

Ethical Culture

The following is a statement on where Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanism¹ stands at the beginning of the 21st century. Its intent is to clarify our shared beliefs in language that resonates with the familiar and unfamiliar alike. Open to the possibilities of the future, it is part of a living canon—an expression of those Ethical Culture Leaders who endorse it and are devoted to furthering Ethical Humanism within its context.

Dedicated to cultivating moral development in personal life and moral reform in society, Ethical Culture seeks to nurture relationships in which we act so as to elicit the best in others and thereby in ourselves, to provide inspiration and guidance for moral living, and to transform the way humanity views the meaning of life.

Our faith is inspired and animated by the deliberate and reasoned choice of attributing worth and dignity to all. Imbued with a profound sense of interrelatedness, we recognize that we are both dependent and independent—each a unique end unto ourselves. We understand that if any one of us were different life itself would be different. It is through this sense of ourselves as members of an organic whole that we reinforce the attribution of moral worth to every individual.

Ethical Culture is a religion of ethical relationships, a Humanist² movement in which ethics is central. We organize congregationally in order to live out our values in community with others, inspired by the ideal of perfected living that always lies beyond our reach. Together we direct our efforts toward assuring a just and abundant life for all.

We are committed to life-long learning and endeavor to keep our beliefs consistent with our advancing knowledge of ourselves and of the rest of nature. We love life, embrace it in all its particularity and diversity, and accept it, and the natural world in which it occurs, as all and enough.

We are dedicated to the principle that relationships of respect, compassion, and integrity are the building blocks of personal and global harmony. We hold that democracy is not just a political system but also a personal commitment—a continual exercise in freedom of conscience, thought, and moral responsibility expressed through humane deeds. We seek to promote personal moral development and social responsibility through direct assistance, social action, and public advocacy.

Ethics begins with judgment and choice, and we know that how we choose to treat others is what is most important, as the kind of world in which we live radiates from personal decisions and interactions. The values and principles that guide our choices rest on a natural interpretation of experience, and are derived from the emotional capacities and intellectual abilities of human beings and the culture they create.

Ethical Humanism connects personal living with moral responsibility to and for community. Our relationships bind us together in universal citizenship. This sense of mutuality leads us to a shared responsibility for the kind of world in which we live. Examining life through the prism of human experience, we see that we are capable of wonderful and inspiring things. We find that there is meaning in the potential for personal growth and cultural transformation.

Since its founding in 1876, Ethical Culture has evinced a reverence for life and a dedication to its improvement, uniting with others of goodwill in an effort to create a more humane world. In placing deed before creed our welcome becomes broader and more inclusive than the boundaries of our beliefs. Standing as a beacon of hope for all, we extend the hand of welcome to those who share these aims and are eager to work toward them within the Ethical Humanist context.

¹ Today the historic identification, Ethical Culture, and the modern description, Ethical Humanism, are used interchangeably.

² “Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.” *Humanism and Its Aspirations, Humanist Manifesto III*, The American Humanist Association, 2003.

Signatories

We, the undersigned Leaders of the Ethical Movement, in accepting this statement as a product of many minds and recognizing that we may be of varied convictions on its particulars, affirm our substantial agreement with its affirmations and confirm our dedication to live by the principles it espouses and to promote the values it reflects.

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*Adopted by the National Leader's Council of the
American Ethical Union, November 1, 2008*