



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 4

Visit our web site: www.essexethical.org

DECEMBER, 2005

LEADER'S MESSAGE

Off to War: Again and Again and Again

Tiny events can have cataclysmic consequences. We all know about the example of the butterfly — how one flip of the butterfly's wing in a certain direction at a particular time under certain conditions could for example cause a hurricane on the other side of the globe. Strange stuff. But I am not sure it is limited to purely physical events.



When I read an article in the *New York Times* about the precipitating event leading to the Vietnam War, I was reminded about this strange principle. It seems that the initial report of an attack by the North Vietnamese Navy on American destroyers on Aug. 4, 1964 was actually false, due to an error in translation from an intercepted message of the North Vietnamese. The National Security Agency's mid-level officials stood by the initial report even after the error was later realized in order to cover up their agency's error. This bureaucratic cover-up resulted in the now famous Gulf of Tonkin Incident that Johnson cited in his request to Congress to authorize the military defense of South Vietnam. And so you have a stupid bureaucratic cover-up causing a war that cost the lives of more than 58,000 Americans and over 1 million Vietnamese.

This principle also calls to mind the tragic precipitating *causa belli* of World War I. A militant, terroristic Serbian nationalist kills the Archduke Francis

Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo and ends up provoking WWI between the Allied and the Central Powers — a war that all the participants were ready for but none really overtly wanted or planned.

And yet despite the appearance of pure accident, both cases show pre-existing conditions that made those nations vulnerable to such accidents. Europe before World War I was a continent divided into two armed camps, each with interlocking alliances that could be ignited into open war by a hair trigger. And so a single terrorist brings all of Europe's imperial powers into deadly conflict. As Will would be wont to say, "the readiness was all."

"When a nation is not only ready to go to war but planning to do so, it goes to war — with or without a precipitating cause."

It is a similar story with Johnson and the Gulf of Tonkin. Even putting aside the speculations alleging that Johnson knew the truth about the decoded message, it was nevertheless the case that the US was prepared to act at will and without provocation to contain the spread of Communism. Again, "the readiness was all."

When a nation is not only ready to go to war but planning to do so, it goes to war — with or without a precipitating cause. Such was the case in our unprovoked aggression in the current Iraq war. In this case there was no accident at all. There is no near miss. This is not a case of being slightly off the mark about information about weapons of mass destruction. We were so anxious

to go to war and begin, before the heat of summer would compromise the invasion, that we interrupted the UN's search arbitrarily and insisted that the data supported the existence of weapons when no such claim was made by the report. It was embarrassing not to find those weapons. But that's a minor inconvenience when you consider the control of the oil, the need for which is this nation's Achilles' heel. This is not an accidental cause and not a minor one. In the end, it is an appetite that cannot be quenched. It can only be extirpated. *Let's start now.* — Boe

NEW MEMBERS

On Sunday Oct. 23 we got two new members

Joyce Jackson is retired from the State Department of Health, having worked on addiction and AIDS. She is now working as a clinician at the Psychiatric Emergency Room of the University Hospital in Newark. Joyce has already made friends through the Newcomers group and she feels comfortable and happy to be a new member.

Gus Lindquist, a retired computer system specialist, is now a writer of plays and short stories and an active blogger. Gus is a father, grandfather and a great-grandfather of two and enjoys the good life being a community activist for peace and justice.

We welcome them both to active participation in the Ethical Culture Society.

The membership committee meets next on Monday Dec. 12 at 4:00 p.m. at the building. All are welcome!

— Anja Moen,
Chair, Membership Committee

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 email to the editor (howardgilman@netscape.net). 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.

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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“The future will not belong to those who sit on the sidelines. The future will not belong to the cynics. The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

— Paul Wellstone
1944–2002

FUND RAISER NEWS

Concert on Saturday Dec. 3

Soprano Marjorie Berg of Short Hills will sing songs by New York City composer Warren Michel Swenson at the Ethical Culture Society on Saturday Dec. 3 at 3:00 p.m. The composer will accompany her on the piano. The program will include several love songs and will feature a whimsical song cycle entitled “The Butterfly Ball and the Grasshopper’s Feast.”



Berg has sung in recent years at the Ethical Culture Society with The Stirling Duo. She has also been a soloist with The Harmonium Choral Society, The Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey, The Masterworks Chorus, New Jersey Concert Opera and Ridge Light Opera. She is currently a guest soloist and recitalist at several area churches.

Warren Michel Swenson’s compositions have been recorded by Pulitzer Prize winner William Bolcom and George Shirley of the Metropolitan Opera, Paul Sperry and Irma Vallecillo, and Arlene Auger with Dalton Baldwin. His oeuvre also includes opera and sacred choral music, much of which has been published by Oxford University Press.

Donation is \$25. Refreshments and conversation with the artist and her accompanist will bring the day to a mellow conclusion. Reserve early, and do bring your friends.

Dec. 10 Norwegian Dinner — Scandinavian Jule Bord

On Saturday evening Dec. 10, plan to attend our fundraiser dinner at the home of Anja Moen. The Scandinavian *Jule Bord* is a holiday table — a food extravaganza featuring gravlak, shrimp, cured beef, herring salad, sweet cabbage, soft bread, and rice pudding with red sauce and other Scandinavian delicacies. Seating is limited, so reserve now. Call Nancy Bohn or the office. Donation is \$25.

Mid-winter Warm-up

Cold weather got you down? Lack of sun making you grouchy? Cheer up! On Jan. 21 Jim Quigley offers respite from the post new year’s blues with gourmet food and fireplace.

8 to 10 people can enjoy an evening of food and fun at Jim’s place. Always a FUN raiser, this event will sell out quickly, so make your reservation NOW. Snow date is Jan. 28.

Coming soon

Trivial Pursuits evening Feb. 10 at Jeanine Rosh’s ... Marshall’s BBQ ribs in the spring.

Spread the word. — Jeanine Rosh

EDITORIAL

Freedom for the Dying Under First Amendment

“Shall we recognize the right of the dying to freedom in their end of life decision-making?”

The gist of my Oct. 16 Platform was that the dying are yet living and are thus entitled ethically and legally to make those vital, personal and private decisions connected with their dying as they see fit. Surely this position is inherent in the Society’s official embrace of physician-assisted dying (PAD) with appropriate safeguards against abuse. Currently two unanimous 1997 Supreme Court decisions deny that PAD is protected against criminalization by the states by reason of the 14th Amendment. But several of the Justices stated that the issue (“Is suicide a Constitutionally protected right”) was too narrowly framed by now-deceased Chief Justice William Rehnquist. And several stated the door is yet open to reexamination of this issue on more compelling facts. (All the patient-plaintiffs had died before the case reached the Supreme Court, and none of the physicians were facing state prosecution for aiding in a suicide.)

Surprisingly, with only a passing aside by the NJ Supreme Court in the Karen Ann Quinlan case, no court has passed on the question as to whether the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom is implicated here. This is doubly mystifying in the context of the Supreme Court’s expansive definition of “religion” in *U.S. v. Seeger* and elsewhere: in sum, any belief system (even atheism!) which fills the role in a believer’s life which traditional religions do.

By setting up barriers for dying persons' free decisions, state governments in effect "conscript" them into something like a religious rite. Indeed, some Roman Catholic authorities have analogized interaction with the dying as much like the sacrament of communion. The earlier "flag salute" and "prayer in the school" decisions hold that the First Amendment absolutely bars government from forcing citizens into professions of faith against their will. Again, the physician who believes her calling is a sacred expression of her religion is unlawfully barred by government from lovingly ministering to her patient.

The next case insisting on freedom for the dying should thus additionally set forth these Freedom of Religion arguments.

— *Winthrop Thies*

LETTER

Photographic view of three countries

Early in September Terri Suess shared her excitement about how spruced up the fresh paint had made the building look and invited me to hang a show of my photographs. What fun! Bob and I had gone on a 2003 Witness for Peace delegation to Cuba and Nicaragua. Later the same year we were tourists in China. Between the three countries I took about 1,000 photos and enlarged some to give my impression of the countries. More enlargements, more framing and the search for hooks to fit on the molding, help from Elaine Norstein and others hanging them, and wow. It has been a thrill to me to see my work — 29 photos in all — hanging at Ethical. I have received lots of positive feedback on the show from members and visitors and Terri Suess and I look forward to other members getting a chance to show their art.

— *Patty Ganley Bender*

PLATFORMS

(continued from page 4)

Join us as we honor the wisdom of nature in winter, taking the time to acknowledge our need for rest and recuperation, and to celebrate the bright flame of the human spirit through music, mirth and myth.

Dec. 25 Christmas Day, Boe Meyerson, Leader and Facilitator: *"Colloquy on the Theme of Gifts"*

Instead of our traditional Sunday morning Platform Address, our Leader Boe Meyerson, will conduct an alternative service called 'Colloquy.' It consists of readings, music, reflection, meditation, songs, and voluntary participation of those at-

tending who choose to share their thoughts on the theme.

Jan. 1 Boe Meyerson, Leader and Facilitator: *"Our Communal Future — Discussion"*

On the first day of this New Year we will have the opportunity to share our visions, hopes, wishes and aspirations for our community: family, congregational, civic, national, global. All participation is voluntary and all are welcome.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Folk Singing Friday Dec. 9
7:30 p.m. second Friday of the month with Lisa Novemsky.

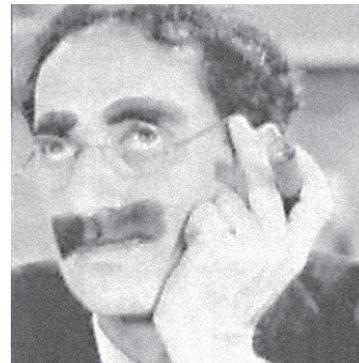
QUOTES

"The most fundamental problem of politics is not the control of wickedness but the limitation of righteousness. There is nothing more dangerous than a people convinced of their own moral superiority. Tyranny, a form of disorder posing as order, is the result."

— *Henry Kissinger*

"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies."

— *Groucho Marx*



*Quotes from the website of Progressive Action Alliance
(<http://www.progressiveactionalliance.org>)*

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

December, 2005

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.

Dec. 4 Boe Meyerson, Leader and Facilitator: *“Colloquy on the theme of Acceptance”*

Instead of our traditional Sunday morning Platform Address, Boe Meyerson, will conduct an alternative service called “Colloquy.” It consists of readings, music, reflection, meditation, songs and voluntary participation of those attending who choose to share their thoughts on the theme.

Boe Meyerson is the Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County. She also serves as the Ethical Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University. Boe represents the National Leader’s Council on the Board of Directors of the American Ethical Union and serves on the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Division of the United Nations Association.

Dec. 11 Anne Stires, *“Bioneers”*

Anne Stires holds a BA in Economics and a MA in Industrial Education and Training from Montclair State University. After working many years in the corporate world, she is currently retired from that world and is working to advance the mission of the Montclair Backyard Habitat Project, the Hilltop Conservancy, and her own backyard habitat which is certified by

the National Wildlife Federation. She has three grown children, a daughter-in-law and two grandsons. She is a member of Bioneers.

Bioneer is a word coined by the founders Kenny Ausabel and Nina Simons of the Collective Heritage Institute. It joins ‘bio’ meaning life, with ‘pioneer’, a person who prepares the way for others. Kenny and Nina founded the Institute and launched the Bioneers Conference to assist in the restoration of the earth. This October will mark the 16th year of the Conference, held in San Rafael, CA. Originally, its purpose was to gather together people who were concerned about farming practices, monocultures and the production of our food supply. What

Kenny and Nina found was that issues surrounding farming and food were tied directly to issues surrounding natural resource use, health care, politics, social justice, media, environmental degradation and the use and abuse of power, to name just a few. Today the Conference creates a place where, for three wonderful days, people can network, listen to speakers and attend workshops that address all of the issues that inhibit the earth’s, and our own, restoration. Anne is attending her fifth consecutive conference this year.

Please note: **The Social Action Committee** is meeting on **Sunday Dec. 11** after platform.

Dec. 18 Louisa Lubiak, *“Winter Solstice Celebration”*

Louisa is an ECS member, an environmentalist, and a naturalist who draws her inspiration from the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, lessons of Mother Nature. She celebrates the seasonal holidays based on the Celtic wheel of the year with the Earth-Based Spirituality Circle of the Morristown Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Louisa is a long-time resident of South Orange and Maplewood, is a graduate of Columbia High School, has a B.A. degree in Earth Science from Kean University and currently works for the NJ Department of Environmental Protection in Trenton.

For the natural world, the onset of winter is a signal to slow down, draw in, and rest from the fervent growth of the summer. In the human world, the shift into the darkest time of the year triggers an urge to festoon our houses and streets with the comforting glow of holiday lights. As the ancients implored the waning sun to return to their darkening world through the magic of bonfires and candles, we moderns seek to brighten the world and lighten our lives with the magic of incandescent bulbs. *(continued on page 3)*

