

NONTHEISM – Although the subtlety of our approach to the god question is difficult to get across, if we are going to present a clear religious view, we must be direct about our positive position on the idea of ultimate reality. Ethical Culture has through history made varied attempts to define our version of nontheism: a) we make no statement on the god question, b) it is not the important question, c) we don't make absolute statements. A direct positive position could help to preclude the arguments about god at the point when people first enter our front doors.

While members can hold diverse views on the god issue, our relational understanding of the nature of human reality precludes both atheism and theism. Those are statements about a reality we are unconvinced exists. A realm of absolutes in which truth, beauty or the good reside does not fit our naturalistic, relational understanding of human experience. The god idea is a human idea that attempts to frame feelings and thoughts about the origins of the universe and the substance of human experience and values. The god idea is an expression of human yearnings and as part of the human experience it must be appreciated as an aspect of human expression. Some still find the unpacking of the idea of god to be useful in understanding human aspirations but we accept that we know only that we are part of a natural process in which each individual strives to express themselves. That said, nontheism is certainly more amenable to atheist than theist because practically we do without god but to the “hard atheist” nontheism says, your absolutist answer to the idea of an absolute god misses the point.

What remains central to our Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism position is that all these absolutist ideas of both atheist and theist miss the point that life is primarily, ultimately, a relational, ethical experience. That is what is real. Metaphysical abstractions such as God and Truth are poetry.

Avoiding a direct statement on god by saying that our approach to living does not necessitate metaphysical and theological arguments avoids the fact that Adler's nontheism started something. Adler's vision of “a universe of spiritual beings interacting in infinite harmony” may not work for us, but he did initiate our nontheistic position with the idea that we replace the god idea with all those beings interrelating.

Our nontheism expresses a pragmatic understanding of the nature of reality. We want people to get past looking for absolute surety behind reality and find their center, their ultimacy in the meaning and purpose they give to life. We are offering a different starting point – the dynamic experience between and among Adler's universe of spiritual (fellow) beings creating living reality. What we offer is meaning in the doing of life.

References - appendix, page 6-7.