

Ethical Views

January 2006 Vol. 120, No. 5 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

January Platforms

Sunday, January 1

There will be no platform.

Sunday, January 8

Memorial Sunday

Platform: PES Leader, **Richard Kiniry**, will lead us in taking time to remember those whom we love but who have left us behind, and in taking time to feel ourselves in the stream of life. We will remember and honor our members who have died in the past year, but also others who have played a significant part in our lives. Members are invited to come and share their stories and memories.

Sunday, January 15

Platform: **Brian D'Agostino**, educator, author and social scientist will speak on *"Beyond War & Capitalism; Ethics for the 21st Century."* Events in Iraq suggest not only the obsolescence of U.S. military power in an age of terrorism, but the obsolescence of war itself. Similarly, the ecological crisis suggests the unsustainability of a global corporate economy that places profits above people. Our age therefore demands bold and far reaching thinking about alternative security and economic arrangements, thinking that is not forthcoming from mainstream political leaders or pundits. This talk aims to present some conceptual tools for envisioning and creating a humane and sustainable future, as well as practical steps that socially responsible individuals can take as citizens, workers, consumers, and investors.

Sunday, January 22

Platform: **Michael Nutter**, Councilman at Large, will be our speaker. Topic to be announced.

Sunday, January 29

Platform: **Dr. Ana Lita**, Ph. D. and Exec. Dir. of the IHEU - Appignani

Center for Bioethics, will deliver an address entitled "Toward a Humanist Bioethics." With the developed world growing increasingly aware of technological innovations, why is it the general understanding of the thinking behind such advancements lags so far behind? Biotech developments are cause for excitement and hope, but they also raise doubts about the adequacy of both our traditional ways of ethical analysis and even the very concepts on which these ethical models are built. It is also far from certain that we will all benefit from any of these advances owing to widespread confusion and uncertainty about whether they are morally acceptable. Such confusion and uncertainty have been stimulated in large part by the current intensity of religious-conservative politics. Dr. Lita is the recipient of a Soros Foundation Fellowship and a National Association Fellowship for International Scholars, U.S. ◇



Leader's Message

by Richard Kiniry

Dear President Bush, Thou shall not kill.

Oh, and yeah, you shouldn't torture people either.

I know you claim to be part of the Christian religion, but where did you get your value system? I'm serious; I don't recognize the moral standards of any religious tradition in your actions. While I may not agree with your politics, I am concerned about you and your moral development and its effect on the nation. People without a moral

center are called sociopaths and although I am not a trained psychologist, I'm starting to suspect that you and your government may be moving close to that diagnosis.

I'm pretty sure the Methodist Church (in which you claim membership) does not hold lightly the Commandment about not killing people and yet you have a notorious record as a killer. Besides your record as the Governor who signed the most death warrants, you entered the White House planning to go to war against Iraq. Which, in case you didn't put two and two together, meant killing people, and there is no indication that you morally struggled over the possible deaths. This week you rather casually admitted that at least 30,000 Iraqis have died as a result of your war. Supposedly 75% of the living Iraqis say they are satisfied with the result of your invasion, but has anyone asked the dead and their families?

Then there is that other Commandment about not lying. Reporters and pundits may, for the sake of a stable society, not actually shove the facts into your face, but we remember the lies you told. You may find a dozen ways of characterizing those lies as premature judgments or misinterpretations but a rose by any other name is still a lie. Just recently you said we did not choose this war; Saddam Hussein did. Is that just rhetoric and not actually a lie? Before this war Saddam Hussein was running scared, changing houses every night, his army of little threat. And what is this about "we" not choosing the war; you choose to go to war, not "we," nor Saddam Hussein.

No doubt every politician has to dance around the truth to keep all the people

(Continued next page)

(Leader's Message continued)

happy, but you so blatantly lie, confident that the American people are too polite or simple to admit their President is a liar. You may justify your lying as necessary for national defense, but do you not worry about what your example is doing to the moral fiber of the country.

And now you, members of your government, and your stooges in the press have spent months attempting to legitimate torture as American policy. My religion takes as a core value respect for the worth and dignity of every human being. I believe your religion does also and yet your excuses for permitting torture are excuses of convenience - convenient ways of subverting religious belief and moral values. Because your enemies do not wear uniforms and use terroristic methods of war, they can be considered scum who don't deserve respect. My humanist religious tradition is often accused of being morally relativistic, especially by your religious allies, and yet if anything your administration is identified with relativistic morality - you suspiciously and conveniently stretch worthy values to legitimate the interest of your business and ideology friends.

Recently your Internal Revenue Service has threatened religious groups that challenge political policy. That makes sense. If religious groups were true to their declared values, they might be gathering mobs outside the White House demanding respect for historic American values. It is the job of religious organizations to challenge injustice, dishonesty, and cruelty in the public and personal arena. That is one of the reasons we have Separation of Church and State; so that religion will have the freedom to challenge authority.

You came into office saying you wanted to raise the moral tone, but while appearing to champion morality, you have lowered the moral intelligence of the country. The one benefit of your actions is that we all

have to face how low our public moral standards have become and we can be hopeful that change is coming. ◇



**President's
Message**

by Howard Peer

Ah the start of a new year and the end of the old. 2005 was a good year for the PES as we added several new members. The two most recent are Jim Erb and Ronald Coburn. Thanks for joining and welcome aboard.

For those of you that have been watching the news on the controversy between the IRS and a church in California in November, the Board considered our current policies and procedures. We decided that we do not need to have a disclaimer for the platforms of invited speakers. The general rule is that we cannot endorse a candidate for a political office nor have a substantial percentage of our work involved with lobbying.

Also in November, I attended a meeting of the AEU President's Council. It was well represented with some 24 attendees representing around 22 societies, including Austin, TX and St. Louis. Since the Presidents have not officially met for many years and there is no formal structure, the meeting was something of a forced march led by the AEU to encourage some continuing form of interaction and progress. The meeting was held in parallel with some Religious Education activities including a meeting of the YES/FES groups. YES being Youth of Ethical Societies (18 and younger) and FES being Future of Ethical Societies (18 years old or have graduated high school through age 25.)

OK, honestly now, how many of you knew that the AEU had these programs? That's what I thought. I had heard of YES, but knew nothing about it. I had never even heard of FES. And so I took two things away

from the whole President's council meeting. First, there are two very different types of societies; those that have children and those that don't. Those involved with FES/YES were energized and vibrant and on a mission and the youth programs were a very important part of their Ethical experience. Obviously this does not (now) define the PES. But someday it will, and I look forward to that day.

Second, we are doing a really poor job of communicating between Societies. It was truly refreshing to meet with a group of strangers and yet know that we all share something very important and special in our world view. It was a really nice and interesting group of people. Any of us would have felt right at home and I think any of them would have felt right at home with us. Yet we are generally unaware of the other societies in other cities and states. This was borne out by the results of the brainstorming session we had when the two top issues were "Communications Infrastructure and Process" and "Shared Resources." There was a widespread feeling that we could use better web tools. In the meantime, I urge each of you to take whatever opportunity that you have to visit other Societies. I would love to hear of your experiences.

Coincidentally, the AEU Board will be having a meeting here at the PES on the weekend of March 10, that will include the next meeting of the President's Council. The Community Committee has generously agreed to host a dinner for participants on the evening of March 10. I, in a moment of unguarded altruism, have agreed to cook a meat dish (pot roast?) but we will need side dishes and most certainly will need a vegetarian main meal for those so inclined. We will also need servers to help manage the flow for what we expect to be a large group.

Another upcoming event will be our annual Service Auction. Carol Erb will be the event's impresario. Temma

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(President's Message continued)

and Bob volunteered to solicit contributions to the auction. Jean said she would do the sign up sheets. Ok, that takes care of the administration, but a great service auction needs some great offerings. That is where you come in. So, when you see Temma or Bob come be ready with some great idea for the service auction. ◇



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!



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.

Platform Summary

Sunday, December 4th



Richard Kiniry

In his address, *Living in Faith*, leader **Richard Kiniry** continued his crusade for Ethical Humanists to "come out with a full-fledged challenge to ancient world views." What is faith to us who wish to be defined as rationalists? We believe faith is an activity and that our religion is the tool with which to do it. Our faith is in the capacity of human beings to make the world better. We have faith in life. We find meaning in what we do -- our world is more expansive and more diverse than that of the traditionalists. Faith is also personal -- a feeling of trust in the world and a sense of our own worthiness. However, Richard cautions against becoming just another absolutist frame, where we are proud of our intellect, but don't change our behavior. The world we live in may not express our values, but our lives can. Richard challenges us to "Walk the walk," not just "Talk the talk". We accept the messiness of life as we immerse ourselves in it. We don't expect otherworldly rewards. We live with doubt. Richard said, "As we are living life, Life is living us as well."

--Temma Fishman



SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Chair

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

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

January 8 - Temma and Arnold Fishman in celebration of their daughter-in-law's birthday.

January 15 - Terry Murley in honor of Lyle's birthday.

January 22 - Bob Kay in honor of Roz Kay.

January 29 - Temma Fishman in celebration of husband Arnold's birthday.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

January 8 Nick Sanders

January 15 Madeleine Suringar

January 22 Saul Machles

January 29 Janice Moore

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

January 8 Jean Bradley

January 15 Harry Thorn

January 22 Amber Anderson

January 29 Mary Wassermann

Coffee Hour Lunch

January 8 Doris Leicher and Howard Peer

January 15 Jean Bradley

January 22 Ken Greiff and Janice Moore

January 29 To be announced



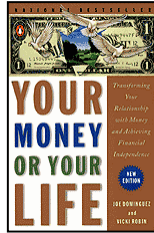
THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history. Presently we are discussing Arthur Dobrin's book, **Ethical People and How they Got that Way** (available at the Society).

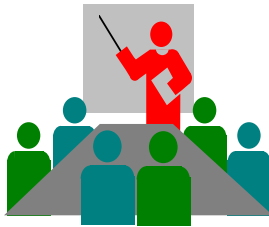
Third **Thursday** of the month, **January 19**, 7:30 PM

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, **January 25**, 7:30 PM



INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL HUMANISM

Sunday, January 15th, 1:30pm

This Ethical Society is part of a 130-year-old humanist religious tradition. This class 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. Does it make sense and can it make your life better? We will examine the philosophy, spirituality and social theory of Ethical Humanism. Using The Eight Commitments of Ethical Culture as a tool, we will look at the core principles of the intrinsic worth of every human being and ethics as a way of life.

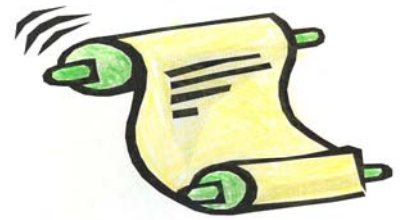


Mark the date! You won't want to miss this one! On Friday, **March 10** at 7:00 PM, the Philadelphia Ethical Society is hosting a **potluck dinner** for the visiting members of the **AEU Board of Directors**. Enjoy delicious food lovingly prepared by friends. Enjoy interesting conversation as you get to know the Ethical Culture volunteers who work to serve Societies all over the country. Find out about the nationwide Ethical Culture Movement. Want to make something special for this event? Please let us know by calling 215-735-3456.



PES Member **Carole Erb** reads some of the letters from students at the Robert Morris School.

*Thank you Letters for Dictionaries:
from Students at the
Robert Morris Charter School*



Dear Members of the Ethical Society,

Thank you for the dictionaries that you gave us. They're good for looking up words. It is important to know how to use a dictionary. You can look up words you don't know.

Sincerely,



Dear Members of the Ethical Society,

Thank you so much for the dictionary. I am sharing my favorite word and definition with you in my own handwriting.

My favorite word is chocolate. Chocolate is a candy made from cacao the roasted seed of cacao. I love chocolate.

Sincerely,



Dear Members of the Ethical Society,




Thank you so much for the dictionary. I am sharing my favorite word and definition with you in my own handwriting.

Fantasy is my favorite word in the dictionary because I love fantasy because I love to write fantasy most people do in my class room.

Sincerely,

Note: the word is 'fantasy'

January 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Richard Kiniry <i>Memorial Sunday</i>	9	10  Carol Love	11 <u>Meetings</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 PM-Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM-Education Committee	12	13	14  Lyle Murley
15 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Brian D'Agostino <i>Beyond War & Capitalism; Ethics for the 21st Century</i> 1:30 PM <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> Introduction to Ethical Humanism	16	17	18 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	19 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM History of Ethics	20 Roberta Wood	21
22 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Michael Nutter , Councilman at Large. Topic to be announced.	23 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Camp Linden Board at PES	24	25 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Voluntary Simplicity	26	27	28
29 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Dr. Ana Lita, Ph. D. <i>Toward a Humanist Bioethics</i>	30	31				 Birthdays

Ethical Views is published monthly
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Put on your thinking caps! It's not too soon to plan your donation to our annual Fabulous **Fundraising Service Auction** to be held at our **Valentine's Party** on Friday, **February 17** at 7:00 PM. Will you offer your specialty dish, a fun-filled sing-along evening, poetry night or dinner at your house, guitar lessons, a canoe ride, movie night, a trip to a museum or restaurant, computer instruction, photography, or some other delightful service or event? A member will soon be contacting you to sign up. We need to know a month in advance so that Jean Bradley has time to make up her signature creative sign-up sheets which will allow us to choose the events we love at the party. All proceeds benefit the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Questions? Call 215-735-3456.

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