

Ethical Views

April 2006 Vol. 120, No. 8 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

April Platforms

Sunday, April 2

Platform: Our Leader, **Richard Kiniry**, will speak on behalf of **Secular Religion**. Usually secular is meant to indicate separation from religion. But the idea of a secular state is a value statement, an expression of a moral position. We must ask ourselves, does a secular society have no religion or does it simply put individual religions under a higher authority, namely justice?

Sunday, April 9

Platform: Former FBI translator **Sibel Edmonds** will discuss her ethical journey. (See Insert)

Sunday, April 16

Platform: Professor and Director of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, **Jane Golden**, will speak on a topic to be announced. Since 1984, Ms. Golden has been the drive behind the Mural Arts Program. She holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, and degrees in Fine Arts and Political Science from Stanford University. In addition, Ms. Golden has received honorary PhDs from Swarthmore College, the University of the Arts, and most recently LaSalle University. Ms. Golden has received numerous awards for her work, including the Red Cross Spectrum Award, the Arts and Culture Award from the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, an Eisenhower Exchange Fellowship, and most recently the Philadelphia Alliance Award and recognition as a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania.

April 9th Platform Speaker



Sibel Edmonds

When is it right to expose a possible national security cover up? Former FBI translator Sibel Edmonds will discuss the ethical considerations

that led her to report careless work practices and security breaches at the agency to her superiors. Shortly after she made the report, she was fired. According to the ACLU, "Edmonds discovered poorly translated documents relevant to the 9-11 attacks and reported the shoddy work to her superiors." She has challenged her firing in court, but the government dismissed the case, citing security considerations. Edmonds, who was born in Iran and grew up in Turkey, is fluent in several languages, among them Turkish and Farsi. She translated documents for the FBI during 2001-2002. Her story can be read at her website, www.justacitizen.org.

Sunday, April 23

Platform: **Maria Sliwa**, who served as an NYPD undercover police officer and then as director of corporate research at a prestigious Manhattan firm before she was inspired to work on human rights, will address the Society on **Slavery in the 21st Century**. There are over 27 million modern day slaves today. Ms. Sliwa will tell us about the different types of slavery and what the audience can do to help stop this problem. While lecturing at universities, civic and religious organizations, Ms. Sliwa has helped to organize a grassroots awareness campaign with her colleagues at the American Anti-Slavery Group. She has led divestment campaigns aimed at preventing the Sudanese government from conducting slave raids against its black African population in the South.

Sunday, April 30

Platform: **Gary L. Francione**, Professor of Law, and **Nicholas B. Katzenbach**, Distinguished Scholar of Law and Philosophy at Rutgers University School of Law, will speak on **Animals: Our Moral Schizophrenia**. When it comes to nonhuman animals, there is a very great gap between what we say and what we do. Those of us who live with nonhuman companions regard them as members of the family. We have no doubt that these nonhumans are sentient, able to think, have emotions, etc. When these animals die, we grieve, sometimes more profoundly than when human relatives die. But we stick forks into other animals who are no different from our companions. In this talk, Mr. Francione will discuss this phenomenon, and the role that is played by moral and legal doctrine in reinforcing the notion that animals are things or resources. He will argue that these views cannot be defended rationally. ◇

The Philadelphia Ethical Society is now air-conditioned during the summer.



Leader's Message

Musings

by Richard Kiniry

From the perspective of progressive people it is easy to hate the present occupant of the White House. And I don't mean Laura. But hate is an unfashionable feeling and it produces more trouble than it's worth. Besides that, we supposedly believe in respecting every person and can you both respect a person and hate him?

Jesus told his followers that they should love their neighbor as themselves. Love is a strong word and you have to wonder if he meant the same thing as we mean by love. Loving family and friends goes with the territory; even when they are at their worst, the love remains. Personally, I have only minor complaints about my neighbors — none of them has done anything that would precipitate hate. I respect their interests, but love isn't part of the deal.

It's interesting that religions seem to specialize in encouraging us to do things that appear contrary to human nature. We are, by nature, self-interested creatures with basic drives and, even with our loved ones, there is an element of possession. Religion tends to expand self-interest. Although many of the religious instructions are simply meant to control our appetites, they also provide arguments for caring about others. Caring does work in our self-interest, but only in a relatively stable community. Community only works if there is a feeling of attachment among the members, and religion as a civilizing institution offers encouragement to care.

But religious groups, including Ethical Humanism, don't stop at the civilizing influence of caring. They make caring a really big deal (as with Jesus and his "love your neighbor" and Felix Adler's "bring out the best in others"). In both cases you are expected to take respect to another level of concern and commitment. You are expected to feel a real attachment to others, including total

strangers. It sounds very nice, but other than as a suggestion concerning behavior, I don't notice many people actually trying to live that way. The level of caring suggested in both those adages is over and above a recommendation about good relationships. It describes a style of living that is about changing human nature, or at least playing with it.

Religion, like everything else, is a product of evolution, but it is also an instrument of evolution. We usually identify religion with talk of gods and the afterlife, but most basically it's about adding intention or direction to life. Religion is about expanding human nature. It is about putting each person's life at the center of the universal process. As an evolutionary mutation, religion, like art and music, pushes human life to a higher plane. Our lives are supposed to mean something. Human life is no longer just swinging in trees and searching for food, but the creative act of making life better. If there was no mind running evolution before, there certainly were many minds doing it when humans got into the act. In the process, religion stressed our psychological attitude to live. What is called "the spiritual life" is our inner value system. Religion emphasizes that inner life as who we truly are. How you act, and how you relate to others, reflects that inner self. Good religions build on the empathy that is part of human nature and makes it a way of life.

So, coming back to the present occupant of the White House. If we don't hate, why not? Because from our parents, teachers, or the kids in the neighborhood, we have learned to live on that higher plane. With all the damage we may think he has done to our human community, he is still one of us. We care and wish he cared as much. Of course, we may care enough about everyone else to demand his removal from the People's House.

Caring is, I believe, some form of love, but I save love for those I am unconditionally attached to. Whatever you call it, the respect for each person—not as an abstract entity but as an individual with needs, a fellow traveler—is the beginning and the end of good living.

<>



THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

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

3rd **Thursday** of the month, **April 20, 7:30**

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.

4th **Wednesday** of the month, **April 26, 7:30 PM**



News of Friends and Members

We send greetings to **Lew Wilkinson**, **Ethel Boyer** and **Jesse Zelnick**, who are rarely able to come to the Society.

We're sending special hellos to **Roberta Wood**, **Gladys Huber**, and **Jessie Harmath**. They can surely use our phone calls and letters and the opportunity to share news with friends. We miss them all and wish them well.

Our thoughts and sympathies are with **Mary Lou DaSilva** who is presently occupied with caring for her gravely ill mother.

It was a great joy seeing **Bob Kay** up and about again and looking so fit.

Ethical Action Committee Report

The Ethical Action Committee (EAC) is the arm of the Philadelphia Ethical Society devoted to social justice projects. When Chairman **Nick Sanders** pronounces the Committee's name, the emphasis is usually on the word 'Action'. The EAC aims to concentrate on concrete actions, rather than on education, discussion, or spiritual development.

Three recent EAC projects illustrate the rewards—and disappointments—of taking action to make the world a better place.

Several months ago, Sanders and EAC member **Saul Machles**, after attending local environmental group meetings, asked the EAC to endorse a written call protesting the way that Sunoco's Philadelphia refinery stores highly volatile hydrogen fluoride (HF). A coalition of community groups charged that Sunoco's handling of HF was not safe for the surrounding neighborhood.

In March, Sunoco announced plans to change its processing of HF.

In another EAC action, the committee urged PES members to take action on the federal budget. In Sunday platform announcements, the EAC urged PES members to participate in an 800-number call-in campaign sponsored by the Coalition on Human Needs to protest Bush White House plans for the 2006 budget. The administration proposed cuts of nearly \$67 billion over five years to Medicaid, Food Stamps, student loans, foster care assistance, child support enforcement, and other programs—at the same time that it cut taxes for the wealthy.

Under pressure from constituents, Congress reduced Bush's proposed cuts to human services from \$67 billion to "only" \$39 billion. (But the 2007 federal budget is being prepared now, and early indications are that Bush will again ask for \$65 billion in cuts to those vulnerable programs. If you want to find out more, read a

report on the 2007 budget by the Coalition at: www.chn.org/pdf/FY07BudgetAnalysis.pdf.)

Sometimes quick action is required. In mid-January, the ACTS Christian Transitional Services, a women's shelter at 28th and Masters, burned down and 126 women and children were out on the street. EAC member **Carole Erb** brought the situation to the Committee and the PES responded with bags of clothing, children's books, linens, and financial donations. Erb has arranged with a local pharmaceutical company to use \$120 in PES donations to buy drugs at half price. Erb is also selling "End the War" magnetic ribbons and donating the proceeds to the shelter.

The EAC also sent a letter to Senators Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum expressing our doubts about Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito's stance on women's reproductive rights, church-state separation, and other constitutional issues. Alito was confirmed.

Meanwhile, the EAC does other, continuing actions: cooking meals for the Trinity homeless shelter and contributed to a clergyman's group protesting the death penalty.

And all this with one aim in mind: Action. Or, as a long-standing Ethical Society motto puts it, Deed Before Creed.

—**Bob Moore**



In response to the South Dakota bill just passed banning abortion, PES Members **Lyle** and **Terry-Martin Murley**, **Richard Kiniry** and **Henry Pashkow** took part in a planned parenthood demonstration at the justice building in March.

Robert Morris Children Need You!

The Philadelphia Ethical Society has had a long, happy association with the **Robert Morris School** at 26th and Thompson Streets. Ruth King, the principal, is looking for someone representing the Philadelphia Ethical Society who is willing to serve on their School Council, which will meet once a month starting in August. The children need the help of the community to make Robert Morris a magnet school for the arts. If you're interested, contact Temma Fishman at temmafish@aol.com or at the Society.



President's Message

by Howard Peer

The March issue of **Church and State**, the monthly newsletter published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, had an interesting article on recent happenings in Ohio. As you may know, a couple of right-leaning evangelical pastors, emboldened by their recent successes in the Presidential election year, had increased their electioneering activities. Local observers had, as C&S put it, "noted the efforts of evangelical pastors' Russell Johnson and Rod Parsley to rally like-minded religious leaders throughout the state to elect as governor Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell, an avid supporter of the Religious Right agenda." In response a different group of ministers including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Lutheran filed a complaint to the IRS challenging the overtly political activities by a 501(c)(3) organization. 501(c)(3) organizations are tax exempt and are required by law to follow certain rules

(Continued next page)

(President's Message continued)

that limit their political activities in order to maintain their tax-exempt status. Americans United have a web site providing general guidelines at: www.au.org/site/PageServer?pagename=resources_IRS.

But in short (quoting from the AU site) "organizations, including churches and religious organizations, are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office. Contributions to political campaign funds or public statements of position (verbal or written) made by or on behalf of the organization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign activity." Allowed activities may include "certain voter education activities (including the presentation of public forums and the publication of voter education guides) conducted in a nonpartisan manner that do not constitute prohibited political campaign activity. In addition, other activities intended to encourage people to participate in the electoral process, such as voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, would not constitute prohibited political campaign activity if conducted in a nonpartisan manner. On the other hand, voter education or registration activities with evidence of bias that: (a) would favor one candidate over another; (b) oppose a candidate in some manner; or (c) have the effect of favoring a candidate or group of candidates, will constitute prohibited participation or intervention."

I find this all interesting on two different levels. One is obvious. We tend to be a like-minded crowd, and as like-minded people we tend to have similar political leanings and are, on average, more likely to vote for one candidate than another. We also tend to be an activist crowd and we want to DO things. Our faith, like that of most all other religions, is not neutral on matters that affect how we vote. So it feels natural for us to get involved and affect our future. But we need to be careful in what we do; for there are rules and guidelines and,

frankly, penalties for those who cross the line. And the lines and rules and guidelines all exist for good reason. To poorly paraphrase something I recently heard: "Democracy is not doing what the majority wants. It is rule guided by the majority that protects the rights of the minorities." As long as we are a minority, we should be grateful for the rules. When we become the majority, we should remember where we came from.

These rules and guidelines are germane to this very publication as well as to our platform addresses. Our authors and editors, of both paper and electronic media, need to be ever cognizant of our limitations. Believe it or not, we have had some interesting discussions about these matters and have given them some due consideration. One sly purpose of this article is to gently and tactfully remind the editors of these rules.

The other, perhaps more interesting meaning of these rules is this. Guess who defines what a "religion" is in the United States? Well, the IRS. Paradoxical isn't it? That for all the talk of separation of church and state, it is the state that defines what a church is. I don't know how it could be otherwise and I have no alternative solutions but I do find it comical. Can you imagine a bunch of IRS auditors sitting around over a few beers and having a heated discussion about what constitutes a religion? Now of course their findings have been challenged and the rules have been clarified in the court system, but still the image remains. What have we come to? No wonder we get ourselves into trouble. And I don't have any better suggestions. Until next month. ◇



Above:
Ashley Opalka,
Soprano

*We thank our
February and March
guest musicians!*

Below: Rebecca Harris,
violinist



GET TO KNOW US SOCIAL

**Wednesday - April 5th
7:30 PM**



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.

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!

Philadelphia Ethical Society Forums
presents
A Different View:
Perspectives from Iran and Syria

Lawrence Davidson

professor of Middle East history
at West Chester University
and

Janet Amighi

anthropologist at Montgomery Community College

will report back on their fall trip to Iran and Syria.

Their travel was sponsored by **Academics for
Peace and Conscience International.**










Sunday, April 23, 7:00pm

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 S. Rittenhouse Square

"During our trip, we spoke with people in the streets, at universities and in government offices including the President of Syria, Beshar Asad, and the just past president of Iran, Mohammed Khatami. We will report back on the varied views we encountered . . . and discuss American relations with Iran and Syria today and how these relate to the war in Iraq."

Dr. Davidson is author of several books on the Middle East, including the recently published, *Concise History of the Middle East*. Janet Amighi lived in Iran from 1971-79 and authored the book, *The Zoroastrians of Iran*.

April 2006

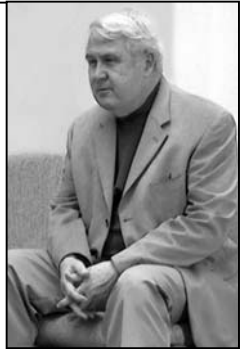
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Richard Kiniry <i>Secular Religion</i>	3	4	5  GET TO KNOW US SOCIAL 7:30PM	6	7  Ethical Humanist Seder 7:00PM	8 CAMP LINDEN WORK DAY 11:00 AM
9 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Sibel Edmonds Former FBI Translator <i>(See insert on front page)</i>	10	11  Jeannette Kohler	12 <u>Meetings</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 PM-Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM-Education Committee	13	14	15
16 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Jane Golden, Professor and Director of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program	17	18	19 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	20 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM History of Ethics	21  Henry Pashkow	22  Kate Esposito
23 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Maria Sliwa <i>Slavery in the 21st Century</i> 7:00 PM <u>Forum</u> <i>A Different View: Perspectives from Iran and Syria</i>	24 <u>Meeting</u> 7:30 PM Camp Linden Board at Dr. Carol Love's home	25  Chuck Hinson	26 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Voluntary Simplicity	27	28	29
30 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Gary L. Francione & Nicholas B. Katzenbach <i>Animals: Our Moral Schizophrenia</i>						 Birthdays

Platform Summaries

February 5: “How good are you?” asked our Leader, **Richard Kiniry**. Goodness is based not only on what deeds we do or stands we take in society, but how we act, interact, treat each other and lead our lives. Quoting Dale Drews from a talk he gave, Richard added, “How intrusive is ethics in my life? How nice do I have to be?”

Sometimes we need to review our personal ethics by assessing our deeds and by looking at how we act in the community. Ethical responsibility is in being aware that our faces and demeanor broadcast messages, that our presence may affect another. We need to see those things we do to the web of community that have a negative effect. This is not about living up to a set of rules, but about trying to be our authentic self in a group situation with an awareness of our impact. Being honestly authentic is our primary job and we can’t *always* be concerned with our effect on others. Right or wrong is arbitrary, and sometimes a sharper view can be a good balance in a relational soup that may be too sweet.

—**Janice Moore**



Richard Kiniry

February 19: **David Adler**, from the Food Trust, spoke to us about the inefficiencies in the food system, both in Philadelphia and nationwide. He focused on his organization’s efforts to correct these discrepancies through education and awareness. The Food Trust has commissioned many studies, one of which was recently published, showing the relationship between the availability of healthy foods in lower class neighborhoods and the prevalence of diseases attributable to poor diet. Type II diabetes and obesity, for example, are much more likely to occur in these environments. The Food Trust was also successful lobbying the Philadelphia school system to have sodas removed. The educational aspect of the Food Trust’s programs aim at younger children, arranging field trips to farms, and organizing markets in the schools themselves. Adler said, “instead of lecturing, we try to use the natural inquisitiveness of children to encourage consumption of healthier foods.”

—**John Hall**



Larry Angert and Alan Silverblatt

February 26: **Larry Angert** and **Alan Silverblatt** came to educate us about one segment of the Ethical Humanist population – Humanistic Jews. As active members and spokespersons of Shir Shalom, a Delaware based chapter of the Society of Humanistic Judaism, they each shared a brief history of their organization as well its core principles and philosophy.

Humanistic Judaism offers a non-theistic alternative to contemporary Jewish life to people across the world. The International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews is an association of organizations from various nations, including Israel – a nation that Larry Angert called “a center of Humanism.” Both speakers emphasized the similarities between Humanistic Judaism and Ethical Humanism. Believing “the freedom and dignity of the Jewish people must go hand in hand with the freedom and dignity of every human being,” Humanistic Jews hold strong to ethical values and collective responsibility for solving human problems. Although many sectarian Jews criticize Humanistic Judaism as a belief that tries to “have its cake and eat it too,” Humanists hope to collaborate in making this segment of Ethical Humanism better known to Jewish people and the world.

—**Diana Zarzuela**

VISITORS FROM THE AEU March 10-12



Above: Photos from Potluck Dinner given by PES for Members of the AEU.

Below: **Arnold Fishman**, President – AEU introduces AEU Members in the audience at the PES Sunday platform.

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except July and August.

Editor, John Anderson Hall
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Distribution, Jean Bradley
Web Master, Bob Moore

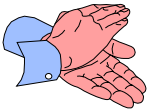
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(215) 735 - 3456
philaes@prodigy.net
www.phillyethics.net



SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Chair

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

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

April 2 - Doris Leicher & Howard Peer
For Spring!

April 9 - Nancy Freilich in honor of
her sister Sharon's birthday.

April 16 - Amber Anderson: Happy
birthday to Amber's terrific mom,
Shirley Anderson.

April 23 - Carol Erb in honor of our
sixth grandchild, our fourth
granddaughter!

April 30 - Harry Thorn to welcome
grand nephew Ethan!

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

April 2 Saul Machles
April 9 Irene Putzer
April 16 Saul Machles
April 23 Saul Machles
April 30 Harry Thorn

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

April 2 Doris Leicher
April 9 Harry Thorn
April 16 Saul Machles
April 23 Temma Fishman
April 30 Mary Scholl

Coffee Hour Lunch

April 2 Doris Leicher and
Howard Peer

April 9 Jean Bradley

April 16 Ken Greiff & Janice Moore

April 23 T.B.A.

April 30 T.B.A.

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, PA 19103