PREFACE

THE CULTURE of my childhood home and church was biblical, God centered, authoritarian in approach, emphasizing the virtue of belief and the wickedness of doubt; the culture of my education from high school on was largely liberal and scientific, both in method and content, emphasizing the freedom of the individual, the powers of the human mind, the virtues of questioning and inquiry, and the methods of modern science as the ideal way of knowledge. I began to feel some pangs in high school, but before the end of my first year in college my intellectual cramps were severe. Like so many others, I had internalized the contradictions among biblical religion, democratic liberalism, and modern science. These conflicts within the culture had become deeply disturbing personal problems for me.

I have struggled ever since my first year in college toward an integrated cultural perspective and a unified worldview. I recognized early in my quest that the basic problems in philosophy of religion could not be dealt with responsibly in isolation from other philosophical problems in the culture, especially problems concerning values, ethics, subjectivity, and meaning. After much study and a long quest, I bought into scientific naturalism but tried to salvage a theory of experience and thought that would make possible scientific knowledge of an external physical world and a theory of ethics that would validate democratic liberalism. The early years of my professional career as a philosopher were given to these two enterprises, but naturalism collapsed on me when I tried to work it through. The intentionalistic theory of experience and thought that I came to accept in trying to show how scientific knowledge of physical objects was possible opened the way for a general theory of experience and thought that makes possible knowledge of a value (or normative) dimension of reality and knowledge of subject mat-

ter with inherent structures of meaning. In other words, my work in defense of an objective naturalism led me to reject naturalism in favor of an objective humanism—an objective theory of the culture in terms of the full spectrum of human experience and a worldview that involves categorial structures of factuality, normativity, and inherent meaning (or intentionality). I argued against scientific naturalism and worked out and defended a version of humanistic epistemology, a humanistic theory of culture, and a humanistic worldview in a number of papers and in my three major books: *Ethical Naturalism and the Modern World-View* (1960, 1973), *Philosophy and the Modern Mind: A Philosophical Critique of Modern Western Civilization* (1975, 1985), and *The Metaphysics of Self and World: Toward a Humanistic Philosophy* (1991).

Although these works have prepared me for the present study in the philosophy of religion, this book is self-contained and stands alone. What is needed is developed in the book, but some readers may want to go to the other books for a fuller treatment of the arguments against modern naturalism and for objective humanism.

The present work is a study of the nature and grounds of religion and its function in life and culture; how the religion of a culture may be logically challenged by developments in other sectors of the culture, such as science, historical inquiry, morality and ethical thought, and metaphysics; and how such a religion can achieve cultural coherence and intellectual respectability in a free culture—in a culture that is held accountable only to ongoing experience and critical thought. The unique and perhaps the most important contributions of the book lie in its detailed analysis of the accountability of religion, the way it proposes to deal with modern cultural contradictions by reconstructing the intellectual enterprise in terms of a realistic theory of the humanities and lived experience, and the interpretation of the meaning and truth in religious discourse made possible by this intellectual reconstruction.

I have used the work of other philosophers only when it helped with the task at hand. My approach is to appeal to the structure of experience as it is present to everyone and to the culture as it is available to the typical educated person. I have tried to speak not only to the professional philosopher but to all educated persons seriously concerned with religion in our culture, especially to those who think a religion has to be accepted at face value or not at all and to those who are inclined to dismiss religion as lacking intellectual respectability. No other work, to my knowledge, has laid out as complete a view of what a religion is accountable to and how it can

be criticized and reconstructed in terms of ongoing experience and logical tensions with other sectors of the culture.

The humanistic epistemology and metaphysics that are developed in Chapter 4 and more fully in my earlier works (especially *The Metaphysics of Self and World*) provide a powerful way of dealing with the questions of meaning and truth in religious discourse. Others have claimed some special basis for religious knowledge, but I like to think that I have engaged the naturalistic epistemology and metaphysics of the modern age on their own terms and made out in detail and in a unique and compelling manner a humanistic epistemology and metaphysics that provide foundational support for religion in a free, integrated culture.

Although I am concerned with the religious dimension of human consciousness and with religion and culture in general, the Judeo-Christian religion in Western culture is my primary case study. I make this emphasis because the Judeo-Christian religion is the religion most involved in Western civilization and the one best known to me and perhaps to most of my readers; and because no other religion has suffered comparable logical tensions with the rest of its culture or has been subjected to the same level of critical examination. Furthermore, I am interested in what I take to be a negative turn in modern religious consciousness and in what would be a responsible religion for us in our time.

In Chapter 1, I consider what a religion is in terms of its function and how a religion is logically interwoven with the whole culture of which it is a part. This chapter helps to define the framework of the book, but it also has its own task: to locate religion both in human experience and in the culture.

In Chapter 2, I consider the logical tensions and conflicts between the Judeo-Christian religion and cultural progress in empirical science, historical studies, and reflective moral consciousness and ethical thought. In Chapter 3, on religion and the metaphysics of the culture, I consider the development of Christian thought as Christianity moved away from its Semitic origins and confronted the metaphysics of the Hellenistic world, the efforts of Christianity to square itself with the metaphysics of medieval Europe, and how the essential life-supporting belief system of the Judeo-Christian or of any other religion is challenged by the naturalistic metaphysics of modern Western culture.

In other words, the point of Chapters 2 and 3 is that a religion, any religion, is logically accountable in its belief system to the science, history, ethics, and metaphysics of the culture of which it is a

part. This does not mean that the religion must automatically yield to these sectors of the culture, but it has a responsibility, along with the other sectors, to work for consistency, if not coherence, within the culture. I claim, however, that where there are inconsistencies the weight of evidence is on the side of the empirical findings of modern science and historical studies. Furthermore, I contend that a religion should accept the moral consensus based on reflective, critical ethical thought of an age, unless that consensus is grounded in an unacceptable metaphysics.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the sensory empiricism and naturalistic metaphysics of the modern age cannot be consistently thought through, for the limits they impose on knowledge and reality are inconsistent with the presuppositions of even scientific knowledge-claims. Furthermore, I make what I believe is a compelling case for a wider range of semantic and knowledge-yielding powers of the human mind in terms of which we can interpret and integrate the whole culture and achieve a unified worldview that will make sense of the human phenomenon and all the other realities we must acknowledge as knower-agents. The arguments of this chapter are treated more fully in my earlier books, especially *The Metaphysics of Self and World*.

In Chapter 5, I turn to a consideration of the positive grounds in experience and reality in terms of which a religion can substantiate its claims and have sufficient epistemic weight to hold its own in its logical struggles with other sectors of the culture. This leads to an attempt to sort out what in religious claims can be supported and what is at the mercy of evidence for which other sectors of the culture are the better judges. This is the issue that forces us to reject a literal interpretation of religious language and symbols in search of an understanding of the truth claims of a successful historical religion according to which such claims are true in light of the total range of human experience and thought. We saw this process at work with early Jewish and Christian theologians (Philo, Clement, Origen, Augustine, and others). I consider how religious discourse and art function pragmatically in structuring, developing, and organizing deep feelings, emotions, and attitudes; how religious symbols and discourse relate semantically to reality and are true or false; and how religious beliefs are subject to confirmation, refutation, or correction.

The Epilogue contains a summary of the major theses of the book and a conclusion about what would be a responsible religion in modern Western culture—one that would be responsive to all

of that to which a religion is accountable in experience and in our culture and yet preserve what is basic for promoting and sustaining a positive religious consciousness.

I have made use of some material from several previously published papers: "The Accountability of Religious Discourse," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985), pp. 3–17; "Introduction," *The Philosophical Approach to God: A Neo-Thomist Perspective* by W. Norris Clarke, S.J. (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Wake Forest University, 1979), pp. 1–10; and "An Examination of the American Way of Life," *World and I*, October 1989, pp. 589–597. I am grateful to the editors of these publications for permission to draw on these articles. I am also grateful to the authors and editors of other publications that have been quoted as indicated.

My intellectual debts are too numerous to list, but I do want to express my gratitude to the students in my philosophy of religion classes over a period of more than thirty years who shared with me their experiences and problems with religion. I owe a special debt to several people who have read drafts of this work and made helpful comments, especially Thomas Alexander, Seth Holtzman, Terry Moore, John Sullivan, and Warren Nord. I am also indebted to the editors and readers for Temple University Press. Jane Cullen, senior acquisitions editor, deserves special mention. I deeply appreciate her buoyant spirit, enthusiastic support, and good will.

I dedicate this book to my two grandsons, Adam and Nathan Alexander, with the hope that they will know the full joy of a life well lived in pursuit of higher values, with unwavering faith in the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of the struggle.

1

Religion and Culture

HUMAN BEINGS are religious beings. They may be occupied most of the time with their immediate situations and short-term projects, but with somewhat normal powers and a certain level of maturation, they have a sense of their identity and are engaged in living a life. We cannot have a self-concept and be engaged in living a life without having feelings, attitudes, and concerns about ourselves and the lives we are living. It is our lot to be concerned about our place in the world and how our lives fit into the scheme of things.

The Religious Dimension of Human Consciousness

Basic self and life sentiments and worries constitute the religious dimension of human consciousness.[1] They form the spiritual background within which we grapple with our various identities and ordinary matters in daily living; but on occasion this background may become the focus of our consciousness. Crises may develop that render problematic one's basic life feelings and attitudes and the belief system in which they are grounded; indeed, dramatic experiences may radically transform one's religious consciousness.

Animals respond behaviorally to items, features, and processes in their bodies and environment that are present to them in their sensory experiences. Some animals even seem to be present to themselves. Cats and dogs exhibit jealousy under certain conditions. Jealousy is the awareness of another as threatening one's social place. It involves some degree of self-awareness, some mea-

sure of self-transcendence, for it requires an awareness of oneself as having a social place. Dogs, but perhaps not cats, can exhibit shame under the look of their masters. Shame is an experience of violating one's normative self-image, or of being present to others in a way that does violence to the way one would like others to think of oneself. Perhaps dogs, and even some people, are capable of only the latter form of shame; but most people can feel ashamed of themselves about a purely private matter. Embarrassment, however, requires a social context; it consists of an awareness of oneself as present to another in a form that does violence to one's image of oneself-in-public. Shame and embarrassment require a measure of self-transcendence, the capacity to hold oneself present to oneself.

Guilt feelings, feelings of moral shame or embarrassment, are more complex. Feelings such as shame or embarrassment or even insult may involve only a normative image of one's self as a particular individual. But moral feelings about one's self involve a normative concept of oneself as a person—as a kind of being who, by one's nature, has responsibilities and rights. Feeling guilty about something one has done is a form of pain; it is feeling injured *as a person* by some act of one's own; it is the feeling that the act was incongruent with, or unfitting, for one as a person. So the person who feels guilty about some act or project or way of life of his or her own feels that it would be wrong for another person to do the same thing or to live the same way under similar circumstances. In other words, these feelings do not pertain to oneself under one's normative self-image as the particular individual one is; they pertain to oneself as the kind of being one is and as the holder of the office of personhood by virtue of one's nature. Moral sentiments would not be possible without the higher mental powers and abstract concepts made possible by language and community.

Religious feelings are even more complex than moral feelings. They require a higher level of self-transcendence; they are of oneself and the life one is living as a human-being-in-the-world. So religious feelings involve not only self-awareness in terms of a generic normative self-concept but world awareness as well, and a sense of how one and one's kind fit into the world and relate to what is ultimate. Thus religious consciousness requires not only the capacity to hold one's self present to oneself as a person and to hold up the life one is living for critical review and evaluation, but also the capacity to place oneself and the life one is living in the world as defined by the conceptual or symbol system in terms of which one experiences things and seeks to understand them.

Religious consciousness is much like job consciousness. One cannot have a job or occupation without having some feelings and attitudes about it. One may be concerned or anxious about it. Obviously one may have doubts about whether the job is securely situated in a worthy enterprise, whether one is worthy of the job or whether it is worthy of oneself and one's best efforts, whether one is functioning well in it, and so forth. One may have despair about the job. One may feel that it is insecure, or even that the enterprise of which it is a part is going nowhere. One may feel that the work is not worth doing, or even that the enterprise of which it is a part has no worthy function. One may even feel that it is not a real job at all, that there really is nothing important for one to do, and that it doesn't matter how one functions in the job. Indeed, one may disapprove of the job and of the enterprise of which it is a part; one may feel that it is harmful to people without justification or even that it is evil or wicked. On the other hand, one may have high job morale. One may feel that the job is highly important in a worthy enterprise, that it is worthy of one's best effort and that one is worthy of it, and that one is doing well in it.

One may have similar attitudes toward oneself as a person and toward the life one is living. One may have deep anxiety about oneself and the life one is living, or even about humankind and the whole human enterprise. Indeed, one may be in deep despair, not just about one's own life, but about the whole human condition. On the other hand, one may have very positive life attitudes. One may have the conviction that important things are at stake in living a human life and that it is of the utmost importance for one, in living one's own life, to render a good interpretation of what it is to live a human life in terms of the particularities of one's self and circumstance. And one may feel that one's life is on the right track, that one has the inner strength and support to face any contingency in a humanly responsible way, and that one is living well as a human being and as the individual one is. In other words, one may live with an undergirding feeling of self-worth as a human being and as the particular individual one is, with the sense of having a place in a friendly and supportive (even if awesome) world; one may live with confidence, even in the most difficult situations, that somehow things will (or can be made to) work together for good. This is religious faith. It is important for living well, for happiness.

An unconscious faith in the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of the human enterprise and of one's personal life may be shattered by a dramatic experience or a moment of self-transcendence in

which one glimpses oneself and the life one is living in the context of the world as one comprehends it. Such a challenge may come from some threatening force or disaster that calls into question the meaningfulness of one's endeavors or even those of humankind. Fear before the forces at work in the world was a powerful factor in early religions. Disasters were taken as judgments on the acts and lives of individuals and the ways of a tribe or nation. A confluence of events with one's efforts and those of a people was taken as approval and support. Religion arose as a way of finding integration and harmony among the values and purposes of human beings and those at work in the world around them. It sought unity and harmony by trying to influence the forces at work in the world and by transforming the values and purposes of the people.

A sense of self-worth and of the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of one's projects and the life one is living may also be challenged by an inconsistency with the ideals and judgments to which one subscribes but in a manner that lacks governing power. People who accept their ineffective or dormant ideals and judgments as having the sanction of the society or as underwritten by the ultimate powers of the universe are most likely to suffer from a sense of guilt and to turn to religion for forgiveness and for the power to reorder their lives so that they can live with an inner peace and harmony. These people may have dramatic, transforming religious experiences, whether under some trauma or in a quiet reflective moment, when their latent ideals and principles rise up in consciousness, perhaps in the form of an inner voice that speaks with divine authority (depending on their belief system) and condemns their life as out of order and in need of reformation and redirection. This is often the form of religious conversion of a teenager or a wayward soul brought up in a religious culture.

Of course people may come to acquire ideals and principles and visions of reality that were not in the culture in which they grew up. They may appropriate them from another culture, or they may acquire them on the basis of their own experience, inspiration, and insight. Individuals, however, seldom do more than correct, amend, alter, or extend an existing culture that was generated by a historical community. This was true even of Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and Gautama. Once such ideals, principles, and views of the human condition and the world gain a foothold, regardless of their source, people may condemn themselves and their earlier lives in terms of them and after some crisis emerge with a sense of being

a new self and having a new life. The transformation may bring joy and a sense of inner peace and harmony with what ultimately counts in the world.

The deepest kind of religious crisis involves a challenge to the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of human existence as such. It transcends feelings of guilt, sin, and unworthiness; it renders problematic the ideals, principles, and views of reality presupposed by such feelings. People who have taken for granted their self-worth and the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of their lives may have a dramatic negative religious experience that shatters that faith. Consider two examples, one a fictional character and one a historical person.

Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman in Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis," awakens one morning with the realization that he has the body of a giant insect. He is a man living in the home of his parents. The family, consisting of his father, mother, and teenage sister, is dependent on him. Even though he is a giant insect with a hard shell and many little legs sticking up, he is aware that he has overslept and has missed his train. He tries to get up, thinking that he must catch a later train. He is worried about what his boss will think. The family gets involved in trying to get him up and out to work. When the door is finally opened and they see a giant insect, they somehow realize that it is Gregor. As time goes on, the father, who lost his business five years before, has to get a job, the daughter becomes a salesgirl in a store, the mother takes in sewing, and the family takes in three boarders. The father assumes a more assertive role in the family with his new job and new responsibilities. Gregor lives on for some months in his room, eating leftover food that his sister brings him. He escapes into the other part of the house only occasionally, and then frightens and disgusts the others. In one such instance, the father, in trying to drive him back into his room, injures him. He progressively eats less and finally dies. Throughout this ordeal, Gregor keeps his awareness of what he once was and who the others are and even understands what the others say, but he cannot communicate with them. Although the family continues to recognize him as Gregor, in the end they stop calling him by his name and refer to him as *it*. After he frightens the boarders and they leave in disgust, even the sister decides that they have to get rid of him. He dies that night before they can destroy him. The housekeeper throws him out, and the family is greatly relieved.

The story may be read as a literary expression of a profound negative religious experience. For five years, Gregor has worked as a traveling salesman. He carries samples of material and takes orders. He travels by train and spends nights in cheap hotels. When in his home city, he lives in his parents' home. He has to support his mother and father and sister, but they keep a cook and a housekeeper. He seems to be barely making it financially. He wants to send his sister to a conservatory, but he has not been able to do so. His boss is very demanding. Gregor seems to have no friends. One morning he awakens, aware that he has overslept and has missed his usual train. As he lies in bed, he is suddenly aware of himself and the life he is living. It all seems so insignificant and hopeless. He still feels something of his usual inner promptings to go to work, a concern for what his boss will think if he does not show up on time, a concern for members of his family, and so forth, but he is immobilized by overwhelming life despair. He cannot go on living his meaningless life. He never overcomes his deep depression. The life he was living comes to a halt; he progressively loses his human powers and finally dies. Gregor even feels unworthy of funeral rites, for he is nothing.

Gregor's dramatic encounter with himself and his life in a moment of self-transcendence is not just an encounter with himself as the particular individual he is but an encounter with the human condition as such. In the person and life of Gregor, Kafka gives us an interpretation of what human life is like when we view ourselves as human beings in the world in terms of our modern way of life and worldview. The other characters in the story go on living their very ordinary lives without the paralyzing influence of the transcendent awareness Gregor experiences.

Kafka's story is a literary expression of the kind of life arrest that Leo Tolstoy suffered at the peak of his fame and fortune. In *My Confession*, he wrote:

> In my writing I advocated, what to me was the only truth, that it was necessary to live in such a way as to derive the greatest comfort for oneself and one's family.
>
> Thus I proceeded to live, but five years ago something very strange began to happen: I was overcome by minutes at first of perplexity and then of an arrest of life, as though I did not know how to live or what to do, and I lost myself and was dejected. . . .
>
> I felt that what I was standing on had given way, that I had no foundation to stand on, that that which I lived by no longer existed, and that I had nothing to live by. . . .

> I could not ascribe any sensible meaning to a single act, or to my whole life. . . . Sooner or later there would come diseases and death (they had already come) to my dear ones and to me, and there would be nothing left but stench and worms. All my affairs, no matter what they might be, would sooner or later be forgotten, and I myself would not exist. . . . A person could live only so long as he was drunk; but the moment he sobered up, he could not help seeing that all that was only a deception, and a stupid deception at that![2]

People who have had an active and cultivated religious faith may acquire beliefs and ways of thought that form a worldview and belief system that are inconsistent with the presuppositions of religious faith. They may live with the contradictions for a long time and then may rather suddenly and dramatically have their faith system collapse in a life-shattering way. Usually, however, such transformations are more gradual and protracted. When this is the case, the religious problem is the same, although it may not be felt as acutely: It is not just a matter of one's self-worth and the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of the life one is living; it is a matter of the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of human existence. There is no hope of finding a new identity or of reconstituting one's life in a way that makes life morale possible, without reconstituting one's worldview. This is the dominant form of the religious problem in modern culture.

Contrast the negative religious experiences of Gregor Samsa and Tolstoy with the literary expression of the positive religious experience of Isaiah as an individual within a religious culture that is not in question for him:

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him who cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the alter. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. (Isa. 6:1–8)

In sharp contrast with the religious experiences of Gregor Samsa and Tolstoy, Isaiah's experience in the temple is positive and life affirming. He confronts ultimate reality under the image of God and the world as filled with God's glory. In the presence of God and his manifest glory, he feels that he and his people have defiled themselves and their position in the scheme of things. Nevertheless, he feels cleansed and renewed in the experience and charged with a divine mission. He goes about his new mission with high life morale, for he feels that he has something important to be and to do, that his identity and mission are highly meaningful and important in the total scheme of things, and that he is working in concert with the ultimate and highest purposes and forces of the universe.

People whose framework of thought and worldview undercut the presuppositions of positive religious experiences are not susceptible to such experiences and life transformations of the Isaiah type unless they possess a residual religious culture that is still operative at some subterranean level. Reconstruction of their intellectual perspective and worldview is a prerequisite for such experiences, and it is likely to be a demanding critical process over time. Experience alone cannot work the transformation, for it is too closely linked with the person's operative cultural perspective. Those whose cultural perspective rejects the possibility of an objective structure of value and meaning in the world are susceptible only to negative religious experiences similar to those of Gregor Samsa and Tolstoy.

Of course, people may live out their lives without ever having a dramatic religious experience, negative or positive. They may have an undisturbed faith in the meaningfulness of their lives and the worthwhileness of the human enterprise. For some, this may be more or less an unthinking faith; for others, it may be a faith informed and nurtured by a body of unquestioned traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some may live miserable lives in more or less constant anxiety or despair; indeed, some may be so paralyzed by deep-seated anxiety or despair that they are unable to cope with ordinary stresses and strains. But most people with more or less normal mature powers have moments of self-transcendence in which they reflect on themselves as human-beings-in-the-world and wonder about the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of their lives. And some have experiences in which the imperativeness of some life-defining mission grips them with such force that they feel that for this they were born. Their lives may take on a heightened sense of meaningfulness and the world a new splendor, especially if the mission is experienced as the pull of the universal and the

transcendent. They may feel themselves to be a new person, with a new life to live, and with a new source of energy. Such was the experience of Isaiah.

The Fundamental Religious Problem

The fundamental religious problem is formulated by Shakespeare's Macbeth: whether life is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Human beings, who are under an inherent imperative to define and to live a worthy and meaningful life of their own, cannot avoid the religious problem. Of course it weighs more heavily on some than on others.

Religions are established cultural ways of helping people with the religious problem. They are organized systems of thought and practice for promoting a positive religious consciousness. In some cases, religious exercises are ways of trying to placate, and to reconcile people to, the fearsome powers behind events; in other cases, religious worship becomes a kind of world-lovemaking. In all cases, religious practices are ways of relating people in the world in a way that engenders positive life attitudes. Religions are the official cheerleaders of life. They celebrate life and the forces that create and sustain it. They affirm the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of life, especially in the face of death, disaster, or whatever makes the religious problem more acute. Religions strive to interpret human life (the values, the meaning, the ideals discovered or developed in lived experience) and the world in a way that makes sense of the human scene. This is not simply an intellectual enterprise; it is highly practical. Religion is oriented toward solving the human religious problem. It encourages and supports the organization and direction of individual lives and the society in terms of the highest values and ideals known and in terms of an understanding of humankind and the world that supports the human enterprise.

Most cultures have been shaped by a dominant concern for humanistic values grounded in the needs of selfhood and lived experiences: the need for a worthy identity, a sense of self-worth, self-respect, and the respect of others; the need to love and to be loved; the need for beauty, understanding, meaningful experiences and activities, self-expression, and self-fulfillment—in sum, the need for a meaningful and worthy life. The Judeo-Greco-Roman-Christian civilization of the West is such a humanistic culture. And so are the Islamic culture, the Hindu civilization of India, the Taoist-

Confucian-Buddhist civilization of China, the Shinto-Buddhist culture of Japan, and all the other cultures of human history. They were all generated by a dominant set of basic humanistic concerns: What is it to be a human being? What is it we should become or do? What does reality require of us? How can we understand self and world in a way that would further the human enterprise conceived in these terms?

While religion is humanistic (that is, it is shaped by humanistic values and ways of thought), it is more than simply a humanistic way of life. The governing concern of all religions is the religious problem, which is a humanistic problem that no way of life can avoid. But it is a specific humanistic problem; and religions, although they engage all human concerns, focus on the religious problem and approach everything else from this orientation. The religious problem, as already indicated, concerns the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of life: the question about whether (and, if so, how) our lives and our history fit (or can be made to fit) into the world in a way that supports and enhances their meaningfulness and worthwhileness.

Alternatively, we may speak of the religious problem as alienation: the problem of not knowing who we are—not knowing what our place is (or whether we have a place) in the larger scheme of things or how to organize and direct our lives in meaningful ways. The problem may be individual, or it may be both individual and universal in scope. The latter is the most virulent form, and it is most pronounced in the modern age. The solution sought, in both individual and universal forms, is not just knowledge and understanding, but salvation; it is the kind of knowledge and way of life that save the lost person by placing him or her in a meaningful context with a sense of belonging and a defining purpose.

The biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden expresses the religious problem. In the garden of nature, everything has its place and is shaped and governed by the laws of nature. There may be conflicts, but everything unfolds according to inherent laws and circumstances. Originally Adam and Eve were creatures of nature, just like everything else in the garden. They lived by their instincts, impulses, and sensory stimulations. Then they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This is presented as contrary to the divinely ordained order of things and thus as bad. It certainly was a radical change in the garden, whether or not it was a natural development in the order of nature. To live as a creature of nature is one thing; to live with rational knowledge

of good and evil is another. Knowledge transformed the creature, who, in turn, transformed the garden. The ancients regarded the rational creature as an anomaly, neither purely a creature nor a god. The story says that Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden. No longer were they at home in it; they were alienated creatures, "cursed" with a whole set of new problems.

With knowledge of good and evil, human beings were no longer creatures of impulse and sensory stimulation, living in a very narrow present. They became self-aware with a normative self-image and had feelings of shame and embarrassment. They began to wear clothes to express their sense of their identity as moral beings. With awareness of the past and the future, they became concerned about the needs and dangers of tomorrow; and so they began to plan and to work to provide for the future. The biblical story says that men were condemned to live by the sweat of their brows and women to bring forth children in suffering and to be ruled by their husbands. Furthermore, human beings became mortal creatures—not that otherwise they would have lived forever, but mortal in the sense that they had to live with knowledge that they would die and that death could come at any time.

People have always been, and still are, frightened by their knowledge-yielding powers, which threaten comfortable habitats and ways of living, whether in the garden of nature or traditional society. Advances and transformations in knowledge change our view of the world and of ourselves and our ways of living. Some people have always tried to condemn, to suppress, or in some way to flee from the critical, inquiring mind, especially in religion, morality, and politics. The person with critical questions and in search of better ways of thinking and living is often regarded as wicked or a traitor. Throughout history people have built walls around their cherished views and ways and often have killed to protect them. They have tried in various ways to absolutize the relative and the provisional and to ground them in the eternal.

What made the American political experiment of the eighteenth century unique was its effort to build an Enlightenment society based on a free culture that would develop by education and the unleashed powers of open, critical minds with nothing off limits. "Freedom" is the key word in the American lexicon. People are not really free unless they have been educated (not just indoctrinated) in the culture and unless the culture that structures their subjectivity has been freely developed under criticism and is open to ongoing critical reconstruction. The commitment to freedom set America in

conflict with authoritarianism and traditionalism, both in religion and other areas of life, for the normativity of sacred documents and traditions had to be tested in every new generation by open and free inquiry and debate. This did not mean abandonment of the accumulated wisdom of the ages, but it did mean that the beliefs and practices handed down had to be tested and to pass muster in the experience and critical reflection of each new age in order to be maintained.

Knowledge has always been a Pandora's box. It generates new problems. All of our distinctively human problems stem from the fact that we are creatures of knowledge. Other animals have bodily needs and often have difficulty in satisfying them. They get sick or crippled, and they become old and die. Some kinds of animals may have problems of social status as well; they may be dominated or driven off by the more powerful members of their group. And most animals are objects of prey for some other species. But human problems are of a different order. Human beings carry their problems with them even when all is momentarily well. Furthermore, they have a whole set of problems not shared by other species: They have not only practical problems in staying alive and keeping their bodies comfortable but identity problems, moral problems, artistic problems, political problems, intellectual problems, and religious problems.

In an important sense, the religious problem is the dominant human problem. Of course survival, if it is threatened, may become the most urgent problem; but the religious problem affects the worthwhileness of all human endeavors, even the struggle for survival. Without an undergirding faith in the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of life, the will to live is put in jeopardy. Life despair, deep depression, can render one unable to cope with the ordinary exigencies of the human condition, even in the midst of highly favorable material conditions. Religious faith is essential to human life. No other creature known to us has such a need.

People who deny that they have, and that they need, religious faith no doubt understand faith in some restricted sense, perhaps as believing some set of religious doctrines. Life despair or depression is recognized as bad and destructive by all; high life morale is praised and coveted by everyone. In our scientific age, we tend to think of despair and depression as psychological rather than religious problems and many turn to psychological counselors or psychiatrists rather than to traditional religion for help. The difference in approach lies in how we understand the condition, and how we

understand the condition depends on how we understand ourselves and the world. Different modes of thought are involved.

Modes of Religious Thinking

When we, in our culture, want to know what something is and why it is the way it is, we typically turn to science for the most reliable answer. Modern science is a very specialized form of thought that provides the kind of knowledge and understanding of things and events that, in principle, shows how we could gain mastery of them by manipulatory action. It makes possible a technology of control. In internally organizing and directing our lives, both individually and collectively, we think about ourselves, others, and institutions in humanistic terms—the categories of personhood, agency, subjectivity, meaning, normativity, value, rationality, and so forth. These terms do not appear in a straightforward way in the descriptive/explanatory language of modern science. In earlier societies, there was little specialization. People confronted situations and events and sought to understand and to relate to them in terms of the total range of human interests and experience. They had only one framework of thought, the humanistic conceptual system; it was grounded in the total range of human experience, but desires, feelings, emotions, and passions in the experience of self, others, and social relationships loomed large in people's consciousness. And their ways of experiencing, thinking about, and relating to their natural environment were of a piece with their ways of experiencing and thinking about themselves and their social environment. Their basic categories and general conceptual system were grounded in their humanistic experiences. The forces at work in the world around them were conceptualized both in experience and thought in terms of concepts that were grounded in, and had their primary application to, human subjectivity and action.

Lived experience is expressed in narrative language and various art forms. Life is often said to have a narrative form, but this puts the matter backwards. Narratives have the form of life. Feelings and emotions are expressed in the form of words, images, and symbols. The aesthetic quality of such expressions consists in the appropriateness of their form to the experience, thought, or life they express. We try to make experienced reality intelligible by placing it in a wider context. Lived experience is extended primarily by the imagination. From the dawn of storytelling, people have sought to

explain their lives and what they experience by incorporating them in an imagined wider context that made sense of them, much as we explain an action or episode we experience by placing it in a wider story of our life. So for primitive cultures, explanation was by storytelling. The extended explanatory story was as rich in concrete detail as lived experience itself and engaged the whole person. Narrative language and various art forms have been the language of religion from the beginning. An abstract theological or metaphysical conception of God simply does not have the same religious significance as the character, *God*, in religious stories. It does not speak to the whole person; it does not make possible a personal relationship; it does not enter into, elevate, and order the higher feelings and emotions or shape the will of people. Religions that are more conceptual and intellectual, such as the nontheistic religions of the East, inevitably develop popular forms that depend on religious stories about, or symbols of, divine beings.

We find in primitive culture two kinds of forces recognized in nature: spirit forces and what anthropologists call "mana" forces. Spirit forces are agents with subjective constitutions similar to human beings. They have desires and emotions, good or bad characters, and intentions. They act for ends of their own. They may be friendly or hostile to one another and to human beings; they may be angry and vengeful; they can be flattered and placated; they may become cooperative and helpful. They may be local and have little power, or they may have control over a large territory and many kinds of circumstances and events. According to this primitive view, spirit is the source of change and events are actions; purely physical things, without spirit-initiated change, would be inert. Whatever had the capacity for self-initiated change was said to have a soul or spirit. The most obvious example other than human beings was ordinary animals. According to the etymology of the word, animals are soul possessors. The sun, the moon, and the wandering stars were all considered to be gods, or great and powerful spirits. In many languages, we find that the words for air, wind, and spirit had a common origin, for air and wind were considered to be disembodied spirits (or spirits with very refined or transparent bodies) with the capacity to move things. The spirits of human beings and animals were identified with breath, for when humans and animals finally lost their capacity for self-motion the most obvious change was the cessation of breathing. We still speak of people and programs *expiring*. And we speak of a moving speaker, a creative writer or brilliant thinker as *inspired*. We also speak of a

team, school, or nation as inspired or spirited. In other words, there is a long history of thought in which the forces at work in the world and in ourselves are conceived as spirits. When we feel in ourselves or witness in others some unusual force at work, whether for good or evil, we still speak as though we or they had been invaded by, and were in the grips of, some foreign spirit. We talk about people being divinely inspired or possessed by demons, even though we may not mean what we say literally, in the way in which people once did and some still do.

Mana forces, in contrast with spirit forces, are impersonal. They are not agents; they do not have a subjective dimension or intentional direction. But like spirit forces, mana forces are value oriented. Some mana forces work for what ought to be and some for what ought not to be. This is the conception of causality in voodoo thought and also in astrology. We find vestiges of the mana way of thought in our ordinary discourse. We still talk about good and bad luck. Some people believe that certain objects or acts have the power to bring good luck and others the power to bring bad luck. We think of some people as having a special inherent power of good luck and others as saddled with a destructive power that defeats all their efforts and destroys them.

These two primitive frameworks of explanation have been greatly refined and extended in the history of human culture. The major historical religions draw on one or the other or a blend of them. The Jerusalem religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have developed a worldview based on the concept of spirit dynamics; Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism depend heavily on the concept of manalike forces in their theories of change. Consider Brahma, Karma, the Tao (the way), yin and yang.[3] Classical Aristotelianism and Stoicism in the West also drew heavily on the root concept of mana or impersonal value-oriented forces in their theories of change and causality. Yet we find the concept of spirit forces in all these cultures as well; often they are lesser forces than the supreme impersonal force. In some religions, we find the conception of the ultimate shifting back and forth between impersonal and personal models; a more intellectual approach tends to favor the impersonal conception, and a more religious approach is drawn toward the more concrete, personal form. But the ultimate or the divine is always conceived in value terms; indeed, in most religions ultimate being is conceived as the causal power of normative requiredness or as a causal power actualizing what ought to be, even where subordinate causal powers working for evil are be-