

A CONCEPT MAP FOR ETHICAL CULTURE

TOWARDS PHILOSOPHICAL CONSENSUS

A STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL LEADERS COUNCIL OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

The character of life is fascinating: It is frustrating and fulfilling; trivial and tragic by turns; often routine, sometimes roisterous; a steady diet of picayune days, from time to time caught up in vast national and global events, as humanly powerful as the great earthquakes and the swirling weather patterns that sweep across our blue planet as it orbits its star.

To survive, to make the most of our days, to make sense of life, and to change it for the better are primary human occupations, for which, among other tools, we need conceptual tools. In Homer's classic metaphors, human life is a journey (the Odyssey) and a battle (the Iliad), for both of which a map is useful. But the map room on a ship is at one remove from the boiler room, and the map room at army headquarters is at one remove from the front line. Maps point, but the map readers must generate the movement.

This statement needs to lie beside the daily newspaper. The newspaper reports the action; the concept map displays the lie of the philosophical land and helps us to place that action in a wider vision of significance. Philosophy editorializes experience.

To use an extended metaphor, we may say that for every territory of experience there is a Crossroads of choice, a Street of action, a Market Place of public discourse, and a Balcony of reflection. Each position has pros and cons. None can take the place of any other and each has a necessary function to fulfill.

We present this statement as a Balcony view, a concept map of Ethical Culture. In Ethical Culture we have given a primacy to deed over creed, but we have always been a philosophically minded people, and from time to time we the ascent to the Balcony to formulate and explicate where we have come from, where we stand on the intellectual map of our time, and what our direction may be.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

FELIX ADLER

Adler was the directing leader of the Ethical Movement during his lifetime and is spoken of as its founder, though he attributed that role to Julius Rosenbaum, who organized the Sunday lecture series, with an inaugural meeting in May, 1876 and ongoing lectures, with music, in the fall of that year, leading to the incorporation of the New York Society for Ethical Culture in February, 1877. We remain indebted to the profound philosophical and ethical insights that Adler distilled in his lectures and into such books as *The Religion of Duty* (1906), *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* (1918), and *The Reconstruction of the Spiritual Ideal* (1925).

What was the central issue that Adler set out to address within his historical context? He stated it thus:

To understand the Ethical Movement it is indispensable to bear in mind the evils which it seeks to counteract. These evils are chiefly materialism and moral skepticism, a skepticism which, nourished by the crumbling of ancient creeds, has attacked the very springs of moral endeavor, has produced in the minds of many, a feeling as if there were nothing great any more worth living for, and as if life had been utterly emptied of all its nobler content. -- *Ethical Record*, Vol. 1, p. 2

To state that positively: Adler set out to produce the feeling that there is something great worth living for, rich in nobler content. That great thing lay in the ethical disposition of humanity as a clue to the nature of reality:

I affirm the real and irreducible existence of the essential self. or rather, as my last act, I affirm that the ideal of perfection which my mind inevitably conceives has its counterpart in the ultimate reality of things, is the truest reading of that reality whereof man is capable. I turn away from the thought of the self, even the essential self, as if that could be my chief concern, toward the vaster infinite whole in which the self is integrally preserved. -- *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 359-360

If we seek to unpack this confession, which has elements of strangeness to our ears 72 years later, we shall come upon some of the central concepts with which Adler processed the data of human experience. Against moral skepticism, he brought to bear an ethical certainty; against materialism, he brought to bear the vision of a spiritual reality. That ethical certainty and that spiritual vision were for Adler emergent from the frustrations he wrestled with and they were inexorably linked with the intellectual agnosticism (*Ethical Philosophy*, p. 357) that dispensed with the notions of both "creation" and "immortality" as inadequate attempts to bridge the gap between the finite and the infinite. The only "translucent" point in the screen between finite and infinite lay in the ethical experience of humanity. In processing that ethical experience Adler focused on certain themes that became the central planks in his philosophical platform.

The "task of humanity" as Adler saw it was to gain an "ethical footing," make an "ethical imprint," upon the empirical substratum of developing life. It was to ethicize human relations. And to accomplish this, one needs to follow the **supreme ethical rule**: Namely, to elicit the best in oneself and others by drawing out the unique difference that constitutes each self. This rule was premised, not on the sometimes scarce evidence of goodness in persons, but on "attribution" of a **unique and normative worth** to every person.

The task went beyond the individual to embrace the whole of life and involved the recognition that each of us serves a vocation committed to the transformation of society by the **consecration of all life to the spiritual and ethical ideal**. Moral experience is the central arena of all human endeavor, which must face and overcome the three "shadows" of sickness, sorrow, and sin. From that arena and back to that arena all concept building proceeds -- hence "deed before creed."

Two major concepts that gave perspective on the human task were, for Adler, those of the **"reality-producing functions of the mind"** and the **"ethical manifold."** Both were concepts that Adler learned from Kant and made his own. To attempt to translate what Adler meant by "reality-producing functions of the mind," we may use an analogy and point out that our human mind is capable of producing a mathematical series -- the Fibonacci series -- to represent the distribution of seeds in the flower of the sunflower. We can represent that reality out there because the structure of

our minds has been shaped by the same forces that produced the sunflower. In similar fashion, Adler felt that our sense of the diversity and the unity of the universe and of the relational (and so ethical) nature of human experience were reflections of a larger reality that he termed "transcendent." The mind could read off that reality because it was structured to be "reality-producing." The ideal we conceive has its counterpart in an ultimate reality just as the empirical world of the flower has its counterpart in a mathematical concept in the human mind. For Kant, as for Adler, the transcendent was that which ordered and gave understanding to the empirical data of the senses. It was to be distinguished from the "supernatural," a concept which Adler also rejected.

However philosophically we assess this notion today (there are thinkers who still see the mind as transcendent to the brain and others who see the mind as only an activity of the brain), it undoubtedly gave Adler the sense of conviction, the ethical assurance, the moral courage to launch a movement and answer the skepticism he faced.

That the mind is driven to perceive the world in terms of a diversity held together in a unity produced the other concept, that of the "ethical manifold." (Manifold literally means of many parts or folds.) For Adler, the ultimate social reality is a many-folded unity, in which the multiplicity of individual units and the unity of their connectedness receive equal respect and development. In place of nirvana or the Kingdom of God as the goal of religion -- both conditioned by the social and political realities of their day -- Adler substituted the design of an ideal democracy: "a universe of spiritual beings interacting in infinite harmony" (as he put it, *Ethical Philosophy*, p. 126).

However we assess the metaphysical status of that universe of spiritual beings (and Adler himself refused to speculate about it), the vision of it was for Adler **a design for human relationships on this planet here and now**. We may sum it up:

To each of us an attribution of worth; from each of us our unique contributions and for all of us a community of mutual respect, justice, and care.

The human task, undergirded by these philosophical constructs, is simply stated: It is "the acquisition of ethical personality." (*Ethical Philosophy*, p. 261.) Informing that human task are the three "reverences": Respect for those above us in moral development whether the outstanding teachers of the past or the preeminent among us today; appreciating the differences of others equal to us and contributing our differences; and reverencing and cultivating the potential of those still young or disabled in any way. Characteristic of the ethical attitude is the painting, and constant retouching, of ideal portraits of our fellow humans and ourselves (*Ethical Philosophy*, p. 231.), and acting toward them, and ourselves, in accordance with those portraits.

This is something of the legacy Adler left to us.

STATEMENT ON RELIGION, 1895

One of the first anthologies of our Ethical philosophy was *Ethical Addresses (First Series, 1895)*. Adler's opening address on "What Do We Stand For?" explained that we are not a church because we admit philosophically skeptical persons who want a moral message without a "detour through the land of faith or philosophy." "The gospel which they (the Ethical Societies) preach is essentially this: that the good life is possible to all without the previous acceptance of any creed, irrespective of religious opinion or philosophic theory." "We have found," Adler declared, "a new bond of fellowship, a new common ground upon which agnostics and theists and good men of all shades of belief and opinion can stand together; it is the common pursuit of righteousness, the supreme desire to see righteousness flourish on earth."

Added to this address was a statement by the Leaders defining **the attitude of the Ethical Movement to religion**. It begins by referring to two definitions of religion: (1) Religion as a "passionate devotion to a supreme cause." In this sense the Ethical Movement is a religion; and (2) Religion as a connection between "man's being and the Universal Being" -- which does not define the Ethical Movement. The statement then distinguishes those affirmations to which dissent among us is inadmissible because they determine the collective character of the Movement, and those to which dissent is admissible. Admissible dissent prevailed in all areas having to do with a view of Universal Being. Lecturers and members were free to hold and express theistic, agnostic, or other philosophical beliefs, so long as they were identified as not characterizing the Movement and so long, as no public religious exercise was introduced as an expression of such private beliefs. One other qualification rounded out the statement: The moral end is the supreme end of human existence but not all members on joining may be able to see that. Sufficient for membership was a "serious interest in the moral end."

PRINCIPLES OF UNION, 1912

In *Toward Common Ground*, pp. 75ff., Howard Radest outlines the recruitment in England, under Stanton Coit, of several Leaders who were to come to the United States and take on leadership of American Ethical Societies. Radest also intimates some of the diversity of thought that this English addition brought. An English "Union of Ethical Societies" had been formed in 1896 and over its name the volume *The Ethical Movement: Its Principles and Aims* was published in 1911 and, revised, in 1912. It was coauthored by Horace Bridges (later of Chicago), Stanton Coit, George O'Dell (who served as national "office" for the American Ethical Union for 30 years but was never to become a Leader), and Harry Snell (who became a Labour M.P. in Britain and President of the British Ethical Union). Bridges served as editor.

The Principles of Union and their exposition are worth looking at to indicate the international flavor of the Ethical Movement and the common currency of concepts that gave life to it. It is interesting to note that they considered The Positivist Society that was the brainchild of Auguste Comte as the closest kindred movement to the Ethical Society (though they noted the differences), and that they felt the democratic spirit of the Ethical Movement reflected the trend of the time, including the scientific inspiration of the age, and also the example of trade unionism and the agitation for the emancipation of women.

The nine Principles and a summary of their commentary on them read as follows:

[1] In all the relations of life the moral factor should be the supreme consideration.

No other movement of thought has ever made ethics central to its philosophy. This is the focal point of vision and stands opposed to biological determinism, individualistic hedonism, and any art or ritual for its own sake.

[2] Love of goodness and of one's fellows are the true motives for right conduct; self-reliance and cooperation the true sources of help.

Supernatural sanctions are unnecessary and supernatural help is explicable in terms of access to psychological energies, not an outside source. "A movement does not become distinctively ethical, and therefore does not deserve to be so designated, unless the sanctions to character which are appealed to are purely humanistic and naturalistic" (p. 3).

[3] Knowledge of the right has been evolving. We start with the moral obligations already reached and advocate a progressive ideal.

No other religious group acknowledges that righteousness is earthborn and subject to development as the human will strives for self-fulfillment. This is basic to the Ethical Movement. We build on the past (unlike the anarchist innovator) but move beyond the past (upheld by the traditionalist).

[4] The individual considers the convictions of others but finds final authority on any opinion or action in his or her own conscientious and reasoned judgment.

Authority has its place only in service to freedom and may be opposed in the name of freedom, but freedom of conscience can only be counted on to advance ethical behavior when ethical ignorance has been overcome by ethical education to secure a "reasoned judgment."

[5] The well-being of society requires economic and other conditions that afford the largest scope for moral development of all its members.

Social conditions may thwart moral growth. Ethical religion is concerned with the whole life of the person and needs to address the social order. We have had "enough of a religion which operates only on Sundays, and has no guidance for the six days of constructive toil by which the world is kept going." And, further, "ethical religion is on the side of the outcast poor in their claim for conditions in which the moral life can breathe and live."

[6] The scientific method should be applied in studying the facts of the moral life.

Though still rudimentary, a science of ethics is urged that we may understand moral ideals

as "actualities," as "facts," that have a universal validity. We cannot yet give a "fully filled-in map of life," but we are active investigators.

[7] The moral life involves neither acceptance nor rejection of belief in any deity, personal or impersonal, or in a life after death.

The concept of the good life finds its origin in the nature of humans as social and rational beings. The primal, survival instincts and the powers of the human mind, still largely not opened up, are the "resources to which humanistic religion may appeal." We need neither supernaturalism, spiritualism, or an afterlife to empower us.

[8] The acceptance of any one ultimate criterion of right should not be made a condition of ethical fellowship.

This is the principle of Ethical Catholicity. It recognizes that there are principles of right action, for we are not relativistic, but that no one ethical theory can command our allegiance or require our submission.

[9] Ethical Fellowships are the powerful means of encouraging the knowledge and love of right principles of conduct and of giving the strength of character necessary to realize them in action.

We do not believe that moral sensibility can grow in isolation. Reading books cannot do it. "Ethical fellowship is essential to the full development of moral personality." Such fellowship introduces us to a wider variety of persons; in it each person deserves respect; the weak are helped by the strong; the spoken word vivifies the soul, and the group-spirit enlarges individual selfhood. "It is the duty of an ethical fellowship to be a powerhouse, generating currents of energy which stimulate the intelligence, the idealism, and the will-to-service of all who belong to it."

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY, 1926

In honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the Ethical Movement, two important volumes were published: *Aspects of Ethical Religion*, edited by Horace Bridges, as a collection of essays in honor of Felix Adler, and *The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ethical Movement 1876-1926*, with a prefatory note by Henry Golding, as a collection of statements by Adler and contemporary Leaders, with a chronology. These essays and statements throw a flood of light on the understanding of the nature of the Ethical Movement as then conceived. Several were directly addressed to definition of Ethical Culture and should be consulted to fill out the overview offered by this present paper.

Adler's own address on *Some Characteristics of the American Ethical Movement*, included in the latter book and originally given in London in 1925, points to the desire to find a "consecrating influence" on life as the origin of the Ethical Societies and the giving "birth to personalities who have attained for themselves an abiding ethical faith, and are aflame with it," as the goal. Interestingly, he saw the opposition to the Movement to have come from three sources: The fundamentalists who thought his abandonment of religious dogma as the source of morality monstrous; the relativists who saw morality as a mere convention of humans; and the individualists whose "voluntarism" overemphasized the importance of selfhood to the neglect of the social pole of moral experience.

STATEMENT ON ETHICAL HUMANISM, 1965

In 1965, on behalf of the Leaders Council, a commission on philosophy, chaired by Joseph Blau, presented a paper, drafted by Edward Ericson, that received approval by the Leaders as a definition of *Ethical Culture as a Humanist Movement*.

Humanism is a broad intellectual movement into which tributaries have flowed from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Its focus is on humanity and humanity's life on this planet, in history and in imagination. That human focus is seen as either (1) not affirming or denying recourse to any supernatural or otherworldly referent, or (2) as determinedly exclusive of such a supernatural recourse. Thus there are differing currents within the main stream of the humanist tradition with differing relations to the religious tradition.

In the 1965 statement, it was noted that Ethical Culture has always been humanist in its essential purposes and values,

even before the name became vigorously promoted in this century. We were the "first movement of national and international scope to develop an ethical, social and religious philosophy on a non-creedal, non-theistic basis." (We were, of course, anticipated by ancient Confucianism and Stoicism.) Our social vision and practical labors stressed human capacities and dignity; we placed human relations at the center of our moral and spiritual quest; we believed human beings must accept responsibility for the direction of human life and destiny. All of these emphases are characteristically humanist. Thus the Ethical Societies (to quote the 1965 statement) are part of the great and living humanist heritage of those who value freedom, affirm this life and this world, cherish the life of reason and the scientific method, and 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 the person. But the statement also carried a strong demurrer against the use of the term Humanist in any restrictive and dogmatic way to define our Ethical philosophy. We recognize diversity within Humanism and are not committed to a particular philosophical or metaphysical reading of Humanism. We do affirm the term Ethical Humanism, adopted in the declaration that established the International Humanist and Ethical Union in 1952.

THE HISTORIES

Philosophy gets reported in histories and among the histories that directly bear on the themes of this statement, we select the following:

[1] Leo Jacobs, *Three Types of Practical Ethical Movements of the Past Half Century* (1922), which compares Ethical Culture (chap. 111), a "Pure Ethical Movement," with two other movements: (a) The "Religious Ethical Movement" of F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley's Christian Socialism and of the Jewish Community Centers, and (b) the "Social Ethical Movement" of Edward Denison and Arnold Toynbee which led to the "Settlements" of Toynbee Hall in England, and Coit's Neighborhood Guild and Jane Addams's Hull House in the United States.

[2] Howard Radest, *Toward Common Ground* (1969), which chronicles the growth of the Movement in the United States.

[3] Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (1979).

[4] Horace Friess, *Felix Adler and Ethical Culture* (1981).

[5] Edward Ericson, *The Humanist Way* (1988), which places our thought in a larger context.

All will repay study by yielding up a richer and deeper appreciation of the thought and experience that constitute our reason for being.

SPEAKING TO THE PRESENT

BASIC ETHICAL CONCEPTS

While sharing with a wider community of thinkers in a contemporary ethical and humanistic view of life, we in Ethical Culture have staked out certain distinctive emphases that characterize our Movement:

Religion as Ethics

We are philosophically and practically committed to a view of humanity as *Homo ethicus*. That is, we see all of life primarily through an ethical lens and we live all of life primarily in pursuit of quality of relationship and of social transformation. We define ourselves in terms of a commitment to study, promote, live by, and apply ethical values. We value care and respect for the individual, the pursuit of justice in society, and the creation of community.

Ethics as Praxis

All the great religions and philosophies of life require that theory and practice go hand in hand, but again and again history witnesses to the loss of focus on behavior through conflict over creedal elaborations or orthodoxies of ritual or questions of true identity. Ethical Culture not only gives a primacy to ethical action over creed or ritual, but finds in the lived experience of eliciting the best the raw material out of which theory develops.

Sources of Ethics

We draw our ethical values from the moral heritage of the great religions, the insights of the moral philosophers, the moral wisdom of our social traditions, the shared insights of our groups, research into human and animal behavior, and the reasoning, experience, and sensibility each of us develops in -confronting ourselves and in engagement with the needs and challenges of the world.

A Lived Attitude

We define ethics not simply and solely in terms of what is right or wrong, but in the larger sense of what is good and what is true. Our ethics is not just a debate about morality but a lived attitude of respect for the worth of others and of ourselves. That is why it escapes being defined by any creedal formulation. It is always a "raid on the inarticulate," (in T.S. Eliot's phrase), a quest.

The Individual and the Community

In our ethical view, each person is an independent center of learning and sharing-an independent center, to be respected and valued as such, so that no one can lord it over another in thought or behavior; and yet a center for learning and sharing, because the goal of the individual is completion in interaction with others. We seek a creative balance between the fulfillment of the individual and the good of the community.

Societies

Therefore, essentially and strategically, we seek to operate within the wider community as a society and not only as individuals. Unlike some others of humanist persuasion, we are deliberately and firmly committed to a congregational way of existing and functioning. Each society is a microcosm of and springboard to the wider community.

The Whole Person.

While laying great stress on the rational mind as the processing agent of reality, our ethics is as large as the human mind, as large as human experience, and as large as human

community. Our ethics is understood and expressed emotionally as much as rationally. It finds its lineaments in art as well as science. It is hewn and honed as much in the marketplace of social change as in the cloistered study of philosophical thought. It pursues the Greek ideal of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, as well as the Hebrew ideal of social righteousness and the Christian ideal of inwardly motivated love for the outcast and even for the enemy. It is open to Oriental religious traditions as to modern Western movements.

But it embodies what it takes from all these traditions in its own frame of reference. It has a sense of the human being and human community as constituted by a power to choose and, having choice, to be thrust inevitably into making choices in the light of ethical principle and ethical experience. We begin, continue, and end with the human as *Homo ethicus*.

NON-THEISM - THEN AND NOW

The first comparative area of thought that Adler and the early Leaders had to address was that of Theism, since they were separating themselves from theistic communities. This question has not disappeared, for theistic religion remains a powerful force in modern life. Adler's own approach is instructive and twofold: He rejected classical theism but sought to learn from its legacy. As early as his student days in Berlin, he tells us in *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* (p. 9), his studies and personal reflection had led to a "net outcome", not of "atheism in the moral sense," but of "the definite and permanent disappearance of the individualistic conception of Deity." What that individual Deity stood for as a symbol, he sought to replace with the notion of a spiritual and social whole.

We may modernize his thought by saying that where the ancient model of ultimate reality was drawn from the V.I.P.'s of ancient culture—kings, judges, warriors, patriarchs, parents—Adler substituted the model of democratic society. "We have replaced the God-idea by that of a universe of spiritual beings interacting in infinite harmony," (p. 126). In the writings published in 1906 under the title *The Religion of Duty*, he discussed Theism at length and indicated what he could and what he could not accept from that system of thought. For Adler the issue involved both principle and practical strategy: It was a matter of principle to gather up the good from the past and he saw certain ideals embodied in ancient theistic ways of thought that he wanted to preserve. At the same time, as a matter of strategy, he wanted to appeal to God-believers who had become unchurched and to invite them to join the Ethical Movement without having to check their theistic mental baggage at the gate. The 1895 statement on religion indicates that the Leaders shared this tolerance while expecting a gradual evolution towards acceptance of the supremacy of ethics on the part of new members. This approach of drawing on but transforming the past characterized the writings of several other Ethical writers (Sheldon, Martin, Bridges, Chubb, Muzzey, etc.) who presented traditional religious themes from a new non-theistic perspective.

Adler left an unresolved tension in our thinking on the question of Theism by insisting that members of the Ethical Movement are free to believe in this regard as they may wish, while declaring the supremacy of ethics and its independence from theology. A supreme and independent ethics must inevitably challenge traditional theistic systems of thought in which ethics is based on the revelation of a Creator in nature (deism) or through personal messengers and their sacred writings (theism). That tension remains within the Movement: Some remove the tension by totally rejecting what theism has to teach; some attempt to revise traditional theism; some leave such issues to private speculation; and many, as we have seen above, transmute the values of the ancient theistic systems into a humanist frame of reference. Historically, the period following Adler's death saw an emphasis on a humanism that found little place for Adler's own transcendentalism. By Adler's design, his metaphysics was not an orthodoxy for the Movement he created. However, continued reading of and renewed interest in Adler's thought has led to reappraisal of his concepts and their contemporary relevance.

The question may then be raised: How can we both preach tolerance and freedom of belief and yet insist that only an ethics independent of theology be the basis of the Movement? To which the answer, to be true to the genius of the formula that has undergirded the Movement, must be one of speaking of the operational reality of the Societies in contrast to the speculative nature of thought about ultimate reality. As Leaders, we cherish freedom of belief on the speculative nature of ultimate reality but we do assert the operational primacy of ethics as the basis of Ethical Culture, meaning by that that while we do not affirm or deny private theistic belief, such belief does not characterize the Movement nor should any practice that presumes such belief (such as public prayer to a supreme being) be imposed on our meetings. Our ethics is rooted in human resources and in the ongoing unfolding understanding of human nature

within the setting of the evolution of life here on this earth and against the background of the larger universe. We see through a human lens and can only formulate our perceptions of the universe in human terms.

HOW WE ARE A RELIGION

As noted above, the semantics of the word *religion* was addressed in the Leaders' statement of 1895, where the Ethical Movement was seen as a religion when religion is defined as "passionate devotion to a supreme cause." Adler expressed a tolerance in relation to the terminology and considered it optional whether our way of life is characterized as a "religion" or as a "philosophy," though it is clear that he was content with the term "religion." In a footnote to the Supreme Court's judgment in *Torcaso v. Watkins* (1964), it was noted that a non-theistic religion is for legal purposes as valid as a theistic religion. We urge careful clarification when the term religion is used. We assert our affirmation of the term religion when it refers to:

The reverence, wonder, and thankfulness with which we take our place in the universe.

The sense of a larger whole of which we are a part.

The organization of communities that generate values and meaning and seek fellowship in pursuit of ideals.

The passionate devotion to the cause of serving the good of humanity and the world.

A way of life that integrates our values and gives ethical direction and resources for ethical living.

Access to the "ethical energy" that resides in the human mind and heart and in the inspiration of human companionship and collaboration.

ETHICAL HUMANISM

As we have seen, two historical streams are represented in modern Humanism: the Renaissance tradition with its strong focus on and delight in human endeavor, especially as encountered in the classics of Roman and Greek literature, and the Enlightenment tradition with its strong emphasis on the rational study of humanity to the exclusion of any recourse to a supernaturalist frame of interpretation.

We reaffirm our place in modern Humanism, and describe Ethical Culture as:

[1] A practical humanism in its focus on what we can do for and with our fellow humans to create a more just and humane world; we look to human resources to solve human problems.

[2] A philosophical humanism that (a) proclaims the supremacy of ethics as a basis for understanding and guiding life, and (b) that gains conceptual leverage on human existence by placing the fulcrum of understanding firmly in human experience and particularly in human moral experience.

We are therefore *Ethical Humanists* and often use that name interchangeably with that of *Ethical Culturists*.

ETHICAL HUMANISM AND SCIENCE

Of particular interest to us is the relationship between humanism and modern science. "Science" is both an attitude and a professional discipline. As an attitude, it is an extension of the humanist approach, seeking explanations for natural phenomena without recourse to supernatural causes. This attitude is the "climate of opinion" within which contemporary life is lived. This is the overarching paradigm of thought with which we close the 20th century and will open the 21st century. Science is humanism in its explanatory and technological aspect. As a professional discipline, it takes its place alongside all the other arts and crafts of humanity: music, art, literature, drama, sports, and culture in general, but as an attitude it gives the frame of reference against which a large part of our present life is lived out.

It may also be noted that the professional discipline of science functions on a parallel basis with the Ethical Movement: Both espouse an operational methodology that does not depend on any particular theory of the ultimate nature of the universe or of an "ultimate" reality. Science pursues its tasks with the same intellectual agnosticism about ultimates that Adler embraced. It is true that on the outreaching edges of modern science there are scientists who extrapolate from

known data to conceptions of the origin of the universe, but these extrapolations prove congenial both to theistic and to non-theistic views. It is important to distinguish, therefore, the governing attitudes and the practical benefits of modern science, on the one hand, from the support that science may give, one way or another, to philosophies of the universe and of the place of humanity in that universe.

As a people for whom ethics is our way of life, we have a twofold relationship to modern science:

FIRST, as citizens of the modern world, we affirm and embrace the exploratory, open-ended, experimental, hypothetical, self-corrective, and verifiable methodology on which science operates; we fully accept the evolutionary scenario in which science has placed us; and we continue to learn, also in the area of ethics, from advances in biology, anthropology, and the neuroscience of the human mind. We recognize that science has so altered our concepts of reality that it is now imperative that we pursue philosophy in close connection with the unfolding findings of modern science, and that we pursue ethics with a strong focus on the problems created by the advance of modern science.

But, **SECOND**, as a community committed to a primary focus on ethics, we view science as a human enterprise subject to the distortions and misuse that are present in all human endeavors. We oppose the misuse of science to justify public policies that debase human dignity and worth, or damage the larger environment of the earth, and we seek to bring the technological advances of modern science to the bar of human good. In every advance made possible by science, we concern ourselves with the ethical implications, that is, the effect on persons, the good of the community, and the larger biosphere, both positive and negative. Not everything that is scientifically possible is appropriately ethical. What is good is a larger human, and not a narrowly scientific, decision. We, therefore, explore what other paradigms of human life-through art or philosophy-have to add to or correct in the paradigm of science as a way to truth in the contemporary world.

CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

It is our fundamental premise that human culture needs moral character to be just and healthy, that civilizations decay when ethical responsibility is lost. We are not prophesying the future but we would like to record some of the challenges that face us as we seek to formulate an agenda for the decade ahead and into the new century. What direction may be taken by the themes that we have discussed above or by themes that we have hitherto neglected?

THE ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

This is not the place to deal with all the challenges we face from prisoners of conscience to minority oppression to animal welfare, from war to poverty, from environmental respect to population growth, from issues of religion and state to those of democracy in our world today. The technological revolution continues apace and the development of science faces us with a steady challenge of bio- and techno-ethical issues. At the same time we who profess a nontraditional religion have need to consider the path of both individuation and cooperation with other religious groups and movements, humanist and traditional. What we particularly want to bring to bear on all these developing and ongoing concerns is *a focus on effective goodness underpinned by clear thinking, high motivation, and passionate commitment*. We share with numerous others a special interest in ethics in thought and action, but the ethical perspective is our reason for being and the challenge to us is to make that perspective a reasonable, attractive, and accessible option on the map of our time.

NON-THEISM

It is difficult to get off the debating ground on which pro-theism, antitheism, and non-theism have set up their warring camps. It is our judgment that the debate needs to take a new turn. What is at issue in the God-debate is a symbol of humanity's search for meaning. Since all understanding has to pass through the psychological and sociological processes by which we project and extrapolate from our experience to the larger world, we can see that the debate is about what is an appropriate, legitimate, and pragmatic Diagram for humanity's place in the universe. The challenge involves both theoretical philosophy and social critique.

Theoretically, Felix Adler declared that "the ideal of perfection which my mind inevitably conceives has its counterpart in the ultimate reality of things, is the truest reading of that reality whereof man is capable" (*Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 359f.). This was his version of what in modern philosophy is known as "the anthropic principle," the notion that the human observer is a clue of some kind to the nature of the reality of the universe. Today the Ethical Movement needs to adventurously explore a philosophy of meaning, without losing its basic resistance to any particular philosophy becoming a creedal orthodoxy. We need to explore what ethics as a clue to philosophical significance might mean. *What kind of universe follows from there being ethical actors in it?* We need to develop a philosophy of human nature and human society that would underpin our ethical focus. This would take us beyond theistic and atheistic groundings of ethics and ground a philosophical ethics in its own frame of reference. Looking to the future, we need a usable metaphysics of ethics. What is the larger reality of which we humans as social beings in relation to ourselves, other life, and the world are expressions? What valid reality can we perceive in Felix Adler's God-substitute: "The universe of spiritual beings interacting in infinite harmony?" is this an ideal diagram for action in an empirically based world, or is this a pointer to a Platonic or Kantian reality of ideals transcendent to empirically based experience?

There is also a social critique involved in this challenge. The issue is not one of simply substituting present-day democracy for the kings and patriarchs of the past as symbols of an ultimate overview of reality. Present day democracy itself has to be examined for the lingering effects of the oppression and subjugation that obtained under the kings and patriarchs. The equality of all persons, premised in the Declaration of independence as the basis for our democracy, took a notoriously long time to be extended to freedom for blacks and political enfranchisement for women. An ethical philosophy needs to become a social critique, a reassessment of which values are important, and an impulsion towards social change.

SPIRITUALITY

It has become increasingly clear that a religious approach to life must address more than the intellectual needs of the person. This was understood in Adler's insistence that music accompany the Sunday lecture. But a wholistic awareness of human needs must include other forms of intellectual learning, other forms of cultural inspiration, many forms of fellowship to meet different needs, and more channels of engagement with the world. We have developed naming, and marriage, and memorial ceremonies. We have developed festivals. We need to be continually creative in the development of such celebrations, while being very aware of the way in which ritual and ceremony (as did creed) came to be a substitute for moral experience in the religious history of the past. How our Ethical Societies may more richly offer uplifting experience to our members and explore a human spirituality should be on our agenda for the future. As we explore that agenda practically, we need intellectually to define and delineate the content and the parameters of an ethical spirituality, and to elaborate our understanding of the community in which all of this takes place.

ART

It has been noted among us that reflection on the relation of ethics and art has scarcely had any prolonged attention given to it in our national or local deliberations. Adler spoke of it in discussion of the "vocations" (in *Ethical Philosophy*) and built an outline theory on the notion that the artist produces "a semblance of the spiritual relation," that the quality that is "convincing" in art is the equivalent of what has "worth" in ethics. Others among us, have addressed these issues but we have not developed a substantial tradition of reflection that would enable us to speak with knowledge and insight to the issues facing art in the wider community and as a pursuit of value. We look to the day when in a culturally literate nation we may hear the taxidriver quote poetry, we will honor aesthetics in our public meetings as a way to truth alongside ideology, we will award the creative artist, the craftsworker, the innovative entrepreneur, the educator, as we do the social reformer or civil rights advocate. In Ethical Culture we already have basic constructs that can be built into a philosophy of art: Our valuing of the individual and therefore of individual expressiveness; our sense of responsibility for making a better world and therefore a commitment to an art that overcomes the deadening effects of personal habit and of the social status quo; and our attachment to ideals that constantly challenge where we are now and so to a basic respect for the prophetic iconoclasm of art that forces us to see with a new realism and an imaginative widening of horizons. We want to see the arts valued, rather than merely priced. We want the artist to have the same freedom that we claim for religion and for science. And we urge

an artistic exploration and expression of the values we cherish, in our meetings as elsewhere.

PRAXIS

In a statement from the Balcony -- to refer back to our opening metaphor -- it is easy to get lost in the discussion of ideas and forget the importance of the Street where action must take place, the Marketplace where public engagement must occur, the Crossroads where thought must become choice, and the very earth on which we have created these human artifacts. So we end this reflection by returning to our central theme that Ethical Culture is about social transformation in the light of ethical values. We need other statements to address other areas of our life-in-action: social, political, pastoral, psychological, aesthetic, environmental, and personal. We send this statement out within the limited compass of being a concept map, a thinking person's guide to Ethical Culture's relationship to its past and to current movements of thought. But our hope is that the clarifications and insights that it offers into what we are as a Movement will lead to a greater commitment to a religious Diagram of living that engenders social change, to a more humane Humanism, to a more people-oriented Science, and to a larger ethical imprint on the empirical engagements of life in our world today. Like all aphorisms, Deed before Creed (or the primacy of praxis over philosophy) needs elaboration. Clearly, thought can lead to action, and unthinking action may do harm. But the formula does suggest two things worth exploring: (1) it is a call to action *beyond* words and thought, and (2) It is an invitation to find truth *through* action, to make living experience the source of our philosophizing. As such, it remains a vital motto.

CODA

The process of preparing this statement has given us an increased sense of what is involved in a community of peers seeking to arrive at a consensus of thought. Not every Leader subscribes to every opinion expressed in this Paper. Voices have been raised: (A) To underline that this statement is to be read not as an orthodoxy of thought but rather as a crystallization of an ongoing discussion among us, a marker on the path "towards philosophical consensus." And (B) To express recognition of the incompleteness of such a statement in addressing major areas of our life and thought. We need, and this statement does not supply, a rationale for social justice and action, a schema for community, an understanding of art as a way of human perception and a source of inspiration, and a conceptual framework for the search for meaning and spirituality. But with these caveats and qualifications, the National Leaders Council sends this document out in hope that it will engage the minds and hearts of our readers as an aid in the continuing pursuit of the truths and values by which Ethical Culture is shaped and for which it lives. We have tried to make these words our own and through them we seek to connect with you in a fellowship of the exploring mind-drawing and redrawing a concept map for Ethical Culture.

Prepared and approved by
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