

## **SENSIBILITIES AND BELIEFS**

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I have at times described myself as a person with religious sensibilities and no religious beliefs. I would like to dwell on that phrase in these pages and consider whether and how such a claim might make sense.

The context for this discussion of religion is philosophical pragmatism, so let us begin with a consideration of what both terms mean. Religion is, as we all know already, notoriously difficult to pin down. Some religions, most obviously Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, include at their heart a belief in a single absolute God who stands above nature as its creator and redeemer; some religious traditions, Buddhism for example, may but do not necessarily involve such a belief. Some religions regard themselves as having universal applicability, and thus are likely to incorporate more or less aggressive forms of proselytizing; others, such as Shinto, make no claim to anything more than local relevance. Some religious traditions rest on complex ecclesiastical structure and hierarchy, while others are primarily a matter of direct spiritual practice. Some religions emphasize the individual's spiritual life and practice, while others rest much more on community. Some highlight experience, while others rest on tradition and ritual; some emphasize creative spiritual life, and some obedience; some require agreement to some set of beliefs, even if a very small set, and others are defined more by how one lives than what one believes; some look toward personal redemption in an afterlife, while others ask one to give up one's attachment to redemption, along with everything else; for some one's ethical life is paramount, and for others it is more or less irrelevant; some rest on complex theologies, and others not; some involve a decided sense of mystery, while for others things are much clearer; some have a sexual dimension, and others eschew sexuality; some have political aspirations, and others retreat from political life. And then there is

William James' well-known elaboration of the many varieties of religious experience.

It is worth noting that this list of traits of religious traditions, as diverse as it is, does not even have a historical reach, which is to say that examples of religious communities, individuals, and traditions matching each of these traits may be found somewhere in the world today. Presumably if we took a broader historical view the list of possible characteristics of religion would be longer still. It is also worth noting that religious traditions and practices overlap with respect to these traits in the sense that, for example, Christianity and Islam may have similar approaches with respect to some of them and quite different approaches with respect to others. We should also mention the fact that even within religious traditions that we can identify by a single term there are or can be serious disagreements. Many Sunni Muslims, for example, suspect that Shia Islam is not Islam at all; some Christians do not accept Mormonism as a form of Christianity; and there are many Christians for whom the reliance of the Roman and Orthodox traditions on the Trinity, Mary, and ranks of saints amounts to a not very subtle form of polytheism. There is, then, no single trait that defines all religions and on the basis of which we may distinguish what is religious from what is not. Like most other things, the many social and individual phenomena that we are inclined to describe as religious are related to one another through a set of family resemblances rather than a single common feature or set of features. In light of this variety, there is little point in trying to offer a single definition of religion. The situation is somewhat less complicated in the case of philosophical pragmatism, but not much. Early on, Peirce so much disliked the direction that James was taking the idea that he began to refer to his own view as "pragmaticism". Not long after, A. O. Lovejoy published his famous essay "The Thirteen Pragmatism" to try to sort out the terrain as it appeared to him in 1908.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is", *The Monist*, vol. XV, no. 2, pp. 161–181, April 1905 and *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume V*, eds. Charles

Peirce's pragmatism has a logical and methodological bent; James's is oriented toward the individual; Dewey's and Mead's versions are distinctly socially inclined. All of the classical pragmatists were predisposed to taking seriously traditional philosophical questions about the nature of reality and knowledge, while the Rortyan version of neo-pragmatism does not take them seriously. Some versions of contemporary pragmatism continue to draw on the classical traditions, while others pursue certain pragmatist ideas through methods, assumptions, and issues that come from the Anglo-American analytic tradition, while still others are thinking through a Gadamerian hermeneutical lens.

It may be slightly more likely that we can find a common thread in all of these than is possible for religion. If there is a candidate for an idea or method common to the many pragmatisms it is that ideas are not to be understood as reflecting reality but as provisionally useful tools with which we may solve problems of various kinds, theoretical and practical. For our purposes that may be sufficient, because it would be as pointless to try to adjudicate among the forms of pragmatism as it would be to try to decide which religion or religious tradition is preferable to or more genuinely "religion" than the others. For my part I find the classical pragmatist tradition far richer in resources and more valuable methodologically than any of the current versions of neo-pragmatism, though I prefer to modify it with a heavy dose of the Columbia naturalism of Dewey, Buchler, Randall, and others.

Then there is the question of how pragmatism may take up religion, and again there have been various efforts to do so. It is well known that Peirce was religiously inclined, and James, perhaps more than any other prominent

pragmatist philosopher, made no secret of his interest in demonstrating both that pragmatism may be used to explore theological questions and that on pragmatist grounds it is intellectually defensible to endorse certain religious ideas and beliefs even in the absence of sufficient evidence for them. For his part Dewey made a clear effort to render religious concepts and commitments meaningful in ways that are consistent with his general naturalism and instrumentalism. Over the years many others have also attempted to construe religion in pragmatist ways, from Eugene Fontinell some time ago to Sami Pihlström most recently.<sup>2</sup>

I do not at this point wish to survey the many interesting pragmatist approaches to religion, but to return to the question posed at the beginning, which concerns the sense that may be given to a life of religious sensibilities without religious belief. Perhaps it would be best to begin with the issue of religious beliefs. There are, as I have said, religious traditions that rely much more on practice than on belief, so the question at this point is not whether it is possible to "be religious" without such beliefs. In fact I am not much interested in the question whether I or anyone else is or is not "religious". I do not see what is gained by deciding whether the adjective fits in any particular case. At this point I would simply like to explore the reasons one might have for doing without religious beliefs altogether.

Which beliefs may usefully be considered to be religious? The most obvious initial candidate is the belief in the existence of God, specifically the standard God of monotheism. In most accounts this God is eternal and is responsible for the existence of everything outside himself, which is to say for reality in general. The God of monotheism is typically absolute, or absolutely complete

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Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935; A. O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms", *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, (now *The Journal of Philosophy*), Part I, 2 January 1908 pp. 5-12. Part II, 16 January 1908, pp. 29-39.

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<sup>2</sup> For Eugene Fontinell see for example *God, Self and Immortality: A Jamesian Investigation*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000; for Sami Pihlström see *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013.

and perfect, and therefore immutable; he, she, or it, depending on one's political, cultural, or other predilections, is generally understood to be omniscient and omnipotent; and perhaps most importantly, the absolute God is understood to offer salvation and redemption to individuals, communities, and/or to nature generally. May one believe in such a God? Of course one may, and as we have noticed, James went to great lengths to demonstrate, convincingly in my view, that it is intellectually defensible to so believe if one is inclined to do so.

But there are also many good and perfectly plausible philosophical reasons not to be inclined to hold this belief. One of them is that to posit a creator God that stands outside nature does nothing to help us understand anything about nature, least of all its creation. It is sometimes thought, tacitly or explicitly, that because nature contains no principles that could help us explain its origins, there must be something outside nature to explain it.<sup>3</sup> But it seems to me that such an idea simply pushes the puzzle back one step, because then we are compelled to ask what explains the origins of God? The standard answer to that question is that God is eternal, but if that is the best we can do, there is no reason not to offer that explanation about nature itself. That is not to say that there is better reason to posit nature's eternality than God's, but simply that there is no reason not to do so, in which case to posit God as creator in order to explain nature fails as an explanation, and complicates the situation immensely. And on a purely ontological level, if one endorses a pragmatic naturalism then one has by definition ruled out the possibility of a God standing outside of nature

simply because nature is defined as whatever there is. Some naturalists, pragmatic and otherwise, have offered various conceptions of a God that does not stand outside nature, but they are quite different from the standard God of monotheism, and fall outside our immediate scope.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth noting that there are probably many people who simply cannot imagine reality in general or their lives in particular without an absolute God. That may well be a sufficiently compelling reason for such a person to hold a belief in God, but it is in no way compelling for those of us who can imagine both reality and our lives without God.

What, we may ask, about the other prominent attribute of an absolute God, namely its role as redeemer? This belief prompts the question why we think we need a redeemer at all? I do not have an answer to this question, probably because I do not in any way feel the need. We no doubt all have occasions in which we feel the need to be forgiven for some action or behavior, and to have the opportunity for a fresh start. But this is quite different from the need for redemption or salvation in general. And certainly there is sufficient imperfection in nature and in our individual and social lives, some of it grotesquely immoral, to incline us to desire something better, some kind of improvement. Such a desire for melioration is of course understandable and entirely valuable, but it is quite different from a desire for or expectation of absolute redemption or salvation. I find it far more useful to regard the desire or hope for melioration as most fruitful when tied to the understanding that it is we who have primary responsibility for it. If we wish forgiveness then it is incumbent upon us to so organize our behavior that we

<sup>3</sup> For a new argument along these lines, and one made in the context of an otherwise naturalist ontology, see Lawrence Cahoon, *The Orders of Nature*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. For another interesting and new approach to God, or more accurately "god-ing", see Robert Corrington, *Nature's Sublime: An Essay in Aesthetic Naturalism*, New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> One model for this sort of thing is Whitehead, given his conception of God's consequent nature. I say this is a model more than an example because speaking strictly, Whitehead was not a naturalist philosopher given his reliance on eternal objects.

deserve it; and if there is redemption to be had, it is we who are in a position to so act that we bring it about to whatever extent is possible. If it is we who are responsible for whatever redemption, salvation, and melioration there may be, then redemption, salvation and melioration are very much aspects of our lives and dimensions of nature, not conditions that lie beyond them.

Another function that belief in the God of monotheism may play is to provide an account of things in general, or a justification of whatever goes wrong, or what John McDermott calls a 'canopy of explanation'.<sup>5</sup> As in the case of redemption, there are many people for whom such an account or justification seems a necessity, and God offers it. But also as in the case of redemption, there are those of us who do not need or expect a justification or account of everything collectively. We may, if we are naturally inquisitive, seek an explanation or justification of this or that phenomenon, but that is an entirely different matter. To be inquisitive about aspects of nature, for example the behavior of matter, or human psychology, or oceans, or art, makes perfect sense on any terms. It does not imply, however, an assumption of, never mind the necessity for, an explanation or account of everything taken together. Furthermore, on a technical level it is impossible within the framework of pragmatic naturalism to posit a "whole" of nature, in which case there is no sense to be given to the idea of an account, explanation, or justification of everything.<sup>6</sup> And in light of the more or less standard pragmatist expectation that we think in so far as we encounter problems, we can expect those problems to arise quite normally in the course of life and we can expect to

engage one another and our environments continually in the resolution of those problems. There is good reason to agree with McDermott when he says, as he has done repeatedly, that there is no canopy of explanation, rather we make sense of ourselves and our world, to the extent that we are able, in the course of living our lives.

One additional point is worth making in the context of belief in an absolute God, and that has to do with ethical principles. Philosophers tend not to make this mistake, but many other people appear to think that without an absolute God as the source of ethical principles neither ethics nor an ethical life would be possible. This is of course not true on the face of it, if only because there are many examples of secular ethical principles, some of which have been with us for many centuries, their durability justified, presumably, by their success in guiding our lives. And pragmatists have a rich history of ethical analysis on which to draw, the basic point of which is that our ethical principles arise, like everything else about our lives, in the process of addressing the issues that face us.

Other beliefs may also appropriately be considered religious, one of which is the belief in personal immortality. This is of course related to beliefs that we have already discussed, most clearly the belief in redemption and salvation. As in other cases, the belief in personal immortality is one that many people find congenial, or even necessary. I probably do not need to say that I am not one of them. On technical grounds, it would be difficult to maintain a belief in personal immortality on pragmatist, and certainly on pragmatic naturalist grounds, if only because such a belief in its standard forms is usually tied to some notion of a soul and related conceptions of personal identity. Pragmatism is unlikely to be a comfortable home to a traditional conception of the soul because unlike most traditional ontologies, pragmatism to a great extent endorses the importance of relations. James' radical pluralism is a sustained argument for the ubiquitous

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<sup>5</sup> John J. McDermott, "Afterword: You are Really Able", in James Campbell and Richard Hart, eds., *Experience as Philosophy: On the Work of John J. McDermott*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006, pp 237-271.

<sup>6</sup> See Justus Buchler, "On the Concept of 'the World'", in *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Kathleen Wallace and Armen Marsoobian, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990, pp. 224-259.

presence and importance of relations; Dewey's 'situations' are thoroughly relational; and recent and current pragmatic naturalism rests entirely on an ontology of constitutive relations.<sup>7</sup> In any such relational understanding of personal identity it is impossible to incorporate a traditional understanding of the soul, and therefore it is equally impossible to sustain a traditional conception of personal immortality.

Of course it is possible to have a different understanding of personal immortality, as has been the case in Buddhist philosophy and theology. Buddhism, at least in several of its forms, is as relationally oriented as is pragmatism, but it nonetheless has also held a notion of personal reincarnation, if not immortality. Presumably pragmatists could do the same if they were so inclined. And perhaps some are so inclined. I, however, am not, nor do I see the point. Without philosophical or theological commitments to drive one, there is no intellectual force inclining a pragmatist toward a belief in personal immortality. Of course there may be psychological reasons of various kinds for people to hold such a belief, but I have no special knowledge to enable me to comment on that. Suffice it to say that I also feel neither psychological nor intellectual inclinations to endorse a belief in personal immortality. Moreover, I do not see that any aspect of my life suffers as a result of not expecting to outlive myself. If there is something I would like to achieve I had better do it now.

So whatever else my stock of beliefs may contain, it does not include these typically religious beliefs. That is not to say that I think that other people who consider themselves to be pragmatists ought not to believe them. The corridor of pragmatism, to repeat James's well-known expression, can accommodate a room wherein a theologian is at work. Such a person would have some particularly difficult challenges if he or she were

developing a religious conception within the context of pragmatic naturalism as I understand it, but I would not want to rule out the possibility. I accept, as I have said, James's argument in "The Will to Believe" that in the case of religion we have an intellectual right to accept key religious beliefs if we so choose. But I choose otherwise.

What then about religious sensibilities? What does it mean, and does it make much sense in the end, to embrace religious sensibilities in the absence of religious beliefs? Let us consider first what it might mean. Despite the centrality for many people of beliefs to their religious identity, it is not clear that beliefs are as critical as they appear to be, or as uniquely critical as they appear to be. Of course the belief in Allah is at the heart of what it is to be a Muslim, and for many Christians acceptance of the Nicene Creed, with "I (We) believe in..." as its opening words, is profoundly important. But still, on a day-to-day level I suspect that there is greater significance for the religious life in how one lives than in what one believes. The two may of course be related, but I suspect the relation between beliefs and patterns or habits of living is contingent rather than necessary. A devout Muslim prays several times each day, and there is no question that the habit of prayer is in his or her case related to the belief in the existence of Allah, but one can also without much of an effort imagine a case in which the humility and devotion that characterize prayer might be practiced in the absence of such a belief. One might, for example, understand some forms of meditation in such a way.

This points to the distinction I would like to make, which is that religious sensibilities are to be understood, or anyway may be understood, more in terms of how one lives than what one believes. One of the prevalent forms that such sensibilities takes is faith. This may sound surprising in that faith is often associated with beliefs in the sense that to say that one has faith in this or that entity, or in this or that outcome of an action, is to say that one believes in that entity's existence or that that

<sup>7</sup> See John Ryder *The Things in Heaven and Earth: An Essay in Pragmatic Naturalism*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013.

outcome will come about. That is a normal use of the English word “faith” and I do not mean to propose that we should use the word otherwise. I simply wish to point out that we do in fact use the word otherwise when, for example, we refer to someone as a person of faith, or a person of deep faith. We are generally in such a case not commenting on the person’s beliefs, or the strength with which a person holds his or her beliefs, but rather on the aspects of that person’s life, behavior, habits, actions, and commitments. A life of faith, we may say, is at least as much a life lived in certain ways, as it is any one belief or set of beliefs. In fact in practice it is probably far more about how one lives than what one believes.

There are no doubt many ways to characterize a life of faith, and surely others can do it better than I. On the face of it, though, we might say that a life of faith is one that embodies certain values and predispositions to act in certain ways. Among them are likely to be a noticeable degree of humility, perhaps even piety; a practical commitment to the possibility of melioration, redemption, and salvation, even if piecemeal rather than general; a sense that whatever is wrong with the world and with us, there is nonetheless a sense that in general things are more or less “right”; a trust in the general decency and goodness of others; and a commitment to justice, individual and social. Of course each of these characteristics that can be ascribed to a person admits of degrees, and each is also subject to wide range of interpretations. Humility may be moderate or abject; trust may be naïve or worldly; the sense of rightness may be Panglossian or realistic; melioration may be gradual or revolutionary; and certainly justice admits of a wide range of interpretations. Nonetheless, the point is that each of these traits and their associated actions, behavior, and habits, may be ascribed not simply to a person of faith and associated with specifically religious beliefs, but also to people who endorse none of the standard beliefs that we have characterized as religious.

Once we disassociate these characteristics from a belief in God, for example, we can see how and why one might embody them in one’s life for reasons other than religious beliefs, and the reasons tend to be pragmatic in nature. Our personal and professional lives require a degree of trust, and it may well be that we will succeed more often than fail if we assume that the people with whom we interact are on the whole worthy of our trust rather than not; humility is a far preferable approach to take in relation to others than arrogance, preferable in the sense that up to a point we are more likely to maintain constructive relations with family, friends, and colleagues if we engage them with a sense of humility rather than superiority; there is surely a great deal wrong with the world, on both micro- and macro-levels, but in practice it would be debilitating to dwell on that, so that however much we would like to see things better than they are, we live, and sensibly so, on the assumption that things are right enough to move along; still, though, if we act to improve what we can, at least a good deal of the time, we are likely to inhabit stronger communities and a better world; and that melioristic approach to our lives may, one could argue that it should, suggest ongoing action and behavior oriented toward rather than away from greater justice. There are many reasons, in other words, for us to embrace the sensibilities that are embodied in a life of faith without any appeal to the religious beliefs that are usually associated with them.

All of this suggests that there is a degree of plausibility in the idea that traditionally religious sensibilities may be endorsed even when they are divorced from religious beliefs. But to do so is, I like to think, more than merely plausible in that there are good reasons of various kinds to do so. The pragmatic justifications of trust, humility, and the other sensibilities associated with faith suggest that there are desirable outcomes if we embrace them, and that is one good reason. Another good reason concerns how we, that is to say those of us without religious beliefs, interact with believers.

This is not an empty or merely formal question because there are various ways such interaction can occur. One common way that non-believers approach believers is with some measure of dismissiveness. Some of the better-known atheist writers may be described this way. For them, and for many others, religious beliefs are a species of superstition that on the whole is detrimental to individual and social development and progress. The reasons often given for such an attitude are familiar enough: 1) religious beliefs are inconsistent with a serious commitment to science and scientific methodology, and we need the latter to learn about the world and develop technologically; 2) more generally, the most valuable method we have for examining issues of any kind, and for adjudicating disagreements and controversies, is reason, and religious beliefs are not available for rational inquiry and critique because they are not based on rational principles or evidence; 3) insisting on the truth of propositions and ideas that derive from allegedly divinely inspired sources leads not to the development of knowledge and understanding but to ideological rigidity; and 4) traditional religious social norms and principles have their origin in ancient times and cultures, and are generally a hindrance to our attempts to deal with contemporary social problems.

Each of these claims about religion is contested by the many more careful theologians and religious believers among us, and I do not wish to come down on one side or the other of such debates. On the one hand it is sensible enough to say that if propositions made in books that are held to be divinely inspired are unavailable to examination or criticism, then it is hard to see how any conceptual development can be made with respect to them. On the other hand, all major religious traditions have had among their adherents some of the most intelligent, insightful, and influential thinkers in our history. So in the end the question whether religious beliefs are a hindrance or a reliable guide to knowledge and life is not an easy one to resolve.

It is also not necessary for us to resolve it because the issue is not whether religious beliefs are true and reasonable, but whether those of us who do not hold them are warranted in regarding believers as anachronistic obstacles to human advancement. My view is that the critics of religion and religious belief who engage in this sort of dismissive interaction are not justified in doing so, and that we would be far better served to take a wholly different approach. The primary reason is that in this case at any rate, communication is a greater good than truth. Let me explain what I mean.

There are analogies on which we can draw to clarify this point. We may, if it is not reaching too far rhetorically, paraphrase the traditional religious believer's claim in relation to sin and sinners, which is that one may, or ought to, hate the sin but love the sinner. In our case, we may reject the truth claims of religious beliefs, but nevertheless maintain the kind of respect for believers that enables further communication and constructive interaction. A different analogy may also help. There are cases around the world of cultural practices that many of us, especially though not exclusively in the liberal West, find objectionable or even abhorrent. Some of the ways women are treated in parts of the world come to mind as the most ready examples. We quite properly reject such practices unequivocally, but at the same time we have every good reason to continue to interact with the people who practice and endorse such traditions with the respect that human beings deserve and that is a necessary condition for further communication and continued engagement.

Another case, closer to home for some of us, has to do with the growing tolerance for and resort to torture in recent years. The parties responsible for this surprising and reprehensible behavior are primarily American, though they had help from a number of European and Middle Eastern regimes, some of which no longer exist. The political leadership, policy makers, legal apologists, and military and security personnel who led, justified,

and carried out the many cases of torture in “black sites” around the world needed to be stopped and exposed. But they also need to be engaged, regardless of the moral seriousness of their transgressions. We may have thought that after Nuremburg, the Geneva Conventions, and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, this would be a conversation that we would no longer need to have. But we would have been wrong in thinking so. If torture can so easily be resurrected as an instrument of policy and security in the contemporary “liberal” West, then clearly we need to be talking about it. And we need to be talking about it with the very people who seem so easily persuaded of its value and acceptability.

Whether it is unacceptable beliefs or unacceptable behavior, and I do not mean to equate them at a moral level, the most valuable approach on our part is to engage rather than to shun. If that is right, then to dismiss religious believers as a species of fool is inappropriate. Though it may seem a bit ironic in an argument for the appropriation of religious sensibilities, the primary impulse here is humanistic. In the end, if our collective, social problems are to be solved, it is we who have to solve them. Some of the problems we face at the macro-level are monumental, and solving them presents challenges that we may or may not up to. But whatever else is required, and there is a great deal else, we do not stand a chance if we are not willing to accept and engage one another respectfully, regardless of our disagreements.

Such a deep respect, and the communication and engagement it enables, has a humanistic character, but it also has a religious pedigree, and it is the latter that inclines me to regard it as a particularly important illustration of a religious sensibility. I do not mean to say that such respect for human dignity and communication necessarily follows from any one or set of religious beliefs. On the contrary, I would like to distinguish beliefs and sensibilities in this case. The reason I am inclined to regard such sensibilities as religious is that they are a

natural component of a religious life, in the sense of the life of faith as I described it above. Furthermore, there are many examples of people whose religious faith prompts them to act in just these ways, and to extraordinarily noteworthy effect. I think, for example, of the representatives of many religious traditions currently at work on the project of deep interreligious dialogue, which is something that is desperately needed in the current environment of intercultural misunderstanding and tension;<sup>8</sup> or the members of Christian orders, some of whom I had the privilege of knowing in Central America many years ago, who have given so much of their lives, in some cases their lives themselves, in the exercise of respect for and commitment to the poor; or the religious leaders who urged and provided moral leadership for the Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa in recent memory, which more than any case I can think of exemplifies what is so profoundly significant in religious sensibilities.

One may wonder whether it is necessary or appropriate to regard the sort of sensibilities to which I am pointing as religious, especially when, as I have been arguing, they do not need religious belief to underpin them. In my view it makes sense to consider them to be religious sensibilities because they are so much of what it can mean to live a religious life. That they also have a humanistic context is what allows those of us who do not accept religious beliefs to endorse them.

I began by saying that I sometimes describe myself as someone with religious sensibilities and no religious beliefs. I should qualify that comment now, after working through these thoughts. I would not want to ascribe to myself the wisdom, courage, and moral strength that I am ascribing to the ideals and most outstanding examples and illustrations of religious sensibility. For one thing it would be descriptively false, and for another it

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<sup>8</sup> As an example I would refer the reader to the Dialogue Institute (<http://institute.iesdialogue.org/>) and its president Dr. Leonard Swidler.

would be inconsistent with the humility that is also a profound religious sensibility. It is better to say that though I find nothing to endorse in religious beliefs, I find a great deal to endorse in the finest examples of religious life.