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Phillip W. Warren, B.A., Ph.C., Professor Emeritis, A.P.O.E.C., Cert.Edu-K.,CC-EFT

4459 52A St., Delta, B.C., V4K 2Y3 Canada

Phone and voice mail: (604) 946-4963. Toll free: 1-866-946-4963

EEmail: <phillip_warren@telus.net>

Website: <www.rebprotocol.net>

U.S. mailing address: P.O. Box 1595, Point Roberts, WA 98281-1595

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CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK FOR DESIGNING AN ETHICAL VALUE SYSTEM©

Phillip W. Warren

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Saint John's University, Collegville, Minnesota

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a brief statement of the concept of "optimum" in terms of three interrelated sets of concepts: (1). the components of the process of understanding -- Contact, Communication and Clarity; (2). the scale of Levels of Human Functioning and Existence; (3). the eight categories of survival. Optimum thus consists of existing (functioning) on the highest level with the most understanding on all categories of survival. Degrees of sub-optimum existence can be analyzed in terms of these three interrelated sets of concepts.

A. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to provide a set of concepts by which one may construct an ethical value system (Normative Humanism - Fromm) that transcends the usual self-centered (but not necessarily selfish) systems. In this system the self-concept (self-determinism, self-actualization) is one fundamental aspect of the value system, but only one. One of the fascinating paradoxes is that the optimum (self-actualized) person tends to naturally have this type of value system. This paper is an attempt to make the system more explicit and clear to people who are not optimum so that they may understand it more fully. Hopefully, also, the paper may lead normal people to expand their scale of values so that they transcend their own self-centered and usually selfish-centered values.

Three interrelated sets of concepts are involved in the formulation of this frame work. These concepts involve (1) the components of the process of understanding, (2) the levels of human functioning and (3) the eight categories of survival.

B. UNDERSTANDING: THE THEORY OF CONTACT, COMMUNICATION AND CLARITY.

The three components of the process of understanding are Contact (community, closeness, respect, affinity), Communication and Clarity (consensus, conformity, agreement, reality). These components are -mutually interdependent such that as any one component improves so also do the others. Conversely, as any component tends to deteriorate the other parts also tend to do so and create less understanding. Communication is generally the easiest of the three to change; a person

who understands communication and can use this understanding can bring about a higher degree of general understanding in virtually any situation. The total process of understanding, Communication is the means, Clarity the result and Contact an attitude that Communication and Clarity can occur. (For a similar view see Rogers 1959, especially pp. 236-240.)

1. CONTACT

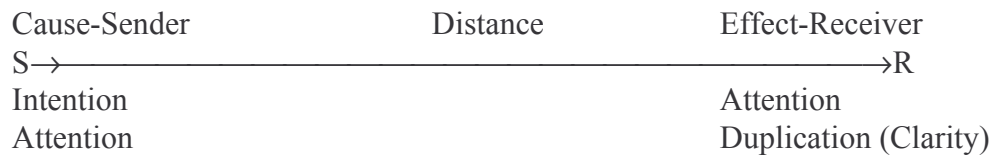
In this approach, when one is willing to Contact someone or something he is willing to grant beingness to the other. It implies a rational respect. Maslow calls it "Being Love" and "Being Cognition" and Rogers refers to it as "Unconditional positive regard." Contact is essentially the willingness and ability to share a viewpoint or a number of viewpoints. It is also the belief that an interchange of Communication and Clarity can occur. To the degree there is this possible interchange, Contact exists. It is an attitude which makes Communication and thus Clarity possible. A person who creates Contact is willing to be like or to share that for which he is creating Contact. Contact can be conceived of as "sampling constant" or biasing factor in the total process of understanding some viewpoint. In the process of interacting with someone there can be bias in both the positive and negative directions. The positive bias is usually self-corrective whereas the negative is not (C.F. Newcomb on "Autistic hostility"). Contact is conceived of as sampling a viewpoint in an unbiased manner so that one knows both the good and bad aspects. The attitude is essentially non-judgmental-- "B Cognizing" --so both good and bad are accepted as given. Thus one finds "What is" (achieves Clarity) in regard to a viewpoint.

One can conceive of a scale of attitudes of Contact (respect) and a person's position on this scale determines his ability to communicate and to share a reality (achieve Clarity); to understand and be understood. The closer one's attitude approaches a complete willingness to co-exist and share (confront in an unbiased manner) the greater will be his ability to understand and be understood. other person who is high on the ability to Contact is willing to share the ideas, beliefs and beingness of other persons or of anything with which he has Contact. He is willing to duplicate that viewpoint or let it duplicate his. There is a scale of attitudes for Contact with the highest level being the co-existence of spirit and a gradual decrease through the interposition of distance, energy and the physical universe. The process of individuation progresses from the state of knowingness of complete identification while retaining the awareness of your own individuality down through the introduction of more and more distance and less and less duplication (Clarity) to eventually end up at not-knowingness. The person at the top of the scale knows that he can identify at will with any viewpoint or number of viewpoints and yet retain the knowingness of his own existence. That is, he can assume or not assume any viewpoint or number of view points as he wishes. It is a common belief that if one assumes another viewpoint that this necessarily implies that one must give up his own. Therefore, people compulsively and desperately cling to their viewpoints, afraid to contact, look or confront another person and his ideas. If people would discover that the willingness to assume another viewpoint does not thereby imply that they have to become that viewpoint and give up their own and could have the experience of assuming another's view without threat to their own view, then there would be more understanding and peace among men.

2. COMMUNICATION

Communication is an ability and like any ability, it can be improved through knowledge and practice. The reason Communication is so important is that an improvement in this ability results in a simultaneous improvement in other more specific abilities. This is true because Communication bridges and closes gaps and the gap may be between your present level of performance and the hoped for level. Communication is the active component of the three aspects of understanding.

The definition of one-way Communication is: the action of impelling an idea or particle from a source point, across a distance, to a receipt point, with the intention by the source point of bringing into being at the receipt point, a duplication of the content of the message which emanated from the source point. In diagrammatic form it is:



The following seven aspects of the definition of a one way communication are all considered necessary but none are sufficient:

- (1) Cause-Sender: Something or someone must be there to originate and start a message on its way.
- (2) Intention: The sender must intend to originate the message and get it across to the receiver in a form that is understandable (duplicatable). That is, the person must be decisive and not "wishy washy", not talk to himself, use language and concepts which the receiver understands and can duplicate, take the initiative in originating, etc. The concept of intention is a logical and psychological primitive in the system and it is assumed that the reader knows what intention involves.
- (3) Attention-Sender: To actualize his intention to communicate the sender must put his attention on various aspects of the communication process: The message -- content; sending the message -- consider the direction, velocity, intensity, etc.; the distance and other barriers to be traversed -- consider the optimal force to use to travel the distance (not too little or too much), use the proper energy form to get around or through the barriers and to use in the system; the form of the message -- make sure that the receiver can duplicate it accurately.
- (4) Distance: Communication closes a gap and this gap can be physical distance or it can be a gap between ideas, opinions and knowledge.
- (5) Effect-Receiver: Something or someone must be there to receive the message eventually.
- (6) Attention-Receiver: This involves "really listening" in an unbiased manner with full attention. It is obvious that the attention of the receiver must be on the message rather than on something (anything) else such as his own problems, thoughts, opinions and arguments concerning the content of the message. Many people find that their attention is off the sender and his message when they find something with which they disagree. Their attention goes off the message and on to their own thoughts and rebuttals and counter arguments. Thus they do not know what the message contains or else they confuse the actual content of the message with their thoughts about what was contained in the message. They then have an inaccurate duplication of the message but believe that it is accurate -- they are imputing things to the sender that he did not say.

- (7) Duplication (Clarity): This plays a vital role in communication. It is necessary to have received the message accurately without distortion in order to respond to that message in an appropriate -fashion. Duplication (Clarity) is the extent to which the message sent and the message received are similar in denotation and connotation.

The analysis of one way communication, while important, is literally only half the story. Certain additional considerations enter when you consider two way communication or interaction. The cycle of two--way communication is briefly as follows: 'A' originates a message and sends it to 'B'. 'B' receives, duplicates and encodes it. 'B' then answers the question or executes the request, etc. contained in the message. 'A' then acknowledges that 'B' has answered the question or executed the request. Then 'A' and 'B' reverse roles and this particular cycle is completed.

In order to be in optimum Communication each individual in the interaction at least must be willing and able to:

- (1) send or receive at will, switch roles freely, and not have an overbalance on one or the other.
- (2) duplicate the other one's message.
- (3) have the message they send to the other in a form that the other can duplicate and understand.
- (4) Accommodate to the physical, emotional, and cognitive distance between them.

Some of the conditions which occur in a distorted and sub-optimum Communication are:

- (1) A failure to be duplicatable before one sends a communication (a problem of many innovators and original thinkers).
- (2) An intention in the originator contrary to being received such as when one is enamored with his own verbiage.
- (3) An unwillingness or inability by the sender or receiver to give attention to the other and to the message, as when one is "wrapped up in his own thoughts".
- (4) An unwillingness or inability by sender or receiver to change roles as when one wishes to always be boss or servant.
- (5) An unwillingness or inability to acknowledge and answer.
- (6) An unwillingness or inability to accommodate to the distance and other barriers.
- (7) An unwillingness or inability to duplicate or listen.

The importance of an acknowledgment is much underrated in the Communication process. The function of an acknowledgment is to let the other person know that you have received and understood the message. It is an action in the cycle of Communication which terminates that particular cycle and functions as a "behavioural period." An acknowledgment is not to be confused with reward, punishment, reinforcement, approval etc. The function is not to approve, disapprove or

evaluate the message in any way. It is simply to let the person know that you have received and understood his message.

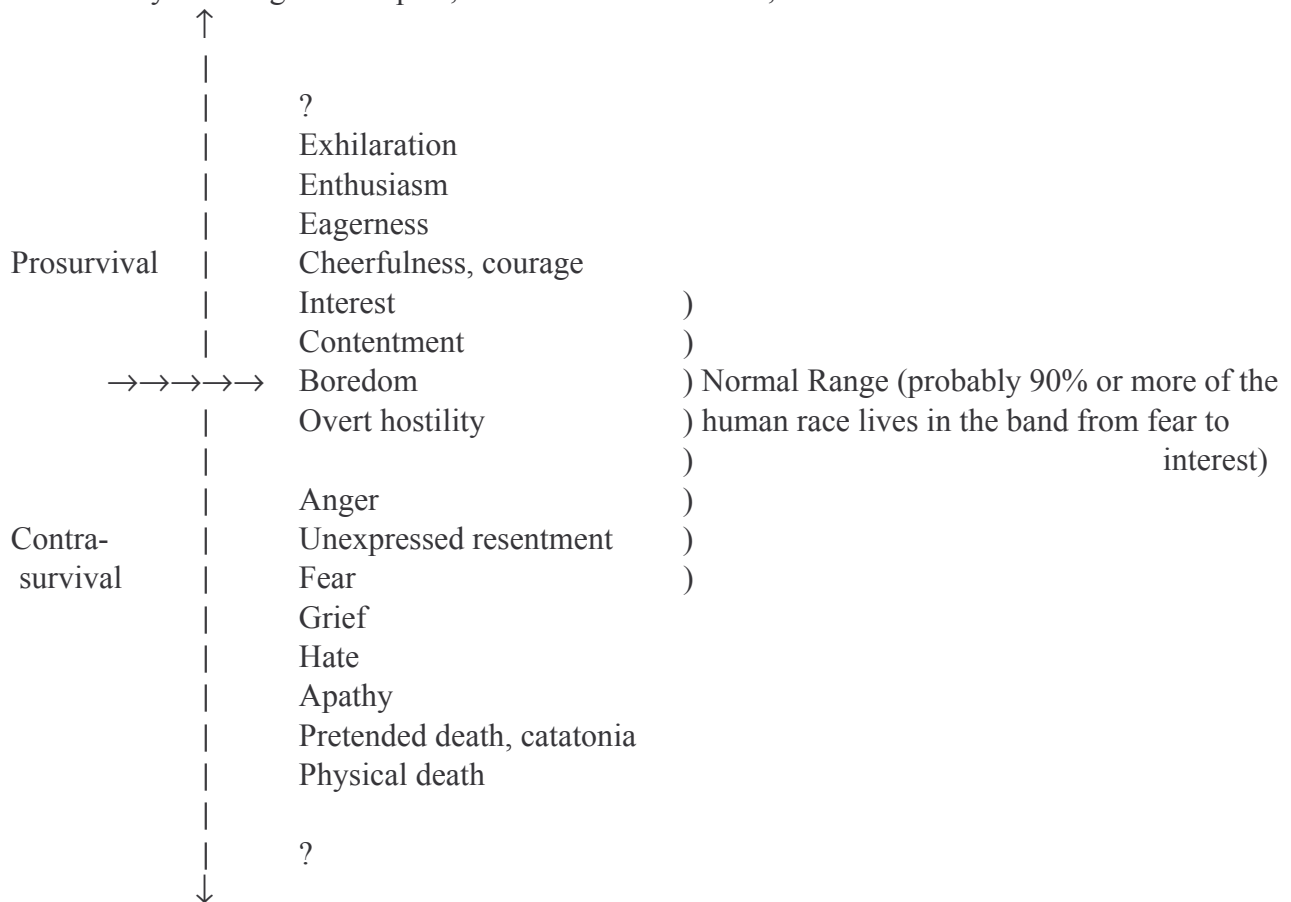
3. CLARITY

This aspect of the process of understanding involves agreement, but it is agreement on what is involved in the area of concern and not agreement on evaluation of the area. Another term which attempts to get at this aspect would be similarity and communality of cognitive structure. In terms of the process of communication it is the extent to which the message sent and the message received are similar in denotation and connotation; the degree of duplication between the cause and effect points on the communication line. The word reality can also be used here since Clarity and agreement is the essence of reality -- something is real to people to the extent that there is Clarity and agreement about the area of concern. Truth and reality are different, however, since people can agree on, or be clear about and believe in, totally false things. In the process of understanding something or someone the aim is to obtain an accurate and undistorted picture (idea, image, model etc.) of the object, person or topic.

C. LEVELS OF HUMAN FUNCTIONING

The concept of levels of human functioning (health, existence, awareness, ability) is an attempt to define a qualitative dimension in human existence. Merely not dying, not being mentally or physically ill, not being dumb, unaware, disabled and so on is not sufficient to define "high level wellness". This approach of levels is fairly common in Asian psycho-religious systems but is just recently being used in Western psychology in the attempt to delineate the realms of human existence and ability above the normal or typical. Related formulations are Goldstein and Maslow's use of concepts of "self-actualization" and the "hierarchy of needs"; Roger's use of "fully functioning"; Dunn and Jourard's use of "high level wellness"; Warren's use of "optimum functioning". These approaches are all attempts to conceptualize the higher realms of human existence. This concept is discussed more fully in Warren (1964, 1967-1968). The following figure will give a picture of this qualitative dimension of man's existence:

+∞ Serenity of Beingness as spirit, Ultimate consciousness, Unified nirvana



-∞ Complete unbeingness as spirit, Ultimate unconsciousness, Disbursed nirvana

While a complete delineation of each level will not be attempted here a brief description of the characteristics of functioning and behavior on the upper levels of cheerfulness, eagerness, enthusiasm can be given. Behaviorally there is swift and decisive approach; physiologically the autonomic nervous system and endocrine system are at optimum under control of the cortex, muscle tone is excellent, reaction time very quick and the person has a high energy level.

The person is nearly accident proof and has very high resistance to various diseases with no psychosomatic or psychogenic complications.

There is a high ability to experience present time pleasure and he finds existence very full of pleasure. Sexual interest is high but is often sublimated to creative thought and activity. The "spiritual" or higher characteristics of a desirable sexual partner are emphasized over the physical characteristics. The person has constructive and procreative efforts in all fields of endeavor. He displays an intense interest and concern for all children and all phases of development.

In general, affinity, love, contact and respect are strong and outgoing. The person loves everything and everyone. There is a search for different viewpoints in order to broaden his ~n reality. There is the ability to assume the viewpoint of others without necessarily giving up his own. There is strong, able, accurate, and clear exchange of beliefs and ideas and a high differentiation of all communication.

There is great creative persistence on a given course and the person is excellent at projects. He displays a high degree of self mastery and an active approach toward his environment. There is a

general dislike of control of others and he gains support by creative enthusiasm and vitality backed by reason. There is a strong sense of responsibility and concern for all categories and aspects of survival. He has a very high ethic level and he bases ethics on reason. Very courageous and truthful. In general he has a creative and constructive approach to his world.

The question marks above "exhilaration" and below "physical death" indicate the lack of knowledge of these areas of existence. Research and study in these areas are just now becoming known and considered in the western world but the vast literature of mysticism, occult sciences, the secret tradition etc. is concerned with them. There is a resurgence of interest in these areas among the popular press and the general public and now even the scientific community is beginning to take them seriously and see clues to new areas of research which were contained in the ancient writings.

The assumption implicit in the formulation of "Levels of human functioning" is that each person displays a typical or usual level in various areas of life (his physical health, interpersonal relations, ethical behavior, values etc.) and so the complete formulation would have columns which deal with each of the various aspects of life to form a matrix. It is assumed that the person will exhibit consistency across these columns (aspects of life) and that by knowing his general level of functioning we can predict his actions in all the various areas. It is also possible to plot the persons level across time and so follow the high and low points for a specified interval and from this find his modal or typical level of functioning. People differ in the amount of variation they show comparing one time with another. As a general rule it is easier to go down scale than up. Thus, we would expect the person at the top to show more fluctuation of levels than one at the bottom. The person at the healthy top levels is able to function on a greater variety of levels and is not stuck or fixated at any given level. The person at enthusiasm does not show this emotion for a tragic event (unless he is stuck at enthusiasm similar to the schizophrenics "inappropriate affect"). The scale is also one of self-determinism (or better, balanced determinism) with balanced determinism at the top and other determinism at the bottom. At the top the person is balanced on being cause and effect points whereas as the person goes down scale he becomes more and more effect of his environment and others. In terms of the current interest in expanded awareness techniques the levels of functioning can be conceived of as an indication of how much the person's attention-awareness is under his self-determined control. The higher a person is on the scale the more his attention-awareness is under his control and thus the more he may direct it to whatever aspect of the universe he desires. The higher the person is the more he is able to be aware of and the more he can direct his attention outward if he so desires. Whereas the lower he is the more his attention is internalized and the more he is an "encapsulated man" (Royce). With one's attention stuck on or in something one can hardly become aware of a very broad range of phenomena. The usual reason for this fixation is fear and so the fixation becomes circular. In order to free the attention you must examine that which you fear but this is precisely what the person can not do by himself. The fear must be approached gradually and so the deconditioning and desensitizing techniques in therapy are particularly useful here (Wolpe, Warren 1964). At any rate, the basic goal of any therapy may be conceived of as freeing the person's attention-awareness to place it under his self-determined control.

D. THE SURVIVAL URGE

1. THE EIGHT BASIC CATEGORIES OF SURVIVAL

The basic goal of man and of all life which embraces all activity is survival. However, the impulse is not simply to not die but is rather to obtain the highest quality of survival. In addition survival does not merely involve self-survival but embraces other areas of existence. Thus, the general survival impulse can be analyzed into categories or areas -- the effort to survive along certain paths or in certain areas of the total spectrum of existence. The categories of survival defined here are to be conceived of as a set of interrelated areas forming a complex set of relationships to culminate in a general world view. The various categories are not necessarily seen to be of equal importance either for a given individual or in some ultimate objective sense. The various categories merge into one another and knit together to comprise one unified impulse toward survival. The system of survival categories is one method of showing the different spheres of activity in which the life force functions in its effort to survive. The health and value maturity of an individual can be judged in terms of how many of these categories he is aware of and concerned about. (See Cantril Chap. 15)

a. SELF (I)

This is the urge towards existence as an individual, to be an individual. It includes body, mind and spirit (see "life force" category). It is the effort to attain the highest level of survival for the longest possible time for one's self.

b. SEX AND FAMILY (II)

The continuance of a life form as a species depends upon its ability to perpetuate itself in some manner. This includes the continuance through procreation and reproduction. But the continuance of the species depends upon more than just the ability to reproduce. Therefore this dimension includes family relationships and the education of the young, especially among human beings. The family and some system of education is necessary to maintain, perpetuate and develop the existing society and culture. It is primarily through the family that man learns and agrees upon appropriate values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. Further, it is through the family that the young are protected and directed until they become capable of standing alone and beginning their own families. Thus, the category includes several sub-parts: (1) The sexual act itself and anything relating to the action of sex. (2) The urge for survival through children, the product of the sex act. (3) The family, since the family as a unit affects the rearing of children.

c. GROUPS AND SIGNIFICANT OTHERS (III)

This involves the effort towards existence in groups of individuals beyond the immediate family unit, (e.g. friends, clubs, lodges, schools, churches, companies or unions, community, state, country.) The individual has a definite interest in the survival of the various groups to which he belongs. Group activities are pleasant and indeed necessary to existence. Each person is usually willing, if only by taking a small part in their activities, to help groups survive and continue.

d. MANKIND (IV)

This is the effort to survive as a species and interest in the species as such. This category is rarely considered by many people; it has little reality and clarity to them because they have little

communication with it. Unless men as individuals become willing and able to understand the species as a whole, it is probable that there will be no individuals left to communicate to.

e. LIFE FORMS (V)

This is the effort toward existence and survival for any and every form of life (Schweitzer's "reverence for life" or "Ahimsa"). It is an interest in life as such. It is obvious that an individual needs more than people to ensure his existence. As a life form, man is dependent on other life forms for his survival; unless other forms existed man could not. Practically all the food the individual takes into his body is or was once alive. To the degree that he aids these life forms necessary for his own survival, he assists his ~n survival in terms of the first four categories.

f. PHYSICAL UNIVERSE (VI)

This involves an interest in the survival of the physical environment. It is clear that people and other life forms would not be able to live if they had nowhere to exist. It is essential to survival that there be a planet in reasonable condition. Man increases his survival potential as he organizes matter, energy, space and time in combinations more suitable to himself. If a person can increase his ability to communicate with the universe, he will thereby gain greater contact or closeness and clarity regarding it and control it intelligently instead of the present pollution.

g . LIFE FORCE (VII)

This is the urge to survive as a beingness and includes the impulse of all individual units of beingness to survive. There is more to living than solid things (this is the "something more" as opposed to the "nothing but" view). There is man as a spirit or life force. It is intimately related to the urge to survive as self (category one) but here the emphasis is on the effort to survive as spirit, soul, mind etc. This may or may not be real to some people but it is very real to others and they definitely seek to survive as spirit or soul. Certainly people think, know, decide. These thoughts, and the ability to use them are intangible; that is they are not observable in the ordinary way by another person. A person depends upon his thinking to a large extent for his survival and similarly he depends upon the thoughts of others. The person is not his thoughts but he has them and that which has them is the spirit. The person does not "have a soul", he is the soul and as such is interested in his survival as a soul. The individual through his life generally loses his reality and contact on his being through enforced and denied Contact, Communication and Clarity (agreement) on the topic of spiritual things. When this happens, he is essentially unable to conceive, in any meaningful experiential manner, the final category of survival -- supreme beingness.

h. ULTIMATE STATE (VIII)

This category includes the impulse to survive as the supreme being, the ultimate form, ultimate reality, truth, state, "mysterium tremendum" or whatever term is used to point to this concept. Only when the person is in a state of knowing and responsibility (sanity) on the prior seven categories will he be able to discover or glimpse this eighth category of survival.

2. DISTORTION AND SANITY ON THE CATEGORIES OF SURVIVAL

If a person is not operating at all on any of the categories he is, of course physically and spiritually dead. If he is operating at optimum on all categories he would be living the fullest possible life (be at optimum or self-actualized). Each of the eight categories can be broken down and analyzed in

terms of the three component parts of understanding: Contact, Communication and Clarity (agreement-reality). Because the eight categories are interrelated, distortion of Contact, Communication or Clarity on any one simultaneously introduces distortion in the others. Distortion is usually greater among certain categories than others in different cultures, but the level of sanity is uniformly low in most all cultures with regard to categories seven and eight.

To the extent that a person increases his Contact, Communication and Clarity with these categories and as he can control himself and his relationships to these categories, to this extent he is sane, able and happy. When a person is incapable or irresponsible on any one category, this affects his relationship to the others. To regain control of one's life, to channel it in a constructive and satisfying manner, it is necessary to raise one's Contact, Communication and Clarity to a high level for as many categories as possible. An increase of ability and understanding can be achieved through developing a person's ability on any one category. However, if only one category is dealt with, then only a partial solution is possible.

3. A CHART OF POSSIBLE DISTORTIONS WHICH MAY OCCUR IN A PERSON'S LIFE.

The chart given here is intended as a guide to systematically plot the possible areas of maladaptation which may occur in the process of socialization and interaction with others. Using this framework it is possible to systematically pinpoint the areas of a persons life which have in some way become sub-optimum. Distortion occurs when a member or representative of a category enforces or inhibits (denies) Contact, Communication, and Clarity concerning another category or member-representative of the category. For example if a person has irrational beliefs regarding boy scouts we may find that his mother made him (son) attend boy scout meetings against his wishes. This is analyzed as follows: family member (mother) enforces contact (affinity, attendance) for a group (boy scouts) on the self (the son). In my experience I have found that many otherwise rational people who are militant atheists (or better anti-theists) have had considerable enforced Contact, Communication and Clarity (agreement) regarding the categories of "life force" (7) and "ultimate state" (8). Until the effects of these moments of enforcement have been "run out" (emotionally desensitized and rationally examined) the person can not be sane about these categories of survival.

ENFORCED:			INHIBITED (denied):		
Contact	Communication	Clarity-agreement	Contact	Communication	Clarity-agreement

Concerning the Survival Category of:

Self					
Family and Sex					
Groups					
Mankind					
Life forms					
Physical Universe					
Life force					
Ultimate State					

E. ETHICS AND OPTIMUM SURVIVAL

From the three sets of concepts described in this paper it is possible to define a form of "ethical calculus". The optimum solution to any problem is that solution which brings the most benefit to the greatest number of survival categories (benefit is that which enhances survival). A stable basis for ethical behavior is then defined in terms of striving towards optimum survival in all categories of survival. The goodness of a solution is a function of the number of categories included and the quality of survival on each one. Optimum is defined as maximum survival on the maximum number of survival categories. Survival is both qualitative and quantitative and quality is defined in terms of the extended chart of levels of functioning (extended both in the vertical and horizontal, see Warren, 1964).

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