



ETHICAL CULTURE

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FEBRUARY 2008

Leader's Message

The Greatest Idea in The World

"The great use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it," wrote Bertrand Russell. Wise and thoughtful men and women in all ages have agreed that the greatest lives are those given to the well-being of others. In promoting human understanding and happiness, we discover our own deepest and most enduring values.

Many who belong to no church or sect – along with many, who do – when asked to identify their creed, will reply simply: "My religion is the golden rule." Or they will answer: "Formal church doctrines and theologies are not important to me. The way in which I relate to others and to myself is all that matters." Without perhaps having a label for their faith, such people – to the degree that they live by these convictions – are practicing the essence of Humanist religion."



So begins the first chapter of Ed Ericson's wonderful introduction to Ethical Humanism entitled *The Humanist Way*. He goes on to describe the philosophical contours of Ethical Humanism, emphasizing its roots in Naturalism. He gives a wonderful synopsis of our history. Then he discusses what he calls "the secret of moral creativity." Here he gives a brilliant exposition of Adler's golden rule "Act so as to elicit the best in others and thereby in thyself." He appropriately explains how Adler's longer more detailed version of the rule far more accurately reflects Adler's true message. "Act so as to elicit in others the distinctive excellence characteristic of each of them as fellow members of the ethical whole, and thereby to that excellence

more fully in yourself." Though far more complex, this form emphasizes the idea of the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each of us which for Adler is one of the great sources of human worth. Here the interaction is not one in which we recognize in the other a fixed uniform set of virtues or praise that we personally hold dearest. Rather, this rule guides us to be open to and appreciative of the unique values and sensibilities of others. This is a highly original and highly sophisticated ethical concept. It is Adler at his unique best. — *Boe Meyerson*



President's Letter

I had much pleasure in attending a Kwanzaa party in December. Kwanzaa is an African-American tradition celebrating self-development and identity. A guest welcomed me with the salutation "Mama" and I was deeply moved. I haven't been addressed in that manner since my African drumming and chanting days with Babatunde Olatunji who brought beautiful customs and spirituality to our country from Nigeria in the 60s. "Mama" is a term of respect for women of older years. I was honored with that name in the special years of my friendship with Babatunde (affectionately called Baba). The honorific connected me to the beautiful customs and spiritual meaning that still live within though Baba has since passed on. It is significant that language can evoke depth of meaning that lives vitally today. Though Yoruba was Baba's language, it is a universal language of which I think Felix Adler would approve: "*Ajaja a me lo – ajaja a me lo*" / "I am that I am the highest spirit that I strive to become" — *Betty Levin*

Upcoming Fund Raising Events

We're putting together a **Stirling Duo event** early in 2008 – our own Mary Babiarz and Joe Gluck – back by popular demand. Details to come.

March 2, Sunday Afternoon Soup and Sondheim – the Strollers' "*Anyone can Whistle*", is an absurdist social satire about insanity and conformity, among a dozen other things. Any opportunity to experience Sondheim's genius is an event not to be missed. Add lunch and camaraderie and you've got a fun afternoon. \$23 per person for ticket and lunch. Call the office to reserve.

Game Night (formerly *Trivial Pursuits*) **March 14**, Friday evening at Jeanine Rosh's starting at 7 p.m. Warm grog (or beverage of your choice), healthy snacks and the challenge of the game will start out your weekend with a bang. Room for 9, \$15 donation.

Sylvia Kramer's Poetry Evening is tentatively 7 p.m. Saturday **April 26**. If you believe you could never write anything, you are a perfect candidate. Sylvia weaves her magic in a most delightful way and *voila!* a poem appears. Or it's great to come and just listen.

May 31 Marjorie Berg and Friends (pianist John Pivarnik and Margaret Walker, flautist) return in a concert of romance and passion. Please keep the date open; this will be a lovely evening of music and meeting old friends and new. Details to follow soon.

Mini Market – for raising funds after Sunday Platform – offering good, useful items for re-sale. If you would like to participate, bring your clean, saleable items on Sunday, we will sort and ticket those that are marketable and you take them back home if not sold. Items are on a table on Sunday, then on the mantle during the week. ■

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 (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 ethicalsessex@netscape.com to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

From the Social Action Committee

THE AMERICAN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The Social Action Committee of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County has, after nearly a year of study, come to the conclusion that the American health care system is too expensive and that it delivers inferior and unequal care. Further, we believe that adequate health care for every individual must be seen as a basic human right.

In light of this statement, we have been examining the platforms of the presidential hopefuls for their health care proposals. Full plans have been presented by most candidates at this point, and several of the Democrats, including Senators Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, and Barack Obama have many similar features in their plans, including tax credits for the purchase of health care, no denial of coverage by insurance companies, the ability to take your health care with you if you change or lose jobs, ways to help businesses pay for their employees' health care, and more.

Most of the Democrats are proposing mixed private-public funding of health care. Only one candidate, Representative Dennis Kucinich, is for a universal, single-payer, not-for-profit health care system similar to the not-for-profit Medicare and VA based systems that have operated successfully for decades. One other candidate, Republican Governor Mitt Romney, has actually proposed and gotten enacted health legislation – the current Massachusetts near-universal health insurance plan. Governor Romney has, however, substantially backed away from that plan.

At a recent Sunday morning platform, we presented the highlights of several of the candidates' plans, along with a look at the universal, tax-supported systems of the type available in most of Western Europe and Canada, and at our own Medicare system. To read about the candidates' positions in

detail, go to their individual websites, or, go to our web page where there are links both to a summary of the candidates' positions and to the candidates' websites: <http://www.essexethical.org/socialaction.html#healthcare>.

Committee member Winthrop Thies believes that all of these proposals (including a national health plan) are deeply flawed, since none of them engage meaningfully, he says, with the issue of quality in medical care. He questions whether in the long run plans which rely on private health insurers, as those of almost all the candidates' do, are in the best interests of a sound national health care system.

Other committee members, however, are strongly of the view the reality of politics today may well mean that we cannot simply jettison private health insurance companies.

Neither the Ethical Culture Society, a religious and educational institution dedicated to the idea that the ethical life is the highest calling of human beings, nor its Social Action Committee endorse or support individual candidates or

party platforms. We believe, however, that health care is an issue with such deep moral and ethical dimensions that we urge you to examine the candidates' platforms closely in the upcoming months. Whatever candidate you finally support, and whatever leads you to make that choice, we urge you to consider that 40 million Americans have no insurance at all and that health insurance costs are eating away at our economy. Adequate health care for every individual must be seen as a basic human right. ■

From the Membership Committee

With great pleasure and pride we inducted into membership the following individuals on January 6, 2008: Karen and Edmund Bokert, *Maplewood*; Chris Geissler, *youth member, Maplewood*; Joanne Grace / Mrs. Barry Zack, *South Orange*; Sabri Taha, *Belleville*; Barry Zack, *South Orange*.

— Barbara Cotler, *Membership Chair*;
Betty Levin, *President*; Boe Meyerson, *Leader*

From the UN

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE UN

Sixty years ago, in 1948, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On Dec 10, that declaration was reaffirmed as Human Rights Day. This extraordinary document was a response to the horrors of World War 2. It became the first global statement that all human beings have equality and dignity. This document has been translated in more than 360 languages, has inspired the constitutions of many newly formed independent states, has seeded many human rights treaties and instruments, and has inspired the founding of many human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. The Declaration is both a moral guidepost and a practical yardstick to deal with complex actions of governments.

The declaration remains as relevant today as the day it was adopted. But the freedom and rights enshrined in it are not a reality for everyone, and are increasingly under attack. The 60th anniversary of the declaration is being commemorated by the UN for a whole year, by many activities designed to educate, defend and promote the rights in the declaration.

There have been major human rights achievements. The International Criminal Court is an independent permanent court that investigates and prosecutes individuals accused of the most heinous crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. What is crucial is that it is now more than halfway to its goal of universal acceptance — 105 countries have become “states parties”, with however, the US, Russia and China not yet members.

The Court currently has proceedings in 4 situations, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, northern Uganda, and the Sudanese region of Darfur. Many individuals from the former Yugoslavia have been already prosecuted. The International Criminal Tribunal, based in Arusha, Tanzania, has investigated the brutalities in Rwanda. 27 people have been convicted, 5 acquitted.

The ICC faces complex problems in apprehending indicted subjects, particularly in Uganda, the Sudan, and the former Yugoslavia. There is also a moral dilemma. Legal action complicates the efforts to reach negotiated peace settlements in Uganda and in the Sudan. Compromises for peace should not allow those guilty of the worst atrocities to go free. Where to draw the balance?

A bitter Sarajevo joke: When someone kills a man, he is put in prison; if he kills 20, he is declared insane; if he kills 200,000 he is invited to a peace conference.

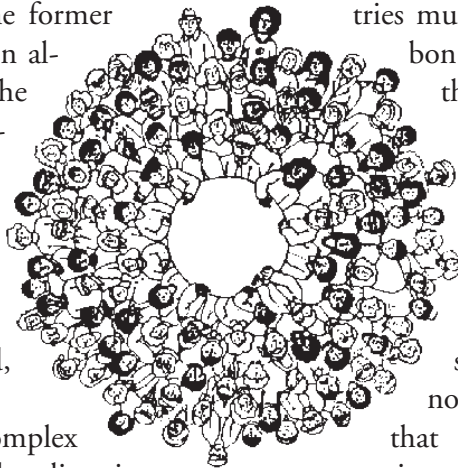
A major challenge for human rights are the deprivations of vulnerable groups and global injustice stemming from climate change. The rich countries are responsible for 70% of cumulative green house emissions. It is the people least responsible who are suffering and will continue to suffer the most. Scientists warn that floods will increase as glaciers melt and sea levels rise. Monsoons in India will intensify, as will droughts in Africa. Communities that rely heavily on agriculture will suffer from food scarcity and health issues.

In early December the UN held a major environmental conference in

Bali to extend the Kyoto Treaty due to expire in 2012. Lack of action will affect everyone and most quickly and painfully for the 2.6 billion people living on less than \$2 a day. Rich countries must cut their own carbon emissions and help the poor to adapt. The solution will demand changes in the types and uses of energy, and the political will to make these changes. Part of the solution will be technological innovations that only the developed countries can afford.

One good outcome: at the Bali Conference the developed nations agreed to speed the transfer of technology to cope with climate change to the developing countries. The agreement must be followed by action. What we do now will affect both our own and our children’s future. A Chinese proverb says, “One generation plants a tree: the next gets the shade.” The shade we need is for all the generations to come.

— *Phyllis Ehrenfeld, Pres. of National Service Conference of the AEU, and Rep. to the UN.; and Dr Sylvain Ehrenfeld, IHEU Rep. to the UN*



Platforms (continued from page 4)

to Egypt last November in search of family roots and new insights into their African connections. Rebecca



Gladys Smith

Perez will have just returned from a second visit to Egypt to attend the wedding of new friends. Gladys Smith, who recently joined the Society, is a social worker, community activist, and mother. ■

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

February, 2008

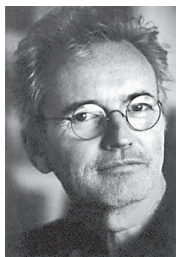
Platforms begin at 11 a.m. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. For information about our Sunday School, 11 a.m.–12:15 p.m., and our Youth of Ethical Societies (YES), contact the Society office, 973-763-1905.

February 3 Boe Meyerson “*Ethical Humanism: A Religion of and for This Life, This Earth, This World, This Human Community*”

This address by Leader Boe Meyerson will focus on the defining characteristics of Ethical Humanism as presented by Edward Ericson in his authoritative study, “*The Humanist Way*.” Emphasis will also be placed on seeking to understand the ethical life as a challenging, enriching, and productive spiritual journey. During the presentation, there will be ample opportunity for audience participation.

Boe Meyerson is the leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County. She is also the Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

February 10 Michael Lally “*Love, Politics and Poetry*”



Right after the Super Tuesday primaries and just before Valentine’s Day, poet/actor/teacher Michael Lally will explore, through poetry and dialogue, the inter-

twining dynamics of power and attraction that underlie political choices and personal relationships.

Born in Orange, New Jersey in 1942, youngest of seven in an Irish-American family of cops, priests, and politicians,

Michael David Lally started out playing piano and reading his poetry in coffeehouses and bars in 1959. In 1962 he joined the Air Force. After more than four years as an enlisted man, he later used the G.I. Bill to attend the University of Iowa Writers Workshop. During those years he wrote the autobiographical *South Orange Sonnets*, which led to a New York Poetry Center Discovery Award in 1972.

Lally’s first book was published in 1970. By 1980 there were twenty, including the 1974 poetry collection *Rocky Dies Yellow*, and the 1978 collection of prose and poetry *Catch My Breath*. In 1974 he received a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Award, the same year he wrote a long autobiographical poem, *My Life*, which on his receiving his second National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Award in 1981 was denounced as pornography on the floor of Congress by politicians out to discredit and dismantle the NEA. Lally moved to L.A. in 1982 to find work acting in movies and TV, while his writing found its way into several movies.

Lally’s *Cant Be Wrong*, a collection of poems, won a PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Excellence in Literature award; and his *It’s Not Nostalgia*, a collection of poetry and prose, won an American Book Award.

February 17 Azmat Hassan “*Violent Extremism with particular reference to South and South West Asia*”



Former Pakistani Ambassador Azmat Hassan will discuss the elections (scheduled for mid-February) in Pakistan, the broader subject of violent extremism in the region

and the possible responses to it from the governments involved and the international community.

Ambassador S. Azmat Hassan (Ret.) is a Senior Faculty Associate at the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University. He teaches courses on the history of diplomacy and on the modern middle east. A former career diplomat from Pakistan, he has served as Pakistan’s Ambassador to Morocco, Syria and Malaysia. He is a frequent guest on TV and Radio as a commentator on foreign affairs. He lives with his family in East Hanover.

February 24 Gladys Smith and Rebecca Perez “*An Egyptian Saga — Tracing roots in Africa*”

On this last Sunday of Black History Month, Gladys Smith and her friend, Rebecca Perez, will describe their trip

(continued on page 3)