



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 29 NUMBER 8

Visit our web site: www.essexethical.org

APRIL 2010

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

Apr 4 Boe Meyerson, *"A Spring Celebration"*

Boe will begin by giving a brief introduction to the pros and cons of springtime. She will give a brief Platform address on some of the ambivalences among famous poets to the onset of this traditionally happy season.

All members and newcomers planning to come to our Platform meeting on Sunday April 4 are hereby invited to bring their favorite springtime poems to share with all of us. Boe will start off the program with some of her favorites. Please note that there is room for curmudgeons as well. You are free to bring anti-spring poems if you so desire.

Boe Meyerson is the Leader Emeritus of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County. She holds Masters Degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, in Literature and from Columbia University in Philosophy where she also taught Humanities.

Apr 11 Martin Novemsky, *Yiddish and Social Justice*

Martin Novemsky will deliver readings in translation of some favorite examples of Yiddish literature, pieces that highlight the intrinsic values of social justice expressed in Yiddish culture and in the language itself. That will be followed by a discussion.

Martin Novemsky, professor emeritus of Theater at Fairleigh Dickinson University, grew up in the Bronx with Yiddish as his first language. It left him with a lifelong love of the language and the culture. As an actor, he has per-

formed readings of his own translations of the work of writers like Sholom Aleichem at various venues in New Jersey, New York and Massachusetts.

[Next Social Action Committee Meeting is Sunday, April 11], after Platform at the Society. Read Social Action Committee minutes at <http://www.essexethical.org/socialaction.html#minutes>

Apr 18 Michelle Munsat, *"It's Not Necessarily Over When The Soldier Returns from Iraq or Afghanistan: Legal Problems Faced by Many of Our Returning Vets"*

Michelle Munsat is a member of Military Families Speak Out, a nationwide organization of over 4,000 members, each of whom has a family member or loved one in the military and who is opposed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. She will be discussing the problems facing the returning soldiers and the efforts to aid them. Her involvement with MFSO has brought her to a unique understanding of, and involvement in, the legal issues facing military veterans of these wars.

Ms. Munsat is an attorney specializing in plaintiff's employment and immigration law and appeals. Michelle's daughter and son-in-law served in the Army, and her son-in-law did one tour in Iraq.

Apr 25 Anthony C. Sciglitano, Jr., *From Saeculum to "the Secular": Narratives of Salvation in Theology and Secular Culture*

In the middle ages, "saeculum" indicated a period of time, namely, the time from the beginning of the Christian Church at Pentecost to God's consummation of Creation in the end. This

temporal category was understood as a time of pilgrimage, when souls never fully happy in this life would nevertheless struggle to mirror the virtues of the City of God in their personal, ecclesial, and political lives. In the 14th century, a major shift (one of many!) began to take place in this view of the secular. "The secular" now began to take on the "spatial" significance we are familiar with today: a public region or area of discourse according to reason (law, economics, politics) that makes of faith and its content something for the private, affective sphere. On this account, faith is about particular beliefs/feelings that should be restricted to the private sphere because they cannot be verified by reason and may cause violence, or at least some sort of fanaticism.

Anthony Sciglitano, Ph.D. is currently Associate Professor and Chair of Religious Studies, Seton Hall University. His training is in Contemporary Systematic Theology at Fordham University. He has published in professional journals such as *Modern Theology* and *Pro Ecclesia* and is finishing a book entitled *The Cross and the Covenant: An Anti-Marcionite Theology of Religions with Crossroad press*. Anthony is especially interested in contemporary discourse on secularism and Christianity, specifically, and secularism and religions more broadly. He is privileged to chair a department of remarkable people and scholars.

Apr 9 Folk Friday at Ethical

Sing along with friends Lucky, Dusty, Rusty & Tio Pete, every second Friday of the month at the Society. No admission fee. Bring acoustic string and rhythm instruments, join in playing with us; bring *(continued on next page)*

Platforms begin at 11 a.m. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. For information, contact the Society office, 973-763-1905.

Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



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Editor's note

The newsletter invites you to submit articles, announcements, commentary, etc. for publication. ITEMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY THE EIGHTH OF THE MONTH FOR INCLUSION IN THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S EDITION. Items should be no more than 150 words, preferably submitted via email to the editor (gilman.howard@gmail.com). Items can also be delivered to: Editor, Ethical Society Newsletter, 516 Prospect St., Maplewood, NJ 07040. Please call the office, 973-763-1905, and leave word especially if your item is time-sensitive.

Editor reserves right to edit for length, clarity and content. Opinions offered in this publication are those of the authors.

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Our web site: www.essexethical.org

**...act so
as to elicit
the best
in others
and in
ourselves**

Attention members! Please submit your email addresses to ethicalessex@netscape.com to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

some refreshments to share. Ethical Culture Society, 516 Prospect St., Maplewood; 7:30 p.m. (973) 763-1905 or 763-8293; lnovemsky@comcast.net

Peace Study Group Continued

We have had a fine response to our Peace Study Group on March 14th and more such groups will continue. Please telephone Betty Levin, coordinator, if you wish to be in this illuminating group that can eventually change history! And most important, if you can interest your friends and neighbors, I have car and will travel to your community for such an event. My home phone number is 973-763-1033.

In the meantime, join the National Conversation for the Peace Bill. This happens the first Tuesday of each month at 9 p.m. by calling 712-432-1601, at the interrupt, #47021 is the access code. The pertinent dates are April 6, May 4, June 8, July 6, August 3, etc. Each month you can assume the phone number remains the same. For certainty, check the Web site: www.thepeacealliance.org.

I hope to hear from you that you want to join a new Study Group and on the Peace telephone conversation on Tuesdays!

Another "Peace Bill" Event May 14

Ms. Dot Maver, champion of the Peace Academy, part of the Department of Peace Cabinet Level Bill now in Congress, will speak at our Society on Friday night, May 14 at 8 p.m. Ms. Maver is a leader in the Peace Alliance and former campaign staffer in Dennis Kucinich's presidential campaign.

You may notice that Friday night coincides with our "Folk Friday." Since Ms. Maver would be in New Jersey only that time, Lisa Novemsky has graciously arranged to have the folk singers do their spirited thing in the living room, allowing the Peace Academy discussion to take place in the main meeting room. On the evening of May 14, Ethical Culture will rock! Watch for more details.

— E. Betty Levin, Board of Trustees

Apr 24 Sale to Benefit Society

As a woman of a certain age, I'm cleaning out my house in preparation for whatever. The trinkets, kitchenware, art books, lin-

ens and possible collectibles are too nice to just discard so I'm selling them at a house sale to benefit our Ethical Society. All proceeds to the Society minus advertising expenses. But I need help, just as you good people pitched in when we had our traditional Society White Elephant sale almost every spring.

In consultation with others, I have set the date for Saturday, April 24th, rain date April 25th. Can volunteers come early on the 24th to tag the items and possibly on Friday the 23rd, depending on the weather, and of course, serve as salespeople on the day of the event? Fortunately, I have a large driveway and could also use some large tables brought from the Society? Please call me with your "yes" and your Ethical generosity.

— E. Betty Levin, (973) 763-1033

The Joys and Sorrows of Springtime



For those who are, as a rule, fairly happy (in the absence of great losses) springtime is a time for rejoicing in the return of the Sun's warmth and its beneficent effect in allowing the flowers of our gardens to slowly but surely emerge from the earth. Yet for those burdened with melancholy, the coming of spring only serves to heighten the awareness of separation between those who are free of depression and those who live with it. This is nicely illustrated in T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Wasteland": "Winter kept us warm, covering earth in forgetful snow." From this he concluded that "April is the cruelest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory with desire."

Whether your life circumstances make you pro or con springtime, you are all invited to bring your pro or con spring poems to share with all of us.

— Boe Meyerson

Children's Books — Reminder

We are collecting used childrens' books to be given to the Parenting Center for distribution to local children who live in poverty. Kindly deposit these books in the box so labeled in room next to the parlor.

Thank you, Mira Stillman

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY, APRIL 11

Excerpts from Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, US Representative to the UN, on the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, Jan. 23, 2010

Great tragedies should remind us of our common humanity, and of our shared duty to keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.

The United States relentlessly seeks a world where we have finally learned the lessons of the Holocaust, of Rwanda, of Darfur — a world where we put effective action behind the words “never again” by truly ending genocide.

The horrors of the recent past demand that we not let the Holocaust be seen as somehow remote or unfathomable. We should resist any view of the perpetrators as simply banal, as mindless cogs in the engine of mass murder. Each and every life taken — by the pitiless firing squads tramping behind the Wehrmacht legions, by the deliberately created privation of the ghettos, by the cruelly constructed factories of death — each and every life taken was taken by a long chain of breathing, thinking people. Those were people manning the guard towers. Those were people calculating the schedules of the trains. Those were people pulling the switches and the triggers. The Nazis built a vast system of institutionalized cruelty, but no system runs itself. Sometimes, as Christopher Browning and others have written, ordinary men are capable of the most extraordinary viciousness.

The perpetrators made their choices. So too did the bystanders, the people and governments who turned the other way in the hour of moral emergency. But so too did the righteous among the nations — the villagers who took in desperate neighbors — the diplomats who shoved aside bureaucracy and timidity to help fleeing Jews escape the

Nazi snare — the office secretary in Amsterdam who helped hide her boss’s family for two years, including a young girl named Anne Frank — the citizens who risked their lives for others almost as a matter of course — the quiet men and women who will forever remind us that human beings are capable not just of unimaginable cruelty but also of unimaginable bravery.

We do not choose the circumstances in which we live, but we do choose the way we respond to them. We choose. We all choose. Even in the face of the most terrible tyranny, we choose. That is the basis of moral agency — choices, large and small, that add up to reveal our character.

As President Obama put it in Oslo, we must face the world as it is — a world in which human beings can rise to the most astonishing heroism or sink to the most awful depravity — a world in which we must do more than just bear witness — a world in which choices matter.

We must choose to keep faith with those targeted by killers and demagogues, with those hounded from their homes by the callous and the cruel.

We must choose to celebrate the different ways in which we have all been created.

We must choose to defend the rights that all people have but that not all people can exercise.

We must choose to work together to expand the reach of decency, to resist the preachers of division, to refuse to stand by lest innocent blood be shed.

Atrocities are not inevitable. They need not be part of the landscape of world politics, unless we let them be.

Today, we still face those who reject our common humanity to justify uncommon callousness. We still face those who see difference as a spur for spite rather than a source of strength. We still face those who deny the plain

facts of history. We still face those who seek to ride the tide of malice and mistrust — those who make a career of hatred and division.

We may never find an end to oppression. But we will never stop trying to find one.

So in the early years of a new century, we must work together to apply the lessons of the last decade’s bitter succession of genocides. We must work together to mete out justice to the perpetrators. We must work together to build up the world’s capacity to respond surely and swiftly to mass slaughter. And we must work together to prevent conflict before an ember becomes a blaze.

We all know the greatest obstacle to swift action in the face of atrocities is, ultimately, political will. The hard truth is that stopping genocide requires more than just the wisdom to see a way to save innocents from the knives and the guns. It requires above all the courage and the compassion to act.

Countries have particularly vital duties to shield their own populations from the depraved and the murderous. And we believe that other states, in turn, have a responsibility to help if a state cannot meet its fundamental duties to its citizens — or to take collective action if a state will not meet that essential responsibility.

We are determined to do far more in the future to save the innocent and the vulnerable.

We can rededicate ourselves to our shared commitment to human rights and human dignity — and to a few stark and powerful beliefs.

We believe that even in war, there are rules. We believe that even in the pursuit of power, there are limits. We believe that even in a violent world, there are rights. And that always, there is hope. ■



ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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the food pantry box in our front hall.

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY NEWSLETTER · APRIL 2010



Meredith Sue Willis and Alice Robinson-Gilman (above, from top left) presented a platform on February 28 about Mountaintop Removal in Appalachia, a process by which coal mining operations destroy mountains — and often the streams and homes of the people near them. The platform included information and readings from a collection of writings by professional and amateur writers from the Appalachian region.

The audience included a group of students and adults from a youth social action program at Morrow Memorial Methodist Church. The group recently travelled through Appalachia (and will again in April) witnessing conditions first-hand. The teens agreed that the trip had been an extraordinary learning experience. It was a delight to have them as guests and their articulate and thoughtful observations added greatly to the presentation and discussion.