



Ethical Views

January 2010 Vol. 124, No. 5 Newsletter of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

Platforms

Sunday, January 3, 2010

Memorial Sunday

This is the time to remember those whom we love but who have left us behind, a time to feel ourselves in the stream of life. Guided by Richard L. Kiniry, Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, we will remember and honor our members who have died in the past year and others who have played a significant part in our lives. Members are invited to come and share their stories and memories.

Sunday, January 10, 2010

Working on a Local Level for Decent Health Care for All in Philadelphia

Speaker: Carol Rogers, recently retired Physician Assistant and Health Educator with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health

Rogers will share health data that show broad disparities in health status and access to health care resources in Philadelphia and discuss organizing for equitable access to health care services on a local level through a new nonprofit organization, Healthy Philadelphia.

Sunday, January 17, 2010

Ethical Culture as More than a Religion

Speaker: Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader-Intern, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

A confirmed secularist for most of his life, Hugh Taft-Morales now calls Ethical Culture his religion. He does so, however, while simultaneously advocating that Ethical Culture is more than a religion. Adler's genius was in placing ethical commitment to the worth of all above any religious or philosophical characteristics. While Ethical Culture has a humanist religious hearth that offers warm inspiration to

many, those not "religiously minded" need not gather round the fire. In ethical relationships and deeds – independent of any religious claim – is where Ethical Culture lives.

Sunday, January 24, 2010

Abu Ghraib and the American Public Discourse

Speaker: Douglas Porpora, Professor of Sociology, Drexel University

This talk describes the public reaction to the revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib as expressed in the opinion pages of 23 newspapers and news magazines from across the political spectrum. The main finding is that although the practices at Abu Ghraib were widely deplored, specifically ethical evaluation was either muted or infrequent in the mainstream press, appearing more on the fringes in left-wing or right-wing outlets and especially within religious circles. The natural questions concern the relations of religion and morality in our public discourse.

Sunday, January 31, 2010

Looking Ahead at Health Care in the United States

Speakers: Sylvia Metzler, Nurse Practitioner, and Ron Coburn, MD and Member of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

Ron has a broad background in the health care field in teaching medical students and residents, practicing internal medicine and pulmonary medicine in city hospitals, university hospitals and VA hospitals. Sylvia is a Nurse Practitioner with an office in North Philadelphia. Both are members of Physicians for a National Health Program. They will outline steps in which any legislation passed by Congress can be a start for a building of an equitable and economical health care system in this country.



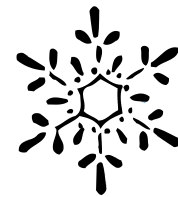
**Platforms at
11:00 a.m.,
Sundays**

Musical interludes performed by
Katarzyna Marzec-Salwinski

Coffee Hour & Discussion follow Platforms

Childcare provided at no charge

All are welcome!



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**Leader's
Message**
***Hello, Can
Anyone Hear
Me?***

— Richard L. Kiniry

When you come upon someone texting in the middle of a sidewalk or in a store aisle, are you expected to say excuse me or just stand there waiting for them to notice you? Is there any place you shouldn't take a cell phone call? After experiencing an increasing number of e-mails each week, have you decided to just ignore most of them and claim you never received them?



We are in a changing world. Not only is it getting hotter and salt water

is rising but technology is changing the way we relate. Seemingly some people, usually younger people, are in constant communication with friends and family. They are always talking, and yes, I think it is talking, since e-mailing and texting are not actually writing.

What happens to the human race when technology changes the way we function and relate? What did the first wheel do to the human sense of distance, our dependence on craftspeople, the status system, the economic system? Did the people who couldn't afford or didn't like the new technology of the wheel just die off or get run over? And will all our present day improvements in communication become standard for all except the poor and the refuseniks?

I have heard even young people express concern that the new communication technologies that appear to bring people together actually isolate them into smaller personal worlds. As people walk the streets with i-pods and phones, as they text and check their e-mails, as they are managed by their blackberries, when do they have the time to think for themselves or interact with the space and people around them? In their smaller worlds, they are deprived of the broadening influence of contact with diverse experiences and it seems that in that isolation, the level of respect for those outside the smaller world diminishes.

I could be wrong in my concern. I could just be expressing the usual criticism of the new by those who find their familiar world changing. It could be that all this technologically enhanced talking could turn into a new burst of interconnection among all of humankind. That would be nice.



But humankind is so quick to run with anything that makes life easier and more enjoyable that we seldom stop to worry about the long-term effects of innovation. Television was supposed to have an educational influence yet through the years besides lowering behavioral standards it has created a culture of uncritical zombies.

Sometimes we should say no, not always to the innovation itself, but to the way we use it. The invention

of the wheel led to the automobile, which like the original wheel is very useful but beside the negative effect on the environment the automobile has radically changed how we live. Everything from our sexual and eating habits to our relationships to our neighbors and children has been disrupted by the car culture. And only now are we saying no, attempting to respond to the negative affects of the car by restricting its use and offering options.

Of course, texting does not mean the end of civilization. But a laissez-faire attitude toward innovation, as with a similar attitude toward the supposed free-market system, is an act of resignation, an acceptance that we have little control over the urges of humankind, acknowledging that the march of progress cannot be controlled. That attitude of acceptance might make sense for people with a traditional religious approach that imagines that all of life is somehow in the hands of God, all part of his plan that will work out in the end. But as humanists we know there is no plan, just human beings playing around without a script. We can make bad decisions that are never redeemed, never work out. Our world can change forever.

Making our world better is not a process of material progress but progress in the way we treat each other, in the support the culture that we create offers each person in expressing their unique selves. And innovations in communication should be judged not by the quantity but by the quality of the exchange of thoughts and feelings. Improvements that help us to understand each other as an outlet for our empathy would be actual progress.



SCHOOL FOR ETHICS

Worldly Wisdom: Great Books and the Meaning of Life



James Sloan Allen has created a humanist approach to the Great Books. "Worldly wisdom is made up of good ideas and useful humanism that help us understand our lives and give meaning to them in this world." The book, *Worldly Wisdom*, is a series of commentaries that follow human wisdom from Homer's *Iliad* to the works of Sartre and Martin Luther King.

This class is a chance for members and friends of the Society to read and discuss those books we meant to read earlier in life while following the course of humanist thinking through the ages. Another advantage will be the opportunity to examine our own lives in the presence of ideas from around the world and through the ages.

This will be a monthly series with participants taking turns in leading the discussion. We will have copies of James Sloan Allen's book to be lent to those leading the discussion and participants will be expected to have read at least part of the selection for that month. In January, we will be discussing Aristotle's *Ethics*.

Tuesday, January 12, 7:30 PM.



Introduction to Ethical Humanism

The Ethical Society is part of a 133-year-old Ethical Culture Movement. We are a humanist religious fellowship. This workshop is a chance to delve into that history and philosophy. We attempt to offer the "big picture" of Ethical Humanism and provide opportunities for questions. Interested visitors, newcomers and members are invited to examine our approach to living as we look at our core ideas – the intrinsic worth of every human being, naturalism, nontheism and ethics as a way of life.

Led by Richard Kiniry
Friday, January 15, at 7:30 PM

BEGINNING THIS MONTH!!!

Moral Mondays ***Four Ethical Explorations***

Mondays, 7:15-9:00PM -

January 18, February 1, February 15, and March 1



Looking for an engaging intellectual experience? Want to connect classic western philosophy with common ethical experiences? Willing to do some reading?

Join **Hugh Taft-Morales** at the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia for some philosophical

fun. Each class will offer dynamic lectures and group discussions. Requires about an hour of reading per week.

Jan 18 – Reason, Emotion, Desire

The Moral Psychology of Plato and Hume
The Harmonious Soul - Reason as Charioteer
(Plato)
The Beast Within - Reason as Slave
(Hume)

Feb 1 – Shades of Selfishness

Animal Selfishness: Survival of the fittest
(Nietzsche, Spencer)
Rational Selfishness: The Virtue of being Number One
(Ayn Rand)
Spiritual Selfishness: The Drum Major Instinct
(Martin Luther King, Jr.)



Feb 15 – Shades of Altruism

Animal Altruism: Sociobiology and Survival
(Peter Singer)
Rational Altruism: Enlightened Self-Interest
Spiritual Altruism: The Value of Sacrifice

Mar 1 – Morality Beyond The Self

Self-Actualization in the Absolute
(Hegel, Marx, and Bradley)
Autonomy and Relations
Buddhist Detachment

January 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3 11:00 a.m. Platform: Memorial Sunday Richard L. Kiniry 12:30 p.m. - Greeters & Ushers Training Event	4	5	6 6:30 p.m. Finance Committee	7	8	9 Camp Linden Volunteer Day
10 11:00 a.m. Platform: Working on a Local Level for Decent Health Care for All in Philadelphia Carol Rogers	11  Carol Love	12 Class Worldly Wisdom 7:30 p.m.	13 Meetings 6:30 p.m. Education Committee 7:45 p.m. Ethical Action Cmte.	14 Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty Meeting 6:00pm	15 Class Intro to Ethical Humanism 7:30pm Lyle Murley	16
17 11:00 a.m. Platform: Ethical Culture as More than a Religion Hugh Taft-Morales	18 Moral Mondays First Session 7:15pm	19	20 Meetings 6:30 p.m. Executive Committee 7:30 p.m. Board of Trustees	21 Amnesty International 7:00 p.m.  Ken Greiff	22 Thursday Night Talkies 7:00 p.m.	23
24 11:00 a.m. Platform: Abu Ghraib and the American Public Discourse Douglas Porpora	25	26	27 7:00 p.m. Camp Linden Board of Trustees	28	29  Jordan Orange	30
31 11:00 a.m. Platform: Looking Ahead at Health Care in the United States Sylvia Metzler and Ron Coburn					 Birthdays	

My Ethical Culture

— Nic Esposito



I was thousands of miles away in Louisiana when I first experienced the stark reality of my grandfather's deteriorating lung condition.

I remember hanging up the phone after my father informed me of my grandfather's need for an oxygen tank, and from some ingrained habit I instantly felt the urge to pray. I was riding my bike, and as I looked up to the sky all I saw was the blue hue. But rather than seeing God above me, all I could think of was the way the light reflected off the ocean and into the atmosphere, creating the color. So if I knew God did not create the color of the sky, and as I was also relatively sure he did not create the expanse of the trillions of stars or the possible other universes either, I realized that praying to him to make my grandfather better was a futile pursuit.

I began to wonder, who or what does an atheist pray to in tough times? It was the first time I consciously referred to myself with that philosophical identification.

Consequently, my next thought after God was of the countless doctors and scientists who had developed the treatments that had kept my grandfather alive for so long. But rather than pray to them, all I could do was mentally thank them for sharing the same pragmatism and curiosity that had led me to the philosophy of atheism, and then the humanism that has come to manifest itself in my ethical culture.



After returning home, I spent much time with my grandfather, for which I am grateful. His main concern after I moved back to Philly was that I to go back to church. I don't think it was completely out of deference to God, and I'm not sure that the Ethical Society was what he had in mind. I just think he wanted me to find a community with which to practice my morals as he prepared to leave this earth and could no longer provide those lessons himself. Although his Catholicism would not allow him to reveal such an opinion while on this Earth, I think he would be happy with my decision.

My grandfather was a great example of what it means to be a gentleman and, even more importantly, what it means to be a gentle human. Even though he practiced Catholicism, in our compassion and our goodness to other humans was where we met to seek the highest ground. Needless to say, it was extremely difficult to sit in that hospital room, watching his eyes wander from side to side as his consciousness slipped and his body gave out. In that moment I was able to see the body for what it really is, just a machine to hold whatever force our consciousness is. It was even harder to listen to family members reassure themselves that he was in heaven, meeting his mother and father once again.

But this event has not left me confused. Although I have no confidence to righteously profess what I think happens when we die, after reflecting on my grandfather's loyal, humble and just existence, I have a pretty good idea of what it is to be a human on this earth, while we have this life. For as I've come to realize when pondering death and existence, and people's opinions about both, I'd rather focus on the good I can do now, than dictate what will happen to me in the hereafter.



A Good Deed and a Good Time

-- Temma Fishman

For the past several years, the Ethical Humanist Society, through its Ethical Action Committee, has purchased dictionaries for underserved children in the public schools.



This effort is made available by the Dictionary Project, whose mission is to increase literacy among children. I have been heading the effort with help over the years, but this year, I'm looking for "new blood," people interested in participating in a fun and rewarding experience with me.

After purchasing the books, we take them to a school of our choice. This year we will focus on an inner-city Philadelphia public school. We

usually provide the books to third-graders, as this is the time when children begin to concentrate on learning their dictionary skills. Each child gets his very own dictionary to keep.

The best part of the experience comes with relating to the children as you offer a brief, basic, interactive lesson on dictionary use. The kids are lovable, enthusiastic, very appreciative, and they participate with the amusing and incisive comments that children are so good at. They often express their gratitude by sending us thank-you notes decorated with charming drawings, which we display for our members to see. It is a truly delightful experience that will leave you smiling with satisfaction.

If you would like to do a good deed for children who need help and have a great time doing it, please contact me at temmafish@aol.com or at my phone number in the membership list. We will be ordering and delivering the books soon. Visit www.dictionaryproject.org to learn more. ◇



This month, our Quaff and Quarrel will be held on Monday, January 18th at 6:30p.m. The place is the same -- Doobies, which is located at 2201 Lombard Street.

Thursday Night Talkies

January 21, 2009, 7:00 PM

Movie, discussion,
popcorn & pop



Six Degrees Could Change the World

Based on Mark Lynas's *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet* and narrated by Alec Baldwin, the program roams from the bushfire-ravaged suburbs of southern Australia to the drought-stricken farmlands of Nebraska to the rapidly melting glaciers of Greenland. In the process, aerospace engineers, marine biologists and ordinary citizens share their experiences and predictions.



Step Up to the Plate, Ushers and Greeters

We will be holding an Usher & Greeter training event following Coffee Hour on **Sunday, January 3rd**. We will teach each other the best way of efficiently and effectively making the Platform run smoothly and making sure our visitors are welcomed and informed about the Society.

Jean's Listing

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except July and August.

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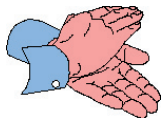
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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Flower Dedications - Ramona Ward,
Coordinator

Jan. 3 - Open

Jan. 10 - Terry Murley: "In Honor of
Lyle's Birthday."

Jan 17 - Irene Putzer: "In Honor of My
Mother's Upcoming Birthday."

Jan. 24 - Proud Grandparents, Temma
& Arnold Fishman: "To Celebrate the
2nd Birthday of Granddaughter, Zoey
Elisabeth Fishman, Born Jan. 23, 2008."

Jan. 31 - Open

Ushers - Betsy Lightborn, Coordinator

Jan 3
Jan 10 T.B.A.
Jan 17
Jan 24
Jan 31

Greeters - Ken Greiff, Coordinator

Jan 3
Jan 10 T.B.A.
Jan 17
Jan 24
Jan 31

Coffee Hour

Jan 3 - Group A-D
Jan 10 - Group E-K
Jan 17 - Group L-O
Jan 24 - Group P-Z
Jan 31 - T.B.A.

Photo credit

*All photos this issue
by Janice R. Moore*

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