



Ethical Views

January 2002

Vol. 116, No. 5

Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Sunday, January 6

Colloquy: *Acceptance*

**Platform: Richard Kiniry, Leader,
Philadelphia Ethical Society**

Memorial Sunday

We are starting a new tradition. For the second year, the first Sunday of the new year is being set aside to remember those who have died but who remain part of our lives. We honor their memories and remember how important they were to us. Members and friends are invited to share good memories of loved ones.

Sunday, January 13

Colloquy: *Appreciation*

**Platform: Roger Allen, Ph.D.,
Professor of Arabic,
University of Pennsylvania
*Plurality in the Countries
of Northwest Africa***

There are several languages spoken in NW Africa. And there are many young men and women who travel to Europe for their education. All have to decide what language and what culture to adopt. One group has chosen to occupy a central space that unites European and African cultures. Professor Allen's perspective takes us over the straits from Spain to Islam and the Arab world of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.

Professor Allen was born in England and earned his Doctorate at Oxford. He came to Philadelphia in 1968 where he has lived ever since. He is the author of several books including The Arabic Novel, 1982, 1995 and The Arabic Literary Heritage, 1998. As a result of his work as a translator he became the nominator of Nobel Prize winner Naquib Mahfouz.

Sunday, January 20

Colloquy: *Beauty*

**Platform: Rebecca Kochman,
Director, Interac Senior Center**

Aging: Thoughts on My

Professional and Personal Life

Rebecca will discuss how her work with older adults and her experience with her own and family's aging inform one another. She will include information about health and housing issues and how our society views older adults

Ms Kochman received her MSW from the University of Pennsylvania. She has worked with older adults for 26 years, for the past 12 years as Director of Interac Senior Center.

Sunday, January 27

Colloquy: *Change*

**Platform: Diana Waters,
Teacher and Facilitator**

Social Inequality:

***Moving from Agent to Ally
and from Victim to Empowered***

This platform will present identity development for members of dominant culture groups who wish to be in alliance with oppressed people and for members of oppressed groups who wish to ally with sensitive members of dominant cultures.

Diana Waters has over 20 years experience as a teacher & facilitator. She has served as Adjunct Faculty at Temple University, facilitated workshops on women's issues for Planned Parenthood, Aldersgate Youth Services, Women Gather Conference and the Philadelphia Public Schools, and performed adolescent peer counseling and parent training. Since 1996 she has worked at HCA, Inc. as Project Director.

Leader's Message

The Winter of Our Discontent

Richard Kiniry

Things are looking bad. We are at war with nameless evil forces; terrorists are threatening our cities and our lives; the economy is in free-fall; jobs are disappearing by the thousands; and to make matters worse the wet and cold of winter have belatedly arrived.

When things are good, we bask in the sunshine and ignore inconsistencies. We may think our economic system is unfair but, when times are good, our complaints fall on deaf ears. Our nation's foreign policy may be supportive of dictators who serve our partisan interests but, if their people put up with the tyranny, what can we do? And in the fine days of summer an inefficient heating system doesn't cross our minds.

Well, the inconsistencies have returned to haunt us. But bad times are also >

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Sunday Platforms 11:00 AM

Colloquies at 9:45 AM

**Colloquies led by Richard Kiniry
and Susan Jo Klein**

**Coffee Hour and Discussion follow
every Platform**

**Musical Interludes performed by
Pianist Jeremy Gill**

**Childcare provided at no charge
during Platforms**

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Leader's Message

Winter of Our Discontent

not the time to rock the boat. The country doesn't want to hear about mistakes in foreign policy in a time of crisis. When the economy is bad, most of us are just happy to have a job. So, no time is a good time to face the inconsistencies of our private and communal lives.

Since there is no good time, maybe this is the time. Emerson said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds . . ." but consistency between the world we want and the world we inhabit is not a foolish wish. Consistency between the value system we claim to hold and the life we are actually living is a lifelong struggle. And the unfulfilled dreams of youth still wait for fulfillment. We may not have the life of our dreams and most of us do settle for a partial version, but there ought to be some consistency between those dreams and the choices we make.

Bad times offer a pause in the triumphant march of the "take-care-of-number-one" approach and we can more candidly admit that although we may have supped at the cup of plenty, we knew there was something wrong all along. It's amazing how dense we humans are. We knew the bad times were a'coming. We knew there were too many inconsistencies, too many people left out of the party. When times are good, we grab onto casual satisfactions and when they tarnish, we imagine a disaster. Times are bad but they were already bad for most people. The land of the free and home of the brave encouraged short-term satisfaction, but bad times can give us a jolt out of illusion and into reality.

Where is happiness? Can we find it in scarcity? Can we embrace scarcity for the sake of others? A lot of people are already out of work and the "welfare-to-work" hoax has dissolved into the

School for Ethics

Get to Know Us Social

Every other month we will offer a casual social event for those who are curious about the Society and its philosophy. Members will share stories of their religious and philosophical journeys and Society leaders will answer your questions. Refreshments Served.

Monday, January 7, 7:30 PM

Defining the Good Life

A monthly discussion about the choices we make. We will discuss big issues like racism, sexism and the environment but also more personal issues like lifestyle choices. We will do this within the context of the Ethical Humanist point of view - an understanding that defining values is an ongoing process. Each month we will have focus on one topic. Participants can offer subjects for upcoming meetings.

Monday, January 21, 7:30 PM

The History and Intellectual Roots of Ethical Culture

This ongoing discussion group offers a philosophic approach to understanding Ethical Humanism. We will examine the varied pieces of the Ethical Humanist Philosophy and explore the open questions. We will use Edward Ericson's book, The Humanist Way, as he places Ethical Culture in the larger history of humanism. We will also use parts of Felix Adler's, An Ethical Philosophy of Life, John Dewey's, A Common Faith and other historic documents of the Ethical Culture Movement.

Final class January 22, 7:30 PM

reality of men women and children with no means of support. Things are looking bad and terrorists aren't our only problem.

Already there is a wild scramble to return to "good times" - economic growth and all our enemies six feet under. Who questions the expediency of secret trials?. The opportunity to face the inconsistencies in our democracy is being avoided. But each of us has a voice. We can be voices crying in the wilderness, reminding ourselves and our communities of the inconsistencies between our noble values and reality. <>

To sit with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute.
But to sit on a hot coal for a minute, it seems like an hour.

That is relativity.
- Albert Einstein

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With Thanks

Arnold Fishman

It is the day after Thanksgiving and I just received an email from a gentleman I met yesterday at the Philadelphia Ethical Society. The Society had opened the building to an animal rights organization which, with the help of PES Associate Zoray Godwin, prepared a truly sumptuous all-vegan feast for the homeless. Temma and I had decided we would help and, to our delight, our children joined us. When we got to the kitchen, there were so many volunteers that we were asked to go into the Assembly Room so that there would be room for them to work. This left us free to socialize.

We started by making sure that everyone was seated comfortably in front of a plate of steaming hot food. Once that was accomplished, my attention was drawn to a table at which there was a spirited conversation in progress. Three men were seated around an eight-person table, so deeply engrossed that they failed to realize that I had joined them. Jerry, an aging white man wearing a fashionable sport jacket, dress shirt open at the neck and an untied necktie worn as a scarf, was holding court. The only hint that something was amiss was that everyone else was wearing sweats and jeans, the ubiquitous uniform of the streets. In retrospect, I noticed that Jerry wore a sweater between his shirt and his jacket to ward off the cold.


It wasn't until I spoke that I was discovered and then it was with a startled look. I was fixed in their gazes like a deer caught in the headlights. It turns out that Jerry was a "job coach" and corrected me when I said he was a "head hunter," as employment counselors are sometimes called. It occurred to me that he couldn't have chosen a better audience than the homeless who, I assume, were also jobless. But on >

the other hand, it didn't look like anyone had the money to pay him a fee.

Tom and Elliott, two black men, were also sitting at the table. We swapped stories and had a grand time. They were articulate and interesting. We engaged in good-natured ribbing and I was impressed with their gentleness, humor and wisdom, especially in the face of their desperate condition. The conversation ranged from politics to philosophy to family. There was so much laughter that Temma joined us and soon the table was filled.

Later, Jerry had to use the men's room and asked that I watch his attache case which, from the looks of it, contained all of his worldly possessions. By the time he returned, I had hidden the case in the kitchen. Jerry was so upset that I had to get it for him immediately in fear that he would suffer a heart attack.

That evening we and the children were attending a conventional eat-a-thon at the home of friends. As we were leaving the Society I said to Temma, "I hope the company tonight is as good as the company we are leaving." It was, but certainly no better.

Why should these people be homeless? Why in this land of plenty should anyone not have a roof over his head? I had wanted to ask them why they were homeless but I didn't have the courage. I was afraid to break the mood. Now I am sorry that I didn't. Maybe next year when we do it again I will actually ask the question. Looking back, it was certainly one of the best Thanksgivings I've ever had. It is the Philadelphia Ethical Society which afforded me the opportunity to do something useful and bring out my best. Thanks 

Community

Lew Wilkinson and Temma Fishman

In his talk, *When Is War Justified*, David McReynolds, longtime peace activist and twotime candidate for President on the Socialist ticket, asserted that no war is justified. In relating the history of our role in Afghanistan, he reminded us of that, "Truth is the first casualty of war."

Afghanistan is a country in which people feel allegiance to their tribe or village, not to a national government. In 1978, much to the surprise of the CIA and the Soviet Union, a Marxist government took control of the country and bestowed women's rights, universal education and other liberal policies.

The Soviets executed the head of the government and a ghastly war ensued. The U.S. aided rebel forces, including Osama Bin Laden, in the fight against Soviet occupation. America was convinced that the devastation of Afghanistan was a small price to pay in its crusade against communism.

Warlords, violence and lawlessness followed until the Taliban took control. Initially this theocracy of mostly students was welcomed because it brought an end to the chaos. But later, it inflicted oppressive laws, forbade the education of girls, required women to wear veils and implemented many other brutal practices. Although we claim to decry these horrendous conditions, Saudi Arabia, our ally, also actively subjugates women..

No Afghani people or aircraft were involved in the September 11 bombings - just Saudis and Egyptians. We bombed Afghanistan because it was hosting Bin Laden. The Taliban asked to see the proof that he was responsible (a reasonable request) but we refused.

Bin Laden was angered originally not >

Sunday Morning Volunteers . .
make Sundays special for all of us.
Call the Chairs to enlist.

Coffee Hour Hosts

Harry Thorn, Chair

January 6 Nancy Freilich
January 13 Saul Machles
January 20 Jean Bradley
January 27 Harry Thorn

Flower Dedications

Selma Toth, Chair

January 6 - Elizabeth Goldsmith, in honor of the wedding anniversary of her parents, Arthur and Marguerite Sessler Goldsmith.
January 13- Doris and Howard Peer, in honor of their anniversary.
January 20 - Elizabeth Goldsmith in loving memory of her father Arthur Goldsmith.
January 27 - Saul Machles, in honor of his sister Libba's birthday.

Greeters

Susan Jo Klein, Chair

January 6 Jeffrey Dubb
January 13 Carol Kaufmann
January 20 Carol Love
January 27 Irene Putzer

Coffee Hour Edibles

January 6 Howard Peer & Doris Leicher
January 13 Temma Fishman
January 20 Jean Bradley
January 27 Susan Jo Klein

Ushers

Rick Zorger, Head Usher
with help from Richard Kiniry & Arnold Fishman



Court alters what state calls religion: Humanist group in Austin wins tax-exempt status reserved for deity-based religious organizations

Ken Herman,
American-Statesman Staff
Thursday, December 20, 2001

A judge in Austin, playing traffic cop at the precarious intersection of church and state, on Wednesday gave the green light for religious tax exemption to a local group that does not require its members to believe in a supreme being.

State District Judge Paul Davis' decision, 11 months after he heard the case brought by the Ethical Society of Austin, said former Comptroller John Sharp erred by denying the exemption to the small group. "The court finds that ESA, in its pursuit of the 'Ethical Ideal,' acts like a traditional religion and functions as a traditional religious organization for its members."

The case is largely a symbolic one. The group owns no property and pays very little in state taxes. Groups that get the religious exemption do not have to pay any levies, including the sales tax and local property taxes.

State Comptroller Carole Rylander, who became the defendant in the case when she replaced Sharp in 1999, said the decision could have dire consequences. "I absolutely am going to appeal that decision as far as we have to appeal it," she said. "Anyone who dresses up and parades down 6TH Street on Halloween will be applying for an exemption."

Austin lawyer Peter Kennedy, who represented the Ethical Society, welcomed the decision and criticized Rylander's reaction. "The ruling poses no threat to Texas taxpayers and opens no door to fakes," he said, adding that the society "plays the same central role in its members' lives as do other religions for people of other faiths." "This time of year, and this year particularly, it is a shame to see >

politicians publicly trivialize the depth and variety of human religious experience."

The case began in June 1997 when the Ethical Society, which meets on alternate Sundays in Central Austin, was briefly granted tax-exempt status by Sharp. A day later, after reading about the decision in the newspaper, Sharp undid it, claiming it was improperly granted by his staff. Sharp said he was adhering to a long-standing principle of denying the exemption to groups that do not require their members to profess belief in a supreme being.

The Ethical Society of Austin, affiliated with a movement that traces its roots to 1876, describes itself as "a humanistic religious organization that espouses the doctrine of ethical culture, which is inspired by the ideal that the supreme aim of human life is to create a more humane society."

In his order, Davis said Texas law provides little guidance in determining what is a religion and what isn't. "It is agreed that there is a line; it is not clear as to where to draw the line, or which organizations fall within the line and which organizations fall outside the line," he wrote.

After reviewing conflicting textbook definitions of religion - and noting that Ethical Society groups have been granted religious tax exemption in other states - Davis decided that the Austin group is a religion for state tax purposes. He pointed out that its members hold regular meetings, offer Sunday school classes and celebrate "life-cycle rituals." "The search for something beyond the power of humankind is exactly how ESA treats its pursuit of the Ethical Ideal.

"The 'ideal' is a goal to strive for, it is a mystery, an ultimate concern, a power beyond an individual," Davis wrote. "The evidence before the court indicates that ESA acts like a traditional religion in its pursuit of this ideal." <>

Editor's Note: Somewhat abridged

Community

by our support of Israel, but by our presence in Saudi Arabia, considered by Muslims to be holy land and off-limits to military bases. The bombing of the World Trade Center, in Mr. McReynold's view, was the result of our foreign policy. The Bush Administration is making no attempt to address these problems.

Castro and Kaddafi have called for an international tribunal to deal with terrorism, but we have instead opted for violent attack. Bush wants Bin Laden dead or alive; Rumsfeld simply wants him dead. Bin Laden will be guaranteed martyrdom. McReynolds believes that every bomb is a seed, fertilizing terrorist movements and destroying hopes of a secular, democratic government.

Mr. McReynolds urged us to write Congress, opposing the "ticket to riot." He thinks we should use intelligence efforts working through Pakistan to destabilize the Taliban and bring those responsible to justice. Bush has hijacked the tragedy of September 11 and is using it to further the Right Wing agenda of military tribunals, bonuses to the rich, and Star Wars. He has a vision of us as a nation at war. Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, McReynolds urged us to recapture the revolutionary spirit by opposing racism, poverty and militarism.

Dr. Ed Schwartz, former Philadelphia Councilman and President of the Institute for Civic Values presented *Civic Idealism*. The U.S. is founded on the creed of equality. In the early 1800's, Alexis de Tocqueville saw this equality before government as something new, expressed in the principle of one person, one vote and in active citizenship. Civic idealism, which leads to fulfilling the promise of a higher vision, can also lead to aberrations such as Nazism and the Taliban. Civic >

values, as set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution are rooted in American soil. These principles were created by our founding fathers as guideposts. Built into our philosophy is government's responsibility to protect a citizen's inalienable rights. But how can we come together, with each group in our diverse population having its own idea of rights? The answer is through community and cooperation, where our tradition of justice is rooted.

Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us of our promise, but how can we fulfill it? We must be involved in building our communities and in offering support to each other - especially the needy. We already have what we need to do that. We can fulfill our promise through the democratic process, which requires active participation and the accountability of officials. We fulfill it by ensuring equal opportunity for all.

The present demands for homeland security is wreaking havoc on budgets. But even so, we must ask, "What are we willing to do to help our neighbors?" This challenge is a shared responsibility. Homelessness has increased threefold over last year due to cutbacks in the number of welfare recipients. Other needs include reliable voting machines, campaign finance reform, and civic and political education in our schools. We must teach how to live and work with government and with each other. Dr. Schwartz challenged us to resurrect the philosophy of civic idealism - the promise of the democratic tradition which lives where active citizens work together. He ended with a quote from de Tocqueville, "Citizenship is the American ideal and there is no ideal over that one."

Richard's talk, *Home for the Holidays*, was an in-depth examination of that phrase, one that is rife with emotional significance, bringing different memories to different people. Memories of home can evoke nostalgia, >

bittersweet and deceptive since, for many people, home was not a happy place at all. The feelings intensify for those who don't make it home and may disappoint those who do and are reminded that it is not such a good place to be. Also the phrase is narrow in the sense that it does not really apply to non-Christians. And of the snow-covered country homes we see on holiday cards, one might ask, whose home is it and what holiday?

He then discussed how words and phrases can affect us. For instance a rather common phrase like "greasy spoon diner" can conjure up feelings in people. Simple words can be manipulative. Words like skinny, short, slender, intelligent, and stupid. affect feelings and self-worth. The use of emotion-laden words and phrases can make us feel better or worse, can distort our ethical selves, or enhance our self esteem.

Richard reminded us that the holidays are a festive season and magical. All is dreamy and snow-covered and fairy-like. We have the religious stories, Dickens' story, Santa, elves, the movie *Home Alone*, and even the Grinch! If we consider the holidays, we find them to be a combination of the commercial, the religious, and human nature. Somehow or other, we become engrossed in good will and disappear into this *magical* place.

The fact of the matter is, these holidays were invented about 150 years ago in order to get away from drunken orgies that used to take place at the end of the year. Originally starting with decorated trees, Santa and gifts, the holidays became religious with the Jesus story as a later addition. And then Hanukkah was invented to compensate for Christmas. Because all these holidays are really based on the Winter Solstice, wouldn't it be nice if we could consolidate all of them into one big Winter Solstice Celebration? Since we stress love and understanding of each other at this time of year, we could then do what we should do...embrace ALL people and live in peace. <>

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Ethical Action Committee Update

**Good Food for the Homeless,
Signatures and Contributions**

The Committee has been busy over the last few months. On December 19 Ken Greiff, with a little help from Jean Bradley, prepared a scrumptious meal for 25 of center city's homeless men. The repast included turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, broccoli, cauliflower and even cookies. Saul Machles helped serve and later reported that the men thought the food was great. This once-a-month effort continues through the Spring, so if you want to help serve or prepare a meal contact Cherin Silver.

The Committee is supporting those few organizations which members feel best represent the interests and ideals of the Society. So far these include the National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood, the Nature >

Conservancy and, of course, our own children's program at Camp Linden. The money you spend for lunch on Sundays helps support these services.

And, efforts to influence the votes and concerns of our state and national representatives continues through almost weekly petitions. Your signature can make a difference!

Other activities include sponsoring the recent holiday gift drive for families in North Philadelphia. Toys, financial contributions and food stuffs were donated by many generous friends and members. The Committee added \$100 of its annual budget to the proceeds.

This energy has emerged through the involvement of a growing Committee. Members Dale Drews, Temma and Arnold Fishman, Richard Kiniry, Cherin Silver, Madeleine Suringar and Lew Wilkinson are working to voice your concerns to the community <>

There is a theory which states that if ever anybody discovers exactly what the Universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable.

There is another theory which states that this has already happened.

-from Douglas Adams in his series,
Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy