

PRAGMATISM AND PROCESS THOUGHT

As a religion Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism is a religious approach to living. So, its intellectual and philosophic aspects are heterogeneous and only part of the larger religious approach. Although we talk about philosophic neutrality, we do occupy a certain space in the spectrum of intellectual thought. Historically the Movement built on or reexamined Adler's thought in the light of Dewey and Pragmatism. That makes sense. Without taking on Pragmatism as our official philosophy, its emphasis on the relational, subjective nature of reality offers an intellectual foundation for our religion. Pragmatism rejects the meaningfulness of absolutist language and thought, and while accepting the objective nature of reality it finds the subjective human element to be the basis of our collective understanding of reality. Also, Pragmatism's focus on action as the purpose of philosophic thinking offers a foundation for our emphasis on deed.

Actually I must include Existentialism as a philosophic approach that also situates us intellectually. While existentialism emphasizes the personal struggle, its appreciation of their individual's role in and responsibility for creating their world offers ways of unpacking what Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism can mean.

Process thought rejects western philosophy's emphasis on things and substances in favor of a view of life as an interrelated flow of experience. There is no dualism between mind and body and all experience, including the organic, takes part in the ongoing process of reality. Reality is not made up of static things interacting, not linear cause and effect; it is an ongoing process that is both mental and physical. Life is a process of participation in events. At each moment everything comes together to create the next moment. This supports Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism's view of the relational nature of human reality. Ethical living is not just a case of choosing between clear-cut principles and values, not just making periodic significant decisions. Ethical living is the experience of being a presence that affects for better or worst the living of all individuals and the whole. We are all related points in the web of life and presences in the flow. Each is essential to the whole, all part of each other.

Without arguing about the fine points of these philosophies, both Pragmatism, Existentialism and Process Thought offer intellectual foundation for the core ideas of Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism. Pragmatism's rejection of the philosophic search for Truth and Goodness in favor of finding meaning in participation, Existentialism's emphasis on life as a act of self-creation and Process's understanding of our reality as an interrelated flow of events offer clarity as we try to explain our approach but also a starting point to question that approach.

References - appendix page 8.