



Ethical Views

Summer 2004 Vol. 118, No. 10 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Summer Sundays

Picnic, Colloquies and Book Discussions

June 6

52nd Annual Camp Linden Picnic

June 13

No program

June 20

Colloquy - Led by member Temma Fishman, - topic TBA

June 27

Member Carol Anne Riddle will lead a discussion of the book, *Who Prospers? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success*, by Lawrence Harrison. Though geography and natural resources affect a nation's industrialization and progress, the most important factors are the people and their culture. Spain, languishing in dusty poverty, experienced rapid industrialization after 1975. Why do her former colonies still languish? Why did Japan and the "four little dragons" (Taiwan, S. Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore) develop strong economies? Why are Indians now doing well in the U.S.? Why have Chinese done well in other countries but not at home – until recently?

July 4

No program

July 11

Colloquy - Led by Arnold Fishman, member - topic TBA

July 18

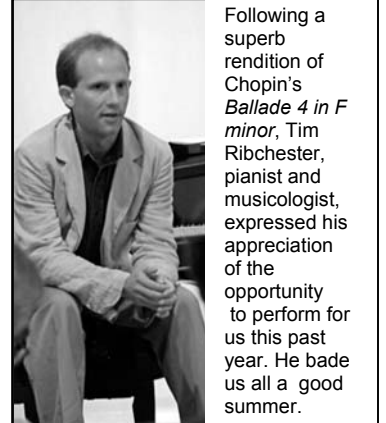
Members Nick Sanders and Bob Moore will lead a discussion of Susan Blackmore's book, *The Meme Machine*. Evolutionary psychologists say that certain ideas, called "memes," can replicate themselves from mind to mind, in much the same way that genes replicate themselves from generation to generation. It's called the science of Memetics, and although it hasn't produced any scientific breakthroughs yet, it's a thought-provoking and broad-ranging field, ranging from religion to fashion to technology.

July 25

Colloquy - Led by member Kate Esposito - topic TBA

August 1

Member Ellen Rose will lead a discussion of Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*. Jacoby's history of American secularism — from Thomas Paine and the founding fathers through the nineteenth-century abolitionists and suffragists to John F. Kennedy, who declared unequivocally that he believed "in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute"— provides many inspiring role models for today's embattled secularists — including ethical humanists — under constant attack by a militant evangelical Christianity, whose born-again president begins every cabinet meeting with a prayer.



Following a superb rendition of Chopin's *Ballade 4 in F minor*, Tim Ribchester, pianist and musicologist, expressed his appreciation of the opportunity to perform for us this past year. He bade us all a good summer.

August 8

Colloquy - facilitator and subject TBA

August 15

Member Bob Moore will lead a discussion of Carl Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*. In this 1995 book, the popular scientist discussed how New Age fads and pseudo-science threatened to replace reason and scientific thinking. It was Sagan's last book; he died the next year. Ten years later, how are we doing, Dr. Sagan? His book (available in most libraries) is 450-pages, so we'll concentrate mainly on the first two chapters and samples of the rest. And we'll update Sagan's concerns with a look at a government report that claims a political agenda has recently been forced on scientists in areas like climate science, reproductive health, stem cell research, prescription drug policy, etc.(available by download from www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience or call the PES office).



Colloquies are contemplative, meditative experiences accompanied by music during which we thoughtfully consider a specific topic, introduced by a facilitator, concerning how we relate to ourselves and to each other, and reflect on its meaning by pondering a related question, readings, and parable. You may speak if the spirit moves you, or remain quiet. These gatherings provide enlightening and tranquil respites from the distractions of the busy world outside.

It is time to say farewell to Arnold Fishman, whose presidency of the Philadelphia Ethical Society will end on June 30, 2004. Following is his parting speech which he delivered on Sunday, May 30, 2004.

President's Message

My Ethical Culture

Holy Ground: Community, Purpose, and Reward

by Arnold Fishman

“The place where we meet to seek the highest is holy ground” is the affirmation written above our stage and on the buildings of many of the other Societies throughout the Ethical Culture movement. What is it about those words that make them so resonant for me? They sum up what religious humanism means to me. First, they presuppose a group, a place, and a regular gathering. They imply a community - “The place where we meet.”

The next phrase conveys a purpose. The community has come together and agreed on a reason to meet. We meet “to seek the highest.” What is the highest? Not an easy question to answer, if you are trying to be inclusive. But any understanding of the highest must include, at least, your best and the best of others in a benign setting. What do we do about the Highest? We seek it. We may not attain it, but that does not matter. We are charged with seeking it, because it is in the seeking that we live out our lives. The doing, not the believing, is paramount. It is the quality of the journey that counts. We act as an instrument for the self actualization of those around us, as catalyst for our own growth, and a force for creating a humane environment.

The final words inform me as to the reward for such a life long quest. What do I get for being part of a community with such a purpose? Perhaps not salvation and eternal life, but I will be on what “is holy ground,” ground that has the capacity to make me whole. Wherever I am will become such a place. Those around me will be free to be their unique authentic selves. And, I will be the agent of that transformation. Could there be a higher calling?



Arnold Fishman, Former President

The View From Ethical Culture

Summaries of Spring Platforms by Education Committee Members

Jone Johnson Lewis reconnected us with Ethical Culture's founder, Felix Adler in her April 25 address, "Ten Great Ideas from Felix Adler," great ideas to live by that still resonate with the best of the Ethical Movement today. Here's what they are.

1. Every philosophy/religion comes into being as a product of its own time. From its origins in the late 19th century, Ethical Culture sought to address the problems of urban/industrial society through responding to three longings: individual sense of insignificance as an accident of evolution; incredible suffering brought on through industrialization; and the pain of a divided conscience over conflicting goals.

2. Every person is unique and of inherent human worth.

3. Everyone is inherently interconnected. Because reality is social, ethical life is an interactive process. Individual actions make a difference because an ethical life is lived in deeds.

4. Life can be called ethical when lived in actions that bring out the best in others and ourselves. The process of doing good is as important as the deed.

5. The ethical life is a lifelong task that continues with future generations, requiring cultivation. "We must tend to our lives and relationships as a gardener tends to a garden."

6. Diversity and pluralism are essential to individual development and democracy. This requires us to build a diverse community and commit to it, learning to live with difference.
7. Living ethically means we act to bring out the best in everyone in groups, believing in the uniqueness of all members of the group.
8. Our priority is for those whose uniqueness and worth are least recognized, for those whose lives are most limited, for whom the gap is widest and who have the fewest choices.
9. Failure and frustration are essential parts of the ethical life. Frustration can lead to learning.
10. How the aforementioned are put into practice is the philosophy of worship, the equivalent of worth made, i.e., the shaping and crafting of ethical life. What we do Sundays makes a difference to our ethical being.

* * *

In "Justice and Its Parameters" on March 28, Roger Allen offered sobering reflections on the Middle East quagmire in the context of its recent permutations following the assassination of Hamas spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin. His address asked hard questions rather than providing answers. Indeed, he began by saying he had no answers.

He quoted Samuel Huntington's observation that the current conflict in the Middle East involved not nations as in the past but entire cultures. And in this conflict the innocent have already suffered and many more will.

Although we say in the Pledge of Allegiance, "with liberty and justice for all," for all whom? Allen pointed out that our concept of justice is placed on a framework of other terms – law, freedom, democracy, and terrorism, with definitions poorly understood by other cultures. T.E. Lawrence was astute in his observation at the end of World War I when he said that democracy in the middle east (Iraq) would mean work. In Algeria, the first democratic act was to abolish democracy.



According to Allen, the important questions we should ask are "Is there a universally desired form of government? And what is terrorism and who decides on the definition. He concluded that we in the US are terrifyingly unequipped and uninformed in terms of cultural knowledge to be activators of the policy the US has decided upon. Justice like democracy must surely imply a population that is knowledgeable to enter into debate and to discuss issues.

Betsy Lightbourn

Lyle Murley initiated our Nurturers' Festival on Mothers' Day, 2004 by suggesting that Felix Adler's admonition to "act so as to encourage the best in others, and by so doing you will develop the best in yourself," can readily be seen as a call for us to be nurturing. Bertha Waters followed by recounting the "nurturing" advice passed down to her from her grandmother, who had lived into her adult years as a slave: Don't show too much affection for your children, because they may soon be separated from you. In contrast, Alicia Conquest Bulgin took the occasion to describe seven major positives in her life that her Mother-who was present for the Festival-had given her. Turning then to the whimsical, Lew Wilkinson gave us a poem reflecting the sentiment of the child who decided to answer "a child" when asked the question "What will you be?" Two other stories-one about working with autistic children and another about tutoring at the Robert Morris School-revealed how nurturing can result in being nurtured oneself. Both the Robert Morris School story and one about the summer camp at Camp Linden reminded us that the Ethical Society has ongoing nurturing programs for children whose life circumstances warrant special attention. Then John Hall led us to consider the role of art in creating a nurturing environment, and our reciprocal responsibility to nurture artists. Our festival was concluded by reading Julia Ward Howe's 1870 proclamation for a convocation of mothers to build a nurturing world free from war.

Nick Sanders

Howard Callaway, author and educator, began his platform presentation, "Emerson as Educator", with two questions: why has Philadelphia been shrinking in the past decades and what is the present day mission of Ethical Societies? Understanding Emerson, Dr. Callaway asserted, illuminates American cultural antecedents as well as American historical distinctiveness. Emerson was a Unitarian minister who relinquished his ministry in order to be a spokesman for all religious points of view. Truth for Emerson was more sacred than theology. He attempted to be a scholar of all world culture and to adapt those insights to the uniquely American situation. Emerson's optimistic outlook influenced the development of American Pragmatism in the practice of amelioration, "things can improve," which was forward looking, dependent on the future. Emerson's philosophy rested in an insistence on the ability to form and reform culture by the power of knowledge. Knowledge is power according to Emerson's stance, and that makes us free. Freedom, in turn, is dependent on creativity of thought and the ability to think through a solution. Freedom and power are, however, limited by contemporary circumstances and the complex irregularities that enter our experience.

Although Emerson speaks to us from a time when the country was more homogeneous, his ideology and nonconformist religious tradition bestow a legacy of diversity within American intellectual thought. Emerson, for instance, asserted slavery could not exist and questioned the compromise accepted by the Founding Fathers. He saw Ethical Societies as a federation of religious fellowships that could be above denominational conflicts and representative of a broad spectrum of religious beliefs. Emerson understood the wisdom of the Founding Father's prohibition of any national religion while supporting the guarantee that all religions be free to compete for support on their own terms.

In applying Emerson's philosophies to the diminishment of Philadelphia, Dr. Callaway's platform offered Emersonian direction and questions, not solutions. Reflective of the power of problem solving, are we attempting to solve the problems in our own cultural world and keeping to our independent insight until we discover errors? Imitative of Emersonian anti-establishment tendencies, are we questioning traditional ways of thinking and encouraging an intellectual freedom that is responsive to inclusive and creative solutions?

In conclusion, Dr. Callaway talked of the influence of Emerson being extended by James, Dewey, and Adler and expressed his own view of Emerson as a writer representing the best of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

Terry Martin-Murley

Is it possible to be happy and a thinking person at the same time? This question was put to us by Richard Kiniry in his talk, "Thinking and Happiness". We, in Ethical Culture try to use rationality to understand life, and we, like the rest of the world, yearn for happiness. But, the more fundamentalist a religion is, the more optimistic its message. So, are we, the members of the "thinking person's religion" doomed to be miserable? It seems possible to achieve happiness by avoiding thinking. "So, why mess it up; why not just enjoy life?" asked Richard. Apparently, happiness and thinking is hard. Yet, Richard gave us some tips for accomplishing just that. His advice is to think about what you're doing. Think about the cause and effect your public and social actions have as you face reality. In other words, use your brain and indulge in honest thinking. Consider the poverty you find amidst the plenty and the effect your lifestyle has on the lives of others. Richard offered this advice, "Be a non-theistic, thinking George Bush", (an oxymoron?) Hold an optimistic view of life while recognizing the "bad stuff". Think and do good. Think and be optimistic. "Unreflective ideas hurt people. Every time we're honestly thoughtful, we run into relationships. We each hold the life potential of everyone else in our hands. Creatively, respectfully work to bring out goodness in others. If I'm not making it all good; it doesn't make sense", said Richard.

* * *

Ethical Culture emerged after the Civil War in the process of transforming from an agrarian to an industrial society. With the new working class, came tidal waves of immigrants to our shores. In 1866, our founder Felix Adler, addressed the membership in his father's synagogue, and called for a new religion which would sanctify human life by addressing the social and political ills of the day. In 1876, he founded the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Marc Bernstein, AEU archivist, related the history of Ethical Culture in his talk, "The Triumph of Social Reform: Ethical Culture's Early Years and Why They Matter Now". We established the Visiting Nurse's program, which paid nurse's well to minister to the sick and poor, to light fires in cold tenements, clean wounds, deliver babies, clothes, and other necessities to ease the misery of crowded, dirty living conditions. Felix Adler created the first kindergarten in 1877 at the Workingman's School which

included programs in science and technology. The first settlement house was founded in 1886 by Stanton Coit of the New York Society. It offered clean bathrooms, running water, showers, and health care information for the poor as well as celebrations of ethnic cultures. Now called the Madison House, it still serves the poor in New York City. In 1914, 1/6 of the city's population lived on 1/82 of its land in tenements that often had no bathroom and only one window. In 1897, John Lovejoy Elliott started the Hudson Guild Settlement House in an Irish neighborhood. Children flocked to participate in its clubs, library, and boxing bouts. It reached the kids' hearts. Other settlement houses were founded in Chicago, Philadelphia and St. Louis and offered humane, moral alternatives to the debilitating influences of the tenements. William Salter, who had a passion for social justice, founded the Philadelphia Ethical Society in 1885 with S. Burns Weston. Weston established Southwark Settlement House in Philadelphia in 1906. The first generation of leaders exerted a power and influence not likely to be found today. They met with the likes of Rockefeller, Wilson and Eleanor Roosevelt. Membership was made up of the wealthy. Today, Ethical Culture is meritocratic and must compete with other like-minded organizations. Mr. Bernstein urged us to find important work we can take on. "We are small and manageable, yet big enough to make a difference. Be innovative and unique; be risky and commit to those who are often frowned upon. Remember, deed above creed to maintain the soul of the movement."

* * *

"What can I do with the summertime?" you may be asking yourself. In his talk, "First Dance", which he presented as our last platform of the season, leader Richard Kiniry offered some suggestions. In this politically-charged world, everyone is taking sides. Our current obsession (and who can blame us?) with politics has kept us busy all winter, however, this is the "first dance" of summer—a time to be carefree and irresponsible. But we're the people who eschew soap operas in favor of NPR, and these aren't usual times. Republicans today aren't just average conservatives, like Eisenhower. "Justice is up for grabs," warns Richard. Doctoring is dictated by insurance companies, our privacy and civil rights are invaded, national parks, now decorated with anti-evolutionist signs, are in disrepair, and the military has creepily turned to the sexual torture of prisoners. Bullying is an accepted part of American life — we can justify a little abuse because we're doing "God's work". Maybe the dominance of the right wing is possible because we've neglected our civil rights too long. We, as a nation, are sharply divided philosophically. We can clearly see at work the two opposing moral world views Richard spoke of earlier — the strict father and the nurturing, caring mother. It is tempting to see the torturers as "evil people, not us", but they were ordinary people doing what they were told, but no one has taken responsibility for the life experiences which shaped them. The real politics that produced them are ignored. We, in Ethical Culture, know the world is a production of all of us, not just some "bad people". Richard suggests, "Turn off CNN, BBC News, and even Moyers and think about what it means to you and your place in it." Now we have time to put it all into focus and work to improve the lives of people, instead of using politics as an escape. Work to raise the minimum wage, fight for schools that teach rational ideas, lobby for national health care, and question the need for a military. Richard advised, "The minds and hearts of the people will determine the outcome of the election. Do the groundwork, focus on our lives, not just political opinions."

Temma Fishman

Upcoming Meetings

Community Committee

Thursday, June 10th at 6:30p.m.

Board of Trustees

Wednesday, June 16th at 7:30p.m.

No meeting in July

Wednesday, August 18th at 7:30p.m.

Ethical Action Committee

T.B.A.

Education Committee

Wednesday, June 9th at 6:30p.m.

No meeting in July

Wednesday, August 11th at 6:30p.m.

Camp Linden Board

Thursday, July 1st at 7:30p.m.

(At the Philadelphia Ethical Society)

Selma Toth

Born, November 17, 1920

Died, May 16, 2004

Many of us remember Selma very well as the Sunday Flower Contribution Coordinator, which she did for several years. She was also valued as a dedicated volunteer in service to the visually impaired.

Sincere condolences to all who knew and loved her.



Member Profile

Nick Sanders

by Nancy Freilich

Nick Sanders first came to the Ethical Society by invitation from his wife's friends, Dale Drews and Betsy Lightbourn. He began attending when Dale made his first presentation after his surgery. In early 2003, Nick became a member. Since then he has participated in the Education and Ethical Action Committees; has several times prepared coffee, served as a greeter, and worked at Camp Linden; and has organized two workshops for the Society-one on fair trade and the other on the racial wealth gap.

Nick lives in West Philadelphia with his wife, Margaret. They are both active in community organizations, and enjoy hiking and bird-watching outings together. He also spends time with his older daughter, Laura, and her four children, ages one to 16. Laura's family lives only a 20-minute drive from Nick's home. He is able to visit with his other daughter, Kelly – who is just finishing her first year in college near Allentown, Pennsylvania – less often.

Nick works in an education research center at Temple University, where he is responsible for evaluating several educational projects that are funded by U.S. Department of Education grants and grants from the state departments of education in the region (i.e., Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). He has a Ph.D. in educational psychology, and was on the graduate faculty at Penn State University earlier in his career. He also has work experience in property and casualty insurance business and in the recycling industry.



BIRTHDAYS

June

3 Temma Fishman
7 Janice Moore
18 Bob Allen

July

20 Bill Goldberg
26 Betsy Lightbourn

If we missed listing your birthday, please contact us*
and bring it to our attention.

We would like to include you next time.

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CAMP LINDEN
Children's Summer Programs

Programs begin on June 28th and end on August 13th

CARIBBEAN POOL PARTY

July 31st through August 1st

Volunteers welcome!

For more information, contact any of the following:

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610-259-3392

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Elizabeth Goldsmith

Born, August 22, 1911

Died, June 7, 2004

Elizabeth Goldsmith attended Sunday School at the Ethical Society beginning in 1917, continued her involvement as secretary of the "young people's group" and by teaching Sunday School herself during the depression. She studied music at Temple University and later became a music teacher. She never married and was living alone at Cathedral Village at the time of her death.

Elizabeth was a lively lady who loved to travel and meet new people. She was a good story teller and on more than one occasion shared her memories from the platform of the Society. She will be missed.

Philadelphia Ethical Society

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