



Ethical Views

March 2002

Vol. 116, No. 7

Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Sunday, March 3

Colloquy: *Courage*

Platform: Paul Halpern, Ph.D.,

Professor of Physics,

University of the Sciences

The Pursuit of Destiny:

A History of Prediction

This talk will address the history of both scientific and non-scientific prediction, including a discussion of the concepts of free will and determinism. It will address the ethical issues arising from knowledge of the future, for example, through genetic testing. When is it best to know the future, and when is it unwise?

Dr. Halpern is the author of seven books including, *Time Journeys*, *The Cyclical Serpent* and *The Pursuit of Destiny*.

Sunday, March 10

Platform: Richard Kiniry, Leader,

Philadelphia Ethical Society

The Worship of Nature

How far does our respect and involvement with nature go? If we consider the natural world to be sacred, does that include only the pretty, beneficial parts or also all the nasty bits?

Sunday, March 17

Colloquy: *Change*

Platform: Marianne Layden, Ph.D.

Director of Education,

Center for Cognitive Therapy,

University of Pennsylvania

The Media and

Messages About Sexual Violence

Both the actual number of sexual traumas and publicity about sexual traumas are increasing. Questions are raised about what causes these kinds of

points to permission giving beliefs which normalize dysfunctional attitudes about women and sexuality. The media is implicated in the spread of these damaging messages. We will discuss the beliefs, look at some examples of how they are spread and talk about ways to improve the situation.

Dr. Layden works with both victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. She is Director of the Social Action Committee for Women's Psychological Health.

Sunday, March 24

Colloquy: *Doing*

Platform: Richard Kiniry, Leader

Spring Equinox Celebration

Friends and members of the Society celebrate the arrival of spring through music and poetry.

Sunday, March 31

Colloquy: *Emancipation*

Platform: Stephanie Oppenheimer,

Volunteer, Peace Corps

Perspectives from a

Peace Corps Volunteer

In a brief description of the goals of the Peace Corps, Stephanie will discuss why she joined, and the two years that followed. Through a description of Senegal and the village in which she served, she will touch on her training and responsibilities and the problems she faced. In addition, she will explore the heightened sense of global awareness and social duty that she gained.

Ms Oppenheimer graduated from Emory University in 1999 and joined the Peace Corps the same year. She served in northern Senegal as a rural

Leader's Message

What Is Your Religion?

Richard Kiniry

Some of us have very negative views of organized religion. We point to the negatives - the Crusades, colonialism, free thought, acceptance of ideas, abuse of outsiders and frequent byproduct, fanaticism. Some of us translate that negative opinion into the institutions of religion and negativity concerning anything with religion. And yet there are many understandings.

If we don't define religion as an institution but as a person's approach to the ultimate meaning of life, religion becomes something we can do. So, in this understanding, everyone has their own religion, and consequently some people's lives, religion is more than we thought.

It does sound like wishful thinking to claim that everyone has a personal understanding of the ultimate meaning of life. It is hard to imagine the executives at Enron connecting their lives to an ultimate understanding of life. How about your local drug

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Colloquies at 9:45 AM

Platforms at 11:00 AM

Coffee Hour and discussion

follow the Platforms

Musical Interludes performed

Pianist Jeremy Gill

from last page

Leader's Message

Your Religion

dealer, or a fan at a Britney Spear's concert? Does a mass murderer have an ultimate understanding of life?

Recently I have been fascinated by the realization that the actual living going on in this world, what is actually happening in the lives of people, is a far cry from the cultural understanding of what is happening. We live in an artificial arrangement that removes the personal and straightens out the particular. Our common space offers a relatively orderly and conventional understanding of life, but in actuality everyone is doing something very individualistic and unusual. Even the most conventional of us is a saboteur of the common understanding of life.

And so it is with religion. Real people build lives based on certain values and needs and those feelings express some idea about the meaning of life. They can paste an organized religion onto their lives and actually try to live it; they can use a religion as window dressing; they can develop their own unique religion; or they can ignore the whole idea of meaning in life, but still live lives that express some conception of the meaning of it all. For thousands of years philosophers and sages have pointed to an ultimate out and beyond our personal lives, but we have insisted on finding our own ultimate in our own way.

In that Ethical Humanism is no different from other religions, I'm so happy when someone says Ethical Humanism or EthicalCulture is his religion. Since we are not big on dogma and are instead open to personal interpretation, it is not easy to distinguish Ethical Humanism as a religion. So, when people label Ethical Humanism as an approach to living commensurate to the grand, ancient

as their religion are so much more than just that. Even the youngest of us has evolved a well-textured understanding of life. It may not be consistent but we are all working with a self-made theory about life and our Ethical Humanism is only part of the package.

So, my question becomes, what is your religion? Take the time to think about what is sacred, special to you. What do you spend your time doing? Does that express your heartfelt desires? Ultimately, what is most important to you? Such reflection may not be a comfortable experience. What we discover to be our fondest desire may be petty. Our ultimate understanding of life might go no further than our self-interest.

If there is no ultimate meaning to life outside of what people are giving life, imagine the transformation our world would experience if more people stopped long enough to ask those questions. Our world is full of opinionated people with unexamined lives. Imagine if our world was full of aware people. ◇

Education Committee Report

Love and Relationships

by Lew Wilkinson
and Temma Fishman, Chair

Rebecca Kochman, Director of Senior Center, spoke about *Thoughts On My Personal Professional Life*. She has 30 years working at senior centers and thinks that they give many older people a reason to get up in the morning.

The media caters to the young and attractive. As a culture, we are afraid of unsightly, illness or death. We value autonomy - a value which may be inappropriate. As a result, many people are isolated.

Interac offers transportation, fitness programs, health services, speakers (member Dale Drews is there), and dancing, Yoga, Tai Chi, pottery and computer classes. It is a place where the mentally ill can heal and where people who have lost loved ones can fill the void. Interac is a community of helpers.

School for Ethics

Defining the Good Life

A monthly discussion about the choices we make. We will discuss 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 focus on one topic. Visitors and newcomers welcome.

Monday, March 25, 7:30 PM

Get to Know Us Social

Every other month the Society offers a casual social event for those who are curious about our history and philosophy. Members share stories of their religious and philosophical journeys and Society leaders answer your questions. Visitors and newcomers are encouraged to attend. Refreshments Served.



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Education Committee Report

Ms. Kochman says the center needs more teachers and staff, better food for their lunch program, a system for recycling, and more volunteers. We live in a society where there are few opportunities for inter-generational encounters. Yet, these activities present a wonderful potential for "little miracles" where those in need can find help, joy and companionship. Those who volunteer enrich their lives. Ms. Kochman thinks there is no substitute to giving and receiving.

We were delighted to have Diana Waters addressing, *Social Inequality: Moving From Agent to Ally and From Victim to Empowered*. Diana conducts workshops which tackle the difficulties members of one group have in relating to members of other groups. These groups can take many forms...race, sex, sexual orientation or economic class.

Some people have difficulty knowing where they belong in a group and must develop solidarity with group members and mutual relationships with allies from other groups. There are five steps in moving from victim to empowered:

1. **Belief in the System:** Deny oppression and, instead, adopt belief in mobility, success, and acceptance through personal effort.
2. **Identity Crisis:** Become aware of personal feelings of anger, confusion, and alienation.
3. **Pride in Group Membership:** Learn to recognize oppression and respond with group solidarity.
4. **Introspection:** A reevaluation, a self and group exploration, leading to a newly defined and affirmed sense of self.
5. **Empowerment:** A deep connection with the group and a sense of security in your own identity, leading to commitment to individual and collective action.

have trouble relating to members of these groups. There is a six-step process that requires moving past guilt, fear, anger and resistance, from agent to ally.

1. **Beginning Naivete:** Members of one group often do not admit differences in other groups. Their philosophy is, "People are people."
2. **Dissonance:** Awareness of oppression and privilege comes about as a result of personal experience and may provoke a moral dilemma with feelings of guilt and anxiety.
3. **Internalization of Stereotypes:** One resorts to stereotypes to rationalize privilege and the oppression of others.
4. **Moving toward Action:** From experience or active questioning of assumptions, one becomes self-conscious about behaviors and attitudes and wants to help.
5. **Introspection:** Grappling with one's own privilege and internal stereotyping, leads to developing real, open cross-cultural relationships.

Her final thought was from Martin Luther King, Jr: "Now the judgment of God is upon us and we must learn to live together as brothers, or we are all going to perish as fools."

Leader Richard Kiniry gave a fine talk entitled, *Love and the Morality of Patriotism*. He began by discussing how parental love can be muddled by conflicting feelings. Many parents give things to their children to show their love. However, one cannot BUY LOVE. There is no pure love, no perfect way to raise children. Love is conditional and complicated and can lead to great psychological pain. Love is a mishmash of words, thoughts, feeling, and actions. It's a hodgepodge that eventually achieves order through shared feelings.

We may never understand love. Personal love is not pure, not simple. Once upon a time, love had a mystical quality (Love is divine.), and people believed that it would transform the

"Stream of Love" battling the hate. Love is an abstraction. A stream running through human history, a nice image, but what does it mean? There is no actual flow; however, the love of man for man is a constant of caring, giving people.

Patriotic love is a big thing that we do, but what aspect does this love have? After September 11, patriotism has become a war fever with millions of Americans quite comfortable with the deaths of thousands of Afghans. Is that Love?

Under a monarch, it is not necessary to love one's country. Just do as you are told and everything is fine. In our democracy, we do love our country. The problem is, in order to love it, we focus on the negatives: our ruthlessness toward Native Americans and enslaved Africans. Samuel Johnson once said, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

The patriotic saying "United We Stand" is not true; it is a warning, a threat that implies that we will be united in our destruction. Not all of us, however are in support of war. Patriotism is a fragile, superficial love which divides us into a "them" mentality. Is the "love of country" viable? Yes it is, if enough people are in it. Ethical Societies find meaning by trying to make life better for everyone. We are making a better world by loving our neighbors.

Dr. Craig Eisendrath, Senior Lecturer at the Center for International Studies, has considered *After September: A Vision of a Humane Foreign Policy*. He emphasized that if we are to live in a humane world, we must pay attention to the needs of others and have concern for the least of us - the values expressed in our Judeo-Christian traditions. To accomplish this as a nation, the United States must abandon its position of unilateralism and a policy which fosters severe problems in world security. Because of the influence of money plays in elections, the federal government the American people are not

multilateralism to lift people out of poverty. We should be combating AIDS with more than our 2 billion dollars contribution. Building a jet fighter plane costs 150 billion dollars and may well be militarily useless. But that sum is enough to arrest the spread of AIDS. The perception that we give generously is incorrect. We are allowing millions to die. We need a world consciousness.

In Rwanda we allowed the massacre of ½ million people. This points to the need for a ready UN deployment force. Unilateralism incites us and others to increase defense budgets at the expense of domestic problems. We should support the International Criminal Court. The US fostered the Nuremberg trials and the Declaration of Human Rights. In the 50's and 60's our government was in the forefront of the arms-control movement, but has lately retreated from that position by refusing to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and abrogating the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. This encourages the creation of missiles in Iraq, Iran and Libya, making the world less secure. If we had true regard for other peoples, we would form a very different foreign policy - one based on ethical American standards.

Members and friends of the Ethical Society joined in celebration at our annual Love Festival. We sang old-fashion love songs and recited poetry and prose. We had some true talent in our midst. Poet Marion Cohen read some of her work and member Jeanette Kohler raised her lovely voice in a solo piece. We laughed at humorous readings and maybe cried a little at the poignant ones. We made fun of the often bumbling human attempts to cope with love. We even paid a tongue-in-cheek tribute to Paul Newman. All was done with the magnificent accompaniment of pianist Jeremy Gill. Throughout the program, there was much smiling and nodding in agreement...and applause, of course. All in all, it was an excellent way

Progress

by Saul Machles

It may be very easy, especially these days, to slip into thinking that we have not made any progress toward greater civility, peace and justice. Corruption, brutality, starvation, and capitalistic exploitation are all too common. We hear bad news all the time.

But if we look at human societies in a very broad way, we see that our world is not as brutal as it once was. Though there is still a huge economic struggle, African-Americans have much more freedom. Women have greater power over their own lives, especially in the US and Europe. The average American enjoys one of the greatest standards of living ever achieved by any society.

These general tendencies toward greater civility and human wealth will continue, albeit imperfectly, and with occasional setbacks (loopy Florida elections and unintended presidents notwithstanding).

These gains are not limited to the United States. The "green revolution" in the 1960's resulted in better fed people in India, China, and large parts of Central and South America. This is no small accomplishment. New technologies hold promise in feeding even more people. The heyday of European colonial exploitation is behind us. Soviet communism, with its intrinsic contradictions, is dead, and social democracy is slowly spreading. Even the current clash between the West and Islamic fundamentalism is a symptom of progress in education and access to information. Progress often scares people, especially those in control. Sociologists have come to understand the mechanisms of generational poverty. Some day in the near future, public policy and political action will be more responsive to this recent understanding. Rather than building unneeded stadiums, cities will

admission that we humans have the ability to single-handedly change the earth's ecosystem. There are now 6 billion people on our planet, and the annual population growth of 1.5% will get worse before it gets better. While it's true that the environment will eventually adjust and allow itself to heal. Unfortunately, it seems that global warming will ravage the world's poor before we are wise enough to make the kinds of lifestyle changes that will be necessary to combat the problem.

It is extremely tempting to lose faith and conclude that humans are flawed and doomed to suffer from our foolishness. For several years, confronted with the bleak reality of global warming, I quietly lost hope and despaired of our capacity to make the world a better place. During that time, a sense of futility crept into my thinking. It has taken me years of wrestling with this issue to see any glimmer of hope. Hope may be very difficult to come by, but it most surely is there. I believe that twenty years from now, a solar powered car will be the exception.

Woodrow Wilson labored most of his political life to create the League of Nations. He died heartbroken when the League disintegrated, thinking his struggle had been in vain. What he did not see was that the United Nations would be created out of the ashes of the failed League.

It is easy to imagine that the Israelis and Palestinians will be locked in the cycle of violence forever. They will. Sooner or later, enough people on both sides will want a permanent peace.

The pace of progress is often slow and filled with setbacks. We need to do all we can, so that we know where we want to go, and who or what is in the way. We need to keep pushing and keep the faith that progress is eventually made. Human efforts and have never been in vain.

Presidents Report

My Ethical Culture

(a Work in Progress)

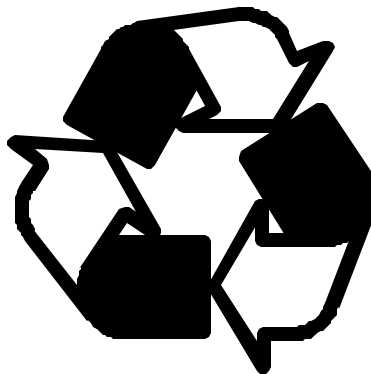
by Arnold Fishman

The last time I visited this topic I had concluded that my ethical culture was predicated upon our shared beliefs that the universe and our place in it can be explained scientifically and not supernaturally; that ethics and morals are manmade and culturally derived, not revealed; and that life can have meaning and purpose without resorting to god. Okay, the next question has to be, what is that meaning? I had satisfied myself that self-actualization worked for me. In the words of the army commercial, "all that you can be." Therefore, when I bumped into Felix Adler's teaching, "Act so as to bring out the best in others thereby bringing out the best in oneself.", I was convinced he was wrong. In my judgment he reversed the process. By focusing on the other, Adler diverted our attention from the only beings which are susceptible to our control, ourselves, to objects beyond our control, everyone else. His guideline was, therefore, a prescription for failure.

I have been stuck at this point for a long time. Not that it consumes me, but reconciling that conflict would make me more comfortable. If life is an ethical experience as Ethical Culture professes, then the focus of one's gaze is central. Should I be looking primarily inside or outside in my efforts to live a meaningful life? Isn't the greatest good to society to develop myself? In doing so, don't I guarantee that I am in a position to contribute rather than take? The more people who are capable of making a net contribution, the smaller the number of people who need help

Lately I have been toying with an idea which would permit me to unify this apparent inconsistency. What if acting so as to bring out the best in others *is* acting so as to bring out the best in oneself? If that were true, then my philosophy and that of Adler's would > mesh seamlessly. I could reach out to others without feeling that I was ignoring myself. I could then be confident that in concentrating on others, I was at the same time maximizing my own potential. I am not yet convinced that I can incorporate this into my life stance, but I cannot dismiss it as a working hypothesis.

Where does all this leave me? I haven't a clue! I will someday set aside time, while lying in the sun, to ponder its implications. Even before I do, I know that life is about being good to yourself. I will not accept a world view which extols suffering. While I agree that we are tested by adversity, I see no reason to court it. Life, even the best one, has all the trials which any sane person would require. Life and all of it is, in one sense, a harbinger of death. What we call dying is hopefully, a short segment of any life. If you have lived well, perhaps you can live that bit of it well also. Therefore, my resolve, for the moment, is to strive to live with empathy for others and integrity to myself - so that I might die in that same way. ◇



Sunday Morning Volunteers
make Sundays special for all of us

Coffee Hour Hosts

Harry Thorn, Chair

- | | |
|----------|----------------|
| March 3 | Susan Jo Klein |
| March 10 | Irene Putzer |
| March 17 | Temma Fishman |
| March 24 | Cherin Silver |
| March 31 | Harry Thorn |

Ushers

Rick Zorger, Head Usher

with help from Richard Kinin
Arnold Fishman

Flower Dedications

Selma Toth, Chair

- March 3 - Ilene Haas, in celebration of her 60TH birthday
- March 10 - Dr. Robert Kay, in honor of his daughter Pamela
- March 17 - Temma and Arnold Fishman, to celebrate the birth of their son Craig.
- March 24 - Elizabeth Goldsmith, in memory of her mother Marguerite Sessler Goldsmith.
- March 31 - Ethel Boyer, for her wonderful granddaughter Stella

Greeters

Susan Jo Klein, Chair

- | | |
|----------|--------------|
| March 3 | Saul Machles |
| March 10 | Mary Lou da |
| March 17 | Jeff Dubb |
| March 24 | Lew Wilkinso |
| March 31 | Zoray Godwin |

Coffee Hour Edibles

- | | |
|----------|------------------------------|
| March 3 | Howard Peer
Doris Leicher |
| March 10 | Temma Fishman |
| March 17 | Jean Bradley |
| March 24 | Susan Jo Klein |

In Loving Memory of Comrade Gus Hall

Remembrance

by Zareefah Story

A comrade
Whose life was as timeless as
the midnight sun;
Huge as the very air we breathe.
A life long,
enduring,
 full of battle scars
 deepening spirit and fresh optimism.
Beethoven heard it right
as Prokofiev stood astride
while the talking drums of Africa
reminded, remembered us all
His thoughts directed his life.
His life unfurled his thoughts,
 from past, present, future
 weaving a direction; course,
 he knew - had to be taken,
 to fight the good fight!
His skills at organization
 connecting
 building coalitions
his honesty and steadfastness
his clarity of analysis
his vision without opportunism
his call for deeper, fuller democracy
his truth
That goes marching on!
The interlocking friendship –
comradeship –
love of working people,
he had no equal.
Unshaken confidence in the
inherent goodness of human beings –
but particularly his class,
the working men and women of the world!
His truth that goes marching on!!
When Imperialism,
Capitalism,
Racism,
Fascism and
War stand to refute his body and
place history on its head,
That which will be righted

revolutionary humanity!
Working people!
His truth that goes marching on!
The need for change was the
centerpiece of his life.
His love for humanity
cradled his strength, his resolve
but a gentle tenderness for our children
to whose welfare he was committed
His truth that goes marching on!!
With great wit and consummate humor
that never prostituted for effect or expense;
Never wavered!
Stoic in allegiance to his class
... the workers in whose presence
 his leadership
 his party —
guided a revolutionary unfolding situation
to meet history!
to arise
to stand
to greet destiny as the sun meets the new day!
He understood who he was as a worker
and working class leader
social scientist –
Marxist Leninist,
husband, father, grandfather
to forge something new
in the 20TH and 21ST century.
To go without,
to be denied,
to be deprived
is the essence of the struggle!!
To have —
to have not
 there in lies the problem
Gus understood what it meant
not to have voice,
or be denied inclusion
and suffer the misappropriation
of life's bounty
produced by the worker
and named surplus value!

Friday, April 19 at 7 PM
Lecture and Performance by
Pianist and Assistant Conductor of
the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra
Jeremy Gill
\$15. Proceeds benefit the Society.
Wine and Cheese Reception



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