

Ethical Views

December 2005

Vol. 120, No. 4

Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

December Platforms

Sunday, December 4

Platform: **Richard Kiniry**, Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, will speak about "*Living in Faith.*"

Is "people of faith" just another description of fanatics? Faith as a life-stance brings that religious notion down to earth but is faith still an excuse for giving up thinking? And should we Ethical Humanists be actively trying to live a life of faith?

Sunday, December 11

Platform: **The Honorable Renée Cardwell Hughes** will speak on a topic to be announced. She is a trial judge in the Court of Common Pleas, the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania which encompasses the City of Philadelphia. Judge Hughes has served in the Trial Division of the court, since her appointment to the bench in 1995 by Governor Tom Ridge. She was elected to a full ten year term beginning January, 1996. She has handled both civil and criminal proceedings. Her civil caseload has covered a broad range of civil proceedings, including mass torts, asbestos litigation, products liability, and medical malpractice. Judge Hughes has also presided over a wide variety of criminal cases including homicides, rapes, and other major felonies.

Sunday, December 18

Platform: Join us for our *Winter Solstice Program* of candlelight, poetry, music and inspirational readings, orchestrated by leader **Richard Kiniry** and presented by members and friends of the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Our community comes together to offer warmth and comfort to each other as we face the cold months ahead and to celebrate the beauty of the season. All are welcome.

Sunday, December 25

There will be no platform.

Report on Recent Ethics in Action

During September and October, members and friends of the Ethical Society were encouraged by the Ethical Action Committee (EAC) to become engaged in a variety of actions that expressed the members' concerns for our community, and for positive social change. Efforts included: (1) Supporting through petition and Board endorsement for a campaign by the Clean Water Action and the Community / Labor Refinery Tracking Committee. Their aim is to have our local Sunoco refinery cease using the very deadly hydrogen fluoride in its refining process; (2) Contacting US House of Representatives to block the attempt to cut important social services in order to pay some of the costs of Katrina instead of rescinding recent "temporary" tax cuts; (3) Helping with maintenance and clean up at Camp Linden; and (4) Providing each of the Robert Morris Charter School's 3rd graders with his or her own dictionary.

The Ethical Action Committee of the Society will continue to make suggestions at the Sunday platforms about actions we might want to take in unison for greater impact. You can also find suggestions in the American Ethical Union's monthly *Ethical Action Report*, copies of which are available on the Society's notice table in the lobby.

Please give the EAC feedback on the related actions you take and your assessment of results, care of Nick Sanders, EAC Chairperson.



Leader's Message



KEEP X IN CHRISTMAS

by Richard Kiniry

The shopping season is upon us. We may not believe any of the stories connected with the holidays but we are still expected to prove our affection for family and friends by buying stuff. I know I already have too much stuff and even the children in my world have more clothes, toys, and games than they will ever get to use.

A couple of years ago I went thorough my house packing up all the clutter. I filled three boxes without trying but refilled the place with new clutter in no time. Friends bring back presents from vacations, my birthday elicits a book or a nice shirt, and the Holidays arrive with more stuff I could live without. Of course, I am my own worst enemy. I can not walk past a piece of blown-glass without fingering my credit card. I keep promising that I'm going to move into a loft, an all white loft, with room for just a bed and a couple chairs - no room for pretty things or Cuisanart attachments.

The holiday season is a prime example of how materialistic we have become. For believers, the mythical stories that supposedly engender the holidays are events with religious significance. But those stories include a large dose of magic. Besides a virgin birth and magic oil, there is a gift-giving old man from the North Pole and a reindeer with a stop light for a nose. So, the religious stories become an

(Continued next page)

(Leader's Message continued)

occasion for more magic - gifts magically falling into our laps. Of course, to perform the magic you need a credit card that will produce some black magic down the road.

Giving can be very satisfying but being forced to give takes some of the joy out of the giving. And since everyone we actually know already has too much, you have to be clever to find some bauble that will please.

Well, this year I'm giving myself permission to be true to my beliefs. I have always given some presents that were contributions to the needy or to a cause, and I have decided it is time to be consistent and give only meaningful gifts. I may kill some of the magic of the season but that is a side benefit of intentional giving.

I could decide not to participate at all and announce that I will neither give nor receive holiday gifts, but that is a bit too high-handed and holier-than-thou. Actually my sentiments are not so unique and there is a growing trend among people tired of the meaningless giving who are looking for a better way. Charitable groups are offering us opportunities to give presents that give to others. You can present your family and friends with cards informing them that in their name you have bought a cow for a family in Bangladesh or feed a Native-American family. And there are always home-made gifts - rum balls or a bird house.

Our materialistic culture finds endless ways of manipulating our behavior and we have to work at freeing ourselves from its clutches. The holidays season is a perfect time to think about what we are doing as we go forth into the world of jingling cash registers. It is time for more imaginative giving, gifts that both express our values and might also push someone closer to their better selves. ◇



President's Message



by Howard Peer

Having planned to write this article on the outbound trip, while waiting for my train this morning, I wandered into the book store to find a nice sailing magazine for my ride home. They had, once again, rearranged the magazines on the shelves so I found myself standing there scanning the titles looking for a likely suspect. Slowly, I became aware of the huge variety of topics being presented to me. I don't know what was different this time; I often get the exact opposite reaction, every thing is just a different angle on the same thing, mostly some form of light weight gossip. What really got me was the almost intentional contrasts, perhaps the stock person was a surreptitious literature grad student with an eye for the ironic.

There was "Spiritual Writing" promising help to "Share your faith through fiction, essays articles and more." That was next to the UTNE Reader with an issue on charity aid and emergency giving. On the face of it, the faith-based mag was touting how to capitalize on faith for personal gain while the sectarian mag was telling us how to make sure everyone is taken care of, if just enough. On the next rack down was National Geographic with the banner "The Secrets of Living Longer." I thought it a nice contrast to the above. On the one hand the Christians proclaim to revel in the hereafter, not the here and now, yet clearly seek temporal improvement. So the Christians would have no need for information on living longer for they are going to live forever, in heaven. The secularists are promoting equal and fair treatment in the here and now, they are promoting living longer in another sense, living until next month, next week, or tomorrow. Yet I'm sure that of the

three National Geographic has the widest circulation and most name recognition.

Turning to the left was a rack of magazines with rock and roll and music on the top, photographic magazines occupied the middle and their covers featured some really, really nice nudes. Then, stuck down on the bottom of the rack was "High Times" dedicated to marijuana usage. So there you have it, American culture on display in a magazine rack, read from bottom up - "Drugs, Sex, and Rock & Roll." How iconic, or ironic?

On the right rack was testosterone territory: surfing, skate boarding, cars, outdoor sports, and boating. Ah yes, one lonely mag about sailing, but alas I had already read it. And on the next rack? Well, we won't go there. All the covers were discretely covered with opaque sleeves and they were shoved deep down into special high profile holders with only the titles peeping out winking at us.

So what did I buy? "Spiritual Writing" because its banner was "How to write to inspire." And Heaven knows I needed inspiration to help get me through this mornings writing assignment. And National Geographic because I too, a lowly secularist, want to live for ever. Selfish? Perhaps, but then I tend to ascribe to the philosophy that, if we are truly honest with ourselves, all of our acts are driven by some selfish desire.

To be fair "Spiritual Writing" had some good articles on writing tips and techniques, if read for it's technical merit alone. National Geographic had an article on Adventists with the tag line that "Regular churchgoers appear to live as much as two years longer than non-churchgoers." I think it is the community support or maybe it is the idea that if we are part of God's Chosen then we must deserve to live and consequently take better care of ourselves.

In any case and until next month; go forth and prosper. ◇

Platform Summaries

Sunday, October 23rd



Kenneth J. Campbell

Photograph by Bob Moore

Kenneth J. Campbell, the Director of the International Relations Program at the University of Delaware, spoke to the issues of the U.N.'s relevancy. His opening words set the tone, by suggesting that the U.N. is the only option the world has, therefore it must work. He explained that the U.N. is the newest in a long history of international organizations concerned with peace, and pointed out that the recent failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia failed largely because the organizations' actions were blocked by members of the U.N. Security Council. He pointed out that the notion of "the world in trouble" is a myth, and cited specific research on the decline of genocides, deaths per war, etc. (www.humansecurityreport.info). The only cause of war, he said, is profit, whether it be a warlord in Somalia or a Texas oil man (my words there). In closing, Dr. Campbell, who was inspired to study these subject by his experience in the Vietnam War, declared that we are entering a new era. The world must decide for unity or chaos. Luckily, he said, history is on the U.N.'s side.

— John Hall

Jon Shure, President of New Jersey Policy Perspective, said that in order to restore the values we care about, we must understand the ways in which the political/cultural climate has changed. We need to be proactive in order to create a society that takes care of each other, that helps each person achieve his or her full potential. He suggested two tactics: (1) *Engage* – Speak up when you hear someone make an outrageous statement. Don't be polite, be political. Be confident (even arrogant) in presenting your views. (2) *Frame* – Learn to shape the terms of a debate and to put things in ways that people whom you wish to persuade can relate to. Don't let someone else define you and your feelings. Don't let them take your words and turn them into something else. For example, instead of examining whether Welfare worked or not, the premise of the debate was that it did not work. Thus, the unfortunate outcome. Social Security threatens to go the same way. The battle is in defining such issues before the debate begins.

— Janice Moore

Sunday, October 30th



Jon Shure during a talk back at the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Photograph by Janice R. Moore

Sunday, November 6th

From his platforms of the past two months, our leader, **Richard Kiniry**, continued an unfolding of a "new religious environment" -- one in which every person is purported to be a person of honor. Richard clarified that he was not talking about the type of honor that is reflected in the eyes of others, as with an award or being pleased with being called on to perform some service. Neither was his meaning coming from doing any given religion's conception of God's will. To the contrary, he was talking about the honor that exists when one is true to one's original and natural self as a loving human being. This type of honor is, in fact, often subverted by religions that promote individual salvation and, more generally, by social systems that foster individual accumulation of wealth and status. Richard's message is that our options for self-expression are often limited by prevalent notions of honor, whereas we should be developing the honor of true self expression.

— Nick Sanders



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!



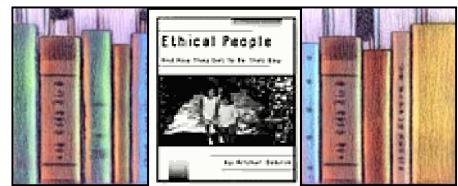
A REMINDER

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.



GET TO KNOW US
SOCIAL

Wednesday
December 7th
7:30 PM



THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

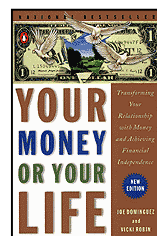
This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history. Presently we are discussing Arthur Dobrin's book, **Ethical People and How they Got that Way** (available at the Society).

Third Thursday of the month, December 22, 7:30 PM

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

In age of materialism and consumption as a way of life, we are forced to question are 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. On November 30th we will be going in a slightly different direction by discussing the practical financial ideas found in the book, **Your Money or Your Life** by Joe Dominques and Vicki Robin.

Fourth Wednesday of the month, December 28, 7:30 PM



Photograph by Janice R. Moore



Dale Drews and Betsy Lightbourn at the Ethical Society

Photograph by Janice R. Moore



Shawn O'Brien and Amber Anderson at Camp Linden



SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Chair

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

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

December 4 Betsy Lightbourn "To my life partner and co-conspirator Dale Drews in honor of his birthday."

December 11 Henry Pashkow "In honor of all the good friends I've made at the Ethical Society over the years."

December 18 Amber Anderson "Happy Birthday to Shawn O'Brien, the love of my life!"

Greeters - Saul Machles, Chair

December 4 Irene Putzer

December 11 Saul Machles

December 18 Carole Erb

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

November 6 John Hall

November 13 Harry Thorn

December 18 Naomi Poses

Coffee Hour Lunch










November 6 Doris Leicher and Howard Peer

November 13 Jean Bradley

December 18 Ken Greiff and Janice Moore

December 25 No platform

December 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3  Birthdays
4 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> Richard Kiniry <i>Living in Faith</i>	75	6	7 GET TO KNOW US SOCIAL 7:30 PM	8  Dale Drews  Jesse Zelnick	9	10
11 11:00 AM <u>Platform</u> The Honorable Renée Cardwell Hughes	12	13  Richard Kiniry (on the 14 th) >	14 <u>Meetings</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 PM-Ethical Action Committee 7:30 PM-Education Committee	15	16  Roberta Wood	17 WINTER SOLSTICE SUPPER AND CELEBRATION 7:00 PM
18 11:00 AM Winter Solstice Candlelight Celebration	19 <u>Meeting</u> 7:30PM Camp Linden Board at PES	20  Bertha Waters (on the 21 st)>	21 <u>Meeting</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Board of Trustees	22 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM History of Ethics	23  Bob Moore	24
25 No Platform	26	27  Carole Ann Riddle (on the 28 th)>	28 <u>Class</u> <i>Weston Room</i> 7:30 PM Voluntary Simplicity	29	30  Howard Callaway	31



WINTER SOLSTICE SUPPER AND CELEBRATION

Saturday,
December 17, 2005
7:00 PM

Mark your calendars for our exciting holiday party. In addition to party activities, we will also have our mitten tree, which you can decorate with mittens, gloves, scarves, or hats for donation to the needy.

We do appreciate your signing up to attend and/or to bring a dish. The price of admission is \$5 if you bring a dish, \$10 if you don't.

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Photograph by Jean Bradley



Photograph by Amber Anderson

CONGRATULATIONS

One of our newest members, **Mary Scholl**, and her fiancé, **Rick Fonda**, exchanged wedding vows at the Ethical Society on October 29th. In the receiving line, they are congratulated by a guest and are seen later, cutting their wedding cake.

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