

HUMANISM AND THE WELFARE STATE

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Three years ago, I did a paper on liberal religion and economic justice for a Unitarian Universalist ministers' study group.¹ In that essay, I tried to address the question, "Given our basic Humanistic and liberal religious ethical principles, what do we mean by the phrase, economic justice?" And does our present North American capitalistic system meet our basic ethical criteria for a just economic order?" I expressed my eagerness to share some of my thinking on that subject with my fellow Humanists and to deal with the broader question of social justice through a discussion of Humanist attitudes toward the modern welfare state.

And so I stand before you this evening, not as an expert on either social ethics in general or welfare policy in particular, but as a socially involved clergyman concerned to establish a firm theoretical foundation for a Humanist *praxis* on social welfare.

I intend to do two things. First, I will try define certain limits for a Humanist social ethic and to suggest a possible approach within those limits. Second, I will propose a stand and practical measures that Humanists might take regarding the state of social welfare programs in the United States at the end of President Reagan's first term.

Let me begin with a few general remarks about Humanist approaches to social issues. It should not be too surprising that Humanists have serious differences about social and political questions, just as we differ in basic philosophical orientation. Some of us are pragmatists, others are positivists of one kind or another, and a few are existentialists. Similarly, we are liberals, conservatives, socialists, or libertarians, with or without the prefix, "neo." So far as I know, no present-day North American Humanist claims to be either a fascist or a Soviet- or Chinese-style communist.

And that is significant. We do agree on something in the socio-political realm: we reject all forms of totalitarianism, either of the right and the left. To put it positively, we have a commitment (I am tempted to call it a *religious* commitment) to democracy and democratic methods of decision-making and rule, both in society at large and in our Humanist organizations and institutions.

Our commitment to democracy, in turn, is based on a basic consensus on certain other principles. We see humans as rational beings capable of self-rule and altruistic behavior - a condition without which democracy would be impossible. However, we also realize, without adopting anything like a doctrine of total depravity, that humans are also capable of ferociously destructive anti-social behavior. As the late Reinhold Niebuhr once put it, humankind is good enough to make democracy possible and bad enough to make it necessary. Thus, a democratic state is not only desirable but needed, both to permit the development of rational and altruistic behavior and to curb and control anti-social actions by individuals, institutions, or even the state itself. Humanists, by and large, are not anarchists.

Another Humanist fundamental is a strong belief in individual freedom, so long as one person's freedom does not interfere with anyone else's. Humanists recognize that freedom is not an absolute, nor is it an end in itself: in Martin Buber's phrase, it is not a goal but a footbridge. It is a means to the end of the fullest possible human self-development within the limits of a sustainable global ecosystem.

A fourth commonly held Humanist commitment is to the uniqueness of each human individual. But there is some confusion in Humanist circles over the aim of promoting the individuality of every person and the modern ideology of Individualism. This ideology, the appearance of which coincided with the triumph of capitalism in Western Europe and North America, asserts that the rights of the private person to the acquisition and use of property always and in every case take precedence over the rights of the community or society as a whole. (In liberal religious groups, the doctrine has been extended to assert the priority of any and all individual interests and claims over those of the institutions or organization as a whole.) In today's technologically complex and economically interdependent world, living under the threat of ecological catastrophe and nuclear destruction, such a doctrine seems to me to be dangerously anachronistic.

To conclude this short list of Humanist "Fundamentals" for now, I would include the principle of *secularism*. Secularism asserts that religious dogmas and institutions should neither be tied to the state nor control it. In the United States, this is usually expressed by the phrase, "separation of church and state." Humanists oppose state support (and in some cases even such passive benefits as tax exemptions on buildings) of any religious institution, including religious schools, and oppose religious dictation of government policies, such as prohibitions on abortion or the mandating of prayers or religious teachings in government-funded schools.

But here again, the principle of secularism is susceptible to misinterpretation by some Humanists, for whom "separation of church and state" also means separation of religion and politics. In a pluralistic and democratic society of competing interest groups, of people from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, there is no way to separate religion and politics.² Our very political system was born in and nurtured by a religious sect, the Puritans. The doctrine of church-state separation is itself a religious doctrine, coming out of the Anabaptist tradition of the Radical Reformation. Since the time of the Hebrew prophets, spokespersons for particular religious views have asserted and exercised their right to criticize and denounce government actions in the name of their religious convictions. Modern religiously-inspired social action programs are a continuation of that tradition, and both our political and religious lives would be impoverished without such programs, for then political controversy would be little more than a cynical game, a clash of social, economic, ethnic, racial, and ideological interest-groups, each out to get as much as it can for itself, and religion would be a completely privatized activity, a kind of spiritual masturbation.

Thus, I see nothing wrong with religious people, either as individuals or as corporate bodies, petitioning and demonstrating for or against particular issues. Every faith has its moral imperatives, which have both private and

public aspects. If a particular religious group is opposed to nuclear war, for example, but not necessarily to all wars, is it enough that it tells its own members that they should not serve in the armed forces in such a war, or should not work in businesses involved in making nuclear weapons? Obviously not, in my opinion. Such a group is morally obligated, it seems to me, to act in the public realm to make its views known and to try to persuade fellow citizens and public officials to take or to refrain from taking certain actions in order to prevent nuclear war.

The problem comes, in a democratic, pluralistic, and secular society, when one church or coalition of churches tries to impose its particular prohibitions on society as a whole, as in the case of abortion, prohibition of alcoholic beverages or gambling, or imposition of Sunday closing laws; or tries to force its beliefs, symbols, and rituals on others, as in the case of mandated school prayers and Bible readings, Christmas displays, or religious ceremonies held on public property.³

To sum up on Humanist "Fundamentals," then: despite differences in emphasis and details, we share a deep commitment to certain working principles - to democracy, the essential worth and dignity of every person, to the highest degree of personal freedom consistent with the rights of others and a sustainable ecosystem, the promotion and enhancement of the individuality and self-realization of persons, and secularism, capsulized in the phrase, "separation of church and state." Or to put it negatively, Humanists by and large reject assertions based on appeals to the innate sinfulness of human nature, to divine revelation, to race, nationalism, "blood," or other "irrational" factors. I see no reason why these principles should not apply as much to our stands on social, economic, and political issues as to religious, philosophical, and psychotherapeutic matters.

As Humanists, then, we seek to derive our ethical principles and stands on social issues not from divine commands or traditional religious dogmas, but through the use of reason and human experience. We may value the Commandments of Judaism, the courage and moral stands of the Hebrew Prophets, and the ethical teachings of Jesus, Buddha, or Mohammed, but I think we can all agree that we seek independent validation, outside any particular religious tradition, for any system of ethics guiding our activities on social issues. By the same token, we reject any ethical system based on what Marx called "ideology" - that is, false consciousness dictated by the interests of a particular class, whether that class be the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, the petit-bourgeoisie, or one race or sex.

A Humanist social ethic, in other words, must stand independently of any and all theological or ideological precepts and any and all economic or political "interests." It must be truly universal. Humanists therefore reject dogmatic Marxism, Nationalism, "Free Enterprise" Conservatism, and all ideologies based on the special interests of one of race, nation, sect, class, or sex. However, it may be advisable, possible, or even necessary from time to time for Humanists to form coalitions on an ad hoc basis with more narrowly focussed groups to support or oppose specific measures or causes. Some very conservative church groups, for example, agree with Humanists on church-state separation.

A century ago, more or less, the young Felix Adler worked out an ethical philosophy and its religious expression on just such a universal basis, on the foundation of Immanuel Kant's thoughts on "Practical Reason." Adler rejected both socialism and free-enterprise capitalism, and developed a public philosophy he called "Organized Democracy." Through the New York Society for Ethical Culture, which he founded in 1876, Adler developed an outstanding independent school system (originally intended for working-class children), founded a visiting nurse program and other social services, aided in the programs of settlement houses for recent immigrants, supported regulation of tenement houses, advocated changes in child labor laws, and in the early period, backed small-scale cooperative workshops, communal living arrangements, and Western colonization schemes for unemployed workers. However, Adler's basic Neo-Kantian philosophy, summarized in a paraphrase of Kant's Categorical Imperative - "Act so as to bring out the best in others, and thereby in thyself" - never became the official doctrine of the Ethical Movement. Adler's contemporaries in Ethical leadership had their own ideas on ethics, as have their successors. And in any case, Adler died literally at the dawn of the modern welfare state in this country - in April 1933.

So Adler's social outlook, formed as it was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, is only slightly helpful in formulating a Humanist social outlook for the end of the twentieth century.⁴

Just a month before Adler's death and a week or two after Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural, another group of Humanists tried to articulate a social policy for the movement. Let me quote a bit of Scripture:

The Humanists are firmly convinced that existing and acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate, and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible. The goal of Humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world.⁵

It should be noted that this language (incredibly awkward as it was, I might add) was adopted by the original signers of Humanist Manifesto I in the depths of the Great Depression, just a few months after Norman Thomas (Socialist) and William Z. Foster (Communist) polled nearly a million votes between them in the election won by Roosevelt. With the coming of the New Deal, World War II, and the triumph of Social Democracy in Western Europe and Stalinist Communism in Eastern Europe (not to mention Maoist Communism in East Asia), this moderately socialist consensus within the Humanist social pronouncements have been for the most part moderately liberal in wording and largely ineffectual in practice.

Clearly, then, it is time for the formulation of a new approach to social issues by organized Humanists. Neither the old theologies nor the old

ideologies will do. And neither will it do, in my opinion, to rule out all Humanist corporate involvement in controversial social issues on a *priori* grounds. That is an evasion of ethical responsibility.

What I am suggesting, provisionally, is that find an ideologically neutral basis (relatively speaking) for our thinking on this matter, and that we work with the theory of John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971), summarized in the phrase, "Justice as fairness." This theory has set the standard for American liberal social ethics in our time, and despite its widely noted faults⁶ at least provides a reasonable starting-point for our theorizing. The theory meets two of our basic criteria: it is rational and free from any obvious religious or ideological bias. (Wolff claims, however, that it reflects "...the liberal-Humanitarian utopian mentality."⁷)

Let me summarize my understanding of Rawls's theory of justice as fairness from my earlier paper:

Rawls's basic idea is deceptively simple. ...He speaks over and over again of justice as fairness, a more-or-less self-evident proposition. Rawls, in the Lockean tradition of social contract theory, not the Rousseauian) assumes an "initial situation" in which people meet as equals behind a "veil of ignorance." "This initial situation is fair between individuals as moral persons, that is, as rational beings with their own ends and capable, I shall assume, of a sense of justice" (*A Theory of Justice*, p. 12). ...

...Rawls rejects utilitarianism:

"...Once the principles of justice are thought of as arising from an original agreement in a situation of equality, it is an open question whether the principle of utility would be acknowledged. Offhand it seems hardly likely that persons who view themselves as equals, entitled to press their claims upon one another, would agree to a principle which may require lesser life prospects for some simply for the sake of a greater sum of advantages enjoyed by others. Since each desires to protect his interests, his capacity to advance his conception of the good, no one has a reason to acquiesce in an enduring loss for himself in order to bring about a greater net balance of satisfaction. In the absence of strong and lasting benevolent impulses, a rational man would not accept a basic structure merely because it maximized the algebraic sum of advantages irrespective of its permanent effects on his own basic rights and interests. Thus it seems that the principle of utility is incompatible with the conception of social cooperation of individuals for mutual advantage. It appears to be inconsistent with the idea of reciprocity implicit in the notion of a well-ordered society. (*Justice*, p. 14.)

Rawls adds that the initial bargain or contract is made publicly and is understood by all parties, and that the terms of the contract are freely chosen. There are two basic principles: (1) "equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties" and (2) "social and economic inequalities, for example

inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society" (Justice, pp. 14-15).

Nearly 300 pages further along, Rawls refines and elaborates these two principles, so far as institutions are concerned:

"First Principle - Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

"Second Principle - Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" (Justice, p. 302).

Rawls modifies these two "final" principles with two "priority rules":

First Priority Rule (The Priority of Liberty) - The principles of justice are to be ranked in lexical order and therefore liberty can be restricted only for the sake of liberty.

"There are two cases: (a) a less extensive liberty must strengthen the total system of liberty shared by all; and (b) a less than equal liberty must be acceptable to those with the lesser liberty.

Second Priority Rule (The Priority of Justice over Efficiency and Welfare) - The second principle of justice is lexically prior to the principle of efficiency and to that of maximizing the sum of advantages; and fair opportunity is prior to the difference principle. There are two cases: (a) an inequality of opportunity must enhance the opportunities of those with the lesser opportunity; [and] (b) an excessive rate of saving must on balance mitigate the burden of those bearing this hardship" (Justice, pp. 302-303).

Rawls then sums up:

"General Conception - All social primary goods - liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect - are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored" (Justice, p. 303).

These general principles, derived logically and rationally, can provide an agreed-upon standard for testing practices and proposals constitutive of a just economic and social order. Rawls himself makes several suggestions, which he says would work within the context of either a capitalist (with extensive private ownership) or a socialist (with extensive public ownership) system. However, we should note that "...a just constitution that secures the liberties of equal citizenship," including "liberty of conscience and freedom of thought" are prerequisites. Among Rawls's proposals are "fair (as opposed to formal) equality of opportunity," assurance of "equal chances of education and culture for persons similarly endowed and motivated," "free choice of occupation," and a government serving five major functions:

(1) Allocation - to keep the price system workably competitive and to prevent the formation of unreasonable market power; (2) Stabilization - to bring about reasonably full employment and free choice of occupation; (3) Transfer - to establish and maintain a "social minimum" to guarantee a certain level of well-being and honor the claims of need; (4) Distribution - through taxation and necessary adjustments in the rights of property, gradually and continually to correct the distribution of wealth and prevent concentrations of power detrimental to the fair value of political liberty and fair equality of opportunity, and to raise the revenues that justice requires, preferably through a progressive expenditure tax; and (5) Exchange - to balance the claims of special-interest groups.

Further proposals include strict limitations on private inheritance, pollution controls, and other familiar liberal-democratic ideas. By and large, Rawls feels that a truly free market system is more fair and just than a centralized planning process. He also accepts a reasonable degree of economic and social inequality in wages, perquisites, etc., (the "difference principle") so long as such differences are actually beneficial to the least advantaged members of society.⁸

From the General to the Particular

With "The Theory" in mind, we can now proceed to a consideration of the welfare state, with particular reference to the United States since the New Deal.

Consistent with the basic Humanist principle of the inherent worth and dignity of every human being and Rawls's General Conception, I would hope that all Humanists would agree that every person is entitled, as a matter of right, to certain goods:

- HOUSING, even if only a clean, safe dormitory bed;
- FOOD, to meet minimum nutritional standards;
- CLOTHES, clean and appropriate to the season;
- HEALTH CARE, treatment with respect;
- EDUCATION to the limit of each individual's capacity; and
- PROTECTION against victimization and crime, especially for children, the elderly, retarded, mentally ill, handicapped, etc.

These rights have nothing to do with anyone's personal character, background, or attitude. For example, drunks and other addicts, the incurably lazy, those we consider immoral or otherwise obnoxious are entitled to the same basic minimum to maintain human dignity as the virtuous, the "deserving poor" of song and story, the honest drudge down on his or her luck, and so forth. It is ironic that even under Reagan, we take better care of most convicted murderers than we do of the homeless or young unwed mothers and their babies.)

Since it is a fact that for whatever reasons, large numbers of persons can't maintain even a decent social minimum, society as a whole is left with responsibility for providing for their needs. How? There are three basic ways:

1. Through strong nuclear and extended family ties.
2. Through churches, synagogues, and private secular charities.
3. Through various levels of government.

It is obvious that families, religious institutions, and private charities can no longer meet these needs. The nuclear family, though stronger than some sociologists think, has been buffeted in recent years by a rising divorce rate and the unwillingness or inability of many absent fathers to keep up alimony and child-support payments. The large extended, multi-generational family, though still around, has weakened considerably. Religious institutions and private charities get only the crumbs from the tables of the middle class, and rely heavily on tax exemptions and outright government grants for survival. That leaves government as the chief source of money to support such entitlements. Hence the welfare state. It is not socialism but a substitute for socialism; if we had a socialist society, in my view, there would be no need for specific entitlement programs.

Although some trace it back to Bismarckian Germany in the 1880's, the modern welfare state really began in the United States, the older British Commonwealth, and western Europe in response to the needs of working-class and middle-class people in the Great Depression. There was nothing particularly revolutionary or even socialistic about most of the early welfare-state programs: old-age and disability pensions, unemployment insurance, minimum-wage and hour laws, federal backing for home mortgages, legalization of trade-union activity, and more adequate funding of state and local relief programs, etc. Socialists and (in the Popular Front period) Communists supported these measures, but did not benefit from them, politically. The beneficiaries in the United States were main-line liberals in the Democratic Party. (For what it is worth, the wartime Beveridge Plan in Britain, a blueprint for postwar social welfare programs, was drafted by leaders of the ill-fated Liberal Party, not the soon-to-be-triumphant Labor Party.)

It is important to note that the welfare state was not and is not a step towards socialism, but a means of keeping the socialist wolf from the door. The New Deal in this country and similar programs in France and Britain probably saved capitalism from either socialist revolution or fascist reaction in those years, and such programs have contributed greatly to the steady weakening of the traditional socialist movement in the West ever since World War II. In trying to dismantle the American welfare state, the Reagan Administration and its millionaire supporters demonstrate not only their ignorance of history but their ingratitude as well. It has given the United States a society of unprecedented social stability, almost impervious to any appeal for truly radical economic change.

The only really new welfare-state program added since World War II have been in the area of health care and social services for the elderly. Britain and the social democracies of Western Europe have gone much further with comprehensive, publicly funded health care ("socialized medicine") than has the United State. Here, we stopped with providing minimal health insurance to Social Security pensioners (Medicare) and charity medicine to

those on public assistance (Medicaid). Both systems are inadequate and subject to abuse, principally by doctors and private hospitals and clinics. Public housing programs had begun before World War II and virtually stopped by the 1960s. The Federal Government has been out of the low-income housing business (except for the elderly) for about 20 years, although all levels of government are still underwriting middle- and upper-income housing through subsidized interest rates, tax exemptions and abatements, and other incentives. The oldest nutrition program in this country is the soup kitchen, followed closely by the low-cost school lunch. Both are still with us, supplemented by Food Stamps and targeted programs like WIC (for mothers with babies and small children). All these nutrition programs have been cut severely by the Reagan Administration. Since the mid-1960's, thanks to increased longevity and greater political clout of the elderly, a few new token social services have been added for older people, who tend to vote in higher proportions than younger folks and are therefore paid attention to by politicians of all stripes.

So in terms of new programs, the welfare state really hasn't expanded very much since World War II. What has grown is the number of poor people in this country. Over the last 30 years, the poor have increased in numbers, darkened in complexion, and have become more female. In the rapid inflation of the 1970's, welfare payments failed to keep up with the real cost of living, while real income of middle-class people, which had been rising steadily since the 1950s, suddenly stopped growing and even regressed slightly. The result was the Tax Revolt of the late 1970s and the "Voodoo Economics" of the Reagan Counter Revolution.

For Humanists, as I see it, the question is not whether or not to support the continuation of welfare-state programs, but how to save those that are left, repair the damage to those hurt by the cuts (including thousands of children who may never recover from slashes in prenatal and child nutrition and healthcare programs), how to reform programs to make them more humane for the recipients, how to rehumanize the welfare bureaucracy and restore a sense of personal caring in the delivery of services, and only lastly what new programs to add. (A more comprehensive and cost-effective system of prepaid medical care through greater use of HMOs would be first on my add-on list. Provision of free or low-cost day care for working mothers of small children would be another.)

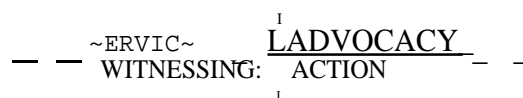
I totally reject the argument put forward by some Reagan supporters that the current welfare system imposes an unfair burden of taxation on the struggling middle class and the enterprising upper class. Comparative studies year after year show that the total taxes paid by Americans to all levels of government, expressed as a percentage of income, are in the lower-middle range for industrialized countries. Moreover, poor people often pay higher taxes, proportionately, than middle- or upper-income people, because of the regressive nature of Social Security, property, and sales taxes in this country. And in any case, the major scandal so far as Federal taxes go is that so many of the dollars are being diverted from civilian programs (of which social welfare is only a part) to an enormous and totally unprecedented peacetime military buildup. I cannot work up much

sympathy for these middle-class tax protesters who claim that their civil liberties are being abused because the government is taking money away from them and giving it to teenaged girls who have babies out of wedlock in order to get on welfare. I hate to tell them this, but so long as the deindustrialization of America goes unchecked and unskilled young people can't get jobs, those teenagers, if such be the case, have a better Constitutional and moral right to have babies out of wedlock than middle-class suburbanites have to build a swimming pools, buy second Cadillacs, or send their kids to private schools. The middle class has no right to such amenities at the expense of the poor.

While I am not recommending a Marxist or even a neo-Marxist approach to social issues for Humanist groups, one recently revived concept, picked up from the early Marx, does deserve our attention. That is the idea of "praxis," now widely used by Catholic Liberation Theology and some religious educators (Thomas Groome, in particular.) "Praxis" is a Greek word that simply means "practice," but has been adapted lately to signify the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, reflection and action. The action is informed and guided by the theory, arrived at through reflection and study, and in turn is modified by the experience of the practice. Praxis is thus a testing of theory and a carrying out of reflection. It also implies reciprocal relations with others and being influenced and taught by those one aims to teach or influence. Children teach their teachers, publics inform their politicians, members of religious communities and Humanist groups engage in dialogue with their professional and lay leaders.

I suggest that we try to develop a praxis for Humanist social action. It would begin (with reflection, such as I have tried to present tonight, on the philosophical, ethical, and if you will, the religious grounding of our social attitudes. We would then proceed to study and try to understand the facts of particular issues - the state of the welfare state, for example. Such understanding should be more than academic: it should be based whenever possible on direct experience of the problem and empathy with the people involved. It should involve our hearts as well as our heads. (I know that this will be hard for a movement so predominantly male, white, middle-aged, and middle-class.)

Then we can go on to action. Several years ago, some practitioners of religiously-based social action came up with a useful model or "window" for social action. It looks like this:



It's fairly obvious what we mean by "service." We go out and do something concrete and tangible for people: run a soup kitchen, provide beds for homeless people, open a clinic. The New York Ethical Society has been doing this for over a hundred years, and is still at it. Advocacy can take many forms: going with a member when she or he applies for a specific social service or has a problem with some bureaucrat, writing a letter to the editor on an issue, or testifying at a public hearing. "Witnessing" means

putting yourself and your organization, in some cases, on the line: in Flushing, for example, the Quakers have a silent vigil to protest the arms race; every Saturday they stand in front of the Post Office with placards for an hour. A picket line is another means of witnessing. Much of the activity of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s involved witnessing. Finally, "action" in this context means primarily political activity, which can be anything from campaigning for specific legislation to supporting candidates for office.

The four modes or forms of social action are presented as a grid to show their inter-relatedness. We often have to become advocates on behalf of those for whom we provide services. In becoming advocates for people in need, we often are called upon or find ourselves witnessing to our faith. When we pass a resolution on hunger and send it to members of Congress, are we advocating, witnessing, or lobbying (engaging in political action)? The lines dividing these modes of social action are broken, not solid. And from time to time, given a particular circumstance, we as Humanists are called upon by the ethical imperatives of our tradition to engage in all of them.

Whether we should engage in such action as corporate bodies or merely as individuals has been a lively issue in nearly all segments of the Humanist and liberal religious movement. The view that religious institutions as such should stay scrupulously out of social and political controversies has long played what I believe to be a pernicious role in the Western religious tradition, and has been dominant in American religion for most of this country's history. It also has a name: *pietism* - the belief that social change will come only through the conversion of individuals, through changing individual minds and attitudes; and that the sole job of the religious institution is the spiritual care of individuals. It assumes radical dichotomies between soul and body, mind and matter, public and private, the sacred and the profane, which I believe are close to heretical notions among Humanists. In this country, the silence of the churches prolonged the agony of slavery before the Civil War and served to perpetuate racial segregation for a century afterwards. In Germany, the silence of the churches before, during, and after the rise of Hitler and during the Holocaust was a universally acknowledged scandal. By and large, the churches have learned their lesson: in an age of mass communication and mass movements it is not enough for people of good will to act as isolated individuals. We must speak and act also through our organizations, and especially through those organizations that claim to represent humankind's highest ethical teachings - our religious organizations. That was the lesson of the Holocaust and the American Civil Rights and Vietnam Antiwar movements. The lesson is being repeated now, for those who didn't get the message the first time, in today's ecological, women's and other liberation movements, and in the worldwide campaign for nuclear disarmament.

In comparison with these issues, in the face of ecological and/or nuclear catastrophe within a generation, it may seem futile for us to argue about whether we should be spending 17 or 25 percent of the Federal budget on social-welfare programs. But people are in need: they are hungry, they are

sleeping in the streets, parks, and doorways right outside this building tonight, and in this building tonight. As a movement, we Humanists are still only at the first stage of developing a praxis in regard to domestic human needs for what Rawls has called the "social minimum." We have barely begun to reflect on the subject. And no doubt, we have a great variety of ideas on what to do about the myriad of problems. We won't even begin to solve them tonight. But we can begin the process of reflection and study, the first step.

Are we, as Humanists, for the welfare state or against it? The question seems silly. The welfare state is a fact, and has been for forty years. Nobody planned it: it just developed as a series of pragmatic responses to specific needs that were not being met by "free market" capitalism. The welfare state has never and does not now constitute a threat to capitalism as an economic system; rather, it helped to save that system during the period of its greatest crisis - from the Great Depression to the postwar period. It needs to be seen as a stage in the development of late capitalism, not as its antithesis.

In the best of all possible worlds, the welfare state probably wouldn't be necessary. Everyone would have enough money (if we still had money) to meet all basic needs, from the cradle to the grave (a phrase from the Beveridge Report, by the way). Many have advocated replacing the present system of categorical aid programs with a guaranteed annual minimum income. Experiments with that concept, however, have not been terribly successful. Many poor and under-educated people have trouble managing even small incomes, especially if they are too small in the first place. Many New York welfare recipients cannot pay their rent on the first of the month and have enough left for food for the last week or ten days of the month. Alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, and unstable family relations, all too common in a culture of poverty, make it necessary to stipulate the purposes for which money is to be used: hence Food Stamps, two-party rent checks, and Medicaid.

No doubt the administration of these programs could be improved, both in terms of making them more effective and more humane. Decentralization of service centers, while maintaining national minimum standards of eligibility and payment levels, would help enormously. The huge centralized welfare offices in New York City are not only hard for poor people to get to, but incredibly dehumanizing once the client gets inside. The desensitizing of overworked caseworkers and the rest of the welfare bureaucracy is a real and serious problem. It is only made worse by the heartless cuts of recent years (on the order of 25 to 40 percent for most programs) and demands for more and more stringent eligibility requirements. The scandalous behavior of the Reagan Administration in knocking half a million people off Social Security disability pensions and then defying court orders to put many of them back on is a case in point.

The first priority of Humanists should be to restore the cuts. Some reforms are no doubt needed, but first we need to get thousands of homeless people under decent shelter, begin once more to provide prenatal care for

poor women, and see to it that poor children at least get a little bit to eat at school if they can't get it at home. Then we can talk about reform.

And to conclude these remarks, I want to ask the Board of Directors of NACH (who are the only ones who can make policy decisions for the organization) to remove one giant obstacle to the development of a Humanist praxis on the welfare state or any of the other issues considered at this conference. I call upon them to remove from the NACH Bylaws the prohibition against this organization taking any stands on controversial social issues, forthwith.

The related matter of clergy holding public office is open to serious question: it depends on the individual and the particular situation. A number of clergy are or have been elected to Congress, and an ordained Baptist minister has just completed a highly publicized run for the Presidency of the United States. As it has happened in nearly every case, the individual candidate or office holder has been able to establish his or her independence from the church he or she has been affiliated with. The late Walter Judd, former Congressman Robert Drinan, Senator John Danforth, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson never stood as candidates of the Methodist, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, or Baptist churches, respectively. I am sure that their religious beliefs informed their policy decisions and stands on issues; and I see nothing objectionable in that. But if they had used their candidacies to stir up interfaith animosity or their offices to promote the interests or their particular churches, they would have violated the written and implied covenants that regulate U.S. political life.

Another obvious violation of those covenants, in my view, would be the formation in this country of a political party under control of a particular church, such as the Christian Democratic parties of Europe and some Latin American countries, or direct church endorsement of particular candidates for office. In the context of the political traditions of North America, at least, religiously-based social action should be centered around particular issues, not parties or candidates.

(FOOTNOTES)

1. "The Waltz of the Oxymorons: Liberal Religion and Economic Justice" (1981).
2. Just this month, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued an interesting document on this subject. (*The New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1984.) Discussion of this issue has been a feature of the 1984 U.S. presidential campaign.
3. On the related questions of clergy running for or holding public office and church-run political parties, see the "Additional Note" at the end of this paper.
4. For details of Adler's social ideas and programs, see Horace Friess Felix Adler and Ethical Culture, (1981), Benny Kraut *From Judaism to Ethical Culture*, (1979), Howard Radest (1969), and two of Adler's own works *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* (1918) and *The Reconstruction of the Spiritual Ideal* (1924).
5. "Humanist Manifesto" (1933), [ec. 14.
6. See Daniels *Reading Rawls* (1974), Wolff *Understanding Rawls*, (1977) and Ackerman *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (1980).
7. *Understanding Rawls*, p. 138.
8. All quotes are from *A Theory of Justice*. The practical proposals are presented in Chapter V, Sections 41-44. The "just savings principle" refers to capital accumulation - how much can fairly be put aside, at the expense of the present generation, for the sake of future generations?