

CHAPTER TEN: CORE MORALITIES

So, what is a core morality? Paraphrasing Ross Snyder⁵⁵, “It is a call to meaningful living, a way to *be* rather than a list of prohibitions or admonitions. As such, it is forever dynamic, enticing each of us to discover deeper and deeper layers of meaning.” Thus, it leads us to a new mythos that helps to harmonize our purposes and behaviors.

I notice my hesitancy to write further. The very act of listing these attributes of core moralities has its frightening side for me. I recall vividly a certain youth who had been raised a strict Catholic. In 1970, I had come to know him as a true-believer hippie celebrating his religious rites with drugs and preaching the virtues thereof. Later I knew him as a fundamentalist Christian. He believed that he had changed in these three manifestations, but it seemed to me that nothing basic had changed. The dependent child seeking a true belief had simply changed hats. My fear is that this same man would accept the core moralities as a new dogma rather than as the challenges they are. The drive to “know-for-sure what I know” is still overwhelming to many.

Going beyond that fear, I offer a compilation of core principles, grouped under four different headings in this chapter, and begin with one that has special meaning for me: graceful aging.

1. The Core Morality of Graceful Aging

When a three-year-old looks at an eight-year-old s/he sees a big and old person. At eight years one can hardly imagine being 18, and so it goes. All of us are aging.

⁵⁵ Ross Snyder, who developed the phrase “core morality,” taught at the Chicago Theological Seminary from 1941 until about 1977. He represents a style of teaching that celebrates education as an event more than as a passing of knowledge. For him, teacher and student are two humans exploring meaning together. To quote him freely, “Life is meant to be lived. All of us are meant to be participants, not merely spectators. Organizing a life-world and taking it some place is what life is all about. It is the goal that includes all other goals.”

Many cultures venerate youth. This doesn't make sense because all of the venerators are getting older. Even idolized youth are getting older. Isn't it ridiculous to venerate that which nobody is becoming? Isn't it much more sensible to venerate the inevitable—becoming older? To place supreme value on youth is life-denying, for it implies that we are better at the beginning of life than at the end, and that the physical vitality when young trumps the possible wisdom one gains in the aging process.

Many have a tragic view of this aging process. Many have accepted the idea that getting old is a matter of having less of everything—fun, sexual pleasure, and brainpower. As a result, many people choose to fulfill such unhappy prophecies, although none of them is a necessary consequence of aging. They have decided to believe that such tribulations are inevitable. In contrast to this insanity, I propose that we live life in such a way that those younger will say, “How wonderful it must be to be your age.”