ETHICAL HUMANISM

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Humanism is a belief in the dignity and worth of each and every human being. The measure of a good person and a person’s character is not whether he or she believes in God, but whether he or she has a faith in people.

There is nothing arbitrary about this. In fact, it comes as close to a universal and transcendent truth as one can find. All religions, all philosophies of noble stature work to protect the fragile, sacred nature of human beings.

Humanism represents a thread in history which sides with humanity against all those forces which threaten to crush it — whether that power is the state, a religion or an economic system.

In addition to this focus upon the inner core of people, the imbuing of life with a sense of intrinsic worth, humanism stands for the creative development of human abilities.
GOD AND THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT

Misunderstandings regarding the Ethical Movement are nothing new. For more than one hundred years we have been attempting to find the appropriate language to explain the nature of our religion. It is inevitable that the words we use will not fully convey what we mean and that we will use words that for others have different meanings. Unless we are to coin new words, we must use the vocabulary which is our common inheritance and do the best we can to explain what we mean.

Felix Adler encountered this difficulty throughout his career and on several occasions felt it necessary to defend himself by claiming, "I am not an atheist." In fact, there were good grounds for thinking that Adler was an atheist, for he had decisively rejected the idea of God as it is traditionally conceived in the Western world. From the perspective of others he clearly was an atheist.

Adler needed to explain himself even before he founded the New York Society for Ethical Culture. After he had delivered his one and only sermon at his father’s Temple Emanu-El in New York, he was summoned by the board of trustees to explain why he had not mentioned Jehovah during his sermon. The brash and impetuous Adler blurted that he believed in God but not the same God in which they believed. Adler did not succeed his father as temple rabbi.

The charge of atheism continued to plague him throughout his life. A decade before he died, while addressing his colleagues Adler commented, "The net outcome ... was not atheism in the moral sense - I have never been what is called an atheist - but the definite and permanent disappearance of the individualistic concept of Deity."
Was Adler truly an atheist? Unquestionably he stood outside the circle of believers who hold that the Deity is an all powerful Being. More explicitly, he rejected God as being providential and personal, as the source of revelations and miracles, a supernatural Being capable of suspending natural laws and as the author of the Old and New Testament. With such a sweeping repudiation of the attributes generally associated with God it is little wonder that Adler and the members of the Ethical Movement were characterized as atheists.

Adler’s objection to an individualistic concept of Deity was more penetrating than the obvious rejection of superstition. He found the concept wanting on ethical grounds. For God is usually presented as a Deity who commands laws for us to follow and obey out of a reverence for him. Adler’s humanistic thrust would not allow him to hold such an irrational position. He knew that we need to bring human experience and reason to bear upon all questions, especially upon those which we call moral or ethical.

Adler felt that true morality is that which fosters the development of character and personality. Obedience to laws which cannot be questioned does not further human development but stunts it in serious ways. It puts the mind to sleep. What needs to be fostered instead is the responsible use of freedom.

The reaction to Adler’s call for conscience in place of obedience, the rejection of the Torah as the ultimate source of law and the displacement of God as King led many to criticize Adler as setting loose a philosophy that could only lead to immorality itself. Without God, they feared, people would merely follow their own senses. Without immutable rules flowing from an omnipotent God people would fall into the chaos of selfishness. Only a belief in God could insure a moral community.

The challenge to the founders of the Ethical Movement was to create a religious approach to life which, while rejecting the old concepts of God, would establish an ethical ideal worthy of reverence. To claim the superiority of reason and experience as against revelation and obedience would be insufficient. To assert the autonomy of ethics would do nothing to set forth what ethical standards need to be established.

Ethics needs content. An ethical religion needs content; it needs to stand for something. While the assertion of the autonomy of ethics is in itself a liberating and liberal idea in that it allows for a plurality of philosophies, and therefore is tolerant of differences, a religious fellowship requires a more positive stance beyond that. It has to stand for particular principles; it must have a positive ideal.

When Adler said that he was not an atheist what he meant was that he was groping for something which retained some of the ideal qualities of the traditional God yet is reformulated in such a manner that it is consistent with modern thought and science, as well as liberating the human spirit. In order to express his deep concern, Adler occasionally used the word God.
He could find no other that came near what he felt. In one of his Sunday morning addresses at the Ethical Culture Society, he said:

*People want a confession of faith, I am told. Hear then mine - a simple one. I believe in the supreme excellence of righteousness; I believe that the law of righteousness will triumph in the universe over all evil; I believe that in the law of righteousness is the sanctification of human life; and I believe that in furthering and fulfilling that law I also am hallowed in the service of the unknown God.*

Years after this admission of faith, Adler returned to the same phraseology in the dedication of the Fieldstone School, the jewel of the Ethical Culture school system. A part of his speech can be found engraved in a cornerstone at the school's archway. It reads:

*This place is an educational temple ... to train for the growing life of the world. We are erecting here an altar to the Unknown God, the unknown, unpredictable, inconceivable divine things that slumber as yet unborn in the bosom of mankind.*

Nor was Adler alone in using the word God to express his religious outlook. Stanton Coit, born and raised in Ohio, joined the Ethical Movement in 1883. In 1892 he moved to England to found the West End Ethical Society in London, a society that came to be known as The Ethical Church. That Society's statement of purpose reads in part: "We believe: in the ideal of truth, beauty and righteousness; it is the principle of life. The benign and mighty father of man's spirit, the God Reason, Joy and Love."

Horace Bridges, who joined with Adler in 1898 and served as leader of the Chicago Ethical Society from 1912 until his retirement, said in 1950, "Credo in unum Deum." That for him, he explained, was the only justification he could find for believing in the brotherhood (and sisterhood) of humankind. Because God is the Father, we are all brothers and sisters to one another.

Whether it was an Unknown God, the God of Reason, Joy and Love or the Fatherhood of God, one thing remained unequivocal - none of these formulations were imposed upon members as a position to which they must subscribe in order to join the ranks of the Ethical Movement.

Every leader and Society has respected the intellectual integrity and conscience of each of its members. When they used the term God it was as an indicator, a pointer towards an otherwise inexpressible ideal.

The Movement has always had room for and has continued within it those who are theists, agnostics, atheists and those who defy categorization, such as Adler. But whatever the language and the reasons for employing or avoiding the term God, the leaders were all distinctly religious. The early leaders were careful to avoid theological disputes, recognizing the often futile nature of such argumentation. So when they used the word God it was primarily in a suggestive way, as in Adler's Unknown God.
This has been the task of the movement since. For us the existence of God is not the issue. We recognize that the matter of God's existence is on a different plane than the question of, say, whether or not the moons of Saturn exist. It is not a belief in God that is important but the bringing into our lives a sense of devotion. In this regard, the early leaders of the Ethical Movement anticipated by nearly a century some of today's outstanding theologians. For example, Prof. James A. Ogilvy explains contemporary theological thought to the lay student this way:

*Karl Barth, a leading twentieth-century theologian, writes that whenever we use the name "God" we are talking about the not-God. Our language fools us. We feel gratitude and we know how to give thanks only when we are giving thanks to someone. But that is our shortcoming. So in saying that the existence of God is not the point, contemporary theologians are not denying the appropriateness of the feeling of gratitude, only that we may be confused in the way we express our feelings.*

This is precisely the attitude Adler held when he said, "Religion means a cosmic faith ... a cosmic sense not only of mystery but of trust. An ethical religion means interpreting this immense Nature about us in terms of the highest that human nature can be or think of."

By laying aside endless discussions regarding the definition of the Deity, the ethical religion seeks to express the highest ideals and to promote a cosmic faith and trust that rests in a sense of profound gratitude. The tasks of an ethical religion is how to make life sacred. This means, in the language of Martin Buber, that the formation of relationships which are not based upon objects (It) but rather based on subjects (Thou) are the experiences of the divine.

Adler was asked to make a profession of faith and did so. With the same integrity and assurance with which he announced his, we today can make ours. Here is where we make our stand:

*Life is sacred, every human being is precious and cannot be replaced. We are children of the universe. We are made of the stuff of the stars, honey and oak, winter wheat and wind. "My sister, life," said the Russian writer Boris Pasternak. And he was right. We are brothers and sisters to the mice and the moths, as well as to each other.*

We can barely imagine life's infinite wonder, complexity and ultimate unity. But there is still something more than this cosmic sense. It is that we are who we are because for billions upon billions of years the chemicals of the universe have been combined in such a way that we have stumbled into the sentient life which we now inhabit. No one in the history of the galaxies has ever been like you or me before and no one will ever be like us again. You have been a billion years in the making and the person you are will never happen again. This is no mere hyperbole but is borne in the lessons of biology.
And from ecology we learn this - we are all connected to each other and what one does affects all others. We do not live in isolation but are in endless series of relationships.

When I conducted the ecology workshop at the Encampment for Citizenship in Colorado, an environmentalist visited the class. He had the students stand in a circle and each student was designated as a particular part of the environment, such as a bird, the air or the soil. String was then distributed so that each student held the end of several strings and at the other ends were those students who were environmentally connected. For example, the bird held a string connected to the air, to a tree, etc., while the tree held strings attached to the soil, a cloud and so forth. When the instructor asked one of the students to pull on her strings, it became obvious that the effects of the yanking were felt by more than those to whom she was connected. For instance, although the bird had no connection to the soil, the tree to which it was attached did.

This exercise made visible what usually remains invisible to us, that is, the manner in which we affect other people and things. But whether or not we know it, our influence is real and is felt. Furthermore, it is also eternal. Since what we do vibrates through the whole system, it changes the world even if only to an infinitesimal degree. But that new world determines what next will stumble from the darkness of the universe into the life of this world and what kind of world it will encounter.

Even if we do not realize it or admit it to ourselves, we do make a difference, we do count and the world can never be the same again because we have been there. Life is a sacred gift and it is incumbent upon us to act so as to honor it.

Adler has helped us find an appropriate expression of gratitude by shifting the manner in which we conceive of God. Rather than being a single star over the horizon of a secular life, God, as understood by Adler, is contained within each life, so that each life itself is a star that together with others creates an infinite galaxy of stars. In this way life itself is made sacred and holiness is to be found among the thistles. The face of the divine does not shine down from above but out through the eyes.

Once we remove the superstitious and supernatural elements of God, we realize that God is not something that intrudes into our daily lives. God is not a force outside of ourselves. However, this does not mean that we need to accept things as they are or ourselves as we appear to be. There are unexplored and deeper dimensions that are unrealized. There are powers and insights, abilities and awareness to illuminate both the attics and the cellars of our beings, our hearts and souls.

Adler wrote, "You are but a tiny estuary but when the tides enter your being you feel the pulse of the infinite sea." Our spiritual development consists of the cultivation of our singular, innate qualities while simultaneously
allowing the pulse of the infinite sea to flow through us. This is a religious outlook wide enough to encompass both our spiritual needs and intellectual requirements.

But there is still more to religion, in particular an ethical religion. Not only must there be a coherence and logic to the religious philosophy. The test of a religion must also include the human good which it generates. Is the religion itself ethical, does it promote the commonwealth and goodness, does it lead to moral behavior and human growth?

Most religions stress prayer or ritual as the method to reach the divine life and thereby achieve a moral life. But for us our prayers are in our relationships. Once again by shifting metaphors we come closer to realizing what we are after. Conventionally, the distinction made between philosophy and religion is that the former is a matter of the head and the latter issues from the heart. We recognize the importance of both the head and the heart but find that the guiding metaphor is neither of these but that of the hands. Religion is that which we can do with our hands - hold, touch, caress and build. It is community and helpfulness, love and care.

These, after all, are the qualities of goodness: decency, integrity, kindness, respect and generosity. Jesus was right when he admonished the pious for praying out loud in the temple. By making a show of their piety they externalized and circumscribed something which must remain forever personal and fluid.

The profession of an ethical faith leads to certain consequences. Because we maintain that each and every person is important and indispensable we know that none of us is fully free until everyone is free. So while our spiritual life is personal it reaches outward towards others here in this life. We are required to do our best to reconstruct society in such a way that the integrity of all its citizens is respected. We build for those we will never see, just as there were there who labored before our time.

There is an inherent religious need that begs to be recognized. It is the need for the sense of the divine, the need to stand for and with something other than our own self. This is how we find meaning, it is our purpose in being. It is upon this that we make our stand. Always honor the integrity of that which lies within.

It is a very simple message but if humanity were to accept it, then we would no longer grind human beings under the wheels of war or execute victims in the name of high purposes.

This then is our message: Life is sacred, revere it with all your heart.
Because the founder of the ethical movement was a Jew many people jumped to the conclusion that it is a Jewish sect. The same argument might apply to Christianity, for Jesus was a Jew; St. Paul, who established the church, called himself "a Hebrew of the Hebrews"; and the early apostles were all Jews. A prominent humanist, when asked the difference between humanism and Ethical Culture, replied, "Humanism has a Christian background and Ethical Culture a Jewish background," without considering that Christianity itself had a Jewish background. But Felix Adler broke as completely with Jewish theology and ceremonial as did Jesus or St. Paul. It is not the accident of one's birth that determines one's religion — at least for people who think for themselves. Moreover, all the four "original" lieutenants of Dr. Adler were Gentiles who came out of the Christian church: S. Burns Weston, William M. Salter, Walter Sheldon, and Stanton Coit, who founded the Ethical Societies of Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and London respectively. Their successors in the leadership of these Societies (Collier, Bridges, Haydon, Hynd, Blackham) have all been non-Jews. To call Ethical Culturists members of the Jewish sect is as gross a misconception as it would be to call them members of a Masonic order. Ethical religion acknowledges with gratitude the contribution which the Hebrew prophets and the Christian clergy have made to the moral and spiritual uplift of humanity. These are treasures which are not to be monopolized by any church or sect. They belong to us all. But with them are mixed many untimely survivals of creed and ritual which are like the detritus that is borne down with the life-giving waters of a stream. Constant purification of the waters is necessary to preserve religion as a vital, pervasive and inspiring influence in man's life.

David Saville Muzzey
Ethics As A Religion, 1951
REMEMBER

Samuel Adler broke with his father, an Orthodox rabbi, by joining Reform Judaism, then a new approach to an ancient religion. While he rose to prominence within its ranks, he became increasingly disillusioned with life in Germany. One brother had been arrested in 1848 for his political activities; new restrictions were being imposed upon Jewish life. Furthermore, Samuel considered himself a political democrat and saw little prospect of that system coming soon to Germany.

When he received a call to assume the pulpit of Temple Emanu-El in New York, then, as now, America’s leading Reform synagogue, Samuel eagerly accepted the invitation. Like thousands of German Jews of that period, the Adler family migrated to a new land.

Felix was six years old when the family arrived in New York, shy, quiet and dreamy. Although his family was warm and loving, Felix was a lonely boy, often finding it difficult to establish close friendships. The strain of making social adjustments in his new homeland was compounded by his entrance to Columbia College at the age of fifteen.

At that time Columbia still retained its affiliation with Episcopal Trinity Church. Most of the students were several years older than Felix. Thus, in a school of young men, Felix was an adolescent; in a Christian college, he was Jewish; in an American school, he was not American enough. As an act of conscience, he refused to stand during compulsory chapel service. And his sense of alienation increased further by his criticism of the intellectual atmosphere of the college, claiming that it was compromised and weak.

His greatest source of pride came through teaching Sunday School. He was an inspired and gifted religious teacher. So outstanding was his ability that the temple singled him out for a special award ceremony.
Temple members thought a great deal of Felix. Everyone assumed that he would follow his father's path and one day take his place as a religious leader. It was with great expectations that the temple sent Felix to Germany to complete his graduate studies. He would then return to New York, American and cosmopolitan, educated secularly but spiritually oriented. Felix was to be the first true American rabbi of distinction.

Felix left fully committed to Judaism and the Jewish people. While abroad, however, something changed: he underwent a spiritual crisis. As a student, he was exposed to an historical criticism of the Bible, did work in comparative religious studies and took courses in the natural sciences. All this shook Felix's intellectual outlook. His studies led inevitably, for him, to an undermining of the divine nature of the Bible. How could the Bible be divinely inspired when history showed that it had been written over a period of time, contained historical inaccuracies and had been amended? Science demonstrated the mythological nature of some biblical accounts. And Felix also understood how other world religions were also worthy.

Adler too, was exposed to the currents of social criticism. He saw the great injustices created by the industrial system. This led him to ask: How can a just God allow such poverty and misery to exist?

When he completed his studies, he received a letter from his father requesting that he return to New York to help relieve him of some of his duties as rabbi. Samuel was eager to share his work with his son.

In 1873, Felix Adler delivered his first and only sermon at Temple Emanu-El, entitled “The Judaism of the Future.” In it, Adler called for further reforms in Judaism. He claimed that the validity of Judaism lay in its prophetic tradition, that of Isaiah, for example, who said, Put away all evil that is in your hands. Learn to do good. Let the oppressed go free. Break every bond.

The prophets, he said, spoke for humanity as a whole, not only the Jewish people. Adler said, “We discard the narrow spirits of exclusion and loudly proclaim that Judaism was not given to the Jews alone, but that its destiny is to embrace in one great moral state the whole family of man.”

Furthermore, “This religion, not confined to the church and synagogue alone, shall go forth into the marketplace, shall sit by the judge in the tribunal, by the counselor in the halls of legislation, shall stand by the merchant in his warehouse, by the workman at his work.”

No longer was Judaism to be a temple religion but a religion of the whole of life. No longer was Judaism to be the possession of Jews but part of a universal religion. Furthermore, it was not creed which would distinguish the new Judaism but its active part in social reformation.

It was clear to the trustees of the Temple, and to Adler himself, that he could not become a rabbi within the Reform movement. In essence he reformed Judaism to a point so that it was no longer Judaism. Just as his
father, Samuel, could not serve as an Orthodox rabbi, Felix could not serve as a Reform rabbi.

Within three years, with the help of several who heard his sermon at the synagogue, Adler established the New York Society for Ethical Culture.

Adler’s move from Judaism to a different religious conception sets the context for understanding the dilemma which still confronts many members in the Ethical Movement. When a person joins the Movement, does he remain Jewish or must that be discarded? Is she still a Christian or Buddhist or Muslim? This is a perplexing question because of its psychological dimensions. Not one answer is right for all who join. But it is helpful to know how Adler himself addressed this problem and the manner in which he understood it.

In many ways, Adler made it clear that he had no desire to clash with other religions. He was not an iconoclast whose first motive was the destruction of another’s religion. For him leaving Judaism did not represent an abrupt departure, a rupture. He shied from denouncing Judaism or any other religion.

Adler did not convert to a new religion. Rather the formulation of an ethical religion was an outgrowth of the religion of his childhood, one that he loved, issuing from a family which he held dearly. Ethical Culture was a development, an outgrowth of something precious. For that reason Adler never railed against other religions but treated them sympathetically.

But this development led him to an ultimate rejection of the Jewish religion. He did not believe in revelation or miracles; he rejected the idea that the Bible was divinely inspired and thought that rituals were an unnecessary encumbrance. In believing in a universalist religion, as opposed to an ethnic religion, and in claiming that this universal religion needed to take part in the great current of events, Adler effectively removed himself from Judaism.

In setting aside Judaism as his professed religion, Adler still faced the question of identity. Clearly he rejected the Jewish religion but the idea of Jewishness could not be easily laid aside. Nor did he want to. He once said, “I am certainly American in sentiment, in allegiance, in aspiration. But nonetheless, I have taken some pains to know - I wish my children to know - something of the race from which they have sprung.”

A person’s identity consists of many parts - family, race, occupation, nation, etc.; each assuming different proportions for each individual. Adler noted his Jewish ancestry as one part of his identity, an important part but far from the dominant one. What Adler saw as his racial identification receded as his allegiance to his universal religious ethic grew.

Adler was an astute enough psychologist to know that some leave Judaism in order to flee from their racial identity. The attractiveness of Ethical Culture for them was that it offered a route into the anonymous
mainstream of American life, an assimilation of shame. They wanted no part of being Jewish and sought what they thought would be a legitimate channel for this flight. No such assimilationist dream motivated Adler, however. He did not want to hide his Jewish face. His was a sincere conviction which led to a new religious departure outside both Judaism and Christianity.

Regarding this departure’s relationship to his racial roots, Adler said, “The finest point of view when leaving one’s tradition is to keep in touch with one’s racial past, to keep in touch with the roots out of which one sprang - it is part of self-respect not to cut off one’s memory.”

Memory and self-respect are two themes which are intimately entwined, twin aspects of human personality which cannot be separated without serious damage. Lev Kopelev, a Russian dissident, recently addressed himself to this relationship in explaining why in filling out official Soviet papers, he insists upon listing himself as a Jew: “I have never heard the voice of my blood speak to me. But I have heard the voice of my memory. At my heart’s memory live my grandfather, grandmother and aunt, who were executed by a firing squad in Kiev, in Babi Yar because they were Jews to their dying breath.”

There is nothing mystical in Kopelev’s approach, no mysterious racial blood coursing through his body surging with breathless urgency. He remembers because memory resides near the heart and to deny the heart is to deny humanity itself. His grandmother, his grandfather, an aunt, his family were murdered simply because they were Jews. Only chance kept him from a similar fate. To hide from this horrible truth, to hide his identity would be to give final victory to the killers.

Memory is the beginning of human life; it is the genesis of awareness and conscience. We enter this life with predispositions and even preferences but without a memory. That we acquire through experience. More precisely, it is recollection, that is the willing act of memory, that allows us to act other than merely in a reflexive manner. From our experiences we learn. As we remember we grow in sensitivity and understanding.

The French word “oblier” means to forget. The English cognate is obliterate. When we forget we wipe out, reduce an experience into oblivion, nothingness. It is as though it never happened. The adage, forgive and forget, has it only half-right. Forgiveness is a necessary human quality but so is remembrance. It does no one any good to forget, for when we refuse to remember we wipe out part of ourselves. This is a form of self-loathing. The past lives on within us. We can choose to ignore it or not recall it, but to obliterate it is to send ourselves into oblivion.

Milan Kundera, a Czech writer, asked the question, “What is the self? It is the sum of everything we remember. ... Forgetting is a form of death ever present within life.” If this is so, then willful forgetting is a form of spiritual suicide. We murder ourselves as we choose to forget.
There always remains the conflict between the need to remember and the desire to forget. Memory can be painful. Kopolev must continue to experience the wounds, vicarious as they are, that are inflicted with the recollection of the mass grave at Babi Yar. How much easier it would be to refuse to conjure the image his family filling the trench in the woods. As an act of self-respect, he overcomes the pain for the sake of remembrance, of honor.

Everyone has memories that strike painfully. We are reminded of hurts and mistakes, those things of which we might be ashamed. But memory, as Nadezhda Mandelstam points out, can make clear the true meaning of events. Retrospection, if done courageously, removes the dross and leaves a distillation in which the true nature and meaning of an experience becomes clear. We can live our lives again, as it were. We are given a second chance, not to change that which has happened, but to distill the truth, to know something without defenses, in the secret of our souls and thereby reveal ourselves to ourselves. In this way, in the light of undistorted vision, we can come to learn what kind of people we are and do something realistically about the kind of people we can become tomorrow.

Clarity, unvarnished truth, is difficult to achieve. Both our personal and our public histories are constantly threatened by revisions propelled by needs beyond truth. Often our prior relationships are romantically elevated or, conversely, made worse than they were as a method of self-justification. Diaries are re-written to frame for eternity a picture of what never was. Public history undergoes similar treatment as textbooks are altered to fit national needs. For the glory of national pride and the need to teach the young civic virtues the tragic flaws of history are erased in successive revisions.

As this continues to happen we are unable to learn the truthful lessons which history has to offer. And without recollection we turn ourselves over to those who will remember for us. Unless Indians remember for themselves, their history will be through the eyes of those who vanquished them. Unless women remember for themselves, history will reflect the lives of men and their values.

Remembering is an act of responsibility. It is a step away from being a victim. We cannot understand ourselves as a nation if we refuse to recall the legacy of slavery, Wounded Knee and My Lai. As painful as this is, we cannot develop without the memory. We cannot understand ourselves individually if we tear from our photo album pictures of those whom we no longer love. We loved them once, even if now we understand how inadequate that love was. But we did love and rather than excise that we need to incorporate it into who we now are.

Memory is a conserving force and it is this which is feared by progressives. It is a looking backward, a gathering together. Progressives want to look forward, not to be bound by traditions which restrict and
solidify inequities. However, progressives who cut loose completely without a backward glance cut *themselves* loose. They are set free the way a boat is free which has no rudder.

To refuse memory is to confuse tradition with heritage. Traditions often embody the privileges of the powerful. Or traditions may have outgrown their usefulness as circumstances change over time. But the acceptance of a heritage is not following this or that, it is an attitude of relatedness. It is an ingathering of all that has gone before, all that accumulates to make one who she or he is. It is an act of reverence which allows for change, adaptation and progressive development.

When Adler broke with Judaism he was not unique in the manner in which he did it. He left the traditions of Judaism but incorporated its heritage. In the same way, the early followers of Jesus saw themselves as Jews. Martin Luther saw himself initially as a Catholic attempting to reform the church from within. Eventually the followers of Jesus had to leave Judaism and Luther had to leave Catholicism. In each instance a new path was sought by building upon the foundation of the old way.

When we join the Ethical Movement we do so not because we are fleeing from our past but because we now accept a new form that for us is deeper and more meaningful. We desire to enter a wider spiritual fellowship, united with men and women of every heritage. What we seek is a reverence for the human personality, a passion for social justice and an attempt to apply the best of the world’s wisdom to contemporary living.
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