

The Ethics of Response - Ability

Part VI of The Enigma of Consciousness

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Introduction to Part Six

Being alive and being conscious of being alive means making responses to our specific environments of living. These environments include our outer encounters as well as our inner feelings, rumblings, desires, emotions, thoughts, and awarenesses.

The main point to be developed in Part Six is that the action that flows from the religious ferment described in this book can no longer be based on religious beliefs or religious moralities. Nor can such action be based on secular principles, philosophies, or ideologies. Does this mean that there is no basis for action or that everyone is “right” to select their own basis and do whatever they want? No, it does not mean that. Such thoroughgoing relativism is simply one more humanly created philosophy that cannot be our basis for action if we are to begin with being our Being as profound humans.

Chapter 30

A Being Basis for Responsible Action

The basis for responsible action is profound humanness itself. How can this be a basis at all? What does such a basis mean? Here are some hints:

When humans have spoken of acting from love, they have sometimes meant acting from profound humanness.

When humans have spoken of acting in freedom, they sometimes meant acting from profound humanness.

When humans have spoken of acting in hope, they have sometimes meant acting from profound humanness.

When humans have spoken of acting in trust of the goodness of Reality, they have sometimes meant acting from profound humanness.

In the following chapters I will explore what it means to act from profound humanness. Our best secular thinking, our best religious thinking, and all our best disciplines, rules, and principles can have some meaningful connection with profound humanness. It is that connection that makes them best.

Nevertheless, all philosophy and all religion is a finite creation of the human species. Religion is a temporal social practice, not an Eternal verity. So to base our responsible action on our religion or on our secular philosophy is to base our responsible action on something less than Reality. "Less than Reality" will always mean some form of illusion or substitute for Reality, for "less than Reality" will always mean an approximation of Reality. But since Reality is Infinitely Mysterious, "approximation" means "some support from Reality" as well as "some illusion about Reality."

The development of thought in the following chapters will attempt to spell out how we can understand "responsible action" as action based on profound humanness, not human creations. I have already explored how all the religions of the planet are finite human creations, built on the foundation of some humanly created primal metaphor. Humans have not always known this. We are now living in an interreligious age and a post-everything time. Humanity is undergoing a vast leap in consciousness. When we confront the bigoted craziness of so many people, political leaders, and social movements, we may jump to the conclusion that human consciousness is in a worse state than ever before. But that understanding does not go deep enough. The desperate hubbub of our times is in large measure a terrified reaction against the big changes that are happening and are required of us. These changes, if embraced, rather than fled or fought, are positive possibilities.

All religious communities, all philosophical communities, and all ideological communities are being challenged by the times in which we live to consider a fresh basis for responsible action. In the next chapter I will describe the interior roots of our motivation for responsible action. And in the chapters after that I will explore the more outward aspects of choosing specific responsible actions in real life situations.

Chapter 31

The Roots of Motivation

In this chapter I will explore how the motivation to act, either in glorious compassion or in horrific malice, is not rooted in our thoughts or sensations or emotions but in our states of consciousness.

So what are thoughts? What are sensations? What are emotions? And most of all, what are states of consciousness? The following chart holds these interrelated dynamics in an order that helps me share my experience of these dynamics, how I distinguish them, and how each relates to the topic of motivation.

States of Bodily Function	Thinking	<p>Thinking includes the human capacity for language, for art, for mathematics, often called the symbol-using capacity. Symbols are mental entities that stand for assemblies of imaged content. Images are a more primitive aspect of thinking. They are the multi-sensory reruns of specific experiences.</p>
	Sensations	<p>Sensations include the outwardly focused dynamics of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and the tactile sensations of the skin. Also included are the more inwardly focused sensations of pain, of muscular and bone movement, and of the chemical qualities in the blood and other fluid systems. We can consciously notice and distinguish all these varieties of sensation.</p>
	Emotions	<p>Emotions are bodily feelings, but they are energies that rise from the dialogue of the conscious self with outward experiences or with what we think are our outward experiences. Emotions come in pairs: anger and affection, fear and safeness, sadness and gladness, sorrow and contentment, anxiety and ease.</p>
States of Con- scious- ness	<p>Consciousness is a deep enigma. It is the core self, the deep me, the noticer, and the doer. Consciousness is not thinking, it is the thinker. Consciousness is not the sensations; it is the sensor. Consciousness is not emotions; it is the self that is having these feelings. Consciousness is that within the body that knows itself experiencing and using these bodily functions. Here are names for some of the deepest states of consciousness:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Trust and Despair Compassion and Malice Freedom and Bondage</p>	

Trust and Despair

Despair is not an emotion; it is the absence of trust. And trust is not an emotion; it is a state of consciousness that can exist along with any emotion. We can live in trust and still be angry. We can live in trust and still be fearful. We can live in trust and still feel affection or safeness. We can live in trust and at the same time experience all the variations of sadness and gladness, sorrow and contentment, anxiety and ease. Trust is not a feeling: it is a willingness to have whatever feelings we have. Trust is an openness to and a curiosity about what our feelings mean. Trust is a willingness to feel our feelings and use them to identify what is happening to us. Trust can also put our feelings to work for us. Anger can be useful to the trusting person. Fear can be useful to the trusting person. Trust is trustful of anger and fear as well as of affection and safeness. Trust is an effortless letting be of our emotions. And trust is an effort to manifest freely our emotional richness. Deep trust trusts what is real. Our emotions are real and therefore part of what deep trust trusts. Deep trust is also trustful that despair is a doorway back to the deep trust of the Real. Trusting persons invite the despairing to the community of trusting the Real.

Compassion and Malice

Similarly, malice is not an emotion; it is the absence of compassion. Malice has many forms including a sentimentality that replaces the true courage of self-affirmation. Malice is also a substitute for enchantment with Being and for an outgoing affirmation of others and of being with others. As a deep state of essential consciousness, compassion has many forms but none of them can be understood as a state of emotion; compassion can exist alongside any emotion. We can live in compassion and still be angry. We can live in compassion and still be fearful. We can live in compassion and still feel affection or safeness. We can live in compassion and at the same time experience all the variations of sadness and gladness, sorrow and contentment, anxiety and ease. Compassion is not a feeling: it is a willingness to affirm whatever feelings we are having. Compassion is openness to and curiosity about what our feelings mean. Compassion is a willingness to feel our feelings and use them to identify what is happening to us. Compassion can also put our feelings to work for us in our relations with others. Anger can also be useful to the compassionate person. Fear can be useful to the compassionate person. Compassion includes compassionate toward anger and fear as well as toward affection and safeness. Compassion includes an affirmation of our entire emotional being. Compassion includes our effort to manifest freely our emotional richness and to assist others to do the same. Compassion is compassionate toward what is real. Our emotions are real and therefore part of what compassion is compassionate toward. Compassion is also compassionate toward self and others in our estrangement from the real. Compassion seeks to assist self and others to be open to experiences of the "hell" of despair over Reality, and thus open to being welcomed home to the glory of Reality.

Freedom and Bondage

Bondage is also not an emotion; it is the absence of freedom. And freedom is not an emotion; it is a state of consciousness that can exist along with any emotion. We can live in freedom and still be angry. We can live in freedom and still be fearful. We can live in freedom and still feel affection or safeness. We can live in freedom and at the same time experience all the variations of sadness and gladness, sorrow and contentment, anxiety and ease. Freedom is not a feeling: it is liberation from the compulsive quality often given to our feelings as well as a willingness to have whatever

feelings we have. Freedom is openness to and curiosity about what our feelings mean. Freedom is a willingness to feel our feelings and use them to identify what is happening to us. Freedom can also put our feelings to work for us. Anger can be useful to the free person. Fear can be useful to the free person. In its free actions, freedom freely employs anger and fear as well as affection and safeness. Freedom is an effort to manifest freely our emotional richness and to assist others to do the same. Freedom is free to live what is real. Being freedom is what is real; bondage is a substitute for freedom. Our emotions are real and therefore part of what freedom freely enjoys and uses. Freedom is the absence of the compulsion to act out our feelings in some addictive or unconscious way. Freedom is also free to address estrangement from the real – to assist self and others to be open to experiences of the “hell” of despair over Reality, and thus open to being welcomed home to the glory of Reality.

Motivation and Emotions

Emotions attend our actions and enrich our actions, but they do not motivate our actions. Motivation is a deeper dynamic than our emotions. Motivation is rooted in these profound dynamics of consciousness: our trust or despair, our compassion or malice, our freedom or bondage. It may seem sometimes that we are motivated by our anger or fear, but most of us can recall times when we have not acted-out our anger or when we have acted courageously in spite of our fear. Fear probably evolved in our psyches because it aided our species in fleeing dangers. And anger probably evolved in our psyches because it aided our species in fighting challenges to our survival. But these associations can trick us into believing that we need to be angry to fight for social justice, and we do not. Injustice may anger us, and we may find that anger useful. The motivation to act and to shape the quality of our action comes from a deeper source.

We are motivated by our compassion or by our lack of it. We are motivated by our trust of Reality or by our lack of it. We are motivated by our freedom or our lack of it. This is a very important awareness. We do not have to drum up anger to act boldly. And we certainly do not need to act out our anger in some thoughtless manner every time we are angry. But also, we do not need to hold our anger in contempt or think that we have to replace it with affection. We can learn to let our feelings be our feelings, and we can learn from our feelings. At the same time we can distance ourselves from addictive obedience to what we think our feelings are urging us to do.

Living beyond our feelings is not always easy to realize in our practical living, for our feelings are very subtle and our awareness of them may still be emerging. Also, we may be unconscious of the extent of our malice and how it joins forces with our anger. We may be unconscious of the extent of our despair and how it joins forces with our fear. We may be unconscious of the many ways that our consciousness and our emotions are mingling.

The key point here is that we cannot trust our emotions to be an absolutely trustworthy guide. Our emotions are doing their job, but they can be misleading. Emotions are a valuable energy that arises in relation to both our perception of the external world as well as from the current state of our consciousness. If our state of consciousness is malice and our thinking about the world erroneous, our emotions will guide us to do malicious things in a supposed world that does not exist. On the other hand, if our current state of consciousness is compassion and our thinking about the world is relatively accurate, then our emotions will tend to be in line with the actions that our compassion envisions and motivates us to do.

Motivation and Sensations

It is also a mistake to view our sensations as an absolutely trustworthy guide. Consciousness needs to notice our chemically initiated signals such as hunger, thirst, and sexual desire, but these signals must be evaluated by consciousness in order to pursue optimal living. A worm may almost entirely obey these signals, but humans have evolved consciousness and thinking to assist us in choosing more wisely than a simple rendering of obedience to these important signals. Pain and muscle sensibilities also require thoughtful consciousness. Even our seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and tactile sensations require thoughtful evaluation for best-case actions. Our consciousness, not our sensations, is the source for our best-case actions. And our twisted consciousness is the source of our malice, bondage, and despair.

Motivation and Thinking

Thought can also be a misleading guide to the life of action. Thought is genuinely and positively motivating only to the extent that it awakens our trust, compassion and freedom and gives guidance for the engagement of these motivating forces in the external world. Thought can also give guidance to the motivating forces of despair, malice and bondage.

And our thinking can be grossly mistaken about ourselves and the external world. In the best-case scenario, our thinking is still incomplete, evolving, changing, and never arriving at any final certainty. Thinking is enormously useful, but still fragile in its hold on Truth.

A "belief" is a thought to which we are committed with our consciousness. Only because we are committed to a thought does that thought play an important role in our motivations. Without commitment, a thought can simply float through the mind like passing clouds. Commitment is a dynamic of consciousness, not a dynamic of thought. It is commitment that makes a thought a belief. Thoughts are without impact on our motivation until they become beliefs. It is when we organize a set of thoughts into the net of commitments that we create beliefs. Beliefs are always being acted upon in some way or another.

A ministry to our beliefs is actually a ministry to our commitments, even though the attention of this ministry seems to be focused on our thoughts. The key question we need to ask about our beliefs is, "Are they true?" That is, are they in accord with Reality with capital "R"? Trust, compassion, and freedom have to do with affirmations of Reality. Despair, malice, and bondage have to do with commitments to self-constructed "realities" we have substituted for Reality. Our despair results from our conscious or unconscious unwillingness to live in the real world and be our true selves. Malice and bondage also result from our conscious or unconscious rejection of realism. It is through our commitment to illusory beliefs that we keep ourselves in the pains of despair, malice, and bondage. When we question a belief, we are actually questioning a commitment of our consciousness. That is, we are questioning whether our commitment is illusory – whether our beliefs are truly believable even to ourselves. When we examine the sort of living that our beliefs lead us into and how we would be different without those beliefs, we are assembling data that may reveal to us the illusory nature of those beliefs, which includes revealing the illusory nature of the commitments of consciousness that underlie those beliefs.

Thinking is not the main root of realistic motivation. It is trust, compassion and freedom that provide the root of positive motivation. Accurate thinking is important for effectively manifesting our trust, compassion, and freedom. But thinking is a tail on the dog of conscious motivation. The tail does not wag the dog. It is the dog of consciousness that wags the tail of thinking, including the thinking of this chapter.

Chapter 32

The Ethics of Radical Monotheism

People typically think of monotheism as an idea or belief – almost never as a mode of action or ethics. “Radical monotheism,” as elaborated by H. Richard Niebuhr, has to do with a basic center of value and a fundamental ethics.¹ The core question to which “radical monotheism gives answer is: What is good? What is best for the loyalty, devotion, and cause of my life, and of our lives as an organization, a region, a state, a nation, or a species of life? In his book *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, Niebuhr inspired me to see monotheism as universal basis for responsible action, an ethics that is not merely Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, but an ethics that applies to any community (religious or otherwise).

“Radical monotheism,” as defined by Niebuhr, is one of three prominent answers that humanity has given to the fundamental question of ethics. The other two answers he named “polytheism” and “henotheism.” Curious as these three terms may seem, they point to basic alternatives for determining ethical action, and they apply to every human life and every society, past or future.

Contemporary Theism

For Niebuhr “theism” in the terms “polytheism,” “henotheism,” and “monotheism” does not mean belief in gods or goddesses, or in a supreme being (God) alongside other beings. The gods and goddesses of ancient polytheism were stories about processes within the human psyche or within the human interactions with the environments of human living. Polytheism does not mean taking these stories literally. The gods and goddesses do not exist as literal beings observable by scientific examination or contemplative inquiry. For example, Venus and Mars are just stories about the dynamics of love and war. Polytheism can include loyalty and commitment to both love and war and many other centers of value. The gods and goddesses point to real powers in our lives, but as mythic stories, they are artistic creations of the human mind.

Similarly, Niebuhr’s radical monotheism is not a belief in One God that rules over all the other gods and goddesses, angels and devils, gremlins and fairies, and other visualizations and fictions about aspects of our lives. Radical monotheism has nothing to do with beliefs in beings or in a being. Radical monotheism is a devotion, a loyalty, a trust in what is Real where Reality is always more than our thoughts about Reality. Reality is an ongoing surprise to whatever is our current sense of reality. In radical monotheism we are loyal to a Reality whose Wholeness is beyond our rational comprehension; nevertheless, with our consciousness we can experience conscious connection with this Unifying Mysterious Every-thing-ness. When radical monotheism is our core devotion, it relativizes all our other devotions. These devotions can remain as relative centers of value in our living, but in radical monotheism we have opted for the One center of value that renders our lives flexible with regard to all the other values.

For example, the “oneness” of devotion meant by radical monotheism is not of the same quality as the oneness of devotion meant by choosing our nation as our one overriding center of value. Though we are part of our nation and our nation is part of us, we are more than our nation. The reality of our lives is more than the presence and destiny of our nation. A devotion to Reality includes a devotion to all nations. Similarly, radical monotheism is more than a devotion to humanity; monotheism

¹ Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Radical Monotheism in Western Culture* (New York: 1943 --1970, Harper Torchbooks)

includes devotion to all beings, living and inanimate. The One center of value that constitutes radical monotheism is Reality as the Quintessence and Entirety of what is Real.

This Quintessence is more than a concept. It can be experienced. It can be visited. It can become a steady station of the consciousness in which we dwell. It can be experienced as our profound humanness, for that is what it is. Profound humanness is merely the inward experience of loyalty to the Final Reality to which radical monotheism is loyal. Radical monotheism can become the trust and devotion and loyalty of our lives. It can become the cause for which we live and die. And people who so live are around us at every moment.

Polytheism as Ethics

As an answer to the question of value and ethics, "polytheism" means having many centers of value, a pantheon of loyalties for my life or for our lives as a social group. Those many centers of value might include: family, work, sex, pleasure, money, self esteem, companionship, approval, power, status, variations on these, and many more centers of value. All of us tend to begin our living dedicated to this poly-loyalty arrangement of choosing our course in life. Indeed, we all have many or most of these centers of value. We bow our knee to whatever symbols or powers may reward us in relation to such values. Eventually, the tragedy of having multiple centers of value begins to be felt. We discover that these various centers of value fight with each other. Both family and job can each seem to demand our whole lives. Our one life can seem torn between the two. Our dedications to both pleasure and work may also tear us in two. These many centers of value each fight for an ultimate claim upon our time and energy. Furthermore, we begin to experience the sad truth that each of these centers of value can and will let us down. Our dearest friend or lover can leave us. Family can die or despise us. Our job can disappear or turn sour. Forms of pleasure can simply end forever. All these meaning-givers or centers of value in our polytheistic pantheon of values can enter the twilight of no longer functioning as meaning-givers that we can trust. So, here are the weaknesses of a polytheistic ethics: (1) the many meaning-givers war with each other, and (2) they each let us down.

Henotheism as Ethics

Henotheism is a partial answer to the weakness of the polytheistic scatteredness. Henotheism builds a pantheon of wholeness for the many gods. To the core question of value and ethics, henotheism provides a unifying cause or value that gives an overall unity and dependability within which all our other values can take a relative place. This typically means a human culture, an overall social arrangement that arranges the many values in relation to something more inclusive. This usually means choosing to identify with a common culture or a limited peer group as our overarching meaning of our living and action. Religious in-groups can easily manifest this henotheistic quality. Members bow their ultimate trust to the religious group rather than to the various gods or goddesses that the group may honor. In modern times, patriotism to a nation has been given henotheistic standing – "my nation right or wrong" – "my nation is the greatest on Earth" – "being a patriot of my nation is the to-live-for-and-to-die-for value that gives unity to my life." Such serious nationalism often includes believing that my view of being a patriot is true for all the other members of my nation: I view them as subversive if they disagree with me about my view of the nation I treasure.

Henotheism can also take the form of making my racial group or my sub-culture as my overarching center of value, identity and action. Finding a group membership that

makes my life worthwhile is a strong draw, even if it includes contempt and perhaps violence toward other groups. Humanism is also a form of henotheism in which my center of value is the whole human species – “Whatever is good for humankind is good and whatever disadvantages humankind is bad.” This center of value, taken alone, can exclude the value of other species and include an oppressive relationship with the entire natural planet. Finally, henotheism can be expanded to include all living forms, yet even this center of value is henotheistic, not radical monotheism, because it does not include the inanimate aspects of Reality. Henotheism differs from polytheism in that it attempts to find a unifying cause for my life, and it differs from radical monotheism in that it opts for a range of values that is less than the Whole of what is Real.

Radical Monotheism as Ethics

As an answer to the question of value and ethics, radical monotheism includes everything, inanimate and living, in its scope of values. Everything is good because it IS. The radical monotheistic center of value is a loyalty and a devotion to the Source from which all realities emerge and into which all that has emerged returns. Birthing and dying are equally valuable parts of the whole process of Reality. Coming and going, big and little, pleasant and painful, growing and rotting are all valuable because each process is a manifestation of the Overarching Process of Reality to which loyalty is being given. And “Reality” in this definition does not mean my or someone’s sense of reality, but the encountered Reality that is constantly a surprise, a mystery, an enigma beyond understanding by any human mind.

It is often the case that monotheism degenerates into a set of ideas that are used to make sense of things, whereas radical monotheism means a commitment to THAT GRAND NONSENSE that never makes complete sense to our fragile minds. Monotheism has often degenerated into the belief that my group and its beliefs are the super-blessed, or perhaps the one-and-only truth holders. That sort of “belief in one God” is henotheism, not radical monotheism.

The “mono” in “monotheism” means that there is a single overriding loyalty, the Real. The core ethical question becomes, “What is Real?” Good-and-evil no longer mean two aspects of what is Real. The Real is the good and the good is the Real. “Evil” within the radical monotheistic value-perspective means any denial of the Real – any hatred of the Real, any illusion that masks the Real, any escape that flees the Real, and any a fight with the Real that seeks to win against THAT which cannot be defeated. Such hopeless conflict with invincible Reality is appropriately called “despair.” And despair, as we have seen, is joined with malice to self and others and with bondage to some moralism or license that substitutes for our deep freedom. Radical monotheism includes the release within human beings of these profound essential qualities: trust in Reality, compassion for all, and deep freedom from egoism, social conditioning, and fatalism.

Loyalty to my self-constructed self-image is a loyalty that must be drastically demoted when service of the One overarching Reality is one’s life devotion. Polytheism, on the other hand, does not require a break with egoism. Polytheism is a form of egoism, for the polytheist trips from one source of ego enhancement to another, to another, to another, to still another. Each of the gods or goddesses of the polytheistic ethics is actually some aspect of human life viewed as a power for the enhancement of my ego. Henotheistic devotions are similar. My devotion to my nation is actually a devotion to my view of my nation as an aspect of “me.” Even my devotion to humanity as a center of value is a devotion to me as a human. Radical monotheism also has a view of what is human, profoundly human, namely devotion to the Whole of Reality – only that is profound humanness. We see the call for this total sacrifice of egoism in the

well-known line of Jesus, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." These words means that the cravings for ego promotion are given up in order to affirm Reality and radical realism as the best-case scenario for my life. This radical scenario is viewed as true humanness in the context of radical monotheism. So, radical monotheism is not the same as humanism, even though radical monotheism does result in a thoroughgoing affirmation of humanity along with frogs and rocks, mountains and oceans. As one obtuse example, persons of a monotheistic perspective would not favor destroying all the spiders on the planet to save a few human lives.

Radical Monotheism and Science

Natural science is a method of approaching what is True. In that sense, natural science is a servant of radical monotheism. The discoveries of science are discoveries of what is real and thus enrichments of our radical monotheism. But the formulations of scientific knowledge are always partial, incomplete, and open to further advances in the process of science. So any current scientific formulation is not the quintessence of Reality; it is only a humanly invented level of understanding of some part of Reality. Nevertheless, the process of science is an approach to the truth of Reality and, therefore, compatible with radical monotheism. Yet the specific results of science can be "idols" that radical monotheism opposes when they are substituted for the fullness of Reality.

A good scientist can be a radical monotheist. This is observable in the consciousness of those scientists who have come to see that "the more we know about nature, the more we know we don't know." Our scientific advances do not bring us to some promised land of absolute knowledge; rather, they open up even more unknowns to be explored. But scientific advances are still advances; each advance is more real than the formulations over which it is an advance. The "progress" of science is a journey into what we truly experience to be so. The keystone of science is the actual experience of our senses. Obviously, what we sense is conditioned, or at least shaped by, what we believe before we sense it. But our sensations, when we are fully open to them, can challenge what we believe – indeed, can challenge what our whole society has believed for a very long time. This willingness to let sensations challenge beliefs is the key to competent scientific research. This openness to being challenged by Reality illustrates how science, as a method, is compatible with the loyalty of the radical monotheist.

Many philosophers of science notice that modern scientific experiments are very complex and very distant from the everyday experience of our senses. Many of us cannot, even in our imaginations, reduplicate the complex interpretations of the light gathered by immense telescopes from galaxies billions of miles away. Nor do most of us understand the use of huge atom-smashing cyclotrons for exploring the microcosm of nature's smallest constituents. It can seem to us that we are stuck with simply trusting scientists in what they say rather than actually knowing how scientists arrived at their current formations of truth. As true as this is, it is also true that these scientists are trustworthy only to the extent that their science is referencing actual experiences of the senses. And if we were to become competent scientists in their field, we could also observe with our own senses whether these advances are indeed advances into truth or not. Any philosophy of science is bogus that does not keep in touch with the fact that a scientific advance is trustworthy only when a community of scientists can witness that this new formulation of truth is compatible with what can be seen, heard, smelled, felt, tasted, or otherwise sensed with our human senses.

Radical Monotheism and Contemplative Inquiry

The human senses are not, however, the only source of truth. The human senses cannot sense consciousness. The human senses can only sense the behaviors and the reports of conscious beings. Consciousness is assumed by scientists, but it cannot be explored by them as scientists. Consciousness, often called subjectivity, is a secret known to scientists, but rigorously excluded from the objectivity of scientific research. Science is objective in its tests for truth. As a scientific test for truth, subjectivity is purposefully and faithfully avoided in the scientific approach to truth. This is both the grandeur of science and its limitation. It cannot explore directly the nature of our consciousness. All exploration of consciousness is explored by a conscious human who is noticing consciousness within her or his own being. These inward noticings can be shared with other noticers of their own consciousness. We thereby construct a community of discussion about consciousness. All good art is a sharing of these inward noticings. Much psychology and philosophy is also a sharing of these inward noticings. Religion is good religion only if its assertions are rooted in this inward noticing. Psychology, philosophy, and religion may combine their inward noticings with the scientific type of knowing, but competent thinking must remain clear about what is known as a result of scientific research and what is known as a result of contemplative inquiry.

Radical monotheism is compatible with both scientific research and contemplative inquiry. Anyone who is looking honestly at her or his own consciousness and reporting accurately about it is a potentially trustworthy source of truth. And all truth, from whatever source, is consistent with the devotion, loyalty, and cause of the radical monotheist.

Radical Monotheism and Social Ethics

It is of utmost importance to understand that Radical Monotheism is a context that leads to action in the social sphere. Radical Monotheism is the vocation of living one's whole life in a context of values that relativizes every limited center of value and lives from this ultimately inclusive center of value: the real is the good and the good is the real. This does not mean that our oppressive social patterns must be tolerated, it means that our social change actions must begin with the situations we have and the real possibilities contained in those situations. Realistic living is not a recipe for conservatism; it is recognition that the Real includes possibilities that can be realized with proper effort, as well as the obvious truth that the Real is our current situations that provide our unavoidable beginning points for action. Realistic living does not imposing our ideals upon reality, we are willing within the real lives and real challenges that we confront.

Radical monotheism affirms that everything scientific work discovers to be real is good, and that everything contemplative inquiry discovers to be real is good. And, a radical monotheism loyalty includes the challenge to integrate our scientific truth and our contemplative truth into a workable program of action for our whole lives in the service of the whole Earth and the whole destiny of humans on this Earth. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have been traditions that emphasize social justice as a consequence of their radical monotheism. The ethics of radical monotheism drives toward justice: it opens to us the need to serve all people and all values rather than the values of our narrow group and its preferences and delusions.

As finite religions in real world history, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam also carry perversions of radical monotheism – most often these perversions take the form of a henotheistic “worship” of the dogma and morality of particular religious groups. This

decay of radical monotheism into an in-group self-worship is a temptation faced by every religious and secular group. Such reductionism of the Real robs social ethics of its flexibility and revolutionary power. It warps the ongoing quest for realistic social justice into an imposition of my group's ethical and moral thinking upon all humanity and upon the planet. This reductionism of the Real is the root attitude beneath all human and ecological oppression. When radical monotheism is our center of value, the ethical sphere is broken open for perpetual creativity toward ever-fresh inventions of justice.

Radical Monotheism and Religion

Every religion is a finite construction created by human beings. At its best, religion does nothing more than point beyond itself to that which is not finite, but which is the everlastingly True and Real. Good religion points beyond its ethical moralities and its dogmatic teachings to a depth of human experience that cannot be contained in any finite ideas, social shapes, or humanly practiced processes. Radical monotheism has to do with openness to the fullness of that ever-surprising Mysterious Reality; therefore radical monotheism cannot be contained within any religious forms – dogmas, moralities, or communal forms.

For example, Christianity as a historical community of religions has now entered an era of history in which its old dogmas, moralities, and communal forms have become ever more obviously obsolete in relation to the scientific truth, the contemplative truth, and the ethical challenges of our times. All hope for a continuation of what has been central and best about the Christian religious tradition rests on a recovery of radical monotheism. Moses and the prophets were radical monotheists. Jesus was a radical monotheist. Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John were radical monotheists. We bring deep confusion into Christian recovery if we do not see the thread of radical monotheism that unites all these luminaries. Though the expressions of these signal figures were limited by their times, this does not change the fact that radical monotheism is a common thread that unites them. And radical monotheism is the thread that unites these ancient witnesses with contemporary women and men who are dedicating their lives to the radical monotheistic cause in world history today.

The center of value that Niebuhr calls "radical monotheism" has been and still is a gift that is being carried by Western culture. Judaism began a sophisticated discussion of radical monotheism; Christianity and Islam, at their best, were a continuation of this loyalty, commitment, and discussion. All three of these Western religions have also spawned perversions of radical monotheism – usually in the direction of making an old witness to radical monotheism into a doctrinal possession with which to discredit and perhaps oppress other religions and cultures.

Furthermore, radical monotheism is not synonymous with practicing Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Even though the term "radical monotheism" may not appear in nonwestern religions, radical monotheism is present almost everywhere as a lived center of value. When Hindus claim that all gods and goddesses are just expressions of one overall Beingness, that has an almost identical meaning with the Islamic saying "There are no gods save Allah." A clear Hindu knows that the gods and goddesses they employ in their devotions are not the Ultimate. Hindu practice, at its best, is a loyalty to the Oneness of Truth. And a clear Muslim knows that many centers of value exist that claim their relative loyalty, but these many centers of value are not "gods" for Islam – that is, they are not Ultimate for the living of human life. The moods of Hinduism and Islam are vastly different, but their depth realizations can be seen as profoundly overlapping.

The "Tao" of ancient China is another symbol for loyalty to that basic center of value that we are naming "radical monotheism." Elements of loyalty to the radical monotheistic center of value are present in almost every religion and in almost every region of the planet. The heritage of the Great Goddess, whose roots reach back at least 25,000 years, was viewed as a great womb that birthed all things and a great tomb that received them home. Humans were fed and nurtured at her breasts. Loyalty to the meaning of this symbol surely functioned for many as a symbol for the same basic loyalty as the "radical monotheism" that H. Richard Niebuhr clarified for us.

I will maintain that "radical monotheism," as I (with help from H. Richard Niebuhr) am defining it here, is a universally present ethical attitude that is available to all humans who have been made aware of their reduced loyalties and are willing to be open to the inclusive Reality in which we are all embedded.

Chapter 33

Contextual Ethics and Responsible Action

So what is the path from *Radical Monotheism* to *Responsible Action* in the everyday moments of personal life and within these challenging times of human social history? My two-word answer to that question is “contextual ethics.” To clarify what I mean, I will begin by distinguishing “contextual ethics” from “right-and-wrong ethics” and “good-and-evil ethics.”

Right-and-Wrong Ethics

The mode of ethical thinking that uses the concepts of right-and-wrong is older than Moses. It has always been a useful mode of thought, and it will remain so. It is based upon the concept of “law.” A law is what defines right and wrong. Thou shalt not murder! Thou shalt not steal! (And so on) Law is a crude tool for ethical application. Law has to be interpreted for each specific instance by a law officer, a judge, or a jury. We might say that a judge or jury is assigned to apply the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law. This conflict between spirit and letter in the application of law was a core aspect of Jesus’ struggle with the religious establishment of his day. This basic tension continues in the apostle Paul, Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and in ourselves if we are honest. This tension between letter and spirit exists in our personal affairs. Our rules for daily living have to be interpreted for the spirit of their meaning as well as the letter of their statements. Laws or rules exist in our minds (or superego) as well as in our social discourse. Right-and-wrong is a useful way to think about ethical choices, but it is not the only way. Right-and-wrong thinking can be misused through questionable interpretations of our laws, rules, and mores or through establishing bad laws in the first place. And how do we know if a law or rule is bad? Obviously, a complete ethical discussion must probe deeper.

Good-and-Evil Ethics

The mode of ethical thinking that uses the concepts of good-and-evil is a goal-oriented type of ethical thinking that was strongly developed by Aristotle. We have goals, purposes, or aims in terms of which a specific action is judged good or bad. For example, the goal of having good teeth makes brushing and flossing good and failing to do so bad. The goal of having better economic equity in our society makes certain tax laws better than others. The limitation of good-and-evil ethics rests in the issue of determining which goals, purposes, or aims are good and which bad or evil. This question raises the issue of centers of value. If my family is seen as a center of value, then spending time with my family is a good goal, and providing economic, educational, and health services for my family is a good aim. If basic safety in my neighborhood or city is a center of value, then having competent police protection and clear laws against murder, theft and rape are good aims. But how are these centers of value to be chosen? We typically refer to more inclusive centers of value, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Contextual Ethics

Contextual Ethics is a third mode of ethical thinking. It does not ask about right-and-wrong or good-and-evil, but about the qualities of the situation that we face and what responses are appropriate within that situation. This mode of ethical reflection has never been entirely absent when we are using the other two modes of ethical thought. The judge who interprets a law will typically analyze the situation in which he

or she is applying that law. Similarly, the discernment of good over evil in relation to a specific center of value must also analyze the situation in which this center of value is applied. As a basic life method, contextual ethics is never absent. We are always in situations, and we must always know those situations in order to create “appropriate” responses within those situations. Whether an action is “appropriate” or “befitting” to a situation is the key consideration of contextual ethics. In order to know what is befitting we must first know the situation in which our responses are to fit. Moment-to-moment spontaneity is a misunderstanding of contextual ethics. We all have in our memories enduring contexts of interpretation about each sphere of life and each scope of consideration. The thoughtfulness that characterizes contextual ethics is letting the real situation improve our ongoing contexts of ethical thought and action.

Monotheistic Ethics

So, how has the monotheistic attitude toward life employed these three modes of ethical thought?

The Eternal Law

The ethics of ancient Israel was almost entirely about **performing obedience to an Eternal Law**. The good laws of social and personal life were seen to derive from a Final Authority that is law-giving and thereby blessing us with dependable guidance. For example, in the high Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas assumed an Eternal Law unknowable to the human mind. Then “natural law,” according to Thomas, meant that part of Eternal Law that humans could know, and “human law” meant those human constructions of further determinations of right and wrong consistent with natural law.

The Final End

When monotheism joined with good-and-evil ethics, the monotheistic theologians began to discuss what it means to **follow paths toward our Final End** (purpose or blessedness). Augustine’s famous phrase “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, Oh God” reflects a use of good-and-evil ethics. This saying means that Reality is an Ultimate End in the accessing of which we can find restful blessing for our hearts and heartfelt actions. With lesser ends we are restless and adrift unless those lesser ends rest within the Final End of this “realistic” Rest.

The Ultimate Context

Today radical monotheistic thinkers, such as H. Richard Niebuhr, speak of **befitting responses within the Ultimate Context**. He went further to say that if we are to be loyal to the Ultimate Reality we face today, contextual ethics is the most important mode of ethical thought. The other two can find their place within the context of contextual ethics and within the context of the Ultimate Context. For example, in our one-world era, radical monotheistic contextual ethics finds it *appropriate* or *befitting* for us to move beyond our racism, nationalism, and economic imperialism into a whole-Earth context of ethical consideration. Resolving the issues of the ecological crisis is also supported by contextual thought in which all reality is being affirmed, rather than humanity alone, or wealthy humanity alone.

Let us look more carefully at how contextual ethical thinking works in a monotheistic context of commitment. First of all, it does not mean a complete rejection of the other two modes of ethical thinking. Right-and-wrong and good-and-evil can be integrated into the contextual ethics mode. We can ask what laws are befitting to our world situation today. We can ask what ends are befitting for our government to

pursue. Similarly, in our personal lives we can consider our talents, our opportunities, and the world's needs, and then ask, "What basic vocation is most befitting for the pursuit of our lives?"

Here is another important characteristic of contextual ethics: We begin our ethical thought with an interpretation of the situation that is being confronted. The whole situation is open for consideration. All aspects of it are considered relevant. Only when an approximately holistic view is reached, does creating the "befitting" response "appropriately" take place. The good action is the one that is befitting or appropriate for this situation. Obviously, there may be several different responses that can be viewed as appropriate, but the choice is not entirely arbitrary. The situation provides a vision of limits and possibilities that need to be obeyed for the response to be appropriate. The interpretation of the situation is a crucial element of the process. And this interpretation uses all three approaches to truth we examined in Part One of this book: the scientific approach to truth, the contemplative approach to truth, and the particularization of our scientific knowledge and our contemplative wisdom in terms of workability in our real-time-real-place choices. And these choices concern not just "me" but "we" who are involved in the choice to be made. We simply look and see what is happening, and then we boldly initiate a response. That is it. Behind all of this thoughtfulness, we know that some sort of response cannot be avoided. Inaction and thoughtless action are still responses to the situation. Contextual ethics is adding our thoughtfulness to the unstoppable flow of events.

Notice that beginning with the situation is different from beginning with a law that we apply to the situation. And beginning with the situation is also different from beginning with ends or ideals that we wish to pursue – hence impose upon the situation. When the contextual ethics mode of thought is primary, the traditions of right-and-wrong and of good-and-evil are made secondary to appropriate response to what is happening now. Current happenings qualify our appropriate responses, they do not determine that response, but they inform it. The response-able human observes, judges, weighs up, and then decides to act from freedom – not pleasing others or blaming the situation or following good principles.² We are choosing, choosing, choosing our interpretations of the situation, and choosing, choosing, choosing our free creations of appropriate responses to the situation. We have abandoned every form of authoritarian thinking and opted to rely on what we are experiencing as conscious human beings confronting the ongoing flow of history that is confronting us. That confrontation requires our rational understanding, intuitive awareness, and downright guesses. And in spite of all this fresh knowing, our confrontation with historically experienced Reality remains an experience of the Unknown and, therefore, our responses have the character of being a leap into the vast Mystery that we are always facing.

Thinking from Big to Small

Within this Ultimate Context of loyalty, what does contextual ethics look like as an ongoing feature of our lives? Without always realizing it, each of us has created some sort of enduring contexts for every layer of our awareness. We have a view of the dynamics of the cosmos and the planet and humanity's place on this planet. This view may be poorly thought through, basically just taken over from our parents and our schooling. It may be largely illusory or simplistic, but we have a context already operating in our lives. Similarly, we have a context for living in our region of the planet – whether that is a nation, a group of nations, an ecological region, or a continent. And

² This is language lifted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's analysis of freedom.

we have our context for life in our community – whether than be a county, city, neighborhood or each of these. All these layers of context interact with each other, inform each other, enrich each other, and together make up our sense of the world in which we live.

Happenings happen to us as we live within these taken-for-granted contexts. Happenings challenge us to improve our contexts. Improving our contexts turns out to be a lifetime task. The point I am making is that we simply do not live without contexts. We do not live in some sort of mindless spontaneity. We live in a continuum of organized awareness, however in need of reorganization that awareness may be. We tend to be defensive of all our contexts, for it can seem painful to our sense of certainty to have to admit the full extent of our ignorance and take on the work of building smarter contexts.

The ongoing, inclusive rebuilding of our contexts logically begins with the most inclusive, for the larger contexts provide context for the smaller scopes of thought. When we retool our planetary outlook, we affect how we think about our local place and how we respond where our body does its doings. Of course, the planetary context does not entirely determine the local context. We need to retool our local context in the light of our local experience as that experience is seen within the context of our fresh planetary context. Much of this retooling goes on in a piecemeal and chaotic fashion. But a full dedication to contextual ethics in the Ultimate Context of radical monotheism will call for many instances of context improvement. Study and contextual thoughtfulness are an ongoing feature of a life that is responsive within the Ultimate Context.

Nothing about this emphasis on thoughtfulness needs to rob our living of its spontaneity, creativity, and freedom. No matter how realistic and clear our contexts are, when we face each particular decision, we experience a call for sheer freedom. We need to live from the heart, so to speak – while all our contexts hang in the sphere of our mind as guidelines that help us decide, but which we in our raw freedom must apply to this specific choice and to the next specific choice and the next and the next.

History Making

We are parts of communities of action within the Ultimate Context. We do not get to escape into an absolutely lonely existence. We confront the flow of history in companionship with others. This may be understood as our privilege to participate in making history. History is not a dustbin of old facts, but a vital drama in which humans are responsible for many of the major outcomes. In times as grim as ours, people are tempted to avoid full lucidity about their historical power to make a difference. Rather than do something, people are tempted to be aloof and just not care about the failures of their society. Any society is a failure if it pampers the rich and neglects the rest. Making progressive history today includes educating our citizens in responsible democratic processing rather than tolerating rule by a wealthy oligarchy. Any society is a failure if its practices are distressing the natural planet to a devastating degree. Making progressive history today includes dealing with the radial demands of climate challenge as well as, in all other ways, taking care of the ecosystems of the planet in which humanity could be an enriching part rather than a destructive force. These and thousands of subparts of these themes cry out for responsible responses from each community of humans whatever their religion or lack of religion, whatever their culture or race or sex or gifts or flaws. And such responses make history. We are not helpless cogs in some inevitable doom. Also, progress is not assured. The weight of the future is inescapably placed on the shoulders of each awake human. We are all Atlas with the Earth on our shoulders, whether we wish to be or not.

Contextual Ethics is an Interreligious Process

The ethics I have outlined above is not a Christian ethics or a Jewish ethics or a Buddhist ethics or any other ethics derived from a community of religious practice. I contend that a religion-based ethics is an obsolete idea that is no longer needed in the dialogue among religions or in the dialogue between religions and secular society.

When we use terms taken from a particular religious heritage, we are being contextually befitting only if we use those terms to describe the way life operates. In so doing we can communicate across religious boundaries. The various religious communities use different languages that point to the same or similar dynamics of humanness. Human cultures are more similar on the level of experience than on the level of beliefs or moralities. Therefore, the practitioners of the various world religions can do ethics together, providing that we recognize that we can each root our ethical thinking in the same profound humanness that each religion attempts to access. We need not start from the “authority” of our religions tradition – its dogma, morality, or religious practices. I mean no diminution of the value of these unique practices; rather I am pointing to a huge revolution in ethics. Social ethics has jumped the boundaries of every religious community and landed in a general or secular context in which all communities, religious and otherwise, share.

That secular context is not secular in an antireligious sense, but in the sense that it is not sectarian, but inclusive. Furthermore, our ordinary so-called “secular world” can now be seen as transparent to the Awesomeness of profound humanness. The ordinary is transparent to the profoundness that all truly functional religious practices seek to access. So living in the secular world no longer means leaving the profound realms of existence, but finding the profound in a manner that will seem surprising to our old patterns of two-realm thinking. We find the sacred within the profane. The sacred is revealed as the depth dimension of the profane. Indeed, the very terms “sacred” and “profane” are profoundly transformed, for they have ceased to mean separate realms.

Finally, though I have used some Christian illustrations, I have not intended for this chapter to be a chapter on Christian ethics. I am speaking on behalf of all good religion for its contributions to the inclusive social-process dynamics. Nor have I intended to elaborate the specifics of this generally secular and interreligious style of ethics. With four of my friends, I have written another book on ethics for our moment of history. We entitled it, *The Road from Empire to Eco-Democracy*. This book employs the contextual ethics methods summarized above, and it does not reference any religious heritage for its “authority.” It sticks with the relative certainties that we can derive from our common experience as human beings. All humanity can experience the same profound humanness and the same overarching Wholeness. We are all Earthlings before we are Christians or Buddhists or whatever religious practice we have or lack. I find it interesting that both the Buddha and Jesus referred to themselves as “the human.” The Buddha made no pretensions about being anything other than “the awake one.” And when Jesus refers to himself as “the son of Adam,” this means the restored and coming true human. We can demote Siddhartha, Jesus, Mohammed, and any other luminary, including ourselves, to the wondrous but ordinary status of “the human,” a potential that is open to every human being. In finite qualities humans differ so vastly it boggles the mind, but before the Final Realty we are all just “the profound human,” or else far less – “the inhuman.”

Chapter 34

The Universal League of Profound Humanness

So, who in our actual 21st Century history are the people who will build ethical guidelines for our times based on profound humanness, on the recovery of being truly human, on an ongoing accessing of the "I Am" qualities that comprise our essential Being? The answer to this question cannot be limited to one particular religious group. Clearly, some Christians and some Buddhists are accessing profound humanness. Some Jews and some Muslims are accessing profound humanness. Some Hindus and some who practice no classical religion are accessing profound humanness. Profound humanness is our true nature that happens to us when it happens to us. No religious group has control of that. There exists in real time a league of profound humanness that cuts across every religious practice or lack of religious practice.

The boundaries of this league are not visible to any human eye. No one has all the data to even make a good guess as to who is and who is not loyally maintaining their membership in this universal league. Yet we league members do meet one another and recognize one another from time to time. We know that our league exists even though we do not know and never will know the actual extent of its presence. But we can be certain of this: Final Reality has her league members, and because being a league member means being in tune with Final Reality, this league is supported by an Invincible Power. This league is on the winning side of history. Lies and false living will ultimately lose, even though these forces can powerfully prevail for a time. Even when the league is being scorned and killed by the forces of falseness, it is falseness that is on trial, not truth, not freedom, not trust in Reality, not love of self and neighbor, not love of Reality, not unspeakable joy, not incomprehensible peace, not rest for our deep beings, not life and life abundant. These qualities are who we are as league members, and they are supported by the All-powerful support. Losing simply does not happen for this side of the core conflict within human history. When losing appears to be happening from some humanly constructed perspective, it is not losing from the perspective of Eternity. The Truth is always winning despite its many setbacks that humans are persistently creating. By "winning" I do not mean military impositions. The winners of the wars or political conflicts are quite often seeking to escape the Truth. It is a deeper insight to notice that Reality is the final Power, and Reality prevails in the end at whatever cost to human efforts.

It is in our awareness of this invincible Truth that we have an explanation for the boundless hopefulness of a Buddha, or a Jesus, or a Gandhi, or a Martin Luther King Jr. or any other courageous luminary in our human story. The courage unto death of such exemplars of profound humanness challenges us to decide whether these figures are stark raving insane or whether the rest of us are. Either most of us are lacking in accessing our humanity, or else these signal figures have gone off a deep end that we "ordinary" persons need to avoid. I believe that the evidence is on the side of viewing none of us as ordinary. We are all extraordinary luminaries just waiting to happen. Indeed "ordinary" and "extraordinary" have lost all meaning. The ordinary human is extraordinary, and the extraordinary human is just an ordinary human coming into his or her own.

So, the universal league of profound humanness is potentially everyone. Yet it is also true that falling away from our profound humanness is a fact of history that has gone on since, let us say, the second day of our human quality of consciousness. This falling away still takes place in ever-new ways. The human species is extensively resourceful in inventing escapes from our profound humanness. Each of us will spend our lives, or can spend our lives, sorting out our various escapes and allowing our

beings to return to their normality of profound humanness. Herein is the valid role of religion: it helps us return to our profound humanness. Religion is a practice that we do, day in and day out, year in and year out, because doing such a practice assists us to recover our league membership in profound humanness.

The nine personality types of the Enneagram analysis are nine types of escape from our profound humanness. This window into our human journey is quite interesting because it shows us so clearly how and when we have all fallen away from our profound humanness. Operating within the absolute necessity of building a personality, we also tend to build an escape from our profoundness. So, we have already built for ourselves a powerful substitute for the "real me." It is not that our personality is a bad thing: we need a personality and could not live without one. But our personality is not who we are. Yet we almost inevitably make this tragic mistake: we take our self-created personality to be "who we are," and thereby miss the extraordinary ordinariness of our profound humanness. In order to exit from our personality cocoons and learn to live beyond personality (even use to our personality as one of our servants), we will need to practice a religion. The religion we practice may be very different from what we have in the past called "religion" – so different that we may be reluctant to call our practice "religion." But any practice, however secular or unreligious it may seem to us, is indeed "religion" in the truest sense of the word, if that practice assists us to access our profound humanness.

These clarifications bring our minds back to the need to renew religion as a vital and needed function in the societies of humankind. There is such a thing as a good Christian religion, even though the probability of it may seem obscure. There is such a thing as a good Muslim religion, even though the probability of it may seem obscure. And such statements are true of all the classical religions. And there may be new religions invented. All religions are invented. Any renewed religion has been reinvented. I personally see great value in the entire religious treasury of the planet. I find useful the thousands of years of religious practice by humans, many of whom were more profoundly realized humans than I. I find myself an arrogant fool when I suggest to myself that I could just start over without benefit of this long past. Criticism of the past is necessary, but in religion, as in any other social function, we need not throw out the "baby" of human experience with the bath water of obsolescence and decay.

In spite of my love of the past, I also know that I am challenged to be a bold inventor of religion for my time. I feel called to find my place among the other religious revolutionaries that I admire. If I choose to be a new sort of Christian, this need not mean that I condemn others for choosing to be a new sort of Buddhist, or something else. The league of profound humanness works simultaneously on all the religions and invents whatever newness in religion that we may need. We do not need one religion for all of us. We do not need to force our religious inventions on others. We need to assist whoever we can to find for themselves whatever practice they need to practice in order to journey ever deeper into the profound humanness we share.

We need to call upon all league members to do their utmost to assure the survival and the thriving of the human on planet Earth. This is our responsible action. Responsible action remains an enigma that each of us has to work out for ourselves, and yet we are together becoming more lucid about how we can participate in that everlasting enigma.

Chapter 35

The Battle with Dysfunctional Religion

We often speak of dysfunctional families. We need an equally strong word to characterize the deep malady that is taking place in a majority of steeped buildings on the street corners of US neighborhoods and in other such buildings across the world. If accessing profound humanness is the valid function of a vital religion, then much of what is taking place in these expensive religious buildings is fostering dysfunctional people. We need something better from our current religious organizations. If profound humanness is our deepest functionality as human beings, then none of us are fully functional; we are all recovering from some deep form of dysfunctionality. We need help – better help than most of us are getting.

We can recognize in ourselves and others the controlling rationalism that takes the place of a trusting relation with Reality that I have described as states of transparent attention, universal forgiveness, and effortless letting be. Dysfunctional religion with its promotion of authoritarian doctrines is not helping us.

We can recognize in ourselves and others the binding moralism that takes the place of the deep freedom that I have described as states of primal merging, inherent purity, and attuned working. Dysfunctional religion with its promotion of moral rigidities is not helping us.

We can recognize in ourselves and others the self-serving malice that takes the place of the essential love that I have described as states of autonomous strength, enchantment with Being, and out-flowing compassion. Dysfunctional religion with its promotion of distracting sentimentalities and half-conscious bigotries is not helping us.

About Rationalism

Rationalism has to do with withdrawing into our minds, and also with imposing the patterns of our minds upon Reality, thereby hiding from the Mystery of Reality in so doing. In religious discussions “dogmatism” is a commonly used word for rationalism. No Scripture or Bishop or ecclesiastical office can claim final authority on what is so about Final Things. Each of us has to discover profound humanness for ourselves. Unless we have the personal authority of being able to speak of what we deeply know in our own being, any religious teaching is useless. It is worse than useless; it is a pretense of wisdom that will eventually carry us into some pit of despair. Authoritative religion swallowed by gullible sheep is killing people in the most sensitive dimension of their existence. Such religious practices turn needy and willing learners into fully stupid people.

About Moralism

Moralism has to do with behavior patterns rigidly followed and imposed on others. What are we to make of people who hate everyone who does not cotton to their moral teachings? What are we to make of those who burn Korans; shame Jews; insist that women use no contraceptives and never opt for an abortion; and a thousand other sectarian, moralistically rigid ravings? What are we to make of the justification of inordinate wealth while pouring contempt on the poverty-stricken and disadvantaged portion of our human family? What are we to make of angry proposals of economic and social practices that mistreat and demean large swaths of the population? Yes, and what are we most lucid of people to make of our own selves when we apply our “enlightened” teachings without regard to the situations to which they are being applied? All this is moralism.

About Sentimentality

There is something very shallow in the too often heard saying, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." Nice is a shallow and malicious standard that is both self-critical and critical of others. It is not kind to be nice. Nice is closer to hate than love. Nice is hatred toward our own feelings of anger and resentment. Nice is fearful and guilt-ridden toward speaking and acting realistically toward and among others. Nice is very far from *love* in the profound humanness sense of inclusive affirmation. Profound love is not a feeling of affection or some rules on how to be nice. To view love as pleasant feelings is a sentimental attitude. Such "love" is more concerned with my own good feelings than with any value outside myself.

Profound love includes a generousness toward my own self and toward the power and glory of being my true being, but profound love is also an abandonment of the strictly self-interested contexts and a movement toward values beyond myself. Profound love is a calling that challenges my "feel-good" interests as well as my current ideas. And profound love honors my real feelings of fear, resentment, anger, sadness, grief, and any other feeling that I may cringe to feel. Any one of these grim feelings may be present at the same time that profound love is present. We can be dreadfully afraid of what needs to be done, and still do it. We can be disturbingly angry over the injustice and foolishness we have to deal with. To deny or suppress my fear or anger is a form of malice toward myself and a withdrawal from the realism that is being signaled by these feelings. With courage we can act compassionately in spite of our fear. Fear is just a useful signal from our bodies that danger is at hand. In realism we can respect fear without using it as an excuse for inaction. Profound love is a courageous dynamic in that it overcomes fear in the sense of acting in spite of fear. Sentimentality kills courage and leads us into superficiality and into inaction with regard to the responses that are befitting for profound love.

And anger is likewise a useful signal that our body produces. Anger often means that our perspective is out of whack with reality, but anger can also tell us something about reality. Anger is a natural energy, useful for challenging actions. Of course, it is also true that acting-out our anger in thoughtless self-indulgent ways is not love; nevertheless, anger, like fear, sadness, grief, or any other feeling can be honored for the creative role it can play in authentic human living.

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Rationalism, moralism, and sentimentality are three structures of escape from profound humanness that catch all of us in their subtle nets. To the extent that we notice how we ourselves have been caught in these patterns, we begin to understand what is going on in the lives of the dysfunctionally religious across the globe. Humanity is being called by Reality to sober up – to give up the rational-security opiates, the moralistic-certitude stimulants, and the sentimentality potions that drown us in their sticky goo. Love of self and others is not a web of syrupy feelings. Love of self and others is a willingness to "let be" the full spectrum of life that characterizes each human being. When our profound humanity is restored, we experience a type of relief and joy, because such healing means taking leave of the despair-producing effort it takes to not be who we deeply are. Rest in being the Being that we are posited to be by the Power that posits us is a peace that is beyond understanding and the joy unspeakable.

We the universal league of profound humanness are called by the reality of our own integrity to fight dysfunctional religion. Whatever our heritage of religious practice or lack of a religious practice, we who are the universal league of profound humanness are called to a life-and-death battle with dysfunctional religion, every dysfunctional

religion, not just expressions of the religion we happen to practice. We need to say this imperative loudly to ourselves because our culture does not fully understand that dysfunctional religion must be corrected. The social process called "religion" is just as important (perhaps even more important) than processes of education or economics or politics. If our religious processes are dysfunctional, the entire society suffers dysfunctionality.

The universal league is precisely that part of a human society that knows the power of religious practices for good or for ill. The universal league consists of those who know the ruin that can be wrought by the sick religions that so many of us have already abandoned. This league of profound humanness is called by their own deep integrity to awaken the masses to the horror of dysfunctional religion. Here is the prophet Amos showing us an attitude that we can take: Speaking for the Final Reality, Amos said: "I hate, I spurn your pilgrim feasts; I will not delight in your sacred ceremonies. When you present your sacrifices and offerings I will not accept them, nor look on the buffaloes of your shared offerings. Spare me the sound of your songs; I cannot endure the music of your lutes. Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."³

Such a stern demand for change delivered to our religious institutions is surely as needed today as it was in Amos' day. And religion deserves stern demands for correction, like any other social process of our societies. We make a mistake when we dismiss our dysfunctional religious bodies as irrelevant and not worth our time and concern. They are a pattern of living that cries out to be healed, defeated, or sidelined. Their members need to be called upon to repent and be healed of their sicknesses. And we need to take pity on the somewhat innocent sheep who are being gathered into these evil kitchens and cooked.

I have sometimes used Christian heritage illustrations for this critique of religion, but it is not only Christian organizations that are crazy making. There are Muslim movements and Jewish movements that are also crazy making, as our news reports indicate. Not all Muslims, not all Jews are paranoid fools prone to ineffective and stupid violence, but many are. Such paranoid defensiveness in religious practice is self-defeating and criminal. Many of the Hindus and Muslims of Sub-Asia have slaughtered each other in incredible fits of defensive stupidity and in astonishing examples of inappropriate rage. Of equal foolishness have been the misunderstandings and wars among Protestants and Catholics. Religion can be a mean and dangerous thing. Even when overt violence is not the obvious manifestation, people are too often being twisted out of shape by doctrines and moralities and communal bonds that discourage rather than assist people to open to their profound humanness.

What is going on in religions today? And what is its cure? The basic story goes something like this: The cultures of the world have changed and are changing in ways that challenge deeply the formulations of religion that millions of people have taken on as their systems of security. Rather than change the religious practices in order to live fully in this era of history, many people have revolted against the onward march of time. They have insisted on turning back the clock. In addition to not opening to real life themselves and not reforming their own religious practices, they have engaged in the futile attempt to force their obsolete religious sensibilities upon everyone, often incorporating political means of doing so, or allowing themselves to be used by scheming politicians who prey upon their bigotry to get votes for still other tragedies. Clearly, dysfunctional religion is a permanent issue on the social-action list of any time and place.

³ Amos 5:21-24; The New English Bible 1970

Having now finished the reading of this book, I invite you to turn again to chapters 14, 15, and 16 and take in once more the qualities of that profound humanness we want our religious formations to help us access. Then read again Chapter 19 and see if you can discern the religious practices that you and others you know most need to practice in order to get on with our journey into the full enigma of the deep consciousness and wonder that is our profound life.