



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

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DECEMBER 2004

Leader's Message

By the time you read these words I hope we will know the identity of the person who will serve as President of this nation for the next four years. I hope we will not be plunged



into a Constitutional crisis. I hope that the decision will have been made by the Electorate as is fitting and proper for a great democracy and that the decision is

not left to those who have not been elected (U.S. Supreme Court). I hope that those who have the right to vote are allowed to vote — that no obstacles are placed in their path as was the case in Florida when deliberately misleading ballots were given to voters, when voters were told that their recent rent receipts

were required, when thousands were turned away for lack of functioning voting machines. Though my hopes are great, my expectations are not so.

“Surely the wealthiest and most technologically advanced nation on earth should be able to conduct a fair election.”

It has been four years since our last phony election. And despite all the time that has passed, our processes are still not fair, equitable and functional. Thousands of lawsuits relevant to voting rights sit in the courts, as yet undetermined.

Despite our long struggle for universal suffrage, the right to vote is by no means fully honored in this land. Despite a tragic civil war, we must still struggle for the right to vote in fair elections.

Surely the wealthiest and most technologically advanced nation on earth should be able to conduct a fair election. I suggest that just as Federal intervention was needed in the past, so it is needed now. Let us have Federally regulated Federal elections with uniform procedures and technology. Federal election process should not be regulated by the states! — *Best, Boe*



Guest Opinion

Arren't we lucky? With the holidays approaching, we, for the most part, are surrounded by friends and family all of whom have everything we need, and then some.

Since 1944, Heifer International has reached out to 125 countries including the United States, helping millions of people overcome their dire situations and start a path to a brighter future. This is the gift of self-reliance. Needy families receive a gift of livestock and the training required to care for the animal(s), use its resources (milk, wool, eggs, etc.) to improve the life of their family and fulfill their promise to pass along their animal's offspring to other families in need. This is truly a gift that keeps on giving. This year please consider

making a tax-deductible donation to Heifer International in the name of each person on your gift list. Cards are available for you to give to loved ones to let them know about your generous gifts. By spending your holiday dollars in this manner rather than at the mall, you receive a added benefit: Think of all the extra time you'll have to spend doing something really enjoyable.

Please call me at home, (973-605-5105) or at the Ethical (973-763-1905) for info or arrangements.

— *Happy Holidays, Gigi*

[Donation forms are available at the Ethical Society for those interested. Gigi is available by phone to answer questions about the project. Items of this nature are to be submitted to the Social Action Committee.* — *Boe*]

(*contact Patty Bender or Fred Sebastian.)

Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



Boe Meyerson, Leader
Jim White, Leader Emeritus

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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 FIRST OF THE MONTH FOR INCLUSION IN THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S EDITION. Items should be no more than 150 words, preferably submitted via e-mail to the editor (howardgilman@netscape.net). Items can also be delivered to: Editor, Ethical Culture 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.

For those interested in receiving their copy of Ethical Culture Monthly by First Class Mail for a charge of \$10/year or \$5/half year (beginning in January), call the office, 973-763-1905, and request our First Class Mail Special.

Ethical Culture Society
of Essex County,
516 Prospect St.,
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Visit our website: www.essexethical.org

FUNDRAISERS CALENDAR

January 14 Trivial Pursuits Party at Jeanine Rosh's. Seating for 10 — sign up now. Snow date TBA

February 13 Stirling Duo Concert 2 pm, Ethical Society building

From now until May 2005 bring clean reusable articles for the White Elephant Sale to be held in May. Drop them off at the Society. Everything but books or clothing can be left at any time now. Bring a bag or two every Sunday. Start looking in drawers and cabinets — there's always something there just waiting for us! *Jeanine M. Rosh*

STIRLING DUO

Back by Popular Demand

Get out your calendars, turn on your computers, and mark this date: Sunday, February 13, at 2 pm. Or better yet, block off the whole day as "EEE" (*Extraordinary Entertainment at Ethical*). Come early, stay late, but be sure to save the date for the Stirling Duo. Seasoned performers Mary Babiarz and Joe Gluck, our own society members, better known as the Stirling Duo, will perform for an Ethical Culture Society Fundraiser at the society building.

Joe (recently retired from the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra with "who-knows-what up his sleeve") and Mary (violinist with the Paper Mill Playhouse Regional Theatre in Millburn, N.J. and all-around good sport) are no strangers to the Metropolitan area, performing for many functions and organizations. Mary adds her piano skills to Joe's violin as they become the Stirling Duo.

They offer an intimate style, highlighted by anecdotal explanations of the works they play. Always there is the unique connection of piece to composer, and performers to audience. Again they will welcome the dulcet tones of Margie Berg, soprano. Her art songs enthrall us and her warm style blended with the Babiarz/Gluck sound goes 'round and 'round and comes out — lovely.

Here's what we're asking, early on. Save the date, and bring a friend, maybe someone you've always wanted to ask, but never had the time. Here's what we're offering: A fabulous concert and after the performance, hors d'oeuvres, beverages, great dialogue and a chance to make a difference in our

financial health. More news on this to follow. For more information or reservations call the society office at 973-763-1905 or Jeanine Rosh at 973-258-9395.

Jeanine M. Rosh

From The UN

Food Security

by Sylvain Ehrenfeld, IHEU representative to the UN, and Phyllis Ehrenfeld, AEU's National Service Conference representative to the UN

The all-important problem of food availability and food security has always been a primary UN concern. The Food and Agricultural Organization (www.fao.org) was one of the first UN agencies founded on October 16, 1945.

Its mandate was to alleviate poverty and hunger, to promote food security and access to food by promoting agricultural development and improved nutrition. World Food Day is celebrated every year on October 16. This year the focus was on the pivotal role of biodiversity in food security and the fight against hunger.

There is good news. Over the past 50 years, food production has increased at an unprecedented rate, outpacing the doubling of the population over the same period. Since the early 1960s the population of hungry people has been reduced from a staggering 50% to about 20%. This number still translates to about 850 million, unacceptable in our world of plenty, when there is enough food to feed every man, woman and child. In the sixties, even the idea that hunger could be eliminated was startling and new. Now

global knowledge is increasing every day, thanks to TV, the internet, the UN and the outreach of international agencies. Years ago we lived without the immediate knowledge of mass suffering. To our discomfort, we now live in one world.

Biodiversity is basic to food security. A recent UN briefing stressed the importance of maintaining genetic variety. Throughout history, humanity has used an estimated 10,000 species of plants and vegetables for food or feeding livestock. Today there are only about 150 different crops planted worldwide, and 30 crops dominate food production. Wheat, corn, rice and potatoes account for about 60% of this harvest. 90% of the animal protein in our food supply comes from only 14 mammal and bird species. Fisheries are facing a dwindling catch. There has been a substantial reduction in crop genetic diversity in the field. Many breeds of livestock are threatened by extinction.

Modern day agriculture's trend is towards monoculture which leads to a rise in production, but is accompanied by a dangerous reduction in biological diversity.

Why is biodiversity so important? Biodiversity is essential to increase resilience, the capacity to resist environmental stress. It is needed for the natural processes of pollination by insects and the regeneration of soils by microorganisms. Biodiversity reduces vulnerability to pests. More variety also contributes to a more nutritious diet for both people and livestock, supporting health and immunity to disease.

Another economic reason for biodiversity is that variety in crops provides some protection for the periodically sharp drops in world prices which make it impossible for poor farmers to make a profit. About 40% of land surface is used

for agriculture. Overall some 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and derive their livelihood from agriculture. Therefore, growth of agriculture is essential for reducing poverty and insuring food security. Rather than a simple crop variety that guarantees high yield, farmers in developing countries are more likely to need an assortment of crops that grow well in harsh climates, and a variety of animals with resistance to disease. For the poor farmer, diversity of foods may be their best protection against starvation.

Consumers also benefit from diversity by receiving wider choice of foods and better nutrition. Lastly, but most importantly, it is essential for farmers in poorer countries to market their products in a fair trading world system that makes it possible for them to compete with the subsidies to agriculture supplied by the wealthy countries.

If present trends continue, the UN millennium's goals to cut hunger by half, by the year 2015, will not be met. Although production is improving, the rate has slowed. We must continue to support the changes that reduce inequality between

the richer and the poorer countries. In the mean time the UN is the major institution that continues to work to promote the availability of food for all.

Editor's Note:

Doug Proops' messages from afar (some have been e-mailed to members) conclude with a sincere "Let us hear from you folks." E-mail a reply to: graeffproops@dominox.com.

EC Directory Corrections

Greeters changes from Hannah Berkley to Ashley Lannigan.

Hospitality changes from Doris Rados to Ashley Lannigan.

Spelling correction: Terri *Suess*, TerriSuess@aol.com

Gigi Goldstein, *cell*: 973-960-7335.

Members' e-mails: Rosalie Sussman: roseemd@yahoo.com

Alice Robinson-Gilman: alicerg101@hotmail.com. (*Also delete this as an e-mail for Molly Gilman on Y.E.S. page.*)

Friends' e-mails:

Jerry Kaplan: Congreves@aol.com,

David Reis: david.m.reis@verizon.net,

Win Thies: delete e-mail address.

Delete Mike Siegel & Marie Weber, and Doris Smorodin.

Was Our Country Founded on the Belief in God?

No. Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin were all deists or freethinkers. At the time they lived, deists were considered little different from those without any belief. We do know that these founding fathers were not interested in identifying the government of the new country with a religious concept of any specific kind.

At the Constitutional Convention it was voted after some discussion that the word God would not have a place in the Constitution. Later on, George Washington, while president, signed this statement in the name of the United States: "The Government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion." Our country has become strong partly through the foresight of our founding fathers. There is no historical evidence that only a believer in a theological religion can have faith in freedom, in self-government, in democracy, or in high moral family values. It was only in 1954 that our Congress inserted in the Pledge of Allegiance the phrase "under God." [*Humanist Philosophy*, Chapter Four, Copyright © 1995, 2002 by the American Humanist Association]

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE

Sunday Morning Platforms

December, 2004

Platforms begin at 11 am. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. Sunday School 11 am-12:15 pm. Youth of Ethical Societies (YES): contact Society office.

December 5 Boe Meyerson: "America's Secular and Humanist Heritage." This address presents some of the dramatic, historical material developed by the gifted historian, Susan Jacoby, whose recent book, *Freethinkers*, was acclaimed by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and quoted by Peter Gay (Yale History Professor Emeritus) as being "not only a good book, but a necessary one" regarding the issue of the separation of church and state.

(Boe Meyerson is the Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex and also serves as the Humanist

Chaplain at Columbia University.)
December 12 Elaine Norstein will be interviewed about her recent trip to South Africa where she grew up under *Apartheid*. In her visits back there she has been able to observe the process of the transition to democracy.

December 19 Winter Solstice Celebration *Another creative seasonal program by Louisa Lubiak and the Sunday School students.* For the ancients, participating in seasonal celebrations was more than just a break in the daily routine and an excuse to have a little fun. Winter Solstice was a time of urgent uncertainty because if the people didn't encourage the Sun to return at this time, he might feel unneeded and

decide to leave altogether! Although we moderns know that the combination of Earth's axial inclination and elliptical orbit produce the Sun's apparent seasonal withdrawal and return, we needn't take the phenomenon entirely for granted. We will examine the perspective, still practiced by some indigenous people today, that in order to be fully present in the world one must enthusiastically participate in the everyday happenings of Nature!

December 26 *Instead of a platform, there will be an informal gathering sharing reflections on Ethical Culture.*

Mark Your Calendars...

December 10 Folk singing with Lisa Novemsky, 7:30 pm every 2nd Friday of the month. Please call the office or email lnovemsky@comcast.net to check in advance.

December 11 Honoring Dinner for Paul Surovell, 6:30 pm, at Temple Sharey-Tefilo Israel.

December 12 Philosophy Every 2nd and 4th Sunday from 9:30 – 10:30 am Leader Boe Meyerson conducts sessions in group philosophical inquiry into personal and public ethical problems. We learn philosophy by doing it together.

December 20 Poetry 7:30 pm Every third Monday. Workshop and readings. Our Poetry workshop is led by Sylvia Kramer. All can learn to write poems. There is also the opportunity for participants to read their own poems to the group. ■

Quote

We cannot make people live or want to live. But we can create the conditions in which they will have more taste for life and more faith in life.

We cannot make people free if they do not want to be free. But we can remove the obstacles to their freedom and help them learn to free themselves.

We cannot make people equal when they are unequal. But we can help defend their rights and open opportunities.

We cannot make people like one another and love one another; But we can reach out to others and help them communicate; and understand each other. We can nourish the feeling of community, the feeling of identity in the common life. We can seek to create a climate of trust and good will with those whose lives we touch.

This is the way to freedom and equality for all, and the hope of a sane and happy world.

— Algernon Black