



Ethical Views

February 2005 Vol. 119, No. 6 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

February Platforms

Sunday, February 6

Platform: Leader Richard Kiniry asks, "Were the Beatles Right about Love?" We can all say lovely things about love, Richard points out — as the Beatles did when they sang "All you need is love" — but as a universal value, love is often more rhetoric than reality. If "love makes the world go round," how fast is your world spinning? Richard invites us to take a personal journey through love..

Sunday, February 13

Platform: We celebrate our *Love Festival* with a concert by The Philadelphia Doctors' Chamber Orchestra, a nonprofit organization made up of approximately 40 volunteer musicians whose mission is to present and perpetuate symphonic music for the community. The orchestra was founded and is conducted by Dr. Fawzi Habboushe, a general and thoracic surgeon. Members of the orchestra — many of them medical professionals — come from many diverse backgrounds and are united by a love of music.

Sunday, February 20

Platform: Robert Berson, Leader of the Ethical Society of Northern Westchester, with a private practice in clinical psychology in New York City, will speak on the topic "*Reflections on the Concept of Worth.*" Reminding us that Ethical Culture affirms the dignity and worth of every human being, he asks how we can think about this central concept of "worth." Speaking from the perspective of the philosophic tradition of pragmatism, he will speak about the necessity, usefulness, and experiential confirmation of the idea of worth.

Sunday, February 27

Platform: Fritz Williams, Leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society, will speak on the topic, "*A Living Faith.*" Attempting to liberate faith from its escapist bondage to supernatural beliefs, he proposes a new and more dynamic definition that grounds faith in our real-life experiences and responses and weaves these humble raw materials into a transformative commitment to making something of our lives. Real faith, he says, is realistic and adventurous, rational and visionary. ◇



Frequent PES visitor, **Bernice Schermer**, will play violin in the concert to be performed by The Philadelphia Doctors' Chamber Orchestra on February 13th at the Society.

**Platforms at 11:00AM, Sundays
Coffee Hour & Discussion
follow the Platforms.**

**Musical interludes performed by
Pianist Tim Ribchester.**

**Childcare provided at no charge.
All are welcome!**

BRING OUT THE BEST IN YOUR CHILDREN

Children don't become good people without working at it. The Philadelphia Ethical Society offers an Ethics for Children program that encourages an open search for personal values.

- Age appropriate curriculum
- Community service opportunities
- Arts and crafts
- Workshops for parents: discipline, dealing with aggression, sex, bullies
- Child-care offered for infants & tots
- *Sundays at 10:45 A.M.

For information call
(215) 735-3456

FEBRUARY ACTIVITIES

Sunday, February 13 at 1:30 p.m. (snow date: February 20, same time). Helen Mullen, former Free Library of Philadelphia's Coordinator of the Office of Work with Children will lead a discussion about "*Choosing and Enjoying Books for Children.*" What are the criteria that professionals use in determining age- and value-appropriateness? Join parents, grandparents, and others who care about children for an engrossing session.

Love Party, Friday, February 18, 7:00 p.m. Join us for our annual Service Auction and a celebration of love, our guiding principle. Valentine's Day inspires us with thoughts of pink and red—rose and chocolates—expressions of love. Why not write a small poem to someone or something you love and come to sign up for various services offered by our members? \$5 if you bring a dish to share, \$10 if not.

Sunday, February 27, 1:30 p.m. Fritz Williams, Leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society and the recipient of many awards (including two Emmys) for his educational programs, will lead a discussion of "*Stories for Our Children and the Child in All of Us.*" The Baltimore Society has a long-standing tradition of reading a story for the children near the beginning of every meeting. One time when it was Fritz's turn to read a story, instead of hunting for a book, he told a story of his own, from a kid's point of view. This has turned out to be a powerful inter-generational connection.



Leader's Message

What Next?

by Richard Kiniry

What next? It seems that we are living in a constant crisis mode with one political or natural disaster quickly following another. For centuries people have been saying that the world is getting smaller. We may have arrived now at a new plateau of that feeling. Reality far and near is crashing into our collective consciousness. This new recognition of world reality seems to have been brought on, at least partly, by the challenge posed by the rest of the world. They are tired of the richest, most powerful nation pretending it lives inside Disney World, far away from the world's problems.

After the train bombing in Madrid last year, Arnold Fishman forwarded me an email that pointed out the difference in response to that terror attack and to the September 11 attacks. After September 11, 2001, in every capital in Europe hundreds of thousand of people marched to express their supportive solitary with the United States. After the Madrid attack a few hundred New Yorkers gathered at the UN.

On December 26th of last year, I watched the late-night news after hearing of the tsunami disaster in the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean. I expected news of this major disaster. What I got were reports of a possible half inch of snow, a baggage pileup at the airport, the death of a football player and then, oh yes, thousands of people are dead in Asia. Only after dramatic pictures arrived did it become big news. And after it was pointed out that President Bush

planned on sending for tsunami relief an amount that was only a fraction of what we spend in one day on war in Iraq did America get on board.

Americans usually do a good job of ignoring death, disease and poverty around the world but I think that is changing. It has become clear that the massacre in Rwanda could have been prevented, and although the tsunami has driven genocide in Darfur off the front page, the problems in Africa, from Aids to genocide, have become part of our consciousness.

It may appear that the triumphant right wing has convinced the people to ignore the problems of others — be they lazy, immoral Americans or heathen foreigners — but the inherent goodness of people may turn around that approach. Our military forces, who are trained to kill, are now seen as lifesavers in Indonesia. The temerity of UN officials calling America stingy seems to have encouraged ordinary people to say, “that may be true of our government but not of us.” The contrast between the many billions necessary to fight an unprovoked war in Iraq to the power of a few billions to recreate people's lives gets people thinking. With the money we are wasting killing Iraqis, we could have paid to have every single one of them go out of the country on vacation while we strolled in to arrest Saddam Hussein. With the 2004 election over, the necessity to protect positions has passed and that leaves space for Americans to acknowledge the pain of their fellow human beings around the world. They may be able now to hear the frustration of the rest of the world. In a sense, the world is asking, “where are those American values we hear so much about?” and we can only hope that Americans are starting to listen. Of course, we could help by reminding our fellow citizens that this is the United States — a collection of peoples. We are an open-ended country, held together not so much by our borders as by our commitment to the worth and dignity of every individual. We are not a genetic nationality. What makes America

both dangerous and remarkable is that on some level the promise of America is that every human being is and should be an American. <>

CLASS CONTINUES

History of Ethics will start again on Thursday, February 17 at 7:30p.m. This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history and for the remainder of this year we will be discussing Philip Price's view after reading his book, *Knowledge of Good and Evil*.



President's Message

by Howard Peer

February, the time of taxes, gloom, and reconciliation. Actually, we have closed out the old year in pretty good shape. Our finances are a little weak and we will have to adjust our endowment investments to pick up some more cash flow. We also have to make some improvements/repairs to the building, exit signs, 2nd floor ceiling, and the like. Still, while things are not perfect, they are not bad and could be a lot worse. And I'm happy to announce we closed the year welcoming a new member, **Adam Pine**.

For me, January and February are months of looking forward and planning. And so it is with the Ethical Society. A lot of our planning for the upcoming year revolves around our

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President's Message (Continued)

budget. Shortly we will be having our Pledge Campaign luncheon. I urge you to start thinking now about how important the Ethical Society is to you and how much support you can contribute.

John Hartman, AEU Executive Director, has sent us his thanks for hosting the Planning Committee between December 9 and 12. He also noted that the Committee of 50 was eventually oversubscribed and ended up collecting over \$35,000 in much-needed funds. He extends his most sincere gratitude to all those who participated.

In the past year, among other things, the AEU approved a resolution opposing the U.S. War against Iraq and — working with an AEU affiliate, the National Service Conference — endorsed the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. By the way, in December the PES Board voted to join the National Service Conference as a group at the rate of \$5.00 per member (individuals pay \$20.00 each to join).

I personally wish to thank all PES members for giving so generously to the tsunami victims. In one Sunday alone we collected some \$1,200 that was given to Oxfam.

And back in October we took up collections for the Robert Morris Charter School, whose Principal sent us this letter of appreciation:

Dear Ms. Bradley,

On behalf of the students and staff of the Robert Morris Charter School, I would like to thank the Ethical Society of Philadelphia for the generous donation. These funds have been earmarked for the purchase of books for our upper grade classes.

The students, parents and staff appreciate your ongoing support to our school.

Sincerely,

Ruth E. King, Principal

Gladys Huber is at Virtua Rehabilitation Center in Mt. Holly, recovering from a fractured shoulder and doing quite well. See Richard,

Jean, or me for her phone number there.

Remember that we will have our **Annual Service Auction** on **February 18** at 7:00 pm. We are looking for a volunteer to organize the event. We also need each of you to volunteer some service. This is our primary fund raiser and we need everyone's support to make it successful.

Last month I mentioned that a former member gave us some burial plots in a lovely suburban cemetery. A couple of them have been sold but we still have about six left. We would be willing to part with these for a very reasonable price. They could make a unique Valentine's Day present to your loved one, ensuring eternal togetherness. Contact Richard, Jean, or me if you have any interest.

Platform Summaries

On **November 21**, Margaret Downey, founder of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia and tireless advocate for anti-discrimination laws, humanitarian lifestyles, and the preservation of the wall between church and state, spoke on the topic "Planting the Seeds of Freethought." Twelve green boxes supporting seed packets, one for each month, were lined up along the front of the stage. Each one represented the celebration of a humanistic idea or freethinking person. For instance, the January box was dedicated to celebrating revolutionary thinker Thomas Paine, February was dedicated to Charles Darwin, March to Albert Einstein, and so on. Ms. Downey will happily advise energetic gardeners willing to fertilize seeds already planted or interested in planting those not yet begun. Perhaps instead of celebrating holidays that glorify war and the slaughtering of native populations, we can make Humanist traditions flower.

— *Temma Fishman*



Candlelight Service photos
by Carol Love



On **December 19**, a multitude of candles glowed among the greens and poinsettia that provided a warm, welcoming, and anticipatory environment for our celebration of the Winter Solstice. Led by Richard Kiniry, this festival of lights, inspirational music, poetry, and prose evoked our appreciation for nature in all its aspects and our longings for warmth, light, and community during this season of long nights and short days. Pianist Tim Ribchester harmonized with the beauty of the surroundings with exquisitely rendered selections from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*. Members and friends of the Society lit candles and read poetry and prose from a variety of writers including Chuang Tze, the Talmud, Felix Adler, Algernon Black, former PES leader Judith Eckerson, Albert Camus, and James Baldwin.

— *Betsy Lightbourn*

On **December 26**, Richard Kiniry led a well-attended colloquy in which members and newcomers considered the true meaning of generosity and the many ways it is expressed. In this season which links generosity to materialism, we reached for higher ground. Inspired by readings and stirring music, we considered the

(Continued next page)

Platform Summaries (Continued)

essence of giving and its effect on ourselves and those we care about. We chose to share our thoughts or remain silent, so as to ponder the question, "When are you being generous?" Giving can cause pain when we worry about whether we gave enough or too much. We may also feel disappointment that we didn't receive what we think we deserve. But giving can bring great pleasure in our appreciation of what we and others have given. Generosity has many forms, but, as with the rest of life, we decide what it means.

— *Temma Fishman*

January 2 was the annual Memorial Day at the Ethical Society, dedicated not only to remembering our relationships with those in the Society and our families who have died during the past year, but also to commemorating how interconnected our lives are with one another. Richard Kiniry began by calling attention to how the great tragedy of the South Asian earthquake and resultant tsunami has raised awareness of our global interconnectedness. We collected over \$1000 to contribute in the name of PES to relief work. Richard and others then recalled aspects of the lives of the three PES members who died during 2004: Selma Toth, Elizabeth Goldsmith, and Eli Shneyer. In addition, Richard reminded us of the deaths of Harry Thorn's mother, Emily, who served from 1976 to 1984 as director of the AEU's efforts to build Sunday school programs in Ethical Societies around the country, and Lester Mondale, who was a leader of the PES and was the last of the Ethical Society leaders to have signed all three Humanist Manifestos. Many others present recalled deceased loved ones who had made a great impact on their lives.

— *Nick Sanders*

January 9: In "Poetry as Dialogue: Hunting is Not Those Heads on the

Wall," Dr. Lyle Murley, member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society and Professor Emeritus of English at California Lutheran University, asserted that when you read poetry, self-interest fades as you engage with the poet in a dialogue in which you feel with intensity the passion the poet tries to convey. This dialogue creates a rare relationship and something new for you, the reader. He showed the powerful emotions poetry can elicit by reading excerpts from Wallace Stevens, Adrienne Rich, Dylan Thomas, Langston Hughes, and others.



Lyle Murley during a platform talkback.

As Dr. Murley pointed out, "Emotions are part of a system of ethical reasoning." He closed with these words from Audre Lorde: "Poetry as illumination [...] as knowledge, births understanding. [...] It is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It is poetry which gives us the courage to see, to feel, to speak, to dare."

— *Temma Fishman*

<>



Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

--Rachel Carson

Sunday Morning Volunteers

Ushers - Saul Machles, Chair

Rick Zorger, Richard Kiniry, Saul Machles and Joe Monte

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

February 6 From Ken Greiff in honor of Pauxsutawney Phil & groundhogs everywhere. May spring come soon, and if it must snow, let it be enough to close the schools!

February 13 From Betsy Lightbourn in loving memory of her mother Marion Valentine Lightbourn.

February 20 From Jean Bradley in memory of her sister Ruth & her brother Raymond.

February 27 From Madeline Suringar in honor of Selma Toth.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

February 6 Saul Machles

February 13 Janice Moore

February 20 Temma Fishman

February 27 Saul Machles

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

February 6 Doris Leicher

February 13 Ellen Rose

February 20 Carol Love

February 27 Harry Thorn

Coffee Hour Lunch

February 6 Howard Peer & Doris Leicher

February 13 Jean Bradley

February 20 Ken Greiff & Janice Moore

February 27 T.B.A.

Service is the rent we pay to be living. It is the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time.

--Marian Wright Edelman

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 5

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 <u>Meeting</u> 7:30 PM Camp Linden Board of Trustees at the Society	3  Arnold Fishman	4	5
6 11 AM <u>Platform</u> <i>"Were the Beatles Right about Love?"</i>	7	8	9 <u>Meetings</u> 6:30 PM Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM Education Committee	10	11	12
13 11 AM <u>Platform</u> ♥Love Festival♥ with concert <i>(See additional parking below)</i> 1:30PM Discussion <i>"Choosing and Enjoying Books for Children"</i>	14 7:30PM Weston Rm. Intro to Ethical Humanism	15	16 <u>Meetings</u> 6:30 PM Executive Committee 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	17 7:30PM Weston Rm. <u>Class History of Ethics</u>	18 ♥7:00PM Love Party♥ and Service Auction♥	19
20 11 AM <u>Platform</u> <i>"Reflections on the Concept of Worth"</i>	21	22	23	24	25	26
27 11 AM <u>Platform</u> <i>"A Living Faith"</i> 1:30PM Discussion <i>"Stories for Our Children and the Child in All of Us"</i>	28					 Birthdays

Additional Parking for our Love Festival – Sunday, February 13th

The parking lot next to Barnes and Noble on Walnut St. is offering PES attendees a reduced parking fee of \$9 per car on Feb.13, the day of our Love Festival. We are anticipating that perhaps the free street parking may get used up if we have a large turn-out. The agent for the Philadelphia Doctors' Orchestra (performing at our platform for the Festival) is inviting about 55 people.

In order to get this reduced rate, those parking there must present a stamped ticket to the parking attendant when returning to get their cars. We will stamp their tickets at the PES , but people must bring their parking ticket to us when coming in for the platform.

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Philadelphia Ethical Society

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for Ethical Action Committee

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Community Committee

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Growth Committee

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A platform talkback in the Weston Room

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