



Ethical Views

November 2006

Vol. 121, No. 3

Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society



November Platforms

Sunday, November 5

A NEW AMERICAN DREAM

Richard L. Kiniry, Philadelphia Ethical Society Leader, poses and examines the following questions: What is your understanding of the American Dream? We hear politicians tout the idea as a promise to every citizen but it is unclear what they are promising. Is the American Dream an economic promise or a promise of the freedom to build a good life together?

Sunday, November 12

AT WAR WITH TIME

Craig Eisendrath, former Foreign Service Officer, college dean, director of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, currently serving as Chairman of the Project for Nuclear Awareness, senior fellow with the Center for International Policy, teacher at Temple University, and author of *Bush League Diplomacy*, *At War with Time* and *War In Heaven: Can We Stop an Arms Race in Outer Space Before It Is Too Late?*

Eisendrath will discuss how over millennia, human beings have attempted to erect a defense against death and impermanence. They have posited an eternal god, eternal ideas, eternal laws of nature, and a secure path to salvation. Not only are these ideas embraced by religion, they also formed the basis of much of modern philosophy until this century. This talk will discuss the breakdown of these ideas and the endorsement of compassion and social involvement as an alternative.

Sunday, November 19

HUMANIST THANKSGIVING

The Society's annual celebration of the bounty of life. As we share a Thanksgiving meal produced by the members, we celebrate harvest time with song, poetry, and reflection. We both honor the bounty of the earth and remember the unequal distribution of that bounty in our human world. We will have a special collection for Oxfam.

Sunday, November 26

SIMPLICITY

For Thanksgiving Weekend the Society will hold a Colloquy on the theme of simplicity. This meditative event gives members and friends time to be reflective but also offer opinions on the subject. <>



Leader's Message

by Richard L. Kiniry

(These are the remarks I offered at the July 4th celebrations in Bala Cynwyd)

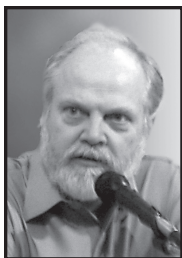
Good morning and thank you for the invitation.

We start this event by stopping to reflect on the greater meaning of the 4th of July. Yes, we declared independence from the English on July 4th but more importantly it was a revolution in the rights of human beings. The United States is the only nation in the world that was founded on ideas and values. It is

not blood, nationality, or language that holds us together as a people; it is a commitment to certain values. Every religion that comes to the shores of America must change and come to terms with our foundational values: equality, freedom of conscience, liberty, justice, and democracy. It is the sacred American story — the story about all of us coming to America to be free from religious and economic persecution, the story about all of us being in this together and being free to make as much of life as we can.

Even in the beginning we did not do a great job of living up to our values. We slaughtered the Native Peoples and we wrote slavery into the Constitution, we have fought just and unjust wars, and economic and social equality is still a dream. But we are a people always in process, and though there have been many missteps our initial values still live. We are always trying to do better in living up to those ideals.

So, this morning let us remember who we are. We are the children of a moral experiment: can diverse people actually live together and build a society in which each person is respected as an individual? From atheists to true believers we are all called on as Americans to respect our common humanity no matter how different we are. We are all born equal. In America all should succeed. So, in the name of whatever you call sacred on this 4th of July, love life and love your fellow citizens. Amen. <>



President's Message

by Howard Peer

Sometimes I get the sense that our collective identity within the Ethical Society is one of protracted guilt. There is something wrong and we need to fix it. Well there are many things wrong. Many Sundays we are addressed by well meaning folks with a cause, each trying to persuade us to join them. As we arrive home from work we find our mailboxes (physical and virtual) stuffed with appeals and crusades. Save, join, help, protect. But will we choose the right path or will we make things worse or will we simply be ineffective?



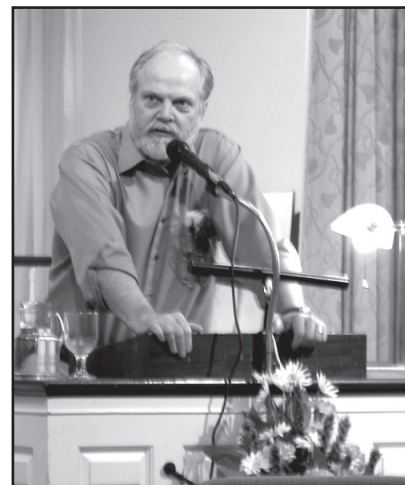
Most of us get a certain relief from doing something. We vent ourselves, exert energy and/or resources. But to what end? What have we really accomplished? Certainly we get to say, "Well at least I did my bit."

Those of us of a certain age got that urge to do something from our parents — for me, from my Father. He was a Depression kid, 3rd grade education, who finally found an education and vocation in WWII. Life was tough, things were simple, right and wrong were writ large for him. Hell, his generation beat two whole damn evil empires.

Then the dime dropped for me. I can remember it clearly. I was in 7th period Advanced History class, 10th grade. Bored, my mind wandered. I was thinking about football practice. Somehow the stars aligned and I was hit with a bolt of lightning. All of a sudden I saw my life laid out in a clear straight line, neat and uncomplicated. Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts to Little League to Football to Army to Frats to Suits to death. Son of a bitch, look what those weasels have planned for me. I went to practice but did not suit up, I quit. Right then and there. Boy did I catch hell. Dad caught hell too. (Did I mention he was the janitor in my high school?) But he stood behind me. Later, when I registered as a Conscientious Objector, he did not stand behind me. I had wounded him deeply and we did not speak amicably for years. But to some extent he was to blame for the stand I took. He had convinced me that I was responsible and that

if something was wrong I should fix it.

As the Society President I get to preside at the Board meetings.



There are generally at least as many opinions as there are people present. Some members are quite vocal and tend to think out loud. Others are quiet and speak infrequently. Yet all opinions are valuable and my job as president is to make sure that each Board member has his say. ◇



Platform Summaries

September 10, 2006

Why do we come here?" "What do we offer?" These questions were posed by Leader **Richard Kiniry** in his opening address on Sunday, September 10 entitled "Part of the Solution." His answer was that we take time at least weekly to be serious about our lives and to connect with an understanding of the world outside ourselves. However, unlike many other religions, we don't connect to the "grand mystery" idea. We try to tell the truth in our naturalistic, down-to-earth way along with other human beings. Our version of connection to the "ultimate" is our relationship with the life around us. "Each of us striving in our own way to make more of life and to love it...If you want your life to be of use, you should be trying to make life better," said Richard. Start with social justice — working on eliminating hunger and war, getting better public transport and gay rights, and removing the restrictions that keep the human spirit down. We are the solution to social problems not just in our social justice work but in how our everyday lives are making life better. Only when we can move beyond self-interest and step into the flow of life can we do this. To paraphrase the thought of Ethical Culture founder, Felix Adler, "You will have arrived at the best when all individuals have the opportunity to be the best they can be."

—**Temma Fishman**

September 17, 2006



The Ethical Society's platform on September 17 was by **Ray Jones**, Director of Ex-Offender and Parenting Services of Impact Services Corporation in Philadelphia. It surprised me when he pointed out that the U.S., which has only 6% of the world's population, has 25% of the world's incarcerated population. Then he told us that 95% of that incarcerated population returns to the society as ex-offenders. Currently, there are about 70,000 ex-offenders in Pennsylvania, of whom a large proportion are in the Philadelphia area. Most have had little contact with the world outside — even with their families.

As the ex-offender returns to society, there are needs for housing, jobs, and most often education and health care (40% have mental health problems). But society does not readily help with these needs. Instead, there is discrimination against ex-offenders. Transitional housing is not supported by government. Employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders. And much-needed financial support for education and health care is essentially non-existent. Thus, the organization Ray Jones directs tries to remedy this lack of accommodation by a variety of projects.

His main call for change is that various criminal justice agencies communicate among themselves. He also said that the ex-offender himself has responsibilities. And overall, for all of us, there is an urgent need for compassion for the ex-offender, to help support his or her positive re-entry.

—**Nick Sanders**



Richard L. Kiniry During Dialogue



During our Fall Celebration in September, we were privileged to hear the baritone voice of **Daniel Lichteig** (above and below, right), accompanied by **Tim Ribchester** (below, left).



As a part of our Fall platform this year, **Richard Kiniry** provided paper leaf cutouts for each of us. On one side, we wrote our names and on the other side, a goal that we wanted to achieve. (Richard promised he wouldn't read them.) At our Fall Celebration next September, our leaves will be returned and each of us can then review our written goal and see if we attained it.

NOVEMBER 2006



Birthdays

<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thu</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>
			1 Meetings <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 p.m. Community Committee 7:45 p.m. Camp Linden/Board Mtg.	2	3	4
5 10:45 a.m. - <i>Weston Room</i> Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Richard L. Kiniry <i>A New American Dream</i>	6	7  Irene Putzer	8 Meetings <i>Weston Room</i> 6:30 p.m. Ethical Action Committee 7:45 p.m. Education Committee	9	10	11
12 10:45 a.m. - <i>Weston Room</i> Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Craig Eisendrath <i>At War with Time</i>	13  Joe Monte	14	15 Meeting <i>Weston Room -</i> 6:30 p.m. Executive Committee 7:30 p.m. Board Meeting	16 <i>Class</i> The History of Ethics 7:30 p.m.	17	18
19 11:00 a.m. Platform: Humanist Thanksgiving	20	21	22	23	24	25
26 10:45 a.m. - <i>Weston Room</i> Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Colloquy: Simplicity	27	28	29  Howard Peer	30		



School For Ethics

The History of Ethics

This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history. We started the year in September with a new direction. We are discussing what passes for Humanist Philosophy. We began by asking what is wrong with Sam Harris's book, *The End of Faith* and now we move on to postmodernism with Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and Social Hope*. All are invited. Call for current materials.

Third **Thursday** of the month,
November 16, 7:30 PM,
Weston Room



Ethics For Children

Sundays, 10:45 a.m.

Our children's program is growing quickly. We now have a staff of three with a new lead teacher, **Josh Bickford**. We strive to challenge the child's understanding of right and wrong and not brainwash them. If you know of any parents who might be interested, we can send them our Ethics for Children brochure. Call the office to request information, 215-735- 3456.



The Life You Save May be Your Own

by Howard Peer

Automated External Defibrillators or AEDs are becoming ubiquitous at malls, airplanes, sports arenas, any place people gather. Why? Because they work. We have all seen the dramatic TV images of the ER Doctor holding the "paddles" and shocking a patient back to life. We expect the EMT that comes in an ambulance to our house to have them. But did you know that the modern devices are simple to use, that millions of people, everyone obtaining CPR training, is now trained to use these devices? The new units literally talk you through the process, all three steps. And they are cheap. Units can be had for under \$1,500.

So, I am looking for a coalition of the willing — a group of people who will donate the money to acquire one of these devices for the Society. The coalition can be made up of many people each contributing a small amount. Or, as in real life, one really big donor could carry most of the burden. So whaddya say? Chip in a few bucks for life insurance? It might be your own! Just write out a check and put AED in the memo area — or cash in an envelope will work.

CPR/AED training is readily available throughout the city and is sometimes taught at the Society. Classes take about 4 hours. I paid \$150 to get Monica certified. My bi-annual recertification training cost \$75 bucks. Think about it.



Humanist Thanksgiving

Join members and friends for a Humanist Thanksgiving Festival on Sunday, November 19th at 11:00 AM. Share in the feast prepared with loving hands by our community. In addition to the fabulous turkey, a treasured tradition, we need folks to bring the usual — cranberries, sweet potatoes, mashed or baked potatoes, brussels sprouts, pumpkin soup and pie, cornbread, green beans, etc. Be prepared to sign up on Sunday mornings with your contribution. With music, poetry, readings, and song, we will celebrate Fall's bounty and the company of friends. \$5 if you bring a dish; \$10 if you don't.



"Fast for a World Harvest."

On November 19, we will have a special collection during our Humanist Thanksgiving Festival for Oxfam-America, a nonprofit organization devoted to reducing hunger specifically and poverty in general on Earth. Each year around Thanksgiving Oxfam asks people to choose a day and skip a meal to remember the more than 850 million people who are hungry. Then, contribute the money you saved. For information, contact the Philadelphia Ethical Society at 215-735-3456

Ethical Views is published monthly
except July and August.

Editor, Richard L. Kiniry
Layout and Photo Editor,
Janice Moore
Grammarians, Ellen Rose
Distribution, Jean Bradley
Web Master, Bob Moore

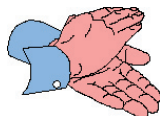
Philadelphia Ethical Society

Richard Kiniry, Leader

Board of Trustees

Howard Peer, President
Temma Fishman, Vice President
Jeffrey Dubb, MD, Treasurer
Jean Bradley, Secretary
Carole Erb
Arnold Fishman
Saul Machles
Bob Moore
Lyle Murley
Irene Putzer

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



SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Head Usher

November 5 - Nick Sanders
November 12 - David Ralston
November 19 - Ron Coburn
November 26 - Jim Cummings

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

November 5 - Bertha Waters: For
her daughter Linda Richardson's 60th
birthday, and for all the other baby
boomers who turn 60 this year.
November 12 - Terry Martin-Murley and
Lyle Murley: In celebration of our 30th
anniversary.
November 19 - Carole and Jim Erb:
In honor of their third anniversary
of walking into the doors of the
Philadelphia Ethical Society.
November 26 - Doris Leicher: In honor
of Howard's birthday.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Head Greeter

November 5 - Harry Thorn
November 12 - T.B.A.
November 19 - Saul Machles
November 26 - Saul Machles

Coffee Hour Hosts - Harry Thorn, Chair

November 5 - Jim Cummings
November 12 - Harry Thorn
November 19 - Humanist Thanksgiving
November 26 - Irene Putzer

Coffee Hour Lunch

November 5 - Doris Leicher and
Howard Peer
November 12 - Jean Bradley
November 19 - Humanist Thanksgiving
November 26 - Colloquy

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse
Square
Philadelphia, PA 19103