

Ethical Culture as a Humanist Movement (1)

The following declaration was adopted at the 1966 Assembly of the American Ethical Union (2) as a position paper of the Fraternity of Leaders (3). It has no authority as a creed or statement of faith but is an interpretation of the Ethical Culture Movement subscribed to by the Leaders there assembled.

Ethical Culture is a Humanist movement. Even before the designation Humanist gained currency as one of our common descriptive terms or names, Ethical Culture was a Humanist Movement in its essential purposes and values. It was the first such organization of national and international scope to develop an ethical, social and religious philosophy on a non-creedal, non-theistic basis. This foundation has been sufficiently broad and flexible to accommodate a variety of philosophical approaches.

Humanism, in the context of ethical and religious philosophy, and as a way of life which many men and women are coming to accept as an alternative to the supernaturalist and other-worldly religions, is a tradition which runs with increasing force through the thought and life of civilization. We recognize that no group or association can lay claim to a monopoly on the title and heritage of Humanist, for to attempt this would be itself an expression of exclusiveness and sectarianism contrary to the spirit and character which this tradition signifies. Therefore, in identifying ourselves as Humanist, we affirm our participation in a great and living heritage, the common property of all who value spiritual and intellectual freedom, who affirm life and the world, who cherish the life of reason and the scientific method and who seek, within the framework of the human enterprise – relying upon natural and human resources – to create the good society and to uphold the dignity and worth of man.

We speak of Ethical Culture and Humanism as one concept, we would thereby recognize a universalism and a relevance to both terms which we value without slighting or down-grading either.

The Ethical Culture Movement can identify itself as Humanist only if the name Humanist is preserved from restrictive, narrow sectarian and dogmatic usages which unfortunately, it has sometimes been made to serve; we would strive to represent and develop a constructive and adequate Humanism. A movement which is dedicated without reservation to the worth of the person, and which is moved by a spirit akin to reverence in its search to understand the deep resources of man and nature cannot narrow itself to a position of creed-like doctrinalism, whether that tendency appears in religious, secular or political dress.

We believe that from the beginning, the founders, leaders, and innumerable workers of the Ethical Movement have been Humanists in their practical labors, social vision and reform, humane ideals, and stress upon human capacities and dignity. They have been Humanists in placing man's relationship to his fellow man and his community at the center of their moral and spiritual quest; and they have been Humanists in believing that man must assume responsibility for the direction