

RELIGION

THE HUMANIST WAY

p 1 The religious philosophy known as Ethical Humanism (also called Ethical Culture) is a moral faith based on respect for the dignity and worth of human life. It is a practical, working religion devoted to ethical living, without imposing ritual obligations or prescribing beliefs about the supernatural. Thus it is purely a religion "of this world."

Yet this life-centered faith is not secular in the commonplace usage of being antireligious, nor is it to be understood as indifferent to religious values. On the contrary, for the Ethical Humanist, life itself is inherently religious in quality; to make this affirmation is simply to believe that human existence in this world is intrinsically worthy of reverence, that the world of ordinary experience is capable of inspiring profound feelings of spiritual devotion.

Commitment to the supreme worth (or sanctity) of human life is the core of the Ethical Humanist faith. This recognition of a spiritual obligation to treat human life as *sacred* persuades Humanists that their belief can, with justification, be considered a religious faith.

P. 16 A Different Way of Thinking About Religion

Although the more conservative students of comparative religion still refuse to accept early Buddhism as one of the world's religions (because of its lack of belief in a God), from the standpoint of this book--and that of many other students of religious philosophy--such an objection is unwarranted. To restrict religion solely to theism (belief in God) is the tendency of those who have never seriously considered alternative expressions of religious faith and experience. But religion is a term we choose to claim, and to apply to Humanism's spiritual life, believing that the function that religion serves in living remains as vital as ever. It is natural, spontaneous, and inevitable to experience ethical commitment as religious, because ethical feeling functions as religion has always functioned, guiding and uplifting our hearts and minds as religion has always done. Ethical faith is unitive. It gives wholeness to personality and to our vision of life. Religion provides human beings with a sense of relatedness and rootage in the sources of our being, offering focus, direction, and motivation to our moral struggles and aspirations, undergirding social idealism, and highlighting the beauty and mystery of our universe.

P 5 The Second Humanist Manifesto of 1973, a consensus statement signed by many leading Humanists, struck a balance between those holding religious and nonreligious conceptions of Humanism by acknowledging ethical religion as consistent with the Humanist philosophy, while rejecting autocratic and dogmatic religious foundations. In the opening paragraphs of the section entitled "Religion," the Manifesto declared:

The cultivation of moral devotion and creative imagination is an expression of genuine "spiritual" experience and aspiration.

We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place