

## Nontheistic Religion

### The Humanist Way

p. 15 Since a nontheistic conception of religion is basic to Naturalistic Humanism, it may be helpful to be as specific as possible in our usage of that term. At the outset, it is essential to understand that "nontheistic" is not used as synonym or euphemism for "atheistic." The atheist, like the theist, takes a definite position with respect to the doctrine that God exists. The atheist denies or disbelieves it. The theist affirms it. But while the individual member of the Ethical Humanist movement may be an atheist, agnostic, theist, deist, or believe whatever else the individual regards to be probable or true about the God question, the ethical philosophy takes no official position with respect to such belief. As nontheistic religion is defined, the prefix "non" should be understood to mean simply that the theistic reference does not apply. Ours is a religion or belief of a totally different type in which the God question is not of primary concern. As we have emphasized before, Ethical Humanism's starting point is ethics, not speculative theology.

Ethical Humanism is commitment to a way of life, to a creative relationship to others and thereby to ourselves, in which metaphysical and theological arguments are set aside. Whether or not God exists may be an interesting question. But the answer to that question--if answerable at all--should make no crucial difference in how we ought to live, how we ought to treat our fellow beings. My ethical obligations and potentialities--and yours--remain exactly the same, whether God exists or does not exist. Our shared task is to live decently, compassionately, and caringly in the world we inhabit.

### CONCEPT MAP

## P. 14 NON-THEISM - THEN AND NOW

The first comparative area of thought that Adler and the early Leaders had to address was that of Theism, since they were separating themselves from theistic communities. This question has not disappeared, for theistic religion remains a powerful force in modern life. Adler's own approach is instructive....

We may modernize his thought by saying that where the ancient model of ultimate reality was drawn from the V.I.P.'s of ancient culture--kings, judges, warriors, patriarchs, parents--Adler substituted the model of democratic society. "We have replaced the God-idea by that of a universe of spiritual beings interacting in infinite harmony," (p. 126). In the writings published in 1906 under the title *The Religion of Duty*, he discussed Theism at length and indicated what he could and what he could not accept from that system of thought....

Adler left an unresolved tension in our thinking on the question of Theism by insisting that members of the Ethical Movement are free to believe in this regard as they may wish, while declaring the supremacy of ethics and its independence from theology. A supreme and independent ethics must inevitably challenge traditional theistic systems of thought in which ethics is based on the revelation of a Creator in nature (deism) or through personal messengers and their sacred writings (theism). That tension remains within the Movement: Some remove the tension by totally rejecting what theism has to teach; some attempt to revise traditional theism;

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