



Ethical Views

November 2007 Vol. 122, No. 3 Newsletter of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia



Platforms

November 4, 2007

Living Ethical Humanism

Speakers: Scott Cox, Henry Pashkow, Laura Katz Rizzo, Ramona Ward

Members of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia reflect on how believing in Ethical Humanism in general and participating in the life of the Philadelphia Society in particular affect their personal and professional lives.

November 11, 2007

Nothing Comes from Nothing

Speaker: Richard L. Kiniry, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

Often as situations arise in our personal lives or when we confront social problems around the world, we search for someone to blame. Life is not that simple and before we travel down the road of blame, we should remember the Shakespearean principle that "nothing comes from nothing." Every situation in life has a history; every person is part of a process that can be examined for explanations.

November 18, 2007

A 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.

November 25, 2007

Colloquy

Facilitator: Richard L. Kiniry, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

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



Humanist Thanksgiving and Service Auction

Sunday - Nov. 18th - 11:00 a.m.

Join members and friends for a Humanist Thanksgiving Festival. 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 their favorite side dishes. 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.

While you're at the Humanist Thanksgiving Celebration, you'll have the chance to bid at our annual Service Auction. Maybe you'd like a fun-filled evening, a Phillies game, a weekend in Wildwood, a vacation in Jamaica. Enjoy Thanksgiving fare and good company while helping to raise money for the Society.



Photo by Ken Greiff

President's Message

by Howard Peer

Recently while waiting for a flight, I watched a CNN report about a study examining the efficacy of acupuncture. The study showed that 44% of acupuncture patients improved while 42% stuck randomly with needles improved and 24% of those who underwent "traditional" treatment improved. This, the reporter stated, "proved" that acupuncture worked. She further explained that acupuncture worked by unblocking the energy knots in our "ch'i flow."

The study may have suggested that traditional treatment was not working well or that acupuncture worked only slightly better than random needle sticks. But it did not "prove" that acupuncture was effective. Presumably I could use my mattress as a pin cushion and get the same results with a lot less financial pain.

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President's Message (Cont'd. from Page 1)

This report contains examples of two types of muddled thinking. First there is the misinterpretation of data. The results do not prove acupuncture is effective. Second the belief in ch'i is an example of "Magical Thinking," which can loosely be described as assigning actions to supernatural forces. So in one little report from a supposedly trusted source we have two different kinds of failed logic. Why do we accept such shoddy work? There are reasons – trust, desire, and specialization come to mind.

Trust: Ponder driving down I-95. Everyone is doing 70 MPH, but you are closing on other cars at 140 MPH in packed traffic. You intrinsically trust that the other drivers will not pull into your lane and will follow the basic rules. Our society can only exist if there is a deep ingrained trust. However, some humans, typified by Madison Avenue types and political spin-meisters, have figured that out and use it to their advantage.

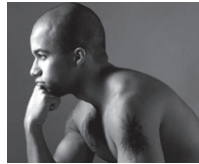
Desire: We want to hear that there is a way; all is not hopeless. You really don't have to exercise and lose 30 pounds; just a little needle stick will make all well.

Specialization: Sir Arthur C. Clark wrote, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Ask yourself, do you really know how your computer works? What about weather patterns, who understands them? We need to trust specialists, masters in their field, for technologies we can not verify. Trouble develops when people purport to be specialists when they are not, when they report faulty information authoritatively as the CNN reporter did, or deliberately manipulate data to their ends as Enron execs did.

We are trusting people who are feeding us spin and advertising constantly, on subjects we can't possibly understand. Who could sort this all out and why

bother? It's a lot of work. Resistance is difficult and requires effort. To not be duped, we must train our minds with determination and discipline.

Other religions embrace muddled thinking. Traditional religions provide an instruction book and if you have a question there is a clergyman who will provide the answer. Yes I am simplifying, I know. But that is the gist.



Ethical Culture is different. A central principal is that we believe in a natural world. Things that happen are explainable. We may not be able to understand them, but we believe that they happen only because of the laws of nature. Ethical Culture holds forth the promise that we are working to develop a better world. We have a mutual obligation to understand the natural world to our best ability. To do this we need to have good critical analysis skills, some understanding of basic mathematical principles and causal relationships, and an open mind.

In particular we try to understand our role. The bugger is that nature is much bigger and more complex than all of us combined, let alone each of us individually. There are very obvious limits to how far we can go in our understanding. We need to develop some guidelines. We can't all understand how a transistor works, nor do we need to. But we should all understand how compound interest works because it is a concept that impacts major decisions like what credit card to use. We should try to understand the efficacy of ethanol and why the environment is degrading at an exponential rate.

Nonsense from TV land parading as news is an insult to the rational mind. We are continuously bombarded with questionable statements, spin, technological miracles, and downright lies. In addition to advertisements, there

are "reality" shows, political promises, Enron-style balance sheets, and military intelligence reports. Is it any wonder we get worn down trying to keep the truth straight?

To me this is not a trivial thing. I see a world faced with insurmountable problems, yet I know and respect others who have a much rosier world view. I can't count how many times I have seen an exposé of how horrible things are, how huge the difficulties are, the gargantuan effort required, that ends with a statement of "cautious optimism." They all say some version of "If we take clear steps right now we may be able to avert disaster."

Many experts were predicting disaster ten and twenty years ago. I think we have been living on borrowed time and now the problems are worse, much worse. Yet still others disagree. I strive to keep an open mind to hear fresh arguments.

For us at Ethical Culture there will be no miracles. God will not bail us out. Without God we turn to one another for answers and support. What we each think is very important to the group. We should try to be clear, critical, and analytical. It's our obligation.

P.S. Directly after dispatching this column I picked up Inside the Third Reich, by Albert Speer, Hitler's principal architect. Late in life, after serving some 20 years in jail, he reflected upon the decision he had made in 1935 to join the National Socialist Party.

"....I remained uncritical, unable to deal with the arguments of my student friends, who were predominantly indoctrinated with the National Socialist ideology.

Not to have worked that out for myself; not, given my education, to have read books, magazines, and newspapers of various viewpoints; not to have tried to see through the whole apparatus of mystification was already criminal. At this initial stage my guilt was as grave as, at the end, my work for Hitler. For being in a position to know and nevertheless shunning knowledge creates direct responsibility for the consequences – from the very beginning." <



SCHOOL FOR ETHICS

THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

The great philosophical questions are not that complicated. Those issues are actually part of our daily lives and each of us has something to say about them. Besides that, it's fun to play with ideas. In this reading and discussion group we examine the varied pieces of the Ethical Humanist Philosophy by exploring the origins of those ideas in western history and philosophy. We are currently reading John Dewey's book, *A Common Faith*. Copies of the book are available on loan from the Society.

*Third Thursday of the month,
November 15, 7:30 PM*

ETHICS FOR CHILDREN

Our children's program continues to grow. We strive to challenge the child's understanding of right and wrong. If you know of any parents who might be interested, we can send them our *Ethics for Children* brochure. Call the office with your contact information, 215-735-3456.

Each Sunday morning, 10:45 AM



Get to Know Us Social

Wednesday

November 7

7:30pm

Wednesday

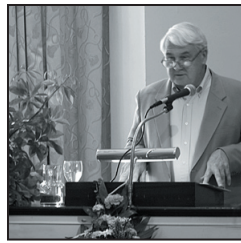
December 5

7:30pm

In November and December we will hold a casual informational 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.

Platform Summary

On September 16, in the second of two platforms on "Not Enough Love," Richard Kiniry continued to develop his belief that love, empathy, and the celebration of differences are central to a new world view. He encouraged us to study the tyranny of a culture which he sees as an environment of restrictions on human nature. He argued that our society has been built to serve the few. It has become a society in which the vices of those of us who have made it are legal, a society in which we are encouraged to establish an environmental bubble of self protection. Richard wants people to change, to reach out to all of life, to value and cherish human differences, and to love lives and recognize the many fellow travelers we have as we all journey together. — *Lyle Murley* <



From the Caring Committee



We send greetings to **Jessie Harmath and Gladys Huber** (photo not available), who are not able to attend Society events. They welcome calls and visits.

Call ahead if you plan to visit them.

Greetings to **Jesse Zelnick**,



Sylvia Bornkoff-Polizzi and Gian Polizzi,

and **Carol Anne Riddle**.

We miss them and hope to see them soon.



Madeliene Suringar would welcome cards and phonecalls, but no visits at this time. She thinks of us all fondly.

Lew Wilkinson is recovering nicely and is looking forward to attending platforms.



Tribute and Friendship Fund

Traditionally, members of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia have marked the passing of other members or members of their families by donations to the Tribute and Friendship Fund. It is a lovely way to honor those who, like us, see our Society as an important part of our lives and of the community we serve. A card is sent to the family of the deceased indicating that a donation was made and a thank you card is sent to the donor. (The amount is not specified in the card to the deceased's family.) Keep the Tribute and Friendship Fund in mind as a way to remember a lost friend as well as to support our Society.

Name a Chair

Honor yourself, a family member or friend by donating an auditorium chair. Compose a tribute or memorial to be engraved on a beautiful brass plaque, which will be attached to the back of the chair. Help support the work of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia while you celebrate someone who has made a difference in your life. \$60 for one chair or \$100 for two. Mail your check to the Ethical Humanist Society, 1906 S. Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA 19103. For more information, contact the Society office at office@phillyethics.org or at 215-735-3456.



What are the “MDGs,” and are you ready to vote on them?

If you attended the platform on October 28, you will know what the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) are. If you missed it, you should know that the MDGs are an initiative of the United Nations, passed by all UN member nations – including the USA – to significantly and measurably reduce major problems in developing countries by the year 2015.

The eight MDGs are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

You can see the measurable goals, their background, and progress reports on the web page: <http://www.unausa.org/site/pp.asp?c=fvKRI8MPJpF&b=328737>

During the month of November, Ethical Society members will be asked if we can come to a consensus in support of these MDGs. If we can, we will announce that consensus on our main sign board in front of our building.

Please take time to become more informed about the MDGs.

— Nick Sanders



You are invited to celebrate the ten year anniversary of
Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty
(formerly Pennsylvania Abolitionists United Against the Death Penalty)

Saturday November 10

Shcraton University City - 3549 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA

Reception & cocktails ~ 6:00 pm

Dinner & program ~ 7:00 pm

PADP is honored to welcome keynote speaker

Celeste Fitzgerald

Director, New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

Also featuring: Awards Ceremony & Silent Auction

Please RSVP by November 1 to secure your seat at this important event by mailing the attached response card to the address below.

Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

PO Box 605

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17108

t. 717.236.4840

f. 717.236.4850

e. info@padp.org

www.PADP.org

**PENNSYLVANIANS FOR ALTERNATIVES
TO THE DEATH PENALTY**

**Ten Year Anniversary
Banquet Response Card**

☐ I, _____,
accept your invitation! Enclosed is my payment of
\$65 per person.

☐ I regretfully cannot attend this event but enclosed is
a tax deductible donation for PADP.




Kindly R.S.V.P. to PADP by November 1, 2007

**The menu options include a choice of chicken,
fish and vegetarian.**

*Stuffed Breast of Capon Marsala
Fillet of Flounder, Lemon Pepper Crumb
Linguini With Tofu, Snow Peas, Carrots and Mushrooms with
Teriyaki Sauce*

**Please list the individuals in your party and their
menu preferences.**

NOVEMBER 2007

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Living Ethical Humanism Speakers: Scott Cox, Henry Pashkow, Laura Katz Rizzo, Ramona Ward	5	6	7 Meeting - Weston Room Community Comm-6:30 p.m. Get to Know Us Social 7:30 p.m. Irene Putzer	8	9	10
11 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Nothing Comes from Nothing Richard L. Kiniry	12	13  Joe Monte	14 Meetings - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Ethical Action Committee 7:45 p.m. Education Committee	15 Class The History of Ethics 7:30 p.m.	16	17
18 11:00 a.m. Ethical Humanist Thanksgiving Celebration & Service Auction	19	20	21 Meetings (all in Weston Room) 6:30 p.m. Finance Committee 7:30 p.m. Exec. Committee/ Board of Trustees Meeting	22	23	24
25 11:00 a.m. Colloquy Richard L. Kiniry, Facilitator	26	27	28 Meeting 7:30 p.m. Camp Linden Committee	29  Howard Peer	30	 Birthdays

Moments From Our Fall Celebration

*Catharine
Fairbairn's
beautiful
soprano
voice.*



*Living
Ethical
Humanism
4 Members -
David Ralston
Carol Love
(for Bertha
Waters)
Monica Peer
Saul Machles*



*Sunday
School
Presentation*

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except July and August.

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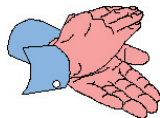
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of Philadelphia**

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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

November 4 - Bertha Waters in celebration of the November birthdays of her daughter, Linda; son-in-law, Albert; granddaughters Monifa, Serafina, Kimora; and grandson, Khashina.

November 11 - Terry and Lyle Murley in celebration of their 31st wedding anniversary

November 18 - Andi Smith in honor of her daughter Laura's wedding

November 25 - Doris Leicher in honor of Howard's birthday.

Ushers

November 4
November 11 T.B.A.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Head Greeter

For the month of November, Saul Machles and friends

Coffee Hour Lunch

November 4 - Group A-E
November 11 - Group F-L
November 18 - Thanksgiving Celebration
November 25 - Colloquy - Group Q-Z

**Ethical Humanist Society
of Philadelphia**
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