool technology alone would place demands on the intellect that go beyond the concrete, literal, time-bound episodic mentality. Widespread tool manufacture required both an elaborate mechanism for inventing and remembering complex sets of procedures and the social skills to teach and coordinate these procedures."[15] The evolutionary changes underlying this transition made possible the intentional use of gestures, facial expressions, and the like, collectively referred to as mimesis, to represent and communicate various events or relationships with others.

The second major transition in human culture, coinciding with the appearance of archaic sapient humans about 300 thousand years ago, is characterized by the evolutionary changes that made human speech possible. Compared to mimetic representation, human speech is far more rapid, precise, and open-ended. The most significant use of speech by early humans was likely the creation of mythic narratives to explain humanity's place in the cosmos. "The mind has expanded its reach beyond the episodic perception of events, beyond the mimetic reconstruction of episodes, to a comprehensive modeling of the entire human universe."[16]

The third major transition in human culture, about 50 thousand years ago, differed substantially from the previous two. Where the first two came about by way of evolutionary changes in the biology of the brain, the third came about by way of development of the technology of external memory. External memory devices were made possible largely by way of the modern human aptitude for graphic invention, which ultimately led to written, phonetic languages. A more remarkable innovation, however, was analytic thought. "The highest

product of analytic thought, and its governing construct, is the formal *theory,* an integrative device that is much more than a symbolic invention; it is a system of thought and argument that predicts and explains."[17]

Episodic memory is the foundation for a sense of self embedded in, but separate from, the rest of the natural world. Mimetic mind contributes to one's awareness of oneself, as an intentional being acting among other intentional beings. Mythic mind contributes an awareness of a sense of personal autobiography, with past experiences, present feelings, and future expectations. External memory expands what one can know about the whole of human existence; analytic thought greatly improves one's ability to come to terms with one's own intentions. Taken altogether, evolution has provided humans with a sense of "self, consciousness, and knowledge-based reason,"[18] the ability to stand back and reflect on one's own intentions and to comprehend and consider one's own circumstances, for pursuing one's own purposes.

Personal Identity

"All living organisms from the humble amoeba to the human are born with devices designed to solve *automatically,* no proper reasoning required, the basic problems of life. Those problems are: finding sources of energy; incorporating and transforming energy; maintaining a chemical balance of the interior compatible with the life process; maintaining the organism's structure by repairing its wear and tear; and fending off external agents of disease and physical injury. The single word homeostasis is convenient shorthand for the ensemble of regulations and the resulting state of regulated life."[19]

Through time, organisms have evolved increasingly complex means of achieving homeostasis. Humans are equipped with four levels of homeostatic regulation, from the simplest—metabolic reactions, reflexes, and the immune system—through pain and pleasure behaviors and drives and motivations to complex human emotions and feelings, each advance in homeostatic regulation progressively overlaying the previous one, building on and complementing what came before. Taken as a whole, the purpose of homeostatic regulation is our well-being.

Emotions and feelings can be classified into three groups, each group associated with a specific kind of knowledge.[20] *Background emotions* are associated with embodied knowledge of the natural world; *primary emotions,* with practical knowledge of material objects; and *social emotions,* with propositional knowledge of social discourse. Perception of a sense of physical ease in the absence of fear or want will likely generate feelings of well-being. Perception of a task skillfully undertaken and successfully completed will likely generate feelings of mastery. Perception of a connection of friendship and love with others will likely generate feelings of acceptance and self-esteem.

Feelings are a means of perception just as are the five senses, the difference being one processes internal stimuli while the other processes external stimuli. As such, feelings "can be mental sensors of the organism's interior, witness to life on the fly. They can be our sentinels as well. They let our fleeting and narrow consciousness self know about the current state of life in the organism for a brief period. Feelings are the mental manifestations of balance and harmony, of disharmony and discord."[21] A life in balance and harmony more likely will

produce feelings of joy, while one in disharmony and discord more likely will produce sorrow.

Feelings, both as sensor and sentinel, inform our human self, the same self described earlier as capable of both self-consciousness and reason. That same human self, also an autobiographical self, remembers past sorrows and joys, takes into account present feelings, and formulates future expectations. We cannot formulate these future expectations without first defining and committing ourselves to what we care about most. In this process of identifying our ultimate concerns, each of us individually shapes our own character. Our intentions thus define our personal identity, and we are nothing if not intentional.

Social Identity

Through time, sociality has evolved independently among many different animals, though with differing degrees of specialization and complexity. Due in part to the wide variety in kind and complexity, scientists have no single standard against which to characterize social groups, though such a standard would likely include "whether the associations are active or passive, primarily reproductive, nutritive, or defensive, and colonial or free-ranging."[22] However classified, a social group will reach some optimum size, where the group as a whole has greater evolutionary fitness than its individual members would have separately. Of all the different groups of animals showing varying degrees of sociality, four stand out as archetypes: colonial invertebrates; the social insects; nonhuman mammals; and humans.

Considering the first three of these four, the older, more primitive forms oddly are more thoroughly social than the newer, more advanced ones. The colonial invertebrates, such as the corals, form colonies where individuals are more interdependent, both in form and function, "in some cases fully subordinated to the colony as a whole." The social insects, such as ants and termites, form colonies where individuals, though physically separate entities, cannot function or survive "apart from the colony for more than short periods of time." Nonhuman mammals form the least structured social groups, where individuals are more self-sufficient, both in form and function, and although an individual's "chances of survival are reduced if it is forced into a solitary existence, group membership is not mandatory."[23]

It has been suggested that bipedal locomotion in the early hominid ancestors of humans was indicative of the emergence of increasing social stability and cooperation; further, that increasing encephalization in the evolution of humans was an adaption that made possible the growth of social groups. "Complex societies make greater demands on memory: large numbers of relationships have to be analyzed, stored, and serviced regularly in order to sustain a large group organization. With certain exceptions, the more advanced primates cluster together into larger and larger social groups, culminating in the human capacity for organizing and sustaining very large groups."[24] Cultural evolution also contributed to human sociality, speeding communication and increasing opportunities for cooperation. Humans, thus, have "achieved an extraordinary degree of cooperation with little or no sacrifice of personal survival."

"To be fully human is to be in relationship."[25] "Human beings are distinctive in being enormously more aware than other creatures both in their individuality and of the factors, both inside and outside them, that compromise it. They can think and talk and argue about these things, so they can share much of their experience and help each other with these problems."[26]

This interaction with others is two-fold, between oneself and other individuals as well as between oneself and the society and culture in which one finds one's self embedded. "We are almost always born into a society or community, and it is in some social context or other that we grow and develop;"[27] we associate and cooperate with others who share the same concerns and values, and we choose among the roles our circumstances offer.

All the aforesaid taken together defines one's social identity; we are without dispute social animals. "First, because we are incapable of developing on our own, because we need human nurture, moral and intellectual education, practice with language, if we are to develop into full persons. This is a sociality of mutual dependence. Second, because we desire relationship with others: friends, lovers, parents, children, the wider family, colleagues, neighbors. This is sociality as an end. And third, because many other things we value—literature, and the arts, the whole world of culture; education; money; and, in the modern world, food and housing—depend essentially on society for their production. This is instrumental sociality."[28]

An Ethical Framework of Moral Codes

This section addresses the second element of Huxley's definition, the ethical framework of moral codes. The ethical framework described here is one of virtue ethics, as originally formulated by Aristotle. As the name implies, this system of ethics emphasizes one's character "in contrast to the approach which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism)."[29] A virtuous person will aspire to a well-lived life, the means and end to which is human flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

Human flourishing is at once an activity, an actuality, and an end. It comprises altogether those activities which actualize what it means to be distinctly human—namely, to be self-conscious and rational, intentional, and social. "These activities also constitute the achievement of a human being's natural end or *telos*."[30] Human flourishing, in turn, requires the possession of certain basic goods and virtues, the goods being freedom and well-being and the virtues being those qualities that allow one to be true to one's own human nature. .

The virtues, in turn, become the foundation for the ethical framework adopted here, Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). Gewirth begins a concise summary with: "an agent is a person who initiates or controls his behavior through his unforced, informed choice with a view to achieving various purposes."[31] The flourishing for such an agent is individualized, depending on one's own particular talents, potentialities, and circumstances; agent-relative, value being found only in the particular activities that make up one's own flourishing; and self-directed, requiring one to take charge of one's own life. Since the PGC is intended to guide an agent's transactions with other people, those other people being agents as well, then flourishing for an agent is also social.

The Virtues

"If a human life is understood as a progress through harms and dangers, moral and physical, which someone may encounter and overcome in better and worse ways and with a greater or lesser measure of success, the virtues will find their place as those qualities the possession and exercise of which generally tend to success in this enterprise and the vices likewise as qualities which likewise tend to failure."[32] If humans are to be self-conscious and

rational, then the corresponding virtue arises from applying one's whole mind to the task—in other words, being mindful. If they are to be intentional, then the corresponding virtue is endeavoring to pursue their own purposes—in other words, being purposeful. If people are to be social, then the corresponding virtue is finding a way to cooperate with and rely on one another—in other words, trust one another.

"If our society has difficulty in functioning, if we are continually confronted by a world in crisis, full of violence, of fear, of abuse, I suggest it is because we are not clear about what it means to be human. We tend to reduce being human to acquiring knowledge, power, and social status."[33] Knowledge is meaningless without mindfulness; power is useless without purpose; and social status is empty without trust.

Mindful. We should strive to be true to our human nature—perceptive, comprehending, and feeling; using our senses—being open to the stimuli we receive from the outside world; using our powers of reason—grasping the meaning, nature, and importance of what we perceive (practicing "careful, alert, and thorough habits of thinking");[34] experiencing and acknowledging our emotional reactions to what we perceive and comprehend. In short, our perception informs us that something exists, our comprehension tells us what it is, our feelings evaluate its worth for us.

If we can cultivate these innate abilities, our curiosity should expand what we know; we should imagine new and different perspectives, seeking and understanding a whole new range of possibilities. Exposed to new knowledge and new perspectives, we nonetheless need to be reflective. "There is but one sure road of access to truth—the road of patient, coöperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection."[35] Fully aware of the world around us, able to consider our own circumstances and to reflect on our own intentions—we can live a mindful life.

Purposeful. We should strive to be true to ourselves, responsive and steady; that is, ready and willing to react to what we perceive, know, and value; unwavering and not impulsive. If we acquire and cultivate these personal virtues, then we can be certain of our own capacities, practical, self-restrained and moderate. Such a person as is self-assured, prudent, and temperate in these ways can find the courage to live a life that is dignified and authentic. Thus, we pursue our own purposes.

Trusting. Collectively, we should strive to be true to one another, honest, considerate, and modest; that is, truthful and sincere; having regard for the needs of others, neither more so my own needs over theirs nor their needs over mine; showing a moderate estimation of one's own talents, abilities and value. If we can acquire and cultivate these social virtues, then, together, we can regard others without reference to our own interests, feelings, or prejudices; working and acting together with others towards common goals; and moved by the misfortune, affliction, and suffering of others. Where we mutually practice impartiality, cooperation, and compassion, in these ways, we may be civil and confidently rely on one another. Trusting thus, we are able to make a place for ourselves in human community.

The Vices

The converse of the social virtues are the social vices—deceit, indifference, and arrogance, all the excesses of extreme individualism. These vices prompt one down the proverbial slippery slope by way of cynicism, mistrust, contempt, and antipathy towards malice. Most anyone

who is willfully deceitful, indifferent, or arrogant well knows it. Knowing one's own motives, one can only cynically believe the same to be true of others. As cynicism deepens, one learns to truly mistrust those others. The really untrustworthy ones are contemptible, deserving only one's disdain or scorn. Where contempt deepens, antipathy follows; one experiences strong feelings of aversion or repugnance. In the extreme, these odious others are rejected as beneath oneself, perhaps as less than fully human. Thus, malice, the desire to do those others harm or to see them suffer, is all the more easily rationalized.

"For one who is indifferent, life itself is a prison. Any sense of community is external or, even worse, nonexistent. Thus, indifference means solitude. Those who are indifferent do not see others. They feel nothing for others and are unconcerned with what might happen to them. They are surrounded by a great emptiness. Filled by it, in fact. They are devoid of all hope as well as imagination. In other words, devoid of any future."[36] So must it also be for the deceitful and the arrogant: anyone who is deceitful must cynically judge another according to his or her own duplicity, and anyone who is arrogant must always be suspicious of another's humility.

A System of Morality

As noted, the system of morality presented here is based on Alan Gewirth's supreme moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency, which is "Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself."[37] This principle is predicated on the existence of a rational agent, such an agent being

> a person who initiates or controls his behavior through his unforced, informed choice with a view to achieving various purposes; since he wants to fulfill his purposes he regards his freedom and well-being, the necessary conditions of his successful pursuit of purposes, as necessary goods; hence he holds that he has a right to freedom and well-being; to avoid self-contradiction he must hold that he has these generic rights insofar as he is a prospective agent; hence he must admit that all prospective agents have the generic rights; hence he must acknowledge that he ought at least to refrain from interfering with his recipients' freedom and well-being; so that he ought to act in accord with their generic rights as well as his own.[38]

The logic for the foregoing is composed of several steps organized in three stages:

1. If an agent voluntarily acts to accomplish some purpose; then the agent must consider that purpose to be of some value. In order to act to achieve that purpose, the agent needs both the capability and the resources (freedom and well-being) to accomplish that act. Thus, from the point of view of the agent, freedom and well-being are necessary goods.
2. If any agent considers him- or herself to be an agent and that freedom and well being are necessary goods, then he or she can claim that freedom and well-being as a right, that right being a rational basis for a justified demand.
3. If any one agent can claim a right to freedom and well being, then all agents can claim the same right.[39, 40]

Notice how the three elements of human nature and their corresponding virtues are implicit foundations for this moral framework. Gewirth's agents are rational and self-aware, intentional, and social. Such agents should be mindful of their choices, purposeful in their actions, and trusting in their transactions with others.

As described above, freedom and well-being are necessary if the choices one makes are to be unforced and informed. In an ethical society, freedom requires civil liberties and the right to due process before the law; enfranchisement in one's own democratic governance; and the right to dignity, privacy, and self-determination. Well-being requires the necessities of life: health care, sanitation, and a safe environment; clothing, food, fuel, shelter, and water; and a human-scale community where a person can find gainful and dignified employment, where someone will always advocate on behalf of that person, and where the bonds of trust, hence the community itself, are possible. Informed choice requires prior access to a proper education.

The fulfillment of rights, whether a person's right to physical security, a person's right to subsistence, or any other, generates three correlative types of duties: the duty not to deprive others of their rights; the duty to protect them from being deprived of their rights; and the duty to aid someone already so deprived.[41] These duties need not fall equally on individuals and the communities of which they are a part, even if all individuals are equally responsible. It is everyone's duty not to deprive another of their life or property; while the duty to protect others from being deprived of their rights may be delegated, in large part, to a constabulary duly appointed by a community of individuals, or the duty may devolve to a select segment of a community to come to the aid of others already having been deprived, as in the rich feeding and clothing the poor.

An Expressive Framework of Actions Expressing or Enhancing Religious Emotion

This section addresses the third element of Huxley's definition, the expressive framework of actions expressing or enhancing religious emotion. The expressive framework of actions is ritual, the practice of which is intended to integrate meaning into life experiences. "Religious practice elaborates upon material culture to inscribe its memories, encode its ritual means of continuity and enduring contact, and to express its lasting illumination."[42] The principal religious emotions, sometimes called the three theological virtues, are faith, hope, and charity.

One element of ritual is the combination of congregation, communion, consensus, and covenant—people coming together, sharing their thoughts and feelings, seeking and formalizing a consensus of what they share in common, and pledging themselves to honor those shared ideals. Community in this way is created by "building trust, defining issues, developing consensus, and making decisions for common action."[43] Such "human activities and associations are extensions of freedom, in that persons unforcedly choose or agree to participate in them and to obey their rules, or at least their rules are arrived at by procedures that provide for the consensual participation of all the persons subject to them."[44]

The second element is an organized practice of charity. If a group of people are to stand for ethical living, then they must seek to create and sustain opportunities for themselves and those around them to live and act in a moral way, which is predicated on their ability to act as autonomous selves and which can only come from a real sense of freedom from want, all of

which depends on people having access in some real measure to life's necessities. This organized practice of charity teaches and reinforces the group's values, empowers individuals with a sense of efficacy, and promotes among individuals a shared sense of purpose.

The third element of ritual is celebration. The objects of celebration include a sense of connectedness (to promote a sense of humanity, history, and place), a sense of continuity (to observe rites of passage, social milestones, and time passing), and a sense of purpose (to protect basic freedoms, the human race, and the environment). Celebration provides a sense of certainty or, at least, a refuge or safe harbor from life's uncertainties, "tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose,"[45] and thus providing relief from that which strains or inconveniences or that which causes pain, disquiet, or discontent in life.

Through the combination of congregation, communion, consensus, and covenant, we seek security—that is to say, the confidence that comes from being accepted into a larger community. Through the organized practice of charity we seek to find a sense of efficacy, hence the courage to continue on with what we believe to be good works. Through religious celebration we seek a sense of certainty to free ourselves of life's inevitable doubts. What is distinctly spiritual—that is to say, the animating force leading one to embrace religious emotions—is a seeming biological necessity (what Paul Tillich describes as a "drive for security, perfection, and certitude"[46]) to seek confidence in the face of alienation, courage in the face of despair, and certainty in the face of doubt.

Too often one becomes painfully aware of one's limits and one's finitude, through feelings of alienation, despair, or doubt. How does one rise above such feelings? One alternative, a religious, yet this-worldly, transcendence may be posited as a "collection of situationally transcendent resources and continually challenging ideals."[47] Professor Stone defines the former as the resources of growth and renewal that are "unexpected, uncontrollable, and superior in power and worth"[48] and the latter as goals that continue "to beckon or challenge no matter what level of attainment is achieved or when the goal is a demand which differs from accepted norms in such a way as to call these norms into question."[49]

Our common reality is that life is full of uncertainties; we are continually challenged to comprehend the world and our place in it. The corresponding transcendent resource is faith; if one chooses to have faith, then one can accept the uncertainties of life and remain mindful. Our common reality is that even the best of our efforts sometimes meet with failure; we are continually challenged to pursue our own purposes. The corresponding transcendent resource is hope; if one chooses to have hope, then one can find the resolve to face one's failures and remain purposeful. Our common reality is that we oftentimes find other people to be indifferent, arrogant, or deceitful; we are continually challenged to trust them. The corresponding transcendent resource is charity; if one chooses to practice charity, showing them loving kindness, then one can forgive the indifferent, arrogant, and deceitful and still be trustful. If people are accepting, resolute, and forgiving, then they can transcend their own selfish interests to achieve a unity of purpose and they can transcend their own petty circumstances to experience a larger reality.

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous

from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness."[50]

Postscript

This, at last, is the path to coherence and harmony, religion's goal. What is presented in these few pages, revisiting the words of Erich Fromm, is "a picture of the world and of one's place in it." It is a modest attempt, in the words of George Beach, to provide "a vision that enables us to make sense of the world, a vision in which all the parts come together, ideally in a seamless whole." It is an attempt to create Julian Huxley's applied spiritual ecology.

I know what it means to be a human, to be rational and self-conscious, intentional, and social. I am confident in my understanding of what, across the long term, works—being mindful, purposeful, and trusting—and how to achieve each of these. I know how I should treat other people, acting in accord with their generic rights as well as my own, just as I expect they should treat me. I know that as a purposeful human being, I have the right to claim freedom and well-being for myself, to be free from fear, want, and ignorance.
I understand that this right to freedom and well-being comes with three attendant duties, not to deprive others of their freedom and well-being and, where I am able, to protect others from such deprivations or to come to the aid of those already so deprived. I am well aware that life can be chancy at best, but I need not fall victim to doubt, despair, or alienation. Through the practice of faith I can accept life's uncertainties and remain mindful; through the practice of hope I can find resolve in the face of my own failures and remain purposeful; through the practice of charity I can forgive others and remain trusting. If I am accepting, resolute, and forgiving, then I can find my place in community and in the larger world.

What is presented here is both religious and humanistic. It is religious in the larger sense because it unapologetically describes the world and one's place in it. Less significantly, it is also religious because it contains elements generic to all religions. In part it is humanistic because it is rationally presented in the best traditions of Enlightenment Humanism. More significantly, though, it is humanistic because right and wrong are determined based on qualities universal to all humans. Altogether, it is part and parcel a religious humanism.

Notes

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