



Ethical Views

September 2004 Vol. 119, No. 1 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

September Platforms

Sunday, September 12

Platform: Richard Kiniry, Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, will speak on the topic, *“Why Bother Making Your Life Mean Something?”* The season begins and it’s time again for “the big picture”. It is easy to vegetate through life, harder to ask yourself if you are doing a good job. And a good job relates to how you relate to the times. As we strive for satisfaction, how far should we go beyond our personal lives with their joys and issues into the lives of people world-wide? In the 21st century, what are the basics of a good life?



Leader’s Message Interesting Times

by Richard Kiniry

Sometimes it is a real toss-up whether it is better to live in interesting or boring times. I guess since we are in a season of constant politics with an endless election, these are supposed to be interesting times but it has become a real bore. Since our country was highjacked by right-wing radicals, we have been titillated with weekly outrages that are great fodder for excited cocktail-party talk, and it is obvious that we are at a watershed moment - if you don’t find the outcome of the election of interest, you are a dunce – but does that make for interesting times? Fearful, hopeful, yes, but not especially interesting.

We may have forgotten what interesting times look like. Interesting times are times of innovation, of creativity, of change - times when people are working together to make life better, more engaging. In other words, what makes this election interesting, is the possibility of getting life going again – getting back to interesting times.

Certainly, some people are having great fun by coming up with interesting ways of taking their opinions to the doors of the opposition. Bad times can get the creative juices going, but it is defense; necessary, but

it is still creativity mobilized in a fight against certain ideas and positions and only indirectly for positive ideas. The human spirit will not be crushed but the medium it has at its disposal makes a big difference.

We have been in conservative times for so long now that we fail to perceive what it has done to our common life. Conserving is commitment to the status quo - we have ours, no need to change anything. In that environment, fitting in is more important than expressing yourself. It encourages self-involvement over involvement with life. People don’t take chances unless it is guaranteed to produce a profit. We are living with all that conservatism, all that lack of imagination, and it leads to neglected common spaces such as failing schools and a for-profit medical system. People become conservative in their dreams and life plans.

Life wants to change and grow, and that includes our moral sense. Life gets boring when the primary issues become protecting your property’s value and your retirement fund. When the life force striving for expansion, for better life is blocked, it gets stupid and closed minded. It becomes SUV’s, mobile phones, and reality television while millions starve around the world. Yes, the Huns are at the gates and we have to be creative in stopping them but as people of faith, we have to think big and more broadly. As people who search for the meaning of their lives not in how well they serve the lord but in what kind of world they create, we should search for the source of problems in the lives of actual persons. What has gone wrong? Our ethical responsibility is not just to solve the endless problems

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Sunday, September 19

Platform: *Fall Equinox celebration*, in which members and friends welcome the new season with autumn colors, songs, poetry, interactive participation, and music.

Sunday, September 26

Platform: Emmy Award-winning journalist and media watchdog Danny Schechter will speak on *WMD—Weapons of Mass Deception*, based on his documentary film of the same title, which accuses the media of promoting, rather than objectively covering, the war in Iraq. After coffee hour and lunch, Schechter will conduct a forum in which he will show his film and invite discussion of it. People who can’t make the platform are invited to the forum.

**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!**

(Continued from page 1)

but to help free the human spirit including our own. The human adventure has got to be translated from one of shoving each person into a convenient niche – laborer, professional, vicariously attractive rich person, or peripherally noticed starving African - into a communal adventure of individual persons each trying to make the best of life. The old theories have failed to produce a better world. They have given us heated car seats and universal inequality. We are different and we should live up to our different understanding of life. During the coming season of the Society, I hope we find all kinds of ways of creating interesting times for ourselves and the community.

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President's Message

Magical Thinking

by Howard Peer

Several years ago I was showing my Mother the internet. She was visiting us, and, not having a whole lot in common, I was looking for something to show her that might give us something to talk about. So I showed her how I could type in some words and get information on some topic or even pictures of a far away place. I'm carefully trying to explain in ways that she can understand and pick subject matter she is interested in.

I asked if she has any questions and she says "Yes." Ah-ha, success, interest! She wants me to surf in on my son and see where he is and what he is up to. She wants me to spy on him!

Considering that she was born in 1917 she has seen an amazing amount of technological change in her lifetime. How much did she understand? I just could not get my mind around her question. It came to me that she lived in a Magical World where anything was possible. For her life was like lightning to a Neanderthal, a force of nature out of control. "Why?" was answered with "Just because." I basked in my superiority and how I had come to be an awake and aware person.

Over the years I revisited this incident to understand it better. I widened my disdain for all those who share her world outlook; those who are willing to let life happen to them without consideration "Just Because."

Yet, upon further reflection I entered a phase of self doubt. At best I know how a few things work, and the general principals behind others. But clearly I don't KNOW how an internal engine combustion engine works. I have a passing knowledge, some vague familiarity that I have taken on faith. What do I really KNOW? I mean really know in the sense that I have verified it myself and that I fully understand all of the mechanisms? Do I even really KNOW that there is gravity? Or do I BELIEVE that there is gravity because people I know and trust tell me that it is there?

Now I have a friend who believes that he will be swept to Heaven when Rapture occurs. Here is an otherwise critical thinker and intelligent person who has completely compartmentalized off a part of his awareness. But am I really any different from him? Don't I just accept things on blind faith? I'll bet more Americans believe in the healing power of prayer than believe that vitamins work. So why do I believe in vitamins but not in prayer? There has to be an answer, some foundation for my belief system.

"Where we stand to seek the truth is holy ground." This statement points

out the difference between Ethical Culture and other religions. We "seek the truth"; lots of religions would say that they are "seeking the truth." Their "truth" is generally "revealed" in their sacred writings whereas we seek the truth in the natural world, as revealed by collective human inquiry. We believe that when humans work together, keeping an open mind, they can put the pieces together to come to a more fully revealed truth about the world we live in. That is to say that we trust or "believe" in the scientific process. Yet, I am still stuck with the word "believe"; I can't get rid of it.

So, why do I like the Ethical Society? Because I believe that you guys "get it," you understand, or at least have sympathy for, my position. We live in a funny enigma. We reject magical thinking and seek to understand our world, yet to do so we must trust others. The distinction is fine but real: not magical, but still based on faith and trust and not yet fully revealed.

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Sunday Morning Volunteers

Ushers

Rick Zorger, Richard Kiniry, Saul Machles, Joe Monte & Lew Wilkinson

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

9/12 Lyle & Terry Murley in honor of their son Marc's birthday!

9/19 Nancy Freilich in honor of her own birthday!

9/26 Saul Machles in memory of his mother Meryl.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

September 12 Saul Machles

September 19 Nick Sanders

September 26 Lew Wilkinson

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

September 12 Harry Thorn

September 19 Nick Sanders

September 26 Temma Fishman

Coffee Hour Lunch

September 12 Jean Bradley

September 19 Ken Greiff
& Janice Moore

September 26 T.B.A.

Ethics for Children

**Classes available for children
from 6 months to 10 years!
Sundays at 10:30 AM**

Kindergarten and Nursery

*(for children from 6 months
to 4 years old)*

Through sharing play material, games, and stories, the children learn to get along with others.

Animal and Human Babies

(for 5, 6, and 7 year olds)

The underlying theme of the classroom will be the children's growing awareness of the world around them and the development of an

appreciation of all forms of life. Relationships with parents, siblings, animal and human friends, wildlife and plant life are stressed. We will use the text, *Love Your Neighbor*.

An Introduction to Ethics

(for 8, 9, and 10 year old children)

Ethical values will be taught by studying the lives of well-known men and women who have lived the progressive and humanistic values that reflect the beliefs and efforts of Ethical Culture. The children will learn of the heroes and heroines who have struggled for racial equality, environmental stewardship, women's rights, healing of the oppressed, acceptance of scientific progress, and, most of all, for an end to wars and the creation of just peace. Algernon Black's *The First Book of Ethics* and the best of Sophia Fah's stories are among our many texts.

What Are Some Goals of the Ethics for Children Program?

- Exploring values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, courage, and commitment.
 - Affirming the value and uniqueness of each individual.
 - Promoting knowledge and celebration of diversity among people.
 - Inspiring social responsibility toward individuals, groups, and our environment.
 - Developing identity as part of a community of people sharing humanistic values.
 - Learning about the ethical teachings that are common to the world's religions.
- Every Person is Important and Unique.
 - Every Person Deserves to be Treated Fairly and Kindly.
 - I can Learn from Everyone.
 - I am Part of This Earth; I Cherish It and All Life upon It.
 - I Learn from the World Around Me by Using Senses, Mind, and Feelings.
 - I Am a Member of the World Community Which Depends on the Cooperation of All People for Peace and Justice.
 - I Can Learn from the Past to Build for the Future.
 - I Am Free to Question.
 - I Am Free to Choose What I Believe.
 - I Accept Responsibility for My Choices and Actions.
 - I Strive to Live My Values.
 - I View Ethics as My Religion.

How Can Parents and Family Members Participate?

Parents meet briefly each Sunday morning to discuss issues ranging from curriculum to parenting to

programming special events.

Following this meeting and while their children attend the program, parents are invited to attend Platform Meetings. Childcare is provided to all families on Sundays as a courtesy to those who wish to attend the Platform.

Ethical Culture Core Values

- Every Person is Important and Unique.
- Every Person Deserves to be Treated Fairly and Kindly.
- I can Learn from Everyone.
- I am Part of This Earth; I Cherish It and All Life upon It.
- I Learn from the World Around Me by Using Senses, Mind, and Feelings.
- I Am a Member of the World Community Which Depends on the Cooperation of All People for Peace and Justice.
- I Can Learn from the Past to Build for the Future.
- I Am Free to Question.
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- I Strive to Live My Values.
- I View Ethics as My Religion.

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Member **Nancy Freilich**, who will celebrate her birthday this month on September 19, spent a part of her busy summer writing the following member sketches.



Member Profile

Joe Monte

Trustee for Ethical Action Committee

Joe Monte was born November 13, 1968, the fourth of five children—three boys and two girls. Both parents are from Southwest Philadelphia: his father is a retired carpenter, his mother a homemaker. Joe attended and graduated from public schools in Southwest Philly, served as a radio operator in the US Army as an enlisted soldier for two years. After the Army he attended Temple University on the GI Bill and graduated with a BA in psychology in January 1994.

Joe had always been interested in mental health, and after graduating from Temple University, he worked in several positions to fulfill his interests. He is currently employed at the West Philadelphia Consortium, a community mental health facility, where he helps hospitalized psychiatric patients reconnect with outpatient therapy. Joe plans to enroll in the Master of Social Work program at West Chester University in January 2005.

He also has a long history of involvement with christian

churches. He stopped attending about five years ago and joined the Philadelphia Ethical Society in January 2004. What attracted him conscientious attitude evident in the platforms and the lives of the members themselves. The platform he found the most impacting was on wealth inequality delivered by Chuck Collins who also happens to be the founder of Billionaires for Bush. With Chuck's encouragement Joe started the Philadelphia chapter of B4B and with the help of his alter ego (Benton D'Mination) organized a demonstration on Tax Day, thanking "the unwashed, common taxpayers for paying our fair share." Benton is currently gearing up to help George W. Bush get reelected for four more wars through the "Leave no Billionaire Behind" campaign.

Of his many interests are: music, religion, science, history and spending entirely too much time on the internet. He speaks Spanish (poorly) and will suddenly break off a conversation with you to play with any kids that may be visiting.

When Joe returns to school this January he plans to attend classes for the rest of his life. His ultimate aim is to teach in a university or to be a psychologist. Failing that he plans on using his hard-earned knowledge in an appearance on *Jeopardy!* ◇



Member Profile

Arnold Fishman

Past President of the Philadelphia Ethical Society's Board of Trustees and Current President of the American Ethical Union

Arnold Fishman was born and raised, with his older sister, in Philadelphia. He studied political science and economics at Temple University and went on to Rutgers Law School. He was a busboy and waiter in the summers during high school and sold encyclopedias door-to-door in the summers during college. He was a systems analyst between college and law school. Following law school, Arnold served a judicial clerkship and practiced law in a firm for ten years. About thirty years ago he went out on his own and says that only then did he begin really to enjoy the practice of law.

Arnold is active in the Camden County and New Jersey State Bar Associations, having served multiple terms as trustee and chaired and served on many committees. He is also a member of the American Bar Association. He argued a first amendment case before the United States Supreme Court, representing a small town that zoned out of existence a so-called dirty bookstore that featured live nude dancers. He is presently involved in a case in which New

A garden is evidence of faith.
It links us with all the misty
figures of the past who also
planted and were nourished
by the fruits of their planting.
—Gladys Taber

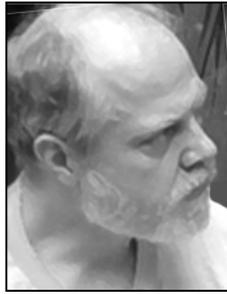
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(Continued from page 4)

Jersey is attempting to introduce a new Breathalyzer. He is a trustee of the Montessori Child Development Center and has mentored youth enmeshed in the criminal justice system.

He met his wife Temma while at college. They have a daughter who is a veterinary pathologist and a son who is a lawyer. Arnold and Temma have a home in New Jersey and an apartment in Philadelphia within walking distance of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

When asked about his interests and nonprofessional activities besides Ethical Culture, he replied, "I do yoga in the morning and meditate for fifteen minutes while standing on my head. I swim a mile a few times a week. I am a certified scuba diver, and I love to ride my motorcycle." ◇



Member Profile

Howard Peer

Philadelphia Ethical Society Board of Trustees President

Howard Peer was born on November 29, 1950 in Atlantic City, NJ. His father was from New Jersey, his mother from Newfoundland. He was raised in Cedar Run, a New Jersey Pine Barrens town, attended public schools there, taking the academic course of study. After high school, he served in the Coast Guard for four years, then worked first for Amtrak and then SEPTA. He attended Drexel University and other schools at night until he earned a BA in physics from Thomas Jefferson College in Trenton, NJ, a state college without walls.

In 1973, Howard married Diana Victoriano, with whom he had three sons—Evan, Matthew, and Brandon. The marriage ended in divorce in 1992, and Howard then

married Doris Leicher, a psychoanalyst with an MSW and MEd. The couple has one daughter, Monica, who is now in the eighth grade and helps with the Sunday School at the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

Howard works at Sistera Consultants in Chadds Ford, PA, where he does consulting work for organizations such as NJ Transit and SEPTA. His official title is Professional Engineer.

Howard came to the Philadelphia Ethical Society in 1989 because he thought it was a like-minded, friendly community that would have room for his ideas. He had been attracted by Leader Judith Espenshade, with whom he took an introductory course in Ethical Culture. He has served on the Long Range Planning Committee and, intermittently, on the Board of Trustees. With his wife Doris, Howard prepares Sunday lunch once a month and also does the dishes.

Howard's hobbies include hunting and scuba diving. He and Doris enjoy the opera and go often to performances by the Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Academy of Vocal Arts. ◇



Autumn is the eternal corrective. It is ripeness and color and a time of maturity; but it is also breadth, and depth, and distance. What man can stand with autumn on a hilltop and fail to see the span of his world and the meaning of the rolling hills that reach to the far horizon?

— Hal Borland

Growth itself contains the germ of happiness.

— Pearl S. Buck

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you are able to donate three hours of your time on a one-time basis to escort a member home from the hospital or to a medical appointment, please contact **Nancy Freilich** of the **Caring Committee** 215-563-3106). The Caring Committee is also interested in compiling a list of reliable temporary cleaning and companion services. Please note that Dining In, an organization of fifty restaurants in Center and University Cities, will deliver meals for a fee. For a brochure listing participating restaurants and menus, call 215-829-1500 or visit their website at www.diningin.com.

Camp Linden News

At its August 4 meeting, the Camp Linden Board created five committees to handle the growth and expanded needs of a functioning camp:

I - Long Range Planning (Building) – Co-chairs, Richard Kiniry and Chuck Hinson

II - Fund Raising – Co-chairs, Matthew Brady (new board member from the brokerage of Ryan and Beck) and Carol Love MD

III - Finance – Co-chairs, Richard Kiniry and Jeffrey Dubb MD

IV - Children's Program – Co-chairs, Saul Machles and Jean Bradley

V - General Planning – Co-chairs, Arnold Fishman and Jill Leeds Rivera

Please consider to what committee you might be able to contribute your ideas and talents. Do you know a group that might like to use the camp? Does your company have any matching fund plans? Where does your expertise lie?

Mark your calendars for the Labor Day weekend at Camp Linden. Work days are planned for September 4 and 5 - Saturday and Sunday before the picnic - and overnight camping will be available. The picnic will take place on Monday, September 6—and the pool will be open!

Camp Linden is a growing, thriving concept that provides a retreat for our membership and we should encourage more people take advantage of this wonderful asset. Our board meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm. I hope to see you at camp or one of our meetings.

– Carol Love MD, President

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

Get To Know Us Social

Monday, September 13, 7:30 p.m.

Every other month we hold a casual event for those who are curious about the Society and its philosophy. Members will be there to talk about their involvement and growth. Leaders of the Society will be present to answer your questions.

Refreshments will be served.

Adult Classes

Ethical development is a lifelong process. To support this development, the Philadelphia Ethical Society offers courses for adults and children which help participants enhance their sense of meaning and purpose in life and improve the ethical quality of their relationships with family, friends, co-workers and the larger community.

If you are interested or need more information, call the Society office at (215) 735-3456. Except for the **Get to Know Us Socials**, you must register.

All adult classes are held in the Weston Room and are free of charge.

The History of Ethics

This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history and this year we will be discussing the views of David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Rawls and others. We will start with Jean-Paul Sartre, reading his play, *The Flies*, and another selection (available at the Society).

Third Thursday of the month, starting **September 16 at 7:30 PM**

The Qur'an and Islam

It's time for us skeptical humanists to look at Islam. Islam has been around for 1400 years but now that fanatic Islamic terrorists are trying to kill us, we decide to check it out. We will read the Qur'an (Koran) and examine what traditionalists and modernists have to say about violence, women, and democracy. If we are in the midst of a clash of cultures, we ought to have a semi-objective understanding of the other side.

Fourth Wednesday of the month, starting **September 22 at 7:30 PM**

SEPTEMBER AT THE PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY – CELEBRATE BEGINNINGS

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--|---------|---|--|--------|--|
| | | | 1 <u>Meeting</u> 730 PM Camp Linden Board of Trustees | 2 | 3 | 4 Work Party – Camp Linden |
| 5 Work Party – Camp Linden | 6 CAMP LINDEN LABOR DAY PARTY | 7 | 8 <u>Meetings</u> 6:30 PM Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM Education | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 12 11 AM <u>Platform</u> Opening Day <i>Why Bother Making Your Life Mean Something?</i> | 13 7:30PM GET TO KNOW US SOCIAL | 14 | 15 <u>Meetings</u> 6:30 PM Executive Committee 7:30 PM Board of Trustees | 16 7:30PM Weston Rm. Class History of Ethics | 17 | 18 |
| 19 11 AM <u>Platform</u> Fall Equinox Celebration  Nancy Freilich | 20 | 21 | 22 7:30PM Weston Rm. <u>Class</u> The Qur'an and Islam | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 26 11 AM <u>Platform</u> WMD—Weapons of Mass Destruction Danny Schechter 1:30PM <u>Forum</u> Danny Schechter | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | |  Birthdays |

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