

Ethical Views

March 2006 Vol. 120, No. 7 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

March Platforms

Sunday, March 5

Platform: Our leader **Richard Kiniry** will give a talk entitled *Stranger than Fiction*. Each day there are a couple stories out of Washington that sound preposterous. The evening news can sound like a report on a freak show. Maybe it is time to sit back, laugh through the tears, and smile at the strangeness of the human condition.

Sunday, March 12

Platform: **Boe Meyerson**, Leader of the Essex Society and Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University, will deliver a message on *The Heart of Ethical Culture*. It will address the emotional and communal core of Ethical Culture as distinct from its rationalist dimension. Some comparisons with the role of compassion in Buddhism will be made. Meyerson is also a Family Therapist, and holds graduate degrees in Philosophy and Literature.

Sunday, March 17



Richard Kiniry's spring tableau last year.

It's really coming! Spring, that is. On this day friends and members will welcome the glorious new season at our annual *Spring Equinox Celebration*. Share the joy of longer days and new life, the sweetness of blooming trees and flowers, the pleasure of warm sunshine, and the return of birds that wintered in southern climes.



Tim Ribchester

Together we'll sing, listen to Tim Ribchester's renditions of Spring music, read poetry, and declare to all our delight in the new season and our reverence for life on Earth.

Sunday, March 26

Platform: **Mike Franch**, one time Leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society, will offer his thoughts on *Patriotism and Pride: Affirmations of a Grateful American*. Should we be proud to be Americans? Are the manifestations of pride dangerous to our future? Is it all right to be ashamed at being American? Shame is essential to patriotism. But gratitude, with its responsibilities, rather than pride, is the emotion of patriotism. Mr. Franch is currently an affiliate minister of First Unitarian Church in Baltimore. He is a health policy analyst for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. He holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland, College Park. ◇



Leader's Message

Our Neighbors' Keeper

by Richard Kiniry

We, meaning most human beings, usually relate to social problems from a distance. How affected you are by

the plight of the downtrodden depends on your level of empathy, but their problems are still not your problems. Well, the evolving economic situation may bring social problems closer to home. Much of the middle-class lifestyle is actually dependent on government support that we take for granted. With the government stepping back from financial responsibility for parts of our social system - education, public transportation, pension support, health care, environmental problems, etc. - more of that responsibility falls on the backs of local and individual resources.

Financial security is becoming the province of the few and although we may have done our own planning for the future, our nest egg may have to stretch to include family, and friends in tight financial spots.

City folk seem to talk constantly about property values but I guess it isn't just city folk. Anyone of a certain age who owns property is confronted with a possible bonanza. Like children before the winter holidays, we talk with disbelief of the possible profits as we dream of pleasures down the road. While this daydreaming is in progress, others in the room sit quietly since they are not owners and are not likely to ever own. Many young people have chosen creative careers that are not well paid and some mature folks have built adult lives that precluded home ownership.

As we all participate in a semi-middle-class life style, it is easy to forget that some have little to fall back on in a crisis. Of course a medical disaster or other crisis could put us all in the poor house, but it is not only those we identify as poor who are in financially

(Continued next page)

(Leader's Message continued)

precarious places. While property values have soared in the last thirty years, income has remained level, and the average property owner has become part of the widening divergence between the haves and have-nots.

I bring this up out of a sense of foreboding. As jobs are outsourced overseas, people are forced to downsize their lifestyles. The national debt rises as more and more money is shifted from social services to the military. Pensions and Social Security aren't what they use to be, and rising medical cost are passed on to individuals. It will take decades to reverse the damage done to the community life of this country. Things are probably going to get worse for all of us. And although we work to raise the minimum wage, to increase spending on social programs, to save Social Security and to stop tax cuts directed to the rich, the situation may call for more personal action.



During Katrina, my cousins in Louisiana lost almost everything. Besides a wrecked house, their jobs are gone and insurance isn't going far enough. The entire extended family has been shocked into giving what they could. It wasn't a great deal of money and my cousins are now living in a FEMA trailer. Katrina was an unusual situation but I think we are going to be seeing more of that kind of difficulty. I believe we are all going to be called on to redirect our giving to more local problems. So, start saving,

your niece or your neighbor's child may need help with college and clean up the guestroom, some old friend may need a place to crash. <>



**President's
Message**

by Howard Peer

Have heart, warmer weather is fast approaching. I can tell because I have seen the signs. That perennial harbinger of spring, the Service Auction, has descended upon us. It is our single largest fund-raising event of the year. If you have not yet done so, please sign up and participate. It's a great way to both do something good for the Society and have fun in the process. Many thanks to Temma and Jean for their work organizing the Service Auction event, and Carol Erb for organizing the other festivities that evening.

As the geese fly south for the winter and the sparrows return to Capistrano, the Service Auction is followed by the Pledge Luncheon, whereupon the Members of the Board engage in wholesome—and riotous—entertainment for all. Actually, Bob is working behind the scene to come up with a skit that is both entertaining and pertinent. We hope to put on an entertaining show. The Pledge Luncheon is scheduled for March 19. Hope to see you there.

Fund raising is always a challenge for us. Although we generate a fair amount of money through the building rentals, the building is also a very expensive enterprise. It consumes much of the cash income by way of utilities, wear and tear, and overhead. It takes a lot of our resources, both financial and personal, to keep it presentable. Which brings me to the point I would like to address.

Each week we make a statement before we pass the plate. "The Philadelphia Ethical Society relies upon the financial support of its friends and members." What does that really mean? On the one hand, we are blessed to have this building and our endowment account which helps defray our costs. But what would the Society be like if we did not have these assets? What is it like for other Societies, or other religious organizations for that matter,

who are not so fortunate? How do they survive and thrive? What are our alternative income sources by which we meet our financial obligations?

Our primary source of income by which we meet our obligations is through our members' contributions. Our annual Pledge Campaign is the methodology by which we muster our courage to talk about money. And we could probably do a better job.

For us, talking about money is uncomfortable. It violates certain social norms and boundaries.



Think about public radio in comparison. Yes they get a certain amount of funding from the government, and they have "corporate sponsors" instead of advertising, but they also do somewhere between 16 and 20 days of on-air fund raising every year. We put far less effort into it. By-and-large we do not hound our members or lather on the guilt. We do not pester you at dinnertime. We tend to see ourselves as non-conformist, and somewhat rebellious. Yet, at heart we are a quiet and polite crowd.

The simple facts are thus; we are a community. We have assets that we hold in "common." These assets are both tangible (such as the building) but they are also human (as in our staff - Jean and Richard.) We are blessed to have this building, and our endowment account which helps defray our costs. We look to our staff to take care of our common assets and to provide us with various services. In turn we are expected to compensate our staff fairly. We do good work and they do good work in our name. We also want to have some budget to support our activities and promote our cause.

All equations have two sides. We have obligations to our staff that we can only meet through our own financial contributions. They rely upon us and our sense of fair play (and ethics!) to ante up and support them in a reasonable fashion. I ask, are we really doing what we can and should? Although the script I read says that we rely upon our friends and neighbors, the truth is we rely upon ourselves to share in common the financial burden in proportion to our means. So, in closing, I ask that you ponder that thought a time or two before putting pen to paper this year during our pledge drive. <>



CLASSES



INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL HUMANISM

Wednesday, March 1 at 7:30PM

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.

THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history.

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

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

In an age of materialism and consumption as a way of life, we are forced to question our own lifestyles. Being ethical no longer means just being honest and good-hearted. How do the choices we make effect the earth and the billions of people living in poverty? If you are interested in making your life more environmentally friendly and socially responsible, this is the group for you.

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



Arnold Fishman & Howard Peer in last year's sketch.

PLEDGE LUNCHEON

Sunday
March 19
12 Noon

We will be having the pledge luncheon for Philadelphia Ethical Society Members on Sunday, March 19, following the Platform.

To entertain us, the Trustees are planning to do a humorous skit, the plot of which will be a surprise!



Remember the date!

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



S E D E R

Mark this date on your calendar!

Celebrate freedom the Ethical Culture way. On **Friday, April 7 at 7:00 PM**, members and friends of the Philadelphia Ethical Society will observe our Humanist Seder. Remembering those who struggled for freedom in the past and honoring those who suffer in oppression today, we blend old and new traditions that unite us with the global community and with each other.

Join us in sharing delicious food, joyful song, and eloquent readings. Bring your own special dish to add to the feast. \$5 if you bring a dish; \$10 if you don't.










For information and to offer your specialty, contact Temma Fishman at temafish@aol.com. RSVP by April 3 by calling 215-735-3456.



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.

March 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Introduction to Ethical Humanism	2	3	4  Terry Martin-Murley
5 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Richard Kiniry <i>Stranger Than Fiction</i> <u>Meetings:</u> Both at 1:30 PM • Community/Membership Committee • Communications Committee	6  Doug Riddle	7	8 <u>Meetings</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 PM-Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM-Education Committee	9	10  Potluck Dinner For AEU Board 7:00 PM	11  Lew Wilkinson
12 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Boe Meyerson <i>The Heart of Ethical Culture</i>	13	14	15 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	16 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM History of Ethics	17	18  Saul Machles
19 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Spring Equinox Celebration  Christa Vanderbilt 12:00 PM Pledge Luncheon	20	21	22 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Voluntary Simplicity	23  Susan Jo Klein	24	25
26 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Mike Franch <i>Patriotism and Pride: Affirmations of Grateful American</i>  Ruth Ann Dubb	27 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Camp Linden Board at PES	28	29	30 Clean Water Action Strategy Meeting 7:00 PM <i>(See ad below for details)</i>	31	 Birthdays



Clean Water Action

March 30th, 7 PM
Strategy Meeting
at Mercy Wellness Center, 2821 Island Avenue

Clean Water Action invites all concerned to discuss Sunoco's outdated Hydrogen Fluoride (HF) facility at Greys Ferry. Clean Water Action is a nationwide nonprofit organization that has been working in major U.S. cities for decades on behalf of maintaining safe and clean water. If you would like a ride to this meeting, Saul will offer a ride for anyone interested, leaving from the Ethical Society, 6 PM and returning there after the meeting. For more info, talk to Saul, or Clean Water Action at 215-640-8800.

Platform Summaries



Brian D'Agostino as he makes a point during the Dialogue.



Michael Nutter (right) ponders before answering a PES member's question at the Dialogue following his speech. PES Leader, **Richard Kiniry** (left) waits for his response.



Ana Lita listens to a comment during the Dialogue.

Brian D'Agostino, educator, author and social scientist spoke to us on January 15 on the subject, *Beyond War & Capitalism; Ethics for the 21st Century*. One of the items he talked about was that events in Iraq suggest not only the obsolescence of U.S. military power in an age of terrorism, but the obsolescence of war itself. He went on to say that similarly, the ecological crisis suggests the insustainability 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. In his talk, D'Agostino aimed 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.

An energetic Dialogue session with Mr. D'Agostino following the coffee hour gave us a chance to probe his ideas further through questions and comments. He was quite generous in his responses.

-- *Janice R. Moore*

On January 22, Philadelphia City Councilman **Michael Nutter**, the member most associated with recent ethics reform, reviewed the related Council legislation and gave his view of the lax ethical environment that preceded it. He pointed out that ethics reform was not at all an issue in City government prior to the controversy precipitated by the discovery of a "bug" in the Mayor's office during the race two years ago. But now, 8 of the 9 proposed pieces of related legislation have passed. Also, there has been a campaign contribution limit set on firms that contract for the City's business. The Councilman spoke about the upcoming legislation for a new and independent Ethics Board (pending needed Charter amendment by the voters in May) which, he emphasized, would provide ongoing oversight of ethics in operations of City government. Along this line, he encouraged us as an organization, as well as individuals, to participate in the fall 2006 public hearings on the Mayor's nominees for the new Ethics Board. He stated that we should remember that as citizens we have responsibility that goes beyond voting in elections: to monitor government actions and make our opinions of those actions known to our representatives. He stressed that just as we would not decide on someone to do our home repairs and then not pay attention to how they were doing the job, we must pay attention to how our government officials are doing the jobs we elected them to do.

---*Nick Sanders*

On January 29, **Dr. Ana Lita**, Executive Director of the International and Ethical Humanist Union's Center for Bioethics, spoke about the multiple roles of the center. The center, which we support as a locus for humanistic influence for both national and international concerns for bioethics, helps educate and influence national and international discussions of bioethics. The center also guides people within the IHEU community regarding ethical opinions that reflect developing knowledge in both science and ethics. In her talk, she stressed three concerns: 1) the advances in technology and scientific research; 2) the ethical concerns which frequently trail scientific developments; and 3) the many concerns regarding bioethics, a modern debate that requires those of us in the humanist and ethical traditions to play a significant part. She argued that we in the ethical movement need to be prepared to evaluate and take stands based on scientific reasoning which is free from superstition and is focused upon utilitarian ethics and individual rights. She said we need to be steadfast, and work to have an impact on both the national and international debates regarding bioethics.

---*Lyle A. Murley*

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Editor, John Anderson Hall
Layout and Photo Editor,
Janice Moore

Distribution, Jean Bradley
Web Master, Bob Moore

Philadelphia Ethical Society

Richard Kiniry, *Leader*

Board of Trustees

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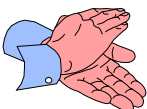
Irene Putzer

Lew Wilkinson

(215) 735 - 3456

philaes@prodigy.net

www.phillyethics.net



SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Chair

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

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

March 5 - David Ralston in honor of his
brother Fred's birthday.

March 12 - Temma and Arnold Fishman
in celebration of their son Craig's
birthday.

March 19 - Jeff and Ruth Ann Dubb in
memory of their friend, Andrew Lezak.

March 26 - Dr. Bob Kay in honor of
Stephen Kay.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

March 5 Saul Machles
March 12 Temma Fishman
March 19 Saul Machles
March 26 Jean Bradley

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

March 5 Doris Leicher
March 12 Harry Thorn
March 19 Bob Moore
March 26 Jim Cummings

Coffee Hour Lunch

March 5 Doris Leicher and
Howard Peer
March 12 Jean Bradley
March 19 Ken Greiff and
Janice Moore
March 26 Amber Anderson
and Shawn O'Brien

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, PA 19103