



ETHICAL CULTURE

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SEPTEMBER, 2005

Leader's Message

By the time you read this article, the summer will be nearly gone. I hope it has been a good one for you and that the sunshine has brought some welcomed warmth and light and not too much heat. I hope it has given you some time for leisure, rest, diversion and, best of all, renewal.



I have taken a few weeks to visit Quebec province. It has been good for me. It has given me the benefits of both a change in scenery as well as a change in culture. I enjoy speaking French, however poorly I do so. The *Quebecois* are wonderfully tolerant of my linguistic limitations. The countryside and wilderness areas are no more beautiful here than at home, just different. What is special is the degree to which the natural landscape is preserved and the degree to which the culture and the government supports the beauty, health and productivity of the land.

Some of those differences in environmental attitude were dramatically present in the conscientiousness with which the government has crafted laws and institutions which support the environment (as well as land holders charged with preserving it) and the degree of acceptance among the people. So while timber harvesting may be limited on private land, still landowners are helped by the government regarding technology for growing healthy and sturdy timber. There appears to be far less resistance to such laws here than at home.

My perception of the degree of contrast between Quebec and the U.S. was

dramatically brought home to me when I read a fascinating article in *The New York Review of Books* by Tim Flannery. In it he reviews six books on the environment written by ecologists, environmentalists and politicians. I learned that a recent survey conducted by the Pew Center revealed that 41 percent of Americans considered "environmental activists" to be "extremists." This was quite astounding. While it is certainly true that some environmental activists have committed civil disobedience by transgressing property laws, the majority of activism has been both non-violent and lawful. To characterize them as terrorists would be like characterizing anti-abortionists as terrorists because of the few who killed people working at abortion clinics. One cannot but wonder at the cause of such a generally held attitude. Surely the press was among the usual suspects. I was also certainly familiar with the hostile attitudes of timber companies and mining com-

panies. However, it was a surprise to learn that the religious right might be contributing to such views. This is apparently the case given the description of the position taken by Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition in a citation to an article by Bill Moyers. There appears to be considerable commonality building between these groups as well as the current administration, most visibly represented by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay. These and other fascinating discoveries have inspired me to choose the relationship of religion, politics and environmental attitudes as my October platform topic.

My September platform address topic has been inspired by the date on which it will be delivered — 9/11. The title is "9/11/05: Are We Safer, Stronger, Smarter?" Though this is a somber subject, I trust it will be mitigated by the pleasure of our meeting together after our long summer separation.

Till then, Boe

From *Are We Religious?* by Algernon D. Black (1900-1995)

In its deeper meaning, we say that the Ethical Movement grows out of people's refusal to accept the evils in their own lives and in the world about them. The "ethical movement" began long before there were Ethical Societies, long before there were temples and mosques and churches. It began with the dawn of conscience, with people's awareness of the suffering of others, the hurts that people do to one another. It grew as people began to recognize good and evil, to see that there are ways of hate and destruction, of love and creativeness. Through the centuries the effort of the individual to control destructive impulses, to atone for wrongs, to live out love and justice in personal relations and in the larger community is the history of humanity's moral development. It includes, too, the social struggle to free people from slavery and exploitation, from ignorance and poverty, the movement for the emancipation of women, for civil liberties, for equality, for universal suffrage, for democracy in all areas of human relations. It is these expressions of the human spirit which are a key to a meaningful existence. It is the destiny of humanity to seek for truth, to create beauty and to strive for the achievement of relationships which treasure the good in people.

(continued on page 3)

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 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.

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of Essex County,
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"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

FUND RAISING COMMITTEE SOLICITS INPUT FROM MEMBERS

You may already have received a survey on Fund Raising Activities sent out by the committee with the hope that your input will result in activities that are more enjoyable, and profitable. Email was used if we have your address. Please respond either by postal mail or email if you prefer. Please don't hesitate to offer your suggestions. No idea will be rejected without consideration. Creativity will be appreciated. If for some reason we have missed sending you a survey, let us know and we'll get one out to you. If you've already returned it, we thank you.

Call Jeanine Rosh at 973-258-9395.

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Committee members Bob Bender, Betty Levin, Boe Meyerson, Lisa Novemsky, Mira Stillman, Win Thies, Paul Surovell and Sue Willis met June 29 at Mira's lovely air conditioned home, discussing in depth what issues and action steps we want to take on for the coming year.

While many issues from civil liberties to "Hands off our Houses" to a possible new anti-Semitism were discussed, Bob Bender suggested that in order to narrow our choices, we should go where there is enough energy and human power to make something happen.

The three objectives we decided on, with their associated action steps were:

Objective One: Continue to support and publicize the National Peace Department Bill which will be re-introduced in Congress on Sept. 10. *Action Steps:* Betty Levin will attend the Washington D.C. conference and bring us latest information as well as new materials and new ideas. The committee will feed Betty ideas for organizations where she might give talks on the Peace Department Bill (churches, civic groups, veterans' organizations, etc.). As needed, other members of the committee will do some of the presentations.

Objective Two: Work to ease the situation of immigrants in the Detention Center

in Elizabeth New Jersey. *Action Steps:* Boe will include this in her October address. A subcommittee of Betty and (we hope) Joan and Anja will assist Boe in setting up a visiting schedule for our members to go to the Detention center. They will also set up a mechanism for buying/collecting small personal items for the detainees. Sue, in the name of the Committee, will call the offices of our national legislators, to support one individual being held in Elizabeth, Serge Pakhomou, a 42-year-old Russian immigrant who has been in this country for almost 14 years and was seized suddenly for a visa violation of which he was unaware.

Objective Three: Take actions to curtail Global Warming. *Action Steps:* Work towards a "green" Ethical Culture Society. Educate our members and the public, including platforms such as one Paul Surovell will suggest to the platform committee. Mira will call a meeting of various Society members with expertise and interest in these issues (Jim Quigley, Louisa Lubiak and others were mentioned) to lay out a plan for further action that she will bring back to the Social Action Committee.

Other business discussed and actions taken included Win volunteering to get a digital version of our Advanced Directive to Sue for the website along with links to other websites for more information. Sue and Boe will help with this.

The next Social Action Committee meeting will be at the Society after platform on Sept. 18 at 12:50 p.m. This meeting will include a 15 to 20 minute presentation by Betty Levin on what she learned at the Peace Department Conference.

Folk Singing — Check about Folk Fridays by calling the office (973-763-1905) or email Lisa at lnovemsky@comcast.net.

Tributes

Two tributes in honor of Gloria Rucker: One from Yetta Kerner in Brooklyn and one from Barbara Kotler, who made a donation to have a plaque made by Mahasin in memory of Gloria Rucker. — Gigi

Algernon Black (continued from page 1) People's moral growth in their personal relations and in the creation of a more ethical society, constitutes the significant spiritual movement in the life of the human race. We need not derive our ethical faith from a theology; we need only agree that all people have the possibility of moral sensitivity and moral growth.

Despite the lack of a guarantee of victory of good over evil, of love over hate, people can make the commitment and give themselves to this struggle for their own salvation. People can and do make the sacrifices and live out the love that is in them without regard to fear of punishment in some hell or promise of reward in some heaven. Whether or not human judgment and human effort matter to the universe, people have a challenge to meet. Basically it is a matter of personal decision and personal integrity.

This does not mean that an ethical faith has no framework or viewpoint beyond man. Felix Adler in his earliest addresses, took the view "Deed Not Creed." But later he realized more and more that "Deed" implies an outlook on life — that "Deed" is part of a larger faith, whether we put that faith into words or not. The larger outlook and faith need not take the form of a dogmatic statement but the "Deed" indicates what the individual views as important in his life perspective.

For "Deed," or a life of action, to be part of a religious life, there must not only be a dedication to values but a feeling of reverence and the awareness that one's own life is part of the larger life of the community of mankind and indeed part of a larger life process in the universe. Although we do not know the ultimate or total truth about reality, although we do not know the beginning of the beginning or the end

of the end or the ultimate nature of the cosmos, we realize that we are part of something much larger than ourselves, possibly having a meaning which is beyond our grasp. It is this larger awareness of man's relation to nature and life and to the cosmos which gives religious quality to the "Deed," to our "here-and-now" efforts to grow and to serve and to create and to love.

The purpose of the Ethical Societies, as an organized Ethical Movement, is not merely to offer a common ground of faith for all, without creed or sectarian division. That is one purpose.

"The Ethical Societies are fellowships of people fostering moral growth and a clearer life orientation in terms of human values — stressing education, service, community action."



Algernon Black with Eleanor Roosevelt

But on the positive side its purpose is to unite people in seeking the truth, in penetrating further into the great mysteries of the universe and of human destiny to which we have not yet found, and may never find, the final answer. Beyond this, the purpose is to unite in the positive task of growing ethically, of being more mature morally, of having more insight, more vision, more wisdom of how we might live together in a more ethical world. For far as we have come in moral growth and fine as is the heritage of customs, laws and institutions which we have received from the generations past, human beings are not yet prepared for the responsibilities of freedom in an age of complex technology and interdependence. We

have not yet created the education and laws and institutions which express, give support and implement our best impulses and our spiritual needs and aspirations.

Our generation faces one of the most difficult moral crises in history. We must fulfill the democratic promise or fall before the anti-freedom movements which grow out of humanity's fears and hates and sadisms. We must fulfill the promise of peace, using the unity and interdependence of the world to make this planet safe for all or be destroyed by bacteriological and atomic weapons. How can we convert our international relations into trust, into creative interplay, interchange of ideas, mutual aid and sharing so that we enrich and liberate humanity? Is this not the overarching spiritual task of all human beings, regardless of theology?

The Ethical Societies are fellowships of people fostering moral growth and a clearer life orientation in terms of human values — stressing education, service, community action.

Here, then, is a life orientation based on moral experience and insight and evaluation. Here is a faith in our capacity to solve our problems, a faith in which everyone is called upon to take responsibility. To strive that the world may be better is a command from within. In this consecration, each of us can find the power within to meet any personal crisis, to make our life decisions, to join together with others in a fellowship which offers meaning and direction and faith.

In this fellowship we bring up our families, live out our friendships, give ourselves to our work and take on the burden of citizenship for a freer and better world.

[Edited excerpts from "Understanding Ethical Religion," edited by Howard B. Radest.]

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

September, 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.

Sept 11 Boe Meyerson, Leader, *“9/11/05: Are We Safer, Stronger, Smarter?”* Boe is leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County and Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

Sept 18 Madelyn Hoffman, *“Holding the U.S. Accountable for Its Actions in Afghanistan.”* Ms. Hoffman will describe the conditions in Afghanistan almost 4 years after the U.S. invasion in October 2001, perspectives of the Afghan people about the U.S. role in their history and efforts by Afghan women to improve their lives. She will also discuss how to stand with the Afghan people to hold the U.S. accountable for its actions and simple ways to assist the Afghan people directly.

Madelyn Hoffman is Director of NJ Peace Action, a position she has held since August 2000. Ms. Hoffman was a regular guest speaking out against the invasion of Iraq on Comcast 8’s “It’s Your Call” in the lead up to the invasion. She has had frequent opinion editorials printed in New Jersey newspapers on issues ranging from nuclear weapons to the nation’s response to 9/11 and most recently on her 10-day trip to Afghanistan in June 2005. Her essay “Breaking Down the Barriers,” was published in *Toward A New Political Humanism* in 2004. She is also an adjunct professor of Political Science.

Ms. Hoffman has been around New Jersey politics a long time. As executive

director for the Grass Roots Environmental Organization from 1983 until 1998, she has seen first hand the effect that average people can have on the political process when they become involved in their communities.

Madelyn Hoffman was Ralph Nader’s vice-presidential running mate on the Green Party ticket in 1996 and ran for governor as a Green in 1997.

The next Social Action Committee meeting will be at the Society after platform Sept. 18 at 12:50 p.m.

Sept 25 Paul Scully, *“Equity in New Jersey.”* Paul Scully is the founding executive director of the NJ Regional Coalition, a grassroots coalition of churches and civic organizations formed to address regional disparities and the decline of older cities and suburbs. He has close to 20 years experience organizing with labor unions, community organizations and religious institutions.

As a member of the senior staff of the Gamaliel Foundation, he pioneered the creation of city/suburban alliances that have the capacity to address and rectify regional decline. He spent ten years as the founding director of a regional community organization in Northwest Indiana. As the East Coast Director for Gamaliel, Mr. Scully helped establish successful organizations in New Jersey, Connecticut, Long Island, and metropolitan Baltimore.

A Walk in the Woods

Sat., Oct. 8, the fund-raising committee is sponsoring a vision of Autumn by way of a walk in the woods at Boe Meyerson’s place, followed by lunch. You can be brisk or leisurely in your approach to the pace of your excursion. There is something here for the hikers as well as the strollers. You will not be alone as you explore the spectacular view of the season in a mountain lake setting. Reserve early. \$15 donation. Rain date: Sat., Oct. 15. *Call Jeanine Rosh, 973-258-9395.*

Message from Pres. Terri Suess

Events were held in August, several at the Society, as a remembrance of the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a Peace Site, the Ethical Culture Society of Essex joined with others to find alternatives to war. Remembering the vast and immediate devastation that resulted from dropping the atomic bomb on Japan 60 years ago, many people around the world took time during the month of August to re-dedicate themselves to creating a world at peace.

Reminder: General clean up and painting at the society will take place the week before Labor Day. Please let me know if you would be interested and available to help. Platforms resume the first Sunday after Labor Day. I look forward to seeing you then.