

SECTION ONE

I start with **DEED BEFORE CREED** because I believe that the adage keeps us from being direct in presenting our world view. On arriving at our front doors people hear the Deed before Creed idea and too often assume that's the limit of our philosophy. They assume that if they are nice people and vote Democrat, we will not challenge them with the subtlety of our perspective on life. Among other ideas, they never get around to understanding nontheism.

While we are and should be open to people with varied conceptions of reality, varied ideas of god or gods, varied ideas of ethics and meaning, it is important that people discover quickly that we have a point of view. Be as unusual as you want to be but there is still a foundational perspective in this Movement that is not going away. Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism has a world view and is a religious approach. While we don't have a creed in the usual use of the term, no Leaders' Creed, we do have an historic understanding of life. Unlike non-creedal Unitarianism we have one approach, life is a relational experience and therefore an ethical experience. As someone has said deed is our creed. We are not dogmatic, but we are creedal. We have beliefs.

How one treats others including the natural world is more important than one's supposed creed but one's conception of the nature of reality makes a difference in ethical choosing. Believing that ethical values are written in the stars rather than developed in the relational experience makes a difference. Individuals following proscribed values miss the relational aspects of ethical choosing, and although they may be doing good deeds, too often others are hurt for the sake of a proscribed value.

Another unfortunate understanding of the Deed before Creed adage legitimates avoidance of the fact that we occupy metaphysical territory. Yes, metaphysics seems to have seen its day and Ethical Culture attempts to be open to varied understandings of the ultimate questions but our understanding of the nature of human reality is situated in the ethical, relational realm and that is sufficient as a foundational stand. As Nel Noddings says, "Taking relation as ontologically basic simply means that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence."

We are not dogmatic and as with Eight Commitments of Ethical Culture we don't claim to have the absolute answers, but we do offer our best guesses, our assumptions about life. People join religious groups for help, they want guidance in living, and to be a legitimate religious organization you need a foundational creed that explains the group's perspective on life and offers a rational structure for an individual's idea of right and wrong living.

There are some references on Deed Before Creed in the attached appendix, page 1.