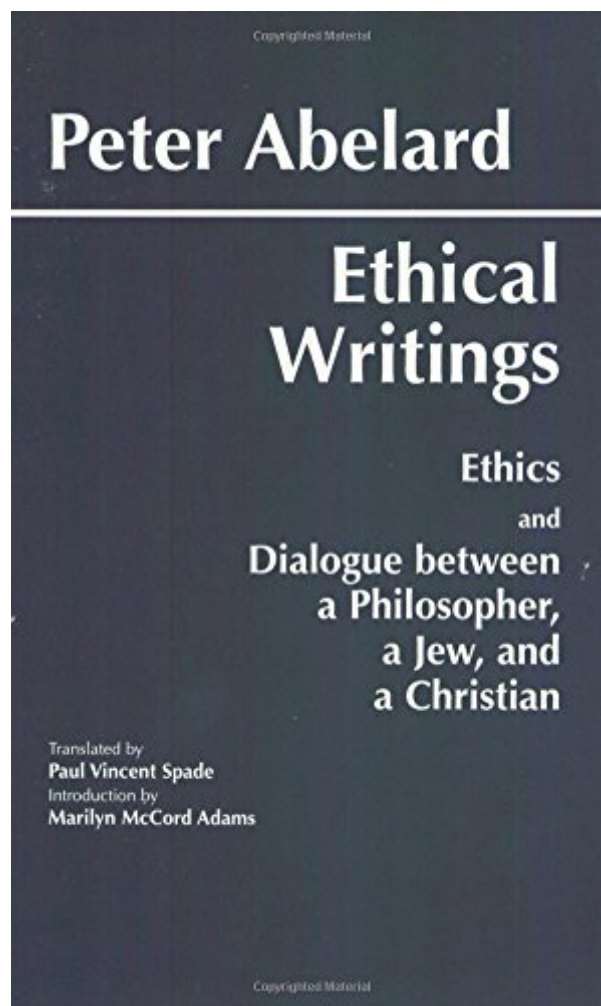


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# Peter Abelard

## Ethical Writings

Ethics  
and  
Dialogue between  
a Philosopher,  
a Jew, and  
a Christian

Translated by  
**Paul Vincent Spade**  
Introduction by  
**Marilyn McCord Adams**

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The best translation of these two treatises available in any language: accurate, lively, and readable. --Peter King, The Ohio State University

This volume is excellent. The introduction presents the readings in a clear manner, one that is direct and comprehensible. Similarly, the translation is highly readable. The notes are helpful without being intrusive. In short, this is a volume I have enjoyed using with graduate students and will certainly plan to use with undergraduates. --Charles E. Butterworth, University of Maryland at College Park

## Language Notes

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Original Language: Latin

## About the Author

Peter Abelard

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Abelard's major ethical writings--Ethics, or Know Yourself, and Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian, are presented here in a student edition including cross-references, explanatory notes, a full table of references, bibliography, and index.

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Two of Abelard's Most important Works.

By B. Marold

Ethical Writings: 'Ethics' and 'Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian' by Peter Abelard, Translated by Paul Vincent Spade, Introduced by Marilyn McCord Adams.

Most major theologians have written on ethics, but Abelard's works are more important to his corpus of work than with most others. The simple reason is that so few of his works are available to us in English, and many that are were left incomplete by Abelard. The more complex reason is that Abelard's signature doctrine of atonement, which he posed as an alternative to the equally famous doctrine by Anselm of Canterbury, is based primarily on the nature of virtue ethics. What makes it even more modern sounding is that it is based on a theory of philosophical psychology and intention which is as modern as tomorrow.

Both works in this volume were left incomplete by Abelard, but the volume contains all we have. The heart of Abelard's theory of intention in 'Ethics' is that sin is based on intention, not on the act, or even on the disposition to do the act. An inference he makes from this is that the Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus were not acting sinfully by that act. They were acting lawfully. One wonders what Abelard would have thought of the thousands of Nazis who professed that they were 'just following orders' before WW II, in persecuting the Jews and others. But this position is a lynchpin to Abelard's doctrine of atonement, whereby one is changed by the love of God to intend to do his will.

In his 'Dialogue', the author, Abelard does not play the Philosopher. Rather, he plays the mediator in the conversation about ethics. It should be no surprise that the Christian comes out of the dialogue with the advantage. Unfortunately for those who are fond of Plato's dialogues, Abelard is far more rigid and less conversational. Most of the speeches are very long, and there is relatively little drama or strong words, as there are in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.

This appears to be the least expensive option for purchasing these two works on Amazon. It is far less expensive than those available from the expert on Abelard's ethics, David Luscombe. Therefore, I consider this a very good choice (although I have not read Dr. Luscombe's introduction and translation).

If one gets nothing else out of reading Abelard, one should appreciate the sophistication of his psychology and the extent to which he is different from the Roman church to which Martin Luther and the other Reformers objected. Luther and Abelard shared the same 'nominalist' philosophical outlook, so one may be surprised at both their similarities and differences.

This is a revelation of how sophisticated was Medieval thinking.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By Peter Mestancik

Pierre Abelard is Christianity incarnate. Merci !

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Abelard's great ethics translated carefully: super!

By bartkl

Abelard's ideas concerning the significance of the intention of an act rather than the consequences caused by it are brilliant. I share his vision - I always have - and am amazed to find such an early thinker with such

authentic and extreme ethical ideas, which seem to be considered radical even nowadays. Also, nothing but credit for professor Spade's translation. Not being a native English speaker myself, I may have a different view on these matters, but I dare say the translation is clear, consistent and accessible. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in ethics.

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