



Ethical Views

October 2007

Vol. 122, No. 2 Newsletter of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia



Platforms

October 7, 2007

The Evil of Competition

Speaker: Richard Kiniry, Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

We too quickly accept competition as a necessary part of human life. There is something wrong with the idea that there will always be losers.

October 14, 2007

Approaching Death

Speaker: Susan Rose Teshu, Co-Leader of the Ethical Society without Walls and Dean of the AEU's Leadership Training Program

We will all die and have people in our lives who die. Can we do anything to make the end of our lives any better? How does thinking about our dying affect how we live our lives?

October 21, 2007

Abolition: Anticipation and Activism

Speaker: Ashlee Shelton, Director of Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

The issue of capital punishment is tied to a number of social problems that plague our nation, including racism, economic inequality and violence. Because of these linkages, more Pennsylvanians are standing up for abolition than ever before. I will discuss the history of the abolition movement, the current state of capital punishment in the Commonwealth and, most importantly, where we are headed as activists on the road to abolition.

October 28, 2007

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a Mandate for Local Action: The Case of the Philadelphia Global Water Initiative (PGWI)

Speaker: Christiaan Morssink, Adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, where he teaches a graduate course on global health.

I see the MDG as an integrative set of policy goals that provides all UN agencies, willing governments, NGOs and individuals with a mandate to collaborate in framing congruent action plans. The MDG provides a moral framework for approaching the world's markets, problems and need for equitable governance that focuses on stewardship.

The birth and current actions of PGWI are an illustration of how these functions of the MDG play out for local actors.



Leader's Message

SELF-INTERESTED POLITICS

by Richard L. Kiniry

It is amazing now quickly a bridge falling down can change people's attitude toward taxes. Before the bridge collapsed in Minnesota the Republican Governor and a large percentage of the citizens were dead set against raising taxes for infrastructure repair; following the disaster raising taxes quickly became the right thing to do.

Translating self-interest into community policy works in politics but is that the best way of running a society? Major disasters don't always work as an impetus to remedial action. New Orleans still sits in ruins because that disaster affected the "wrong kind" of people and did not arouse the self-interest of most of the population. Conversely, the paranoia of average

self-interested Americans has us over-reacting and going to war against phantom enemies.

A society that depends on self-interest as the driving force for political action is in trouble. Certainly self-interest is always part of the motivation for political action, but our dependence on self-interest as impetus to action guarantees partial, unequal solution that must be repaired in the future. The American Revolution was an upper- and middle-class revolution. The high-minded Enlightenment ideas that legitimized the Revolution continue to thrill our hearts, but the reality was that the founding fathers were acting in their own self-interest. As a result, besides the evil of slavery, women's and worker's rights were left to another day. Social Security and Roosevelt's other New Deal programs were fought vehemently by the wealthy but it was a rare time when community interest surpassed self-interest. Of course,

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

Roosevelt's programs saved capitalism for the wealthy.

So many of today's social, political, and cultural problems cry for solutions that will need self-sacrifice on the part of us average citizens. That self-sacrifice will be not only be financial. We also carry around opinions and positions that are mental constructs that defend us against any threat to our self-interest — such as the idea that we deserve a comfortable lifestyle or that our view on life is the only right one.

Every honest — yes, honest — solution to perceived problems must answer to multiple voices and interests.

Every honest — yes, honest — solution to perceived problems must answer to multiple voices and interests. Too often solutions do not go deep enough into the source of problems because the self-interest of the middle-class might be threatened by facts. We have become used to ignoring legitimate demands that challenge our self-interested opinions or desires.

The best thing we can do to prepare for a better world is to encourage ourselves and others to look beyond our own self-interest. That is the necessary ground work to a healthy human community.



Photo by Ken Greiff

President's Message

by Howard Peer

There are a few ideas that I find interesting when considering how communities and societies interact. One is Marshall McLuhan's Global Village. McLuhan theorized that we all have roughly the same number of human contacts—a few close relatives and friends, more daily acquaintances, still more whom we meet frequently, and a larger group we can recognize but

don't really know. Jared Diamond noted how when two aboriginals meet the first thing they try to do is to see if they have some common acquaintances. If not then they are free to take full advantage of one another.



McLuhan

I was reminded of this the other day when a college administrator was complaining about the excessive compensation some sports players get. But athletes play an important role in society, because they are someone we all know. When a couple of guys who don't know each other get together, one or the other is sure to say something like, "So waddaya think of T.O.?" The ice will be broken and they will start to establish a relationship. If they don't then they can try talking about someone else they both know—like a movie star, rock star, diva, or some other famous person (like Paris Hilton). If all of these super recognizable people were to vanish from Earth tomorrow you can bet that we would replace them in short order, for we need them.

So we each exist socially within a couple of circles of relationships. The innermost circles are small and familiar, but as we go out the circles become looser and may overlap. Once we have established our families these innermost circles tend to be constant; composed of old friends and relatives. The outer circles morph with greater ease as we move through jobs, neighborhoods, etc. Here again the super stars help us out because they tend to be reliable. We can't sit and talk to them but they present a constant human presence in our life. Oprah and Donahue and Leno have all been staples and, because they feature human interaction, we feel as if we are just sitting around having a nice chat. We feel included in something like McLuhan's Global Village.

We in Ethical Culture can be a bit of a special case. For many their religion is a part of their social inner circle, that part that is generally invariant over a lifetime. Yet most of us have made a

conscious decision to come to Ethical Culture, generally relatively late in life. I think this says something about us and who we are in general. We are not your average John and Jane Doe with 2.3 kids who watch 27 hours of TV per week. We generally tend to be more engaged with living humans in two-way communication and we tend to be more selective about the circles we join or who we allow into our own inner circles even as we support openness and diversity. On the one hand, there is a certain arrogance to this exclusivity. On the other, reinventing oneself and choosing a less-traveled path is not easy. In fact it requires courage. This may be one reason why as a movement we are slow to grow: we offer self-inspection, while the mushroom churches next to the McMansions offer group feel-good. In short, what we are attempting, which runs counter to our cultural programming, is a new social order based on reason but sensitive to the human spirit. I suspect that while we all claim faith in humanity, what we really mean is that we have hope in what humanity might become, if we put our minds to it.

Breaking new ground in physical or social exploration is difficult. Someone has to be out in front of the crowd figuring out a better way - I'm glad it's us.



**UPCOMING
CELEBRATION**
Sunday
November 18th
11:00 a.m.

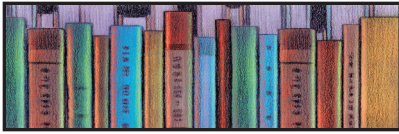


Photos by Janice R. Moore

**Thanksgiving Luncheon and
Service Auction**



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. In October we will be reading John Dewey's book, *A Common Faith*. Copies of the book are available on loan from the Society.

*Third Thursday of the month,
October 18, 7:30 PM*



Get to Know Us Social

Wednesday
October 3
7:30pm

Every other month we 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.

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



Photo by Janice R. Moore

Platform Summary

On September 9, 2007 **Richard Kiniry** opened the new year for the Ethical Humanist Society with his address, "Not Enough Love," the first of a two-part presentation (part 2 was held on September 16). His initial focus was on Gloria Steinem's assertion that "empathy is the most radical of human emotions." Because, he argued, our culture encourages us to be self-absorbed and comfortable in our fantasies, our function as humanists is to work to change the culture. He stressed thinking and empathy. Because life intensifies when we think about it, because science tied to critical thinking and questioning leads us toward a reality based in nature and experience, and because empathy leads us to connect with others on their terms, Richard argued that a basic way to change the world is to change current world views. Love, which he presented as the enemy of any closed mind, becomes, then, a central impetus for change, a basic force to alleviate the unfairness that our society has structured into its world view.

— Lyle Murley

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.

EAC Report

Many of the projects of the Ethical Action Committee, such as serving meals during the cold weather months to homeless men at the Trinity Church Shelter at 22nd and Spruce, are ongoing. This effort is ably directed by member Judith Will. If you would like the rewarding experience of preparing and serving a meal to these men, be sure to contact her.

Leader Richard Kiniry regularly attends meetings of the Pennsylvania Alternatives to the Death Penalty and reports their activities to the EAC. At present, the group needs help with mailings and making phone calls. Richard will be calling for volunteers at the October 21 platform. He would welcome your company at meetings.

Some of our projects this year will focus on furthering the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) Campaign, endorsed by the UN and the National Service Conference, Ethical Culture's

arm to the United Nations. You can read about these goals by visiting <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>.

Member Ron Coburn attends meetings of Amnesty International and informs us at platforms throughout the year of the group's concerns and initiatives. He provides letters on human rights issues from AI for members and visitors to sign, which then get sent to the appropriate leaders and lawmakers.

We will once again be purchasing dictionaries for the third graders at Robert Morris School. Two of our members will be delivering the books to the school and will present a brief lesson on their use to each class. If you are interested in participating in this joyful project, contact Temma Fishman.

We have available DVD copies of Jonathan Miller's *History of Disbelief*. If you would like to borrow a copy, contact Temma.

We recommend positions on ethical issues to the Society's Board of Trustees and membership which, if approved, get posted on our board outside the Society. Our present message endorses reproductive freedom.

Every Sunday at platform, someone from the EAC informs us of an Ethics in Action. These calls for action often come from the Ethical Action Report (green sheet), a joint effort of the American Ethical Union and the American Humanist Association. Copies can be found on the AEU website and in our lobby. If you have an issue for action you would like to present, let Temma know.

We invite assistance from members in the ongoing work of the committee. Together we find the rewards inherent in helping others. The EAC meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

— **Temma Fishman, Chair**

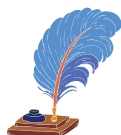


Preposterous Poets' Party



On Friday, October 5 at 7:00 a grand time will be had by all as we investigate the realms of rhyme, both old and new. Come dressed as your favorite poet or poetic character, or just come with your muse! Come ready to recite and listen to your favorite verse, sonnets, or ballads. Please keep the length to ONE PAGE. Bring some food — your favorite specialty, perhaps some fare appropriate to the poetic genre you embrace. Sign up on Sundays or call Carol Love, impresario laureate. The cost is \$5 with food, \$10 without.

This party will also be part of our preparation for the upcoming Service Auction on November 18th. Members and regular attenders will offer services, parties, and other fund-raising events or items for the benefit of the society. Think of what you'd like to contribute and sign up at the Poets' Party or any time before the auction.



Before New Year's Party






Mark your calendar for 7 PM Saturday, December 29! Join us for a gala holiday celebration at our Party Before New Years. Enjoy a delicious dinner followed by an exciting live performance of Hank's Cadillac.



The band is named after the 1952 convertible that took Hank Williams on his last ride. The Band parks that Caddy right at the intersection of Roots, Rock and Retro-Country - all for your dancing and listening pleasure.

In addition to the dinner, there will be wine, beer, and delicious desserts at the bargain price of \$40 per person for members and \$50 for non-members. For those attending only the dance, the prices are \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members, including drinks and desserts. Invite friends and family, or come alone. Sign up now to reserve your place! Contact the Society at office@phillyethics.org or at 215-735-3456.

OCTOBER 2007

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3 Meeting - Weston Room Community/Membership Committee - 6:30 p.m.  7:30 p.m. Get to Know Us Social	4	5  Preposterous Poets Party 7:00 p.m.  Jeffrey Dubb	6
7 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: <i>The Evil of Competition</i> Richard L. Kiniry	8	9	10 Meetings - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Ethical Action Committee 7:45 p.m. Education Committee	11	12	13
14 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: <i>Approaching Death</i> Susan Rose Teshu	15  Doris Leicher	16  David Collier	17 Meetings Weston Room - 6:30 p.m. Finance Committee Weston Room - 7:30 p.m. Exec. Committee/ Board of Trustees Meeting	18 Class The History of Ethics 7:30 p.m.	19	20
21 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: <i>Abolition: Anticipation & Activism</i> Ashlee Shelton	22	23	24 Meeting 7:30 p.m. Camp Linden Committee	25	26	27
28 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: <i>Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as Mandate for Local Action</i> Christiaan Morssink	29  Gladys Huber	30	31		 Birthdays	

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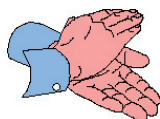
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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

10/7 Nick Sanders: "To celebrate my happy marriage to Molly Sayvetz."

10/14 Bob Moore: 363 years ago today, a rebellious Quaker Pacifist named William Penn was born. He wrote: "Any government is free to the people under it ... where the laws rule, and the people are a party to those laws."

10/21 Dr. Carol Love: "In celebration of the birthday of my partner of 6 years, Marvin Friedman"

10/28 Richard Kiniry: In memory of his Aunt Mary Hagan

Ushers

Oct 7
Oct 14 T.B.A.
Oct 21
Oct 28

Greeters - Saul Machles, Head Greeter

For the month of October, Saul Machles, and friends

Coffee Hour Lunch

October 7 - Group A-F
October 14 - Group G-L
October 21 - Group M-P
October 28 - Group Q-Z

**Ethical Humanist Society
of Philadelphia**
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