

It is not enough to be critical of traditional religion and religious belief unless you can offer something to replace them (vii).

There are three ways in which humanism can be understood: as a psychology of self-realization; as a naturalistic philosophy; and as a way of life (viii).

Common criticisms of Humanists:

- live too much in their heads and not enough in their hearts; too rationalistic
- don't want to have anything to do with spirituality
- spend too much time and energy on what they do not believe
- do not identify sufficiently with marginalized or oppressed people (4)

Perhaps one of the differences between *religious* Humanism and *secular* Humanism is that religious Humanists may be inclined to greater empathy and compassion and to living out of their hearts as well as in their heads. (5)

Many Humanists eschew spirituality because they assume it refers to supernaturalism. But it need not, and it should not. Spirituality refers to that dimension of our lives that deals with values, truth, meaning, love, integrity, joy, happiness, in essence, with how and why we live. (5) [compare with Huxley and Dewey: religion as one's life guided by ultimate commitment to ultimate ideals]

Karen Armstrong: "The one and only test of a valid [i.e. "good"] religious idea . . . was that it must lead directly to practical compassion." (7) [but I would add that a "good" religious idea leads to truth and beauty, as well as goodness (compassion)]

It is true that some Humanists have not grown beyond the sophomoric stage of rebellion, rejection, and reaction. (7) [cf. James Fowler: *The Stages of Faith*]

Having "existential security" correlates with being less religious in the traditional sense. . . . Where life is fragile, "nasty, brutish, and short," people seek help from a supernatural source. (9)

Education in general is a secularizing force (10)

the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has roughly doubled in the past two decades, from 8.2% in 1990 to 16% in 2008 (10)

The essence of Humanism: belief in the value and centrality of human beings, and the implications of that basic conviction (11)

Most of these [pre-20th-century] Humanist forerunners were just as concerned about the need for social change as they were about the problems posed by traditional religion. In fact, since they believed religion to be one of the forces that prevented social progress, they considered their critique of religion to be a first step toward beneficial change. (15)

John Dietrich and Curtis Reese, UU ministers: began to preach and teach a religion without God, called Humanism (15)

1933 "The Humanist Manifesto" emphasized "the complete realization of human personality" as the highest goal (16) [i.e. Humanism is a religion that "worships" human development at both the personal and the societal levels]

25 "fundamental" beliefs shared by most religious Humanists (19-24)

Whatever enhances and enriches life is good; whatever diminishes life is bad. (21-20)

Council for Secular Humanism:

We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality. (24)

How a person interprets [meditative experiences, or a spiritual sense of oneness with the Universe] depends on the assumptions he or she brings to it. (26)

Three “cognitive tools” that play roles in believing in God

- Agent detection
- Causal reasoning
- Folk theory of mind (as separate from the body) (26-27)

These tools dictate that we are born with a tendency to be religious, but the particular religious beliefs we hold are those taught by our culture. (28)

The psychological root of theism is the adult’s projection onto the supernatural of the dependency needs of the infant (28)

Religion is too often thought to mean belief in God, but Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, and Taoism are great religions that posit no Western style deity despite the fact that some popular versions developed theistic worldviews. (31)

John Dewey: The adjective *religious* refers to devotion to an ideal that helps to unify the self by composing and harmonizing the various elements of our being. (32)

Dewey insists that religious experience does not include assenting to any facts; that is the role of science (32) [so is it really necessary for religious Humanism to assert *facts* about the Universe? Facts such as that there is no god, there is no existence after death, etc.?)

Religious Humanists participate in a non-theistic religious *community* where they experience support for their convictions and values, inspiration for living meaningfully, celebration of life’s passages, and help in times of crisis (33)

[vs. secular Humanists] Religious Humanists also tend to be more likely to cherish and nourish such qualities as awe, wonder, and reverence, and to acknowledge that much we do not understand remains in the realm of mystery. [that is, to not be naïve materialist-realists] . . . they tend to be open to the idea of spirituality in a naturalistic sense (33) . . . more likely to affirm a role for feelings and emotions (34)

Humanist communities: UU fellowships, Ethical Culture societies, Humanistic Judaism congregations:

- Support and encourage Humanist values in a non-Humanist culture
- Provide life-long learning opportunities
- Group social action
- Emotional support during life’s ups and downs
- Celebrates “rites of passage”
- Celebrate major traditional holidays (35-38)

Community: more than a group of individuals each seeking his and her own interests. A community consists of individuals bound together by common interests, a commitment to one another, and a strong communal sense; its members identify with the larger whole and find much of their life’s meaning through their involvement in the community. Meetings, simple rituals, rites of passage, and learning and working together help to create a genuine community. (37)

Humanistic communities function in the lives of their members in much the same way as traditional congregations; they provide the same services but with a different worldview; they ask the same questions about life, but they offer different answers. (39)

Religious truth is evolutionary; it evolves over time; it changes as our understanding of life and the world change. . . . This is the genius of naturalistic religious Humanism (41)

The only Humanist belief that is not scientifically grounded is the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. (44)

Its compatibility with science enables Humanism to have a worldview that is both relevant and contemporary. (45)

The theory of natural selection maintains that the only purpose of organisms is to survive and to reproduce. (46) [is this a valid statement? Or is it reductionistic?]

Thus, evolution by natural selection has resulted in a “radical naturalization” both in our self-understanding and in our understanding of the world. (48)

Paley: the argument from design in 1802 (50)

Naturalistic Spirituality:

- Sense of the unity of all things
- Because we are one with all of the natural world we therefore have a moral responsibility to care for and preserve it
- Science in general and evolution in particular evoked this discovery of spiritual meaning in the natural world. (50-52)

God = emergent creativity (55)

While humanistic religious naturalism eliminates the comfort and security that many find in traditional faith, it more than compensates for this loss by giving us the excitement and satisfaction of being an integral part of an incredibly vast, beautiful and mysterious cosmos. (57)

Jesus sought to free Judaism from being a religion of laws and rituals and to make it a religion of the heart (58)

Religious naturalism’s story is a religious story because it calls us out of our self-centeredness and enables us to see ourselves as part of the great living system known as the cosmos. (59)

Like no other story it gives meaning and purpose to human beings as the agents responsible for the current and future stage of evolution, psycho-social evolution. Like no other story it provides the individual with a meaningful worldview and a sense of belonging to a larger whole. (59)

Spiritual: a quality of our lives that eclipses the mundane, everyday things we deal with in our work, our shopping, and our recreational lives. Spirituality is the opposite of the superficial, practical, technical or perfunctory. . . . an emotional state of intensely heightened and generalized awareness of one’s intimate relationship to and involvement and even identification with other persons and the rest of the universe (62)

A tremendous effort to discover or realize our better selves is what spirituality is all about. Spirituality is a process rather than the result. (64)

We [humans] must rely on ourselves and our own resources (67)

The importance of our own intelligence. . . . a synthesis of our reasoning and our emotional capacities (67)

Virtue ethics emphasizes the character of the individual rather than rules on consequences good people do good things, and they do good things because they want to, not because they feel it is their duty or responsibility (71-72)

Love: active concern for the well-being of those who we love (75)

Love without “works,” without active caring and responsibility, is not really love (75)

The opposite of love in this sense is not hate, but indifference (75)

The essentially selfish erotic nature of romantic love must give way to the mature companionable love that seeks the good of the other person if a marriage is to last. (76)

[Caring for oneself and caring for others] are not contradictory but conjunctive, for the feelings we hold toward ourselves are likely to be projected onto others (79)

- be responsive to your own needs (80)
- self-acceptance but not complacency or self-satisfaction (80-81)
- gratitude for what we are (82)

A humanist religious community in which people recognize the worth of one another is helpful in increasing self-love and self-acceptance. (83)

For the Humanist, **courage** is the determination to prevail and to live with meaning and joy in the face of an impersonal universe and without the psychological comforts of traditional religion. (84)

Being a non-theistic Humanist in the United States today requires the courage to go against the dominant culture in which over 90 percent of the people say they believe in God. (85)

It takes courage to be part of any cognitive minority: to take unpopular stands (85)

Reverence as the well-developed capacity to have the feelings of awe, respect, and shame when these are the right feelings to have (87)

Acts that disrespect and demean others demonstrate irreverence. (87)

At its extreme, a lack of reverence can be understood as a fundamental source of the violence in family, community, national, and international life. (88)

Lack of reverence leads people to arrogance (88)

As an ethical principle, reverence for life gives rise to an ethic of love in personal relationships, justice in social life, and trusteeship with respect to the natural environment. (89)

The ability to be **tolerant** begins with the reverent sense of my own limitations and with the understanding that, no matter how strongly I think that what I believe to be true is in fact true, I may be wrong. It is the knowledge that my truth is not the whole truth, nor the only truth, nor perhaps even true at all. (90)

the more knowledge and understanding we have, the greater the likelihood of our being tolerant persons. . . . includes appreciating the influence of family, culture, and tradition on their beliefs and behavior (90)

diversity and pluralism benefit society since we learn from others who have different opinions from our own (91)

two levels of toleration. The first is mere passive tolerance which is simply allowing others to believe or do things with which you disagree. But the second level of toleration goes beyond that to active appreciation of another's beliefs or practices even as they contradict your own. (91)

when I stop to ask why people believe the way they do, I am usually able to become more tolerant of their position (92)

certain types of people require an authority to tell them how to live. . . . seek the solace, comfort, and promise of recompense in the afterlife that conservative and fundamentalist religions offer. (92)

It is easier to be a Humanist if you have a full stomach and a decent bank account. (92)

Nevertheless, toleration has limits. . . . The Humanist will tolerate differences and different views as long as those differences do not conflict with basic Humanist values. (93)

Cultivating a profound and unshakeable feeling of **gratitude** is the key to becoming more fully human. Life is a gift (94)

Gratitude as a fundamental outlook on life leads to the capacity to find joy in little things (94)

Often it is not our misfortune but how we interpret painful events that makes all the difference (96)

The grateful heart neither denies nor overlooks the tragic dimension of human existence. (96)

Gratitude is also good therapy. . . . to write down each day or each week the many things for which you are grateful (96)

As a Humanist I am sometimes asked “To whom or to what are you grateful?” My initial response is that gratitude is a state of mind, an attitude toward life, and it does not need to have an object. (96)

Gratitude is a primal religious affection It is this fundamental sense of gratitude, not beliefs or doctrines, that divides truly religious people from non-religious people. (97)

religion begins with thanksgiving and ends in service (97)

Ironically, the very wealthy tend to be the least **generous**, while the poorer people are very generous. (99)

Generosity is the opposite of selfishness, and human beings are by nature selfish. That is part of our evolutionary inheritance (100)

But we also have an altruistic side based in empathy seems to be a quality that varies widely from one person to another depending on personal inclination and experience (101) [cf. mirror neurons]

Much that passes for **humor** in America today takes the form of sarcasm and mockery, which are profoundly disrespectful (102)

Humor is never “good” if it is at the expense of someone else. (103)

Humor unmasks our pretensions and leads to humility. (103)

To laugh at ourselves, we have to stand outside ourselves—and that is an immense benefit. (104)

There are times when it is clearly better not to tell the **truth**. (109)

To live the truth is even more important than telling the truth. Living truthfully is to live with integrity, the word we use to indicate that one’s actions are consistent with one’s words. (110)

Hope is that virtue on which every worthwhile accomplishment and every other virtue depend. It is a forward-looking orientation (111)

Hope is linked to self-respect (112)

Hope needs to have some connection to reality (112)

Hope is more general, a basic attitude toward life rather than the expectation of some specific outcome. (112)

Whether our hopes are realized may not be as important as the fact that we have them. (113)

Patience and impatience represent two different attitudes toward time and therefore toward life itself. Each represents a way of being, of looking at life and the world. (116)

To find pleasure and satisfaction in the process of living and not merely in doing tasks and accomplishing goals (117)

The Buddhist teaching of mindfulness; focusing on the present moment (117)

A way of living that combines goal-directedness and a process orientation (117)

It helps to live deliberately if we have a long-term vision of our lives (118)

Spirituality means waking up. . . . **meditation** practices making it a habit to realize what is happening in the present moment . . . the act of watching yourself (119)

Faith in the sense of trust and fidelity is closer to what religious faith should be about (122)

Faith in oneself and faith that life is good and worth living and potentially meaningful This is faith because it is not self-evident and it cannot be proved (122)

We make life worth living by the way we live. We are the meaning makers. (123)

Religion's role has been to codify and give supernatural authority to pre-existing **ethical** values (128)

A consistent correlation between traditional religious affiliation and attitudes of intolerance, bigotry, and prejudice (128)

Humanism affirms that ethical and moral principles are created by human beings (129)

The process of moral evolution is rooted in our animal background. (130)

The expanding circle of morality (130)

Moral precept developed over thousands of generations in human societies without any basis in religion (131)

In the West, ethics was united with religion only in the Hebrew tradition as found in the Old Testament. (131)

In general, we can say that whatever action leads to human enrichment and well-being is ethical or moral and whatever diminishes human well-being is not. (132)

How we treat other persons in *any* context has ethical implications (132)

Whatever we adopt as the goals for our life will determine our values and our ethics. (133)

In practice many if not most of our moral decisions derive more from our feelings than from our rational conclusions (134)

Found a clear correlation between empathy and altruistic behavior—helpers simply could not stand by and see others suffer (135)
. . . . Their altruism trumps their instinctive self-centeredness. (136)

"Empathic neuronal circuitries" = "mirror neurons" (136)

An ethic of love and compassion teaches . . . not that we should ignore or neglect our own needs and desires, but that the good life includes caring for and about others. (139)

"Paradox of hedonism" which says that the more we pursue pleasure the less satisfying it becomes (139)

Love, understood as an emotion that leads to action on behalf of others. . . . guided by empathy (139)

We can love a person without liking them (141)

"situation ethics": its central value is love (141)

Ethical decisions are usually a matter of choosing between "shades of gray" (141)

Following an ethic of love and compassion is demanding because it requires us to become as informed as possible about each situation, and to give serious thought to all aspects of what we are doing. (142)

We have the means to create a more just society if our resources were distributed in a more equitable manner (146)

The moral problem underlying our unjust economy is our materialistic values (146)

We think in highly individualistic terms rather than in communitarian terms (147)

So materialism combined with hyper-individualism leads to economic injustice (147)

[Charitable contributions] do not change the social conditions that caused their suffering [in the first place] (148)

Most of the problems in our society are systemic—the result of injustices and inequities in our social structures. (149)

If we truly care about people we will want to be involved in issues that deeply affect their lives, and that means we will be involved in political issues. (150)

We Humanists . . . [should] talk less about what we don't believe, and instead demonstrate by our lives the principles that guide us (150)

Trusteeship is reverence for life applied to nature, and its ethical principle is responsibility. (151)

If we were to regard nature as sacred, as an object of respect, it would help moderate our exploitation of its resources (152)

The way forward [about the environment] begins with education (153)

Irrational assumptions:

- that it is necessary for each of us to be loved or approved by virtually every significant person in our community (157) . . . [rather] It is better to encounter some disapproval than to sacrifice one's integrity. (158)
- that a person should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects (158)
- the idea that unhappiness is externally causes (159) [rather] happiness does not result from external circumstances but from our inner attitude, especially from the difference between our expectations and the degree of their fulfillment (159)
- that past history determines present behavior (159) [rather] The past need not determine the present when we understand its bearing on our thoughts and actions. In this way the exercise of reason, intelligence, and understanding can greatly increase our freedom. (160)
- that there is a right, precise, and perfect solution to every human problem (160)

Destructive **anger** (163)

Often anger is a secondary emotion (164) By pausing to think and ask, "What am I really feeling?" once can often avoid flying into a rage. (165)

When we are angry . . . we feel self-righteous (165)

Anger can sometimes have a constructive result. . . . We can turn our anger into a positive action. (166)

Worry can be useful if it leads to helpful changes, but worry becomes a problem when it is excessive and immobilizing. (167)

Act on whatever is worrying us where that is possible. . . . seeking more information looking at things from a larger perspective have faith in ourselves, in our own ability to get through crises (169)

Some degree of **anxiety** is inherent in being human . . . complete security is impossible (172)

Reduce or control anxiety through the application of reason accept our limitations as human beings (172) live for something bigger than ourselves (174)

Nothing significant would ever be accomplished without the impetus healthy anxiety supplies. It is only excessive anxiety that is the problem. (174)

Guilt: There is often much to learn from our missteps, but it is not helpful to dwell on them. . . . concentrate on making the present and the future the best that we can. (178)

There is no answer to the question, "what is **the meaning of life**?" because that is not the right question. The right question is "how and where can we find life's meaning?" (188)

Creativity is at the center of this universe, and since we are the product of this powerful force, creativity is very much at the center of our lives as well. . . . We are part of nature, and our creative ability is part of nature's process (189)

Making our lives meaningful by participating in the sacred creativity of the universe (189)

We also find meaning in the experience of loving and being loved and needed by others. (189)

Our lives become more meaningful when we are deeply committed to and involved in causes that contribute to human well-being and world betterment. (190)

Our lives gain meaning insofar as we participate in the process of life enlargement and enrichment and oppose all those things that would diminish and destroy life. (192)

When we understand ourselves as part of a universal process How we live, the decisions we make, and the actions we take all play a role in the ongoing process of cultural evolution. (192)

It does seem that **suffering** plays a powerful role in deepening our lives and broadening our sympathies. . . . gives us a deeper perspective on living when we recover (196)

The crucial question regarding suffering is not “why did this happen to me?” but . . . “how can I make this meaningful or productive?” (196) We live in an unfinished world, and it is both our privilege and our responsibility to work on finishing it. (197)

Our language about **death** fosters its denial. (199)

Death is tragic only when it is premature. (201)

death is nature’s way of making room for others to enjoy a few years on this amazing planet . . . we are part of the process of living, dying, and being reconstituted in other forms (201)

We live on in the form of our influence on others and our contributions to the world (201)

Whether what we leave behind be great or small is less important than that our actions are on the side of love, justice, and peace. (202)