

In 1524 Erasmus came out against Luther in his *On Free Will*, in which he argued against Luther's views on the free will. Luther replied sharply in his *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525). Luther could not stomach Erasmus's gentle SKEPTICISM and his willingness to accept Catholic teachings. As matters unfolded, Erasmus to a large extent broke with the reformers.

In his thinking Erasmus advocated a "philosophy of Christ" as different from various scholastic theories. The "philosophy of Christ" was to be reached by pious studies rather than by disputations. By this Erasmus intended to convey a simple form of Christianity, not a systematic theology but a message to be lived.

On the whole, Erasmus was a scholar. He seems to have been a moderate and cautious Christian, rather than an agnostic. It is not likely that he was ever an atheist (see AGNOSTICISM, ATHEISM).

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**ETHICAL CULTURE.** In some cases, yesterday's unbelief becomes today's commonplace. Unbeliefs are always contextual, shaped by time and place. The Ethical Culture movement provides a test of such generalizations. Ethical Culture, like many religious movements, stemmed from a prophetic individual who selected his and recast his inheritance.

Felix ADLER was born in Germany in 1851 and immigrated to the United States when his father became rabbi of New York City's Temple Emanu-El, the wealthiest Jewish congregation in the country. After graduating from Columbia University, he studied for the rabbinate in Berlin and Heidelberg. In 1873 in his first sermon at this temple he called for "[a] religion not confined to church and synagogue alone shall go forth.... A religion such as Judaism claimed to *be-not of the creed but afthe deed.*"

Although what would come to be known as Reform Judaism was already emerging within German American Jewry, this vision was too extreme, and young Adler left with a small group of enthused supporters. Three years later, in a rented hall, he expanded upon these themes, leading to the incorporation of a Society for Ethical Culture: "Judaism was not given to the Jews alone, but ... its destiny is to embrace in one great moral state the whole family of men.... We propose to entirely exclude prayer and every form of ritual. ... Freedom of thought is a sacred right of every individual man.... Diversity in

the creed, unanimity in the deed."

Such statements evoked the wrath of orthodox Jews and Christians. Adler was processing his admiration for Ralph Waldo EMERSON'S new "moral religion" and Immanuel KANT'S rational morality, both highly controversial heresies in their time. In addition, the academic world was digesting Charles DARWIN'S new theory of evolution that devastated design justifications for a god (see EVOLUTION AND UNBELIEF), which, for thoughtful theologians, had remained as the last intellectual defense of any kind of orthodoxy.

Critics perceived an actual ATHEISM in Adler's MINOS-TICISM, whereas a much smaller group of supporters viewed it as the only survival platform for any kind of religion.

Also influencing Adler was his participation in the Free Religious Association. Founded in 1871, mostly by Unitarians alarmed by a growing creedalism in their own denomination, ideas such as transcendentalism and scientific theism were surfacing here, along with explorations of religion beyond liberal Christianity and Judaism. In 1878 Adler was elected president of the Free Religious Association. Frustrated by discussions that did not lead to concrete action, he resigned in 1882 and this may have crystallized his decision to move ahead with the new organization and career.

Adler's new society based itself upon what he called the Supreme Ethical Rule: "Act So as to Elicit the Best in Others and Thereby Thy Self." Adler was able to assemble and hold the intense loyalty of a group of successful and wealthy New Yorkers, and to motivate them to focus upon needs of the community. For persons of Jewish background, this was a clear element of their heritage. Ethical Culture's absence of metaphysical discussions, religious identities, behavioral laws, and rituals helped maintain this focus and eliminate distractions. Adler's vision continually opened new areas of ethical advance. He was successful in stimulating societies in other cities and in recruiting and guiding the education of future leaders. Within a few years, additional societies were established in Chicago, Philadelphia, and St. Louis that still are strong.

At the same time, Adler was continually guiding the education of potential leaders. Most of these early leaders and would-be leaders had left the religions of their childhoods, as had Adler. The closest parallel was within the Unitarian ministry (see UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM), and some came from it while others shifted into it.

What was emerging was a new form of religion, without rituals or creeds and operating with leaders rather than ministers. The sole commitment in this religion was to work for ethical change in society. Such change was the surest way to effect individual ethical growth. The rapid industrialization of the United States had left much of an earlier Protestantism in small towns, and had left cities populated with immigrants from oppressive coun-

tries abroad who were assimilating only slowly. Thus this was a time for social experimentation, however limited the scale. A "social gospel" was being explored in liberal Protestant circles, and a few Catholics were exploring what they termed an "Americanist" movement.

Although most members of Adler's supporting circles were economically well-off, their immigration memories kept them concerned about those less advantaged (some of their historians regarded this as noblesse oblige or even guilt)-but whatever the motivations alongside their ethical concerns, they were pioneers.

To serve poor children, the new society in 1877 created a District Nursing Department that set the pattern for visiting nursing movements. The first free kindergarten east of the Mississippi was created by Adler and the society a year later.

That same year a Workingman's School was created, extending the ethical concern to compensate for the limitations of the new public school movement. A women's group from the society turned to the study of child development and the "new psychology." Here was established a blend of academic education and practical skills that set the pattern for what would later be called "progressive" pedagogy and that was a forebear of PTA developments.

Another protege, Stanton Coit, had discovered Adler's ideas while a student at Amherst. After sponsored study at Berlin and Columbia, he founded in 1886 the Neighborhood Guild in New York (later known as University Settlement). Patterned on London's Toynbee Hall, this was the first US settlement house. Here radical university students could live and work among "the masses," creating "the enlightenment of the people in social principles." Two years later, Jane ADDAMS founded Hull House in Chicago along similar lines of organizing and empowering the poor so that they could better control their own destinies.

Adler founded the Child Labor Society in 1904, and he and other society members were leaders in the development of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union. Members played key roles in creating successful prison reforms, and as European turmoil brought refugees in the 1930s, members were in the forefront of resettlement efforts.

Adler never lost his vision that ethics depended upon education, and the experiments with schools that started with the children of the poor evolved into more integrated schools, both in class terms and in ethnic terms. In 1895 the original school was turned into the Ethical Culture School, with guaranteed scholarships for poor children and provision for "pay pupils."

In 1903 Anna Garlin Spencer, a Unitarian minister, joined as an associate leader. In 1908 she began directing a summer school in Madison, Wisconsin. Her work for women's rights, however, was not supported by Adler and she left in 1913 for an academic career.

By the 1920s the vision generated the Fieldston plan

for a large school at Riverdale. What was needed was an alternative to the "mass schools" (public schools) and the "class schools" of the rich. John D. Rockefeller helped finance the venture, and V. T. Thayer was appointed director. The pragmatism of John DEWEY thereby entered Ethical Culture despite Adler's reservations.

In the 1940s Florence Klaber collaborated with the Unitarian Sophia Fahs to produce a new series of religious education materials for posttraditional schools. Students read various creation stories from around the world, for instance, climaxing the unit with views from modern science.

Adler held an appointment in Columbia University's philosophy department and taught an annual seminar. Over the years, many colleagues became involved with the society and were also involved in the academic training of leaders: among others, David Muzzey, John Hennan Randall, Horace Friess, Herbert Schneider, and Joseph Blau. Leaders were also involved in creating a number of organizations, for example, Algernon Black with the Encampment for Citizenship and Jerome Nathanson with the Conference on Science and Democracy. These post-Adler leaders increasingly moved away from a Kantian idealism into a naturalistic instrumentalism reflecting Dewey's dominant role in American philosophy.

Leaders and members of societies might give varied responses to the question of whether Ethical Culture is a religion. In a recent Texas case, it was successfully argued that it deserved tax-exempt status on this basis. Perhaps more importantly, the movement has shown that a focus on ethics alone permits a very small number of persons to accomplish a great deal within their culture. The concentration of intellectual life in Manhattan has also helped, since the society is able to provide physical space and platform to many national causes.

Looking at the society today, it is clear that a majority of leaders would comfortably identify themselves as humanists who work within a postpatriarchal, transethnic, and postnationalistic worldview. On the international scene, they are well represented in the INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST AND ETHICAL UNION.

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