

Secular Humanism vs. Biblical Christianity

CATEGORY	SECULAR HUMANISM	BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY
1. View of God	Atheism	God created and preserves the universe
2. Authority	Man is his own final authority. The individual is autonomous	Man is under God's authority
3. Man's nature	Man is inherently good	Man is inherently sinful
4. Source of problems	Inner disharmony. Societal corruption	Sin
5. Primary tool	Human reason	The work of the Holy Spirit; Illumination and application of God's Word
6. Methodology for Reform	Getting in touch with our "real self"	Getting in touch with God
7. Ultimate goal	Create a utopian society where every person is self-actualized	Enjoy God forever

1. View of God

A) Secular Humanism

Secular Humanism starts with the assumption that there is no God. As a philosophy, it assumes that we live in a closed system (called naturalism) with no creator God and no supernatural causal agent. Thus, man is on his own. What we know we know through reason alone. Everything can be explained through natural explanations which posit no existence of God. Everything is cause and effect.

The Humanist Manifesto II says:

We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, **the dogmas and myths of**

traditional religions do not do so. Even at this late date in human history, certain elementary facts based upon the critical use of scientific reason have to be restated. **We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant** to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race. **As non-theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.**

But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. **No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.**

Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices.

Science affirms that **the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces.** As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. **There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body.**¹

God, the Humanists say, is the creation of man, not the other way around. Carl Sagan said that 'gods are the dreams of men'. Nature is everything, there is no supernatural, no force outside of this cosmos which either created everything or even exists. Only the material world is important. It is important to realize that the concept that there is no God is the *sine qua non* of Humanism.

B) **Biblical Christians** start from the premise that there is a God who created and preserves the universe. Furthermore, we believe that there is sufficient evidence to prove to anyone that God does exist.

2. Authority

A) **Secular Humanism** starts from the premise that man is his own final authority.

Lucia K. B. Hall, a Humanist, writes: "Traditional religious belief has assumed that a deity was both the source and enforcer of the only possible right ethical system. As secular Humanists, however, **we need to discover a naturalistic explanation for the ethical impulse.** Since the source of this impulse cannot be found in reason, we need to look to an irrational, emotional response that has evolved as part of the human species."²

The *Humanist Manifesto II* says:

"The preciousness and dignity of the individual person is a central humanist value. Individuals should be encouraged to realize their own creative talents and desires. **We reject all religious, ideological, or moral codes that**

¹ Humanist Manifesto II.

² Noebel, pg. 201.

denigrate the individual, suppress freedom, dull intellect, dehumanize personality. We believe in **maximum individual autonomy** consonant with social responsibility. Although science can account for the causes of behavior, the possibilities of individual freedom of choice exist in human life and should be increased."

B) **Biblical Christianity** starts from the premise that man is subject to God, under the authority of God. We are not independent agents, creating our own rules, but dependent agents who are called to obey God's rules. The basis of Humanistic ethics is that the individual is autonomous, not subject to any higher authority. Dennis Prager says that the greatest difference between Humanism and a Judeo-Christian philosophy (which he calls Left and Right) is not belief in God, but rather the belief in the authority of Scripture. If God is the authority, and He wrote the Bible which is authoritative for both Jews (the Old Testament) and Christians (the Old and New Testaments), then we are subject to what Scripture says. Biblical Christian ethics derives from God's revelation in His Word. **God makes the rules and we are to keep them.** God has revealed to us right and wrong. He created us to enjoy life with Him, but only if we will live a holy and righteous life.

Max Hocutt, a Christian writer, says, "**The fundamental question of ethics is, who makes the rules? God or men? The theistic answer is that God makes them. The Humanistic answer is that men make them. This distinction between theism and humanism is the fundamental division in moral theory.**"³

3. Man's Nature

A) The **Secular Humanistic** view is that man is good by nature and therefore perfectible. Secular Humanists start from the premise that man is inherently good. The Humanist does not view man as a fallen creature. Islam also starts with the premise that man is inherently good. Some of the Humanist Psychologists have said:

Carl Rogers said:

"I see members of the human species, like members of other species, as **essentially constructive in their fundamental nature, but damaged by their experience.**"⁴

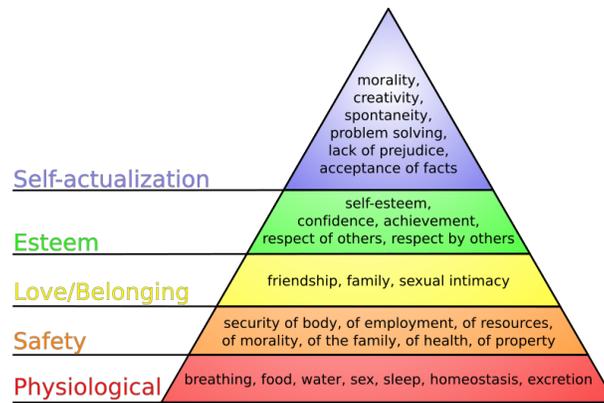
For myself, though I am very well aware of the incredible amount of destructive, cruel, malevolent behavior in today's world - from the threats of war to the senseless violence in the street - **I do not find that this evil is inherent in human nature.**

Part of modern Humanistic Psychology is based on the theory of self-actualization, which is basically "the full realization of one's potential." Abraham Maslow further developed the theory of self-actualization, putting it into a chart. His premise was that we become self-actualized and

³ **Understanding the Times**, David Noebel, pg 193

⁴ Ibid, pg 359.

our creative potential is released when the lower needs are taken care of - our physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem are satisfied.



The purpose of humanistic therapy is to **allow a person to make full use of his or her personal capacities leading to self-actualization.**

Self-actualization requires the integration of all the components of one's unique personality. These elements or components of personality include the physical, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and spiritual. **The marks of a self-actualized person are maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity.**

B) The Biblical view

First, **Biblical Christianity** starts from the premise that man is inherently, innately sinful. We have a sinful nature, which doesn't mean that everything we do and think is wrong, but rather that every part of us is tainted with sin and that we cannot have a relationship with God unless and until the issue of sin is dealt with, through the blood of Christ.

Secondly, we believe that guilt is objective, not subjective. Our problem is not that we **feel guilty**, but rather that we **are guilty**. We stand guilty before God and we have to have an answer for the guilt, the ransom of Christ for our sin so that we will not have any more guilt. Much of the effort of modern humanistic psychology has been on getting us to feel good about ourselves, and to deal with the guilt feelings. It is not a matter of **feeling** good, but of **being** good, which only happens through a relationship with Christ.

Third, we believe that man is not perfectible by his own efforts, but only by the transforming work of God's Spirit within us. We can reach our human potential only through **transformation, not reformation**. It is not a matter of trying harder, but of receiving a new nature. The issue is one of **power to overcome**, not merely a matter of **intention**.

C) Implications for Christian character

There are some profound implications for Christian character in the area of man's nature.

First, if there is no sin nature, then we are able to reform ourselves. If, however, we have a sin nature, then we are **incapable of doing what is right**. No matter how much we desire to be good, we will just be frustrated because we keep falling back into the same sinful thoughts and behaviors. If, as humanistic psychologists believe, there is no sin, then we are *able to reform* our own selves. Secular humanists believe that it is by getting rid of the guilt and limitations imposed upon us by society – our parents, our culture, religion, etc. – we can become self-actualized individuals. The goal is inner *reformation*, not inner *transformation*. The best we can come up with is conformity. Because they do not believe in the limitation of our sinful nature, they believe that we can become anything which we set our minds on becoming. The Biblical model is that we have **an impossible limitation – our own sinful nature. We cannot become what we strive to become because we don't have the inner nature to do so**. We want to become good, but we find ourselves unable. We can't become good with a new nature. We don't need idealism and good intentions, we need power from God.

The second implication is that if mankind is basically good and there is no inherent, innate sin, then there is no ideal of character. We are to become the best “us” that we can become, but there is no ideal outside of ourselves to which we are being transformed (or even conformed). There is no model which we can even try to achieve, since perfection is only becoming a better us. **Character ideal is relativized**. So, even though Christ was seen as a great person, His character is not to be imitated, but only serves as inspiration to become a better person ourselves. The Biblical model is that the lives of those in the Bible were given as models to follow. Christ's character is the ideal into which we are being transformed by God's Spirit who dwells within us. Right, Biblical character is **objective and absolute**. There is an absolute ideal to which we are trying to shape our own character and also the character of others (e.g. children).

Third, for Secular Humanists, both the ideal and the power lie **within us**, in a greater **desire** to do good, or in **techniques** to bring out the natural goodness within us. If, however, man is depraved by nature, we need to look **outside** of ourselves for the solution to the inner conflict which we all face. We as believers have the Holy Spirit within us, so we do look at the power of the Holy Spirit within us, but those who do not have Christ have nothing good in the sinful nature. If man is a sinner, then the answer to the turmoil within us must come from a source outside of **ourselves and greater than ourselves** - God. We are self-actualized when we get into a right relationship with God, which means that we have been set free from the burden of our sinful nature, and we inherit a new nature, born in God's image. **Our quest, then, is without, seeking for God's power to enable us to overcome our sin**, not within, seeking to release our own inner potential. For those who have a personal relationship with Christ, God's Spirit lives within us, **but the power does not come from within our nature, but from His nature, His Spirit, His presence within us**.

Fourth, if there is no sin and man is inherently good, then society is to blame when we don't turn out the way which we wanted. If we are a *tabula rosa*, and good within, then something from without must have corrupted us - in society, in our upbringing, from other human beings. We will talk more about this later.

Fifth, if there is no sin, then education becomes a process of releasing a child's inner goodness. If, however, man is sinful by nature, then education is a matter of **instilling virtue into the child, not in bringing it out**. The whole focus of education is changed. **Wisdom, virtue, character, and goodness are not released from the child's inner being, but interjected from without**. Education becomes education in virtue and wisdom, not just in information and skills. If there is no inherent sinful nature, then the goal of education becomes the releasing of the natural goodness within the child, instead of imposing righteousness on the child from without. The Biblical model is that of discipline, education, reformation, shaping of the child so that he/she does what is right. **Virtue, character, righteousness, discipline, and right behavior are not to be brought out of the child, but to be instilled into the child**. A child left to himself will bring his parents to shame. **The goal is not to help little Johnny become a better Johnny, but to become a better person and a better Christian**. Johnny needs discipline, training, rebuke and correction as well as encouragement and teaching.

Sixth, We are commanded in the Bible to put off the old man and put on the new man. The goal is not to express our inner man or somehow bring out our natural goodness, but to suppress it, deny it, put it to death. Man is sinful and the only way we are to deal with our sinful nature is to put it to death.

Seventh, we are to deny ourselves, not encourage self-centeredness and self-absorption. Real joy is found in denying ourselves, humbling ourselves, giving ourselves to others. The deception of Humanistic Psychology and self-actualization is that we help others by helping ourselves, that the goal is to focus on me, not on Christ or other people. Jesus came in order to make it possible to be Christ-centered and other-centered, not to spend our lives focused on ourselves. How can other-centeredness come out of self-centeredness?

Eighth, the goal of our lives is not self-actualization, but rather it is serving God; not to maximize our potential, but to maximize God's presence on earth. Not us, but God. Not our happiness, but God's. Not our potential, but God's glory. Our potential, however, is released as we serve God. He will bring us to the place of maximum usefulness. It is to God's glory that we become fruitful.

Ninth, we as believers are focused on heaven, not on earth. Our home is heaven and we endure even suffering because we are not focused on things down here, but on things in heaven. Our goal is growth, not happiness. Our home is heaven, not earth. We are focused on heavenly rewards, not on our earthly existence. Secularists do not believe in an after-life; they reject the

super-natural. They believe that only this life matters, not the next life. We as believers in an eternal God believe that we have eternal life, with eternal rewards.

4. Source of Problems

A) The Secular Humanistic view.

Secular Humanism takes inner disharmony and societal corruption as the source of our problems. Society and its social institutions are responsible for man's evil acts. Man is inherently good, so if there is a problem it comes from not understanding or releasing our inner nature. **The goal of ethics and of psychology then, is to help us as human beings to feel good about ourselves and to help us to achieve inner harmony.** Thus, individual freedom is important if we are to achieve inner harmony. In order to help individuals who are conflicted inside, we need to deal with those forces which have corrupted him/her - governmental injustice, poverty, bad parenting, etc.

Carl Rogers said: "I see members of the human species, like members of other species, as essentially constructive in their fundamental nature, but damaged by their experience." He also said, "experience leads me to believe that it is cultural influences which are the major factor in our evil behaviors."⁵

Abraham Maslow said, "Sick people are made by a sick culture; healthy people are made possible by a healthy culture."⁶

We see this emphasis on the system with all the victim legislation which has emerged in the last few decades. **The individual is not to blame, so we defend the individual and blame the society.** The emphasis shifts from individual responsibility for our actions to institutions, usually the government. If we can eliminate poverty and income inequality, we can work toward a culture which produces healthy individuals.

The secret to better mental health, then is to get in touch with our unspoiled, inner self. Man, in himself, has the potential for great good, since he is basically good, but that goodness has been corrupted by society. We become healthy emotionally when we strip off all the negative effects forced upon us by society and become our real selves. **The quest, then is inward.** "Since our inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, it is best to bring it out and to encourage it rather than suppress it. If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful, and happy. **We must focus on our own self, our own will and desires, for only then can we become good.**"⁷

B) The Biblical view

Biblical Christianity states that sin is the source of our problems. Our problem is our own sinful nature, not societal corruption. That which is spiritual is contrary to that which is natural. We believe that if you put an evil person into **any system**, he/she will corrupt it. The

⁵ Rogers, "Notes on Rollo May," p. 8. Quoted in **Understanding the Times**, pg 361.

⁶ Noebel, pg 361.

⁷ Noebel, pg 362.

problem is not with culture, systems or society, **but with the people in the society. There is no perfect society because there are no perfect people.** Society does corrupt people, but corrupt people also corrupt society.

C) The implications for Christian character

First, a lack of Christian character cannot be blamed on the corruption of society. The Humanist view of the source of our problems doesn't accord with reality. If society and culture are to blame for the evil within us, then the issue arises that society is merely a collection of individuals. How does society become corrupted if the people within it are innately good? Why is evil so universal? Why do we see two people emerge from the same family with the same background and genetic disposition and one leads a very constructive life and the other goes down the wrong path and gets into all kinds of trouble? Differences in nature and nurture cannot account for much of what we see in life. For those who are willing to truly look within, it is obvious that there is something fundamentally wrong in our human nature. We don't find, even in our own hearts and lives, goodness, but rather a deep fundamental and innate evil. Some of the problems with the concept of sin are related to a misunderstanding of the nature of what we call total depravity. Total depravity does not mean that everyone is equally corrupt, nor that everyone is as corrupt as we could be, but it does mean that sin taints every part of who we are.

Secondly, if the major problem we face is to reform society so that the corrupting influence of society is corrected, then our focus is no longer on individual righteousness and right behavior, but on the society and culture, its institutions and government. We no longer have responsibility for our own attitudes, values and behavior, **but we shift responsibility to society.** This is a very dangerous philosophy, because it leads to always blaming someone else for my own problems, instead of taking the responsibility for my actions. **We cannot reform other people, but we can reform ourselves.** But, if we believe that the problem rests with other people, we will never take the responsibility for our own actions. The end result is anarchy, every person believing that they are the only righteous ones. We end up with a narcissistic frame of mind. Dennis Prager says, "Moral character begins with taking care of oneself, if one is able to. Conversely, it is a moral defect to rely on others when one does not have to...The more the state takes care of its citizens, the more deleterious the effects are on most citizens' moral character...The essence of good character is to be a responsible person, meaning, first and foremost, taking responsibility for oneself."⁸ If we depend on society to take care of us, especially the government, the more an attitude of entitlement replaces an attitude of gratitude. Ungrateful people are unhappy people.

Thirdly, if we blame society for its corrupting influence, we take the focus off of our own character development. Instead of pursuing righteousness in our own worldview, attitudes, values, character, attitudes and behavior we focus on societal conditions - overcoming poverty, income inequality, racism, nationalism, etc. But, each of these problems begins with human sin, not societal influences. Yes, we as Christians are to be involved in solving injustice in the world,

⁸ Prager, location 5225.

but the beginning place is the injustice of our own hearts. Historically, Christians have been at the forefront of helping to solve many of the injustices of the world - sexual injustices, equality of women, health care, child labor, abolition of slavery, prostitution, economic injustices, etc.⁹ Christ came to bring justice to the world, but He knew that the issue of human sin had to be dealt with first. Out of a renewed heart comes a renewed interest and passion for being involved in helping to cure injustice in the world. **Self-centered, sinful people will not be the catalyst for societal change. First, deal with our own sin, then the sins of society.**

Fourth, if we help people to live a better life by helping to give them a better place to live or more justice in their lives, but don't introduce them to eternal life, then we are giving them only part of the solution, the lesser part.

Life is more than material prosperity, justice in society, and overcoming problems. Both societal reformation and inner transformation are needed. Faith without works is dead, but works without faith is also incomplete. If we enable people to live a better life here and don't introduce them to eternal life, we have robbed them of what is more important. **We need both character development and good works.** There is a return now to community development through the CHE network, offering holistic community change through assessing the needs of a community, then helping them to achieve those goals. However, the goal has to be to introduce people to eternal life, not merely to help them physically and emotionally.

5. Primary Tool

A) The Secular Humanistic view.

How do we understand what is right and wrong? Secular Humanism takes **human reason** as the fundamental tool for discovering what is ethical and what is not, what is right and what is wrong. There are some basic assumptions of what can be called "Humanistic Ethics."

a. We can arrive at certain basic facts about the universe through reason.

The *Humanist Manifesto II* says, "Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself."

b. Man himself, with no tools but the power and objectivity of his reason, can assemble a true and accurate vision of himself and his world, and he can interpret that vision.

c. Man himself, totally apart from God or supernatural revelation, can not only solve his personal problems and those of the world, but he can actually make himself and his world a better place to live in.

B) The Biblical view

⁹ For a detailed explanation of the role of Christianity in helping to solve injustice in the world, see Alvin J. Schmidt's *How Christianity Changed the World*.

The primary agent for transformation in the Christian life is the sanctifying work of God's Holy Spirit. The Biblical view is that **we cannot change ourselves and we need more than human effort to see genuine inner transformation. We have to have a new nature**, a new birth in order to be able to become like Christ, which is our goal. We are incapable of our own redemption, our own sanctification and our own glorification. 2 Cor 3:6 says that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The effect of yet another man-centered effort to do the work which only Christ can do is spiritual death. We, in the flesh, are incapable of genuine change. I remember a teacher back in the 70's, Bob Mumford, who said, "If we try to crucify ourselves, we will always use rubber nails." **Not only do we not know how we should change, we are incapable of making the changes ourselves. We need a power greater than our intentions or self-determination.**

There are some fundamental problems with reason alone to arrive at genuine transformation.

First, the Bible teaches us that **because of the fall of man our reasoning is distorted and corrupted.**

Dennis Prager says, "The heart is an awful guide to good behavior and the conscience may be a fine guide but 1) it is easily overwhelmed by human nature (for example, appetites, lust, envy, greed, etc.) and 2) it can be easily overridden by rationalizing one's behavior ("it's not that bad," "everyone does it," "it's a big department store, not a mom-and-pop store"); and therefore 3) people need to believe that they are accountable to, and will be judged by, someone greater than themselves."¹⁰

Second, since the thinking of everyone is distorted, we as believers are exhorted **to be renewed in our minds** so that we begin to think the way that God thinks. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. God's thoughts and ways are completely different from our thoughts and ways. Our thinking is motivated by our morals. If we are wicked and immoral, our thinking will be wicked and immoral. **There has to be an answer for sin before there is an answer to our thought process.** The whole process of sanctification is the process of first changing the way in which we think. If we want goodness to prevail, a relationship with God and wisdom is the key to unlocking it. Our own heart and our own thinking are insufficient and deceptive. We are to trust God, not our reasoning process.

Third, truth is revealed, not arrived at through our own thought process. We come to truth through spiritual discernment. Spiritual discernment differs greatly from our own thought processes, independent of God. How does it differ?

1. Spiritual discernment is, as the name suggests, spiritual. This type of discernment comes from God, given by His Holy Spirit, called illumination. Only in right relationship with God can we understand the things of God, truth, right and wrong. Yes, we discern truth through

¹⁰ Prager, location 5303.

reasoning, but that reasoning has to be taught by, shaped by the Spirit of God. Thus, if we are out of relationship with God, our thought processes will be distorted, darkened, and futile.

2. God's thoughts and ways are completely different from our own because they have a different source. They are higher, better, eternal, part of the Kingdom of God. Our own thoughts are distorted by sin and therefore earthly, unspiritual, of the devil; but God's wisdom, thoughts and ways are pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. God has given us 1) His Word, 2) His Spirit, 3) His people to help us in deciding case by case what is right and what is wrong. It is not we who decide, but we decide what God would want.

3. God's thoughts produce different fruit, spiritual fruit, good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit.

6. Methodology for Reform

(A) **The Secular Humanist viewpoint:** Mental health can be restored to everyone who gets in touch with his real “good” self. Secular Humanists believe that truly free men will be able to get in touch with their inherent perfection and create a utopian world civilization.

The *Humanist Manifesto I* says:

"Religious humanism considers the **complete realization of human personality** to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now."¹¹

“The task of the Humanistic psychologist, then, is **simply to unlock the potential creativity and goodness inherent in every human being**. Mental health can be achieved worldwide, as soon as each individual's self-actualization needs are met. Specifically, as soon as each individual learns to love and nurture his real self, the mission of Humanism will be fulfilled.”¹²

As you can see, the emphasis is now on the psychologist. **Only in union with the psychologist can we become actualized human beings.**

Many of us have been indoctrinated into this philosophy since the time we were little children.

Humanist Manifesto II says:

We appreciate the need to preserve the best ethical teachings in the religious traditions of humankind, many of which we share in common. But we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities. Traditional religions often offer solace to humans, but, as often, **they inhibit humans from helping themselves or experiencing their full potentialities.** Such institutions, creeds,

¹¹ *Humanist Manifesto I* can be downloaded at www.americanhumanist.org.

¹² Noebel, 365.

and rituals often impede the will to serve others. **Too often traditional faiths encourage dependence rather than independence, obedience rather than affirmation, fear rather than courage.** More recently they have generated concerned social action, with many signs of relevance appearing in the wake of the “God Is Dead” theologies. But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, **humans are responsible** for what we are or will become. **No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.**

Again, the *Humanist Manifesto II* says:

The preciousness and dignity of the individual person is a central humanist value. Individuals should be encouraged to realize their own creative talents and desires. We reject all religious, ideological, or moral codes that **denigrate the individual, suppress freedom, dull intellect, dehumanize personality.** We believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility. Although science can account for the causes of behavior, the possibilities of individual freedom of choice exist in human life and should be increased.

Many Secular Humanists embrace "third force" psychology, which is the work of Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Erich Fromm, and Carl Rogers. This psychology focuses on man's inherent goodness and predicts that every individual can achieve mental health simply by getting in touch with his "real self".

"Self-actualization is achieved when the individual achieves full development of his or her abilities and ambitions."¹³ They call on individuals to become "self-actualized" by meeting all their personal needs. Guilt is forced on people by society, and, as such, is unnecessary baggage. **Christianity is one of the chief sources of individual guilt and therefore is a serious hindrance to collective mental health.** The main problem, they believe, is that few people are in touch with their real selves, and do not love themselves enough. The "real self" can be defined as that innate goodness that underlies whatever corruption might have been forced on the individual by culture. What we have to do is to get in touch with our **unspoiled, inner self.** Maslow says, "Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, **it is best to bring it out and to encourage it rather than to suppress it.** If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful, and happy."¹⁴ Once an individual becomes self-actualized, he will be capable of acting in harmony with his true self, **and his true self always desires good.** What we are striving for is the affirmation of our truly human self. **We needn't worry about helping others; rather, we should simply concentrate on creating a good self.**

¹³ Noebel, pg 364.

¹⁴ Noebel, pg 362, quoting Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pg 4.

"Once an individual becomes self-actualized, he will be capable of acting in harmony with his true self, and his true self always desires good. **Therefore, the man who listens to his real inner nature will always act morally.**"¹⁵

Erich Fromm says:

I shall attempt to show that the character structure of the mature and integrated personality, the productive character, constitutes the source and basis of "virtue," and that "vice," in the last analysis, is indifference to one's own self and self-mutilation. Not self-renunciation nor selfishness but the affirmation of his truly human self, are the supreme values of humanistic ethics. **If man is to have confidence in values, he must know himself and the capacity of his nature for goodness and productiveness.**¹⁶

Vice is defined as indifference to one's self. Fromm says, "Not self-renunciation nor selfishness but the affirmation of his truly human self, are the supreme values of humanistic ethics." Jesus, on the other hand, said that we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

Erich Fromm says that society is failing because people are not getting in touch with their real selves:

The failure of modern culture lies not in its principle of individualism, not in the idea that moral virtue is the same as the pursuit of self-interest, but in the deterioration of the meaning of self-interest; **not in the fact that people are too much concerned with their self-interest, but that they are not concerned enough with the interest of their real self; not in the fact that they are too selfish, but that they do not love themselves.**¹⁷

B) The Biblical perspective

What is the Biblical perspective? Let's critique the Secular Humanist viewpoint on mental health from a biblical perspective.

1. The beginning place of mental health from a Secular Humanistic perspective is that man is inherently good. They believe that once we get in touch with our real selves, listening to our real inner nature, **we will always act morally.** The Bible says clearly and repeatedly that our inner nature is not good, but is tainted by sin. Those who get in touch with their inner nature might feel good about themselves, **but they are do not act morally because they are still sinners.** Their sin nature has not been dealt with, **and no matter how self-actualized they feel, they are not right with God.** Corruption begins with the fall of man, not with society's corrupting influence. Our inner nature is not to be suppressed, it is to be put to death. Nothing

¹⁵ Ibid, pg 366.

¹⁶ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p 17. Quoted in Noebel, p. 367

¹⁷ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 139. Quoted in Noebel, p. 365.

good lives in our sinful nature. As we peel more layers off the onion, it is still an onion underneath. To get real clarity, we need God's revelation, not more introspection.

*Col 3:5-7 **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:** sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*

*Ro 7:18 **I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.***

2. We cannot look within and find mental health, since:

a. Mental health means that we are integrated and whole, and we cannot be integrated unless we are in touch with God and unless we are sacrificing our lives for someone else.

b. God created us and only He knows what we need in order to be emotionally healthy. Emotional health begins with spiritual health which begins with a right relationship with God. This statement does not mean that everyone who has a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ is emotionally healthy, but it does mean that spiritual health is the **beginning place** for emotional health, and that **seeking emotional health without spiritual health is unhealthy**. Maturity, according to the Bible, is spiritual maturity. It is only achieved through communion with God, and being conformed to His image. **Maturity has to have a spiritual dimension to it**. Without the spiritual dimension, maturity is only emotional maturity. Emotional maturity is part of the package of spiritual wholeness, but not the whole thing.

*Eph 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God **and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

*2 Cor 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed **into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Peter Scazzero, in talking about 'emotional healthy spirituality' says that God's image includes physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social dimensions. "Ignoring any aspect of who we are as men and women made in God's image always results in destructive consequences – in our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves."¹⁸ When we try to define maturity without all these dimensions, we end up with a truncated maturity. Only in the balance of these different dimensions do we come into genuine wholeness and maturity. If, for example, we have an individual who is physically fit, intellectually sharp and yet lacks a capacity for interacting with other people because he has never understood the emotional forces which drive him, he is not mature. If, for example, we have a woman who really understands her

¹⁸ Scazzero, p. 18.

emotions, is great with other people, and has great intellectual development, yet is lazy and totally undisciplined both in her physical life and in her spiritual development, she is not mature. It takes development of all these different dimensions. There also has to be a spiritual dimension to our maturity. We cannot be mature and whole without developing the spiritual side of our lives – our relationship with the Lord, and our growth with Him. Eph 4:13 says, *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. Maturity is attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Spiritual maturity is not independent of Christ, but includes the fullness of Christ.

3. The goal of the Secular Humanist is happiness, self-fulfillment. The goal of a disciple of Christ is pleasing God and living for Him. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says that it is the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted who are blessed. The philosophy of this world is that it is the strong, the rich, the powerful, the dominant, the self-actualized, and the famous who are blessed. Christianity is cross-cultural, opposed to what is considered normal and natural in this world's system.

Furthermore, how can we maximize our potential by focusing on ourselves? How can I become more loving by focusing on me? Won't I become more self-absorbed and self-centered?

¹⁹

Oswald Sanders said, "**Our Lord's teaching was always *anti*-self-realization**. His purpose is not the development of a person - His purpose is to make a person exactly like Himself, and the Son of God is characterized by self-expenditure. If we believe in Jesus, it is not what we gain but what He pours through us that really counts. **God's purpose is not simply to make us beautiful, plump grapes, but to make us grapes so that He may squeeze the sweetness out of us.**"²⁰

4. When we follow Christ and only when we follow Christ can we become "self-actualized." Why and how?

a. We can become self-actualized only when the Holy Spirit has transformed us from the inside out. **The greatest obstacle to self-actualization is not a lack of self-knowledge, but the limitation of sin in our lives** - sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (See Gal 5:19-21) We get waylaid along the way to self-actualization because we have the downward pressure of sin in our lives. The most productive people in the world are those who have been cleansed from the cycle of sin in their lives. Christ has set us free from the slavery to our own sinful nature. In order to be free, we have to have a new nature, created in God's image. Freedom, self-fulfillment, self-actualization,

¹⁹ For examples of how Christians have been the initiators of many of the injustices in the world, read *How Christianity Changed the World*.

²⁰ *My Utmost*, Sept 2.

and happiness without having our sins forgiven are only a shadow of the freedom which we can have in Christ.

b. Furthermore, Christianity enables us both to **express** and **repress** natural impulses. Our full potential is achieved as we say ‘no’ to some of our natural impulses. Many of our impulses are against nature, against our conscience, against our self-interest. For example, if we grab some stranger’s private parts in public, it might be an expression of who we are, but it will be counter-productive to any sense of self-fulfillment (even if we are not arrested). The Biblical position is that it is sin which keeps us from our full potential, not a lack of knowing who we are.

Only in communion with Christ can we be truly productive. **It is not subjective guilt which limits our productivity, but objective guilt.** When we become whole in Christ we become more productive in our outward life. **Our problem is our sinful nature, not our guilt feelings.**

c. Only the Lord knows who we really are on the inside and what our capabilities are. Only in a lifetime of obedience to the Lord can we become truly self-actualized. The most productive person who ever lived is Jesus Christ, and he made it clear that the only way that we can be as productive as he was is by living “in the vine,” being connected with and in intimate fellowship with Christ.

*Jn 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; **it must remain in the vine.** Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. **If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.***

*Jn 8:36 **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***

*2 Cor 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and **where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.***

*Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and **do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.***

d. We discover **who we are** through knowing Christ better. This sounds like a contradiction, but allow me to explain. Sin keeps us in darkness and it is only when we are in the light that we can see clearly who we are. Those who do not have a relationship with Christ are unable to see who they really are because it is the Holy Spirit who reveals **who Christ is**, but who also reveals **who we are**. The Holy Spirit is the One who searches hearts and reveals truth; nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. It is in communion with Christ that the deep things of the heart are revealed to us. I have had the Holy Spirit show me many times things in

my heart which I had no idea were there. Those who do not have the searching of the Holy Spirit and who have no hope, do not have the opportunity to have the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

*Ro 8:27 **And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.***

*Ac 15:8 **God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.***

*1 Cor 14:24,25 **But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"***

*Heb 4:12,13 **For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***

5. The next reason that we cannot be self-actualized except through a relationship with Christ is that **in order to become who we were intended by God to be requires that we have humility**. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. When we are motivated by pride, self-interest, or selfish ambition we will be opposing God, who will be opposing us. We cannot be self-actualized unless we are right with God, who created us. Those who become all that God has called them to be do it through the contributions of others and through accepting that they are not the center of the universe.

My mother always used to tell me about a man she knew who was valedictorian of his high school class, a graduate of West Point, and a brilliant man. However, he never did much in life because he thought that he knew everything and would not accept advice or direction from anyone else. He always thought that he should be the boss. His own pride prevented him from achieving what he could have achieved. Pride limits self-actualization. Many people think too highly of themselves. Jesus, the greatest man who ever lived, was humble.

*Ro 12:3 **For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.***

*Jam 4:6 **But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***

*1 Pet 5:5 **Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***

*Php 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, **but in humility consider others better than yourselves.***

*Jam 3:16 For **where you have envy and selfish ambition**, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

6. Self-actualization comes from creativity, and **creativity comes from our creative God**, the Creator of the whole universe. Our creative potential is released when we are in right fellowship with the God who is not only the most intelligent person in the universe, but also the most creative and most productive. When the Creator of the universe dwells in our hearts, we can become all that He intends for us to be. In fact, **He is at work within us to make us into everything which we are intended to be**. God's intention is that each one of us who are His children become everything which we were intended to become. When we are aligned with the Lord in our hearts, thoughts, wills, and emotions, He works in us to maximize who we are. **His very purpose is for us to be fully productive and completely fulfilled**. He is glorified when we are blessed and a blessing to others. **God enables us to reach our potential, not ourselves**. Can we do better by ourselves than through the help of the creator of the universe and the source of creativity?

*Phil 2:12, 13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed— not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence— continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.***

*Heb 13:20,21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **equip you with everything good for doing his will**, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

7. Self-actualization is developed in healthy environments. A healthy church, a healthy family, and a healthy school will be the place where children grow up emotionally and spiritually healthy. Human potential is developed in a healthy environment, where there is love, acceptance, and intellectual stimulation - what we call an environment of grace. Unconditional love and appreciation for who we are is the environment where children can maximize who they are because they know that they are valued and loved for who they are. God's intention is that Christians produce homes in which children will grow to their potential (i.e. they are self-actualized). If we begin with the assumption that children are sinners and that they need to be trained in righteousness, and we don't squash their personality, their skills, or discourage them, then they will become what they were intended by God to become. God desires that they become self-actualized and good parents also desire that their children are self-actualized. God's plan for our lives is not that we become "cookie-cutter" copies of one another, but rather that we become what we are intended to be, which is absolutely unique to each one of us. God is at work in us to bring us to the place where we understand who we uniquely are and then He is at work to bring us to the place of the utilization of our unique personality, talents, skills, education, and

spiritual gifts. **God delights in diversity and He is glorified when we use our unique gifts for His glory.** I remember the famous line from *Chariots of Fire*, when Eric Little tells his sister that he felt God's approval when he ran. We glorify God when we clean dishes, clean the floors, design computer parts, fix cars, plant trees, build businesses, teach high school students, etc. all to the glory of God.

*Col 3:21 Fathers, **do not embitter your children**, or they will become discouraged.*

*1 Cor 12:14-20 **Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact **God has arranged the parts in the body**, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

*1 Cor 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do it all for the glory of God.***

*Heb 13:20,21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

8. **Maturity is not productivity** per se, but wholeness in communion with God. Productivity comes out of maturity, but the goal is not productivity, but a relationship with God. Those who talk about self-actualization are focusing on **external productivity**, which is certainly an indication of self-actualization, but not a good overall measure. Furthermore, Jesus talked about spiritual fruit, not just productivity per se, although the two are often interrelated. If someone never amounts to much in the eyes of the world, but leads many to Christ, or leads a life of obedience to Christ, or fulfills what God has sent him or her to do in the world he/she bears much spiritual fruit.

If productivity is our aim, then we are reduced to an economic model, virtue only for the sake of production. Then, a more productive person is more virtuous. But, productive in what sense? Is a person who turns out all kinds of pornographic films virtuous because he has produced much? Is the person who has planned and carried through on killing 10 people in the last year more productive and virtuous than the one who only planned and killed one person?

Jesus' goal for us is to produce disciples, not just that we become busy people. Productivity can become an excuse for busy-ness, abundant activity, but little spiritual, lasting fruit. We Americans are great at being busy, but sometimes accomplishing little of eternal fruit. I have caught myself many times responding to the question, 'so what are you doing?' with the response 'I am very busy doing...' as if my busy-ness was a justification for my existence. We, as Americans, are good people if we are busy people. How do we define productivity, in the eyes of man or the eyes of the Lord? The question is this, 'Is what I am accomplishing good or

not?' **Christ wants us to accomplish what is good**, to produce spiritual fruit, not merely to accomplish a lot of things. The book of proverbs is full of admonitions to diligence and hard work so we are to be diligent and to accomplish things, but we are to accomplish the right kinds of things. We have to examine our lives to see whether what we are doing is good for others, or whether it is merely busy work.

Pr 12:14 From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him.

Pr 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Pr 18:9 One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.

Pr 21:25 The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work.

Pr 22:29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.

Pr 31:17 She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.

Productivity is a relative term, depending on the purpose of our lives. **Real productivity is doing what God wants us to do with our lives.** If, as Jesus said, the purpose of our lives is to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth, then productivity is being able to achieve as much as we can, given our 'potentialities' in the pursuit of that goal. If our goal is our human happiness, which is what is advocated by the Humanists, then productivity is advancing that goal. **We, as Christians, have a completely different purpose in life.** The **quality** of our work and accomplishments is as important as the **quantity**. Therefore, our concept of productivity is totally different and the means by which we evaluate whether we have been productive is completely different. **We are not self-actualized when we achieve great things according to men's standards, but rather when we achieve what God wants us to achieve and bring glory to Him.** If accomplishing much is our goal, then Hitler was a self-actualized person. He accomplished a great deal, but his accomplishments were evil, not good.

When Jesus called the apostles to follow Him, He was calling them away from a productive life of catching fish, collecting taxes, etc. into a life of fishing for men.

Mt 4:18-20 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

*Jn 15:4,5 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; **it must remain in the vine.** Neither can you bear fruit **unless you remain in me.** "I am the vine; you are the branches. **If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***

9. **Being a Christian does not inhibit us from experiencing our full potentialities**, but rather encourages our full potentialities. What psychology labels as self-actualization is

somewhat like what we call spiritual maturity, Christian character. Yet, the concepts are different. Our concept of spiritual maturity is the end product of God's working in our lives, the goal of sanctification, the end product of becoming like Christ.

To repeat, the *Humanist Manifesto II* says:

We appreciate the need to preserve the best ethical teachings in the religious traditions of humankind, many of which we share in common. But we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities. Traditional religions often offer solace to humans, but, as often, **they inhibit humans from helping themselves or experiencing their full potentialities.** Such institutions, creeds, and rituals often impede the will to serve others. **Too often traditional faiths encourage dependence rather than independence, obedience rather than affirmation, fear rather than courage.** More recently they have generated concerned social action, with many signs of relevance appearing in the wake of the "God Is Dead" theologies. **But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species.** While there is much that we do not know, **humans are responsible for what we are or will become.** No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.

10. Because Christ is Truth, Christianity is the only religion which integrates what we believe, what we are, and what we do. Our whole being has to be integrated.

7. Ultimate Goal

A) The Secular Humanist perspective:

The Secular Humanist wants to create a utopian society in which inequality among classes of people is abolished and in which there is material or economic equality in the world. This utopian society takes place when we no longer divide humanity along nationalistic grounds, but establish a transnational federal government.

The *Humanist Manifesto II* says:

We deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds. We have reached a turning point in human history where the best option is to transcend the limits of national sovereignty and to move toward the building of a world community in which all sectors of the human family can participate. Thus we look to the **development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government.** This would appreciate cultural pluralism and diversity. It would not exclude pride in national origins and accomplishments nor the handling of regional problems on a regional basis. Human progress, however, can no longer be achieved by focusing on one section of the world, Western or Eastern, developed or underdeveloped. For the first time in human history, no

part of humankind can be isolated from any other. Each person's future is in some way linked to all. We thus reaffirm a commitment to **the building of world community**, at the same time recognizing that this commits us to some hard choices.

B) The Biblical perspective:

1. We believe that men are sinners, and if there is centralization of power in a transnational government, it will lead to more concentrated power in the hands of one or a few people. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. We have a profound distrust of the goodness of man. Dennis Prager said, "Much, perhaps even most, evil does not emanate from particularly evil people or even from the bad or self-centered parts of human nature, **but from the good and idealistic parts.**"²¹ He goes on to say, "When it comes to personal relations and, even more so, to formulating social policy, **intending to do good is completely insufficient.** In order to do good in both the personal and social spheres, people also need wisdom, common sense, and a moral value system."²² So, even though it is idealistic to diminish national governments and concentrate power in a transnational government, it doesn't accord with the track record of those who have accumulated great power. Good intentions are not enough.

C.S. Lewis wrote,

"The greatest evil is not done in those sordid 'dens of crime' that Dickens loved to paint...it is conceived and ...moved, seconded, carried, and minuted...in clean, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices."²³

2. Jesus did not seek to establish an earthly kingdom, but rather He came to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

3. The only way that righteousness is going to reign on earth is when Jesus comes back. Men trying to establish Utopia without dealing with the sin in the human heart is futile.

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²¹ Prager, location 1217.

²² Ibid, location 1232.

²³ Thomas, *Against the Night*, pg. 46.