

Ethical Views

February 2006 Vol. 120, No. 6 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

February Platforms

Sunday, February 5

Platform: Our leader **Richard Kiniry** will talk to us about our own *Personal Ethics*. Our everyday actions not only say who we are but also affect others. We can spend so much time checking our own feelings that our affect on others goes unrecognized. Would you actually want to see yourself as others see you?

Sunday, February 12

Love Festival

Is love in the eye of the beholder? Let's find out. Members and friends are encouraged to speak of or display their love for the people, places and things in their lives.

Sunday, February 19

Platform: **David Adler**, the communications coordinator at The Food Trust, will give a talk entitled *Building a Healthy Food System*. Food, its production and consumption, cuts across many of society's most pressing public concerns. Mr. Adler will tell us how he works with local, sustainable farmers to support agriculture practices that promote the health of the land as well as people. He will also explain efforts to educate the public at large and school students in particular about nutrition and increase access to fresh food through farmers' markets, supermarkets, and school beverage and food reform. Mr. Adler holds a bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College and a master's degree in Jewish studies from the University of Oxford.

Sunday, February 26

Platform: Two speakers, **Larry Angert** and **Alan Silverblatt**, will speak about *Humanistic Jews: One Segment of the Ethical Humanist Population*. Both speakers are ethnically Jewish. Each have found in Humanistic Judaism, an intellectually honest way to express

themselves. Humanistic Judaism, founded in 1969 by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, is a relatively recent addition to the wide array of Jewish denominations. Its adherents affirm that the power to achieve meaningful and ethical lives lies within ourselves, through our actions and the actions of others, independent of any supernatural authority. Humanistic Jews choose to conduct their religious lives in the context of the Jewish people rather than in a purely secular milieu. <



Leader's Message

Standing Up For Love

by Richard Kiniry

Ethical Humanism tends to be a religion that is worn lightly. With little dogma, we are more an approach to living than a tight, controlling system. We also have trouble taking the dogmatic conflicts within other religions seriously. We tend to believe that most other religions don't make sense and as a result we take a laissez-faire attitude towards their internal arguments. We say, "let those people do their own thing."

Well, maybe we should look more closely. We have a world-view that makes sense, at least to us; other traditional religions posit a world-view that seems irrational, at least to us. But beyond those world-views are actions. Accompanying our world-view is the expectation that we act with love and respect for all the life around us, and we share that expectation with some traditional religious groups. One of the sayings that Felix Adler left to us is, "Deed before Creed." Although I believe creed can significantly change our deeds, the way people relate to other human beings and to life is more important than the supposed theory of any particular religion.

Recently, a controversy developed over the new television show "The Book of Daniel." The religious right considers the show to be disrespectful of Jesus and wants it off television. So, I had to see it and although I found it mildly entertaining, I understand their problem. Everyone in the show's extended family is breaking one of the Commandments and Jesus, a regular member of the cast, is understanding of all this human folly. A local television station interviewed people with different perspectives on the controversy and one woman in all seriousness said, "This isn't Jesus. It is more the anti-Christ. Jesus judges and condemns sin. This is a loving Jesus who forgives people". I guess that was not unexpected but I couldn't believe my ears. She was denying a loving, merciful Jesus for a wrathful Jesus.

That is only one of many current examples of the negative interpretations of the Christian message being used to police our cultural life. Rather than sitting back and just watching this internal conflict over the Christian message, we can do our small part. Whether Jesus was a historic figure or a fictional character, there is no denying that the Jesus of the Gospels is a special person. He speaks of turning the other cheek and loving your neighbor as yourself. He hangs out with the workers, the poor, prostitutes. He says the rich are going to have a nearly impossible chance of getting into heaven. In other words, that message is so much ours that we ought to stand up for that approach when the opportunity offers.

What might be called the battle for Jesus is also our fight. Our small group is part of a bigger struggle - will respect and caring be the expectation that directs our cultural life? We can do our part by pointing out to family, friends and total strangers the hate and meanness of that wrathful Jesus approach. We can challenge governmental policy not from

(Continued next page)

(Leader's Message continued)

a political position but from the moral position that we share with other religious groups. We can encourage the loving, humanistic side of Christianity by cooperating with Christian Churches in their programs that help the poor and fight injustice.<

Our hearts and minds are with: Adam Pine and Lew Wilkinson, for speedy recoveries from their recent surgeries. Lew would welcome a phone call or visit, but limit your get-well wishes for Adam to a card. Call Richard Kiniry for more information.



President's Message

by Howard Peer

Dear Members,

The December Board meeting was a very busy and productive meeting despite not having much on the annual agenda. Below you will find some notes on items of interest. Also, we are planning for our Service Auction on February 17. I've included some ideas on how to make this more successful. But first I would like to note that Lew Wilkinson was once again unable to attend due to a medical issue. We miss Lew's presence on the Board and wish him a speedy and complete recovery. Lew, you are missed.

Jean alerted us that our electric service from the Energy Cooperative of Pennsylvania is going to increase by 67% beginning this January (8.99 cents/kWh to 15.09 cents/kWh. This will result in an average bill going from \$793.64 to \$1,125.26 or an increase of nearly \$4,000 per year. This, obviously is not good news. Jean will seek to get quotes from other suppliers. Please let her know if you have information on a viable and reasonably priced alternative.

Our Camp Linden Caretaker, Lew Buckingham, will be out of the country for a while in February. In his absence,

we could use a few good people to run out to Camp Linden to check up on things. It's not a bad duty, a nice drive and a peaceful walk in the quiet woods. Please let Saul know if you can help out.

As I write this, the Alito confirmation hearings have just begun. By the time you read this you will likely know the outcome. None-the-less you should know that Bob Moore presented a position statement crafted by the EAC to the Board. The statement noted our concurrence with the position of other notable organizations in opposing Mr. Alito's appointment to the Supreme Court. The resolution was adopted by the Board with minor changes. The letter will be sent to Senators Specter and Santorum.

Planning work on the handicapped ramp is progressing. Like all things in a bureaucracy we need to process all the necessary paper work. Our Architect, Charles Loomis, has been researching various zoning and permitting issues before completing the design. So far, so good. I'll keep reporting as work progresses.

Over the years, our Service Auction has evolved to be our single largest fund raising event. It is traditionally held in February and this year we have tied it to the Valentine's Day Party, both scheduled for Friday, February 17 at 7:00 PM. Carole Erb has graciously volunteered to be our impresario and is arranging an "ALL CHOCOLATE" evening. Sounds yummy. Now a good service auction requires good services. Bob and Temma will be collecting service sign up sheets describing what you will be auctioning. No sheet? No problem! Just drop one of them a quick email with the particulars of what you will be offering. Of course the big problem with a Service Auction is trying to think of something that we can provide that people will be willing to buy. And that can be difficult.

OK, now listen up, here's the idea. We have to come up with both things/services to sell AND things/services to BUY! Selling lots of good stuff is no good if nobody wants to buy what we are selling. Right?

So I am suggesting that we think not only about things that we will sell, but

things that we would BUY! So, for example, let's say I want to learn Spanish. So I put out a BID to buy Spanish lessons. \$10 each for 10 Spanish lessons. Or, maybe I'm going away on vacation for a couple of weeks and I need someone to sit my cat. So I put out a BID to have someone sit my cat for a couple of weeks for \$50 bucks. Or, how about a "Surprise Birthday Cake"? Let's say I would like a Carrot Cake with cream cheese icing for a birthday cake. The deal is I want it to be a "surprise." So, for \$35 you agree to give me my "Surprise Birthday Cake" sometime in the next year - you pick the day. I'll forget about it and some day I'll come home and "surprise!" There will be this wonderful cake to make my day. Hint, hint, wink, wink. <

We welcome new member, **Marvin Liebman**, who has visited often, in the company of member **Irene Putzer**.



Platform Summary

On Dec. 11, member **Doris Leicher** spoke about the biological origins of ethics. Biology, she said, can serve as a bridge between the hard sciences and the social sciences since social behavior emerges in all species. Social needs are nearly as basic as other survival needs, and loyalty to others or to a group sometimes takes precedence over other survival needs. Solidarity and friendship can be our strongest motives. Likewise, a child's social learning and cognitive development is greatly influenced by the parents' ability to acknowledge their child's feelings and intentions. Social attachment determines the child's ability to develop as an individual and to develop emotionally.

So social behavior and ethics develop together, in individuals and in societies that survive. These developing processes emerge in biology, evolution, and society in general, and in each, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. These processes also favor adaptation. Successful living requires continual interaction and change. If we are too proud of ourselves and refuse to change, we can harm ourselves and others. Just so, our self-awareness requires social participation to see oneself reflected in the reactions of others.
- **Harry Thorn**



THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

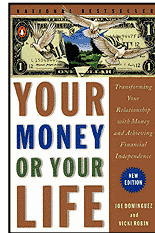
This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history. Presently we are discussing Peter Singer's book, **Practical Ethics** (available in paperback and on line).

Third **Thursday** of the month, **February 16, 7:30 PM**

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

In an age of materialism and consumption as a way of life, we are forced to question our own lifestyles. Being ethical no longer means just being honest and good-hearted. How do the choices we make effect the earth and the billions of people living in poverty? If you are interested in making your life more environmentally friendly and socially responsible, this is the group for you. At this stage of our study, we are discussing the practical financial ideas found in the book, **Your Money or Your Life** by Joe Dominques and Vicki Robin.

Fourth **Wednesday** of the month, **February 22, 7:30 PM**



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!



GET TO KNOW US SOCIAL
Wednesday
February 1st
7:30 PM



Adopt a Director!

For the weekend of March 10th, that is. After that, you'll have to give him (or her) back. The Philadelphia Ethical Society is hosting the American Ethical Union, and some members of the AEU Board of Directors need home hospitality for Friday and Saturday nights. Take one (or two) into your home and enjoy getting to know some really interesting and dedicated people. If you can spare some space for a friend of Ethical Culture, let Arnold Fishman know.



Remember the date!
Friday, March 10th at 7:00 PM, the Philadelphia Ethical Society is hosting the AEU Board of Directors at a **potluck dinner** prepared by the loving hands of friends. Enjoy the delicious food and interesting conversation as you get to know the Ethical Culture volunteers who serve Societies all over the country. Find out about the nationwide Ethical Culture Movement. Want to make something special for this event? Contact Temma Fishman at temmafish@aol.com, or call the PES office at 215-735-3456.





Love Thy Neighbor!

Take part in our Annual Fabulous Fundraising Service Auction, to be held on Friday, February 17 at 7:30 p.m. While enjoying the decadent desserts for chocoholics and others at our Just Desserts Valentine's Party, you'll be able to sign up for exciting events of your choice. Maybe you'd like a fun-filled evening at someone's home, a thrilling Phillies game, a Sing Along, delicious pies and cakes, a Dim-Sum lunch, an African dinner or any number of other scintillating treats. Enjoy great food and company while helping to raise a little money for the Society. Care to host an event or offer a service? You can offer one until Feb.15. For more information, email Temma Fishman (temmafish@aol.com), Bob Moore (bobmoore@verizon.net) or philaes@prodigy.net. Or just call the Society at 215-735-3456.

NOT JUST FOR COUPLES! ♥♥♥

Everyone is invited to join us on Friday evening, February 17th, for a night of decadent chocolate delights and dancing. The Festivities will begin at 7:30, during the silent Service Auction. Please let Carole Erb know if you are planning to attend and what delicious chocolate treat you will be bringing to share. Suggestions include: cakes, cookies, candies, mousse, chocolate covered pretzels or nuts, ice creams, puddings, There will also be some healthier treats for those who don't eat chocolate. Come dance to the romantic songs of Michael Crawford, Kenny Rogers, Frank Sinatra, Rod Stewart and many others...and wear something red!!! You can email Carole at: carjam60@aol.com or call her at home: 215-321-1977. There is no fee for this event if you bring something and feel free to bring some guests, too.

February 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 GET TO KNOW US SOCIAL 7:30 PM	2	3  Arnold Fishman	4
5 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Richard Kiniry <i>Personal Ethics</i>	6	7	8 <u>Meetings</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 PM-Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM-Education Committee	9	10	11
12 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> <i>Love Festival</i>	13	14	15 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	16 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM History of Ethics	17	18
19 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> David Adler <i>Building a Healthy Food System</i>	20 <u>Meeting</u> 7:30 PM Camp Linden Board at Dr. Carol Love's home	21	22 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Voluntary Simplicity	23	24	25
26 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Larry Angert and Alan Silverblatt <i>Humanistic Jews: One Segment of the Ethical Humanist Population</i>	27	28				 Birthdays

MY ETHICAL CULTURE

Each Sunday there is time during the Platform for "My Ethical Culture". This is a space (3 to 5 minutes) for members to offer their personal take on Ethical Humanism's approach to life. On Sundays when we don't have a personal version from one of you, we find an inspiring quote. If you are interested in presenting your version of "My Ethical Culture," speak to Richard and he will find a date for you.

Note: Come to Richard's platform on February 5th for a better understanding of personal ethics.

Like many Americans, the Philadelphia Ethical Society had serious doubts about the confirmation of Judge Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court. Before the Judiciary Committee hearings on the nomination, the Society's Ethical Action Committee and its Board of Trustees voted to send a letter to Judiciary Committee Chairman Senator Arlen Specter stating our doubts about Alito's judicial and philosophical record.

The subsequent Judiciary Committee hearings, while polite, did not seem to honestly reveal Alito beliefs in a way that was consistent with his previous statements and actions. They did not change our minds about him. At press time, we do not know whether Alito was confirmed, but the sentiments in the Society's letter to Specter accurately express our doubts about the direction of the Supreme Court if Alito is confirmed.



ETHICAL ACTION REPORT

The Philadelphia Ethical Society collected \$222 from members and friends for Oxfam's Fast Day. We contributed the money saved by giving up one meal.

On Saturday, December 3, **Saul Machles** represented the Society at the Sunoco Hydrogen Fluoride Neighborhood Education Campaign by visiting many homes in the area of the Sunoco refinery to discuss and hand out information about hydrogen fluoride, a deadly chemical used by the company in the processing of fuel. The PES, as well as other organizations, is urging Sunoco to adopt safer alternatives.

Philadelphia Ethical Society leader **Richard Kiniry** and member **Henry Pashkow** participated in the demonstration against the death penalty on December 7. It was organized by PA Abolitionists United Against the Death Penalty and was held to mark the 1000th execution in the United States since the death penalty's reenactment.

On December 12, **Ellen Rose** and **Temma Fishman** joined hundreds of anti-war protestors outside the Bellevue Hotel where President Bush was promoting his Iraqi war agenda to the World Affairs Council.

The Trinity Church men's shelter program is humming along smoothly due to the dedicated efforts of member **Judith Will**. Philadelphia Ethical Society members and friends provide meals to homeless men the first Sunday of the month at the 22nd and Spruce Streets facility. In December, newcomers **Amy Fitzgerald** and **Margo Rosenblatt** cooked and served the dinner. As **Jean Bradley** said, "Saul and I did the winter shelter on January 1. The men were happy that someone was there to greet them on New Year's Day and enjoyed the lasagna, meatballs and especially the Caesar's salad. Judith invited us to her house afterwards for dinner as a holiday thank you. We didn't need to be thanked but were happy to accept the invitation. We had a great afternoon and evening. Thank you Judith for pulling this together each month with such grace and style!" Members **Terry Martin-Murley** and **Lyle Murley** have signed up to provide dinner for the men on the first Sunday in February. Those who participate find it to be a richly rewarding experience.

We collected donations of scarves, hats, mittens, books, and toys for the children of the Robert Morris Charter School.

A STATEMENT ON THE NOMINATION OF SAMUEL ALITO TO THE SUPREME COURT

As a humanist religious fellowship, the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) is continually concerned with the effects of political and judicial decisions on the freedoms and rights of the American people. After reading reports from many sources on the judicial philosophy, past decisions and public comments of Samuel Alito, we must express our misgivings concerning his nomination to the Supreme Court. We feel we must speak out because our home Senator, Arlen Specter, is chairperson of the Judicial Committee that will conduct the confirmation hearings; and because our city is the birthplace of the Constitution.

The PES notes that three organizations we respect — the Union for Reform Judaism, the Unitarian Universalist Association, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State — have taken the unusual step of announcing their opposition to the nominee even before the Senate hearings on that nomination have begun. These groups' individual decisions to oppose Alito before the hearings begin were not taken lightly; they follow up on much study.

Those three groups have thoroughly studied Alito's record as it pertains to civil rights, constitutional liberties, separation of church and state, reproductive freedom, police power, and public access to legal remedies. We attach great weight to their research.

Therefore:

The PES calls on our Senator Specter to conduct the hearings so they allow full discussion of the issues that these three groups have identified and to ensure that we find out the nominee's stance on these issues. There is no need for haste in making this decision.

And we join with these three groups in their call for opposition to Judge Alito. We will revisit this position after Alito's hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Committee, in case anything that transpires therein should cause us to reconsider our opposition to him.

-- The Philadelphia Ethical Society

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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Chair

Rick Zorger, Richard Kiniry, Joe
Monte, Saul Machles and John Hall

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

February 5 - Jim Cummings in honor of
his brothers & sister, Charles, Russell,
and Elestina.

February 12 - Howard Peer: To my
lovely wife Doris on Valentine's Day.

February 19 - Bob Kay in honor of
Kathy Kay.

February 26 - Janice Moore in honor
of her father's birthday on the 29th.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

February 5 Saul Machles
February 12 Temma Fishman
February 19 Saul Machles
February 26 Ken Greiff

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

February 5 Doris Leicher
February 12 Ken Greiff
February 19 Pat Leopold
February 26 Harry Thorn

Coffee Hour Lunch

February 5 Doris Leicher and
Howard Peer
February 12 Jean Bradley
February 19 Ken Greiff and
Janice Moore
February 26 To be announced

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