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## Peter Abelard. Bibliography on His Ethics and Moral Philosophy

### Bibliography

1. Bejczy, István. 2003. "Deeds Without Value: exploring a Weak Spot in Abelard's Ethics." *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* no. 70:1-21.  
Abstract: "In his ethical writings Peter Abelard declared the accomplishment of good deeds irrelevant to a person's merit. Also, he denied that acts had any moral value in themselves. The article argues that both theses are contradicted by the purport of Abelard's ethical teaching. If the opportunity to act is present, good intentions must be followed by good deeds in order not to lose their meritorious character. Moreover, the intrinsic morality of intended acts determines the morality of human intentions, whereas the moral evaluation of these acts determines whether consenting to them is sinful. Good acts can become neutral or bad on account of improper intentions, but evil deeds always retain their evil character. In the early-twentieth-century debate on Abelard's alleged moral subjectivism, both sides appear to have been at fault to a certain degree. Those who charged Abelard with subjectivism mistook his theses on the indifference of human actions for the essence of his ethical teaching. Those who defended Abelard against the said charge have pointed to his use of objective criteria of right and wrong either with regard to intentions or with regard to deeds. In the first case, they did not notice that Abelard's notion of objectively right or wrong intentions implies a judgment on the intrinsic moral value of material deeds; in the second case, they failed to account for the inconsistency with Abelard's theses on the moral indifference of human actions."
2. Briola, Lucas. 2016. "A Case Study of Scholasticism: Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard on Penance." *Journal of Moral Theology* no. 5:65-85.
3. De Siano, Frank. 1971. "Of God and Man: Consequences of Abelard's Ethic." *The Thomist* no. 35:631-660.
4. Decosimo, David. 2018. "Sin, Consent, and Apparent Confusion in Abelard's *Ethica*." *The Journal of Religion* no. 98:29-58.
5. Findley, Brooke Heidenreich. 2006. "Does the Habit Make the Nun? A Case Study of Heloise's Influence on Abelard's Ethical Philosophy." *Vivarium* no. 44:248-275.  
Abstract: "A careful reading of Heloise's letters reveals both her contribution to Abelard's ethical thought and the differences between her ethical concerns and his. In her letters, Heloise focuses on the innate moral qualities of the inner person or animus. Hypocrisy—the misrepresentation of the inner person through false outer appearance, exemplified by the potentially deceitful religious habit or habitus—is a matter of great moral concern to her. When Abelard responds to Heloise's ideas, first in his letters to her and later in his *Collationes* and *Scito te ipsum*, he turns the discussion away from her original interests. He transforms her metaphor of the habitus as false appearance into a discussion of another type of habitus, the habitual process of acquiring virtue, and integrates her focus on the animus into his developing ideas about sin as intention. Examining the differences between Heloise's ethical thought and Abelard's allows us to appreciate the distinct contributions of both."

6. Griffioen, Amber L. 2007. "'In Accordance with the Law': Reconciling Divine and Civil Law in Abelard." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* no. 81:307-321. Abstract: "In the *Ethics*, Abelard discusses the example of a judge who knowingly convicts an innocent defendant. He claims that this judge does rightly when he punishes the innocent man to the full extent of the law. Yet this claim seems counterintuitive, and, at first glance, contrary to Abelard's own ethical system. Nevertheless, I argue that Abelard's ethical system cannot be viewed as completely subjective, since the rightness of an individual act of consent is grounded in objective standards established by God. Likewise, any particular civil government must derive its authority objectively from the natural and/or Christian laws, which ground its possibility and function. In this paper, I examine Abelard's explication of the natural law, discoverable through reason, and the divine laws, knowable only through revelation, in order to explore what form an adequate civil law would have to take under which the judge could be said to have acted rightly."
7. Hamelin, Guy. 2015. "Volonté et *habitus* chez Pierre Abélard: un double héritage." *Quaestio. Journal of the History of Metaphysics* no. 15:363-372.
8. Hoffmann, Tobias. 2003. "Moral Action as Human Action: End and Object in Aquinas in Comparison with Abelard, Lombard, Albert, and Scotus." *The Thomist* no. 67:73-94.
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13. Lutz-Bachmann, Matthias. 1995. "Modern Aspects of Peter Abelard's Philosophical Ethics." *Modern Schoolman* no. 72:201-211.
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15. Marenbon, John. 1992. "Abelard's Ethical Theory: Two Definitions from the *Collationes*." In *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeuneau*, 301-314. Leiden: Brill.
16. ———. 2011. "Peter Abelard's Theory of Virtues and its Context." In *Knowledge, Discipline and Power in the Middle Ages. Essays in honour of David Luscombe*, edited by Canning, Joseph, King, Edmund and Staub, Martial, 231-242. Leiden: Brill.
17. ———. 2017. "Boethius, Abelard and Anselm." In *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*, edited by Golob, Sacha and Timmermann, Jens, 125-137. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 10: Boethius 125-128; Anselm: 129-132; Abelard: 132-135; Bibliography 136-137.
18. McAleer, G. J. 1995. "Reason, the Ethical Subject and Sin in the Thought of Peter Abelard." *Mediaevalia. Textos e Estudos* no. 7-8:177-198.
19. McMahan, Kevin A. 2009. "Penance and Peter Abelard's Move Within." *Saint Anselm Journal* no. 6.2:1-7. Abstract: "Peter Abelard is perhaps best known for having taken the role of master in the schools to celebrity status. Yet dramatically public as his life was, the

analyses he develops in his commentary on the letter to the Romans (c. 1134) and in the *Ethica* (c. 1138) of moral action, sacramental efficacy, even the atonement, center on interior subjectivity. The rightness of an act is determined in the first instance by the agent's intention, and ultimately by God's. The sacraments, such as baptism and penance, represent what God is accomplishing through his relation to the recipient, independently of the actions themselves or the work of the priest. Further, just as sin involves a turning away from God, so our redemption consists in the love aroused in us by the sacrifice of his Son. All of this displays Abelard's capacity for analytic nuance; but it foreshadows, too, the shift that will divide Christian theology in the sixteenth century."

20. Murphy, Sean Eisen. 2007. "'The Law was Given for the Sake of Life': Peter Abelard on the Law of Moses." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* no. 81:271-306.  
 Abstract: "Abelard's most famous spokesman for the ancient and abiding moral and religious worth of the Law of Moses is probably the character of the Jew, invented for one of two fictional dialogues in the *Collationes*. The equally fictive Philosopher, a rationalist theist who gets the last word in his exchange with the Jew, condemns the Law as a useless addition to the natural law, a threat to genuine morality with a highly dubious claim to divine origin. The Philosopher's condemnation, however, does not go unanswered. Abelard himself, writing in his own voice in two major treatments of the Law, defends the ancient worth of the Law as a revolution in moral understanding and a potential guarantor of salvation. The Law is just and rational, he argues, in every one of its precepts, even when interpreted according to the letter. As such, the letter of the Law has been and ought to be retained in Christianity: its moral precepts are binding everywhere and always; its non-moral precepts are binding, when, in the changing circumstances of the Church, they are found to be useful and not conducive to scandal."
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 Abstract: "This article reassesses Peter Abelard's account of moral intention, or, better, consent, in light of recent work on his own thought and on the twelfth-century background of that thought. The author argues (1) that Abelard's focus on consent as the determining factor for morality does not rule out, but, on the contrary, presupposes objective criteria for moral judgment and (2) that Abelard's real innovation does not lie in his doctrine of consent as the sole source of merit or guilt, but, rather, in his exploration of the ways in which this doctrine affects our understanding of the objective criteria for moral judgment. In particular, Abelard is led by his doctrine of consent to a thoroughgoing reassessment of the moral significance of the passions, which, in turn, leads him to reject the view that actions should be evaluated in terms of the praiseworthy or vicious character of the passions they express."
24. Rijk, Lambertus Marie de. 1986. "Abelard and moral philosophy." *Medioevo* no. 12:1-27.  
 "When speaking of ethics in this connection, we are not referring to a 'doctrine on human behaviour'; rather it is to be understood as the philosophical (or theological) pursuit concerning the justification of such a theory. Beforehand it must be said that Abelard's *Ethica seu Scito te ipsum* can be regarded as a theological work in being part of the curriculum presented in theological training. The central question this

work deals with can be expressed as follows: what are the exact standards by which human behaviour is judged good or evil?

One should not ask whether Abelard's *Ethics* is a theological or philosophical work, for that is not the point. As we have already mentioned, ethics was part of theological enquiry and teaching. This answer is not a final one, however. For Abelard's conception of theology was such that philosophy, as an ultimate *rational* justification, was certainly admitted to theology, but, moreover, it even implied that philosophy was an essential constituent of fundamental theological enquiry. We must examine his *Ethics* in detail in order to see how Abelard in fact discusses the issue." (p. 1)

25. Ruys, Juanita Feros. 2014. *The Repentant Abelard: Family, Gender, and Ethics in Peter Abelard's Carmen ad Astralabium and Planctus*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
26. Sweeney, Eileen C. 2016. "Abelard's Christian Socratism." In *A Companion to Medieval Christian Humanism: Essays on Principal Thinkers*, edited by Bequette, John P., 101-121. Leiden: Brill.
27. Valente, Luisa. 2015. "Happiness, Contemplative Life, and the *tria genera hominum* in Twelfth-Century Philosophy: Peter Abelard and John of Salisbury." *Quaestio. Journal of the History of Metaphysics* no. 15:73-98.
28. Vess, Deborah. 2000. "Abelard on Meaning and Usage: Some Implications for the "Ethics"." *The Modern Schoolman* no. 77:217-234.
29. Wilks, Ian. 1997. "The Role of Virtue Theory and Natural Law in Abelard's Ethical Writings." *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* no. 71:137-149.
30. Williams, Paul. 1980. *The Moral Philosophy of Peter Abelard*. Lanham: University Press of America.  
Table of Contents: I. Introduction 1; II. Abelard's Self Presentation 11; III. The Realm of Reason; 45; IV. The Goodness of God and the Dignity of man 63; V. The Gift of Grace 85; VI. The Trinity 91; VII. The Person of Christ 103; VIII. The Vindication of Pagan Philosophy 111; IX. The Objective Basis of Abelard's Subjective Ethics 125; X, The Meaning of Christ's Work 151; Bibliography 173-185.

"It is the intended purpose of this study to approach Abelard's doctrine of Christ's work on its own terms and in context with the general direction of his thought. But one can only accomplish this by subterranean means, by probing beneath the surface in order to uncover the motivating reason behind his rejection of extreme realism and the doctrine of original sin, as well as the fundamental intentionality behind his vindication of pagan philosophy and the utilization of the dialectic. It is in such acts of intention and meaning that the stance and selfhood of a person are revealed. Selfhood, Robinson writes, is constituted by a commitment to a context. (7) And Abelard reveals himself as one committed to a strict following of all the injunctions of the most uncompromising interpretation of the Christian calling. (...)

Abelard proceeds to the next stage of his thought which is an elaboration of a rigorist system of ethics with its sharp emphasis upon man's complete accountability for the character of his life. Virtue, he argues in line with his logical conclusions, is a natural quality acquired by human effort. It is not, as the realists maintain, something synonymous with grace. A man becomes virtuous by struggling to attain virtue, not by a passive participation in this quality. Without the struggle, he maintained, there can be no crown.

Abelard's charted course never alters. It is anchored in his rigid commitment. Thus, he leads one step-by-step to the foot of the cross and his "subjective" view of the Atonement which is the final station of his thought." (pp. 4-5)  
(...)

"And yet, his celebrated theory which has prompted pages upon pages of exposition consists of only a few meager paragraphs in his Commentary on Romans. Abelard never set out to fully elaborate this doctrine, and, for this reason, it remained a brief excursus on the question of redemption. And yet — as St. Bernard rightly perceived — this is the very heart of Abelardianism. His view of the *Summum Bonum*, his Logos theology, his ethics, and even his logical views are knotted together in these three terse paragraphs.[\*] Abelard simply could not mouth the Pauline view of Christ's work. And so, he struggled to equate God's justice (*iustitia*) with His love (*charitatis*) by a bizarre twisting of the apostle's words. He writes: "*Ad ostensionem suae iustitiae, id est charitatis, quae nos, ut dictum est, apud eum iustificat, id est ad exhibendam nobis suam dilectionem, vel ad insinuandum nobis quantum eum diligere debeamus, qui proprio Filio suo non pepercit pro nobis.*"(9) Christ died, he asserts, not to meet the demands of God's justice, but to fulfill the demands of His love. His intransigent moral sense necessitated his manipulation of the apostle's meaning. His moral perspective challenged the faith which he cherished, and eventually caused his condemnation." (p. 6)

(7) James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 46.

(9) *Epist. ad Romanos*, II, 833B.

[\* See in particular the *Question* at 3.26, English translation: Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, translated by Steven R. Cartwright, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America 2011, Book II, pp. 164-168)

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