



Ethical Views

September 2008 Vol. 123, No. 1 Newsletter of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia



Sunday Platforms

September 7, 2008

Welcome Back Sunday

Speaker: Richard L. Kiniry, Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and members of the Society's standing committees

As we return, refreshed or exhausted, from our summer vacations, we look forward to the opportunities and challenges afforded by a new season of platforms, classes, forums and ethical actions organized by the volunteers who serve on the Society's committees. Beside a rundown of what the committees are planning, we will have some readings to remind us of the principles of Ethical Humanism.

September 14, 2008

Finding Our Way through Changing Times

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

Rather than bending with the wind of change, we can be the wind of change. Since I could do without many of the changes in our modern world, I look with suspicion when politicians promise change. But as we look to the future we know our actions will play a part in creating that future. So, in the smoke and mirrors of the coming year, what values do we stand by? And what change do we truly want?

September 21, 2008

Autumn Festival

We honor nature and the change of season with reflections from Ursula Goodenough's *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, and the children will offer their ideas about autumn.

September 28, 2008

Preemption and Prevention in International Conflict: An Alternative to the Bush Doctrine

Speaker: Michael W. Doyle, Harold Brown Professor of International Affairs, Law and Political Science at Columbia University

After exploring the problems with the traditional international law of self-defense and the Bush Doctrine of aggressive prevention, Professor Doyle will outline a set of standards for legitimate prevention that rely on multilateral authorization and set out what should be done when multilateral institutions, such as the UN, do not live up to their responsibilities.



an unequal and wasteful reality, and the resulting anger and the frustration of unsatisfied desire drives the need for change. But the call for change can elicit superficial, short-term responses. (As both presidential candidates seem to be offering to varied degrees.) A new era actually needs a new mind set, a change in understanding of what life is all about.

That new mind-set will take time struggling into reality and meanwhile changing times necessitate changes in behavior. High gasoline cost can restrict your driving habits; house foreclosures may require additions to your home to house relatives; and franks & beans may have to pass for haute cuisine. Often those changes in behavior are not original responses but come to us from offstage. People don't make the decision to get rid of their SUV because the vehicle is environmentally wasteful but because they hear news reports about the tanking of the car's value.

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Leader's Message

CHANGE?

by Richard L. Kiniry

There is a saying that goes something like, "save me from interesting times." Well, I'm afraid we don't have a choice. What with a failing economy, the energy crisis, war, terrorism and rising sea levels, can boils and frogs be far behind? Interesting times are here; we can either run for cover or jump into the fray.

Regardless of who wins the coming election, the social, economic and environmental conditions on our small planet foretell the end of an era. The era of continual growth, continual prosperity and abundance is over. That materialistic mind-set is finally at its enduring limits. It has always been

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

The offstage promoter encourages us to remain in the mind-set of self-interest. As we respond to changing times we can just accept the advice of the pundits and news reports that helped get us into the mess, or we can think our way to behavior that fits our sense of what is good. Changing times require personal reflection.

As people who generally hold contrarian views on social policy (economic policy, environmental policy, military policy, etc.) we are now confronted with the possibility that our noble beliefs may actually move from the realm of wishful thinking into viable options for practical policy. And in that situation, dreams are confronted with the reality of our actual living.

While we may hold contrarian noble values, we live within this materialistic, individualistic world and, whether we want to admit it or not, the values of that world become part of us. And as acceptance grows that our larger world must change course, we can help the change by being true to our long-held noble values. Life is changing, and that necessitates an internal dialogue between our dreams for a better world and personal needs. Can our wish for an end to worldwide hunger necessitate a change in our diet? Can our wish for economic equality mean acceptance of wage control on our income?

But more fundamentally our contrarian point of view reflects a contrarian understanding of life. All that worth and dignity of the individual stuff is a challenge to the traditional mind-set in which individuals are treated as economic units. The biggest question that changing times brings forward is, what is human living all about? How will any change affect the unique character of individual human beings? The excesses of the materialistic mind-set have taken us to the brink of collapse. What change will an ethical mind-set offer? <>

ETHICS FOR CHILDREN PROGRAM

Open House on September 14: Parents and Children Can Experience the Program and Meet the Staff

The Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia offers families the opportunity to participate in a non-dogmatic Humanist religious experience that fosters a climate of shared ethical values, social responsibility and self-expression. Each week children will explore moral questions and celebrate the joys of life through songs, stories, arts and crafts, discussion, projects and games. The lessons will encourage ideals such as social justice, spiritual independence and compassion through group activities and projects, seasonal celebrations and monthly service projects.

Some of the goals of the Ethics for Children program are to:

- Explore values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, courage and commitment.
- Affirm the value and uniqueness of each individual.
- Promote knowledge and celebration of diversity among people.
- Inspire social responsibility towards individuals, groups and our environment.
- Create a naturalistic consciousness of our place in nature and community.
- Develop identity as part of a worldwide religious and secular humanist community.
- Learn about those ethical teachings that are common to the world's religions.
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- Learn about those ethical teachings that are common to the world's religions.

By identifying ethics as central to religion, children in Sunday school are encouraged to explore their own beliefs, with 12 core values emphasized through Sunday morning lessons. The classes are designed to support families and help children learn ethics that encourage love, acceptance and giving in the world.

A team of teachers including **Laura Katz Rizzo, M.Ed, Ph.D.**, **Lily Locke** and **Monica Peer** is dedicated to fostering an exciting and inspired environment for learning. Classes for children from 6 months to 15 years of age take place from 10:45 to 12:00 on Sunday mornings in a cheerful and child-friendly room on the fourth floor of the Ethical Society Building. <>



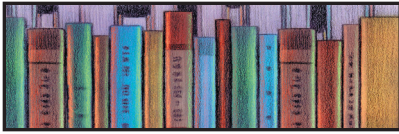
Laura Katz Rizzo holds her son, **Orion Rizzo**, a younger Sunday School member.



Monica Peer and **Lily Locke** as they await arrival of students.



SCHOOL FOR ETHICS



INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL HUMANISM

The Ethical Society is part of a 132 year old Ethical Culture Movement. We are a humanist religious fellowship. This workshop is a chance to delve into that history and philosophy. We attempt to offer the “big picture” of Ethical Humanism and provide opportunities for questions. Interested visitors, newcomers and members are invited to examine our approach to living as we look at our core ideas – the intrinsic worth of every human being, naturalism, nontheism, and ethics as a way of life.

— Led by Richard Kiniry,
Sunday, September 21, 12:30 p.m.

THE IDEA OF GOD

This three-session discussion group will look at what human beings have said about God and what they have been trying to say about life when they speak of God. We will start with Karen Armstrong’s *The History of God*, then move on to Richard Dawkins’s *The God Delusion* and end with Michael Benedikt’s *God is the Good We Do*. This group is open to members and non-members but you must sign up on Sundays, or by contacting the office by phone or email.

*Second Tuesdays – October 7,
November 11, December 9 – 7:30 pm,
Weston Room*

Report on Pledges

Thanks to all 39 of you who by pledging financial support provided a better basis for planning for the Society during our 2008-09 year. Your pledges added up to a little over \$33,000. While we did not reach the \$40,000 in pledges we have budgeted for this year, we are hoping that those of you who did not pledge will help out with your contributions, too.

Also, thanks to those 25 of you who took the time to indicate activities in which you’d like to participate as volunteers. We are in the process now of following up to find out more specifically what you would like to do on behalf of the Society. If the persons coordinating the activities related to your interests have not already talked to you, it is probably because we are just now getting into the post-summer, regular programming at the Society. And of course, your pledging or not pledging volunteer time should not limit your volunteering. It does everyone good when people step forward to help.



Finally, the pledge materials asked you to consider what the Society means to you. Whether you made pledges or not, I hope that you have found it worthwhile to consider how you can support the Society at least to the extent that you derive value from it.

— Nick Sanders

Talk on Libertarianism Highlights DC Conference

One of the pleasures of being a member of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia is the occasional road trip to one of the thought-provoking talkfests convened by EHSOP-related organizations.

There were two such conferences this summer: (1) the American Ethical Union (the EHSOP’s parent organization) held its annual meeting in Austin, Texas and (2) the American Humanist Association and the International Humanist & Ethical Union held a joint conference in Washington, D.C.

For me, the costs of the trip to the Heart of Texas were a bit high, but Washington, D.C. was just down the road.



ESHOP members **Arnold and Temma Fishman** at the IHEU conference dinner.

Five ESHOP members went to the AHA/IHEU conference: Arnold & Temma Fishman, Nick Sanders, Janice Moore, and I, all taking advantage of bargain conference-only discounts at upscale L’Enfant Plaza Hotel in downtown D.C. There were many fascinating events, including a talk by award-winning author Philip Pullman (who wrote *The Golden Compass*) and an appearance by Congressman Pete Stark, the first member of Congress to acknowledge publicly that he didn’t believe in God.

(Continued next page)



Rob Buitenweg

But it was an early talk by a Dutch academic, Rob Buitenweg, that I decided to write about because he presented a carefully reasoned philosophical critique of free-market libertarianism of the type espoused by Ayn Rand, Ron Paul, Friedrich Hayek and Robert Nozick. This is a philosophy that has attracted many thoughtful and well-meaning people.

In his talk, and in his book (*Human Rights Human Plights in a Global Village*), Buitenweg said that libertarians believe that humans have natural rights – but usually the only right they recognize is the right to property. All the various economic, social and cultural rights are, to libertarians, “a quasi-religious superstition to be compared with a belief in witches.” (This account of Buitenweg’s talk is based on the chapter of his book called “The Illusions of Libertarianism.”)

To begin with, Buitenweg argues that the right to property cannot be the supreme right if the distribution of resources is based on injustice. He points to the “violence [that] accompanies the initial acquisition and transference of goods” from prehistoric common ownership to private ownership. Property “was, and has been, acquired by the strong to the detriment of the weak.” And you can’t count on the “free market” to correct any injustices.

Libertarians fear that acknowledging economic, social and cultural rights will require the imposition of coercive measures. “Libertarians value freedom. Therefore, libertarians want governments that limit themselves solely to a few core tasks and that do not try to organize people’s lives [or] compel its citizens to pay taxes to relieve the socio-economic deprivation of the least advantaged.”

Buitenweg’s main point is based on the distinction between negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom is “the absence of persons preventing someone from acting as he or she wants to act.” Positive freedom is “the presence of circumstances that enable people to act as they want to.”

But there’s a third form of freedom, Buitenweg says – “substantial freedom,” which is “the key upon which everything turns. Substantial freedom is the ultimate goal.” Studying the writings of libertarians, Buitenweg says it is clear that libertarians also believe in substantial freedom (“not the absence of impeding persons, but the presence of circumstances that enable people to live their lives as they think fit.”).

“In my interpretation it is substantial freedom, not negative freedom, that is the ultimate goal of libertarianism. Moreover, I think libertarians also want EQUAL substantial freedom. They do not want only philosophers, housekeepers ... or priests to be free.”

“If my interpretation of libertarianism is correct, then it is actually concerned with the achievement of EQUAL SUBSTANTIAL FREEDOM. In order to enable every human being to enjoy substantial freedom, a policy of social justice should be pursued, which may require that the negative liberty of some must be weighed against the positive liberty of others; in other words, that the rich members of a community should be forced to contribute to the alleviation of the miserable conditions

of the poor. The idea that people should be able to live as they think fit certainly requires that others do not prevent them from doing so, but it also requires that circumstances be arranged so as to enable

them to be or to do what they want to be or to do. In other words, substantial freedom should be effected by means of negative freedom and positive freedom.”

And that was just one talk in the three-day conference ... a feast for those with a hunger for ideas and controversy. Why stay at home and watch Book TV or C-SPAN’s talking heads when you can hear the thinkers in person – and ask them questions as they sign your book?

— Bob Moore



Additional IHEU Conference Photos



Darwin Day Celebration display. This year will be Darwin’s 200th birthday!



Bob Moore (right) chats it up with one of the other vendors.

September 2007

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3 Meeting - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Finance Committee Rich Rizzo	4 Scott Cox	5	6
7 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Welcome Back Sunday Richard L. Kiniry	8	9	10 Meetings - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Education Committee 7:45 p.m. Ethical Action Committee	11	12	13
14 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Sunday School Open House 11:00 a.m. Platform: Finding Our Way through Changing Times Richard L. Kiniry	15 Tom Carroll	16	17 Meetings Weston Room - 6:30 p.m. Executive Committee Weston Room - 7:30 p.m. Board of Trustees	18	19	20
21 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Autumn Equinox Festival Class - 12:30 a.m. - Weston Rm. Intro to Ethical Humanism	22	23	24 Meeting 7:00 p.m. Camp Linden Committee	25 Class The Idea of God 7:30 p.m.	26	27
28 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Preemption & Prevention in Internat'l. Conflict: An Alternative to the Bush Doctrine Michael W. Doyle	29	30 Mary Wasserman	October 1 Meeting - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Community/Membership Growth Committees			Birthdays

And how was Camp Linden this summer?

G-R-E-A-T !!



Lifeguards Tristen and Tyler teaching campers to swim.



Saul and campers weeding the garden.



Ready to pot her marigold and take it home.

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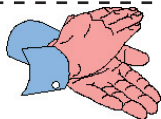
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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

Sept 7 - Chuck and Ramona Ward: "In
Honor of New Beginnings."

Sept 14 - Arnold and Temma Fishman:
"In Loving Memory of Israel Wolf, Temma's
Father."

Sept 21 - Anonymous: "To Celebrate the
UN's International Day of Peace."

Sept 28 - Ken Greiff: "In Honor of Richard
L. Kiniry, Our Fearless Leader, Who
Traveled Up and Back to Camp Linden
Several Times to Make Sure the Bath
House Toilets Flushed."

Ushers

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

Greeters - Saul Machles, Head Greeter

For the month of September, Saul
Machles and friends

Coffee Hour Lunch

Sept 7 - Group A-E
Sept 14- Group F-L
Sept 21 - Group M-P
Sept 28 - Group Q-Z

Photo credits

*Page 5 - Camp Linden photographs by
Jean Bradley. All other photographs in
this issue by Janice R. Moore.*

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