



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 7

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MARCH, 2005

Condolences to Boe

Sad news of the death of Frank Meyerson, father of Leader Boe Meyerson, on January 18. A funeral service was held January 20 at Schoem's Menorah Chapel in Paramus at which Boe delivered an eloquent eulogy. Boe plans to hold a memorial service in May for all our loved ones who have left us. The society extends Boe our heartfelt condolences.

Quote

"I like not only to be loved but also to be told that I am loved.

The realm of silence is large beyond the grave.

This is the world of light and speech
And I shall take leave to tell you that
you are very dear."

[Boe submitted this quote by George Eliot.]

Moral Insight Grows from Living Relationships

Our sense of right and wrong emerges out of the process of living together as social beings. Humanity's social nature is the product of a long evolutionary development having its roots in the gregarious behavior of the species from which human beings

descended. Yet in human beings the development of language and symbolic thought has given a whole new dimension of meaning to social feeling.

We do not, for example, merely grieve for our lost companions or offspring. Even other species exhibit feelings of pain and distress on losing their offspring or mates. But as human beings, we are capable of transforming our pain into sentiments that provide solace and healing and that bring deeper insights into the meaning of life. Thus grief can take on qualitative meanings that have the capacity to heal and transform the character of life.

In the creative mind of a Sophocles or a Shakespeare, numbing suffering can be transformed into the rich colors of tragedy. The death of a Lincoln can recall a great democracy to its moral purpose. The martyrdom of a Martin Luther King may bring the shock of recognition necessary to arouse the moral consciousness of a nation and validate the dignity of all people. It may awaken in us, whether we are black or white, an awareness of our vulnerability as frail members of the human family subject to injury and suffering, exclusion and injustice. It may make

us better people, better able to come to terms with our own mortality and enable us to live our brief lives with strengthened resolution, compassion, and appreciation.

We thus learn to accept our lives with serenity. Inner peace is the distilled essence of reflection on our profoundest experiences, separated from the illusion and superstition that unfortunately are so often associated with ideas of the spiritual. We come to recognize that the



seed of the spiritual life is contained in moral passion. Spirit is born of flesh and nurtured in human love. We need not look to the occult and the otherworldly for the secret places of the inner life. It is the most delicate flower of human caring and love.

These reflections should suffice to illustrate the point that there is nothing of "mere mortality" in the moral life as it is lived by sensitive and spiritually inspired human beings. Ethical religion is a transforming moral faith when it becomes vital—when it represents the harvest of first-hand living.

[from "The Humanist Way—An Introduction to Ethical Humanist Religion" by Edward L. Ericson.]

FUNDRAISER CALENDAR

Theater Party

On Sunday, March 13, the Society will sponsor a Soup and Sandwich Theatre Party, featuring the Strollers presentation of the comedy "Psychopathia Sexualis", by the author of "Moonstruck", John Patrick Shanley. New York magazine says "Patrick Shanley's Psychopathia Sexualis is a salty boulevard comedy with a bittersweet theme, one with thought-provoking depths." We will serving a hearty soup, salad and a "hunk" of bread at 12:30 p.m. before proceeding to the theater for the 2 p.m. presentation. [Note the show time is 2

p.m.] Cost of lunch and the show is \$20. If you can't make the play, but would like to have lunch, that's \$6. Please reserve *now*, as we need a minimum of 20 people — call the society (973-763-1905) or Jeanine Rosh (973-258-9395).

Progressive Dinner

What is a progressive dinner? It is an event that starts out with good food and great company, moves to greater heights with dinner, and ends up with cake and the icing on the cake — contented spirits. Keep your calendar free on Saturday evening, April 16 for our latest fund raiser idea. We start with a cocktail party at the society at 6 p.m., and then

Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



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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 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.,
Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Visit our web site: www.essexethical.org

"Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice."

—Baruch Benedict de Spinoza,
1632–1677

we take it on the road — Dinner, libation, desserts. You just need to be there, and we'll take care of the details. Donation for the evening is \$25. Call the society to reserve — you need to do this now to avoid the disappointment of finding that we're booked to capacity.

White Elephant Sale May 7

From now until May, bring clean reusable articles for the White Elephant Sale to be held in May. Everything but books or clothing can be dropped off at the Society. Bring a bag or two every Sunday!

For Information: call the society office, 973-763-1905, or Jeanine Rosh at 973-258-9395. —*Jeanine M. Rosh*

Social Action Committee

On January 9, the committee voted to nominate Dr. Jack Kevorkian for the Elliott-Black Award, which "...is given by the American Ethical Union as a recognition and tribute to an individual in the larger community who has made a significant ethical contribution to society at personal risk and hardship." (www.ethicalculture.org/neac/elliott-black/ebalist.html). The AEU's Social Action Committee is expected to make a selection from some dozen nominees.

In advocating for the nomination of Dr. Kevorkian, Win Thies suggested the following text for a resolution:

"The Social Action Committee of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County hereby nominates Dr. Jack Kevorkian for the Elliott-Black Award and in support thereof files this statement with the AEU:

"A prisoner of conscience in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. is Dr. Jack Kevorkian, now held in a Michigan jail. At 76 years of age, the remainder of the 10-to-25-year sentence he was given in 1999 may well be a life term.

"Over the course of a decade Dr. Kevorkian responded compassionately to the pleas of some 130 terminally ill and suffering patients. He thrice was acquitted of criminal charges of aiding in a suicide. Until his final act of assistance to the ALS-racked suffering Thomas Youk, Dr. Kevorkian had merely supplied the means for suffering persons to end their own lives.

"But Mr. Youk did not have the physical capacity to do that. He repeatedly implored Dr. Kevorkian to give him release from suffering with an injection. In the presence of Mr. Youk's supportive family and with the entire procedure TV taped, Dr. Kevorkian finally did so. He had the TV tape broadcast on national TV, believing that by so doing he could confront and change the medieval jurisprudence criminalizing compassionately responding to the dying.

"He was tried for murder, elected to represent himself and tried to make an appeal for jury nullification. But the judge ruled that he could not present evidence of Mr. Youk's terminal state, his deep suffering, his repeated calls for help to die. He was convicted and sentenced to 10 to 25 years in prison. All his possible appeals have failed. Now he has called upon the governor for a pardon or commutation of his sentence. But in the present political climate that is most unlikely.

"The AEU by resolution explicitly embraced physician-assisted dying (where the physician only writes a prescription for a lethal dose which the dying person may or may not later self-administer). Passive euthanasia (as by removing a ventilator or feeding tube) is a civil right of the dying, as the Schiavo case in Florida demonstrates. But there is no reasoned ethical difference between passive euthanasia and active euthanasia (as by an injection, as Dr. Kevorkian used for Mr. Youk).

"That is to say, had Mr. Youk been dependent on a ventilator, Dr. Kevorkian could have lawfully removed it and thus have ended Mr. Youk's life. A mere change in the means of accomplishing an otherwise ethical act does not change its essential character. (Indeed, to the extent that Michigan law made Dr. Kevorkian's act criminal it illustrates the irrational character of this aspect of the law.)

"The AEU by giving the Elliott-Black Award to Dr. Kevorkian will support his final act of compassion. And Mr. Youk's end-of-life freedom.

"Dr. Kevorkian served wonderfully to concentrate the public mind on the issue of end-of-life freedom. He consistently acted compassionately. Today he remains a prisoner of conscience and thus a signal candidate for this award."

AEU Board Election May 2005

The American Ethical Union is soliciting and recruiting candidates for the AEU Board of Directors. We seek the strongest possible candidates who are interested in running for the AEU Board in the election to be held at the AEU Assembly in Northern Virginia during May 27-29, 2005, and to take office immediately following the Assembly. Materials are now available for AEU members — letter and application are in the office and are also available for download at <http://www.aeu.org/news.htm>. March 31 is the due date for applications.

NJ CitizenAction plans several *New Jersey Action 2005* meetings to be held in early March (date and place to be announced). These meetings are designed to bring folks together — progressive thinkers and doers — to plan strategies and initiate actions on the issues about which we all care so deeply. Please contact ev@njcitizenaction.org for more information.

UN: The Millennium Project

The end of global poverty? An ideal whose time has come? Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, world renowned macroeconomist, adviser to Kofi Annan, thinks so. His recent report (*Investing in Development: a Practical Plan to Achieve the Development Goals*) spells out a detailed plan in which he shows how enormous reductions in poverty, illiteracy and disease are “utterly affordable.” (www.unmillenniumproject.org).

What would this ambitious task cost? It requires that rich countries double their aid to poor countries. This amounts to a tiny effort — 50 cents for every \$100 dollars of the countries’ income. Five countries, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands and Luxembourg, have already done so. Britain, France, Finland, Spain, Ireland and Belgium have agreed to meet this goal, and others will follow. So far, the U.S. has only promised 15 cents out of ev-

ery \$100 dollars, the smallest percentage of major donor countries. As usual, the problem is much less one of affordability as of political will, especially the political will of the richest and most powerful country in the world.

Nations usually act on perceived self interest. What are the benefits? In terms of preventing disease and epidemics, the international interest is obvious. Reductions in poverty and extreme despair would reduce the prevalence of violence, civil wars, support for international crime, the movement of refugees, unwanted immigration, population growth, ecological deterioration, destruction of cultural patterns of social and family life — the list goes on and on.

Does the world care? The outpouring of help following the tsunami disaster with over 150,000 deaths shows that international empathy and help is very much alive. Jeffrey Sachs has stated that “a silent tsunami of global poverty kills more than 150,000 children **every month** from malaria alone.”

Can this global concern be translated into action? There are stirrings. British Prime Minister Tony Blair is championing increased aid to Africa. A high cabinet minister in his government, Gordon Brown, is campaigning for a Marshall plan for Africa.

Jeffrey Sachs emphasizes that many leaders he has met with would much prefer to use their own resources, but they don’t have the wherewithal. They will do what they can and the donor countries can make up the difference. The report urges debt relief and a fairer trading system, eliminating rich country protections that would help poor countries earn money by exporting to western countries. The report also urges aid to recipients in the form of money specifically directed for schools, clinics, roads, medicine and food.

Measures exist that have already been proven effective. Millions of lives could be saved and improved by immediate help with insect-treated bed nets to

fight the scourge of malaria, elimination of fees for primary education, expansion of school meal programs and treatment of AIDS and TB.

The program has been criticized as utopian and central planning by a global bureaucracy. However the administration of the plan calls for a decentralized application. Foreign aid has often been criticized as wasteful because of bad governance and corruption. In many cases this is a perfectly valid critique. However there are a quite a few poor countries that are known to have a well governed and honest administration; examples are Ghana, Mozambique, Mali, Senegal, Yemen and others. The Report recommends coordinating help with these countries first.

The 3000-page report is the most carefully constructed plan ever put forward. The UN is the natural vehicle to orchestrate this magnificent moral effort. It demands our support.

— *Sylvain & Phyllis Ehrenfeld*

Directory Corrections

Jessica Reiner, wife of Dave Bressen, should be listed as a “Friend” in her own right. Also, Gigi informs us that the phone number for Marion Josephson should read (804) 269-0587.

Harmony (continued from page 4)

expresses the joy of this whole project as well as our vision. *Who Shall Be Free* expresses my deep feelings about the inequalities in our world today and in the past. It was inspired when I learned in my research that our area in early days had some of the most prosperous and beautifully kept farms in the nation. And then came the subsequent bit of information, that the work was done by many slaves. The piece is commemorative and then moves on to make a commitment for the future.”

Please email or call me if you are even slightly interested. I will have the full schedule shortly. If in doubt, give it a try!
— *Jeanine M. Rosh*

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

March, 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.

March 6 Boe Meyerson: *“Ethical Issues of Globalization.”* A description and analysis of the ethical challenges posed by contemporary world trade. Boe Meyerson is the Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County and also serves as the Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

March 13 Sue Willis and Alice Robinson-Gilman: Member panel, topic to be announced. If you would like to participate in this platform, please contact Sue or Alice.

March 20 Jim White: *“The Politics of Palm Sunday,”* an historical political analysis of the event. Jim White is Leader Emeritus of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County. By profession he is the principal attorney for Mental Hygiene Legal Services, representing psychiatric patients in New York State. Jim is also a community activist in Harlem and with the Coalition Against the Violence Initiative.

March 27 Marilyn and Frank Askin on voting rights: *“Making Every Vote Count.”* **Frank Askin** has been in the forefront of legal struggles to expand individual rights for thirty years and has been General Counsel of the ACLU for over twenty. A Distinguished Professor at Rutgers Law School, in 1970 he founded Rutgers’ pioneering Constitutional Litigation Clinic, where he has trained a new generation of public-interest lawyers. He has inter-

persed his activities in the courtroom and classroom with several stints on Capitol Hill as special counsel to congressional committees and has run for Congress twice. He has been involved in voting rights litigation.

Marilyn Askin is State President, AARP New Jersey. A pioneer in the field of elder law, Marilyn served for 15 years as the Director of Senior Citizens Legal Services of Essex County. She is an advocate, activist and educator who has taught seminars in elder law as an adjunct professor at Seton Hall Law School and Rutgers Law School.

Mrs. Askin is on a committee assisting in the development of the State Plan to qualify for federal funding under the “Help America Vote Act of 2002” (HAVA). This provides for federal monies to assist states in upgrading voting equipment and to provide for procedures that will protect each citizen’s right to vote and the integrity of the state’s election system. Individuals selected for the committee demonstrated commitment to the electoral process and the desire and creativity to make elections easier and better for voters.

Mark Your Calendars...

March 11 Folk Singing

7:30 p.m. second Friday of the month with Lisa Novemsky. Check in advance by calling the office (973-763-1905) or

email Lisa at lnovemsky@comcast.net.

March 13 & 27 Colloquy

9:30 to 10:30 a.m. on second and fourth Sundays of the month, facilitated by Boe Meyerson, leader. Topics important for living an ethical, meaningful and fulfilling life will be discussed, shared and contemplated in an interactive and experiential format. There will be reflections on the topic by the facilitator, some silent meditation, the reading of a parable, opportunity to share one’s personal views or experiences relative to the subject, as well as music and song.

Two Towns in Harmony

An exciting choral/orchestral event to be performed on Sunday, July 3, *Two Towns in Harmony* will be a musical expression of the fiber and color of Maplewood and South Orange. There will be youth and adult choruses and full orchestra. Anyone interested in participating is welcome and encouraged to join, including beginners (no “studied” or professional expertise required)! 21 rehearsals are scheduled (adult choral rehearsals began Jan. 31) — o.k. if you attend at least about half. It is an unbelievably uplifting experience to be part of something like this, both in the preparation and the event.

The composer has said about the music: “The *Opening Fanfare* for voices

(continued on page 3)