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***EPH* Contents**

volume 21, number 1, 2013

ARTICLES

- 1 Evolutionary Ethics and Its Future
Robert D. Finch
- 13 Pragmatism and the Contribution of Neuroscience
to Ethics
Eric Racine
- 31 Ingersoll's Voice, Adler's Vision: Motivating
Humanists
James Croft
- 49 For the Love: The Amateur Humanist Intellectual
Christopher J. Kazanjian
- 65 Utopian Visions and the American Dream
Frederic March
- 83 Urban Sprawl and Existentialism in Thomas
Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*
Tracy J. Prince
- 95 Are We Post-Secular?
Bill Cooke

HUMANIST REFLECTIONS

- 107 Atheism... Plus What?
Richard Carrier
- 117 Need Humanism Be Reasonable
Joseph Chuman

Evolutionary Ethics and Its Future

Robert D. Finch

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Historically humans have evolved by the addition of abilities to our behavioral repertoire. Values first developed in the time of the hunter gatherers featuring such traits as strength, bravery and endurance. Men and women often stressed different values. With the advent of civilization values began to include benevolence, fairness and then the growth of knowledge, natural sciences, engineering, medicine and law. Modern humanist ethics began with the work of Hume and the utilitarians. Early humanist ethical systems stressed individual responsibility and the use of social principles. Our principles have evolved through the exercise of reason, by scientific investigation, strategic planning and by including a sense of commitment. Humanism is to be found in a variety of institutions stressing different values, theories and strategic plans. Furthermore humanism is not a finished product, so that the expanding circle of the membership contemplates an evolving set of principles, as well as continuing narratives of our progress. We conclude that there is no quintessential humanist. How then should we strive to improve our definitions, manifestos, practices, reasoning and narratives?

1. Introduction

I have been interested in the subject of humanist ethics for some years. I am beginning to see a complete picture now which I hope to sketch for you today, although I still sense gaps in my knowledge which need to be filled in. Ethics is a wide subject and perhaps the most important one in Humanism.

Moral inquiry in the West began with Protagoras, Epicurus, Socrates, Plato and other Greek philosophers. Modern humanist ethics began with the work of Hume and the utilitarians. Early humanist ethical systems stressed individual responsibility and the use of social principles. Our principles have evolved through the exercise of reason, by scientific investigation, strategic planning and by including a sense of commitment. Humanism is to be found in a variety of institutions stressing different values, theories and strategic plans. Furthermore humanism is not a finished product, so that the expanding circle of the membership contemplates an evolving set of principles, as well as continuing narratives of our progress. Everyone has a unique morality and ethology, and we conclude

that there is no single quintessential humanist. To improve our definitions, manifestos, practices, reasoning and narratives we are obliged to evolve, to plan, and to respond as contingencies arise.

The inspiration for this research struck me some time ago when the new atheists were in vogue. The new atheists of course were Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens, all of whom had recently written books denying the existence of God. It occurred to me that a consequence of this spate of activity was that there would be a renewed need for books on non-theistic ethics. I had been writing a series of essays for our Houston Humanist and Freethought Newsletter on the very subject of ethics, and I am now turning these essays into a collection for publication. After a while the news came out that Sam Harris had produced a new book, *The Moral Landscape*, which seemed to confirm my prediction. There have also been several other new works on ethics published in recent months.

2. The Scope of Humanist Ethics

It seems to me that the scope of ethics is really very wide, as I have tried to bring out with such questions as:

- What is honorable conduct?
- How do we watch our manners?
- How should we behave?
- What should we do? say? think? learn?
- Whom, and what precepts, should we obey?
- How should we examine and plan our lives?
- How should we criticize others or offer constructive ideas?
- How should we acquire knowledge of natural and human systems?

In other words, I am arguing that ethics includes all our behavior, i.e. everything we do, say, think, plan, research and learn.

Humanist ethics is a limited subset of everything humans do. I advocate a humanistic ethics sharing the following characteristics:

It is evolutionary (inspired by Charles Darwin, Julian Huxley, Edward O. Wilson).

It is atheistic (or Nietzschean vs Christian).

It is part of Ethology (i.e., of the study of animal behavior).

It is part of Sociology (inspired by Auguste Comte, Talcott Parsons, and James Q. Wilson).

It includes such topics as conscience, manners, honor, planning, and morals.

It includes some instinctive behavior which has survival value today (fear, food, shelter and sex), although there are other instincts we could probably do without nowadays.

It includes humanistic behavior based on both emotion and reason (think both of David Hume and Immanuel Kant).

It includes values and social systems which may be regarded as both measures and structures.

It involves situational assessments and modifications of behavior which may be used to eliminate problems.

It may include instincts, values, and principles to suit different situations.

It requires humanists to constitute ethical communities.

And, finally, it should be forward looking, as we learn, evolve, and find new visions for the future.

The non-theist's basis for ethical thinking does not include divine sanctions or supernatural revelations. The basis of our ethical knowledge is subjective emotion and meaning and our best understanding of the natural world, which we could call truth. Objective knowledge is what we can share with other people through language, reason, logic, and mathematics. Hence we have built up natural science and cosmology, biology, psychology, and social theory. We use the same cognitive tools in art, and in inventing systems for business and economics. Finally, we see ethics as part of the practical panoply of politics and law, and of the engineered world.

We expand on humanist ethical thinking by considering possible behavior and situations, in relation to our naturalist worldview. Our individual lives are controlled by our brains. The subjective part of our behavior is governed by emotions. Plants do not have emotions. It is only members of the animal kingdom who need instinctive direction for their behavior. It was only a few hundred years ago that people still believed thought was centered in the heart. And even after the brain came to be recognized as important, people still believed in the existence of a soul which they supposed departed the body at the time of death. We now know that our mental existence is the proper province of psychology and cognitive science. Our lifestances are governed by instinct, psychology, ethics, and individual management.

3. Basic Drives

Consider the complexities of the behavior of animals as they move around to satisfy needs for breathing, nutrition, reproduction, fleeing from danger, finding shelter, and so forth. Biologists tell us that animals have various urges based on chemical potentials associated

with their primitive motivations. For most animals, presumably these urges are felt as elementary drives or emotions, and they do not require complex choices or deliberations for the animal to arrive at decisions. Sexual reproduction was an early improvement to animal biology. With the appearance in the world of vertebrates, and especially the large brained mammals and primates, quite complicated thinking evolved between stimulus and action. The additional sophistication in data processing permitted by the nervous system provided its possessor with more successful ways of coping with life together with a wider range and repertoire of emotions. The young had to respect parents. Male and female had to learn to care for their mates. Parents had to care for their young. Along the way we acquired an aversion for snakes and bad smells and entrapment as well as a reluctance to kill our own kind. By the time we became human many of us were seeking beauty and acting out of compassion for others.

4. Systems

Our brains are continuously bombarded with inputs from the five senses, our internal organs, the endocrine system and the specialized modules of the brain itself. These sensations and emotions are subject to interpretations which tell us about the situation in the world around us as well as our own internal drives and conditions. It was Hume who first pointed out that the way this works is that the brain recognizes certain constancies. The constant categories underlie what we term “systems” in modern parlance. The word “system” has been in use since the time of the ancient Greeks, but the term “system theory” only became widespread during and after World War II, sometimes to describe the operation of hardware of interest, or sometimes, a process or method of performing some task. But once the term came into service it was realized that a system or pattern was an object with a recognizable constancy. Then it was appreciated that it could apply in a wide range of circumstances, e.g. all physical laws, physical structures, computers, programs, languages, organisms, organizations, sciences, and religions. Following Murray Gellmann we might introduce another term here, namely, the “Schema,” or that which encodes the constancy of a system (i.e. the essence of a pattern). Examples of schema include lexicons, grammars, rules, programs, algorithms, blueprints, plans, genomes, etc.

Systems may be simple or complex, usually depending on the amount of information needed to express the schema. The biological cell is an example of an open system whose constancy is determined by its genome. Organisms contain assemblies of cells which are built into functional parts called organs, which grow and reproduce according to programmed instructions. Animals are multi-cellular but are mobile and have nerve connections, which permit learning and controlled behavior. The organisms and organs are further examples of systems. We humans are animals but with self-consciousness and we have a knowledge of our knowledge, typically encoded using symbolic language. Finally, there are socio-cultural organizations, with multiple human members, ranging from families to nations, all of which are systems.

5. Evolution

Now let us introduce the idea of *adaptive* systems: i.e. ones in which the constancy changes, usually by a small amount. This gives us a precise way to define evolution as the changing expression of an adaptive system. Biological evolution may be defined as the usually gradual process by which an organism changes into a different and usually more complex form. The changing form leaves a trail of paleontological or genetic evidence which enables us to construct tree-like structures to trace the system's ancestry. In the biological case, for example, the variation occurs in the genome or its epigenetic control.

There is a theory by Marc Hauser that we have an instinctive moral system which operates in a way similar to language. Here Hauser built on a modern theory, due to Noam Chomsky, that language is a complex adaptive system, put in place genetically, as generalized equipment which enables the process of language acquisition to begin. We may think of the brain as similar to computer hardware. In the early years of life, an operating system is laid down by our learning a set of parameters which encode the grammatical rules for our particular language. The underlying universal grammar has to permit the wide variety of human languages. A baby can learn any one of the family of languages, but new language acquisition becomes increasingly difficult as the person grows older. Hauser's theory posits that there exists a universal grammar underlying our moral system and that the codes for the various different moral cultures are laid down as sets of parameters which we learn in youthful instruction.

6. Values, Virtues and Utility

The next features of our moral repertoire involve values, virtues and utility which are verbal constructions to assist our ethical thinking. The fundamental importance of emotion to Ethics was re-emphasized by Spinoza and by Hume during the period of the Enlightenment. Hume's book on human nature (1748 and 1777) is credited with being the first modern psychology text and his emphasis on emotion is now accepted by all psychologists. Emotions are felt directly by the person experiencing them, and we say that they are subjective. On the other hand, there are many situations in which phenomena are observable to the general public, and in this case they are said to be objective. Reports on evaluations of ethical and moral behavior are thus objective. Science has progressed by concentrating its deliberations on objective phenomena.

In respect of sensation and emotion the human brain is basically the same as that of our animal forebears. One of the most important attributes evolution gave to the human species was a great enhancement of the power of reasoning. In the cerebral cortex, we have additional neuronal layers in which we are able to store memories, which enable us to perform further *analysis* of the information we receive. We are able to recognize the constant characteristics of the various systems that we encounter. Humans are able to use symbols to stand for objects and actions and to use these symbols in associations that model the world in expressions of language and art. We are the only species that thinks deeply, employing long chains of reasoning based on simple syllogisms. We can use the cerebral cortex to enable us to imagine the consequences of our actions. We may use

language and words in these recognition processes and indeed designate certain combinations of sensations and emotions as systems of a higher level which we call *values*. It appears that hunter-gatherers had already developed systems of values reflecting the virtues which enhanced their lives: strength, bravery, loyalty, love, and so on. By the time of the ancient civilizations, the desirable virtues reflected the ideals of urban living: honesty, industriousness, knowledge, wisdom, benevolence, freedom and justice. Because they involve the use of language, values may be shared with other humans and are thus objective. We are able to compare the degree of value in various circumstances a process which we actually term evaluation. This includes the basis of the economic activity of bartering and determining market prices.

7. Habits

Our recognition of constancies enables us to respond in definite ways and we develop what we call habits. These are what provide the structure to our everyday behavior. A person may develop habits quite privately but is much more likely to do so in interaction with others. We all incorporate specific values in what we do and the aggregate of those values are what we recognize as our individual characters. Good character traits are said to be *virtues*, and their study has been a facet of ethics since the earliest times. We understand now that well established habits may actually be reinforced in the brain by the growth of new neurons, and that there is a plethora of neuro-transmitters that can strengthen the inter-neuronal synapses.

8. Humanist Values

Over the years, beginning in ancient Greece, and continuing to the present, non-theists have worked to develop values to which whole groups may aspire. These are among the Humanist Values:

Truth, Rationalism, Objective Knowledge, Science and Enlightenment, Civilization, Beauty, Equality, Compassion, Democracy and Tolerance, Equality and Justice, Freedom and Liberty, Optimism, Commitment, and Responsibilities.

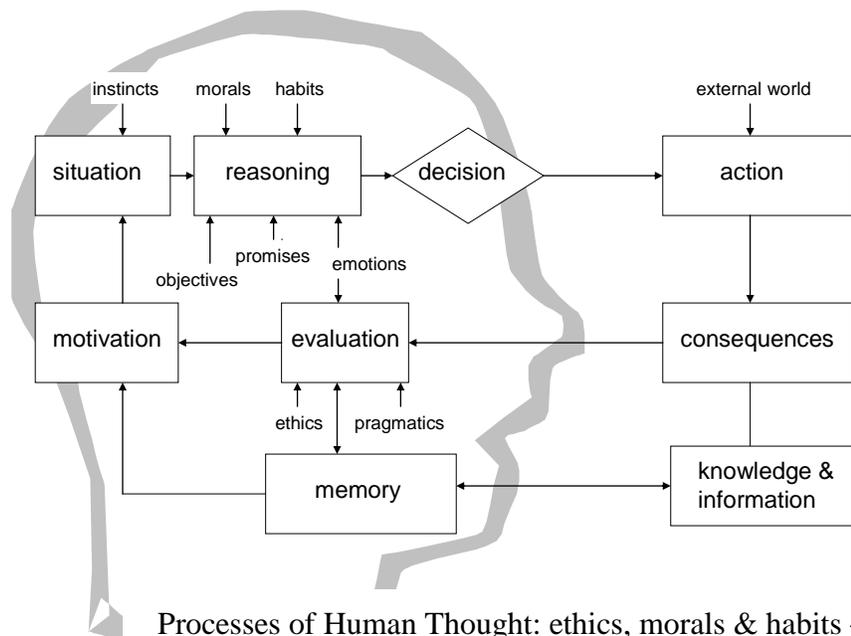
Various philosophers have written on particular values at some length. Kant, for example, stressed the importance of reason in our deliberations. Truth is at the heart of scientific investigation and so is of concern to philosophers of science. We think of Popper in this connection. Equality and justice are pivotal to legal systems, and then we think of John Rawls. Benevolence was one of Hume's favorite values, and *On Liberty* was the title of a celebrated essay by John Stuart Mill. Paul Kurtz has written extensively on an ethic of Responsibility.

There is, however, a problem with using such values individually, which is that they can often lead to contradictory results. For example, should a doctor tell a cancer patient the *truth* of his condition or try to be *compassionate* by with-holding a diagnosis. It takes further thinking to resolve the dilemma. Problems of this sort gave ethicists of the

nineteenth century, such as Henry Sidgwick, much pause for thought. The modern position, reflecting John Dewey, is that these value systems are nonetheless useful by providing *measures* to assess our plans and situations. To find the best way forward in a given situation we need to propose plans and theories and then test them out as best we can. How should we do this?

9. System Processes

The flow chart in the figure below shows the way in which we might resolve moral or ethical dilemmas.



Processes of Human Thought: ethics, morals & habits – management by choice – subjective & objective poles

We begin by assessing the situation we are in. We think about it and come to a tentative decision on what to do. If we take action or propose to do so, then we can assess or predict the result. We evaluate the result in terms of the emotions and values we hold and the evaluation feeds back into our situational assessment. Our memories of these results and evaluations will then be part of our “data base” for the future.

The figure also shows an idea due to Jürgen Habermas, whereby the inputs of morals and ethics operate in two separate branches of the feedback. We might find this a useful concept if we wish to think of morality as the instinctive or a-priori part of our

ethology and ethicity as putative proposals or theories. Our figure is also useful in modeling the making of choices, as we explain next.

Remember that the controversy over “Free Will” has been a persistent difficulty in the treatment of Ethics. The rationalist approach to cognitive science is based on the assumption that there is a cause for every event. This so-called deterministic stance seems to belie our ability to choose freely between alternatives. That this is not the case, however, may be demonstrated by the following argument. Suppose a course of action is considered. Then its likely physical results can be predicted from reasoning and from memories of similar circumstances. These results may be then evaluated on the basis of the sensations and emotions likely to be caused by said physical events. The outcome of this evaluation may be compared with that from some other possible course of action. The one with the highest figure of merit can then be selected. But this is precisely the process by which computers are programmed to make choices, the computer being well known to be a thoroughly deterministic machine. Our choices may of course be far more complex than in the foregoing simple case, but they can always be reduced to a simple situation. Thus we see that human beings have the ability to make choices.

The figure is also useful to show where subjective and objective processes take place. The point here is that thinking goes on inside our heads and is then purely subjective. But sometimes our thinking takes in events which occur in the external world, and if these events are observable to other people, we have the possibility of forming objective assessments. It is also possible that speech or writing could be involved. This would then give us a basis for scientific observation and testing.

10. Human Systems

Talcott Parsons was a professor of sociology at Harvard, who proposed a system theory for the Differentiation of Society. He propounded the idea that the evolution of generalized adaptive capacity was involved in the interaction of small groups of people resulting in the appearance of subsystems for culture, the economy, the polity and the overall societal community. This is a theory for the development of a more extensive social system. There are, of course, numerous major social sub-systems including language, science, literature, governance, capitalism, justice and so on.

The same divisional procedures can be applied to personal systems. Stephen R. Covey, who died recently, had written several books along these lines which I recommend for humanist reading. Covey showed how personal life may be divided into a number of domains (each of which can be thought of as systems), as follows: self, spouse, family, money, work, possessions, pleasure, friends, enemies and church. The same humanist principles can then be applied to all these sub-systems.

11. Humanist Principles

Let us recapitulate some humanist principles:

Truth and Knowledge: We should base our conduct on the best available knowledge of the natural world, in which people and their minds have evolved and of our human-made systems.

Rationality: The systems of the human mind, based in the natural world, enable us to think, and be creative agents, and are the source of personal freedom, dignity and responsibility.

Emotions: We have to recognize that emotions are the driving force of our behavior. We need to provide the loving relationships of a family for the security of young and old.

Values: People are able to share emotions and refine their values through the various arts.

Ethics: We should use our emotions, values and rationality in building ethical theories and systems to live by.

Pragmatism: We should uphold the methods of social systems that have proven to be successful in the past, including the law, science and good practice while working for their improvement.

Commitment: We need to belong to the organizations that foster our worldview and enable it to be tested and improved.

Destiny: We believe that Humanism should offer visions of the future which will inspire the individual and guide the policies of society.

12. Examined Lives

Now these principles could be thought of as moral rules for the construction of a humanist ethic, but there is another whole side to such an exercise which we might think of as Objectives and Planning. We may trace this back to the time of Aristotle, who proposed that the goal of human life was happiness. Socrates thought our goal was to be good and that the unexamined life was not worth living. Taking off from this statement, Robert Nozick wrote an excellent book titled *The Examined Life*. When we make plans for the day, week, month, year and five years, we first examine how well we met objectives for the preceding period and then try to envisage how we might make rational extensions for the succeeding period. Developmental stages in life have been recognized by poets, from William Shakespeare onwards. Lawrence Kohlberg has written about the periods of moral development in peoples' lives, and many psychologists have taken up the theme.

There was another Socratic philosophical movement of the twentieth century, which also derived from the work of Hegel, as did that of Marx, and which also started by repudiation of Marx, as was done by Popper. This was the so-called Frankfurt school, founded by Max Horkheimer and his pupil Theodor Adorno and later joined by Adorno's pupil Habermas. They left Nazi Germany and eventually settled in the U.S. It was in the U.S. that Horkheimer (1937) published "Traditional and Critical Theory." Although the group returned to Germany after the war the seeds planted by Horkheimer's work led to the development of Critical Theory in the U.S. as well as in Germany in the 1960's and 1970's. The magnum opus of democratic humanism (Habermas 1982) resulted from this same source and was styled *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

Peter Drucker has written extensively on the application of planning to businesses of many varieties. We remind everyone that the American Humanist Association itself conducted a five-year planning process, finishing in 2007. Ethics dictate that the AHA should assess how well or otherwise it has met its objectives from that time and where its directions should lie now for the next five year period. Perhaps we will now see the way forward in terms of education and research. We began extending outreach to other organizations (atheists, freethinkers, academics, and political parties) and need to continue this. But we also need to start working for the moral order of all peoples in science, justice, prosperity, polity and religion. Perhaps the objective of our work should be to define a world-wide humanist civilization.

We bring our quest for modern humanist ethics to a closure. Even though we cannot predict the precise outcome of human efforts beyond a few years into the future, surely we could aspire to a destiny in which all people might have the best possible life on this Earth, and try to define what that might be and how it might come about. Should we not continue to explore the known universe and continue to search for other intelligent life? Should we not try to build a civilization throughout our galaxy? Should we not continue to try to understand what might be accomplished in the universe?

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Pragmatism and the Contribution of Neuroscience to Ethics

Eric Racine

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Neuroscience has been described as a revolutionary force that will transform our understanding of common morality and of ethics as a discipline. To such strong naturalistic claims, critiques have responded with an arsenal of anti-naturalistic arguments, often negating any contribution of neuroscience. In this paper, I review the terms of the debate between strong naturalists and anti-naturalists and offer a moderate (pragmatic) naturalistic approach as a constructive middle-ground position. Inspired by Dewey's moral philosophy, I offer an alternate account of how neuroscience broadens our understanding of ethics and moral situations and thus supports a deliberative and iterative process of wisdom-generation.

There have been several claims that neuroscience will inform, and even transform morality and more precisely, ethics, as a discipline. In this paper, I first briefly review such claims and underscore how they are often supported by a positivist (or strong naturalistic) epistemology (Racine 2008). I argue that this epistemology is at odds with the evolution of practical ethics and its integration of empirical research, as exemplified in the field of bioethics and the sub-field of neuroethics.

One likely explanation for these prevailing positivist claims is that interpretations of neuroscientific knowledge are founded on a ubiquitous belief in the epistemic supremacy of neuroscientific explanations and their ability to provide "foundations" for ethics. Such positivist claims have, however, triggered a strong backlash, raising assertions against the relevance of neuroscience in ethics. Taking a middle-ground perspective, I posit that a critical assessment of the contribution of neuroscience to ethics should not necessarily lead to a flat out rejection of the potential for neuroscience to make important contributions to ethics, i.e., anti-naturalism. One caveat is that neuroscience's role in ethics may need to be situated within a comprehensive framework that underscores the role of interdisciplinary and empirical research as well as the ways evidence informs practical judgment in ethics. Thus, the second part of this paper is dedicated to exploring a moderate form of naturalism inspired by the thinking of American philosopher John Dewey, in particular his views on the role and nature of evidence in ethics. I also discuss

how common claims about neuroscience's contribution to ethics are modulated within a pragmatic (moderately naturalistic) theoretical context. Readers should keep in mind that this paper is not by any means the final word on this complex topic but hopefully frames the nature of a significant tension point in the literature and suggests some pitfalls to avoid as well as novel areas to investigate further.

1. The Epistemic Supremacy of Neuroscience Explanations

Several scholars have claimed that neuroscience will inform and even transform morality and, more precisely, ethics as a discipline. Some of these claims are more comprehensive and encompassing, while others are nuanced and reflective, mindful of the challenge of integrating evidence from neuroscience into the framework of normative and practical ethics.

Neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Changeux has long argued that ethics should be based on neuroscientific knowledge and that such an ethics will foster happiness in individual lives and yield the foundation of evidence-based ethical norms and behaviors, creating greater social wellbeing (Changeux 1996, Changeux 1981). More recently, cognitive neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga has written that neuroethics "is – or should be – an effort to come up with a brain-based philosophy of life" (Gazzaniga 2005). Gazzaniga contends that neuroscience provides a novel way to examine ethical beliefs and assumptions and that these may be revised based on developments in neuroscientific knowledge. For example, he argues that, "while certain beliefs may have made sense when they were formed, science has now taught us a few things about how the brain works and we need to be willing to change those beliefs" (Gazzaniga 2005).

Some of Gazzaniga's claims attribute specific features to a neuroscience-based ethics; he asserts:

I believe, therefore, that we should look not for a universal ethics comprising hard-and-fast truths, but for the universal ethics that arises from being human, which is clearly contextual, emotion-influenced, and designed to increase our survival. This is why it is hard to arrive at absolute rules to live by that we can all agree on. But knowing that morals are contextual and social, and based on neural mechanisms, can help us determine certain ways to deal with ethical issues.

The mandate of "neuroethics" is thus, according to Gazzaniga, "to use our understanding that the brain reacts to things on the basis of its hard-wiring to contextualize and debate the gut instincts that serve the greatest good – for the most logical solutions – given specific contexts."

In many ways, strong assertions like these suggest an epistemic supremacy of neuroscientific knowledge in its ability to provide foundations for ethics or to disconfirm unfounded ethical beliefs. This impact of neuroscience is part of what some have called a "neuroscience revolution" (Wolpe 2002). Accordingly, neuroscientists have been called on to "recognize that their work may be construed as having deep and possibly disturbing implications" outside of academia (Editorial, 1998). Likewise, cognitive neuroscientist

Martha Farah and colleagues have stated that, “[t]he question is therefore not whether, but rather when and how, neuroscience will shape our future” (Farah et al. 2004). It is important to consider how some fundamental aspects of the idea that neuroscience will have fundamental implications for ethics are perhaps not novel, but part of an ongoing debate on the contribution of neuroscience to the humanities and general culture.

Taking a historical perspective reveals that in other epochs, the supremacy of neuroscientific explanations also generated great interest and debate. In the early nineteenth century, for example, neuroanatomist Franz Joseph Gall was known for advancing localizationism, and advocating for broad and often controversial applications of phrenology, such as within the criminal justice system (Huber 1996). Some decades later, popular American phrenologists, the Fowler brothers, claimed the unique ability of phrenology to explain the human character. The Fowlers professed that phrenology was a mind-reading technique with implications for child-rearing, medicine, and even morality, deeming it “a Powerful Lever in Self-Improvement, in Moral and Intellectual Advancement” (cited in Racine 2010). Later in the century, leading neuroanatomists and neuroscientists like Theodor Meynert, August Forel, Paul Fleschig, and Oskar and Cécile Vogt put forward the notion that the future of humanity and morality could be guided by neuroscientific findings (Hagner 2001).

Premonitory of some contemporary writing on consciousness (Damasio 1999), Meynert suggested that a primitive “primary ego” dealt with selfish functions of pain, hunger, and warmth while a “secondary ego” (located in the associative fibers and developing gradually with cortical maturation) was “associated with the ideas of mutuality, reciprocity, brotherhood” (cited in Hagner 2001). According to Michael Hagner, Fleschig thought that, “brain research would replace philosophy as the dominant science of cultural orientation” and called for a “physiological theory of morality/moral teaching” or a “moral physiology” to establish a “true culture” (Hagner 2001). In the same period, Forel wrote:

[A]s a science of the human in man, neurobiology forms the basis of the object of the highest human knowledge which can be reached in the future. It will and must find increasing numbers of workers, ever increasing recognition, if our culture is to move forward and not backward. It will however, also have to provide the correct scientific basis for sociology (and for mental hygiene, on which a true sociology must be based). (Forel 1907, 14, cited in Hagner 2001)

The Vogts, continuing in this tradition, propelled the view that man was a “brain animal,” and argued that, “a fortuitous future of our species depended significantly on the expansion of brain hygiene” (Vogt, 1912, cited in Hagner 2001). These statements drift into the realm of biological reductionism and are ostensibly emblematic of the eugenic and public hygiene programs and developments of the time.

The supremacy of neuroscience explanations surfaced in the writings of some physicians and ethicists in the 1960s and 1970s as well. Physician and neuroscientist Paul MacLean, famous for the triune brain theory but also deeply interested in the neuronal bases of empathy, wrote in 1967 that a neuroscientific understanding of empathy could

shed light on moral decision-making and empathy in medicine. Furthermore, in one of the first issues of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* (a special issue dedicated to neuroscience with a contribution from Roger Sperry), bioethicist and philosopher, Tristram Engelhardt, sagaciously pointed out that neuroscience “has revised our view of ourselves and of our moorings in this world” (Engelhardt 1977).

However, while over the past century several neuroscientists have articulated adamant perspectives supporting a substantial contribution of neuroscience in ethics, many others have been more reserved in their statements, remaining sensitive to the epistemic and practical problems of sweeping claims. For instance, Churchland writes, “[m]y sense is that the details of decision making, of choice, of acquisition of character and temperament, and of development of such things as moral character are going to elude us until we have made more progress on certain fundamentals of neuroscience – namely the dynamic properties of neural networks” (Churchland 2002). Notably, Churchland has explored in detail how folk psychological explanations of morality could be vetted by neuroscientific ones. While whether her neurophilosophical perspective also provides a sound theoretical framework has been debated, what is clear is that it concedes significant epistemic weight to neuroscientific explanations but also does not necessarily close the door on interdisciplinary understandings of ethics.

Other contemporary philosophers including Adina Roskies, Joshua Greene, and William Casebeer have explored these questions and attempted to articulate how neuroscience’s contributions can navigate a range of conceptual and methodological problems. One idea formulated within the field of neuroethics contends that, “As we learn more about the neuroscientific basis of ethical reasoning and self-awareness, we may revise our ethical concepts” (Roskies 2002). Accordingly, Casebeer has presented the argument that Aristotle’s moral philosophy best reflects what we understand about moral psychology based on neuroscience research (e.g., contribution of affect to moral cognition, nature of abstract moral reasoning) (Casebeer 2003). Joshua Greene on the other hand, claims that, “[s]ocial neuroscience is, above all else, the construction of a metaphysical mirror that will allow us to see ourselves for what we are and, perhaps, change our ways for the better” (2006). His point is rather descriptive since, in his view, neuroscience contributes to the empirical basis of meta-ethics – as opposed to normative ethics, as seen in Casebeer’s perspective. Through neuroscience, “understanding where our moral instincts come from and how they work can... lead us to doubt that our moral convictions stem from perceptions of moral truth rather than projects of moral attitudes” (Greene 2003).

The point of alluding in a cursory fashion to history is not in any way an attempt to disqualify the interest of the question or to suggest unanimity amongst neuroscientists about the contribution of neuroscience to ethics. Indeed, some neuroscientists like Charles Sherrington strongly resisted the introduction of neuroscience into the humanities for fear of reductionism and the undermining of human values (Smith 2001). Rather, my point is that various historical contexts have shaped the interest of neuroscientists and other scholars by promoting a neuroscientific understanding of ethics – based implicitly and sometimes explicitly – on the belief of the supremacy of knowledge about the brain in the domain of ethics. This positivist, neurocentric interpretation has percolated in different

public discourses, typically exhibiting rather crude forms of reductionism. Recent work on the public understanding of contemporary neuroscience by myself and others has suggested that neuroscience, especially areas of neuroscience which bear significance for behaviour, personality, and morality, are interpreted following a similar positivist trend. For instance, studies on the media coverage of fMRI have shown a wide-ranging proclivity to equate the self to the brain (e.g., we are our brains), which I have described elsewhere as *neuro-essentialism* (Racine et al. 2005, Racine et al. 2010).

Moreover, neuroscience techniques like fMRI and PET scans are vested with the power to offer objective and definitive evidence (e.g., the understanding that fMRI provides the ultimate visual proof), which outweighs other types of evidence (e.g., acupuncture should be medically accepted because fMRI shows neuronal changes associated with it). This phenomenon, which I originally characterized as *neuro-realism* (Racine et al. 2005), has been described in more depth in other works by myself and colleagues (Racine et al. 2010). Some studies examining the impact of neuroimages and neuroscientific explanations on the evaluation of scientific explanations have also suggested the epistemic supremacy of neuroscience. Explanations with neuroscientific explanations (Weisberg et al. 2008) and neuroimages (McCabe and Castel 2008) were rated higher than without such explanations or images by subjects in experiments.

In a context of strong claims and media clamour, some ethicists and philosophers have voiced early criticism against the introduction of neuroscientific perspectives to ethics in particular, especially given the inclination to interpret this body of research along the lines of moderate to strong naturalism (Stent 1990, Macintyre 1998) (see left column of Table 3 in the next section). Claims reviewed in this first section exhibit features of a strong naturalist perspective, particularly that: (1) ethics is an empirical discipline, ideally a kind of applied field of neuroscience (ethical knowledge is reducible to empirical knowledge); (2) neuroscientific knowledge could provide a foundational perspective and guide ethical behavior (e.g., potentially universal natural laws and principles could be identified to guide conduct); (3) ethics is empirical in the sense that empirical knowledge trumps normative ethics and ethics reflection (no clear distinction between “is” and “ought”; ethics predicates are natural properties).

In response to the strong naturalist approach to ethics, some common counter arguments have been presented (see Table 1 for a quick review), which are not further discussed here (Racine 2008). Indeed, it may seem that many neuroscientists of ethics suffer from what Steve Morse has called the “brain over-claim syndrome”, i.e., “[a] cognitive pathology...that often afflicts those inflamed by the fascinating new discoveries in the neurosciences” (Morse 2006). Their interpretations of neuroscience’s contribution to ethics reflect a belief in the epistemic privilege of neuroscience as others have in the past. I have myself critically reviewed common anti-naturalist arguments against the use of neuroscience knowledge in ethics elsewhere and have come to the conclusion that none of the main arguments are entirely compelling, although they do bring wisdom to modulate strong positivist and naturalistic claims (see Table 3 below for sample claims) and help us better understand potential contributions of neuroscience (Racine 2010). In general, anti-naturalistic arguments temper strong naturalistic claims and call for an alternate framework to incorporate neuroscience in ethics.

Table 1: Common conceptual arguments against the neuroscience of ethics (based on Racine, 2005, Racine 2010)

Neurological determinism Contribution of neuroscience to ethics appears to jeopardize beliefs in free will and to support forms of determinism.
Naturalistic fallacy Contribution of neuroscience conflates an “is” with an “ought”; operates a slide from an “is” to an “ought”.
Semantic dualism* Brain properties are different from mind properties precluding any sound integration of neuroscience on ethical thinking because brain properties are confused with mind properties.
Biological reductionism and eliminativism Neuroscience reduces ethical concepts to the point of examining only their trivial components, which are theoretically and practically irrelevant. Eliminativism would err in triaging folk psychological explanations of ethics not reducible to lower-level explanations.
Neuroscientism and the threat to ethics Fear that neuroscience will damage human values and beliefs (e.g., free will, honesty, and personhood) or further contribute to bureaucratic models of organization of care, impersonal and overly objective medicine, and disrespect for persons.

*Substance dualism is in our eyes a moot position in the current neuroscience context, hence its exclusion from this table.

Following anti-naturalists, I take the perspective that scepticism about the epistemic supremacy of neuroscience is healthy and well placed, and even founded given the historic precedent and the potential implications of biological reductionism in health policy and other areas of public life. However, I reject the claim that ethics will not benefit from the fruits of neuroscience research because of the idea that ethics is impermeable to empirical evidence, and stress that the anti-naturalist proponents of this perspective are dangerously wrong. Apropos, Changeux writes that, “the search for a ‘common ethics’ cannot sidestep the recent immense contribution of the humanities, anthropology, history of cultures and of law, psychology and neuroscience, and evolutionary naturalism” (*author’s translation*) (Changeux 1996).

Indeed, critics have often been more radical than those who have put forward arguments in favour of a neuroscience of ethics. When taken in extreme forms (which is not the case for all authors cited above), both perspectives reflect what Dewey called a “quest for certainty,” in which absolute universal principles are considered to be true irrespective of context, time and, geographical location. What I offer is a middle-ground perspective, inspired by Dewey’s writing, which (1) recognizes and values the contribution of empirical research and evidence to ethics (including neuroscience) but (2)

avoids different forms of reductionism and crude ethico-logical fallacies (Table 1) within a view of practical ethical judgment that stresses the role of individual perspectives and experience in moral deliberation.

2. Pragmatism and the Contribution of Evidence in Practical Judgment

Tempering claims about the contribution of neuroscience to ethics *does not*, or at least from the gist of this paper, is that it *should not* automatically lead to a flat out rejection of the potential for neuroscience to make an important contribution to ethics.

Debates over the epistemic supremacy of neuroscientific explanations in ethics, while in need of some corrections and nuances, should not overcast the possible contribution of neuroscience to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of empirical research in ethics and informing practical ethical judgment. The second part of this paper explores pragmatic ethics, a paradigm of thought based largely, but not solely, on Dewey's thinking about the nature and role of evidence in ethics. I present how common claims about the contribution of neuroscience are modulated in a pragmatic theoretical context. By drawing upon Dewey's work on ethics, I wish to provide an alternative framework in which to consider neuroscience evidence in ethics.

Dewey's ethical thought and general pragmatism are notoriously hard to define or synthesize and it is beyond the scope of this paper to present Dewey's general moral philosophy. Table 2 below provides an overview of key features of Dewey's thinking on ethics. These concepts are not principles in the traditional sense, but provide fundamental meta-ethical scaffolding for ethics inspired by pragmatism. Some of these concepts relate more specifically to the use of empirical evidence in ethics and are explained briefly in the following paragraphs, which will hopefully clarify the pragmatic framework presented.

Table 2: Key features of Dewey's ethics (to be published in Racine, under review)

<p>Non-foundationalism Reluctance to posit <i>a priori</i> sources of ethics such as foundational ethical principles or the authority of religious ethics or natural order.</p>
<p>Deliberative, adaptive, and creative Ethics and ethical norms (in contrast to morality based on revelation and religious belief) are developed by humans and are generated as the outcome of human ethical deliberation and creativity consistent with the "method of democracy", i.e., collective deliberation without falling prey to blunt relativism.</p>
<p>Situationalism A general emphasis on the importance of context to understand human behavior and to assess if an act is ethically appropriate for a specific and concrete situation or context while also keeping in mind the possible broader implications beyond a specific situation.</p>

(Radical) empiricism and experientialism
Empirical knowledge and experience not only <i>inform</i> our understanding of ethics but have a potential <i>transformative</i> role in shaping views on the nature of ethical behavior and the assessment of real-world consequences of acts, including consequences on the development of an agent's moral habits and character. Knowledge of these consequences yields "(social) intelligence" through what Dewey described as a process of "inquiry".
Social nature of ethics
The recognition that the scope of ethics is broader than the individual because individual behavior can only be understood as being shaped by social networks and systems.
Interdisciplinarity
Ethics is the act of applying knowledge to human situations rather than a special province of knowledge or expertise in and of itself; contributions of a wide range of disciplines can inform on "human nature" as it relates to moral decision-making and moral behavior.
Practice- and action-oriented
Ethics is practice- and action-oriented and cannot be solely an academic or scholarly endeavor; ethics is a reflective process in service of action but which integrates an iterative process of deliberation and action.
Instrumentalism of ethical principles and ethical theory
Ethical principles have worth in as much as they help guide ethical conduct and generate good outcomes; they are "hypothesis" which should be assessed based on their consequences.
Moderate consequentialism
Consequences of ethical attitudes and of actions cannot be ignored from an ethical standpoint. However, moderate consequentialism does not equate with utilitarianism, i.e., the belief that we should maximize utility but the best decisions since "consequences" have broader and potentially more transformative effect on ethics.
Pluralism
Diversity contributes to generating richer and more insightful deliberations and inquiries; in rapidly changing societies, monolithic and rigid belief systems are underpowered with respect to the ethical challenges created by science and technology.

In the first section of the paper, I reviewed some strong naturalistic claims in the neuroscience of ethics. Table 3 below shows how moderate pragmatic naturalism offers different perspectives on the nature of ethics, the role of ethical principles, and empirical knowledge grounded in the basic features of pragmatic ethics described in Table 2. In the following paragraphs, I elucidate some of the divergences between strong and pragmatic (moderate) naturalism with respect to the neuroscience of ethics.

Table 3: Interpretations of neuroscience’s contribution to ethics following strong and moderate (pragmatic) naturalisms, as defined in (Racine 2008)

	Strong naturalistic interpretation	Moderate (pragmatic) naturalistic interpretation
Nature of ethics	Ethics is an empirical discipline, ideally a kind of applied field of neuroscience; ethical knowledge is reducible to empirical knowledge.	Ethics is inherently a normative discipline (it tries to identify the good thing to do and generate wisdom or knowledge of how to use knowledge), which needs to rely on factual understandings of ethical situations, outcomes of actions as well as on the nature of moral judgment and moral deliberation as such.
Ethical principles and foundations	Neuroscience knowledge could provide a foundational perspective and guide ethical behavior (e.g., potentially universal natural laws and principles could be identified to guide conduct).	Foundations (in a strict sense) in ethics are elusive and most often reflect a debatable quest for certainty. The task of ethics is not solely to provide foundations or universal principles but to propose scenarios of actions based on contextualized moral deliberation, which take into account knowledge of the natural world and should be assessed in specific circumstances and contexts.
Empirical knowledge	Ethics could be empirical in the sense that empirical knowledge trumps normative ethics and ethics reflection (no clear distinction between “is” and “ought”; ethical predicates are natural properties). Knowledge from neuroscience vets other knowledge.	Distinction between “is” and “ought” is acknowledged as a continuum, but ethics is a deliberative process which integrates an understanding of matters of facts as well as an understanding of outcomes of actions. Knowledge from neuroscience could enrich other bodies of knowledge and empower moral agents.

2.1. Ethics is a form of reflexive, creative, and social deliberative enterprise seeking the “good(s)”

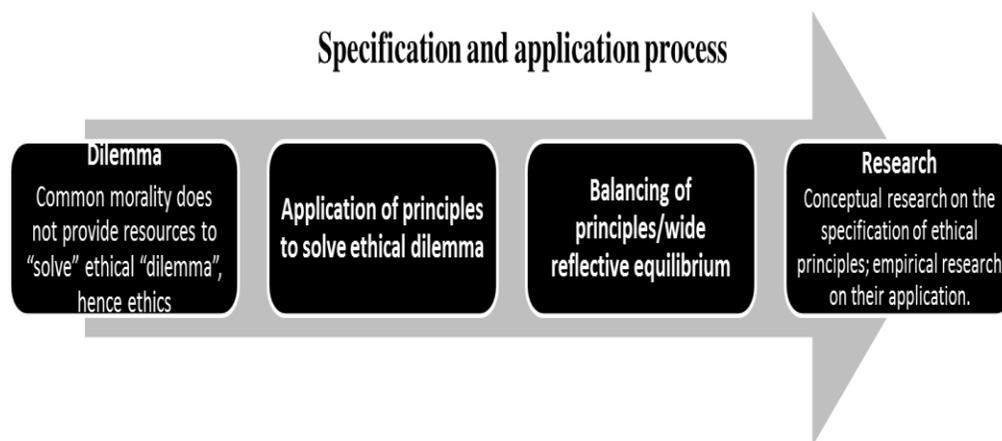
Strong naturalism presents an understanding of ethics as basically applied neuroscience knowledge, which actually usurps some of the elementary normative aspects of ethics. A pragmatic naturalistic approach, on the other hand, considers ethics as a reflexive, creative, and social deliberative enterprise seeking the “good(s),” which comes in plural forms.

Ethics only makes sense in relation to other individuals because of its intrinsic social nature. As Figure 1 captures, in contrast to linear models of applied ethics in which principles are summoned to respond to ethical dilemmas, and then specified, balanced, and entered into a wide reflective equilibrium process (1a), pragmatism suggests an iterative and deliberative process (1b). However, to be fair, within modern ethics, and in particular bioethics, the value of empirical research and experience is now well recognized and broadly accepted (Solomon 2005, Borry et al. 2005). Most bioethicists have come to acknowledge the challenge of anti-naturalistic arguments and strong interpretations of the naturalistic fallacy.

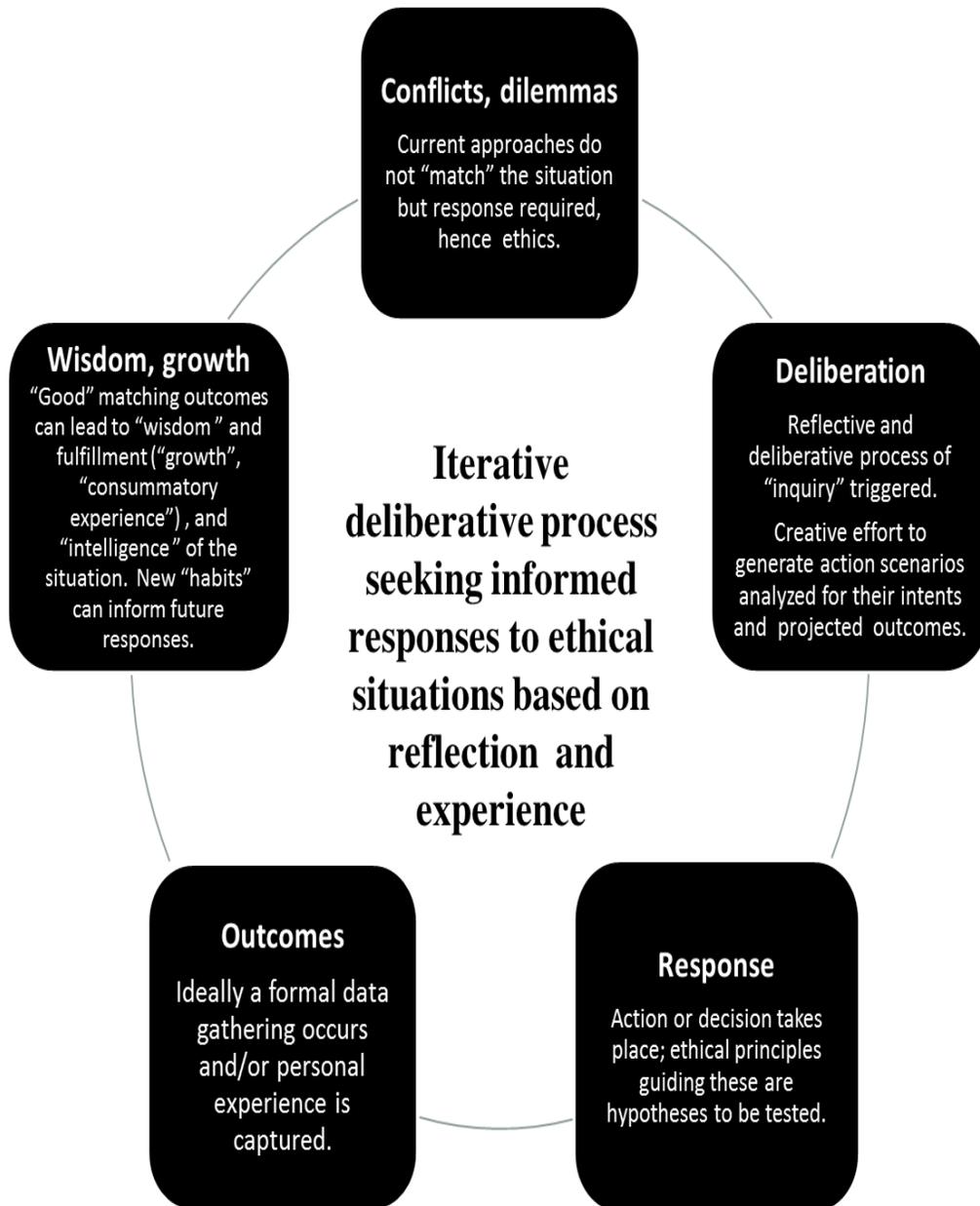
Elucidating this challenge, leading bioethicist Daniel Callahan, commented that, “[s]ince ‘is’ is all the universe has to offer, to say that it cannot be the source of an ‘ought’ is tantamount to saying *a priori* that an ought can have no source at all – to say that is no less than to say there can be no oughts” (Callahan 1996). Contemporary authors like Beauchamp and Childress also recognize the value of experience and empirical evidence in specifying ethical principles:

[t]he abstract rules and principles in moral theories are extensively indeterminate; that is, the content of these rules and principles is too abstract to determine the acts that we should perform. In the process of specifying and balancing norms and in making particular judgments, we often must take into account factual beliefs about the world, cultural expectations, judgments of likely outcome, and precedents previously encountered to help fill out and give weight to rules, principles, and theories. (Beauchamp and Childress 2001)

Figure 1: Comparison of the processes implied in applied ethics and pragmatic ethics
1a. Process of applied ethics (Racine 2012, in press)



1b. Process of pragmatic ethics



2.2. A foundationalist interpretation of ethical principles is contrary to the very nature of ethics

In a pragmatic framework, ethical dilemmas and the like spark the need for an inquiry (see Table 1) similar to common approaches in bioethics. For instance, pragmatism entails a process by which scenarios are proposed and rehearsed in deliberation to foresee their outcomes as integral to ethics. Responding in some form to ethical dilemmas and situations as well as capturing outcomes through personal experience or formal data gathering (although Dewey himself was less clear on this aspect) are also parts of ethics. If the response to the dilemma *matches* the problematic situation, then the individual involved experiences *growth*, and *wisdom* is generated from a deliberative process based on an *intelligence* of the situation (italicized terms have specific meanings in Dewey's writings which cannot be reviewed here).

Moderate pragmatic naturalism offers an understanding of ethics which navigates between strong naturalism and anti-naturalism and circumvents some significant problems found in these two perspectives. For example, pragmatic naturalism does not linger on the question of whether ethics is an entirely empirical discipline with no specificity or a unique normative discipline without connections to empirical disciplines. Rather, the debate centers on how empirical knowledge can be brought to bear meaningfully in the pursuit of moral good(s) and how ethics as a discipline should be dedicated to these tasks. As Dewey wrote:

Whether the goal be thought of as pleasure, as virtue, as perfection, as final enjoyment of salvation, is secondary to the fact that the moralists who have asserted fixed ends have in all their differences from one another agreed in the basic idea that present activity is but a means. We have insisted that happiness, reasonableness, virtue, perfecting, are, on the contrary, parts of the present significance of present action. Memory of the past, observation of the present, foresight of the future are indispensable. But they are indispensable *to* a present liberation, and enriching growth of action. Happiness is fundamental in morals only because happiness is not something to be sought for, but is something now attained even in the midst of pain and trouble, whenever recognition of our ties with nature and with fellowmen releases and informs our action. Reasonableness is a necessity because it is the perception of the continuities that take action out of its immediateness and solution into connection with the past and future. (Dewey 1922)

In summary, ethics pursues the goals of the good, wisdom, and happiness. The neuroscience of ethics could re-describe these goals in the language of neuroscience but could never do away with them. In ethics, empirical knowledge serves to inform practical judgment in fulfilling these goals and intents.

In contrast to strong naturalism, it is antagonistic to the nature of ethics to rely on established principles following a deductive or foundational interpretation of ethical principles or of a singular piece of knowledge. Dewey writes apropos, "The attempt to set up ready-made conclusions contradicts the nature of reflective morality [ethics]" (Dewey

and Tufts 1932). His writings also suggest an inherently creative role in practical judgment in ethics. There is a sense in which ethical approaches are “founded” inasmuch as this “foundation” process leaves room for creative thinking in which imagination is a key ingredient to identify the “good” approach(es) in a specific context. In other words, reflection and deliberation are processes through which empirical evidence is integrated into an ethical response; however, it does not become foundational in any conventional sense. Accordingly, ethical principles are considered hypotheses, part of a flexible and creative moral enterprise, which adjusts responses based on the circumstantial nature of every given situation:

But in morals a hankering for certainty, born of timidity and nourished by love of authoritative prestige, has led to the ideal that absence of immutably fixed and universally applicable ready made principles is equivalent to chaos. In fact situations into which change and the unexpected enter are a challenge to intelligence to create new principles. Morals must be a growing science if it is to be a science at all, not merely because all truth has not yet been appropriated by the mind of man, but because life is a moving affair in which old moral truth ceases to apply. (Dewey 1922)

2.3. Ethics is inherently situational or context-dependent

Some strong naturalistic interpretations of the neuroscience of ethics suggest that universal laws or principles will be discovered by neuroscience and therefore guide human behavior or radically inform other discourses on ethics. From a pragmatic standpoint, however, ethics is inherently situational or context-dependent. This does not mean that answers and ethical approaches are relative; rather, just that their “truth” and “fit” can only be assessed in specific sets of environmental constraints.

As McGee describes, “Dewey found moral investment in the existential context of the social situation itself, not in narrow notions of acceptability and condemnation that we bring to every problematic area. In this way Dewey articulated not relativism, but a careful and subtly contextual ethics” (2003). He also emphasized the constitutive function of habits and social context in shaping and making possible ethical behavior. For instance, he argued that one of the most important sophisms of philosophical thinking is what he calls the “philosophical fallacy,” i.e., the neglect of context, which accordingly leads to “the supposition that whatever is found true under certain conditions may forthwith be asserted universally or without conditions” (Dewey, 1922).

2.4. Experience and knowledge of facts offer various contributions to a deliberative pragmatic ethics but do not provide foundations

Both moderate and strong forms of naturalism acknowledge the value of knowledge of facts, with the specification that pragmatism also calls for the recognition of the value of

first-person experience and inter-subjective knowledge – a departure from a strict positivist epistemology. Experience and knowledge are intimately connected to each other and have various contributions at different steps of the deliberative pragmatic ethics process (Figure 1b). These contributions include a better understanding of the ethical situation or dilemma, providing evidence to support deliberation, informing on the feasibility of different action scenarios, supporting data gathering and reflecting on personal experience, and understanding how outcomes match (or fail to match) a situation. They are also now well acknowledged in bioethics, which is often relying on, as others and myself have argued, an implicit form of pragmatism or naturalism (Moreno 1999, Racine 2008). Dewey summarized it eloquently: “[I]ack of insight always ends in despising or else unreasoned admiration....What cannot be understood cannot be managed intelligently” (Dewey 1922).

The nuances of this approach are important to delineate. Firstly, facts do not bring certainty and no single kind of knowledge possesses an inherent supremacy. Additionally, the acquisition of knowledge does not override the specificity of the “knowledge of using knowledge,” i.e., wisdom, which is the goal of ethics. Dewey, for example, clearly outlined how empirical knowledge would not solve strictly speaking ethical dilemmas:

[I]t is not pretended that a moral theory based on moral realities of human nature and a study of the specific connections of these realities with those of physical science would do away with moral struggle and defeat. It would not make the moral life as simple a matter as wending one’s way along a well-lighted boulevard....But morals based upon concern with facts and deriving guidance from knowledge of them would at least locate the points of effective endeavour and would focus available resources upon them. (Dewey 1922)

2.5. Knowledge liberates and empowers the agent to act on the world

In a strong naturalistic epistemology, empirical knowledge could somehow guide behavior but, within a pragmatic and moderately naturalistic stance, knowledge liberates and empowers the agent to act on the world. For example, knowing about biases in decision-making (e.g., neuroscience suggesting a hard-wired personhood network in the brain could be tricked by non-persons such as patients in a vegetative state or fetuses, according to Farah and Heberlein (2007)) does not support determinism or the call to conform to these biases. Rather, it allows the agent to exercise control on these factors through training or technology (e.g., understanding how a personhood network is hard-wired and can be triggered by non-persons).

Dewey stressed the liberating nature of knowledge which offers the moral agent to be active and free within the conditions of real-world existence: “[w]e are told that seriously to import empirical facts into morals is equivalent to an abrogation of freedom. Facts and laws mean necessity we are told. The way to freedom is to turn our back upon them and take flight to a separate ideal realm. Even if the flight could be successfully accomplished, the efficacy of the prescription may be doubted. For we need freedom in and among actual events, not apart from them” (Dewey 1922). Dewey also pointedly

highlighted the conceptual flaws which equate knowledge of facts to determinism, asserting that “no amount of insight into necessity bring with it, as such, anything but a consciousness of a necessity. Freedom is the ‘truth of necessity’...” (Dewey 1922). Hence, no amount of neuroscientific knowledge about ourselves will explain away our capacity to use this knowledge in the pursuit of practical goals. In this process, different interpretations and uses of this knowledge will unavoidably surface. One can hope this knowledge will breed enlightenment, but absolute foundations in any substantial understanding of this term are elusive.

2.6. Non-reductionism and interdisciplinary scholarship and practices are required

Strong naturalism may suggest that neuroscience could provide foundational evidence for ethics in contrast to “flimsy” disciplines. A moderate approach argues rather that a broad range of disciplines are needed to integrate the first-person perspective through relevant methods (e.g., qualitative methodology) and disciplines. As Dewey argued,

Morals is the most humane of all subjects. It is that which is closest to human nature; it is ineradicably empirical, not theological nor metaphysical nor mathematical. Since it directly concerns human nature, everything that can be known of the human mind and body in physiology, medicine, anthropology, and psychology is pertinent to moral inquiry. Human nature exists and operates in an environment...Moral science is not something with a separate province. It is physical, biological and historic knowledge placed in a human context where it illuminates and guides the activities of men. (Dewey 1922)

Dewey stresses how ethics is not necessarily a discipline confined to definite boundaries, both academic and institutional – it is much more fluid. Ethics is knowledge garnered from both empirical evidence and theoretical insights, mobilized in service of individual happiness and reciprocal enrichment. The neuroscience of ethics can offer a contribution to ethical knowledge, but it must fit within a comprehensive, i.e., non-reductionistic, framework whereby the first contribution of empirical disciplines is to enrich and broaden perspectives on the understanding of the very nature of moral situations rather than quickly disposing of unsupported moral views and suggesting incontestable foundations for ethics. The latter is in fact a disservice to the goals of ethics.

3. Conclusion

This paper reviews general claims about the possible contribution of neuroscience to ethics and underscored how there are implicit and sometimes explicit references to the epistemic supremacy of neuroscience explanations in contemporary writings in ethics and related fields following a strong naturalistic (or positivist) trend. Unfortunately, prophetic language from neuroscientists and others have triggered alarmist responses entrenched in anti-naturalistic epistemological assumptions and conceptual debates that fail to capture the role of evidence and empirical research in ethics.

Inspired by Dewey's thinking, I delineate a pragmatic account of how evidence and research serve ethics in practice and in scholarship. Within this framework, neuroscience explanations will certainly have important contributions to make – but only if they are situated within a broader framework that recognizes the value of empirical research and brings neuroscience explanations into dialogue with perspectives from other disciplines as a means to support and inform the deliberative processes. More simply put, a humble interpretation of the neuroscience of ethics needs to coalesce within an interdisciplinary understanding of ethics (Racine 2010). In conclusion, I acknowledge Dewey (1922) for this compendious final point of attention: whenever we think we are on the verge of an ultimate understanding or explanation, a pragmatic approach importantly reminds us that “[h]umility is more demanded at our moments of triumph than at those of failure.”

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Ingersoll's Voice, Adler's Vision: Motivating Humanists

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Humanism, in contrast to traditional religions, often seems to find it difficult to generate moral energy and motivation in adherents. How will Humanists generate sufficient “moral energy” to achieve our societal aims? I argue that Humanism has within it sufficient resources to motivate Humanists to high levels of moral action. I suggest that we must listen to the voice of Robert Ingersoll, learning how to appeal to the emotions and to the full range of “moral tastes” human beings are sensitive to. We should also remember the vision of Felix Adler as we build moral communities and foster moral leadership.

1. The Problem of Motivation

Humanist philosophers have long been aware of what I believe to be the key problem facing the Humanist movement today: the problem of motivation. How will a Humanist society generate sufficient “moral energy” to achieve its societal aims, without succumbing to some form of ‘fundamentalism’? Traditional religions might always be able to out-perform Humanism in the “moral energy” department, constantly holding us back from achieving the progress for which we strive.

I believe that Humanism has within it sufficient resources to motivate Humanists to high levels of moral action without resorting to “fundamentalism” of any sort. By intelligently harnessing insights from social psychology and compliance professionals, and by drawing on effective community-organizing practices used by politicians, community organizers and religious groups, we will be able to create an engaged, activist Humanist movement more than capable of meeting the challenges we face at this time.

2. My Motivational Strategy

The motivational strategy I outline below has two central strands: first, I believe we must recover Robert Ingersoll's voice, finding a way of speaking about Humanism in public which inspires others to listen and to act; second, I believe we should rekindle Felix Adler's vision of a community-centered Humanism dedicated to moral action. In what follows I will seek to demonstrate how Ingersoll and Adler, icons of the American Golden

Age of Freethought, understood core truths about motivating people which have now been thoroughly confirmed by contemporary science. If the Humanist movement of the 21st Century can learn from these figures we will, I argue, be able to overcome a problem of motivation.

3. Ingersoll's Voice

We need men with moral courage to speak and write
their real thoughts, and to stand by their convictions,
even to the very death.

– Robert Green Ingersoll, 1870

Robert Green Ingersoll, “The Great Agnostic,” was the best-known public speaker of the 19th Century, a gifted orator and stalwart champion of an early form of modern Humanism. Today he is remembered mainly as a religious critic – understandably, as his religious views were remarkable in their time – and his writings can be seen as a template for today’s “New Atheists.” His political writing is less well-known, however, and I believe this is where many of the finest insights for modern Humanists reside.

Ingersoll was an early supporter of numerous progressive causes, including civil rights, women’s rights, and children’s rights, and his speeches on behalf of those causes offer a model of motivational oratory few modern Humanists have been able to match. In these speeches Ingersoll drew on a number of persuasive and motivational principles which have, more recently, been validated by scientific studies as effective ways to motivate people to act around a particular cause: he drew on the emotions of the audience; he appealed to a wide spectrum of our foundational moral instincts; and he combined Logos, Ethos, and Pathos.

I will seek to demonstrate Ingersoll’s use of these three techniques through an analysis of his 1877 speech *The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child*, showing how Ingersoll motivated his audiences through well-crafted emotional appeals, based on all our foundational moral intuitions, while weaving together pathos, ethos and logos into a compelling tapestry.

4. Go for the Gut – Emotivation

4.1. The Power of Emotional Appeals

In *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (2008), Drew Westen provides a magisterial overview and analysis of our current state of our understanding regarding how people make political decisions. Drawing on his own research as a neuroscientist, and on numerous psychological, cognitive scientific and political studies, he argues that Democrats and progressives in general (among whom can be counted most Humanists) have long languished under a delusion: the “dispassionate vision of the mind.”

Under this model, voters, when making a political decision, rationally weigh the negative and positive attributes and policies of different political candidates, finally choosing the one who will provide the greatest benefits for them. If this were true, the best way for a political candidate to appeal to people would be to provide lots of detail about their policies, showing precisely how their policies would benefit the particular group they were targeting. And, indeed, this is often how progressive candidates (and Humanist organizations) campaign.

The problem with this view of the mind, as Westen draws out using numerous empirical studies (supported by Marcus's *The Sentimental Citizen* (2006) and Brader's *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds* (2002)), is that it is almost completely false. While people's rational evaluation of differing policy positions or value-stances do have an impact on voting decisions, the vast majority of variance in political decision-making can be explained by how people feel about a given candidate, party or (by extension) set of values. The gut is central to political decision-making and should therefore be central to all attempts to convince and persuade.

That progressives tend to deny or ignore the importance of emotions in motivating others, Westen argues, is a symptom of their "irrational emotional commitment to rationality": we have such an emotional commitment to the value and importance of rationality that we are incapable of recognizing that the form of rationality they espouse plays little role in political decision-making. I call this the "Rationalist's Dilemma": freethinkers are committed to rationalism, and therefore feel that our appeals to others should be in the form of meticulous logical arguments, and that rousing the emotions is ethically suspect. At the same time, as freethinkers we are compelled to bow to the scientific evidence which demonstrates that human beings infrequently make important decisions following the model of the dispassionate mind. Indeed, it is no accident that "motivation" and "emotion" share etymological roots: people are, indeed, "moved" to action.

4.2. How Ingersoll Roused the Emotions

Ingersoll had no such qualms about harnessing the emotions: in his 1877 speech on *The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child*, he spoke out against corporal punishment and in favor of the rights of the child, way ahead of his time:

I do not believe in the government of the lash. If any one of you ever expects to whip your children again, I want you to have a photograph taken of yourself when you are in the act, with your face red with vulgar anger, and the face of the little child, with eyes swimming in tears and the little chin dimpled with fear, like a piece of water struck by a sudden cold wind. Have the picture taken. If that little child should die, I cannot think of a sweeter way to spend an autumn afternoon than to go out to the cemetery, when the maples are clad in tender gold, and little scarlet runners are coming, like poems of regret, from the sad heart of the earth – and sit down upon the grave and look at that photograph, and think of the flesh now dust that you beat. I tell you it is wrong; it is no way to raise children!

Note the nature of the argument here. Ingersoll does not dispassionately list the reasons why he is against corporal punishment. Rather, he paints a detailed, emotionally-compelling picture designed to rouse moral outrage and disgust. The descriptive details – the dimpled chin of the child, the maples and “scarlet runners” in the cemetery – are strictly logically irrelevant to his argument, but are central to its *emotional* power.

Someone trapped between the horns of the Rationalist’s Dilemma might argue that removing such details would make the argument more honest, more logical, more *rational* – yet in so doing they would rob it of its power to sway the listener, and to motivate them to action.

This message – that appealing to the emotions is an essential method of generating moral energy and motivating people to act – is not lost on all modern atheists. Indeed, much of the success of the New Atheists (particularly Harris, Hitchens, and Dawkins) can be seen to stem from their *emotional* appeals. The arguments they present against the existence of God are, without exception, old news. None of them add anything truly “New” to the discussion. What is new is the passion and emotional force with which the New Atheists have made the question of God a moral issue, a question of values. Consider the now-famous opening to the second chapter of *The God Delusion*:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. (Dawkins 2006, 52)

There is no argument here: what Dawkins offers is a moral indictment of the character of God, designed to illicit outrage (or amusement, indignation, surprise, or some other emotion) in the reader. Much the same can be said of Hitchens and Harris. While they certainly provide arguments in favor of their positions, what captured the popular imagination, and inflamed the modern atheist movement, was their emotive appeals to the moral sense of their audience: their spirited attacks on honor killings, female genital mutilation, restrictions on free speech and other questions of moral value. That these gut-grabbers are so often spoken of as the epitome of disinterested rationalists demonstrates how deep a hold the “irrational emotional commitment to rationality” has on the freethought movement.

4.3. Appeals to the Emotions Are Not Always Manipulative

A critical reader might at this point raise the following criticism: “Even if we grant that emotions have great power to motivated people to act, are such appeals not manipulative, and should Humanists not eschew their use on ethical grounds?”

I recognize the force of this criticism: the freethought movement prizes intellectual autonomy and is (understandably) constantly on guard for threats to individual freedom of thought, and mechanisms which encourage people to be unreasonable. It is certainly true,

also, that the use of emotions can be manipulative: the term “emotional manipulation” denotes a real threat, and everyone can conjure a potent image of a demagogue who has risen to disastrous power on the back of powerful calls to the emotions.

However, it is in my view foolish to respond to the potential dangers of emotional appeals by restricting ourselves from ever making such appeals. Aside from the fact that this would undoubtedly lead to our decimation in the battleground of culture (as the evidence I’ve outlined above shows, an emotionally compelling message will tend to defeat an emotionally inert one), such a course of action also misrepresents and misunderstands the way our emotions interact with our cognition.

A full consideration of the recent research into the role of the emotions in cognition would extend far beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice to say the scholarly consensus now supports the idea that our emotions are an essential component of our reasoning processes, and can often aid us in making wise decisions (see Damasio 2005, for a review of the literature in this area). The least emotional person is by no means the most reasonable or even the most rational, and rousing the emotions is not inherently a threat to our powers of reason. Appeals to the emotions can be manipulative, but are not *necessarily* so.

This fact is itself demonstrated by the very phrase “emotional manipulation”: that we set apart certain forms of emotional appeal as “manipulative” implies that there are other forms which are not. Furthermore, after consideration it becomes clear that there are many ways to manipulate an audience without emotional appeals: misleading statistics, dehumanization of your opponents, and outright lies are all forms of unethical behavior which don’t rely on emotion. Indeed it is sometimes our emotions which save us from manipulative situations: who among us has never had the uneasy sense that a slick salesperson is trying to con us? Perhaps you’ve even kicked yourself for “over-rationalizing” your worries and making a purchase anyway, realizing later you should have trusted your emotional response. The emotions are not necessarily manipulative or inimical to reason.

Finally, I argue that if we are presenting our case for Humanism in a detailed and honest way, an emotional response in our audience is inevitable. How can we talk about the dangers of climate change (homes and schools underwater, whole cities washed away, a submerged Statue of Liberty), the terrible horrors of war (limbs of children blown to pieces, bodies and minds shattered by bomb blasts), or the evils of prejudice (kids tortured with heating coils to turn them straight as they are told the world detests them) without expecting an emotional response in our audience? No, to avoid rousing the emotions of our audience is to avoid telling the truth about the troubles which ail our world, and thus to lie by omission.

In short, as Drew Westen argues, “there is no [necessary] relation between the extent to which an appeal is rational or emotional and the extent to which it is ethical or unethical” (2008, 14).

4.4. Conclusion: Emotional Appeals are both Essential and Ethical

What Westen’s research, Ingersoll’s speeches and the success of the New Atheists

indicate is the necessity of, while still composing cogent arguments, consciously and intelligently crafting Humanist appeals to active emotions in readers, listeners and viewers. Failing to do so, and relying purely on rational arguments, will prevent us from generating the moral energy required to achieve our aims. Susan Jacoby, writing for the *Washington Post*'s On Faith blog, recognizes this danger:

Since the 1980s, the far right, especially the religious right, has been masterful at taking control of public language in a way that always places secularism and secular liberalism on the defensive. We must reclaim the language of passion and emotion from the religious right, which loves to portray atheists as bloodless, “professorial.”..devotees of abstract scientific principles that have nothing to do with real human lives. (2011)

If we are able to “go for the gut” like Ingersoll, we will motivate more people to join us in making the changes we hope for in the world, and will no longer be seen as “bloodless.”

5. Finding Our Moral Foundations

5.1. Moral Foundations Theory

A second lesson modern Humanists can derive from Ingersoll's work is the importance of appealing to a wide range of moral instincts. Jonathan Haidt's (2012) “moral foundations theory” suggests that human beings have six “moral intuitions” or “tastes” which are activated when people are confronted with moral problems of different kinds: we are sensitive to the harm we might do to others; to forms of unfairness (both inequality and lack of proportionality); to questions of disloyalty to a group; to disrespect and failure to honor authority; to violations of purity and sanctity; and to restrictions on liberty. These instincts he calls our “moral foundations.”

The moral foundations, Haidt suggests, are triggered to a greater or lesser extent in all of us. Using the metaphor of a “moral tongue,” Haidt suggests that people have different “tastes” when it comes to morality, with some responding more strongly to particular moral “flavors” over others. He argues that conservatives (Haidt uses political terminology as it is commonly used in the U.S.) are more responsive to the whole spectrum of moral intuitions, while liberals are strongly responsive only to the “harm,” “fairness” and “liberty” foundations, with little concern for “loyalty,” “authority” and “purity.” The “moral tongues” of liberals and conservatives are attuned differently.

This theory, if correct (and Haidt marshals an impressive amount of experimental support), has profound implications for our problem of motivation. Humanists, generally being politically liberal, will tend to appeal to the public using the moral foundations most relevant to themselves (“harm,” “fairness” and “liberty”). In so doing they will miss the moral concerns of a large portion of the populace who may be more conservative, leading to the perception that Humanists are not addressing – or, worse, do not share – their moral passions.

5.2. Ingersoll Tickle the Whole Moral Palette

Once again Ingersoll offers a way forward. He appealed to the full range of moral foundations in his speeches, weaving powerful moral tapestries in which harm, fairness, and liberty are bolstered by appeals to sanctity, purity and authority. Returning to *The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child*, Ingersoll demonstrates his mastery of the moral appeal. As we have already seen, his depiction of the harm caused by corporal punishment of children was evocative and powerful. His whole speech is dedicated to liberty (building from that moral foundation), and throughout he speaks of fair treatment of children: “Do not treat your children like orthodox posts to be set in a row. Treat them like trees that need light and sun and air. Be fair and honest with them; give them a chance.” So Ingersoll was capable of appealing to the moral foundations most important to today’s liberals.

But Ingersoll also appealed to the moral foundations which are more salient to modern conservative minds. Though no Christian, he was happy to appeal to the authority of Jesus when making his argument against corporal punishment:

I have seen some people who acted as though they thought that when the Savior said “Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven,” he had a raw-hide under his mantle, and made that remark simply to get the children within striking distance!”

He speaks of the family (today “family values” is the quintessential right-wing phrase) in terms which can’t help but resonate with the purity/sanctity foundation, saying “I regard marriage as the holiest institution among men. Without the fireside there is no human advancement; without the family relation there is no life worth living. Every good government is made up of good families.” In the following evocative image he describes the institution of slavery as a stain on the purity of the Christian Church, again invoking the purity/sanctity foundation:

Think how long we clung to the institution of human slavery, how long lashes upon the naked back were a legal tender for labor performed. Think of it. The pulpit of this country deliberately and willingly, for a hundred years, turned the cross of Christ into a whipping post.

Finally, the entire speech is shrouded in Ingersoll’s characteristic loyalty to the highest principles of the United States (as he saw them), with references to the flag, to those who have died for the country, and even a short paean to Abraham Lincoln.

Ingersoll’s moral messages, more than any modern Humanist I know, rested on all six moral foundations identified by Haidt in his research. This, I suspect, was part of his appeal, which was able to motivate many to come hear him speak and take his point of view.

5.3. Appealing to All Moral “Tastes” can be Ethical

Just as my case regarding the importance of rousing the emotions, my argument here is susceptible to criticism. One critical tack would be to challenge moral foundations theory itself, and argue that it does not accurately represent the nature of human morality. I cannot engage in an extensive defense of Haidt here, but suffice to say I consider his work some of the finest currently being performed in this area, and his experimental observations have been adopted by many in the field. Opposing views of human morality rarely (if ever) have the range of carefully-crafted experimental studies to support them as Haidt’s moral foundations theory, and I believe Humanists should follow the evidence where it leads.

A second criticism is more dangerous to my cause: even if we accept that human beings have the “moral tastes” which Haidt identifies, is it not our responsibility to reinforce our commitment to the “harm,” “fairness,” and “liberty” moral tastes, and to refrain from appealing to “loyalty,” “authority,” and “purity/sanctity”? Shouldn’t we, indeed, work toward a world in which more people have a “liberal moral palette,” and are less susceptible to appeals to authority etc.? Could appealing to loyalty etc. actually encourage people to consider those sorts of arguments legitimate, thus undermining the goal of long-term moral education?

As before, to accept this criticism would rob Humanists of a potentially-powerful method by which to reach people and generate moral energy, and would put us at a disadvantage against cultural opponents who do not share our scruples – but that does not answer the ethical question as to whether appeals of the type I describe should be discouraged on principle.

This is a more difficult question than the question of the ethics of emotional appeals in general, because while there I clearly nothing unethical about emotions per se, perhaps the same cannot be said about the concept of, for instance, obeisance to authority. Notions of authority, loyalty, and purity have caused extraordinary suffering in our world, and if we appeal to these moral tastes we run the risk of reinforcing them. If we appeal to authority when attempting to motivate Humanists, we do seem to be suggesting, even if only indirectly, that it is justifiable to perform an act because an authority supports it. If we appeal to some “sacred” value which mustn’t be besmirched we must perforce also be arguing that some values are “sacred” – a proposition I find difficult to accept. If we argue that something should be done out of loyalty – even loyalty to a high ideal – we could reinforce loyalty as a reason for action per se.

I have two responses to this criticism: one pragmatic, the other philosophical. Pragmatically speaking, even if we wish to create a world in which people are generally more susceptible to appeals to “harm,” “fairness,” and “loyalty,” and where they lose their taste for “loyalty,” “authority,” and “purity/sanctity,” we must realize that, at present, many people are still extremely responsive to the latter moral tastes. In order to bring about the changes we desire, we will need to appeal to them, and that means – at least in the short term – taking these other “tastes” seriously. If we decide, on principle, only to serve dishes which satisfy those senses on the moral tongue which we delight in, we

cannot be surprised if our dishes go uneaten by the significant portion of the population which does not share our tastes.

The philosophical considerations are knotty, but there are reasons to be less concerned about the reinforcement of these moral “tastes” than we might be. First, there is no necessary logical connection between the statements “Be loyal to x” and “Being loyal is generally praiseworthy regardless of what one is being loyal to.” For instance, there is a significant ethical difference between encouraging loyalty to a particular person for specifiable reasons and loyalty to authority figures in general. Even the most liberally-minded among us can probably agree that in some instances loyalty is justified and ethical, even if they find the idea of loyalty in general problematic.

Second, I think it matters a great deal as to what we promote as authoritative, what we suggest is worthy of loyalty, and what we hold up as relatively “pure.” While we might not wish to exalt any idea as entirely “sacred,” some of the deepest Humanist values (such as the inherent moral value of persons) are, in my view, worthy of sanctification in a broad sense (as long as they remain open to critical scrutiny), and breaches of these values should be regarded extremely seriously. We might even be able to generate loyalty to values which seem inherently opposed to it, such as skepticism. For instance, we might stress the importance of remaining skeptical even in situations in which it would be easier to give in to consensus, thereby promoting “loyalty” to that ideal.

To conclude, the critic here makes a forceful point which must not be overlooked: our ideal might well be to encourage others to develop different moral tastes, and we must try to ensure that, while seeking to motivate Humanists, we do not reinforce bad moral habits. However, I argue that with thoughtful choice of words and careful consideration as to what values, ideas, or people we choose to hold up as exemplary, we can find way to appeal to all moral tastes without traducing Humanist values.

5.4. Conclusion: Humanists Must Appeal to All Moral Tastes

Haidt’s research paints a compelling picture of the nature of human morality which suggests that people are moved by six “moral passions.” Ingersoll, in his hugely popular speeches, harnessed each of these passions to craft emotionally-compelling messages which generated great moral energy. If today’s Humanists appeal to all our moral foundations – with an eye to the potential dangers of doing so – we will be more successful in motivating our movement to take action: Ingersoll’s voice will stir them.

6. Building Moral Communities – Adler’s Vision

Finding a way to articulate Humanism with as much power and moral intensity as Ingersoll once marshalled will go a long way toward solving the problem of motivation. But to truly mobilize Humanists to meet the challenges we face as a species will require us to learn from Felix Adler as well as Robert Ingersoll. Adler, a philosopher, activist, community-organizer, educator and visionary, probably did more to advance the Humanist agenda than any other single individual who is explicitly identified with Humanism, and yet he is mostly forgotten by the modern secular movement. His life and work, unjustly

forgotten by many, holds two central messages for Humanists concerned with the problem of motivation: first, we must create moral communities; second, we must foster moral leadership.

6.1. Who Was Felix Adler?

Felix Adler's primary innovation was the creation of Ethical Culture Societies: congregational spaces in which Humanists can explore, reinforce, and act upon their values. In a short space of time, this social innovation was extremely effective, playing a part in many of the critical social movements of his age: the Ethical Culture movement is credited with founding or helping establish "the Legal Aid Society; the NAACP; the ACLU; the Visiting Nurse Service; the first free kindergarten in America; and the First US settlement house."¹

Ethical Culture Societies overcame the problem of motivation, generating significant moral energy in nontheistic people. It is my judgment that the success of the Ethical Culture movement, though small, was due to its congregational character, and that if today's Humanists wish to motivate others to take action in the pursuit of Humanist ideals, then we will need communities like the ones Adler built.

6.2. The Importance of Congregations to the Generation of Moral Energy

Why the need for communities? Because with community organization comes power. As William R. Murry, writes in *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century* (2007):

Institutionalized injustice can be changed only through the exercise of power... Each person is a center of power. Our task is to use our personal power on behalf of love and justice to effect systematic change. One of the best ways to use power effectively is to form voluntary associations and coalitions of associations. Coalitions are important because there is strength in numbers. In today's world, groups that do not exercise their power on behalf of their interests and rights are usually left out of consideration by governmental or corporate entities...Justice is won only when power is brought to bear against power. (p. 149)

This insight is strongly supported by the research of sociologists Putnam and Campbell who, in *American Grace* (2010), found that people who attend church more often are "better neighbors" and are more involved in their community. Religiously observant Americans, they found, tend to give more money to both religious and secular charities, and volunteer more of their time to causes they consider worthwhile. They are more likely to be civically active in their community, more likely to vote, and are more likely to be active in party-politics. In other words, they are more motivated to act to further their values.

However, all of these effects can be explained by involvement in religious social networks – it's not down to intensity of religious belief. If you hold strength of religious conviction constant, Putnam and Campbell discovered, those who attend church more, have more friends at church, and are engaged in more church-based activities are "better neighbors." At the same time, someone who doesn't believe in God will tend to show the same levels of civic engagement if, for whatever reason, they are as engaged in religious communities as much as someone who has greater religious conviction. Conversely, a deeply religious person who is not a member of a church community doesn't display the same level of engagement. The zealous hermit is less civic than the congregational atheist.

Given this finding Putnam and Campbell suggest that "close, morally intense, but nonreligious social networks could have a similarly powerful effect [on civic engagement]" (p. 478). In other words, according to two of the most prominent sociologists of religion of our age, if Humanists build congregations based on Humanist values, they can expect to generate moral energy and motivate their members to greater level of civic engagement. This, I believe, is the central challenge for today's Humanists: we must listen to this research and work to create intense nonreligious social networks for people who embrace Humanist values.

6.3. Adler's Motivational Approach was in Synergy with Modern Theories

This was precisely Adler's strategy. Asking how we might be able to motivate people to act ethically without a traditional religion, he wondered "how is it possible to induce men to make the effort, there being no authority of book or creed to lean upon? The answer to that is that the method we must pursue is to put men in the midst of crowds" (1905). As Haidt puts it, if you want people to act more ethically you need to alter their social context, to "design institutions in which real human beings ... will behave more ethically" (2012, 91). Adler, working toward the end of the 19th century, had hit upon a truth which has been startlingly confirmed by 21st century sociology: congregational attendance spurs civic engagement. By building Humanist congregations, he harnessed the power of crowds to generate moral energy and encourage Humanists to act.

6.4. Communities Will Not Necessarily Become Cults

Numerous counterarguments present themselves here which aim to speak against the idea of building Humanist communities like the ones Adler built. Critics ask "Are such communities possible in the 21st century?"; "Won't such communities become "religious," mirroring the worst aspects of the traditions we reject?"; "Doesn't Unitarian Universalism already offer such communities?"; "Should Humanists not promote individualism rather than sectarian groupishness?" None of these arguments provide a remotely convincing case against the building of Humanist congregations.

To the first question – are such communities possible to create – I answer a passionate "Yes!" Despite the well-reported decline in congregational membership across America, many millions are still members of a traditional religion: congregational membership is by no means "dead." Every Sunday in America, some 20% of the

population – approximately 63 million people – go to church. All around the country religious entrepreneurs find ways to repackage ancient ideas for a new audience, and make successful community organizations which serve the needs of the devout. To suggest that it is impossible to create Humanist congregations is to suggest that there is something inherently more compelling about the fables and superstitions of millennia-old religions than there is about the Humanist message of reason, compassion, and hope for the future – and I see no reason to believe this to be the case. The sometime-success of Ethical Culture Societies and of Humanist Unitarian Universalist congregations serves as a proof-of-concept here, and the recent (and startling) rise in the number of religious “nones” in the USA suggests that now is the perfect time to revive the Humanist community.

The second fear, often expressed, is that Humanist communities will soon themselves become “religious” – meaning they will display the worst elements of religious groupishness, such as an undue reverence for authority, dislike for outsiders, and a dangerous tendency toward group-think. This criticism, pithily expressed, represents the fear that any Humanist community will, in time, degenerate into a cult.

On the contrary: there is absolutely no reason to believe that any Humanist communities we build will necessarily come to reflect the worst aspects of religious traditions. The most forceful reason to believe this is the fact that many religious communities themselves do not display these negative attributes. There are countless open, loving, thoughtful, anti-authoritarian religious communities which fulfil genuine human needs in their congregants without succumbing to the dangers outlined above, and this proves that congregations which are not cults are possible in principle. Also, the same argument could be used against Humanist membership of literally any organization: any business, non-profit, or family could potentially become a cult, but we do not generally accept this as a cogent argument against membership if such groups.

What is needed to avoid these dangers is not an irrational wholesale rejection of the idea of the congregation: it is too beneficial an institution for that. Rather, we must self-consciously design the sorts of congregations we, as Humanists, desire, taking the best from religious traditions and other community organizations, and remaining vigilant for the potential dark sides of human groups.

The third criticism – that liberal religious movements such as Unitarian Universalism already offer an outlet for those who hold Humanist values and wish to join congregations – is also unconvincing. Unitarian Universalism, despite its creedless nature, wears its Christian heritage loudly in the structure and idioms of its congregations, and this idiom fails to speak to large swathes of the nonreligious population. Furthermore, the very creedless nature of Unitarian Universalism can lead to an unwillingness to challenge unreasonable ideas which do harm to people. One of the central value commitments of Humanists – our commitment to the power of human reason to solve our problems – insists that we not only tolerate but also criticize the creeds of others in an effort to make them more reasonable, and UU congregations do not always demonstrate this value. New communities with new structures, dedicated completely to Humanist values, will likely engage millennial “nones” more effectively than most UU congregations have been able hitherto.

Finally, the question of individualism: is there something inherently problematic about congregating which undermines individual autonomy, and would it not be better to encourage people to identify as “humans” rather than as “Humanists”? No and no. Briefly, there is no inherent danger to autonomy in the congregation. Congregating can in fact enhance individual autonomy: by offering individuals the support of a loving community we can achieve much which we cannot achieve alone. If I have somewhere to go for support when my father is ill, a place to connect with others who might want to join in a political campaign, a space to discuss questions of meaning and purpose in life, then my autonomy and capability is enhanced, not diminished.

Certainly, the community may sometimes make demands upon me, or ask me to take up positions of responsibility, but this too can enhance my power: every responsibility is an opportunity to make a contribution to the welfare of others – an opportunity which may not have been presented to me had I not been a member of the community. And if my community demands too much of me, I am always at liberty to leave.

Finally, there is good evidence to suggest that membership of a community is one of the strongest mechanisms to develop compassion for a broader range of human beings. Scholars of values-development like William Damon suggest that it is through identification with a small group of people (a close-knit family or congregation, for instance) that individuals build the capacity for identification for wider and wider groups (see Damon 1990, 2009, for instance). Far from promoting sectarianism, membership of close moral communities can encourage us to widen our circles of compassion: they may even be essential. As Damon and Gregory (1997) suggest, “In order to accomplish moral education in times of society-wide discord, communities must make special efforts to identify their common values” – and the same is true of Humanist communities.

6.5. Conclusion: Humanists Must Build Communities

There are profound benefits to moral communities, not least of which include their extraordinary power to generate moral energy and to motivate their members to engage more with wider society, and the dangers often thought to be associated with such communities are frequently overblown or misconceived. The Humanist movement, having traditionally lacked the means to generate sufficient moral energy to motivate Humanists to action, must heed the research of Putnam and Campbell, Haidt, Damon and others, look to the model of Adler, and build moral communities for the nonreligious.

7. Fostering Moral Leadership

Adler can help modern Humanists in one final way: he recognized the importance of moral leadership. The Humanist community seems, at large, to be skeptical of the concept of leaders. We are concerned, I think, that a leader might turn at any moment into a “dear leader,” threatening our cherished autonomy. But there is an important difference between authority and authoritarianism, and there is no shame in encouraging people with passion and skill to achieve great things in the name of Humanism. Indeed, it is essential to foster

moral leadership if the problem of motivation is to be solved.

All great social movements have looked to leaders for inspiration and guidance, after all. The rate of moral progress would be significantly tardied had there been no Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, no Harvey Milk. Not everyone has the skills or desire to organize others to agitate for social change, and those who have both should be encouraged to step up and assume positions of leadership.

7.1. Adler as Moral Leader

Adler himself is an exquisite example: here was a man who, in his early twenties, essentially established a new religion, passing up what would have been a cushy appointment at his father's wealthy synagogue in order to create something entirely new. He was a captivating speaker (filling Carnegie Hall weekly until the construction of the Ethical Society's own building), an accomplished public philosopher (his speeches were printed in full in the New York times), a principled educator (working to reform education and founding schools dedicated to Ethical Culture's ideals), and a community organizer who built around himself a social movement dedicated to Humanist principles.

His vision of leadership is telling – he was no authoritarian dictator, but rather preferred leadership by moral example, writing that “The hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men² to see by. The saint is the man who walks through the dark paths of the world, himself a light.” (Adler 1905). He believed that commitment to ethical principles, and motivation to act on that commitment – the moral energy Humanism needs – is generated through close interaction with such “heroes” and “saints”:

Men who are themselves aflame with the desire for the good can kindle in others the same desire. What a man feels he can make others feel; what he sees he can make others see; when he supremely wills the right he can make others will it. Ethics is propagated just as art is. The artist is a man who loves the beautiful, and loves it so much that he can make others love it; who sees the beautiful and can open the eyes of others to see it. So morality is propagated. (Adler 1905)

7.2. Moral Leaders are Essential to the Moral Development of Individuals and Societies

As with Adler's insights into the importance of congregational communities, Adler's insights regarding the importance of moral leadership have been born-out by modern theories of moral development. Colby and Damon, experts in values-development, have stressed the significance of moral exemplars – people who “love the good and make others love it” – in their extensive investigation of moral commitment *Some Do Care* (1992). As summarized by Monin and Johnson (in press), they found that moral exemplars demonstrate “a singular disregard of risk, positivity in the face of discouraging circumstances, open-mindedness to the ideas of those around them, and a desire for

personal growth” (p. 5) – all attributes which reflect the highest values of Humanism and which might be developed in the sort of intense moral communities described in the foregoing section.

The impact such moral leaders can have on those around them is profound. Numerous studies support the idea that moral exemplars can serve to inspire others to greater ethical efforts (generating moral energy on a local scale), and mentorship is widely-regarded as a crucial element of positive moral development (see, for example, Colby and Damon 1992; Damon 1990 and 2009; and Walker, 2002 for an in-depth discussion of moral exemplarity). If we want Humanists to overcome the problem of motivation, we need to promote the development of moral leaders who can serve as an example to others in the movement.

Finally, it must be recognized that ethical progress requires the use of the creative intelligence of individuals. New ethical principles, and new ways of living ethically – as well as ways to galvanize others to live ethically – have to be invented through acts of creative imagination. This explains how truly great moral leaders can inspire communities, societies, or even the whole world: they create new visions of the moral life which open possibilities for action hitherto undreamt.

Gandhi, and his progress from English barrister to moral leader of the world is a prime example of this imaginative moral leadership. Gardner (1993) describes in detail the development of Gandhi's moral commitments and the role of his moral “hold upon others” in creating the morality of the modern world. He describes the development of the non-violent approach Gandhi called Satyagraha as a human invention as significant as the discovery of general relativity by Einstein, and even quotes Einstein himself in support of the idea that Gandhi's singular moral leadership changed the very nature of ethical discourse:

Gandhi had demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled not only through the cunning game of the usual political maneuvers and trickeries but through the cogent example of a morally superior conduct of life. (quoted in Gardner 1993, 353)

If we Humanists are committed, as we claim to be, to ethical advancement – and if we wish to generate moral energy in others – we must foster moral leadership, for if there are no Humanist moral leaders, who will dream of new ethical vistas?

7.3. Conclusion: Humanists must Foster Moral Leadership

Combined, the two aspects of Adler's vision I have explored combine into a compelling whole: if Humanists build close moral communities they will likely engender a sense of civic responsibility and energy for civic participation which currently too often is the province of religious congregations.

At the same time, such communities will foster the development of leaders who are themselves moral exemplars (“heroes” and “saints”), generating moral energy in community members through the force of their example, and imagining new moral vistas

for the betterment of our species. This can be achieved without resorting to absolutism of any kind, and thus we light fires in others' hearts, and together beat back the darkness of the world.

8. Conclusion

I believe the motivational challenge is of critical importance for Humanists. Without finding ways to generate commitment to Humanist values, and action stemming from those values, Humanism will remain a philosophical curiosity without social power or cultural influence, and religion will indeed "outperform Humanism every time." I have argued that it is not necessary to resort to absolutism of any sort to generate Humanist moral energy. Instead, I suggest we look to Robert Ingersoll and Felix Adler and, following their example, convey the beauties of Humanism in the language of emotions and morality, while building intense moral communities for the nonreligious, populated with moral leaders – the heroes and saints of our time.

If we regain Ingersoll's voice and rekindle Adler's vision we can motivate Humanists to act toward a better world.

NOTES

1. This list is frequently provided on Ethical Culture leaflets. This formulation was found here: http://biz.prlog.org/Ethical_Culture/.

2. Sadly Adler's language is the sexist language of his era. I offer it unchanged to maintain the flow of his writing, with apologies.

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For the Love: The Amateur Humanist Intellectual

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The twenty-first century has experienced a surge of intellectuals and specialists that dominate understandings of life and human phenomena. Reawakening the Gramscian definition of the organic intellectual, this paper problematizes ideas of intellectual qualification. It argues that an amateuristic mind will ultimately come to appreciate a humanistic intellectualism. The paper also argues that those working in institutions of education must allow their humanistic endeavors for facilitating the growth of others and the self to be driven by amateurism.

1. A Boundless Mind

We, as human beings, have now come to a point in our history, where we live amongst a vast number of intellectuals. The role of the intellectual has typically been a person associated with an institution of education, government, medicine, research, or even religion. Today, the number of scholars in these fields is larger than ever, discovering knowledge and teaching it to a global audience. One must appreciate that in the twenty-first century, the definition of an intellectual has broadened. The lives of many are informed and directed by *commissars of knowledge*, that are professors, media correspondents, talk show hosts, actors, models, CEOs, or even reality television personalities (Chomsky 2000). However, one must not place his/her life in the direction of celebrity gurus that popular culture has deemed an expert or authority. Around the world, we may find a more authentic sense of the intellectual not on television, the Internet, or even by distinguished qualifications. Instead, intellectuals may be operating in anonymity. They may be everyday people, doing extraordinary things to help human beings learn, grow, and explore creative possibilities. To find these types of intellectuals, we must first excavate and restore an understanding developed long ago.

Intellectualism is best understood as being *organic*, as Antonio Gramsci once defined it in his early twentieth century work *The Prison Notebooks* (Said 1983). An organic intellectual is one that emerges from a social class and prepares them intellectually to become incorporated in civil society (Gramsci 1971; Said 1983). The term

'organic' was used by Gramsci to describe demystify the role of the intellectual and reaffirm its importance for societal movements (Muñoz 1999).

The organic intellectual opposes the *traditional* intellectual, which is one that attains status and is reified by position or qualification. An example of this concept begins by a person of a certain class or group working to include them in a dominant discourse. He/she then attains a level of celebrity or qualification on the matter, such as a Ph.D. in the subject, and thenceforth works from a higher vantage point. In doing so, the traditional intellectual becomes co-opted by greater discourses of power and prestige, essentially losing touch with the reality and lives of the class or group. Edward Said (1935–2003) studied Gramsci's work intensively regarding the intellectual. He describes,

All classes have intellectuals who organize their interests. Once the class has achieved a certain stability, whether by acquiring power or adjacent to power, then the conversion of the organic intellectual into the traditional intellectual is almost a forgone conclusion. But Gramsci leaves open the possibility that the traditional intellectual can also become an organic intellectual once again. (Said 2001, 334–335)

Therefore, if the organic intellectual has a sense of integrity to his/her, let's say, *organicness*, he/she will return to that authentic realm *for* the community. This organic realm is nebulous and complex as it moves *with* cultural and social dynamics. The organic intellectual has almost a nomadic quality, constantly moving, never allowing his/herself to be identified by any one thing.

In the rapidly diversifying and transmigrating world of today, the organic intellectual may no longer be *of* any *one* society. The intellectual may become a wanderer, more interested in being *in* a given culture/society rather than *of* a culture/society. The world has no home for the intellectual; they are, constantly moving and in essence, forever in exile (Adorno 2005; Rizvi & Lingard 2006; Said 2000). Exile is understood as in no longer being allowed to remain in the place from whence a person came. In this sense, it is applied metaphorically to the borders of a previous intellectualism. The nomadic type of thought offers the organic intellectual an anthropological model of learning about the world, cultures, homes, and humans being, where only the strangeness holds familiarity (Cooley 2000; Hughes 2002; Peters 2008; Said 2000). Being an organic intellectual exile means that you will not follow a prescribed path and will fully accept marginality (Said, 1996). Understanding oneself as a novice in engaging circumstances offers an unorthodox style of life and gives one an eccentric career (Rilke 1930; Said 1996).

Historically, intellectuals have been professionals or experts of certain fields, with rigorous training administered by a specific institution. However, in the new millennium there have been wonderful developments in technology and transportation that allow people and ideas to transcend borders to collaborate and integrate. As a result, intellectuals that limit themselves to a narrow specialization are ill suited to serve a rapidly diversifying global community. Fields of interest are blending together and encompassing perspectives from a multitude of cultures. Therefore, one may believe that we live in the era of the

exilic and amateur intellectual. Exilic, in the sense that they can no longer remain in a previous intellectualism defined by culture or geography, and an amateur that knows no boundaries of specialization (Said 1996; Dimitriadis 2006). Rilke (2000) describes that “For the creative artist there is no poverty – nothing is insignificant or unimportant” (12). The amateur intellectual is very much a creative artist, as he/she appreciates the wonder and magnificence of life and that cannot be bound to specialization or locality. The ‘amateur’ accepts,

The desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession. (Said 1996, 76; Dimitriadis 2006)

Amateurism is an intellectualism that is driven by love and genuine caring for all life (Said 1996).

Academic, erudite, or professional programs are not the sole grounds for an amateur intellectual’s training; rather he/she utilizes self-direction to guide learning and growth. With such a wide spectrum of knowledge and skill, amateurs are a form of intellectual that generates critical thought among societies to raise moral and ethical issues in the world. Intellectual amateurs engage cultures and societies in dialectics with others around the world, as well as putting professional and academic spaces and actions into question (Dimitriadis 2006; Said 1996). Everyone is an amateur, as Haley (1976) states, “If their hearts remain pure, they will stay that way. They are the leaven that the dull dough of society will always need” (259). Society depends upon amateurs to connect, embrace, and find possibilities in realms untouched and unexplored. Specialization is a danger to amateurism as it limits one’s view and narrows his/her knowledge of the area and how it factors into life’s greater tapestry (Said 1996).

Furthermore, those who become specialized in methods and theory become divorced from social and political realities (Said 1996). What separates the amateur amongst specialized intellectuals, are his/her pursuits beyond the official discourse, finding a new language for the marginal or minoritarian (Dimitriadis 2006). The amateur resists being co-opted by institutions or status, and resists being defined or reduced to any profession (Nixon 2006; 2008). Credentials and qualifications are important to institutions as they determine the experts. However, it must be cautioned that a position of authority for experts “usually turns out to be a blocking device for methodological and disciplinary self-questioning” (Said 2000, 136). The expert typically acts according to roles and ideas associated with a status or position.

Becoming an expert has little to do with knowledge of an area (Said 1996). There are many individuals, not credentialed, that have a critical understanding or deep grasp of life’s greater tapestry. A person that personifies this idea is Noam Chomsky, a qualified MIT University authority when it comes to linguistics. But Chomsky, in his later years of study, has been interested and driven to critically analyze areas of politics and government

throughout the world. Chomsky has crossed the borders of his academic qualification and has enriched many other discourses through his amateuristic scholarship.

Another example of an amateur intellectual can be engaged in the literary, historical, and poetical arenas. If one wished to see history of the United States in the late 1940s through a different lens, he/she may turn to Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Kerouac was not a professor or authority of literature during the time of his travels across the U.S and into Mexico. Nor was he conducting a type of social experiment for future research publication or distinction. He was a type of amateur intellectual, living the American culture with celebrated indistinctness. He did not write *to* America, he wrote *from* America. He is not speaking *to* you as you read *On the Road* or other works, rather, he is speaking *with* you. As Kerouac (2008) believed, "Anonymity in the world of men is better than fame in heaven, for what's heaven? What's earth? All in the mind" (347). He was driven by the love for adventures, encounters, or one might say: to be with others, *in the beat of life*.

There are more than just analytic distinctions that the intellectual needs to contend if they are to move beyond a momentary understanding (Said 1996). Stated another way, there is much more to a phenomenon than the sum of its parts. Amateur intellectuals are not solely driven by the need for a distinguished career. He/she embodies the true essence of the word amateur: one who does something for love.

2. Intelligent Beings

No longer bound by specialization or affiliation, the exilic amateur intellectual enters a new type of consciousness. It is really an intelligent consciousness, as one begins not only to see, but to operate between the lines. As theoretical physicists David Bohm and F. David Peat discuss,

This notion of *intelligence*, which acts as the key creative factor in the formation of new categories, can be contrasted with the *intellect*. The past participle of *intelligere* is in fact *intellect*, which could then be thought of as "what has been gathered." Intellect, therefore, is relatively fixed, for it is based primarily on an already existing scheme of categories. While the intelligence is a dynamic and creative act of perception through the mind, the intellect is something more limited and static. (Bohm & Peat 1987, 114)

Therefore, by engaging creative possibilities between the lines, the amateur intellectual may become more in tune to the phenomenal aspects of life and led by "intuitive knowledge of what is human and inhuman, what is conducive of life and what is destructive of life. This conscience serves our functioning as human beings" (Fromm 1981, 19).

Amateur intellectuals become humanist intellectuals when love drives them toward the ungraspable meanings of life. The intellectual framework of humanism is "guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience" in order to seek humanity's highest potential (American Humanist Association 2003, para. 2). A humanistic

intellectual appreciates that people have an innate desire and need to strive for living, meaning, becoming, and for the empathetic understanding (American Humanist Association 2003; Hansen 2000; Maslow 1998; 1971; Perls 1973; Robinson 2011; Rogers 1980; Smrtic 2010; Woods 2009).

The history of humanism from a counseling perspective dates back to the mid-twentieth century, where it drew on philosophies of existentialism, American individualism, and phenomenology. From these schools, humanism was influenced with ideas on free will and inner subjectivity (American Humanist Association 2003; Hansen 2005, 2000). The existential qualities of humanism problematize and seek deep understandings of the self, identity, and relations with others and with the outside world (Arendt 1968; Frankl 2006; Habermas 1990; Hansen 1993; Rogers 1969). The humanistic school of thought seeks to “develop in each individual human being an as yet undifferentiated general culture, the fundamental power to think and ability to find one’s way in life” (Gramsci 1971, 26). This type of culture allows one to develop his or her capacities and talents to contribute to the community and help others grow (Hansen 2007; Maslow 1998; Rogers 1980; Said 2001).

Humanist intellectuals are actively involved in both the inside and outside of a society’s ideological core (Said 2004). The humanists extend their conception of self, society, and truth to the world, where “if an injustice is being committed against a person in Bulgaria or China, it is also being committed against you. Though you may never meet the person involved, you can feel his betrayal as your own” (Maslow 1971, 194–195). The American Humanist Association (2003) continues that humanism works for a “world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence” (para. 8). Empowering one into this worldview and type of action allows many to be incorporated into the appreciation, progression, and protection of all forms of life.

3. Pieces of the Puzzle

The amateur humanist intellectual may be working to understand pieces of human and life phenomena, and also more, how these pieces fit into a greater existential puzzle; again, intelligence lies in the ability to create new categories or understandings. This is especially true for those seeking to facilitate growth of others and the self. For example, as human relations make up social groups, Popper (2005) states, “The social group is *more* than the mere total of its members, and it is also *more* than the mere sum of the merely personal relationships existing at any moment between any of its members” (15). We must view societal/human aspects not in isolation, but how they are affecting people simultaneously in spaces of interconnectedness (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). According to Smrtic (2010), this holistic understanding of a human being “Is best understood as a fluid, yet static, integrated, interdependent, reciprocal, and complementary organism” (231). Holistic perspective is about interconnectedness of the mind, body, and the gamut of one’s life experiences into a self-integrated whole (Rogers 1969; 1977).

Holism, as a theoretical construct, may be traced back to Ancient Greece where the word *holos* described the practice of treating not just the parts of a person, but the entire body, in its whole environment (Smrtic 2010). Western holism has roots in Gestalt psychology (Burke & Christenson 2004), which was developed by a group of German psychologists who studied perception at the turn of the twentieth century (Perls 1973). The German psychologists' goal was to show "that man does not perceive things as unrelated isolates, but organizes them in the perceptual process into meaningful wholes" (Perls 1973, 2). Smrtic (2010) explains that a Gestalt may be understood as a "physical, psychological, or symbolic configuration or pattern so unified as a whole that its properties cannot be derived from its parts" (232). Gestalt psychology examines our perceptual ability to put new experiences in front of a larger background (Searle 1994). Gestalt psychology views human experience in terms of patterns of a greater whole (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert 1994; Fromm 1955; Horney 1970; Huxley 1990; Maslow 1998; Perls 1973; Popper 2005; Rogers 1980; 1977; Said, 2000; Smrtic 2010). Although there is no direct English translation of the word Gestalt, it roughly means "a ghost-like image that lingers" (Perls 1973; Smrtic 2010).

A holistic approach offers the individual a wider perception in the endeavor toward self-integration, seeing the parts in relation to a greater whole. Human beings are seeking to actualize potential meanings in every situation and realize it in a life shared with others (Arendt 1958; Frankl 2006; Iannone 2001; Rogers 1977). By inhabiting a common world together, humanity finds beauty in challenges as well as tragedies (American Humanist Association 2003). Essentially, the humanist intellectual begins to appreciate each piece of the human puzzle as an integral part of life's existential and phenomenal whole.

In the encounters of the amateur humanist intellectual, he/she appreciates being a part of meaningful moments in the lives of other people. This is especially true when engaging children. Amateur humanist intellectuals value a child's nature to be "spontaneous, autonomous, active, in touch with life in an imaginative, flowing sense," regardless of circumstance or condition (Moustakas 1966, 15). This flow is integral to a healthy society. The years of childhood "cannot be seen in isolation from the structure of society, which affects the parents who raise the children, as well as the children directly" (Riesman 2001, 4). The puzzle becomes much more complex and broader as we factor in youth. The amateur humanist intellectual appreciates that learning for youth occurs outside the school building with exposure to television, Internet, community, family, or peers on the streets (Iannone 2001). Holism in education is an "engaged pedagogy" for the humanist intellectual and youth, where lessons extend beyond textbook pages (hooks 1994, 15).

The amateur humanist intellectual engages the child holistically, where both parties integral to harmony of a Gestalt. The intrinsic aspect of a humanist engagement works to satisfy the child's psychological needs in all areas of the child's life. The complexity and subjectivity of a child's needs are vast, but as a human being there are common denominators. The child needs to be free from anxiety, have a sense of belonging to the world, feels a sense of respect, and feels love-worthy. When needs for "security,

belongingness, dignity, love, respect, and esteem are all satisfied,” the child is able to self-actualize (Maslow 1971, 190). Needs are defined where,

1. The absence of it breeds illness;
2. The presence prevents the illness;
3. It is a panacea for illness;
4. Where in choices of free will it will be preferred over other gratifications by the needing person;
5. Its function is absent in a healthy person and doesn't appear prevalent or may appear inactive. (Maslow 1998; Farmer 1984; Smrtic 2010)

Basic needs, understood by Maslow (1998), must be met physically and psychologically if the child is to grow (Farmer 1984; Hansen 2000; Rogers 1977; Smrtic 2010). Growth for a child means to actualize and develop individual capacities as a human being: a self-actualization (Fromm 1955). Healthy and growing youth are people that have a greater grasp on ethics, values, and have a sense of self-integration (Horney 1970). One then transcends his/her culture's values and “are not so much merely Americans as they are world citizens, members of the human species first and foremost” (Maslow 1971, 184). Through a humanistic framework, self-actualizing youth approach culture and its values critically (Woods 2009). Those who are involved in causes outside of his/her personal sphere are known to be self-actualizing people.

The conditions in which a child grows are very important pieces of the subjective puzzle. Horney (1970) metaphorically describes, “You need not, and in fact cannot, teach an acorn to grow into an oak tree, but when given a chance, its intrinsic potentialities will develop” (17). This is true for all human beings: if given the right conditions or opportunities, humans will develop and actualize new potentialities (Moustakas 1956). For growth, Horney (1970) further explains that,

He will develop then the unique alive forces of his real self: the clarity and depth of his feelings, thoughts, wishes, interests; the ability to tap his own resources, the strength of his will power; the special capacities or gifts he may have; the faculty to express himself, and to relate himself to others with his spontaneous feelings. (17)

As the child grows and relates to others he/she becomes more in tune with what goals and values in life are about (Horney 1970). The child utilizes a depth of sources in which they may grow and work toward self-realization. As the amateur humanist intellectual and child encounter each other, they begin to interconnect the pieces of life's ungraspable bigger picture.

4. A Humanistic Intellectual Approach to Education

People may appreciate the benefits of allowing amateuristic motivations drive a humanistic consciousness when facilitating the growth of others. How might this process work for the amateur intellectual engaging humanist ideas? Let's use the example of the teacher-student (or if you are in higher education, just think of it as professor-student) relationship to explicate these ideas. However, it must be stated that this discussion is not limited to those in education. Any and all persons driven by love for facilitating the growth of others can utilize them. The teacher (soon to be discussed as facilitator) is typically driven by the love for the development and growth of youth. This makes the example simple to understand, but in no way excludes other amateur humanist intellectuals in other professions (such as psychologists, social workers, scientists, artists, writers, musicians, etc.).

A general goal of education is as Rogers (1969) describes, "To develop a society in which people can live more comfortably with *change* than with *rigidity*" (304). Teachers are better able to help students grow and face changes if they are sensitive to the experience of education and learning, as *students perceive* it. Significant learning is able to take place in an environment where the students can honestly say "At least someone understands how it feels and seems to be *me*, without wanting to analyze or judge me. Now I can blossom and grow and learn" (Rogers 1980, 272; 1977; 1969). In order for growth to be fostered, certain conditions must be present, whether the situation involves a parent and a child, a student and a teacher, or a group and a leader. One critical element in this encounter's condition is *empathy*.

The teacher is more effective in helping a student self-actualize and grow if they facilitate empathy. The teacher as a *facilitator* "concentrates on making such resources clearly available, by thinking through and simplifying the practical and psychological steps which the student must go through in order to utilize the resources" (Rogers 1969, 131). A facilitator must be aware of how a student perceives the learning process (Rogers 1980; 1977). Furthermore, the facilitator must attempt to remove his/her professional authority. He or she must offer "genuineness, realness, or congruence" (Eisenberg & Mussen 1989; Rogers 1980, 115). The relationship between facilitator and student must be made transparent, so that a better understanding of personal dynamics and participating individuals can be achieved (Rogers 1980; 1977). Rogers (1977) describes from personal experience, "I have found my greatest reward in being able to say 'I made it possible for this person to be and achieve something he could not have been or achieved before.' In short I gain a great deal of satisfaction in being a facilitator of becoming" (92).

Empathetic engagement creates a safe environment with genuine caring for the student. In addition, other elements promote a growth-promoting encounter. What Rogers (1980) calls "Unconditional positive regard" for the student, the practitioner "is experiencing a positive, acceptant attitude toward whatever the client *is* at that moment" (116; Crisp 2010; Demorest 2005; Evans 1975; Gunnison 1985; Kirschenbaum 2004; Suhd 1995). This is a person-centered approach to learning, which brings the teacher into the private world of the student (Rogers 1980; 1977). The goal is to empathetically

understand the other person's position so that one can communicate his or her own position and work to progress in more constructive/progressive thoughts and behaviors (Kroll 2008).

As educators and amateur humanist intellectuals, when we observe effectively, "we listen, see, and feel with our intuition, undivided interest, reason, curiosity, and specialized knowledge" (Horney 1999, 187). The facilitator relies on the students' initiative to take learning into his or her own hands by making the learning relevant. Ultimately, the student is driven by his/her deep interests and desires to find meaning (Dewey 2005). This approach creates an environment that appreciates a plurality of meanings and helps students develop meaning making capacities (Frankl 2006; Postman & Weingartner 1969; Rogers 1969; 1977). In regards to meaning making, there will be none if one does not choose to make it (Frankl 2006). Postman and Weingartner (1969) argue that "In order to survive in a world of rapid change there is nothing more worth knowing, for any of us, than the continuing process of how to make viable meanings" (81).

Learning and meaning making relies on a self-directed curriculum and not prescribed external curriculum. The students must choose goals, make critical decisions, engage a range of possible alternatives, and accept the consequences (Rogers 1977). Students allowed to fashion learning goals and have a greater sense of empowerment and involvement (Jorge 2011). Self-directed learning provides a certain set of guidelines and limits, but the freedom the student has is *real*. They have the freedom to express themselves and of choice, and ultimately a "freedom to be" (Rogers 1969, 74; 1977).

Trust is the single most important element the facilitator provides in this learning experience. When trust is established, a student may be more apt to own his/her feelings and not express them as a projection from others. The student may express his/her personal challenges and weaknesses and be willing to take chances expressing ideas to the group. When facilitators are genuine, trust students, take risks into uncharted existential territories with 'subjective leaps', "you can sense persons being created, learning being initiated, future citizens rising to meet the challenges of unknown worlds" (Rogers 1969, 123).

The humanist theoretical perspective "has permeated much of the school curriculum in the form of multicultural education, values clarification strategies, self-concept enhancement lessons, bibliotherapy, and numerous other educational innovations" (Farmer 1984, 162). Research supporting humanistic theory has had large contributions from Maslow's (1998) self-actualization theory. The self-actualization theory has been implemented in many schools and offers educators tools to educate the whole child (Rogers 1977). The child is engaged holistically, meeting the basic needs and offering tools and resources to actualize the self.

Educators can rely on the humanistic framework to begin an active critical self-assessment while critically engaging human misrepresentations and misinterpretations of the past and present (Zucca-Scott 2010; Said 2004). According to Rogers (1977) "The educational system is probably the most influential of all institutions – outranking the family, the church, the police, and the government – in shaping the interpersonal politics of the growing person" (69). The curriculum and instruction in schools must seek to

support the self-actualization of students as well as create self-initiated learners (Farmer 1984; Maslow 1998; 1971; Rogers 1969). However, Farmer (1984) acknowledges the little amount of research for what methods and materials would be most effective. There appears to be a gap in the theory and practice.

Most curriculum, practices, ideas, and actions are being misled by unquestioned traditions and trends; one needs a theory of human needs to base instruction and curriculum around, because there are basic needs for humans across the globe. The amateur humanist intellectual may address these phenomenal needs in order to facilitate humans *being* to humans *becoming*. They are driven by love and curiosity to cultivate life in all areas of the world. They express, explore, and experiment to help and inspire others to reach new potentials.

However, as previously discussed, the amateur humanist intellectuals are not solely found in the field of education or work at an institution. There are individuals across the globe that do astonishing things for the people in their community. Perhaps these intellectuals are anonymously operating in professional fields such as street artists, amateur film artists, program directors that organize pro-social group activities for refugee youth, school aids, students, neighbors, barbers, crossing guards, actors, scientists, neighbors, or personal trainers. Nonetheless, profession or specialization does not bind the pursuits of amateur humanist intellectuals. They are human beings driven by love to facilitate the actualization of people in the greater community; their love is essentially *organic*. As the amateur humanists embrace a type of exilic intellectualism, every community is theirs. It will not be long before you find them in your community and in your life. You will then find yourself learning, growing, and exploring creative possibilities within yourself, other human beings, and life.

5. Conclusion

The twenty-first century has experienced a large growth in the number of specialists and intellectuals. These intellectuals learn, inspire, and inform the masses on certain phenomena or issues. However, in the Gramscian sense of being an organic intellectual, qualification is no longer designated by status or prestige. The amateur intellectual in the organic sense is important for moving and experimenting, as well as progressing and problematizing the many discourses of human knowledge.

As amateurs, they are driven by love and curiosity. The search is not academic but is motivated by his/her entire being to understand and develop life. In doing so, they are afforded a unique humanistic consciousness that informs an amateur intellectualism. One such example of an amateur humanistic intellectualism has been applied to those working in the field of education. Because school is such a dominant part of a child's formative years, it is important that practitioners reawaken the love that drives them and develop an intellectualism that helps facilitate growth for both themselves and others. Amateur humanist intellectuals can be found all around us, laboring for others in the beauty of anonymity.

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Utopian Visions and the American Dream

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Utopian narratives express a universal yearning for a better human society in response to each author's perception of malfunction and malfeasance in his or her own society. The earliest one of which I am aware (other than the legendary folk tale of the Garden of Eden) is Plato's *Republic*. I review and comment on selected utopian literature from Plato to the modern American dream and a humanist vision for a global social order. To its authors, utopian visions are not mere wishful thinking, but societal policy declarations that at least in principle can be implemented, if only in part.

Oh the buzzin' of the bees in the cigarette trees near the soda water fountain at the lemonade springs where the bluebird sings on the big rock candy mountain. In the Big Rock Candy Mountain, it's a land that's fair and bright. The handouts grow on bushes and you sleep out every night. The boxcars all are empty and the sun shines every day. I'm bound to go where there ain't no snow, where the sleet don't fall, and the winds don't blow in the Big Rock Candy Mountain. In the Big Rock Candy Mountain the jails are made of tin. You can slip right out again as soon as they put you in. There ain't no short-handled shovels, no axes, saws nor picks. I'm bound to stay, where you sleep all day, where they hung the jerk that invented work in the Big Rock Candy Mountain.¹
– Burl Ives's version, 1940s²

This very popular folk song especially appealed to Americans who lived through the great depression of 1929 compounded by the Dust Bowl years of the 1930s. It was a time of massive unemployment and desperate people on the move to wherever they might find work. These events precipitated a great expansion of a hobo underclass that rode the rails and lived from hand to mouth. The song is an ironic fantasy of a utopian hobo dream in a dystopian world. In this essay I describe several historical utopias to contrast them with the "American Dream," a beautiful vision of the good life that many have actually enjoyed at times, often at the expense of those who experienced "American Nightmares."

Such Dreams and Nightmares are not only endemic to American society but had been an integral part of all human experience everywhere. In this essay, I describe a small number of more or less famous utopias from western literature. In all cases, they are the

dreams of thinkers who have witnessed human tragedy, believed that they understand the social causes and then propose a new social order remedy. From Plato's *Republic* to modern democracy, these "utopias" share a humanistic intent to create a fulfilled life for all people, even by authoritarian means as Plato and St. Augustine advocate. Utopian visions are always reactions to their respective authors' personal experience of political and social conditions. They typically find these conditions unacceptable and would like to restructure society to produce better outcomes.

1. Plato (429–347 BCE), *The Republic*³

In his description of Plato's ideal social order fantasy, Bertrand Russell categorizes its attributes as education, culture/economy, biological control, religion, and justice. In this state, there are to be three classes of citizens: Guardians (political rulers), Soldiers, and Commoners (workers who produce.) Plato's *Republic* mainly focuses on how the Guardians are to rule.

Education: Education serves to ground society's culture, which includes physical education (meaning gymnastics and athletics), and "the Muses" which includes all other aspects of culture. Since women and men are considered equally eligible to become Guardians, they receive similar educations that emphasize character development by cultivating "gravity, decorum and courage."

The literature and other cultural expressions to which students are exposed are limited. For example, the bad behavior of gods may not be depicted. No story may depict the wicked as happy or the just as unhappy. Since being captured and sold into slavery is unacceptable, nothing should be taught that might inhibit a child's willingness to die in battle for his nation. Plays must be about morally perfect characters of good birth – so most play writers would have to be banned. Music must convey happiness and not sorrow. Students must be prevented from learning about ugliness or vice, or told stories that would frighten them, or seduce them into bad habits.

Culture/Economy: The Guardians are to live apart in a socialistic community that resembles an Israeli kibbutz. Women are equal to men, and children are raised communally. They are to dwell in modest houses and eat simple foods together. All property beyond some defined personal possessions are held in common. For non-Guardians, friendship groups are supposed to own property in common. Owning gold or silver is prohibited. Neither wealth nor poverty can be tolerated. Monogamous families are forbidden, and all women are the common wives of the men.

Biological Control: The "Legislator" who oversees the Guardians asserts quality control measures on the population. Reproduction is carefully controlled by eugenic concepts in which mating pairs, who meet certain criteria including age and health, are selected on special holidays. All children are raised communally, and no parent

can identify their biological offspring. Sick and deformed infants are banished. Anyone can have sex, pregnancies from unions outside the approved selection process must be aborted, or the offspring are killed or left to die.

Religion: The government is encouraged to actually promulgate myths it knows are fabrications in order to help the community strengthen its social order – a “noble lie” but in effect a “royal lie.” In this myth, three kinds of people were created, labeled as gold, silver, and brass (Guardians, Soldiers, and Commoners.) Russell points out: *what Plato fails to realize is that compulsory acceptance of such myths is incompatible with philosophy, and involves a kind of education that stunts intelligence.*⁴

Justice: Russell writes: *The definition of justice, which is the nominal goal of the whole discussion ... consists in everybody doing his own work and not being a busybody.*⁵ Russell explains that the Greeks believed that each person had his or her own social position and appointed purpose or function. This idea is connected to the concept of fate or necessity, as against equality. Thus, in Plato’s *Republic*, the prescribed social stratification is just, and its implementation is likewise just, as a matter of natural and human law. It has nothing to do with a doctrine of equality. In Plato’s world, the inequalities of power and privilege necessarily underpin the very idea of justice.

Why would Plato’s model of an ideal state so resemble Spartan totalitarianism far more than it resembles Athenian democracy? Gottlieb remarks that Plato’s own political philosophy leaned towards democracy. But as Gottlieb explains Plato felt the end has to justify the means, and Athens had failed the test because its democracy had degenerated into chaos.⁶ Russell informs that since Plato’s family were aristocrats he was likely to be wary of Athenian-style democracy. This view was probably reinforced in 404 BCE when Plato was a young man as Sparta defeated Athens.⁷ While Plato believed that democracy’s inherent instability was grounded on nature, he apparently understood that tyranny was also unstable because it was also human nature to rebel against unfair and unjust social conditions. While favoring a Spartan system he also specified measures to satisfy the lower classes as just, thereby eliminating motives for rebellion.

2. Cicero (106–43 BCE), *De Re Publica (On the Republic)*

Cicero’s treatise contains his concepts for evolving a fundamentally humanistic Roman social order. Only parts of it have survived. Its intent was to reform the corrupted Roman republic of his time.⁸

Book one describes discussions between political protagonists of Cicero’s time.

Book two outlines Roman history and how its constitution evolved.

Book three expounds justice in government as expressed in types of constitutions.

Book four is a discourse about education.

Book five contains conversations about the qualities of the ideal citizen in government.

Book Six concludes the book with Scipio's Dream.

Edward Clayton offers the following description of the work:

It describes the ideal commonwealth.... In doing so it tries to provide philosophical underpinnings for existing Roman institutions and to demonstrate that until recently (the dialogue is set in 129 BCE) Roman history has been essentially the increasing perfection of the Republic, which is now superior to any other government because it is a mixed government. By this Cicero means that it combines elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy in the right balance; the contemporary reader may well disagree. But even this government can be destroyed and is being destroyed by the moral decay of the aristocracy. Thus Cicero describes the importance of an active life of virtue, the foundations of community, including the community of all human beings, the role of the statesman, and the concept of natural law.⁹

It would seem that Cicero was a humanist with a clear vision of the reality of a human nature that included those who strive for justice and fairness, and those who abuse political authority to gain personal power, wealth and prestige at the expense of the rest of society. As modern humanists, Cicero's futile attempts to improve the moral fiber of his nation is especially poignant.

3. Saint Augustine (354–430), *City of God*¹⁰

Citing specific sections of *City of God*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy offers the following synopsis of St. Augustine's vision of the social order that God gifted to humanity.

Due to the universal contagion of original sin wherein all have sinned in Adam, humanity has become a mass of the deservedly damned, who have turned away from God and towards the rule of self.

By means of an utterly unmerited grace, God has chosen a small minority out of this mass ... those who by means of grace renounce the self and turn towards God, as opposed to the vast majority who have renounced God and turned towards the self.

In this life, we can never be sure of which individuals belong to which city and thus they are intermingled in a way that thwarts any moral complacency.

While the visible church bears a special relation to the city of God, membership in the Church is no guarantee of salvation and the history that is visible to us is merely a vestige of the moral drama that takes place behind the scenes, defying the scrutiny of our weak and often presumptuous reason.

What is certain is that the linear movement of human history aims at the eventual separation of the two cities in which the members of each city are united with their resurrected bodies and given their respective just rewards: for the small minority saved by unmerited grace, there is the vision of God, a joy we can only dimly discern at the moment.

For the overwhelming mass of humanity, there is the second death wherein their resurrected bodies will be subject to eternal torment by flames that will inflict pain without consuming the body or the degree of torment.

This is hardly a utopian vision for any but the most committed believers in fundamentalist Christian doctrine. For the rest of us, it's simply an aspect of the state of mind of many people with whom we share the global Social Order. The best I can say about Augustine's views is that his heart was in the right place. It was beyond his imagination that such a theological grounding for human society was likely to degenerate into an earthly tyranny that breeds fear and corruption. Church-State history since his time has provided more than ample evidence in support of this view.¹¹ But utopias like the one that the good saint advocates continues to characterize religious movement like his in our modern America.

4. Thomas More (1478–1535), *Utopia*

While his views, like those of St. Augustine in "City of God," are grounded on the same religion, Thomas More is far more socially enlightened.

More was a Catholic humanist who saw humanism as a way to combine faith and reason. In depicting *Utopia*, More's ultimate goal was to indicate areas of improvement for Christian society. At the very least, *Utopia* exposes the absurdities and evils of More's society by depicting an alternative.... Sustaining the arguments of *The Republic*, *Utopia* fashions a society whose rulers are scholars, Aristotle's ideas of aesthetics, justice and harmony are present in the Utopian's philosophy. More's *Utopia* is a type of New Jerusalem, a perfect place on earth. The Puritan experiments of the 1600s exemplify the programming of a utopian New Jerusalem. More uses the New World theme to get his philosophical points across

He is less interested in New World politics and more interested in offering *Utopia* as an indirect critique of the Catholic European societies (England mainly, but also France, the Italian city-states, and other areas to a lesser extent.) More opposed the

vast land enclosures of the wealthy English aristocracy, the monopolistic maneuvers of London's guilds and merchants, and the burdensome oppression of the work through the imposition of unjust laws. These reformatory practices, designed to quantify happiness, calculate moral goodness and produce the optimal balance, echo the anti-privacy measures inflicted upon the citizens of More's Utopia.¹²

Unlike St. Augustine, More was well aware of the Church's corruption of his time, and wanted to reform it. He believed that an enlightened understanding of divine authority would motivate a truly just society. According to the article, More's religious humanism influenced utopian community projects in the 1800s in England, France, and New England, which in turn influenced Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto*, a secular ideal of a communist society.

5. Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), *The Communist Manifesto*

Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 as their vision for an ideal secular society. In that year, the cumulative grievances of the working class exploded into revolution. As reported by Spark's Notes,¹³ the social order stresses that Marx and Engels wanted their "utopia" to relieve, stemmed from a social pressure that had already reached the boiling point and finally exploded into a series of rebellions:

Beginning shortly after the New Year in 1848, **Europe** exploded into revolution. From Paris to Frankfurt to Budapest to Naples, liberal protesters rose up against the conservative establishment. To those living through the cataclysmic year, it seemed rather sudden; however, hindsight offers valuable warning signs. The year 1846 witnessed a severe famine – Europe's last serious food crisis. Lack of grain drove up food and other prices while wages remained stagnant, thus reducing consumer demand. With consumers buying less and less, profits plummeted, forcing thousands of industrial workers out of their jobs. High unemployment combined with high prices sparked the liberal revolt.

France. Parisian citizens demonstrated against the repression. Skilled workers, factory laborers, and middle class liberals poured into the streets. The National Guard, a citizen militia of bourgeois Parisians, defected from King Louis-Philippe, and the army garrison stationed in Paris joined the revolutionary protesters as well. Louis-Philippe attempted reform, but the workers rejected the halfhearted changes. The king fled and the demonstrators proclaimed the Second Republic on February 24th. The overthrow of the monarchy set off a wave of protest throughout east and central Europe, led by radical liberals and workers who demanded constitutional reform or complete government change.

Germany. In March 1848 protests in the German provinces brought swift reform from local princes while Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia yielded to revolts in Berlin by promising to create a Prussian assembly. The collapse of autocracy in Prussia encouraged liberals in the divided Germany provinces to join together at the Frankfurt Assembly to frame a constitution and unite the German nation. However, after drawing the boundaries for a German state and offering the crown to Friedrich Wilhelm, the Kaiser refused in March 1849, dooming hopes for a united, liberal Germany.

Italy. New constitutions were declared in Tuscany and Piedmont, with the goal of overthrowing their Austrian masters. Giuseppe Mazzini, an Italian patriot favored a democratic revolution to unify the country. In February 1849, Mazzini led a democratic revolt against the Pope in Rome, becoming head of the Republic of Rome. By attacking the Pope, the democrats went too far. The French, moved in and defeated Mazzini's Roman legion. The Pope was restored and a democratic Italy collapsed, for now.

Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. In Austria, students, workers, and middle class liberals revolted in Vienna, setting up a constituent assembly. In Budapest, the Magyars led a movement of national autonomy, led by patriot Lajos Kossuth. Similarly, in Prague, the Czechs revolted in the name of self-government. From August 1848, the Austrian army soundly defeated every revolt in its empire. In Vienna, in Budapest, in Prague, the Austrians legions crushed the liberal and democratic movements, returning the empire to the conservative establishment that ruled at the beginning of 1848. Nothing had come of the revolutions of 1848.

This synopsis conveys the flavor of the times when the Communist Manifesto circulated in European bookstalls and ultimately changed the course of world history. Revolt was already in the air when the book hit the streets. The mood of rebellion continued into the 20th century when the book spawned Communist parties in Germany and other countries. But its most profound influence was achieved in Russia when the Communists overthrew the Czarist regime in a murderous revolt in October 1917. Their success would inspire the Chinese revolution that began in 1927, and after a long struggle, extended by World War II, culminated in the People's Republic of China in 1949. Both revolutions initiated years of extremely totalitarian governance, contrary to the somewhat humanist and democratic intentions of Marx and Engels.

It is difficult for us to imagine the mood of the times and the social order conditions that precipitated these rebellions. Authors like Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo portrayed fictional persons who struggled to survive under the social and environmental conditions of 19th century Europe. Of course, it was precisely such conditions that triggered the flood of immigrants to the United States from Italy, Germany, Russia and a whole host of other European countries from about 1850 to 1920. Recent global population and economic trends have skewed the wealth of many nations to a narrow upper class, leaving an

increasing proportion of the population to struggle with low wages, unemployment, racism, government corruption and the horrors of poverty. This trend continues today with violent eruptions driven by extremist Muslim utopian visions of a society governed by Sharia law – an attitude akin to Saint Augustine’s “City of God.”

6. The American Dream (1776)¹⁴

The authors of *the Declaration of Independence* and the Constitution’s *Bill of Rights* were children of an era when an educated elite espoused a whole host of humanist values. The first five statements of their *Declaration of Independence* after *We hold these truths to be self evident* are clear commitments to civil rights and the duty of citizens to challenge and even change governments that violate them. They have since inspired the constitutions of many nations, as well as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights – as well as Supreme Court rulings, constitutional amendments and various federal programs designed strengthen civil liberties and individual rights. *The Bill of Rights* is a masterpiece of brevity and clarity of humanistic intent, designed to ensure justice in the courts

These documents are icons honored along with the American flag, the national anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance as emblems of patriotism. For humanists, they symbolize the utopian dream of a truly just, democratic and humanistic society. And indeed significant social order progress towards an improved democracy has occurred since 1776. But, as history now reveals, the road to the Dream is filled with potholes and other barriers. Yet the ideal persists, even as its icons are often used to frustrate fulfillment of the very dream that they symbolize.

7. Humanist Visions in Formal Governance Principles

There is of course no official humanist vision for a Global Social Order. However, the founding documents of today’s United Nations, the United States, and President Franklin Roosevelt’s social commitments in his depression era speeches, and much of our historical culture seeks to commit governance to clearly humanistic concepts, principles, and policies.

While their implementation is far from perfect, the working democracies have at least provided humanistic policy goals that the world can aspire to. The worldwide humanist movement includes a number of independent religious and secular organizations, some of which are loosely connected, and that share a common set of Social Order visions promulgated in their literature and on websites. I now offer A Humanist Vision for a Global Social Order that takes account of what I have learned from all of these sources.

8. A Humanist Vision for the Global Social Order

While I do not know how to design the vital details, consider Table 1, which offers *A Humanist Vision for a Global Social Order* that embodies principles of *the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* and the constitutions of democratic nations for a better life

quality of our civilization. How can we work towards such a comprehensive and “utopian” vision? Is it necessarily “utopian?” There are no easy answers. An essential part of the strategy is to educate people of all ages to the Core Cultural Values. This is not simply a matter of facts and figures. It means cultivating feelings and attitudes that trigger our inborn instincts for cooperation, altruism and fairness.

TABLE 1: A HUMANIST VISION FOR A GLOBAL SOCIAL ORDER	
<p>CORE CULTURAL VALUES are the foundation of the humanist Social Order to be shared by the global human community. There are of course many barriers to fully achieving these ideals. Some of these humanist visions inspired ancient scriptural traditions as well as authoritarian values. Poverty, injustice, and educational deficits breed ignorance, false beliefs, poor character formation, social tension and violence.</p>	
Personal Responsibility Morality & Ethics Dignity, Respect and Privacy Humanistic Religion Racial, Ethnic and Lifestyle Tolerance Security of Persons and Property	Educated Citizenry Equal Opportunity Fair Share of Wealth Environmental Protection & Enhancement Freedom of Speech & Expression Care of the sick, Lame and Indigent
<p>FREEDOMS FROM are principles pertaining to the elimination of the conditions that threaten our freedom to fulfill our lives as individuals in a global human community.</p>	
Want and Fear Hunger, Hopelessness & Poverty Ignorance & Illiteracy Polluted Air Water & Food Corruption & Exploitation	War Oppression & Arbitrary Arrest Slavery Violence & Cruelty Torture & Rape
<p>GOVERNANCE & PUBLIC POLICY includes humanistic goals that governance should focus on. In fact, most of these are already embedded in United Nations governance (Appendix IV) and in the charters of the democratic nations but are often corrupted.</p>	
Defend Core Cultural Values Assure Fair Justice System Maintain & Improve Public Infrastructure Protect Environmental Commons Separate Church from State Reduce the Wealth Gap Support the United Nations	Defend the Freedoms From Define Corporate Responsibilities Prosecute Corporate Corruption Prosecute Government Corruption Pursue Diplomacy – Avoid War Defend the Constitution Defend Democracy

9. The Political Dimension

The engine of all organized human activity is political. It permeates families, tribes and nations as well as governmental and corporate power structures. It is politics that sorts out the hierarchies of power and wealth, determines who controls and who complies, who are allies and who are enemies, who shares in the wealth of a nation and who is left out. George Lakoff is a cognitive scientist who studies our minds' political behaviors in search of communication strategies that can ethically influence people to become more humanistic. He expresses the following humanistic ideal behind the title of his book *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics*:

I analyze the unconscious values behind what I call “progressive” thought: empathy, responsibility (for oneself and others), and an ethic of excellence (making oneself and the world better).¹⁵

Lakoff also analyzes what is today called conservative thought, which I prefer to call neo-conservative thought. The antics of today's neoconservatives are not merely authoritarian, but anti-humanistic in their hostility to our core values. Lakoff calls humanist ethics a “nurturant parent model” in contrast to an authoritarian “strict father model.”¹⁶ These terms mirror the “humanistic” and “authoritarian” social attitudes defined by Eric Fromm.¹⁷ But Lakoff goes on to advocate more convincing campaigns for humanistic policies at all levels, and to lobby for the public good as against private greed. While the competing parties espouse values like accountability, responsibility, equality, freedom and fairness, they understand them differently. Nevertheless they can often negotiate and find common ground. But neo-conservatives firmly reject this precedent. Table 2 exhibits a sample of Lakoff's comparisons of political conservatives and progressives.¹⁸

TABLE 2: Conservatives and Progressives on Humanistic Principles
On Responsibility: conservatives v. progressives
Conservative thinking stresses individual responsibility to be rigidly applied no matter what the cultural, social and economic context may be.
Progressive thinking stresses interdependence and social responsibility to be flexibly applied within a given cultural, social and economic context.
On Equality: conservatives v. progressives
Conservative thinking requires competition for rewards and a hierarchy of merit. Equality in general conservatism can only mean equality of opportunity, not outcome. The concentration of wealth and the (political) power that goes with it is fine, no matter how great.
Progressives: Great concentrations of wealth are not just fine, because great wealth controls access to limited resources (such as places to live, great universities) and access to political leaders, which is far from equal and hence violates political equality.

On Fairness: conservatives v. progressives

Conservatives: In the debate over **California's Proposition 209** (which amended the state constitution to prohibit governmental institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity, specifically in the areas of public employment, contracting or education) conservatives framed their argument as one of fairness in competition for high grades and test scores. Fairness should be based on these indicators of "merit" alone.

Progressives had the opposite view of fairness. Grades and test scores are not in themselves a fair measure of a person's talent...The mission of a university... includes a moral mission to provide professionals for all the state's communities... taking race and ethnicity into account was seen as central to a state university's moral mission.

Conservatives often overcome progressive sentiment in the voting process. Lakoff laments that the progressive movement (by whatever labels (such as liberal, humanist, nurturing parent, democrat) not only failed to defeat Proposition 209, but has also failed to effectively counter neoconservative trends in American religion, politics, and education. He maintains that superior conservative framing of these ideals has defeated the political messages of progressives. For example, conservatives rejoice and progressives lament that the Supreme Court ruling in the Citizens United case may have doomed and has certainly seriously damaged fairness in the American political system.

10. Threats to Democracy

The United States enjoys leading world-class institutions for science and technology. Yet, according to a 2009 survey sponsored by the California Academy of Sciences, a majority of ordinary citizens are seriously lacking in science literacy.¹⁹

- Only 53% of adults know how long it takes for the Earth to revolve around the Sun.
- Only 59% of adults know that earliest humans and dinosaurs did not live at the same time.
- Only 47% of adults can roughly approximate the percent of the Earth's surface that is covered with water. (Only 15% of respondents answered this question with the exactly correct answer of 70%.)
- Only 21% of adults answered all three questions correctly.

According to a 3 July 2012 Huffington Post report, a recent Gallup poll revealed that 46% of Americans believe in Creationism.²⁰ While this is an appalling statistic it did not surprise me. In a recent casual conversation with a highly intelligent and ethical crafts person who was working on my house, he made the following statement worthy of a New Yorker cartoon caption: "While I believe in science, I do not believe in evolution."

We must ask this question: *Can Americans choose the proper leaders and support the proper programs if they are scientifically illiterate? The whole premise of democracy is that it is safe to leave important questions to the court of public opinion. But is it safe to*

leave them to the court of public ignorance? Lack of science literacy is accompanied by an abysmal ignorance of history and civics, the most essential tools for sustaining a democratic society.

The anti-humanistic trends in America's media, financial sector, corporate business policies, and political influence have had invidious effects on American education, economy, health, public infrastructure, the environment, financial regulation, and the overall quality of justice and fairness in the nation. Collectively, these threats have already produced millions of Americans who lack an understanding of how democracy is supposed to work.

This dismal situation was enabled by deceitful election campaigns that conned the electorate into voting for candidates and policies that confiscated their wealth, impaired the ability to find work, destroyed unions and worker equity, and denied access to health care. It also rigged the electoral process by tampering with vote counts and disenfranchising voter groups known for their progressive political views.

11. A Humanist Movement Response

These growing threats demand sustained political and educational responses in the coming decades. We need to help people become scientifically literate but also literate in history, economics, environment, geography, and politics. I urge humanists to explore and develop the following draft Strategic Education Framework for *World Humanist Literacy* that encompasses all the literacies mentioned above by:

Creating a Humanist Education for Democracy Initiative that engages the talent and the energies of the major organizations of the humanist movement.

Declaring World Humanist Literacy as the overall objective of the Initiative.

Considering other organizations that educate for democracy as potential partners.

The well-established principles of a global humanism, as exemplified by the American Humanist Association and its allies offers a path forward.²¹ As our nation's leading advocate for humanism, the AHA helps defend our democracy against breaches in the barriers of church-state separation. It promotes science and evolution teaching unadulterated by theology. It defends freedom of thought and religion. It supports the feminist movement and equal rights and respect for non-violent, non-coercive forms of sexual expression. It also has several ongoing and developing programs of humanist education through leadership training, on-line courses, videos and various publications that instruct while advancing the cause of democracy.

The AHA recently issued its Ten Commitments: Guiding Principles for Teaching Values in America's Public Schools:

1. Altruism

Altruism is the unselfish concern for the welfare of others without expectation of reward, recognition, or return. Opportunities for acts of altruism are everywhere in the family, the classroom, the school, and the wider community. Think of examples of altruistic acts in your experience. What person-to-person and group projects, classroom and school-wide activities, and community service projects might you and your students undertake?

2. Caring for the World Around Us

Everyone can and ought to play a role in caring for the Earth and its inhabitants. We can directly experience the living things in our homes and neighborhoods like trees, flowers, birds, insects, and pets. Gradually we expand our neighborhood. We learn about deserts and oceans, rivers and forests, the wild life around us and the wild life elsewhere. We learn that we are dependent on each other, on the natural world, and all that lives in it for food and shelter, space and beauty.

3. Critical Thinking

We gain reliable knowledge because we are able to observe, report, experiment, and analyze what goes on around us. We also learn to raise questions that are clear and precise, to gather information, and to reason about the information we receive in a way that tests it for truthfulness, accuracy, and utility. From our earliest years we learn how to think and to share and challenge our ideas and the ideas of others, and consider their consequences. Practice asking "what next?" and "why?" and "how do I/you/we know that?"

4. Empathy

We human beings are capable of empathy, the ability to understand and enter imaginatively into another living being's feelings, the sad ones and the happy ones as well. Many of the personal relationships we have (in the family, among friends, between diverse individuals, and amid other living things) are made positive through empathy. With discussion and role-playing, we can learn how other people feel when they are sad or hurt or ignored, as well as when they experience great joys. We can use stories, anecdotes, and classroom events to help us nurture sensitivity to how our actions impact others.

5. Ethical Development

Questions of fairness, cooperation, and sharing are among the first moral issues we encounter in our ethical development as human beings. Ethical education is ongoing implicitly and explicitly in what is called the "hidden curriculum" that we experience through the media, the family, and the community. Ethics can be taught through discussion, role-playing, story telling, and other activities that improve analysis and decision-making regarding what's good and bad, right and wrong.

6. Global Awareness

We live in a world that is rich in cultural, social, and individual diversity, a world where interdependence is increasing rapidly so that events anywhere are more likely to have consequences everywhere. Much can be done to prepare the next generation for accepting the responsibility of global citizenship. Understanding can be gained regarding the many communities in which we live through history, anthropology, and biology. A linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity are present in the classroom and provide lessons of diversity and commonality. We help others reach understanding about the interconnectedness of the welfare of all humanity.

7. Human Rights

Human Rights is the idea that people should have rights just because they are human beings. These rights are universal. That is, they are for everyone no matter what their race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, sex, political beliefs, intelligence, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. School projects can be undertaken to learn about human rights, such as interviewing people who have once or are now participating in various rights movements. Student courts can introduce the idea and practice of due process, a key component of human rights.

8. Peace and Social Justice

A curriculum that values and fosters peace education would promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among nations as well as among cultural and religious or philosophical groups. Education should include opportunities to learn about the United Nations' role in preventing conflict as well as efforts to achieve social justice here in the United States. Students should learn about problems of injustice including what can be done to prevent and respond to them with meaningful actions that promote peace and social justice both at home and abroad.

9. Responsibility

Our behavior is morally responsible when we tell the truth, help someone in trouble, and live up to promises we've made. Our behavior is legally responsible when we obey a just law and meet the requirements of membership or citizenship. But we also have a larger responsibility to be a caring member of our family, our community, and our world. Stories and role-playing can help students understand responsibility and its absence or failure. We learn from answering such questions as: What happens when we live in accordance with fair and just rules? What happens when we don't? What happens when the rules are unjust?

10. Service and Participation

Life's fulfillment can emerge from an individual's participation in the service of humane ideals. School-based service learning combines community service objectives and learning objectives with the intent that the activities change both the recipient and the provider. It provides students with the ability to identify important issues in real-life situations.

Through these efforts we learn that each of us can help meet the needs of others and of ourselves. Through our lifetime, we learn over and over again of our mutual dependence.

These Commitments clearly encompass Education for Democracy. The AHA has the capacity to organize and coordinate the resources of many organizations that also seek to educate for a humanist democracy. While we are not likely to fully achieve the utopian “American dream,” we can certainly become a more prominent and forceful agent for improving the moral fiber of democracy in our nation and in the world.

NOTES

1. Original 1928 song by Harry McClintock about a hobo’s idea of paradise. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Rock_Candy_Mountain
2. Burl Ives’s version, with selective lyrics, is available at: <http://artists.letssingit.com/burl-ives-lyrics-big-rock-candy-mountain-dx26kzx#axzz2MLlgNhos>.
3. This section is loosely based on Russell’s chapter XIV: Plato’s Utopia.
4. Russell, p. 113.
5. Russell, p. 113.
6. Gottlieb, p. 290–292.
7. Russell, p. 106–107.
8. Excerpted and adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_re_publica.
9. Edward Clayton in SEP: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/cicero/#SH7c>. See Section 7.c.
10. Michael Mendelson in SEP: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine/>.
11. Michael Mendelson in SEP: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine/>.
12. <http://www.gradesaver.com/utopia/study-guide/about/>
13. Abridged from <http://www.sparknotes.com/history/european/1871/section1.html>.
14. The major sources for the data in this section were as follows: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Imperialism and <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/timeline-and-history-of-american-imperialism.html>, unless otherwise noted.
15. Lakoff, p. xiii.
16. Lakoff, p. 77, 81.
17. Fromm.
18. Lakoff, pp. 183–185, lightly edited to better fit the context of this book.
19. Source: Science Daily online at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090312115133.htm>
20. Online source at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/05/americans-believe-in-creationism_n_1571127.html. Accessed on 3 July 2013.
21. American Humanist Association: <http://www.americanhumanist.org/>
22. Source: Bob Bhaerman, Education Director, AHA’s Kochhar Humanist Education Center. http://www.americanhumanist.org/What_We_Do/Education_Center/Commitments#

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Urban Sprawl and Existentialism in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

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The Crying of Lot 49 is Thomas Pynchon's profound commentary on existentialism and on America's increasingly generic, brutal, and isolating urban landscape. Pynchon weighs both topics as he depicts the existential angst of a commodified, market-driven life filled with marketing jingles, unplanned sprawl as far as the eye can see, soulless subdivisions, endless freeways, and the resulting breakdown of community where people feel disconnected and alone and their lives seem empty and meaningless.

Imbedded within the *The Crying of Lot 49* is Thomas Pynchon's profound commentary on existentialism and on America's increasingly generic, brutal, and isolating urban landscape. Pynchon weighs both topics as he depicts the existential angst of a commodified, market-driven life filled with marketing jingles, unplanned sprawl as far as the eye can see, soulless subdivisions, endless freeways, and the resulting breakdown of community where people feel disconnected and alone and their lives seem empty and meaningless. As I teach this book, I encourage students to examine how Pynchon challenges us on our own existential quest as we watch Oedipa and Mucho on their searches for meaning in an urban/suburban dystopia. I draw links to T.S. Eliot, Voltaire, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee to discuss ways other authors have explored the existential quest. And I bring in Susan Sontag, Norman Mailor, and influential urban planning texts to further develop Pynchon's commentary on sprawl's impact upon contemporary America.

In Martin Buber's classic philosophical treatise *I and Thou* (first appearing in German in 1923) he famously observed: "*mundus vult decipi*; the world wants to be deceived. The truth is too complex and frightening." Indeed, in Thomas Pynchon's small but richly dense 1966 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, the "truth" is difficult to pin down and, certainly, complex and frightening as the reader confronts the human urge for connectedness and for metaphysical significance. The target for his highly convoluted and satirical exploration is 1960s California, but by extension, all of America. Both ridiculous and solemn and with a decidedly postmodern twist, he presents a world of sterility – mass-

produced generic; garish malls and freeways; flashy marketing strategies; easily seduced, inane, pop-culturized America – with some revolting and some passive inhabitants. Pynchon’s commentary on 1960s California can still be applied to much of contemporary American life. He questions the way America has chosen to grow its cities, how brutal and generic it feels, and how – despite the promises of marketing jingles, subdivisions, and freeways – people continue to feel “the void.” Showing the physical and psychic isolation created by a sprawling car culture, Pynchon delves into how people’s lives seem empty in such an environment. It is shocking to realize that, even though many decades have passed since this book first appeared in print, the brutal landscape he describes has, in many cities, only become worse, and this novel remains an accurate depiction of many American cities.

Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (2000) also describes a decline in America’s civic and personal health that author Robert Putnam connects to major social changes such as waning participation in bowling leagues, PTA and church memberships, political participation, Rotary clubs, Boy Scouts, etc. This leads to dwindling access to “social capital” which erodes our health and the benefits enjoyed with strong community connections. He argues that the loss of social capital can be felt in poorer educational performances, higher crime rates, teen pregnancies, child suicides, and prenatal mortality. And when it comes to personal health, the statistics show that a loss of social capital is as risky as smoking. Oedipa and Mucho’s isolation and loss of social capital is an abiding theme throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*, as they search for ways to feel less isolated.

Susan Sontag’s widely read essays about the incoherent and bleak nature of contemporary American life have a similar message as Pynchon’s: “the idiot village is America ... [It is] the quintessential Surrealist country ... a world in which everybody is an alien, hopelessly isolated, immobilized in mechanical, crippled identities and relationships.” (47, 48, 33) This post-modern existence can be seen as a generic pop-art line up of Campbell’s Soup cans – an Andy Warhol shrug, attesting to the commodified and banal nature of the landscapes and lives in which many Americans must exist. Pynchon illustrates the dulling torpor of the alienating terrain in America’s poorly planned suburbs:

San Narcisco lay further south, near L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts – census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway ... if there was any vital difference between it and the rest of Southern California, it was invisible on first glance ... a vast sprawl of houses ... Smog hung all around the horizon ... (24)

With one city running into the next and no unique features to distinguish one bland freeway, subdivision, and smog-laden city from the next, Pynchon paints a vividly haunting picture. In his cities – with unregulated, inhumanely designed real estate development – freeways and a car culture loom larger on urban and suburban landscapes than livable neighborhoods:

[Oedipa proceeded] onto a highway she thought went toward Los Angeles, into a neighborhood that was little more than the road's skinny right-of-way, lined by auto lots, escrow services, drive-ins, small office buildings and factories, whose address numbers were in the 70 and then 80,000s. She has never known numbers to run so high. It seemed unnatural ... the familiar parade of more beige, prefab, cinderblock ... factories, warehouses, and whatever. (25–26)

If Pynchon felt this way about beige, prefab interminable real estate developments in the 60s, imagine his horror at how even more sprawling and prefab California has become since then.

In *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (2000), authors Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck catalogue a litany of bad urban planning practices which have led to endless, automobile-based developments that have broken down America's sense of community and civic engagement. The authors describe sprawling, ugly, car congested cities filled with strip malls and fast food chains, McMansions, and monotonous moonscape developments, bigbox stores and "artificially festive malls set within barren seas of parking; antiseptic office parks, ghost towns after 6 p.m.; and mile upon mile of clogged collector roads, the only fabric tying our disassociated lives back together ... (x)" This book describes well-planned cities as those encouraging walkable and humane neighborhoods, with green spaces, definable neighborhood identities, a thriving downtown, reduced urban planning designed around freeways, increased urban planning designed around pedestrians and public transportation, urban growth boundaries to protect natural habitat and farmland, locally owned mom and pop shops instead of national retail chains, mixed-use developments, mixed income housing, sufficient affordable housing, and pedestrian friendly streets to create a better quality of life in the built environment. With *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon was light years ahead of his time in his fine pinpointing of the urban and suburban decay caused by poorly thought out urban planning. But unlike the authors of *Suburban Nation*, Pynchon doesn't offer answers but only a bright spotlight on the problems.

The Crying of Lot 49 shows an American culture numbed and "addicted to what protects it from pain (and, ultimately, death)" (Schaub 55). But stepping out of the pervasive numbness can be a terrifying leap into uncertainty. Pynchon's vision is of a world desperate for an explanatory metaphor to cut through the chaos and the emptiness to arrive at some "transcendent meaning" of existence – a "Word," perhaps that can be pinned down to help us arrive at some sort of "truth." The choice is (1) to accept the readily available surface assurances (such as how Warhol's famous pop art of Campbell's Soup played with our eagerness to accept the images of warmth, home cooking, and heartiness suggested by a brand name and its successful marketing campaign), or (2) to understand that the metaphors used to explain existence can be, as the protagonist Oedipa discovers, both "a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were" (129).

The tendency toward entropy (disorder) increases as the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, filters through various symbols and metaphors searching for, what she calls, a

“transcendent meaning.” Possibly, her nickname, Oed, is not accidental. As Berressem explains, “[it is] the acronym of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as well as the German word for sad and lonely (*od*), the word T.S. Eliot quotes from *Tristan and Isolde* in *The Waste Land* ... Pynchon’s California is a post-modern, cybernetic wasteland” (82–3). And like the many researchers who have poured over the weighty volumes of the *OED* looking for the origin of a word or how it has varied over the centuries, Oedipa is on a lonely search for “meaning” in the American urban and suburban environment.

Her epic journey through the sterility of this modern wasteland becomes complicated when she embarks upon her duties as executrix of the mysterious Pierce Inverarity’s will and uncovers innumerable levels to be deciphered. Inverarity had been a real estate mogul who had raped and pillaged the countryside in land speculating to create a multi-million dollar empire. In her investigation of Inverarity’s business dealings she finds a muted post horn is an important emblem for a revolutionary group using its own postal system (W.A.S.T.E.) to make an attempt to truly communicate – free from the machinery, *or* possibly it is an emblem representing the dispossessed, *or* she is paranoid and delusional, *or* it is an elaborate hoax extending through several centuries, *or* it is an elaborate hoax extending only through Inverarity. She has so many “fatigued brain cells between herself and the truth” (93). Finally, faced with the certain inability to attain “transcendent meaning,” she frantically begins to hope “at least, at the very least ... for a symmetry of choices to break down” (171).

Throughout, Oedipa resists sinking into “the void” – the purposeful emptiness of accepting that there may be no answers. The possible answers were all so chaotic and unsatisfactory that “she didn’t like any of them, but hoped she was mentally ill; that’s all it was. That night she sat for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, oh God, was the void. There was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world” (171). Her existential dilemma is between pre-packaged, nicely summed up but seriously flawed dogma or the difficult freedom and/or isolation of embracing none of the explanatory metaphors created by those before her who attempted to impose order on life’s tendency towards chaos. Fleeing “the void” and the generic of the built environment she is passing through, she seeks instead to validate these various metaphors and phenomenon that tantalizingly promise “truth.” But her search takes her both nowhere and everywhere.

Like T.S. Eliot, Pynchon is fascinated with the grail-like search for “truth” among this chaos and, consequently, with what Eliot called “signs ... taken for wonders.”¹ But unlike Eliot – whose message leans toward the tent revival meetin’ religious rhetoric of *Let Go, Let God* (Don’t over think things, just believe in what is predestined) – Pynchon provides an information overload with no catchy summation. Pynchon’s is an existentialist search that attempts to understand the world full of possible answers but finds no easy answer with which to soothe ourselves. He gives instead many examples of the ways in which humans place value and signification on symbols and metaphors so arbitrarily, so desperately. In contrast, T.S. Eliot shows, in the poem “Geronition,” how history has taken an old man down its “cunning passages” leaving him with too much information and not enough answers. Eliot seems to be preaching: Don’t be deceived by the cunning passages – you need no longer wait, for the answer has always been God. Eliot is a poetic

evangelist whose message could be summed up as: Your intellectual excavations will get you nowhere – realize it now and save time! His poems demonstrate his belief that humanity follows arbitrary signs too easily – he talks of “signs ... taken for wonders” and “hints followed by guesses.”

Thomas Pynchon is a wisecracking, very “American” version of ex-patriot T.S. Eliot. The difference is that he understands the easy seduction of simply Letting Go and Letting God, and he is not threatened by the process of the intellectual excavation. He leaves the chaotic world intact for us to sift through. And the chaotic world is reduced down to the enigma of a hackneyed urban and suburban America: “Pierce’s legacy, whose layers of illusion and alienation Oedipa can never peel away ...[with its] transfiguration of the natural landscape by the forces of capitalism, greed, self-indulgence, and overall bad taste” (Chambers 98–99). He names his meta-acropolis “San Narciso” no less. Pynchon paints a picture of a narcissistic culture in love with the mythical image of itself and seemingly unaware of the numbing soullessness of much of the urban geography it has created. This culture’s image of itself is merely a prop, an illusion. It is the playful music and enticing décor inside shopping malls compared to the brutal exterior reality of miles of parking lots, blacktop, freeways, and communities of people disconnected from each other. It is strip mall America, Top 40 hits, and romanticized unreal Hollywood movies, homogenizing images of existence into comfortable clichés and soothing promises.

Oedipa’s husband, Mucho, is not actively on the search for meaning like she is, although he too is tormented by the emptiness of his urban existence. Significantly, in his time spent as a car salesman, he could not escape the terror of a car lot sign creaking with the haunting acronym N.A.D.A. N.A.D.A. (National Automobile Dealers’ Association). The nothingness is reinforced by the despair of a car lot next to a highway Pynchon describes as “a pallid, roaring arterial” (15). Mucho eventually succumbs to the dulling effect of drugs and the beautiful stupor and safety society offers in pre-packaged systems attempting to present some transcendent meaning (via religion, soothing assurances in songs promising love, vapid commercials insisting that their product will fill all needs, the instant gratification of drugs, etc.).

With his typically thrashing satire, Pynchon has Mucho’s transcendent moment arrive in the form of a radio jingle soothingly proffering a product which will, apparently, provide “rich, chocolaty goodness.” Before this life-changing experience, as a disc jockey, Mucho felt he was selling out by supporting the propagation of songs promising everything in a world which rarely comes through on those promises. But in the end he finally understands why all the kids need to hear songs that assure “she loves you.” “The fraudulent dream of teenage appetite [became] a buffer between him and that [car] lot” (15) – between him and the emptiness that exists outside of the songs. Because of an LSD experiment, when he hears the “rich, chocolaty goodness” commercial he develops a sort of harmonic convergence of all humanity in his head. With this drug-induced removal from his isolation, he miraculously begins to hear all of humanity chanting in unison “rich, chocolaty goodness.” (It is a sort of lullaby, some good words to comfort, assure, and calm oneself with but, above all, a beautiful, though vacuous, metaphor for existence.) With his new belief in the promises of this radio advertisement and the messages in the

songs he plays as a DJ, he joins the stream of humanity believing serenely in the promises. For Mucho, release from the terror of “the void” arrives via the California drug culture of the 60s and through the vapid assurances of consumerism. But, for Pynchon, it seems important that it took communication – connecting through the spoken Word – to end the N.A.D.A. nightmares.

Driblette, the actor/director, elaborates on the unfixability of Words. He becomes angry that Oedipa wants a hard copy of the play, since he insists that it really only exists with him, with what is in his head:

You don’t understand ... you’re like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback ... but ... in here. That’s what I’m for. To give the spirit flesh ... I’m the projector at the planetarium.” (79)

How we have come to the intellectual make-up that is individually ours is far more important than mere Words, but many of us pass each other up without making contact, then, like Driblette, we die and what is in our heads is lost forever. Driblette’s/Pynchon’s scorn for dry academic attempts to impose order is evident. “You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfunder supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life” (80). Oedipa soon learns that her quest for the meaning of a few Words will have her playing the biggest role imaginable. She learns that she too is a “projector at the planetarium” – her task is *merely* to see if she can bring her version of the Words into focus. As she questions in her notebook, “Shall I project a world? If not project then at least flash some arrow on the dome to skitter among constellations... Anything might help” (82).

Pynchon seems interested in the impact of cultural transmissions and the commodification of dogma. Although he does not address religion overtly, the book is rife with Christian symbolism. For example: the preoccupation with the “Word” in the Jacobean play correlates with a similar preoccupation in the Bible such as the New Testament verse John 1:1 (King James Version) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Vatican’s control over the play’s original text and the resulting discrepancies in all subsequent versions of that text reflects the process through which numerous versions of the Bible have passed over the centuries, leading to great debate to this day about which version is “official” and “correct.” The insidious fight for such things as control over the postal system and control over the text of the play indicate that seemingly innocuous systems actually represent incredible power since “[w]hoever could control the lines of communication ... could control [the world]” (164). And Pynchon throws in the Jesus/Tristero figure who was “perhaps a madman, perhaps an honest rebel, according to some only a con artist” (159). Significantly, the auctioneer who is “crying” the Tristero stamps (Lot 49 in the auction) begins the cry with his arms spread “in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture; perhaps to a descending angel” (183). This parallels Christian iconography – with

Jesus, saints, and angels frequently pictured with arms outspread, and all that this gesture implies. Her response (and our response) to this gesture by an auctioneer who can, possibly, lead Oedipa toward answers, shows the arbitrary nature with which we invest trust in people who seem to have firmer knowledge about existence metaphors. We want to believe that their answers can embrace us and comfort us as well. The stamps in Lot 49 that have led her on this quest also include a mysterious stamp of a Tristero figure “with its arms outstretched” (127). The auctioneer is the personification of this elusive Christ-like figure that Oedipa has been searching for. He will be crying for them all today. But he is calculated and slick – “on his podium [he] hovered like a puppet-master, his eyes bright, his smile practiced and relentless” (183) – and Oedipa has at least learned to be wary of such characters.

Pynchon, who was a physics and literature major at Cornell, unites these two intellectual interests in the figure of Maxwell’s Demon. Positioning a thermodynamic paradox vs. a communication paradox, Pynchon’s scientist, Clerk Maxwell, allegedly noticed similarities between the two equations for Entropy – one for heat engines, the other for communication – and thought that, although from disparate fields, the equations might work together.² He imagined that they could be linked through a Demon inside the box who could only be accessed through a “sensitive” – a person capable of channeling information to the Demon to offset the loss of entropy. Professor Nefastis, who is trying to prove Maxwell’s Demon, spends his entire academic career searching in vain for a “sensitive.” Again, Pynchon posits communication as a controlling force, although ultimately ineffectual. “Communication is the key,” cried Nefastis. “The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind. There are untold billions of molecules in that box. The Demon collects data on each and every one” (105).

With the Demon’s close observation of every molecule, there is an obvious parallel to the typical religious rhetoric of God’s individual attention to each and every one of the billions of people who have inhabited the earth. Prof. Nefastis finds comfort believing in the Demon’s power over Entropy. He assures Oedipa, “[e]ntropy is a figure of speech then a metaphor ... the Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but also objectively true.” Oedipa feels like a heretic when she questions his controlling metaphor. “But what ... if the Demon only exists because the two equations look alike? Because of the metaphor?” (106) But this is one of the many theories she is willing to try if it will help explain the unexplainable, and she makes a valiant attempt to be a “sensitive,” to communicate with the Demon. When she fails, she begins to understand that “[t]he true sensitive is the one that can share in man’s hallucinations, that’s all. How wonderful that might be to share” (107). She would like to feel serenely comfortable sharing in the hallucinations but cannot quit her intellectual excavations and forget that they are, after all, hallucinations. Yet Oedipa is busy, like the hypothetical Demon, sorting it all out – the clues, signs, and symbols – but never receiving that crucial bit of outside information to bring it all together. Like Nefastis she will try to believe that humans *can* communicate and some order can be placed on the chaos, since the alternative feels like “the void.”

Indeed, Pynchon was compelled by the thermodynamic paradox inherent in entropy, recognizing the poetry of the sheer human need to create elaborate allegories for

the uncontrollable or unexplainable as represented by the real scientist James Clerk Maxwell's ingenious metaphor. Isaac Asimov called the imaginary Demon the ideal entropy-reverser, but although famous for its effort to solve the unsolvable and an intriguing tale, it inevitably fails under closer scrutiny. Similarly, Oedipa finds that every time humanity tries to use Words to communicate comforting explanations of existence, of signs, of symbols to each other, the Words also fail under scrutiny. Finding instead the agnostic paradox that either we can't communicate or there is no Demon, Oedipa faces a riddle to rival that faced by her Greek legend's namesake. As Plater points out, we discover as we watch the unraveling that there are "two simultaneous and alternate worlds: the world as it simply is and the world that civilization has created with its collective inventions and clever designs ... [However] Pynchon leaves us between fictions, imprisoned in language, and we must reconcile our multiple truths with whatever testimony we can summon" (xiv-xv).

During a night spent wandering in San Francisco Oedipa thought she'd found some sort of "truth" when the acronym W.A.S.T.E. and the muted horn image appear everywhere – in Chinatown, marked in chalk on a sidewalk, in children's games. In a gay bar, she sees a muted post horn pin on a man's lapel and hears the story of how the image came to represent a group who help people kick the need for love – the Inamorati Anonymous. W.A.S.T.E. too takes on various functions – used as a rallying cry by groups who appropriate the acronym for their own, sometimes evil, purposes. After the sheer number of reappearing symbols, the temptingly easy answer for Oedipa was to believe that "the repetition of symbols was to be enough." Like Oedipa, we humans frequently use the repetition of symbols to promote a particular belief system. We sing, chant, pray, pledge allegiance to the flag, perform our rituals, political and religious leaders lull us with comforting orations – whatever it takes to make it, finally, enough. She knows "it would be lovely beyond dreams to submit to it." To accept the assurances of the repetitions would make the night "empty of all terror," because she could believe that "something ... would protect her" (117-8). As with Samuel Beckett's important existential play *Waiting for Godot* (published in English in 1954), Pynchon shows us that we, like Estragon and Vladimir, are only running around, killing time, filling up the emptiness with Words and repetitions of Words, and convincing ourselves with activity that some answer is, at last, possible – meanwhile, *waiting* for all the inane but somehow vaguely linked clues to come together to form some meaning.

Voltaire's *Candide* (published in 1759) contains a similar intellectual crisis. Candide begins to question the prevailing 18th-century philosophy of optimism which insisted "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds," a maxim which conveniently gathered life up into a pleasant intellectual abstraction but failed to take into account the harsh realities of an often incoherent world. Candide's search for alternative ideologies leaves him with a lot of painful experiences and no closer to a better answer. However, when he and his entourage finally decide to quit the philosophical search and simply tend their garden, utter boredom sets in. Although one character makes a similar decision to that made by Mucho and declares: "let's work without speculating ... it's the only way of rendering life bearable," another proclaims:

I should like to know which is worse, being raped a hundred times by negro pirates, having a buttock cut off, running the gauntlet in the Bulgar army, being flogged and hanged in an *auto-da-fe*, being dissected and rowing in the galleys – experiencing, in a word, all the miseries through which we have passed – or else just sitting here and doing nothing?

To which Candide replies: “It’s a hard question” (Chapter 30).

The search for a Word, a metaphor, a bit of information from a “sensitive” to offset the chaos possibly won’t end in startling revelations and answers and, in fact, as Oedipa and Candide found out, may present much anguish. But the alternative may be a life of tedium and triviality. It is the human condition, the ultimate epic journey, the existential question. Like Candide, we must decide whether it is more important to tend our garden and remove the chaos or if, despite the pain involved, the search is still the thing.

In two definitions of entropy, we see our choices. Entropy is either 1) a “measure of the unavailable energy of a system” or 2) “an ultimate state of inert uniformity.” We have entropy because energy is out there that we cannot tap into. So we can try to tap into it even though we know there is no access (since by its very definition it is “unavailable”), or we can relax into “inert uniformity.” Our choice, like that faced by Mucho and Oedipa, is between the inert uniformity of “rich, chocolaty goodness” or the chaos of “the void,” and like Candide and Oedipa, we find – “it’s a hard question.”

Twentieth and twenty first-century America, Sontag’s “idiot village,” has indeed been haunted by the schizophrenia of what Norman Mailor called the “love of the mystery of Christ and the love of no mystery whatever.” Either we accept any number of the dogmas which have preceded us or we are faced with making our own sense of the confusion. In *A Street Named Desire*, the 1947 Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tennessee Williams, Blanche DuBois insists into the madness surrounding her: “I don’t want realism. I want magic.” While Martha in Edward Albee’s disturbing and profound 1962 play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* taunts her husband: “Truth or illusion, George, you don’t know the difference.” To which George replies “No, but we must carry on as though we do.” This human conundrum is one of the grandest themes literature has grappled with.

Ultimately, like one of T.S. Eliot’s most famous lines, Pynchon shows us that humanity is “fear in a handful of dust.” Although we might be interested in exploring a world without pre-scribed metaphors ameliorating the certain knowledge that we are born astride a grave, the reality is cold fear. In the beginning was the Word, and after that, the sheer unfixability of language has caused each transmission of information to become so distorted that it often seems nonsensical. Unlike Eliot who tries to impose symbolic structure on a chaotic world, Pynchon flaunts entropy and disorder. Showing the disappointing ineffectiveness of language which is always both “a thrust at truth and a lie” depending upon where you stand, he whips the reader into a frenzy of information overload and very cleverly forces us to become sorting Demons too as we read this book and try to bring it all together. We each have to find our own level of tolerable entropy in our own isolated chaos.

As in Pynchon's scene of a ballroom full of dancing deaf mutes, our life waltz is an individual composition in each of our heads. Oedipa watches in amazement, wondering how the deaf mutes find the right rhythm to dance so uniformly together. Maybe, like them, our luck will hold and we won't bump into each other, or maybe we will. Which is better? On the existential search, in this cacophony of a world full of possible answers, we can choose to embrace the comforts of "rich, chocolaty goodness," "the void," or allow to ourselves that we are not yet able to sum it all up. We are limited by what Pynchon calls the "Epileptic Word" in our efforts to "project a world."

In the end, just as Pynchon gives us no happy summations and conclusions about the existential quest, he also does not let us off with easy answers about the empty banal heart of many of America's cities. We watch Oedipa slowly become more aware of the real legacy of Pierce's empire with his typical landscape destroying and unimaginative suburban developments. "They came in among earth-moving machines, a total absence of trees, the usual hieratic geometry ... [a] sweep of the three-bedroom houses rushing by their thousands across all the dark beige hills" (55-56). And she realizes his "need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skylines, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being ..." (178). Throughout her search, the physical and psychic isolation of what she is living in and what Pierce Inverarity has contributed to slowly becomes clear. Pynchon describes her passing through unvital, undefined towns and downtowns with no centers and no end in sight, no controls on growth, freeways, and development:

... downtown San Narcisco, wherever downtown was ... (39)

San Narcisco had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America. (178)

If Thomas Pynchon had written a dystopia in which he imagined where America's urban landscape was heading after the 1960s, it couldn't possibly have been as frightening as the reality recorded by Eric Schlosser in *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2002). If you think Mucho was pathetic for eagerly swallowing the "rich, chocolaty goodness," being sold by a radio jingle, wait until you see the gluttony, excess, and frantic grab for instant gratification displayed by both consumers and exploiters of fast food as depicted in Schlosser's book. Similarly, as the full horror of sprawling incoherent America is finally revealed to Oedipa, she angrily chastises herself: "this is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl" (150).

It is typical of Pynchon that he plays with the predictable chest-pounding rhetoric of patriotism and invokes jingoistic images of unfurled flags to ask a crucial question. This is what has been created. Will it be possible to create otherwise? Imbedded in Pynchon's allegory of American urban sprawl is the existential quest for meaning, community, and human connectedness as we navigate between "rich chocolaty goodness" and "the void."

NOTES

1. Eliot's influence on Pynchon is clearly established. In Pynchon's first novel, for example, the poet Fausto says "Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot ruined us all."

2. Scientist James Clerk Maxwell created a purely hypothetical demon as an analogy explaining the flow of heat between a hot body and a cold body. Schaub succinctly explains Pynchon's use of the entropy analogy thus: "he exploits the diametrically opposite meanings which the term has in thermodynamics and in information theory. Metaphorically, one compensates the other. In both, entropy is a measurement of disorganization; but disorganization in information theory increases the potential information which a message may convey, while in thermodynamics entropy is a measure of the disorganization of molecules within closed systems and possesses no positive connotation. Pynchon uses the concept of entropy in this latter sense as a figure of speech to describe the running down Oedipa discovers of the American Dream; at the same time he uses the entropy of information theory to suggest that Oedipa's sorting activities may counter the forces of disorganization and death" (51).

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Can We Afford to be “Post-Secular?”

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The notion of our moving to a “post-secular” age has become a topic of conversation. As has been seen with discussions of “secular,” “secularity,” and “secularism,” much depends on what is meant by the term in question. This article surveys what some of the “post-secular” thinkers are saying and looks at how far their views actually differ from those of avowed secularists over the past century and a half. In light of this, it is then asked whether a “post-secular” situation is desirable or even possible.

1. Can We Afford to be “Post-Secular”?

In the last few years, it has become fashionable to write about – or urge us to move toward – a “post secular” age. In some respects this talk is a softening of the older anti-secular feeling so it’s important to recognize that the two conversations are not identical. The older class of anti-secularists are most often unreconstructed apologists for militant evangelical religion, dominionism or for older establishmentarian arguments. Lying behind their calls is the moral concern that “secular” means the same as lacking values, or implies the wrong values, which may well include anything from crass consumerism to rampant immorality. At its most extreme, we have Ashis Nandy, an Indian social scientist, who released an Anti-Secularist Manifesto in 1985, which accused secularism of being “ethnocidal,” and “authoritarian.” And in the United States, we find fundamentalist Protestants like David Noebel announcing that secularism “is graveyard dead,” and that secular humanism, its supposedly inevitable corollary, is not far behind (Noebel 2005, 32).

Things have moved on, though, and now a lot this rhetoric is in turn looking a bit dated. Among those who speak of “post-secular,” the emphasis is more on scientism, threats to genuine pluralism or anti-democratic majoritarianism, although behind these concerns is a broader worry about the flattening out of lived experience in a secular context. This fear still resonates for current anti-secularists like Veit Bader, who in his book *Secularism or Democracy?*, spoke of secularism as undemocratic and monolithic. But few scholars would go this far. In fact, among those who speak of “post-secular”, there is the startling paradox that, at the same time as these complaints are made, we find

them upholding secular values in some sense or another. Rather less frequent is the recognition that these sorts of question could not be posed in the first place without the benefits of living in a secular society.

Before looking in more detail at what “post-secular” might mean, it seems timely to remind ourselves of what a secular society actually is. There are few clearer, simpler definitions than that of Horace Kallen, who spoke of secularism as “the name for a way of being together of the religiously different, such that equal rights and liberties are assured to all, special privileges to none” (Kallen 1954, 57). For Kallen and those who think like him, to uphold the open society where divergent views are at least tolerated and maybe even celebrated, and where religious belief enjoys no special role in determining access to positions of power and influence, is to uphold a secular society. If we value people’s company for the qualities of character rather than for an outward display of theological conformity, then we should also value the secular society that is its essential backdrop. So the question is, if most of us, religious and non-religious, could agree that these values are significant ones, hard-won and easily forfeited, why have some people taken to speaking of the “post-secular”?

In answering this question, we shall attempt to steer as clear as we can from the disputed area of secularization theory. Instead, this article shall be content to follow the general conclusion of Norris and Inglehart that Western societies are becoming more secular, while much of the non-Western world is becoming more religious (Norris & Inglehart 2004, 217). Should we need confirmation for this position, we can turn to the work of a major Christian philosopher. Charles Taylor is a practicing Catholic whose recent work, *A Secular Age*, won the Templeton Prize. Taylor is happy to defend the core claims of the secularization thesis, saying that it has successfully resisted most recent challenges to its legitimacy. There has clearly been a decline of religion, Taylor says, and, especially since the 1960s, we live in a world with an ever-broadening range of “recompositions of spiritual life” as well as various forms of “demurrals and rejection” (Taylor 2007, 437). And while Taylor is critical of aspects of what he calls “exclusive humanism,” he rejects the conservative gambit of claiming it is possible or desirable to return to earlier conditions. “Even if we had a choice,” he writes, “I’m not sure we wouldn’t be wiser to stick with the present dispensation” (*ibid*, 513).

While Taylor doesn’t speak specifically of “post-secular” society, he is a major inspiration for many who do. This is because, while acknowledging our secular society, he goes on to make some significant caveats. In particular, he draws a bleak picture of what he calls the “immanent frame” of the secular age and the sense of flatness that he alleges underlies it. So while not disputing the existence of our secular age, he finds serious fault with it, and lays much of the blame at the feet of what he calls “exclusive humanism,” a term adapted from the 1967 encyclical “On the Development of Peoples” from Pope Paul VI. Towards the end of the Introduction, Taylor outlines his core claim:

I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity ... has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a

humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true. (Taylor 2007, 18)

A lot, then, is going to hang on Taylor's conception of humanism. But here is the abiding weakness of his critique. The point to bear in mind is that Taylor claims to be thoroughly familiar with contemporary humanism. He begins Part Two of his book promising a comprehensive exploration of the polemics around belief and unbelief over the past two centuries. And towards the end of the book, he claims "to describe the contemporary debate, *largely through examining unbelieving positions*, and their critiques of religion" (*ibid*, 728). But this simply does not happen. Far from exploring a broad range of humanist thinkers, Taylor's range is actually very narrow indeed. The only people from the secular intellectual traditions that Taylor exhibits a broad reading of, from original sources, are Hume, Nietzsche, and Camus, with a bit of John Stuart Mill and Martha Nussbaum. Virtually no other prominent humanist is so much as mentioned by Taylor, let alone discussed in any detail.

It is fair to conclude, then, that Taylor's understanding of the "unbelieving positions" is vastly less comprehensive than he claims. He is not the first to have made large claims on the basis of scanty research and he will not be the last. But the fact he is in good company does not make the practice any more defensible academically. His book, therefore, may well be valuable as a record of Taylor's views on humanism, but it can't be seen as a well-researched, objective intellectual foundation for a "post-secular" outlook. The point, then, is that if we are going to lament the qualities of the secular age we live in, it would be a useful idea to acquaint oneself with some of the people who have extolled its virtues.

2. What Has Been Said about Secularism

Informed in the most partial and incomplete way, Taylor proceeds to give a gloomy account of life lived within the immanent frame, a world limited by its secularism. At this point, attention should be drawn to another confusion Taylor falls prey to: he speaks not of secularism but of secularity. But there is a difference here. Secularity is best seen as the broad phenomenon of indifference to religion in modern Western societies. This is not the same as secularism, which is the body of thought about the separation of church and state and the freedom of conscience this entails (Dacey 2008, 30). A secularist, therefore, is someone who subscribes to this body of thought, and by virtue of which cannot, by definition, be indifferent to the issue. And in the same manner, a secularist can lament the indifferentism of secularity with just as much urgency as a religious person can. This has been done by the French atheist philosopher André Comte-Sponville who, while rejoicing in Europe's post-religious condition, also worries that it should be more than simply "an elegant form of amnesia or denial" (Comte-Sponville 2007, 28).

Taylor talks of the three "malaises of immanence," which he lists as the sense of fragility of meaning or of a search for significance; the felt flatness of our attempts to

solemnize the crucial moments of passage; and the flatness and emptiness of the ordinary. These are all malaises of secularity, not of secularism. But he then goes on to make the important point that while these malaises arose from the decay of transcendence, it “doesn’t follow that the only cure for them is a return to transcendence” (Taylor 2007, 309). This valuable insight, again, not peculiar to Taylor of course, is often overlooked.

It follows from this that one does not have to pine for some form of transcendence to agree with Taylor that the three malaises he identifies are significant. They all revolve, in the end, around a notion of flatness, which elsewhere he contrasts with “fullness.” But is flatness an inevitable malaise of immanence as Taylor supposes? Is it possible that it is not so much immanence to blame here but a failure of imagination, one exacerbated in no small measure by the illusions of transcendence that make most things seem ordinary? Maybe what is needed is a new ability to recognize fullness in the secular realm, without seeking to give it an artificial gloss of transcendent bling. But this, of course, is precisely what Taylor does not allow himself to do, because of his ignorance of most humanist thought on the subject. On this subject, for instance, Taylor could have strengthened his case had he read Paul Kurtz’s book *The Fullness of Life* (1974), where a consciously humanist sense of “fullness” is explored. This does not happen.

At this point, let’s go to our main question, and examine the notion of what “post-secular” might mean. A representative example of this trend is the Australian intellectual Clive Hamilton, whose recent work *The Freedom Paradox: Towards a Post-Secular Ethics* illustrates the problem. Much of what Hamilton has to say is sound. Like Taylor, he decries the blight of moral relativism and postmodernism, and outlines their intellectual bankruptcy. And equally, he is impatient with moral conservatives, anxious to have their questionable and often fallacious absolutes pass unchallenged behind a smokescreen of condemnation of secular humanism. But where Taylor’s solution revolves around a rarefied, patrician Catholic transcendentalism, Hamilton’s is based on a transcendental idealism that owes a particular debt to Schopenhauer’s reading of Kant. Hamilton’s solution is not my concern here, so much as his assumption that it should be a “post-secular” solution. His overriding mistake is his unthinking equation of nihilism and meaningless consumerism with secularization. Once again, he is criticizing aspects of secularity, and assuming that secularism therefore stands condemned.

Crucially, Hamilton spends little time justifying why his theory should be “post-secular,” beyond merely asserting that all modern theories of morality, except his own, are rationalistic. “A post-secular ethics,” Hamilton writes, “locates moral authority not in the abstractions of reason or in enslavement to faith; it places it in our own inner selves” (Hamilton 2008, 220). No account is offered as to how this transformation is to take place. But in the meantime, we are left with a pluralist world-society drifting dangerously, with the twin menaces of unalloyed hedonism and consumption on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other.

More relevant and influential has been the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who has been outlining his vision of what “post-secular” means. Within the constraints of his lumbering sentences and heavy use of jargon, Habermas insists he is

not rejecting secularism in its entirety. He is adamant that the institutions of government must remain secular in the sense of being neutral regarding religious and non-religious truths claims. "Every citizen must know and accept," Habermas writes, "that only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations" (Habermas 2006, 9). He is also aware of the intellectual sloppiness attached with the habit of prefixing "post" to things. Such a fashion, he laments, has "the disadvantage of indeterminacy" (Habermas 2010).

Habermas has two objections to secularist thinking. He objects to secularists merely tolerating religious groups as if they are an endangered species who are sure to die out in the glare of scientific sunshine. Related to this is his objection to what he sees as a secularist presumption that their thought is scientifically sound and therefore deserves priority over non-scientific thinking as favoured by religions. He is also reacting to John Rawls' argument that all discussion in the public sphere must be conducted in secular language. This concerns him because of the extra burden this imposes on religious people that is not faced by secular people (Habermas 2006, 12).

None of these presumptions square with the current state of thought in what Habermas calls a post-secular world. The thought of a post-secular world, he contends, is post-metaphysical, in the sense that it stresses the limitations of reason and the acceptance of human fallibility. Regarding religion, post-metaphysical thought makes a clear distinction between faith and knowledge but "refrains from passing judgment on religious truths" (Habermas 2006, 16). It also recognizes that religion continues to make significant contributions to politics and public policy.

In responding to Habermas, we should take care not to reject his concerns too quickly. Much of this is sound and reasonable. But we can feel justifiably impatient on some scores. For example, it is fair to ask whether Habermas has not got altogether too sanguine a view of the threat religion poses. In an interview on his views about "post-secularism" in 2010, he said that religion has become "more differentiated and has limited itself to pastoral care, that is, it has largely lost *other* functions" (Habermas 2010). It seems difficult to reconcile that view with what is happening across large parts of the world. Only in a largely post-religious Europe, does such a genial interpretation come close to being accurate. And most of his comments do seem directed solely toward European affairs. His main target is the *laïcité* movement of European secularism. But this is a strangely Eurocentric view from a philosopher who is sternly critical of Eurocentric attitudes.

Tied up with this unrecognized Eurocentrism is its casual dismissal of the importance of secularism for non-Western nations, some of whom are all too familiar with the reality of religious fighting and hatreds. India, the world's largest democracy relies heavily on its secular constitution to preserve an ever more fragile co-existence between faiths. With more than 140 million Muslims in a mainly Hindu nation, India is on the front line of religious conflict. But its long tradition of toleration, dating back to Ashoka in the third century BCE and the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century CE, of extending toleration to all, even to the non-religious, will be called upon in the century to come. And Amartya Sen is correct to question why secularism around the

world should be dismissed as some modernist peculiarity being swept away by the some new “post-modern” dispensation in Europe (Sen 2006, 313).

It is also reasonable to question whether a clear distinction can be drawn between faith and knowledge, which Habermas sees as permissible, while at the same time refraining from passing judgment on religious truths, which he does not. If religious people should be able to express views of public policy in the context of their language and modes of thought, then it is reasonable for secularists to oppose them in their own language and modes of thought. It is hard to see how this can be done without passing judgment on the religious truths upon which the public policy statements rest.

3. Secularism as Understood by Secularists

In their various ways, Charles Taylor, Clive Hamilton and Jürgen Habermas have all found fault with the phenomenon of secularity. Many who would identify as secularists would share some of their concerns, even if they balked at following them into their variously-conceived clouds of unknowing. And most of the current critics of secularity – as we saw with Charles Taylor – have made little or no effort to familiarize themselves with what secularists have actually said.

So what *have* secularists actually meant by secularism? We can’t hope to give a comprehensive account here, but a couple of snapshots should give a fair picture. The word was coined by the English reformer and journalist George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906) around 1851. None of our critics so much as mention Holyoake, even in passing, which is unfair both to him and to secularism. Holyoake was not a one-dimensional opponent of religion. He brought together the radical, republican, activist and anti-clerical tradition of Thomas Paine, and the ethical, utopian and rationalistic tradition of Robert Owen. And unlike thinkers a century and a half later, Holyoake understood the difference between the “secular” and “secularism.”

Secular teaching comprises a set of rules of instruction in trade, business, and professional knowledge. Secularism furnishes a set of principles for the ethical conduct of life. Secular instruction is far more limited in its range than Secularism which defends secular pursuits against theology, where theology attacks them or obstructs them. (Holyoake 1896, 61–62)

Holyoake wrote and thought about secularism for fifty years, but in his most protracted study of the subject, *The Origin and Nature of Secularism* (1896), he defined secularism as a “code of duty pertaining to this life for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable.” The three essential principles of secularism were held to be: the improvement of life and human effort; that science can have a material part to play in that improvement, and that it is good to do good (*ibid*, 41).

Holyoake was adamant that secularism was not anti-religious. And we can see from his three key tenets that there is indeed no necessary conflict between secularism and religion. It is of necessity anti-theological, when theology presumes for itself a

defining role in areas of government and society, but it is not anti-religious (Foote 1879, 9). He wanted secularism to avoid the excesses of both doctrinal Christianity and atheism. Secularism in the sense of a moral life stance without religion is now better understood as humanism. Indeed, Holyoake toyed for a while of speaking of humanism rather than secularism, but chose not to, mainly because he was worried by radical associations humanism was taking on at the hands of some exiled Germans in England at the time, Arnold Ruge (1802–1880) in particular (Cooke 2011, 30–35).

Holyoake said that science can have a positive role to play in the improvement of material conditions of living. His actual words were: “That science is the available Providence of man.” A statement worded like this is likely to enflame Habermas in particular, who would see it as flagrant evidence of scientistic reductionism. But Holyoake was aware of these possible objections. He added a footnote that the phrase was suggested to him by his friend the Rev. Dr. Henry Crosskey, and that Holyoake added “available,” with the intention of leaving open the existence of any other form of Providence. In other words, Holyoake was taking neither a scientistic nor a reductionist attitude with this phrase. Rather, it made the uncontroversial point that science is a means available for us to improve the human lot (Holyoake 1896, 41).

Holyoake thought of secularism as a moral movement, unconcerned with abstruse theological battles about God. He outlined the secularist rules for human conduct as: truth in speech; honesty in transactions; industry in business, and; equity in reward (Holyoake 1896, 108). The first three of these points would probably find support from left and right of the political spectrum and across the religious/non-religious divide. His secularist rules were given in the same vein as the various outlines of humanist values which more recent thinkers have outlined. The claim was never made that these virtues were the sole preserve of secularists, only that they are entirely consistent with secularism. And, of course, this secularist code for human conduct distinguishes it clearly from the amoral indifferentism of the condition of secularity.

At this point the avowed post-secularist could well complain that this secularist morality is all very well, but it seems precisely the sort of flatness that is being lamented. Where is the transcendence, the majesty in all this? But surely the secularist or humanist can respond by challenging the validity of the question. Who are we to presume that we should seek, let alone deserve, any more than this? Paul Kurtz spoke of the transcendental temptation, whereby people are tempted into the hubris of supposing themselves worthy of immortality, against the prevailing rule of nature (Kurtz 1986, 461). It is a theme that goes back to Heraclitus, who called conceit “the sacred disease” (Wilbur and Allen 1979, 61). At its core is the presumption of according to oneself a place in the scheme of things one does not deserve. It is the core insight of all naturalistic systems of thought, of which secularism is a major consequence, that *Homo sapiens* does not, in fact, deserve the exalted place in the cosmos it has traditionally arrogated to itself.

Spinoza was groping toward this sense of naturalistic humility when he spoke of *sub specie aeternitatis*, or “under the aspect of eternity” as the proper backdrop for our presumption to significance. And Nietzsche observed that Christianity owes its victory to its pandering to human conceit. “‘Salvation of the soul’ – in plain words: ‘The world

revolves around *me'...*" (Nietzsche 1986, 156). Bertrand Russell had the same thing in mind when he asked: "Is there not something a trifle absurd in the spectacle of human beings holding a mirror before themselves, and thinking what they behold so excellent as to prove that a Cosmic Purpose must have been aiming at it all along?" (Russell 1960, 221) Holyoake himself understood this when he said: "Were I to pray, I should pray God to spare me from the presumption of expecting to meet him, and from the vanity and conceit of thinking that the God of the universe will take the opportunity of meeting me" (Holyoake 1896, 100). Secularist thinking, in other words, is not antithetical to a proper sense of naturalistic humility. Indeed, some would add that only a non-theistic position is truly able to avoid the dangers of the transcendental temptation. I would argue it is a core mission of contemporary humanism to articulate this message.

Working from this foundation of naturalistic humility, secularists have tended to proceed to notions of fallibility and its corollary of toleration, much in the way Habermas has assumed we have not done. This is why the link between the secular society and the open society is so strong. The open society, wrote Karl Popper, is where the individual is confronted with personal decisions (Popper 1963, 173). More recently, Ernest Gellner expanded on this when he outlined the merits of the civil society, which he characterized as a "cluster of institutions and associations strong enough to prevent tyranny, but which are, none the less, entered and left freely, rather than imposed by birth or sustained by awesome ritual" (Gellner 1995, 103). Nobody has yet found a convincing means by which this ideal can be achieved outside a secular society.

Some might object at this point that Albania under Enver Hoxha or Stalinist Russia were secular societies, and not noted for their defence of freedom. Once again, the distinction between "secular" and "secularist" is useful. Stalinist Russia was a secular society in the sense of not having an established church, but it assuredly was not secularist in the sense of embracing the principles of naturalistic humility, from which is taken a high valuation on personal freedom and non-coercive institutions as protectors of that freedom. There should be no need at this point to rehearse the teleological presumptions in communism, a feature it shared with monotheistic religion rather than with naturalistic outlooks.

What is clear from all this is the urgent need to appreciate the fragile gift that is a secular society, and to look to nurturing that gift to greater strength and outreach. One person who has done this recently is Lloyd Geering, one of the leading Western radical theologians who, along with Don Cupitt in the United Kingdom and John Shelby Spong in the United States, has devoted his life to forging a Christianity that can live, even prosper, within the parameters of modernity. He does this because he is quite clear, as are many of his fellow theologians, that traditional, doctrinal Christianity is unable to make this transition. In a manner reminiscent of Holyoake, Geering identifies three primary secular values: personal freedom; defence of human rights; and its welcoming attitude toward diversity (Geering 2007, 33–34). I doubt that Charles Taylor, Clive Hamilton or Jürgen Habermas would quibble with any of these. Holyoake certainly wouldn't. But what distinguishes Geering from Taylor, Hamilton and Habermas is his willingness to praise the secular in the language of the secular. More of this is needed. Far from having

to move *beyond* the secular for these qualities to flourish, they are the ongoing core of secularism.

Even when Geering goes on to plea for a planetary spirituality, he does so in secular terms. (*ibid*, 54) And once this happens, a truly exciting confluence of ideas takes place when we notice that the details of what Geering calls a secular spirituality are difficult to distinguish from what secular humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz has called planetary humanism, or the British atheist philosopher Ted Honderich has in mind with his proposed Principle of Humanity (Kurtz 2000, and Honderich 1896, 87–89) There are also close parallels with Comte-Sponville’s atheist spirituality we referred to earlier. It would seem that we do not need to renounce the secular in order to work for fullness. Indeed the surest paths away from the doldrums of postmodern consumerism seem to be consciously secular ones. To indulge, therefore, in the language of the “post-secular” is to confuse the issue and risks jettisoning secular principles altogether.

In conclusion, though, we should not assume from this that we have nothing to learn from the concerns “post-secular” thinkers have raised. The French government’s banning the burqa, for example, is a gift to “post-secular” thinkers, who now can talk about secularist arrogance and majoritarianism. As secularists, we really need to take the “toleration” element of our creed more seriously than we do at present. I am not arguing for a craven capitulation to any outrageous or primitive practice under the banner of toleration. But we need to remember that toleration is just a fancy word unless it includes tolerating things we personally may feel uncomfortable with.

Several people have observed that another way out of the doldrums we find ourselves in now is to at least start talking about religion once again. Western societies have been drifting toward a multi-cultural notion that talk of religion is tantamount to hate-talk, racism or some other gross cultural insensitivity. But as Austin Dacey and others have argued, this sells us all short. It is not intolerant of religion to subject it to informed criticism, just as it is not being intolerant of secularism to subject it to criticism. The point, he says rightly, “of the open, secular society is not to privatize or bracket questions of conscience, but to pursue them in conversation with others” (Dacey 2008, 210). But clearly, if we are going to do this, we need to be sure of a secular society which guarantees our freedom to engage in this conversation without fear of repercussions. There is nothing “post-secular” about this: it is at the heart of what secularism is about.

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Atheism... Plus What?

Richard Carrier

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“Atheism+” or “Atheism Plus” was first promoted by atheist activist Jennifer McCreight, at the suggestion of one of her readers, to describe a movement that had been growing within New Atheism for several years. It is a movement for promoting moral values and the discussion of societal problems among atheists, and for making the atheist community more welcoming of, and responsive to, women and minorities.

Atheism is no longer just the belief-state of various diverse individuals. Atheism is now a social identity movement and a growing and active community. This is most especially the case in America and Canada, but there are similar movements growing in other countries, from the Philippines to Ghana and (secretly) even Iran and Pakistan. Australia and the UK have seen smaller but similar movement growth and recognition. And beyond. Here my focus will be on American atheism, which by its volume and output fuels and encourages much of the rest, but as other societies become more free and secular, or wake up more to the dangerous influence of religion even in their already free and secular societies, I think more nations will follow.

The worldwide recognition now tendered to the term “New Atheism” illustrates the phenomenon I’m referring to. What distinguishes the “new” from old atheism is precisely this feature: atheists are increasingly, and loudly, out and proud. More and more of us no longer hide, and as a group we no longer leave the defense of our beliefs or the critique of religion to a rare handful of intellectuals, but actively engage these defenses and critiques far more widely and openly, online and in print, personally and collectively. New Atheism is characterized by an explosion of public authors and speakers declaring their atheism and writing about it, by the rapid and unprecedented growth of public online communities and national and local organizations dedicated specifically to nonbelievers, and a corresponding proliferation of national, state, and local conferences, fairs, clubs, and meetups for atheists, including a huge increase in groups representing atheist students on college campuses (and more recently even in American high schools).

Though all of this organized or active growth includes nonbelievers who adopt other labels than “atheist,” the label “atheist” is the most rapidly growing and most widely recognized identity label, and all nonbelievers, regardless of label, are atheists in the basic clinical sense of having no belief in a god, and most do participate side-by-side with self-

identifying atheists in the same events and organizations and online venues. But more importantly, it is “atheist” that has become the identity-descriptor most widely recognized outside the nonbelieving community. Atheists are recognized as a constituency by the media – the same media that often does not understand what words like “agnostic” or “humanist” even mean (and rarely knows they have had their own communities and organizations). But labels aside, nonbelievers now even have their own lobbyists in Washington D.C. Such is the growth of their status as an actual community, that they can cobble together enough funding from atheists nationwide to actually pay a full time lobbyist, normally an extravagant luxury for any interest group.

So, atheism is now a movement and is very much an actual community. And as such, its members have expressed and pursued the most widely shared goals of making more and better atheists, and then giving them resources and a comfortable social environment (where they can be themselves and recover their sanity among fellow atheists and not feel isolated and alone). But once a community exists, as a community, it has responsibilities. Any organized and active community has a voice. People will hear that voice and listen and associate what is said as coming from and representing that community to one degree or another. So will that community use its voice responsibly? Communities also by nature have resources. Time, money, personnel, votes, communication networks, information networks, action networks, its own media. Will they use those resources responsibly? Any community, simply by virtue of the fact of being visible as a community, will also be judged. Will that community ensure that it is judged accurately? Will that community care how it is perceived at all? Communities can also influence their members, through all of the above. Will they influence their members for the better?

These questions can no longer be avoided. It can no longer be said that atheists can just be atheists and mind their own business. That cat is already out of the bag. Atheists have built actual physical and widely-networked communities and are continuing to actively grow them and participate in them. We are no longer isolated individuals. We are now a community (no matter how diverse and decentralized) with a voice and an identity, and with resources, visibility, and influence, all recognized by the wider public. And this makes a difference. Even our most basic goal of increasing the number of atheists – or even just the number of organized and contributing atheists (to increase our resources and influence) – cannot wisely be divorced from the question of whether, as we increase the number of atheists, they will be morally responsible atheists. It is all the more important that the atheists we seek to populate our movement and our organizations and social groups be morally responsible atheists, but it is also quite important enough that we not increase the number of atheists in society as a whole who are not morally responsible atheists. The effect on society would otherwise be a very visible and real harm, and would entail that we are actively posing a danger to society rather than a benefit. That is neither what we should want to do, nor how we should want to be perceived by the general population.

As a community we have also widely adopted the additional goals of protecting the rights of atheists. This has been most visible in respect to the fight to perfect or maintain

separation of church and state, so that atheists can receive the equal protection of the laws and be recognized and treated by our governments as full and equal citizens. But this same effort obviously must also include working to help atheists fight not just state but private discrimination and harassment. The atheist community's response to the discrimination and harassment of Jessica Ahlquist very publicly exemplified this. That should not just be some isolated phenomenon. Rather, it is precisely the sort of thing the atheist community as a whole should be doing as widely and as often as it can. Atheists standing up for other atheists. This is why many atheists have recently been actively campaigning for similar responses from the community and its leaders to help fight the persistent online harassment of prominent atheist women, harassment often perpetrated by other atheists (not that it should even matter who is doing the harassing). Anyone who cannot see the similarity between the two cases needs to take a remedial critical thinking course. (Although for those who might not know what I'm talking about, you can peruse my articles on the subject at freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/category/atheism-plus.)

And again, as a community, we not only have, but have widely embraced and pursued, the goal of serving the social and informational needs of atheists, building organizations and meetups and clubs and online networks specifically for the purpose. We, as atheists, seek out atheist sources of educational information about the world, and we seek out atheist social clubs for socializing and enjoyment. It is the atheist community that facilitates that and makes that possible. Indeed such a thing only barely existed before. It's rapidly growing now.

Atheism is therefore no longer just the lack of belief in a god. Atheism is now an influential social movement and a growing, physically interactive community, with goals and responsibilities that have already grown well beyond merely lacking or dispelling god-belief. Though an atheist as such is still and always will be just someone who doesn't believe in a god, what we are seeing now is a community of atheists who are atheists plus certain other things. And in fact we can only thrive and be successful as a community – and we can thereby, through the directed power, influence, and resources of that community, far more effectively increase the number of atheists, and especially the number of morally responsible atheists – if we accept the fact that we all need to be more than just atheists. We all need to be atheists plus certain other things. And we should want as many other atheists as possible to join us in that.

Plus what, then? Atheists, like almost any group, are amazingly diverse, and pursue a wide plethora of interests and passions, and there is no reason to expect all to be alike in these respects. Indeed, division of labor and interest is crucial to the success of any community, so all being alike would be a considerable detriment to our community's success and effectiveness. But there has to be a minimum set of core values we must all share if our community is to thrive and succeed, and be a community of consistent benefit to its own members, and be a community that will earn the respect of the larger world community of which it is a part. So I have cobbled this minimum down to a simple formula: atheism + humanism + skepticism. We need to merge the main goals and values of the growing atheist identity movement with the relatively stagnant humanist and skepticism movements, the latter two also being very real communities, only for whatever reason less successful in growing numbers and media recognition (there have been no

exploding “New Humanism” or “New Skepticism” movements, for example). As a self-identifying atheist (or agnostic or nonbeliever or whatever label you prefer) you need not declare yourself a humanist or a skeptic or join their respective organizations, but you do need to embrace their essential core values.

This should be a no-brainer. The core humanist values of compassion, honesty, and reasonableness, of a concern for the welfare of the human race and the application of reason rather than faith to better it, are essential. No community, no society, can thrive that does not embrace those values and denounce those who renounce them. Likewise, the core values of reasonable skepticism and critical thought, and the testing of views and claims against the canons of evidence and reason before accepting them in any degree, could hardly be values any atheist should want to abandon, much less deride. And it’s hard to imagine how the atheist community can be any good for itself much less the world if it abandons the one thing that potentially makes atheists a greater asset to the world than religionists: an uncompromising, uncompartimentalized commitment to reasoned doubt and skeptical analysis. Thus, atheism, as a movement and a community, needs to be more than just atheism. It needs to be atheism plus these core values of humanism and skepticism.

In practical terms, this means we need to be consistent in holding ourselves to these values, and denouncing (by more persistent and visible exercises of free speech, down-voting, disavowing, and other nonviolent means) those who reject or unrepentantly fail to abide by these core values, whether they be religious or not. Being an atheist should not get you a pass on the same criticism and denunciation we would deliver to a theist who said or did the same things. A community cannot be said to be governed by a value it does not stand up for. And standing up for a value means more than just calling out those who abandon it, or apologizing and correcting ourselves when we fail to uphold it ourselves. It also means living those values. And this means encouraging atheists to adopt a greater humanitarian concern for what’s going on in their movement and in the world. It means asking people to be compassionate, honest, and reasonable (as much as is itself reasonable). It means being compassionate, honest, and reasonable (as much as is itself reasonable). It likewise means embracing critical reasoning and courteous and constructive criticism and being responsive to it yourself. It means directing the same skeptical and empirical and logical standards you apply to religion to everything else as well, every social and political belief you hold. It means being a good skeptic. Not a bad one. It also means being a good person. Not a bad one.

The term for this idea, “Atheism+” or “Atheism Plus,” was first promoted by atheist activist Jennifer McCreight, at the suggestion of one of her readers, to describe a movement that had been growing within New Atheism for several years before it had a name, a movement for promoting moral values and the discussion of societal problems among atheists, and for making the atheist community more welcoming of, and responsive to, women and minorities. McCreight listed some examples of what this meant to her, saying that she wanted to be part of a movement of atheists who were not just atheists but atheists plus people who care about social justice, who support women’s rights (and gender equity generally), who protest racism (and seek to combat it even among and

within themselves), who fight homophobia and transphobia, and who use critical thinking and skepticism to do all of this as well as everything else they choose to do.

Notably, this movement already existed within the New Atheism movement for years before it had any name. It thus had many advocates who did not describe themselves with the label Atheism+ because that label didn't even exist. But now that it does, it is still not necessary for anyone to adopt that label, any more than it was necessary before. It is merely a clinical term that just happens to describe someone who adopts the basic platform of being an atheist + a humanist + a skeptic. In that fashion it is like *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Every human is a *Homo sapiens sapiens* even if they never call themselves that or never use that label for themselves, but prefer instead other words like "human," "person," "man," "woman," or what have you. Thus, not everyone furthering the same values and goals as Atheism+ adopts that specific label, nor need they. What matters is simply the formula: that we be more than atheists, that we be good humanists and skeptics as well.

Christians often claim that atheists have no morals, and that more atheists in a society means a less moral society – indeed, they even imagine it would be a more dangerous and awful society. If you disagree with those claims and assumptions, if you take offense at them, then you surely have to stand up for and act on your values, the values they are denying you live by and fight for. And at the very least, those values must surely be compassion, honesty, reasonableness, and informed and rational skepticism. What this also means is that you shouldn't let bad atheists represent you, nor let them (or anyone else) think they do by your silence.

We should likewise be using our collective intra-community resources to make the atheist community as a whole better informed and more active on social issues, and not just the limited and isolated domains of "science, philosophy, and religion." We should likewise accept and encourage constructive criticism of each other within the movement and use it to better ourselves and our community and its institutions (which does require heeding and calling out the difference between harassment or verbal abuse and actual constructive criticism). In both respects we can demonstrate to the wider world community that the atheist community and movement is not tone deaf to major issues in the world, that we have ideas to contribute toward those subjects that can be compared with the competing ideas of religious faith communities. We can also be making our own atheist community better informed about the problems of the world. And by doing so we can make the atheist community better informed than any other faith community, thereby becoming a more reliable community to consult on those issues.

It's also important to serve the sanity and happiness of atheists by promoting more social activities where atheists can enjoy the company of fellow atheists in shared pursuits. Many atheist community groups have already taken up the idea of Special Interest Groups or SIGs as a way to serve this need. The basic idea is that there are general meetings and socials for the whole atheist community group, but also as many separate SIGs as are desired, which serve the interests of select groups of atheists without having to involve all members of the wider group, as others may prefer other interests instead. For example, bowling clubs, knitting clubs, book clubs, movie clubs, music clubs, nature clubs, science clubs, parenting clubs, drinking clubs, painting clubs, political clubs, charity clubs, clubs

specifically devoted to hitting-the-streets style gay rights or animal welfare activism, and so on. Such a model could and should be expanded to all atheist community and campus groups, and embraced by national organizations that have regularly-meeting chapters. Ultimately, atheists need to have a community to enjoy and get involved in and have fun with. And that does not require replicating the church model. Secular social and hobby clubs have existed for centuries. And one can innovate all manner of new ways to network and socialize within any interest or identity group, like atheism has become.

Nevertheless, institutions can pursue their own narrower goals while still embracing Atheism+ as a laudable set of goals within the wider atheist community they serve. No one is suggesting every atheist organization gear up to fight social justice issues, for example, or deploy a SIG model. You can stick to your mission statement as always, whatever it is. But if your organization has, for example, a mission goal of increasing the number of atheists (or even just of organized atheists), you will have to be responsive to the social realities of what will actually accomplish that. A focus on public education's role in expanding and improving science, reasoning and skepticism, for example, is one of the most important ways to grow atheism, as it is precisely such education that statistically shows a strong correlation with increasing atheism. Broadening appeal to women and minorities will also become an increasing necessity as the white male base not only shrinks but becomes increasingly tapped out. And to draw more women and minorities, you should look for capable women and minority experts and leaders and give them leadership roles, and you should be responsive to their concerns (which will often differ from those of the average white male), and you need to treat them well when they show up (which does not mean "special," but just like everyone else).

The role of differing concerns is more significant than is often recognized. Black atheists are most especially concerned about such issues as inner city poverty and prison reform, areas where religiously-driven values or initiatives (or even religiously-motivated apathy) are the main barrier to making anything better. Theistic retributivism and latent racism often stand in the way of prison reform, for example, an issue any compassionate humanist should be passionately concerned about – as well should even a Machiavellian pragmatist, since most prisoners get out eventually, and you therefore have to live with them; it would obviously be more rational to ensure that prisoners are better people when they get out than when they went in. And that's not the only issue to address with prison reform, as prisons have increasingly become dens of inhumane misery (with high frequencies of rape, intimidation, abuse, violence and racketeering), and now house alarming numbers of relatively innocent victims – as anyone who recognizes the social injustice of the drug war or anti-prostitution laws should acknowledge, but even just the racial disparities in the conviction of the innocent and in the sentencing even of the guilty should be a humanist issue. Black atheists face religious opposition in this domain, a domain that disproportionately affects them, and they rightly see this as an atheist issue. So should the rest of us. Indeed, arguably, religiously-motivated injustices in the prison system is a far more serious threat to the welfare of our nation and our species than teaching creationism in the classroom. Which is not to slight the danger posed by the

latter, but there is something not right about an atheist community caring more about creationism in high schools than Christian hubris and retributivism in prisons.

The same sort of thing should be obvious in education reform. If education is a major factor in making more atheists, and making more atheists is your goal, then shouldn't the disparity in education between white and black neighborhoods be of significant concern to the atheist community? In these respects and others, it's important for atheist groups and organizations who want to grow their numbers and racially integrate their community, as well as increase the number of participating women at least to a level of parity, that they actually ask women and minorities (a lot of them, not just a few) what would get them to attend your events, become members of your organization, and financially support it. Then take their answers seriously. You might not have the means or mission to take direct action on every matter, but there is always something you can do to facilitate the special interests of the groups you want to recruit from.

Social and political activism at the institutional level is unnecessary. There are often plenty of secular-enough organizations for that, although atheists can still create their own, and many do, whether stand-alone or SIGs. But all atheist-serving organizations can at least do a minimal number of things. If you are running such an organization, you can:

- Help encourage your members to get more informed and involved in humanitarian and social justice issues generally (in other words, you can promote morally responsible atheism as a general ideal).
- Facilitate members' access to reliable information and discussion about such issues. For example, by researching and providing the best resources, or direction to discussion venues, specializing in any given matter, or providing your own specialized discussion and networking venues for that purpose, whether moderated online forums or local SIGs (such as through providing to members well-researched start-up instruction manuals for successfully launching and running various kinds of SIG, and providing any other networking and informational resources you can reasonably generate to help with that).
- Sponsor talks from atheist experts in these kinds of issues at atheist conferences and meetups, thereby having an atheist perspective represented on these matters, and communicated to the atheist community. Try also to seek out experts who are atheist women and minorities (and don't just have them talk about their being a woman or a minority; let them speak about the issues they want to or have expertise in), and offer tabling or coordinate events from time to time with minority atheist groups (American blacks [e.g. Black Nonbelievers, Inc. and Black Atheists of Atlanta] and Hispanics [e.g. Hispanic American Freethinkers and Hispanic Atheists Society of America] have already begun developing these, but there are other groups that might like to have a voice, from atheist Filipinos to ex-Muslims; and there is now also Secular Woman [www.secularwoman.org], the first national atheist organization for women).

- Occasionally co-sponsor charitable and educational actions in some of these issues (and be visible doing so). This is what corporations do, purely to grow visibility and market share (the exact same thing atheist organizations are aiming at, only the product they are selling is atheism – preferably morally responsible atheism). Such actions need not be extensive, but should be considered a part of your marketing or PR budgets, as they will generate free advertising from media coverage and grass-roots community awareness. They will also communicate atheist moral values to the wider community, thus representing a different image of atheism than is commonly disseminated.

Other ways to help include providing free or subsidized day care at conferences and events, or even creating a babysitting SIG within your community or campus group where child care duties are rotated among volunteers so parents can attend more atheist meetups or socials. Think also of the disabled. How might you be better serving the deaf or the blind, or even just wheelchair access? These are all examples of what Atheism+ is about.

Even apart from the specific concerns of actual organizations and their active members, atheism still also exists as a widely distributed and highly networked and interacting community. So the question remains. Are we as a community going to actually care about stuff...like sexism, poverty, crime, racism, corruption, injustice, or political and media deception? Or only care when it has to do with religion? Stop to think for a moment how bizarre it would be if atheists only care about things when religion is involved. If you don't think that's weird, you haven't thought about it enough. And yet, indeed, often all these problems do have a lot to do with religion, as I noted in the case of barriers to prison reform. Pick almost any social justice issue troubling our country like that, and standing in the way of solving the problem, often indeed causing the problem, is some religious belief or attitude, or some assumption whose roots lie in religious thinking. Or there is some pseudoscientific or false belief involved, which humanist skepticism would be well-equipped to dispel. Or both.

But even apart from the fact that we should care about our fellow atheists (including the cares and concerns of atheist women and minorities, every bit as much as those of any other atheists) and about our fellow human beings (who suffer from many things worse than religion), and about what values we represent to the world community (and thus whether we speak up as atheists about what we perceive to be the problems of the world and how to solve them), even apart from all that, just to grow our numbers and thus our resources and influence, we need to think outside the box. We need to appeal to a wider demographic than those who just want to talk about God all the time. Far more people, of all demographics in my experience, want to talk about how atheists, as atheists, would solve social problems or make a difference in the world. Or who want atheists, as atheists, to question other things, like claims being made in the political or moral domain, and not just talk about creationism or theology all the time. Those things are fine. I write and give speeches on all those things myself. But I also write and give speeches on many other subjects, and want dearly to hear and read a greater range of topics at atheist events and

venues in turn. I know many less involved atheists who do as well, who would actually attend events and get more involved if they saw that happening.

Certainly almost all atheists really push the ideas of logical rationality, of evidence-based reasoning, of fallacy-detection, of questioning, of applying science to the way we understand the world and philosophy and morality. These ideas often lie at the core of our identity and are ever-present in our discourse. Which means the atheist community can most readily accomplish what other communities can't, which is better informing ourselves. And we can do this on a broad range of issues and thereby produce better-informed conclusions about how to solve the world's problems, conclusions without religious or faith-based premises, conclusions reached from such a well-developed commitment to rationality and skepticism that rivals nearly any other community one can name. We can thus use our atheism, which already gives us this drive for evidence-based reasoning, this drive for knowledge, this drive for a better understanding of reason and logic, to become more informed as political citizens of our respective countries. And not just to make our community better informed politically, but also in terms of our moral values. We can have a more open and honest conversation about what our moral values should be and why, and to what extent we can realise those values in our behavior moving forward. Atheists need this, especially as a community, as a movement. It is necessary for atheists to wake up, if they haven't already, and become more than just atheists. It's time for us to declare ourselves for atheism plus humanism and skepticism.

Need Humanism Be Reasonable?

Joseph Chuman

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This address is dedicated to the life and memory of my esteemed colleague, Dr. Matthew Ies Spetter, who died on 30 December 2012 at the age of 91. Dr. Spetter was Leader Emeritus for the Riverdale Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture, where he had served for 40 years. He also was Leader Emeritus for the New York Society for Ethical Culture, and he had led the Department of Ethics for the three Ethical Culture schools.

Dr. Spetter's formative experiences were shaped by the Second World War. "Ies," as we used to call him, was born in the The Netherlands, and during World War II, was a liaison officer between sections of the Dutch and French undergrounds in Nazi-occupied Europe. He was caught by the Nazis, condemned to death, and was held captive at the Buchenwald and Auschwitz death camps. He escaped the gas chambers as a result of a clerical error, and once freed, served as a witness at the Nuremburg Trials before coming to the United States.

In the U.S., he discovered the Ethical Movement and worked as a leader intern in Brooklyn with the then leader, Henry Neuman. He then served for several decades as the leader of the Riverdale Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture, where he became best known to us, and finished his career as a part-time leader of the New York Society.

Ies received his Ph.D from the New School, trained as a psychotherapist and practiced psychotherapy during his long career. In 1960, he founded the Riverdale Mental Health Clinic which still serves the community. He long taught ethics at the Ethical Culture Schools, chaired the Ethics Department, and taught peace studies at Manhattan College. He, needless to say, lectured often and wrote several books, all of which were dedicated to expounding his philosophy of life.

Ies was always a very formal man, a European man, who took life and Ethical Culture, to which he was whole-heartedly devoted, very seriously. And because he did, many of us take it seriously as well.

There is no doubt that Dr. Spetter's understanding of humanism and Ethical Culture intimately emerged from his personal life experience. To give you a taste of his

humanism, I would like to quote from the very beginning of his book, *Man the Reluctant Brother* (1967). His opening words are rather harrowing. He wrote as follows:

I need truth because I was an eye-witness to the premeditated murder of children.

The killers were men and women of a nation much akin to my own. The children were ours.

I need truth because my generation allowed the ultimately impermissible and because such killing continues. Men everywhere, while protesting their abhorrence, are still willing to permit the impermissible, still willing to kill as “a necessary evil,” still willing to appease their conscience with justifications which fasten the tyranny of evil upon their souls.

I need truth and therefore, behind the veil of language and the logic of argument of this book stands my personal urgency.

If no one is willing to renounce the murder of children how will we then be answerable for anything?

The murder I witnessed was of the children of Europe in World War II. But many more murders have since been added. The killing was against children from France and Holland and Norway and Poland and Russia. They were of all religious backgrounds, though the children of defenseless minorities were the prime targets. Their very defenselessness fanned the ferocity of the killers. Some children were suffocated by gas; some children were buried alive, some children were torn to pieces by fragmentation or fire bombs; some children were given neither food nor water.

All children were taken to be killed: lame children and blind children, children in hospitals and children in the street coming from school, children in light summer clothes, children who had gone for a swim. Yes, even children were taken who wept because they were afraid.

I have seen this and speak of it, not with sentimentality but with outrage and I will not permit it to be locked from your heart.

No doubt, my colleague, Dr. Spetter, did not have a sunny view of the human condition. As a young man, he had witnessed and was a survivor of the darkest underside of human behavior. But he was by no means a defeatist or fatalist. His commitment to humanism was forged out of that sense of the evil propensities of which human beings are capable. And he often said of Ethical Culture and of us, that our mission is to rescue the human from all those forces which seek to degrade it. “Whatever we do,” I recall him saying years ago, “we must not hold human life cheaply.” It is a lesson that has stayed with me ever since.

Just as he begins his book with horror, so he ends it with a note of hope. He wrote:

I hold deeply that each life is a gift which the centuries bestow upon the continuity of existence.

A *Passio Humana*, a passion for Man, is what will negate totalitarianism and oppression, it will open the jail-doors of history, provided our mutuality and love outpace our tools. All of us are constantly close to death and yet we are also in touch with the perpetuation of life through what we create and build.

The sense of future derived from this position has resulted for me in an infusion of insight, which even at moments during my captivity, when death seemed certain and sealed, did not desert me.

Spetter, philosophically, was a kind of existentialist, believing that we can and we must forge our own lives and futures out of our experience, and out of the best that lies within us. His writings and speeches are frequently sprinkled with references to the great humanist Albert Camus, who wrote movingly of the courage and greatness of the human beings; human beings who, when confronted by adversity, have the ability for sacrifice and courage as life calls us to be courageous. He also quoted often from Martin Buber, who wrote poetically about the irreducibility of the humanity that lies within each of us.

It was such ideas that framed Matthew Spetter's understanding of humanism. His humanism reached deeply and ranged widely across human experience. He saw the life of men and women lived out between good and evil, life and death, triumph and tragedy, courage and frailty, hope and despair, what world is and what it might be. And throughout, his mission was to inspire us to summon our agency and courage to fashion a world in which, again, the lives and humanity of women, men and children would be esteemed and not held cheaply. His humanism was a richer and deeper humanism. And from my own humble perspective, I think that my venerable colleague got it right.

I rest upon Spetter's humanism as a prelude to try to explain my understanding of humanism. And to do so I want to focus on the cherished value of reason, and the place of reason in a humanistic philosophy of life.

There is little doubt in my mind, that Dr. Spetter was a rationalist, and so am I. What I mean by this is that I highly value reason and try to conduct my life by its guiding light. In the most intimate sense, I measure my beliefs by the test of reason. I tend to be what you might call an intellectual rigorist. In other words, I like to think of myself as adopting a belief as my own only when it conforms to evidence and to the canons of reason. I want my beliefs to be proportionate to the facts, so to speak, and if a proposition contradicts the facts, the preponderance of evidence or rational consistency, then my inclination is to reject it. I affirm that there is no dignity in asserting what reason tells us is not true. When presented with a proposition that does not sound right to me, my first inclination is to say "prove it," skeptic that I am. When I say that my beliefs need to pass these tests in order for me to accept them, I am not saying that I must personally and directly be witness to the facts and to the evidence that emerges from them. Most of us appropriately accept the beliefs of other people, credentialed and experienced scientists or other experts, for example, whose authority we trust. And this is the way it must be. Our beliefs must often rest upon second hand authority, authority that we believe also passes the tests of evidence and reason.

I want not only my beliefs but my choices in life to be guided by reason. Without reason, we flop around lost, guided only by our hunches, our intuitions and impulses. We need reason as the basis of living a good, productive and dignified life. And we need reason for the sake of sustaining an orderly and civilized society.

Mentioning science, I note that science is the most powerful and productive application of reason that humankind has ever created. Science is the most reliable tool ever forged to grasp a handle on how reality is put together. And the application of science continues to phenomenally expand our understanding of the natural world and to transform the condition of society in ways that would have been totally unimaginable to people just a few centuries ago. I am not a scientist, but I greatly esteem science and the power of the scientific method. If we had to point to a single enterprise that represents the success of the human species it would be I submit, the career of science and the application of science in creating the modern world. I think it is only a fool who dismisses the deliverances of scientific knowledge. And, unfortunately, there are many such fools.

And, finally, I believe that reason can be elegant. I suspect that mathematicians, philosophers and scientists know this well. When previously disassociated and confused ideas rationally pull together, not only do they compellingly grip the mind, they also stimulate our aesthetic sensibilities. In short, ideas and ideas ordered by the template of reason can be beautiful.

It is my commitment to reason and the test of evidence that long ago caused me to give up a belief in a Divine Custodian, a supernatural Being who lords over us, cares for us and judges us. I simply see no evidence, moral or empirical, for such a Being.

It is the cherishing of reason and the salient place that it has in my life and character that leads me to identify myself as a rationalist. But I must say, that having so declared myself, I do not equate humanism, as I understand it, with rationalism. To but it more pointedly, reason alone does not a humanist make. Or, to state it more dryly, reason is a necessary but not sufficient condition to serve as the exclusive basis for humanism.

To be candid, what leads me to deal with this topic is the recent emergence of a multitude of organizations that are known as “rationalist”, “secular,” or “atheist” groups. Some are very new and some have been around a long while but are experiencing a period of revitalization. All but the last cluster would identify themselves as humanist organizations. And since they identify themselves as humanist and so do we, it is easy for those inside Ethical Culture and outside of it to assume that these groups and Ethical Culture are one and the same, and that they are virtually interchangeable with regard to their underlying and animating philosophies. Among the groups I have in mind are the American Humanist Association, which has been around since the 1930s, the Council for Secular Humanism, which publishes *Free Inquiry* magazine, the Secular Coalition of America, the Coalition of Reason, and others. And since many of these groups for the moment seem to be flourishing and are in the public eye, there is a natural tendency to move toward them.

Let me state squarely that I don’t share this tendency. But I must be clear about where I do stand. I wish these organizations well. They do things I believe in and support. And I also firmly believe in coalitions, and I think that Ethical Culture, especially since it

is a small organization, should seek to join coalitions with which we have important overlapping interests. Coalitions, by definition are organizations that are set up for a single purpose, or a small set of purposes, and are made up of organizations that may have very different philosophies and goals, but find common cause in this one project or purpose. When I represented the Ethical Culture Movement on the board of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty, a coalition of many organizations, I was happy sit at the same table with a representative of the Roman Catholic Church, an organization that shared my distain for capital punishment, but with which I shared little else. After all, he represented an organization of sixty million, while I, three thousand, and we each had equally one vote on the Coalition's board.

Likewise, when the secular and rationalist groups are fighting to protect the rights of secularists, or are defending the separation of church and state, or are trying the beat back the churches in their takeover of the public square, or legitimate the place of secularists and atheists in the fabric of American society, I am happy to join in coalition with them to fight for these concerns. These are things I care about. In fact, militantly so.

But my willingness to join with them to support common projects, does not, to my mind, suggest an identification with such organizations, because in significant ways I differ from them, and have a very different view as to what humanism means. I simply do not resonate with their music. Their dance is not a dance I do.

I may be an outlier in the Ethical Culture Movement, and even among my professional colleagues, in that I have never joined nor have I ever been a member of any organization that calls itself "humanist" other than Ethical Culture. This is my sole organizational identification, and Ethical Culture is where my exclusive loyalty lies and always has. I may occasionally attend the meetings of other groups, and even write for their magazines, and as mentioned, am eager to work with them to common political goals, but as an outsider and not as an insider. I have some important things in common with them, but not enough wherein I feel that I belong with them as a fellow member.

And to proclaim a heresy, and for the sake of honest disclosure, I sometimes feel more comfortable and more at home among liberal clergy of the traditional religions, who root their ethics in ancient, venerable and rich traditions, than I do among the members of rationalist and secular groups, whose agendas I often find limited and whose understanding of humanism I often find one-dimensional, dry, and in a certain sense, brittle. It is this that I need to explain at greater length, because it is at the heart of my message.

First, I need to say that this address may seem to some to be an exemplification of what Sigmund Freud brilliantly referred to as the "narcissism of small differences"; that I am making something big out of something small. But I don't think so. I have been a professional in Ethical Culture, if I include my training, for what is now 44 years. It is not a job, but a life absorbing vocational commitment which has long become part and parcel of who I am. It is with me and in me all the time. My humanism is something I live and breathe, and in that sense is near and dear to me and very deeply felt. It helps define where my center of gravity lies. It is something that I think about and reinforce constantly. And

out of this lived commitment, I come to the conclusion and the conviction that humanism encompasses far more than reason or rationalism can contain.

Here is what I mean. However essential reason is to my identity as a humanist, I recognize that reason in the final analysis is a tool. However glorious, reason remains a tool, an instrumentality, a means that enables us to achieve goals and interests that themselves transcend reason and that reason has little to do with. In other words, the nature of human beings is such that the ultimate ends we seek are not themselves rational. For whatever reasons, some people cannot be happy unless they risk their lives scaling mountains, or work endless hours to become prima ballerinas. Some find meaning in turning their bodies into living sculptures through hanging out at the gym and the extraordinary effort of lifting weights six hours a day, six days a week. Others find meaning by teaching others new skills, or by beating out the next guy on the stock market, by being entertainers or winning scrabble competitions, or dedicating themselves to communicating to others ethical values and social ideals. Many others yearn to be parents and nurture children and their lives would be diminished if they were childless. One of the most interesting things about human beings is the almost infinite variety of their values, goals, their dreams and aspirations. And these things we yearn for most do not emerge from reason, they come from the deepest recesses of our being, our hearts, if you will, and very often they emerge from us unbidden. We simply find meaning and pursue our happiness for causes that are diverse and often arbitrary, just as we might prefer chocolate to pistachio, and reason may help us achieve our aspirations and our wants. But reason is not their source. As the philosopher, Schopenhauer, once said, "I can do what I want, but I cannot want what I want." Our wants and desires arise in us from our inner depths, just as our impulses do.

We are creatures of reason to be sure. And reason is essential to life, and it ennobles us. But our humanity extends far more broadly than our reason does. We are also creatures of love and desire, compassion and aspiration, of devotion, of hate and fear, of foibles and foolishness, of joy and sorrow, of courage and self-doubt and irrationality, too, and much, much more. There is much to life that reason cannot penetrate nor explain. There is irony and paradox, tragedy and contradiction, and even aspects of human experience that are mysterious and defy rational understanding. Out of these depths both known and unknown to us comes our creativity, the human impulse to create art and music, poetry and fulfill our infinite longings in the service of which we seek fulfillment and our need to put the stamp of meaning on our lives. This is all part of the human experience, and which a wider humanism embraces, but reason, not so.

Another way to state this is that reason is cold. Reason does not provide warmth, belonging, and does satisfy the need for love, friendship, family, charity, sympathy, devotion, sanctity or forgiveness. But, my point is that my understanding of humanism does.

The Roman playwright, Terrence, had once written, "I am a human being. Therefore nothing human is alien from me." The infinite varieties of human expression should be a source of curiosity and interest for us. The secularist and rationalist groups tend to be anti-religious, condemning the religions on the grounds that so many of the

beliefs and doctrines of the traditional faiths are patently irrational. Indeed the very idea of faith as a justification for holding beliefs that are counter-rational is itself irrational. There is, of course, much that is valid in this critique that I agree with and its validity as far as it goes. And much evil is perpetrated in the name of religion, to be sure. Parenthetically for me, one imposing question is what role the new Pope, whose ascension is reported with such saccharine goodness and light, really played in Argentina's "dirty war," in which vast swaths of the Catholic church had complicity with fascism, murder, torture and repression. I am not naïve to the evil done in the name of religion or when religion is conjoined with political force.

But there is another side. If religion is a human creation, and I believe that it is, then it is a human expression, just as art and music are human expressions, and like art and music is very widespread, and has given birth to traditions that are both ancient and very complex, and in their own ways highly sophisticated. Religion can also be a quest for ultimate meaning and therefore its significance shouldn't be alien to us. If this is the case, then it seems that religion should at least be an object of curiosity and fascination as a human expression, rather than wholesale rejection. And we can see aspects of religion within the humanist frame and not exclusively as humanism's enemy.

A wider humanism can even understand the irrational as a human expression. The Greek tragedians certainly understood the suffering of tragic figures who were victimized by their own fatal flaws, which were as much part of their humanity as was their capacity for reason. And out of their irrational actions, generated by those tragic flaws, the ancient playwrights created great art which speaks to our common humanity over a gulf of more than two thousand years.

I am by no means saying that we should embrace beliefs, religious or otherwise, that our reason tells us are not so. We can reject them and refute them. Only that we appreciate those beliefs as human expressions that in their exploration broaden and enrich our own sense of the human experience and what it means to be human.

My message should be clear. Need humanism be reasonable? Yes, absolutely, but it need be much more. I think that a humanism that identifies humanism merely with the rational, is flat, one dimensional and from my point of view, badly impoverished. It may be the reason why so many of these rational and secular groups are overly intellectualistic, have no communal life, and barely appreciate the humanity of association that embraces families and children. They are also politically quietistic for the most part. In their over emphasis in winnowing the human experience to its rational core and their aversion anything that doesn't meet the test of reason, they seem to me not at all different from the practices of religious devotees who are overly fastidious with the purity of doctrine, that is, those whom they readily condemn.

My humanism and specifically Ethical Culture, which is not focused primarily on reason, but on the humanity that dwells within each of us, potentially allows for a wider appreciation of human expression in its multi-dimensionality and its myriad expressions. Moreover, our commitment to "deed above creed" keeps our sights away from picayune arguments about belief, rational and otherwise, and more directed on alleviating human

suffering in concrete ways. Ethical Culture, thereby, keeps us focused on interpersonal engagement and action in ways in which these other associations, in my view, don't.

In closing, I seek a humanism that is sensitive to human experience in its multiple manifestations; that is moved not only by reason, but by matters of the heart that reason does not reach. I want a humanism that honors reason but is also moved by compassion and love. I want a humanism that rejoices in the triumphs of human beings but also embraces the human being, knowing his frailties and imperfections. I want a humanism that can respect the achievements of great men and women but is no less moved by the precious and ineffable humanity we encounter when we look upon the face of a child.

