



# ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 29 NUMBER 2

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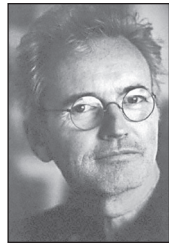
OCTOBER 2009

## SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

**Oct 4 Boe Meyerson**, *“Art and Ethics: The Relationship”*. This platform will address two questions: (1) Is Art essentially moral? (2) Is ethical conduct essentially beautiful? There will be ample opportunity for audience discussion on these topics.

Boe Meyerson is leader emerita of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County.

**Oct 11 Michael Lally**, *“Being a Poet in the Age of the Internet”*. Poet/actor/author Michael Lally has been writing



a much-visited blog, in addition to working on a book. He will describe what it's like having one, discuss with the audience how the internet affects the writing life,

and — as he has in his past appearances at Ethical — he will read some of his poems.

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.

Lally's first book was published in 1970. By 1980 there were twenty 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 poetry and prose have garnered numerous awards, including 2 National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Awards.

**Oct 18 Peter Montague**, *“An Experiment in Coal Power on our Doorstep.”*

Dr. Peter Montague will be giving a short PowerPoint presentation describing a plan to put a new 750 megawatt coal power plant in Linden. The plant will capture its carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), and gather carbon dioxide from other emitters near Linden. The carbon dioxide will be pressurized into a liquid, piped 70 miles offshore, and buried 1.5 miles below the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, hoping it will stay there forever.



This is a gigantic experiment with the people of Linden and the fish in the sea being used as experimental subjects.

Dr. Montague has co-authored two books on toxic heavy metals in the natural environment. From 1980 to 1983 he served as project administrator of the Hazardous Waste Research Program in the School of Engineering/Applied Science at Princeton University. During 1991-1992 he was employed by Greenpeace USA as a senior research analyst in the Toxics Reduction Campaign. Since then he has been director of Environmental Research Foundation (ERF) in New Brunswick, where he is active in the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance. He is presently writing a book about decision-making with the precautionary principle.

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.

**Oct 25 Jane Franklin**, *“Cuba-US Relations in the Obama Era.”* In 1959 Washington launched an undeclared war against Cuba. Air raids repeatedly struck the sugar industry, mainstay of the economy at that time. Others bombed Havana itself. Another attacked a train full of passengers. For 50 years, this war has taken many forms: terror attacks, assassinations, an invasion, an illegal embargo, and an unending State of Siege. Will the Obama Administration continue the war?



Historian Jane Franklin has published books, articles, poems and film reviews and has lectured extensively about Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Panama. She is a frequent commentator about Cuba on radio and television. (Jane Franklin's home page is <http://janefranklin.info/>).

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**Oct 3 Gathering to Honor Boe** Saturday, at 3 p.m., friends, family and colleagues will gather for a dinner to honor Boe Meyerson at Ethical Culture. For details: Rosalie Sussman (908) 686-3782 or Lisa Novemsky (973) 763-8293 or [lnovemsky@comcast.net](mailto:lnovemsky@comcast.net).

**Oct 9 Folk Friday at Ethical** Singalong with friends Lucky, Dusty, Rusty & Tio Pete, Oct. 9 and every second Friday of the month at the Society. No admission fee. Bring acoustic string and rhythm instruments, join in playing with us; bring some *(continued)*

# 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](http://www.essexethical.org)

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

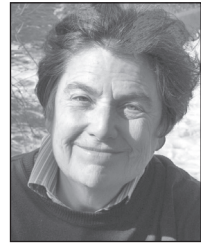
Attention members! Please submit your email addresses to [ethicalessex@netscape.com](mailto:ethicalessex@netscape.com) to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

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

## FAREWELL TO EDWARD KENNEDY

by Boe Meyerson

Our nation has suffered a great loss in the death of Edward Kennedy, a dedicated Senator who has never failed to stand up for those who can not stand up for themselves. A man of significant wealth, he was an ardent champion of the poor and of the underprivileged all of his life. In their defense he earned the nickname "lion of the senate." His roar was heard by all present. His dedication to the least among us was his passion. Yet all of us, rich and poor and middle class alike, are poorer for his passing. Soon another will sit in his chair. Yet none can replace him.



I have never seen such tributes paid to a Senator as those that have poured forth in every media and every newspaper following his death. The NY Times had his story on the front page for four days in a row with elaborate text and photo coverage inside the paper as well. Not since the death of his brother have I seen such outpouring of grief and adulation. We have lost a great Senator. His place will be taken by another but no one can ever replace him.

*Boe Meyerson is leader emerita of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County.*

## FROM THE UN Biodiversity and the UN

by Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld, International Humanist Ethical Union representative to the UN, with the help of Phyllis Ehrenfeld before her untimely death.

The United Nations is the only institution focused on advocacy for the total wellbeing of humanity. Hence its emphasis on biodiversity — often neglected when countries and organizations consider their response to climate change. A seemingly infinite variety

of living organisms, genetic diversity and ecosystems worldwide have produced the plenty that sustains human life, the water and soil that provides the food we eat and the air we breathe. Now life on earth faces an unprecedented challenge, as the world's climate grows steadily warmer. Never before in human history has the capacity of ecosystems been destroyed at the present rate — estimated at 1000 times the natural rate of loss.

The United Nations is promoting 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. Protecting the variety of plants and animal species is nothing less than protecting the underpinning of life itself and is essential to human survival. In 1992 the United Nations formulated the Convention On Biological Diversity which has raised awareness and suggested practical steps some countries have initiated. The Convention has been ratified by 189 states. The United States is a tragic exception.

Changes in the landscape, river basins and oceans have already closed off survival options for many species. Pollution, the introduction of invasive species and over-harvesting of wild animals all reduce the likelihood of natural adaptation to climate change. The rural poor are especially vulnerable to the resulting change in soils, availability of medicinal plants and fresh water.

At least 40 per cent of the world economy and 80 percent of the needs of the poor are derived from biological sources which require genetic diversity to sustain them. To understand the importance of variety in agriculture, consider the fact that nearly all potential crop pests are now controlled by a variety of other organisms and these natural pesticides are often superior to artificial equivalents, since pests often develop resistance to chemical controls.

Biodiversity is vital for medicine. The World Health Organization estimates that 80 percent of people in the developing world rely on traditional medicines derived mainly from plants to treat malaria, stomach ulcers, syphilis and other diseases. Of the top 150 prescription drugs in the US, 118 are based on natural sources. Of these 74 percent come from plants. Microbes and animal species contribute to a range of medicines, including

penicillin and anesthetics.

Climate change is not the only threat. The world's human population is growing fast as well, while natural resources shrink. Fish, for example, is our most important source of protein, yet, as fishing experts say, we, the people, are at war with fish — and we are winning. The number of species of fish, as well as the total population in our lakes and oceans steadily decline. This is but one instance of a “silent tsunami” of biodiversity loss.

The United Nations is building awareness of the extraordinary challenge to biodiversity through a variety of projects. May 22, 2010 will be “World Environment Day” focusing on Biodiversity for Development in agriculture. Research in land farmed by indigenous people has uncovered 47 local varieties of rice, some of which may be better

able to survive climate change and feed people already feeling shortages. Another project, The Equator Prize, aims to use the cooperation and knowledge of rural people. It seeks out and honors standing community initiatives that reduce poverty through conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Its outreach is diverse, paying particular attention to youth and women.

In its efforts, the United Nations strives to protect cultural diversity, such as indigenous languages that also provide valuable knowledge about biodiversity. All religions share in a respect for the earth and its bounty. In Indonesia, when Buddhist priests consulted with environmental experts on deforestation, they explained their traditional way of saving trees by sanctifying the trees as priests, so local people would be forbidden to cut them down.

To those who see nature as sacred, loss of biodiversity is a spiritual devastation. It is a practical threat to the survival of all human beings.

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## DINNER DILEMMAS

*Excerpted from “Ethical issues at the Thanksgiving dinner table” by Unitarian Minister John Gibb Millspaugh (<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/121289.shtml>)*

**W**e are beginning to recognize that our food choices are ethical choices that impact climate change, worker justice and animal welfare, to name a few.

You can't beat the price of turkeys raised in intensive feeding operations, but factory-farmed meat comes with hidden costs to human health, the environment, the workers, and the birds. Consumers interested in more ethical alternatives now turn to free-range and organic meats. But what do these labels really mean?

“USDA Organic” is a more meaningful label than “free-range,” in some ways. These birds will be free of pesticides, unnatural growth hormones, antibiotics and toxic heavy metals and will have been raised on grains not fertilized with sewer sludge. Still, both organic and free-range turkeys can be de-beaked, de-toed, transported and slaughtered in the same manner as their Butterball® counterparts. The Humane Slaughter Act does not apply to any of the 9 billion turkeys or chickens we slaughter in this country each year.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulates the label “free range,” but that only means there must be a door, it must be open sometimes, and it must lead “outside” — perhaps to a narrow pen saturated with turkey droppings. “USDA Organic” means pesticide-free and no antibiotics.

Tofurky® Roast? No animals were harmed in the production of this vegetarian roast. Surprise: more protein and less fat per ounce (*continued*)

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## IN MEMORIAM

### Phyllis R. Ehrenfeld, 1932–2009

**P**hyllis Ehrenfeld died on July 14 after a brief, yet courageous battle with cancer. A Memorial Service was held Sept. 13 at The Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County. She was a playwright, writer and speaker in the Metro New York area. She wrote and spoke extensively on a variety of pressing social issues. As AEU's National Service Conference representative to the UN, she



wrote monthly on their meetings. She was a newly-elected president of the Bergen County Chapter of the UN Association, and a prominent leader of the Ethical Culture Society. Phyllis and Sylvain were members of The Ethical Culture Society for over 30 years. She received the Arnold Gingrich award from the New Jersey Council of the Arts.

In 2004, Phyllis and her husband Sylvain helped found the Bergen County Chapter of the UNA-USA. Phyllis served as President since its inception. During this time, the chapter held five major events in Bergen County on important global issues, emphasizing human rights and international cooperation throughout the United Nations.

Phyllis was also the President of the National Service Conference of the American Ethical Union (AEU) and she and her husband Sylvain represented Ethical Culture at the United Nations and wrote over 90 articles on the UN for Dialogue, the national newsletter of the American Ethical Union.

Phyllis will be remembered for her dedicated focus on global issues and values which unite those within our Ethical Culture Communities locally, nationally and globally. Her husband, Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld, continues his work as the AEU Representative to the United Nations and as a strong voice of Ethical Culture on behalf of the National Service Conference of the AEU at the United Nations.

# ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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## ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY NEWSLETTER · OCTOBER 2009

### DINNER DILEMMA *(continued)*

than a Butterball® turkey breast. To-furky® Roast sales in 2007 surpassed 2006 by 37 percent. At \$9.18/lb, costs 50 percent more per pound than organic, free-range turkey, and over 200 percent more than Butterball®.

### Local vs. global

**Supermarket potatoes** Produce used to be seasonal. Now the freight industry makes it available year-round. Produce travels an average of 1,506 miles from farm to market.

**Local potatoes** Food travels an average of 56 miles from farm to America's 4,000 urban and rural farmers' markets. Freight trains and tractor trailers move food much more efficiently than personal automobiles: Driving an average car just 3 miles to a farmers' market releases as much carbon dioxide as would shipping 17 pounds of potatoes halfway around the world. And proportionally, local farmers can pour as many pesticides and chemicals into the ground, air, and water as Big Ag.

**Garden Potatoes** Backyard and rooftop gardens save money, reduce pollution, and spare packaging without skimping on taste. Garden potatoes can be grown for taste and texture, rather than transportability. Gardens

take time and effort, but nothing is more local than your own backyard or community garden.

### Conventional vs. organic

**Conventional cranberries** Growers apply chemical fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides and pesticides to double or triple natural yields. Not subject to the Clean Water Act, cranberry bogs discharge pollution to lakes, wetlands, and rivers at lethal levels. Workers and neighbors are exposed to highly toxic chemicals.

**Organic cranberries** Growers shun chemical fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides and pesticides, making these cranberries better for workers, neighbors and habitats downstream. The most typical organic fertilizer is fish remains, which may contain mercury and rely on overfishing. Like conventional counterparts, organic bogs require large amounts of water and often depend on fossil fuels. Yet many organic cranberry bogs, now support natural wetland denizens: spiders, bees and migratory birds like sandhill cranes.

### The drive to eat local

"Locavores" eat food grown no further than 100 miles away, aiming to

reduce the environmental toll of food transportation and to improve local communities' self-sufficiency, prosperity and social health. But according to a 2008 Carnegie Mellon study, of all food-related greenhouse gas emissions, trips from producer to distributor account for just 4 percent.

What about supporting local communities, local economies? After all, buying locally strengthens relationships among neighbors. The food may taste better, too, as local farmers can sell produce that does not ship well. And when it comes to farming practices, your neighbor is more likely to answer your questions than is a distant corporation.

Yet in *The Ethics of What We Eat*, the authors write that "ethically, we should put ourselves in the position of all those affected by our actions, no matter where they live. If [local farmers] need extra income to send their children to good colleges, and farmers in developing nations need extra income to . . . afford basic health care or a few years of elementary school for their children, we . . . do better to support the farmers in developing countries." Even, they show, when those impoverished farmers receive just 2 cents of every dollar you spent.