

## **COMPANIONSHIP (A Metaphor For Humanism)**

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A crisis of faith haunts humanism. The world is at risk and we have made it so. Our viciousness toward each other, and above all, our global awareness of it gives increasing credibility to the claims of anti-humanists. To be sure, we did not invent genocide, terror, and torture in the 20th century. But the size of things and our ability to destroy the world itself makes a sad irony of our faith in human potentiality and of our vision of human beings as "evolution become aware of itself."

Humanist victories--and there are many in science, technology, and politics - are bittersweet. The secular state, a victory over clerical power, becomes an end in itself. Bio-medical developments, nuclear warfare, and ecological crisis pose anew issues of human destiny. Yet, when we need to judge on matters of life and death we learn how poorly prepared we are to be as gods.

We find humanist talk about science, progress, and democracy unconvincing. Nor are noisy attacks on dogmatism an adequate alternative for humanist affirmations. Our enemies- and even some of our friends-are right to accuse us of inattention to human experience, of a certain glibness. At the same time, we cannot desert reason for the psychological egoisms that afflict humanism and humanist groups these days.

We have failed to do our homework and are all too willing to let others do it for us. We even feel a perverse gratitude for fundamentalist attacks on "secular humanism" in the media, the schoolroom, and the legislature. At least they call attention to us. No less problematic is our reliance on church-state cases to define who we are. We also confess the inadequacy of our beliefs by our weakness of loyalty. What then is to be done?

Once upon a time, humanism excited intellectual attention and personal devotion. As the precocious child of the Enlightenment and of modern science, it made revolutions, discovered new worlds, and rebuilt old ones. Intellectually, morally, and politically, the humanist viewpoint dissolved tyranny and superstition. Humanism de-mystified everything, challenged everything. But today, this critical Newtonian strategy misses too much. So, our historic strength becomes our present weakness, and yet, rationality need not be a dead end. As Khoren Arisian remarked,

"The fresh uses of reason lie at the heart of virtually every significant advance in Western culture, and no people have been more inspirational on this point than those Greeks who pioneered history's greatest intellectual revolution in politics, art, and philosophy in the

5th and 4th centuries B.C.E., making Athenian culture the undisputed glory of the ancient world. When St. Thomas required an authoritative source for conceptually ordering the world of Catholic Christendom in the 13th century he turned to Aristotle, not St. Augustine... When the leaders of the American Enlightenment sat down to write a Constitution for a new United States of America they had a ready knowledge of Greek as well as Roman political history to guide them...And as for liberalism in religion, it would have gone nowhere without the historical priority of the Enlightenment which postulated rationalism and ethics as its twin classic pillars." 2

What can we say about "the fresh uses of reason?" Illusion is all too tempting and, in our anxiety, we often thoughtlessly imitate traditions other than our own, borrow meanings blindly. At the same time, we need an adequate philosophy of experience. Intimations of things unknown, feelings and rationality together, are surely not alien to us. After all, 20th century humanist leaders like John Dewey and Julian Huxley worked and re-worked the theme of a "religious" humanism in an attempt to reach beyond the 18th century. Typically, Dewey remarked:

It is pertinent to note that the unification of the self through the ceaseless flux of what it does, suffers, and achieves cannot be attained in terms of itself. The self is always directed toward something beyond and so its own unification depends upon the idea of the integration of the shifting scenes of the world into that imaginative totality we call the Universe..."3

Unfortunately, the term, "religious," still leads us into a dead-ended semantic debate. We replace the search for a reconstructed humanism with the aridity of word-games. But, if we are to build a humanism for our age, we must escape the temptation to polarize ourselves and our fellow human beings as "pro" or "anti." We need to re-work the humanist categories of person, dignity, and nature. We need to explore, with generosity of spirit, new visions of person and world while still holding on to reason, science, and democracy.

First, let us try to clear away the debris. We love to choose up sides. We mistake the pleasure of argument for an understanding of what is happening in the world with all its ambiguity. The playing field is a poor metaphor for experience.

For example, we turn faith into caricature when we reduce it to superstition. We create its complement, a simple-minded secularism. Both faith and humanism, however, are too rich with possibilities to be dismissed by abusive labelling. Humanists ought to take human experience seriously. We are ill served by the mentality of the arena. What possibilities appear when we move beyond either! or?

## A CRITICAL HUMANISM

Fundamentalism invites *raucous humanism*. Of course, we are not God's special creatures. We know too much about coming to be and passing away to be beguiled by eternal elevation. A sensibility to other natural beings, indeed to nature itself, suggests the arrogance of "speciesism." However, the pretensions of faith - the claim that we are uniquely the chosen of God - evokes that noisy humanism which is trapped into and even enjoys its denials.

For example, the game of absolutes encourages the foolishness of "creation science" and the polemicizing of evolution theory. We debate "God! no-God" over and over again to the boredom of nearly everyone. Choreographed, we move through the arguments from "design" or "first cause" or "final cause" and the counter-arguments that demolish efforts to read experience with "a priori" logic. The argument goes nowhere.

Suppose, for a moment, we unhooked "faith and its object" and looked for the humanity behind it.<sup>4</sup> Surely, the stories of a special providence told in so many ages and places ask for us to search out meanings. To be sure, the stories are poor physics and biology but they are not merely fictions. Humanists, in other words, cannot dismiss history by patronizing diagnosis by calling people fearful and superstitious. All of us search for sustenance. Some of us, mistakenly "people the space beyond the stars" with spirits and demons. But we miss the point when we report gleefully and accurately that we did not find ghosts when we landed on the moon or sent a rocket to mars. The story of providence poses a question for humanists too: can human needs be met in a universe, grown incomprehensibly large and that does not pay attention to us?

The question has not been answered. The angers of fundamentalism and the confusion of sects confess to a spreading anxiety of spirit. We shout louder and louder, betraying our fears by our intensity. We mask lives of desperation with inordinate busy-ness. We conduct ourselves as if the gods, even if they existed, were indifferent. Even the believer reveals that he does not seriously hold to the notions of judgment and resurrection. Eternity is denied in practice. Thus, an obligation and an opportunity for humanism to answer the question: how shall human life be made purposeful and enjoyable? That is the question posed by faith for a critical humanism.

## A RESPONSIVE HUMANISM

Religious traditions center on the powers of the gods. They tell stories of life destroying flood and pestilence, or of life giving radiance. *Prosaic humanism*, reacting to the animation of nature with mysterious deities, retreats to the "facts." But naive realism is as unintelligible as trans-natural stories of gods and devils. Without context, interpretation, and action, we can hardly know what counts as fact. In other words we need our stories too and we have been aesthetically and psychologically indifferent for much too long.

We are not as gods. Our lives are marked by beginnings and endings and, above all, by interruptions. We are moved by powers often unseen and unknown, by powers that are in us and apart from us. Our biographies seldom play out like theater with beginning, middle and end. So we lack the elements of drama. Yet imagination has stuff to work on. Things go awry; influences, not our own, shape what we are and may be. Above all there is our finitude, the fact of death, a responsive humanism will attend to intensities and uncertainties. For this, the game of denials on all sides is shallow and unconvincing.

As Harold Blackham of the British Humanist Association wrote,

"The loved detail of a landscape is annihilated by distance, but one can return and find it. There is no return in time but what was once somewhere had no less reality than what is elsewhere. The loves and achievements, the tragedies and comedies swallowed up with the empire of Xerxes were as real as our own, and those of yesterday which have passed into equal oblivion. By the criterion of eventual oblivion, there are no distinctions nor standards, no virtues nor values nor joys nor sorrows: nothing is. This is the true nihilism, to take oblivion as the measure of all things because oblivion is the destiny of all things.

"To accept and respect the temporal condition of all things is the beginning of wisdom, for this is the condition and source of all the things that we live and long for, and we can really think of no other terms on which we could enjoy them nor exist ourselves to enjoy them. To appeal against the temporal terms of the human condition, the ephemeral character of our life, to aspire to an eternal unconditioned existence is not really to look for salvation, for it is to reject and forfeit life. This earnest refusal of life is the profoundest thoughtlessness, the tragic misunderstanding not merely of the terms of human existence but mainly of its very character, what there is there to love and care for, and how it is as it is..."S

#### A REASONABLE HUMANISM

Humanism reacts to the "mysteries" of revelation and incarnation. Another reality is, we are told by supernaturalists, necessary for the intelligibility of this one. An extra-natural invasion of the natural is required if human life is to have meaning. This "paradox" of faith is broadcast unashamedly. We are told to lose the world in order to gain it. It is not surprising then to find the corresponding rigidities of *rationalistic humanism*. Rationalism has little difficulty demonstrating the contradictions of extra-naturalism. However, in his anxiety to win the battle, the rationalist ignores the absurd features of existence just as the believer ignores the absurd features of belief. Most of us find it easy to ignore both of them.

Here too, attention to experience is more helpful than choosing up sides. Surely, we admit the permanent incompleteness of our knowledge. Science is always a sceptic's enterprise. This should lead us to a certain humility before making claim and counter claim. A reasonable humanism understands that we meet the world long before we put it together in art and science. We know that even our greatest aesthetic and conceptual achievements finally vanish. So a reasonable humanist acknowledges mysteries but does not transform them into "the mysterious," and lives with absurdities but does not elevate "the absurd."

### **A PROGRESSIVE HUMANISM**

The promise of salvation forces humanists to choose up sides, but sadly. We know enough of the painful and the disappointing to want to believe that somewhere, somehow, it all fits together. Surely, then the idea of salvation is not to be laughed at. And humanists have indeed secularized salvation by reading history through the idea of *progress*. Promethean energy, we believed, would make things right. A selective reading of events outfitted this sentiment with evidence.

But false promises, religious or humanist, turn out cynics on all sides. Progress cannot survive an honest reading of history. Progressive humanism, however, can be sustained once we turn to action. Progress is a stance toward the future and not an interpretation of the past. Our conduct can make a difference and the difference can be better rather than worse. Progressive humanism is thus a philosophy of choices and changes, and a rejection of fate. With Sartre, we imagine ourselves leaning forward into time:

"But there is another meaning of humanism. Fundamentally, it is this: man is constantly outside of himself; in projecting himself, in losing himself outside of himself, he makes for man's existing; and on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist; man being this state of passing-beyond, and seizing upon things only as they bear upon this passing-beyond, is at the heart, at the center of this passing-beyond. There is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. This connection between transcendency as a constituent element of man...and subjectivity in the sense that man is not closed in on himself but is always present in a human universe is what we call existentialist humanism..."<sup>7</sup>

### **A RESPECTFUL HUMANISM**

Religious stories are filled with images of authority and servility. Trust in god the "king," the "almighty," the "ruler of heaven and earth." Unfortunately, as Job discovered, our trust is misplaced and there is no appeal. The message of submissiveness, of acceptance, evokes an ironic

response, an *arrogant humanism*. We think of ourselves as gods; the world becomes our plaything. In a strange inversion, domination becomes a theme of humanism.

We are indeed powerful. But we are not alone in the world and everything is not in our power. The interplay of limitations and abilities requires us to develop a finely tuned sensibility to the beauties and anxieties of experience. We do give voice to ourselves in nature through poetry and art. But we do not know enough to listen to voices, not our own, reply. Of course, there is benefit to us in the world, but it is not solely of benefit to us. "Transactions" occur as the varied membership of the world moves toward a respectful humanism. As John Dewey remarked,

The community of causes and consequences in which we together with those not born are enmeshed is the widest and deepest symbol of the mysterious totality of being the imagination calls the universe. It is the embodiment for sense and thought of that encompassing scope of existence the intellect (alone) cannot grasp... The continuing life of this comprehensive community of beings includes all the significant achievements of men in science and art and all the kindly offices of intercourse and communication..."H

#### AN INQUIRING HUMANISM

Finally, too much of religion demands the surrender of intelligence. Its dogmatic pretensions call forth the reaction of *tolerant humanism*. All is opinion and all opinions are equivalent. The tolerant humanist suppresses criticism for the sake of peaceableness, confuses courtesy with clarity. Unfortunately, while toleration makes few decisions, experience requires closure. The outcome of toleration, therefore, is often the rise of arbitrary authority and an irrational exercise of power.

The truths we achieve always have a flickering quality. So, we make the mistake of thinking we must choose between truth and chaos. We can see, however, that the issue is not truth but the anxiety of doubt. Security can be found in other ways. The continuing renewal of knowledge is the genius of the sciences and the sciences offer reliability with uncertainty. An inquirer's humanism calls thus for a not yet achieved culture of temporality, a scientific culture properly so called. Our discoveries, our reasonings, our arguments are always in the process of acceptance, rejection, and transformation. Moments of organization are discovered in experience...but they are moments. We learn that universe is not organized once and forever.

We can thus find patterns, textures, shapes emerging from the transactions that renew our experience. Intelligibility does not elude us although ultimacy does. Over and over again, we re-open the world's complexities, incompleteness and options. The humanist vista is rich and varied. The excitement and fascination of inquiry reveal that both dogma and toleration are impoverished. The former narrows vision, the latter dispenses with it.

## *Humanism Today*

When we listen to the voices of experience we hear the manifold possibilities of modern humanism - critical, reasonable, progressive, respectful, responsive, inquiring. In turn, these are centered in a reconstructed humanist reality. Our task is to search it out and express it.

We have lost the comforts of Enlightenment boundaries and the myths we once used to put things together no longer serve. We are neither the darlings of creation nor are we become as gods. HI Destiny has vanished before the incommensurable spaces and times of things. Stories rooted in a homely geography or in manageable durations are unconvincing. New stories have yet to be written. We are, as it were, aesthetically and emotionally impoverished. Once upon a time, the politics of revolution and the dream of plenty were the features of a modern metaphor. Freedom and reason stirred the mind and the blood. But we have been de-mythologized. Freedom has become negation and reason mere method. We live in a prosaic age.

We need a new metaphor in order to catch our experience and direct our perception. Nor is this a matter of personal taste. Metaphor takes its validity from the fact that it serves. It is validated in practice, but that is not yet art. A metaphor must have objective relevance else it would not be convincing for very long. But it needs its song and its singers or it will not remain convincing. Humanists, however, have not understood that humanism needs its story. Humanist fundamentalism - the reincarnation of 19th century rationalism - confesses the search for a convincing metaphor. So too with humanist psychologism which dresses humanism in the trappings of fulfillment. Unfortunately, neither of these is very promising. They do not serve. That is why our response to them reveals only a shadow loyalty.

Humanist conversation, looking longingly at traditionalist neighbors, turns then to undefined "good" terms like community, emotion, intuition. However, the development of a "religious" humanism, which is where this conversation is located, is dead-ended in semantics and regarded by many humanists as a betrayal of reason. For others, enamored of the religious, critical theory is absent and sentimentality replaces thought. The religious conversation asks more of humanism than it has historically been able to give. Yet, despite its inner disarray, humanism continues to fascinate, to threaten. A strange flattery is found in fundamentalism's attack on humanism although its target is only a mirror-imaged humanist fundamentalism. The adjectival humanisms of traditional faiths, e.g. Christian humanism, Marxist humanism, acknowledge its fruitfulness. But neither friend nor enemy engages a post-modern humanist metaphor.

The symbol of any humanist metaphor is the person. The humanist story has historically interpreted the person as the free individual but at the same time it locked that individual into a compartment. <sup>11</sup>

He or she could choose to admit or to deny admittance to others and that choice had to be respected. Privacy was the great achievement of political humanism against the intrusions of priests and kings. The invitation,

however, was written in a crabbed hand. The individual was also hidden away from all other individuals and even from self. Intimacy, a personal notion, was not synonymous with privacy, a public contractual notion. Thus, the Enlightenment metaphor had difficulty with the passions which were dismissed as irrational and aberrant. Society became a contract between coordinated privacies. The mechanism for connecting individuals together was the lawful state into which one entered by an act of will and from which one could absent oneself by an act of objection. Told well, this story of the individual was exciting and promising. Its drama, undeniably heroic, was a tale of courage for the sake of freedom and reason. Still today, the metaphor sings a promise when so much of the world is caught in tyranny and superstition.

And yet, the 18th century story does not ring true. Individualism is inadequate, two-dimensional. But, is individualism our only available image? An alternative suggests itself. We are never really alone but always in the company of others...at the moment of birth, when learning and growing up, in the excitements of work and love. Even at the moment of dying, memory dwells on connections. We are in the company of others while walking the streets of the city or the paths of a forest. When apart, like some Robinson Crusoe, we still carry companions with us in the images which populate reflection. A person is a company. With the metaphor of companionship come coordinate themes of intimacy and friendship. These are responsive to our needs in ways that the privacy of contract only shadows. Companionship is an organic image more suited to our experience than the mechanistic images of cause and effect or the economic images of give and get which shaped individualism.

But, who is a companion? We are recalled thereby - but in a different way- to the moral mission of humanism. Once upon a time, it appeared as the revolutionary politics of equality and citizenship. More generally, humanism struggled for the conversion of objects into subjects, for a generous inclusiveness. Companionship carries on that mission. It directs us to a moral evolutionary biology as the company grows and a moral cosmology as we no longer picture reality as atoms banging into each other and bouncing away. The company is never still and never silent. The metaphor invites humanist inquiry and celebration, seeking the knowledge and expressing the joy of being in the company. With the moral energy called for to enlarge the company, the metaphor also directs humanist praxis.

By way of beginning, let us reflect on some of the possible import of the metaphor. As yet neither science nor philosophy, we probe here and there. We want to find out if the metaphor of companionship can capture a vision of person, of relationship, of world. How does companionship reconstruct our sense of nature and all that is in it?

## **PERSONS**

"Personhood" does not seem to be a mysterious idea. Yet, we know that it is not just a description. Many of us still do not regard women or children

as persons, at least not fully as persons. Nationalism and tribalism still draw ideological, political, and moral lines between persons and non-persons. Personhood is thus not a fact of biology or psychology but the outcome of a political and moral struggle. When successful, we attribute "dignity" and "worth," marking persons off from things. Dignity is a directive, telling us that a person is a being whom we may not violate. But violation is not a self-evident notion either.

We notice that a person emerges from supporting relationships like nurture, education, friendship but also from conflict and opposition. Suppression may be understood as the effort to block emergence, to deny status as person and affirm status as thing. Organically, personal relationships empower us to enter into further relationships. A moral feature of personal relationships is that they are chosen or in the case of "blood" relationships that they can be severed. Thus entering a relationship without invitation is a violation even where some over-riding intention like "it's for your own good" seems to justify treating person as object. So, we judge parents or teachers by their respect for the dignity of children, or a good marriage by a grant of mutual dignity. Developmentally, we know we are dealing with a child when we find an as yet unformed ability to be respectful of dignity, i.e. a "child" invades, intrudes.

Worth is a correlate of dignity. It delivers the message of self-respect, of attributing dignity to one's self. When I conceive myself as a being of whom worth can be predicated, then through my motives, choices, and actions I am uniquely present to the world. This presence is active, a presentation and not merely another name for the existence of an object. When I find the attribution of worth by another to him or her self, I cannot be indifferent to what that subject presents. Worth signals a special claim on my attention as dignity signals a special limitation on my action. Things may be treated as instances of categories; e.g. chairs, clouds, stars. We can even pretend a momentary blindness when we subsume persons under functional headings as when we deal with store clerks, toll takers, bus drivers, voters. But, the attribution of dignity and worth tells us that we are using a "convenient fiction" and we forget that to our peril. We may treat persons statistically, as if they were objects, but only temporarily and in "fear and trembling."

Set in an evolutionary framework, this notion of presentation can help us to re-think the notion of purpose. Humanists have denied purpose to the universe because a history of belief in god's purpose was used to justify moral, political, and psychological tyranny. In its place we have offered an alternative: the purposes of men and women as in "enlightened self interest" or "altruistic" behaviour. But, even when proposed as social ideals - e.g. as in "free enterprise" or "democratic socialism" - such purposes lacked ontological status, were only human and ephemeral. Characteristically therefore, Enlightenment politics was one of means, not ends, e.g. "due process," the "pursuit" of happiness. Enlightenment economics focussed on markets and prices. Neither politics nor economics dealt with preferable ends but only with preferred ends. Both succeeded in avoiding questions of ends because images carried over from earlier metaphors persisted in culture and

consciousness. Thus, equality and freedom were justified by the image of human beings as creatures of a common creator. Organized greed was sanctioned by Adam Smith's "invisible hand" a barely disguised god of destiny. But these earlier metaphors have vanished. We are secularized. Without alternatives, an epidemic of privatism replaces purpose with chaos. Hence the modern experience!

Can we reformulate the notion of purpose while avoiding sentimentality and theology? Purpose, like dignity and worth, may be understood as a moral attribute. A being of whom purpose may be predicated is one which makes an intentional difference to the company. For example, a new-born makes a difference to the family but not intentionally. On the other hand, as an infant's presentation emerges out of relationships, the "home" becomes purposive in a different way than before. In a humanist ontology - the model of family and home is one possibility of the metaphor - purpose is not embedded in history by some extra-natural author. We cannot know in advance what difference the baby will make but we know that the home will be different. Purpose alerts us to look forward for intended actions. Later, looking backward, we will see the person as "evolution become aware of itself," but that is later. When we fail to find this, when it does not happen, then the "home" may be said to have failed. The attribution was not genuine. Purpose is thus both an intention to be generated and a basis for criticism.

Looking forward, purpose is a guess at directionality, marking a hoped for impact in the world. Purpose is thus re-introduced as a form of action. It is the way a person experiences progress as fulfilled or unfulfilled purposes. Beings that are purposeful qualify for membership in the company. Presentation that must be accounted for generates the life of the company.

Reflecting on purpose, dignity, and worth can lead in unexpected directions. For example, a landscape may acquire companionate qualities. Points of view and participations reconstruct a landscape as it reconstructs us. For the predator, it is a hunting scene; for the tree, it is a nourishing scene; for the artist, it is an aesthetic scene. "Landscape" is an active notion already purposive and not merely existent. But then the "merely existent" is an abstraction and not the report of experience. The artist may say without distortion that the landscape "speaks" to him or her. Indeed, in great art, it is almost as if the landscape holds the painter's brush. Humanist conversation can speak legitimately of violating or respecting a landscape as when we recognize an appropriate architecture or are dismayed by design gone awry.

With a companionate metaphor, typical humanist ideas like capacity and potentiality acquire new interpretations. They appear as transformations that expand the company, as moves from object to subject. These transformations are hardly predictable. Companions emerge out of exploring the possibilities of companionship with this or that object. Indeed, we might suggest that predictability is a sign that we are still dealing with "objects." They can be collected statistically just because their personality is suppressed or ignored or denied. Surprise is a feature of

"subjects." To be sure, the acorn becomes the oak and the embryo becomes the child. But, "the child" just as "the oak" is an abstraction. Only a reductionist science sees each as an object, an instance - all oaks like all other oaks, all children like all other children. Reductionist thought, for all its utility, is thus a most abstract way of thinking. Ironically the children of the Enlightenment take it to be the most factual.

## ETHICS

A metaphor of companionship opens interesting possibilities for humanist ethics. The members of an ethical community are identified by the attributes of personhood, i.e. dignity, worth, purpose. But, on the one hand, personhood is not self evident and on the other, it is not easily confined. From a moral point of view, the actions of persons shape and are reshaped by companionship. The patterns reveal the moral quality of person and company.

Now that kind of talk is quite familiar. To speak of companionship does not strain ordinary moral usage. A person is a subject and not an object, a being for whom there are no replacements. That is precisely the goal of an ethical transformation of the non-ethical: we intend a move wherever possible and appropriate from thing to person. Historically; we notice that this is marked by a more and more generous inclusion in the company. Our metaphor, in other words is rooted in humanist moral history. The attributes of personhood are to be assigned to a broader and broader population. Thus far, our moral imagination has extended personhood to all humankind and this, whatever its faults, has been the strength of humanist cosmopolitanism.

But reflection takes strange turns. For example, are the boundaries of companionship to be drawn only around the human race? There are hints that this ought not be so. We already have many non-human companions. To be sure, this attribution is often anthropomorphic or sentimental. We assign "personality" to our pets but we reserve the right to withdraw the assignment. From an ethical point of view, however, we cannot withdraw dignity, worth, and purpose. If we could, then we have misused the notion of person or we have behaved unethically. So we have a judgment to make and the metaphor helps us shape our questions. For example, we recognize legitimate claims against "cruelty to animals" which cannot be ignored, trivialized or sentimentalized. But we need grounds on which to justify the claims...hence the problem of companionship.

One criterion for membership in the company is the ability to use symbols in order to grasp relationships between ends and means particularly where delays occur. Language, as it were, hangs suspended between ends and means. Language thus implies a sense of time and not just of duration. Another criterion is the ability to exhibit affectional relationships to the point of placing the good of another above one's own good. One or both of these characteristics... which in ethical discourse are called rationality and altruism...are not, however, found only in human beings. Others use symbols and not just signs and show affectional relationships that cannot

be explained away as "instinctive." 12 The moral company, thus, may already be said to include higher apes, whales, and porpoises. Our study of language and of affectional relationships continues to produce surprises. The company cannot therefore in principle, be restricted to a particular population by any *a priori* boundary.

Doing humanist ethics, as in the past, takes us down some unexpected pathways...but it always has as when blacks, women, children were understood as persons while most people could hardly conceive the possibility. We must be cautious, however, about our criteria. For example, the use of symbolic capacity or any other criterion derived from human experience as the paradigm moral experience may be a case of special pleading. An ethics of companionship might better be based in sensitivities and appreciations. Achieving inter-species "understanding" - i.e. common language - may not be possible. And in the absence of acceptable translations between languages the chance of moral error increases through mis-understandings and non-understandings. We may, for example attribute personhood in unwarranted ways or convert objects into subjects inappropriately. But responsiveness is always a possibility. Companionship thus suggests the interaction of ethical and aesthetic considerations. Finally, the risk of an ethics of companionship is misplaced generosity.

Putting appreciation into the moral center is particularly useful because so much of humanist ethics is overly attentive to moral legalism, to questions of justice and rights. Again, our Enlightenment roots both enrich and impoverish us. The company includes those simply incapable of entering a contract who nevertheless ought to be treated as persons. For example, we can on this view treat infants and handicapped individuals as persons without resort to a dubious notion of potentiality. A companionate view of ethics also raises questions about the thought that we "own" our bodies, the use of private property as a metaphor for liberty, as in the abortion debate. Once we understand that intimacy is not privacy and that intimacy is a term of companionship, we cannot simply act on our own. Companionship does not force us to abandon an ethics of justice for an ethics of caring. But it does lead us to put new questions. At the same time, the tradition of rights and responsibilities pulls us back from deterioration into sentimentalism. Ethics and aesthetics correct each other.

Companionship offers the basis for an environmentalist ethics. However, it also brings to light an unavoidable problem. We eat and breath and move. When we do, we inevitably destroy members of the company. We could, of course, define those we destroy as "things," and we do! However, we are not always careful enough to explain the basis for the definition, using necessity as our excuse. An aesthetic correction of the ethical by putting appreciations into the center carries with it a deeply felt sense of tragedy which now becomes an ontological feature of moral experience. We accept moral failure as an unavoidable feature of our existence in a finite environment. Humanists, perhaps, can thus appreciate a "sense of sin" on naturalistic grounds.

Moral experience becomes a "thick" concept as the ethical and the aesthetic come into touch with each other. A future epistemology will thus be forced to re-think our domains of thought. At the very least, a companionate metaphor leads us to recognize that ethics is not sufficiently defined by categories like rule-making, and obligation-meeting. Companionate relationships open up the ethical boundaries just as an extension of personhood opens up the anthropological boundaries.

## NATURE

Humanists are naturalists. We do not believe in two worlds as our antagonists do. At the same time, a modern humanism cannot accept the dualism of its own humanist ancestry. Ordinarily, we distinguish the natural and the artificial, the natural and the human, the natural and the unnatural. These distinctions become problematic as humanism becomes radically inclusive. What happens to naturalism when we use a metaphor of companionship and keep open the question, who may count as companion?

I recall asking a group of Roman Catholic theologians why a beaver dam was natural but a bridge unnatural? The answer was a retreat to metaphysical dualism and had to be. But the habitual distinctions humanists use also lead to the trap of two worlds, the human world and all the rest. When we address the world, however, with a companionate metaphor, the "unnatural" is meaningless. Our issue is one of membership and non-membership - the important distinction for companionship - and this is never merely given. We do not simply turn nature into a description. And, while humanists may contemplate, they are not contemplatives. Thus, naturalism for humanists entails action. We fail if we leave the world to objects only, i.e. as we found it. We fail disastrously when we turn subjects, except for a privileged human species, into objects.

The members of the company have, as it were, a right to be present. Our metaphor thus hints at the development of a naturalist politics where membership is understood as the pre-condition of citizenship. For inarticulate members of the company, surrogates and agents must be found. In other words, a companionate view of naturalism opens up moral and political terms, terms of right and participation, which have been only anthropocentric even among the most radically democratic of humanisms.

Nature is a presentation too and not merely as a collection of the presented. Unifications and integrations are evident in our experience of ourselves in the world. We are hardly justified, however, in assuming that it is only our experience that consists of such unifications and integrations. Participation, therefore, need not simply be a word of human politics but more basically an implication of the natural interpreted by a metaphor of companionship. Spinoza long ago suggested that the all existents have a "tendency," a characteristic direction as it were.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle's nature was dynamic. These classic views, naturalistic but not prosaic, come back again - as they always do - to pose new insights for a companionate naturalism. Existents are always found in contexts and contexts are not

interchangeable. So an appreciation of contexts, an exploration of points of view, is indicated. Again, aesthetic considerations appear for a reconstructed humanism.

Human beings may not claim that participation is uniquely their privilege in nature. This suggests a humanism that is less arrogantly centered on itself. While taking away our special status as lords of creation, it offers a world that is rich with beings that we need take account of and that, in ways not fully grasped, take account of us.

We might even speculate about tools and artifacts. Ordinarily, these are merely things; we exhaust their possibilities by exploring their functions and uses. But this is to ignore much of our experience. Artifacts and tools are objects only to the limited imagination. The craftsman or craftswoman knows the vitality and responsiveness of tools and materials. The grain and texture of wood resists or invites the carving. We speak properly with respect of paintings and sculptures, buildings and bridges. Dismissing these as mere things reflects a poverty of experience. Thus our disposable world with its economy of discards restricts what we can be with. Modern experience is narrowed to the merely useful. By contrast, a precious object is never merely an object, whether it be a bit of furniture in the home, a favored tool, a musical instrument. Our experience is tied to it and thereby we are transformed by common meanings. As children, these transformations are idiosyncratic, but a favorite toy, teaches us participations. When we grow up, these transformations can take on intersubjective forms and patterns. We can share them with the company. Unfortunately, too often we grow up by growing away from participations.

Transformations are marked by the fact that an object ceases to be out there. The artist in the doing cannot tell where brain, eye, finger, brush, paint, and canvas separate. Afterward, the role may change and the critic appear. But this analysis after the fact does not instruct the doing. If it did, analysts would be performers and they are not. As the athlete or workman achieves competence, continuities appear. Artifact and human being cease to be alien to each other. We need only recall our stumbling movements as novices and contrasting them with the fluidity of mastery. Experience is indeed transactional.<sup>14</sup>

These reflections on a companionate and inclusive naturalism capture features of our world which an earlier humanism ignored by its focus on the human as vital and on the world as mechanism. Some years ago while studying problems of labor, a similar outcome suggested itself to me as a way of "humanizing" work life. It is relevant here in this more general context.

"n. We need to recall that adventurous industrialism was marked by two imperatives: that everything had to yield to manipulation and that the world within which manipulation occurred was essentially neutral and value free, that the laws of the world were natural, impersonal, objective, etc. The result was a de-natured world, a flat world of motion, time, space that was

quantitatively measurable but qualitatively empty. Beauty, goodness, love, and even truth were resigned to the vagaries of human subjectivity.

"To be sure, this earlier inspiration of the modern age did defeat the ghosts and goblins that haunted the human past and so it was a form of liberation. But in our anxiety to be modern we moved into a new prison as we found ourselves inevitably in a world where the human being just had to be alien. In other words, we could not be at home in a world that was said to be so different from everything we cared about, from the ways we felt, even from the ways we perceived and thought. We answered by becoming spiritual aliens, by another kind of dualism in which we resigned our passions to an 'inside' experience and the world to some objective reality 'outside' and 'out there...'

"It need not be this way. As human beings, for example, we are natural organisms and to that extent at least our hopes and feelings are as much a part of the natural order as gravitation and electromagnetism. Moreover, in our relationships with the natural order - to sky and stars, trees and animals - we can on occasion feel responsiveness, a mutuality. So it is inaccurate to report our experience as one where we as perceiving, acting, and valuing organisms confront a dead, colorless, valueless, and unresponsive nature. While cognitively confused and corrupted, there is that much of truthfulness to our lives in mysticism. Above all, the arts teach the lesson of natural relationships that are never neutral." IS

Companionship takes us far from the humanism of the Enlightenment and reflection turns up some strange possibilities. But none of this is alien to the humanist tradition. We know that we need a more inclusive humanist vision. For example, Julian Huxley wrote,

"I feel that any such religion of the future must have as its basis the consciousness of sanctity in existence - in common things, in events of human life, in the gradually comprehended interlocking whole revealed to the human desire for knowledge, in the benedictions of beauty and love, in the catharsis, the sacred purging of the moral drama in which character is pitted against fate, and even deepest tragedy may uplift the mind." 16

Historically, humanism's center was ethics. We have turned up the strong possibility of an interaction between ethics and aesthetics, the suggestion of

a shift in the humanist center. The aesthetic, when opened up, is not simply a "matter of taste" but welcomes the cognitive, the moral, and the emotive suggesting the reconstruction of humanist epistemologies too.

Finally, we are an unfinished story. We need a narrative that tells our part in that story convincingly and attractively. Here, the metaphor of companionship seems most apt. It is consistent with the directions of moral development and biological evolution. It encompasses realities now being perceived in the very small and the very large worlds probed by the sciences. At the same time, companionship catches up the realities of human experience.

To be sure, any speculation may go awry. We may have mistaken the usefulness of the metaphor. Then, we might recall Erasmus. A sense of humor - too rare in our midst - is a necessary corrective to the sobriety of humanist discourse. We take ourselves much too seriously. Perhaps in search of our story, we may come upon the excitement that saw in Enlightenment humanism a new world and a new human being. We seek a humanism that is truthful and fascinating and enjoyable, and that evokes loyalty because it reaches us with its unexpected possibilities.

#### NOTES

1. For example, I think of the following major cases decided after the end of World War II: *Everson v. Board of Education*, 1947; *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 1948; *Doremus v. Board of Education*, 1952; *Zorach v. Clauson*, 1952; *Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington v. Schemp*, 1963; *Murray v. Curlett*, 1963. The very term, "secular humanism" was coined for an *amicus* brief by humanists...and then picked up by the religious right wing.
2. "The Religious Humanism of The Future", *Religious Humanism*, Winter, 1985, p.28.
3. *A Common Faith*, Yale, 1934, p. 19.
4. A helpful approach to the question of faith can be found in James W. Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1981.
5. *Humanism*, Penguin, 1968, p. 210.
6. For example, see Hume's discussion of "miracles".
7. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.61.
8. *A Common Faith*, p.85.
9. For an example of the fascinations of inquiry, see Fred Alan Wolf, *Taking The Quantum Leap*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1981.
10. For an earlier view, see Eustace Haydon, *Biography of the Gods*, New York, Ungar, 1967, (1941).