

THE FAITH OF HUMANISM

BY CURTIS W. REESE

HERE is a large element of faith in all religion. Buddhism has faith in the inexorable laws of Karma; Mohanmedanism in the unyielding will of Allah; Confucianism in the moral nature of Heaven; Christianity in the love of God; and Humanism in man as the measure of values.

There is a large element of faith in all philosophy. Idealists have faith in eternal values; Realists in the objective reality of facts; Nathuralists in an inner survival urge; and Pragmatists in the workableness of truth.

There is a large measure of faith in all science. Faith in the orderliness of nature and in man's mind to comprehend it make science possible. There could be no science if we began with chaos on the part of the universe and incompetency on the part of man.

There is a large element of faith in all human relations also. The foundations of government, the warp and woof of economic relations, and especially the very structure of the home, partake in large measure of the nature of faith.

Hypotheses, postulates, and assumptions in their proper realm are comparable to faith in the realm of religion. In other words, faith is the working basis of religion. In this way I speak of the faith of Humanism.

Competent philosophers, scientists, and even theologians, regard working assumptions as tentative. They constantly check for error; they diligently gather new data and re-examine the old generalizations in the light of the new facts. They welcome criticism and verification from competent persons. Their faith is consciously experimental. And it is thus with the faith of the Humanist.

Humanism aims to comprehend man in his total setting; to know him as a child of the cosmos, as the individual members of the human group, and as the parent of civilizations yet to be. It sets as its definite goal, not knowledge for its own sake but knowledge as a means to the enrichment of human life. Here it attacks its problems with evangelical fervor and summons to its cause all knowledge, all faith, all hope, and all love.

Let us sketch the faith of Humanism in broad outline and see what it has to offer those who are not satisfied with the form and content of the old theology.

I

In the first place, Humanism has faith in the trustworthiness of the scientific spirit and method; viz., freedom of inquiry and controlled experiment. Fundamentalism is skeptical of science; Modernism merely flirts with science; but Humanism says that, while science may give us inadequate knowledge, it gives all we have and we must make the most of it. Upon science and the legitimate inferences from its established facts we are dependent for our knowledge of the nature of the universe, of the evolution of life, and of man's prowess and possibilities. And how stimulating yet sobering it is to contemplate the universe of modern science.

(1) With the destruction of the old cosmologies went many a man's sense of being at home in the universe. For vast multitudes the very foundations of the deep were shaken. The ships of the mighty went down, and only the skiffs of the tough-minded remained afloat. Hence the first task of any religion today is to face with utter frankness the cosmic situation that confronts the modern mind; to marshal such evidence as modern science reveals, examine and evaluate it, and determine to what extent it upholds human hopes.

The revelations of science have given us not a smaller but a bigger universe; not a simpler but a more complex universe; not a poorer but a richer universe.

(2) Astronomically, the old universe was a child's plaything; the new is immense beyond description. Estimates of competent authorities present startling figures. From one side of the earth's orbit in a straight line to the other is 185,000,000 miles. It would take a cannon ball five hundred years to go in a straight line

from one side of our solar system to the other. The earth travels around the sun 580,000,000 miles a year. The volume of the sun is one million times greater than the earth. But these figures are only introductory, for they belong to our little solar system. Our sun is a star; and the universe contains millions more, many of which may have their own planetary systems. The nearest star to our earth is four light years; i. e., twenty-four trillion miles away; and some of the most distant stars three hundred light years; i. e., three hundred times six trillion miles. A ray of light traveling 186,000 miles a second would require fifty thousand years to travel from one side of our universe to the other. And, wonder of wonders, it is thought by reputable astronomers that there are still other universes outside our restricted universe, which constitute a super-universe; and that many super-universes constitute an hyper-super-universe, etc.

(3) For the sake of completeness, one might also mention in contrast with the infinitely large the infinitely little, the universe of the atom with its whirling electrons. But mere mention is sufficient for our present purpose. While neither mere bigness nor mere littleness constitutes value, still we may well consider the delicate balance and super-wisdom of it all, and add this to our faith that human aspirations are grounded in reality.

(4) Coming nearer home, consider the evidence of geological knowledge. Scientific authorities estimate that life has been on this globe a thousand million years and that the age of the earth itself is some small multiple of a thousand million. They show how age after age this whirling globe has picked up stray matter; brought forth the germ of life; and how life has been fruitful and multiplied manifold, producing species of wondrous complexity and marvellous intelligence.

(5) In a most impressive way, the late Jenkin Lloyd Jones once vividly outlined a scale of the vast epochs of the world's history. Borrowing the suggestion and a part of Dr. Jones' collection of facts, I have laid out the creative periods on a scale of one hundred units. On this scale, it takes fifty units to represent the growth of the earth in what Haeckel styled the "tangled forest" period, during which the only vegetation was in the water and the only animals the skullless creatures of the sea. We add thirty-three and one-half units for the period in which ferns appeared on land and fishes in the deep; eleven units for the period

in which pines and reptiles appeared; four units for the period when the mammals appeared and the young were brought forth alive and the period of infancy prolonged,—the period of leafed forests, of birds and animals. Bringing the scale up to the present time, we add one and one-half units to represent the modern period during which man has appeared and has begun to assume his responsibility in the creative process.

In man, then, is the fruitage of what Aristotle called "the inner perfecting principle," of what Lamarck called "the slow wishing of the animals," of what Darwin called "natural selection." In him is the fruitage of age-long mother love, paternal care, and communal life; of an age-long struggle to liberate the fore limbs, to swing hands on flexible wrists, and to develop the throat to the point of speech.

Then this small fraction of the ages that man has occupied on the earth may itself be subdivided into units of time, as is done by James Harvey Robinson, so that on a scale of fifty units civilized man occupies only the last unit. At the very apex of nature's achievements stands modern man. Back of him and underneath him are the positive forces of life urging him on and on to greater achievements. The ages gone look up to him; ages yet to come beckon him onward.

Man is fortunate in that he is the heir of ages past; he is promising in that he is the parent of ages yet to be.

And so scientific knowledge gives strength to the wings of the poet: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god!"

II

In the second place, Humanism has faith in the capacity of man increasingly to understand the universe and his place in it.

(1) It is true that we do not know very much about any one of the many things that call from the depths of the atom, or from the immensities of space. We do not know what life is, nor how a bit of protoplasm carries within it the potentialities that subsequent development proves to be there.

But however inadequately may be man's capacity to understand the universe, there is no other vessel of information. There

is no valid oracle of knowledge. There is no verified revelation of reality. There is no yoga-short-cut to wisdom. Man by means of his own science must unravel the skein of existence if he would weave the fabric of knowledge.

Admitting our lack of information, it is still true that man has demonstrated his capacity to understand with increasing accuracy and clearness the nature of his world and of his relation to it.

(2) Consider to what extent knowledge has grown. It is a long journey from primitive man's capacity to understand that one thing added to another thing made two things to the intricacies of Relativity and the quantum theory; from alchemy to creative chemistry; from astrology to astronomy; from the ancient medicine man to the modern physician and surgeon; from impulsive impression to inferential logic; from magic to science; from individual government with a club to the nation's representatives in conclave at Geneva. But the journey has been made.

(3) The people at large have not until recently understood what marvels of knowledge have been piling up. Heretofore, information has not been popularized. But now expert authorities are putting information within reach of all, and the avidity with which it is grasped evidences the capacity of great numbers to understand complex matters when stated in terms with which they are acquainted. Valuable service of this kind is being rendered by E. E. Slosson. Consider also *Why We Behave Like Human Beings*, by George A. Dorsey; *Microbe Hunters*, by Paul de Kruif; *Psychology Lectures-in-Print*, by Everett Dean Martin; and *The Story of Philosophy*, by Will Durant.

(4) It is thought by some philosophers that we are actually nearing the solution of the age-old body-mind problem. And certainly the current tendency to lay aside both the materialistic and the animistic hypotheses in favor of the organic theory of the nature of life points in this direction. Some scientists believe that we are nearing the understanding of the very nature of life itself. And capable experimenters are placing their instruments at the very gate of death. These doors may never be opened. But in view of man's past record in prying into the unknown, it is a daring man who will predict that any doors are closed forever.

III

In the third place, Humanism has faith in the ability of man

increasingly to achieve the possibilities inherent in the nature of man and the universe.

(1) In his control of nature's modes of operation, man is skillful and masterful. As an everyday affair he makes power that was once thought to dwell only among the clouds, and to be the exclusive possession of the gods. From the depths of the earth he brings forth riches untold. The physical world is beginning to do man's bidding. Not less wonderful is man's understanding of psychological laws. We are beginning to know how to predict and compel results. We now know that within certain limits public opinion and public conscience are subject to human control.

As man learns more and more about nature's processes—both physical and psychological—he learns that human intelligence is a co-worker with nature's processes.

(2) In his origination and development of moral ideas, man is wise and farseeing. As man has needed moral ideas for his advancement, he has achieved them. Moral ideas have never been handed down from heaven in systematized code, though such has been thought to be the origin of both the Hammurabic and the Mosaic codes. When man needed the moral idea of private property, he achieved it; then he who took that which belonged to another became a thief. When man needed the moral idea of communal property, he achieved it; then he who thrived by monopoly became a social parasite. When men needed the moral idea of the sacredness of human life, he achieved it; then he who killed another became a murderer. Man achieves his moral ideas; and when he gets done with them he replaces them with more and better ones.

Man has originated moral ideas that were for the good of tribes and races, and has developed them with farseeing wisdom. What he has done, he will continue to do. I have no fear of the final moral breakdown of the world. Ideas and customs hoary with age may be thrown in the scrap heap of time, but the race will develop more and better.

(3) In his creation of spiritual values, man is hopeful and prophetic. Man achieves his spiritual values because he feels the need for them. He feels that he wants to secure more power in the pursuit of the good life. Hence, he has followed teachers who have proclaimed the more abundant life; he has made re-

ligions and has evolved magic and prayer. Out of the inexhaustible soul of man, in response to his needs, have come forth gods and devils, angels and demons, heavens and hell. These man has made at his will and destroyed when he would. Other values innumerable has he brought out of the depths of his being, personified and sent them forth to battle in his behalf. These spiritual creations of man are so real that they die hard. Aye, they refuse to die until put to death by some greater spiritual creation.

But man's past achievements are only preparatory. They have merely opened his eyes to the greater possibilities of the future. In his power to dream dreams and to see visions, man is potentially the creator of nobler things yet to be.

IV

In the fourth place, Humanism has faith in the possibility and the nobility of a mutualistic social order.

(1) The past in social theory has been divided largely between two views of the nature of proper social arrangements, both of which have been intolerant and bigoted. These views may be called, roughly: individualism, on the one hand, and socialism on the other. There are numerous varieties of each, but for general purposes we may say that individualism is the theory of trusting to social and economic laws that are supposed to make for and preserve private interests. In practice, this means the chance arrangement of social affairs. It is *laissez-faire*: that is, let things take care of themselves. It is the policy of non-interference of the social whole with its parts. Individualism at its best is good-natured rivalry; at its worst, it is social anarchy. And its strongest inclination is in the latter direction!

(2) Socialism, on the other hand, is the dogma of the relentless operation of economic determinism, of class conflict, and of cataclysmic events. It is the tyranny of the many over the few. It is doctrinaire. It fits facts into theories instead of evolving theories out of facts. It is political "fundamentalism." There is no social salvation outside its pale. It will play in its "own back yard" or nowhere at all.

Both of these theories are political blind alleys.

(3) But mutualism embraces whatever is valid in individualism and socialism. Giving full value to the individualistic impulses of human nature, mutualism recognizes the social im-

pulses as well. It finds in natural life, not only the struggle for personal well-being but also mutual assistance.

In practical operation, mutualism is experimental democracy. Its plans are mobile. It is genuinely scientific; it says let us try this thing and see how it works.

Humanism holds that the religion that would be useful in this new day must be neither individualistic nor socialistic, but mutualistic. It must seek to weave the best personal values into a noble social order. It cannot preach a gospel that is purely personal nor one that is purely social; it must preach a gospel that will help to balance personal and social impulses to the end that individual man shall experience within himself the harmony of his impulses, and mankind be organized for the harmonious development of all the races of the world. Such a religion is now finding expression here and there among all churches and all religions and in the lives of manw who are not associated with any religious movement.

Humanism is bringing into the light of day a religion of, by, and for the whole man and the whole world.