



Ethical Views

October 2010 Vol. 125, No. 2 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

October Platforms

Sunday, October 3, 2010

Can the Children Save Us?

Speaker: Richard L. Kiniry, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

Our children will have to face difficult times with the environmental and cultural disruption expected in the future. But can the adults who played a part in creating the future problems be the ones to prepare them for that future? We must question the kind of child-rearing methods necessary in the near future. Possibly reflection on our hopes for children will make adults better people.

Sunday, October 10, 2010

Contested Premises and Practices in Moral Education

Speaker: Joan F. Goodman, Professor, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

There are those who believe schools should not be engaged in moral education as it brushes too closely against religion. But given that teachers approve and disapprove of children's behavior minute by minute, such a view is untenable. Among those who hold to, or stumble upon, the importance of moral education in schools, there are divisions of opinion. Some believe that students should be directly instructed in the virtues. Others believe that moral good is constructed through interactions, discovered rather than imposed. These approaches are related to larger world views and theories of learning.



Ethics for Children

Each Sunday the Society offers a children's program at the same time as the Platform. Although this is a "one-room school house," we will have age-appropriate activities for all age groups. The underlying theme of the classroom will be the children's growing awareness of the world around them and developing an appreciation of all forms of life. Relationships with parents, siblings, animal and human friends and plant life are stressed. We have a certified teacher and will use the text, "Love Your Neighbor."

For information call
(215) 735-3456

Sunday, October 17, 2010

A Story of Wrongful Conviction and Eventual Exoneration

Speaker: Ray Krone: Director of Communication and Training with Witness To Innocence

Ray Krone spent more than a decade in prison, some of it on death row, before DNA testing cleared his name. He is the 100th former death row inmate freed because of innocence since the reinstatement of capital punishment in the United States in 1976. He was the twelfth death row inmate whose innocence has been proven through postconviction DNA testing. Prior to his arrest, Krone had no previous criminal record, had been honorably discharged from the military, and had worked in the postal service for seven years.

Sunday, October 24, 2010

Where does an Ethical Humanist Find Comfort and Hope?

Speaker: Randy Best, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of the Triangle

We need comfort and hope because of the human condition. Each of our lives includes its share of isolation, struggle, tragedy and suffering. We need comfort and hope to lift us out of isolation and despair. As an Ethical Humanist, I will present my non-theistic sources of comfort and hope.

Sunday, October 31, 2010

The Climate for Humanism in Other Countries

Speaker: From the International Humanist & Ethical Union Executive Committee

The American Ethical Union is a founding member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). The IHEU Executive Committee comprises 6 members from Belgium, France, Norway, the UK and the US, and will be holding its annual planning meeting at the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia throughout this weekend. Members will discuss the climate for humanism and church-state issues in their respective countries and other issues that are prominent in the activities of their national organizations. Additional issues to be covered will include humanist activities in the developing world and the IHEU's international representation as a non-governmental organization with the UN in New York, Paris and Geneva. For more information about the IHEU, or if you wish to become an individual supporter, visit the website www.iheu.org. <>



President's Message
Is Anybody Out There? Or, Where
Have All the People Gone?
—By Temma Fishman

My bank teller used to be a real person. But now, she's a disembodied head that appears on a screen outside the drive-through window. I can see that she's human, but it's not easy, because the image of her head is distorted by the curvature of the surface of a monitor, making her appear alien. Not only that, but the surface of the screen acts like a mirror, so her image is blended with the trees in the area surrounding the bank. But, she greets me by name and I try to smile at "her" as if there's nothing Martian about this whole interchange. Her voice is somewhat thin because it's not traveling through the normal air space that exists between people, but rather through a microphone. This way, we don't have to breathe germs on each other. The first time I was confronted with this weirdness, I was totally disoriented. But now, I've learned to accommodate to it and pretend it's just a normal transaction between two humans, or reasonable facsimiles thereof. My slips travel up the pneumatic tube to this being who deftly handles my business with robotic efficiency and sends the requested money down to me through the tube. It's almost fun and very futuristic watching these items travel up and down through transparent plastic tubes. I press a button to get her

to talk to me, and it never fails. I press another button and my items go traveling up through the tube to her. I never speak to her directly or hand her anything. I've even entertained myself by watching others' slips and envelopes fly along these pathways. Thank goodness we don't have to look each other in the eye or pass things by hand. That's so yesterday!

So what does all this have to do with Ethical Culture? Well, we believe in relationships, as far as I can tell, with real people with whom we actually have contact—sometimes to the point of actually being in the same room together. We think this is what makes life meaningful. In this increasingly automated, interneted, facebooked and digitized world, relationships have taken on a surreal quality, at least to someone like me. Perhaps it's my advanced age. But, I used to feel connected to the teller when I went to the bank. We would exchange pleasantries. She was real. She had skin color and a natural voice. We recognized each other. Now, I can't tell whether or not the same person is waiting on me; "she" could be any one of the robots whose job it is to appear at the drive-in window.

At the opening Platform, one member told me, with a big smile on her face, that she was glad to be back with people. I thought, "Yes! That's what this is about—being with people!" I suddenly realized that I'd become somewhat isolated during the long summer, relaxing and fun though it was. Now, I was back in action. There were problems I was called upon to solve, and I felt hassled. It wasn't all fun, but I felt useful connecting with others and knowing this was the start of working together again. There was real sadness and joy all around me, emanating from real people. I listened to our leader Richard Kiniry's message about the dire condition of our planet. Much to blame is our loss of connection with the human beings and other precious living things with whom we share this fragile planet. It was a renewed call to action. So, here

we were on that first Sunday, debating the solutions, eating and talking together, working in the kitchen, and planning events for the season before us. Will we solve the terrible problems we humans have foisted upon ourselves? Probably not, but we have to start somewhere. In our Society, and other groups like ours, there are real people working to do just that. At least we're united with those who refuse the comfort of denial. Here we all were, being in the same room, breathing the same air, sometimes even touching, joined by our confrontation with reality. At least we're not alone.<>

Introduction to Ethical Humanism
Sunday, October 3, 1:30pm

The Philadelphia Ethical Society is part of a 127 year old humanist religious tradition. This is a chance to delve into that history and tradition. Interested visitors, newcomers and members are invited to examine the basic ideas of Ethical Culture. Do they make sense and can they make your life better? Using the Eight Commitments of Ethical Culture we will look at our core ideas - the intrinsic worth of every human being, naturalism, nontheism, and ethics as a way of life.

-- Led by Richard Kiniry.

The Ethical Action Committee
—By Doris Leicher, Chair

With the new season, I want to piggyback on Richard's reminder that Ethical Humanism puts its emphasis in what we do to others and ourselves rather than what we say. Participating in the Ethical Action Committee is an important part of our religion. From my own experience I can say that actually doing something for someone else is a spiritual eye-opener.

This is a short review of what we are doing at the EAC, in case you see something that inspires you. If you don't, come on in and get it started!

The present members are (in alphabetical order and with associated liaisons): Ron Coburn (Amnesty

International), Kate Esposito (KI VA), Temma Fishman (President, Dictionaries), Richard Kiniry (Leader, Anti- Death Penalty), Dorothea Leicher (Chair, Wintershelter, GlobalWarming/350.org), Nick Sanders (UNA-USA)

Here are our ongoing projects :
Amnesty International—we write letters on behalf of political prisoners
Dictionaries—we distribute dictionaries to a school with students who live in poverty, currently the Henry C. Lea School
KIVA is a micro-lending account . As the loans are repaid they get re-invested.
UNA-USA—We support various UN activities (millennium goals, humanitarian aid vial e-mail alerts)
Trinity Wintershelter—we cook/serve food at the shelter on 22nd and Spruce once a month during winter
350.org—we will join another action to address global warming on 10/10/10 (and any other time)
Talkies: this monthly movie series will be discontinued after September unless someone “adopts” it.

Wish list: participation in the Graduation Coaches Campaign, a new campaign by the city to train mentors who already work with students in the best way to guide them to and through college.

Meetings are on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30 PM. The next one is October 6. Come one, come all—you can feel good and have fun at the same time!

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Worldly Wisdom: Great Books and the Meaning of Life

James Sloan Allen has created a humanist approach to the Great Books. His book, *Worldly Wisdom*, is a series of commentaries that follow human wisdom from Homer's *Iliad* to the works of Sartre and Martin Luther King. His focus is the humanist ideas that appear in all these historic writings. This is a chance for members and friends of the Society to read and discuss those books we meant to read earlier in life while following the course of humanist thinking through the ages. Another advantage of this reading group is we will have the opportunity to examine our own lives in the presence of ideas from around the world and through the ages.

This will be a monthly series with participants taking turns in leading the discussion. We will have copies of Allen's book to be lent to those leading the discussion and participants will be expected to have read at least part of the selection for that month.

Since the meetings are planned for the third Tuesday of the month, our first meeting will be October 19th at 7:30pm. The book for this month is Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Dear Editor,

As I write this the Memorial Day Weekend has just closed and we are all aware that the “Top Kill” did not work assuring us of, as a minimum, more oil spillage, perhaps much more. The full extent of the spill may well not be known by the time this letter is published. But that is of little matter to the blame pundits who are trashing BP, Obama, the government in general and who knows what else. But they are all wrong: the blame lies not with those but with US, as in you and me. WE are to blame.

This is not a complicated argument. We live in a (more or less) free market society, where there is an interaction between supply and demand. As demand remains constant and supply dwindles then market pressure will be brought to increase supply. This is fundamental. It works with oil, it works with cocaine. The only way to reduce supply pressure is to decrease demand. In Obama I hear recognition of this fact yet even he sings the mantra of growth in order to bring us out of the depression. The last President who had a clear understanding of this truth and was willing to voice it was Jimmy Carter. We all know how well that turned out.

Gore Vidal called us the “United States of Amnesia.” We are doomed to repeat the past because we choose to not recall our history lessons. We, as a country, as a culture, have been in trouble due to our dependence on oil at least since the 1970s. Clips of Carter chastening us to conserve are painful reminders that we should have paid attention in class. But we didn't.

So what is the lesson to taken from this historical review? That we must now do something? No, I think not, that would be to repeat the mistake, for the second part of the lesson is that we simply don't learn. We have the intellectual ability to handle this mess. But the painful lesson is that we simply do not learn. We don't want to face the fact that cheap oil is gone, it is much more convenient to blame someone else be it Carter, OPEC, Chavez, BP or Obama. We never want to blame ourselves, which inhibits our ability to change. That is the second lesson.

Because of this second lesson there is nothing to do on the cultural scale. But there may be things that we can, individually and as small groups, do on the human scale. Think of it as similar to walking on a beach and seeing the water pull back, way back, exposing the bottom and stranding fish. The awake and aware person knows that this portends a Tsunami and will head for the hills, literally. It might still be a little early to start running, but it is not too early to look at a map and think things out, to have a plan.

Cheers,
Howard Peer

Jewish Dialogue Group

Society members and friends participated last spring in this organized conversation about the Israel-Palestine conflict and the process will continue starting on August 23rd. The Jewish Dialogue Group, a nonpartisan grassroots organization based in Philadelphia, provides carefully structured, facilitated dialogue sessions. We do this in conjunction with Leyv Ha-Ir, the Reconstruction Synagogue that uses our building. Members who have already signed up are reminded of the dates and time: Monday, August 23; Monday, October 4; and Monday, October 25, 6:30 PM.



October 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> 1:30 PM Introduction to Ethical Humanism	4 6:30 PM Jewish Dialogue Group	5	6 6:30 PM Education Committee 7:30 PM Ethical Action Committee	7	8	9 10:00 AM Members Conflict Resolution Workshop 1
10 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u>	11	12 7:00 PM Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty	13 6:30 PM Finance Committee	14	15	16
17 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u>	18	19 7:30 Worldly Wisdom Class	20 6:30 PM Executive Committee 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	21	22	23 10:00 AM Members Conflict Resolution Workshop 2
24 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u>	25 6:30 PM Jewish Dialogue Group	26	27 7:00 PM Camp Linden Board of Trustees at the Society	28 7:00 PM Amnesty International	29	30
31 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u>						

Happy October Birthdays to:

Dr. Jeffrey Dubb on the 5th
Doris Leicher on the 14th
and
David Collier on the 16th

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Philadelphia Ethical Society

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Flower Dedications

- David Ralston, Chair

October 3 - Nick Sanders: In
celebration of nine fine years of
marriage to Molly.

October 10 - Susan Jo D'Alessio: The
Ethical Society and a new year.

October 17 - Doris Leicher: To
celebrate the birth of me and my twin
sister.

October 24 - Ken Greiff: In
celebration of United Nations Day.

October 31 - Richard Kiniry: In
dedication to my Aunt Mary Hagan.

Ushers - Betsy Lightbourn, Chair

To be announced in the Sunday
programs

Greeters - Ken Greiff, Chair

October 3 - Nick Sanders

Other Sunday greeters to be
announced in the Sunday programs

Coffee Hour Lunch

October 3 - Group A-D

October 10 - Group E-K

October 17 - Group L-O

October 24 - Group P-Z

October 31 - Members in above
groups that did not participate
earlier.

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