



ETHICAL CULTURE

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SEPTEMBER 2009

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

Sept 13 Betty Levin, "Bringing out the best in others while healing oneself"

A few months ago, Betty Levin feared she might never be able to return to her beloved house, let alone drive, or pick up the reins of her normal life, but she achieved all that. At our first platform of the 2009-2010 season, she plans to share the extraordinary story of her recovery from an illness earlier this year and the role that her lifelong involvement with Ethical Culture played in that surprisingly joyful process. Just as family and friends helped sustain her through the ordeal, so Betty shared her outlook with those around her, often astonishing staff and visitors with her almost euphoric appreciation for life.

Betty Levin is a third-generation Ethical Culturalist and immediate past president of the Essex society. She has been a psychotherapist for the past 35 years and was the founder of the New Jersey Association of Women Therapists. She is also the author of a number of published essays.

Sept 20 Howard Radest, "Can Virtue Be Taught — The Possibility and Impossibility of Moral Education"

2,500 years ago, Socrates wrestled with the question: Can virtue be taught? And



we're still at it. I think back to my experience as an Ethical Culture Leader, as head of the Ethical Culture Fieldston School, and now as Board of Trustees

Chair of the soon to be born Ethical Community Charter School in Jersey City. I look around at the complications these days of knowing, judging,

deciding and acting ethically. So, once again, I'm trying to figure out what the teacher, the classroom, the school, the parent and the community can do to teach for moral competence. Doing ethics is a life-long vocation, so I'm still trying to illuminate the moral situation and how we can help our children (and ourselves) face it effectively. Can virtue be taught? Socrates answered "yes" and "no." But figuring out what that means remains a continuing puzzle for us human beings.

Dr. Howard B. Radest is dean emeritus of the Humanist Institute and a member of the National Council of Ethical Culture Leaders. He has been an author and consultant treating issues of religious and philosophic thought, moral education, ethics and bioethics. Dr. Radest received his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Columbia University.

Sept 27 Steve Sklar, "Puzzles Concerning Progress and Poverty"

History presents a puzzle. Technological breakthroughs and miles of cable allow news to cross the globe in seconds. Travel improvements bring East and West Coasts closer together than ever before. And yet: warehouses stand full of inventory that people need but cannot afford, banks and other businesses, even large well-established firms, collapse without any apparent warning and even the most capable of men and women find it harder and harder to find or keep employment, let alone make a living. Across the globe, advances in invention and technology have made it possible to produce wealth more effectively than ever before yet once again the world is racked

by severe economic depression. How is it that progress itself seems to bring with it the attributes of poverty?

A mystery for the late summer of 2009? Undoubtedly. But the subject of this talk by Steve Sklar, concerns a development in the late summer of 1869. The telegraph is the communications breakthrough; the transcontinental railroad has just been completed; financial catastrophe, kicked off on Black Friday (September 24), will be known as the Panic and Depression of



1869. And it is a 30-year-old journalist who, ruminating on the perennial global economic puzzle, has happened upon a question productive of insight: Is there a relationship between the rise in land values (which, with the closing of the American frontier at that moment, was spectacular) and the deepening struggle for economic survival? The journalist was Henry George. The question led him to further thought and to writings, the best known of which was a book entitled *Progress and Poverty*. It would become an international best-seller. George's followers would include a young Winston Churchill, Sun Yat Sen and Tolstoy; George's writings and speeches would inspire George Bernard Shaw and others to take an interest in social problems. At George's funeral in New York, Ethical's founder Felix Adler would be one of the eulogists.

Steve will (continued on next page)

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.

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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discuss George's insight concerning the relationship between the institution of private property in land and land speculation, on the one hand, and economic distress, on the other — that is, the relationship between progress and poverty; and a second puzzle, "If Henry George's thinking, once so well known, is as compelling as it appears to be, how has it come to be relegated to obscurity?" As in his past talks, humor will be attempted.

Steve Sklar is a lawyer who specializes in immigration issues. He lives in Maplewood with his wife, lawyer Nikki Pusin, and their two children.

A Member Returns

How will my wheelchair fit in the bathroom at our Ethical Society? I lamented to Jeanine Rosh via telephone at St. Barnabas Hospital shortly after my tumor was removed from my skull. "Where will the Society find the funds to enlarge the space to accommodate a wheelchair?" I almost whimpered.

Since that conversation, I have progressed to walking with a walker, later a cane and now I am on my own, walking unsupported, enjoying life, living back at my home on Sagamore (though I decided to sell the house shortly after my traumatic event, not believing I could ever live there again with the steep driveway

and many steps), starting my psychotherapy practice again and attending many engaging events at the Society this summer.

Were you at the stimulating presentations on being more effective Platform presenters convened by both our Leaders Emeriti Boe Meyerson and Jim White? Highly stimulating discussions and practical suggestions ensued. Why are our Sunday programs called "Platforms"? Boe explained that it is a shortened version of "Platform Address" — "on this Platform we stand." Also, Jim put forward the need for our lay leaders to assume pastoral responsibilities, which many members do intuitively. Charming folk music programs and Feldenkreis activities also contributed to varied enriching events this summer.

Our Ethical Society — what a support system! To say family and friends sustained me through my ordeal is incomplete. Our Ethical Culture community, my spiritual home, has been the bulwark of the support and compassion that rendered my getting well. The notes, phone calls, visits, flowers, special errands hastened my four months of recovery. You caring folks did it. One member sent me a hardy plant that traveled with me from one rehabilitation center to another. Another sent me the program for the Cherry Blossom Festival she attended, knowing that in my passion for



Commemoration and Peace Event Held Aug. 8

The Social Action Committee and NJ Peace Action co-sponsored "Saving Lives — Summer of Peace" at the Society to commemorate the 64th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Japan. Terri Suess organized and presided. The *Hibakusha*, survivors of the atomic bombs, who travel the world for peace, joined us to tell their story.

After a potluck dinner, Solidarity Singers with assistance from Lisa Novemsky and Rosalie Sussman led us in song. NJ Peace Action Executive Director Madelyn Hoffman spoke about the strong potential for nuclear abolition now.

We had poetry and a chance to catch up with people from the peace movement from across the state and beyond, and talk about the "who, what, why and how" of peace.

botanical settings I would appreciate a memento of that hallmark spring event in Branch Brook Park. Anyone experiencing a crisis should have the good fortune to have a significant community like Ethical for support. All during my convalescence, I kept having a fantasy of a special program at our building featuring Beethoven's "Consecration of the House". This summer's gatherings at the house have been just that for me.

Our members and friends sustained and nurtured me during these many months. Thank you all for being there, for being a caring community that one can depend upon in time of need. Since I couldn't drive for a while, I am grateful to so many who helped with errands.

Have you seen my new hairdo, shorn of those heavy locks (see photo)? Thanks to a gifted surgeon with a creative bent who knew more than just removing an intrusive tumor.



I shall have the privilege of delivering the Platform when we open our new season on Sunday, September 13, "Bringing out the best in others while healing oneself."

See you there! — *Betty Levin*

FROM THE UN Racism and Xenophobia Conference 2009

by Phyllis Ehrenfeld, President, National Service Conference of the American Ethical Union and Representative to the UN; and Dr Sylvain Ehrenfeld, International Humanist Ethical Union Representative to the UN. (sylphyle@cs.com)

Worldwide, the UN is tackling the divisive and explosive issues of racism and human rights. As expected, the April 2009 conference in Geneva became very turbulent because of a provocative Israel-bashing speech by Iranian President Ahmadinejad. His abusive language caused many delegates to walk out and precipitated an unprecedented rebuke by the UN's habitually diplomatic Secretary General. As additional attack, the speech came

on Holocaust Memorial Day, April 20. All this volatility spurred a kind of press coverage which completely obscured the real purpose of the conference.

The original decision to boycott the conference by the US and other countries was taken because the 2009 Conference had approved the original document which some claimed equated Zionism with racism. This claim is inaccurate and deceptive. The original 2001 document had become confused in the public mind with the anti-Semitic statements of the NGO side conference. The official UN document completely rejected the sensational and hate-mongering statements. Thanks to then High Commissioner of Human Rights Mary Robinson, with the help of the delegate from South Africa, a document was drafted (with a plan for action) that was well-reasoned and morally acceptable.

This document expressed deep concern about both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and omitted reference to Israel as a racist state. The document expressed concern with the plight of the Palestinians and supported their right for self-determination, the right of security for all states including Israel, asked that the holocaust never be forgotten, and called for support of the Middle East peace process.

In the current official UN 2009 follow-up for the 2001 conference, a number of Islamic countries made an effort to make defamation of religion a breach of human rights. Such a declaration would be a serious threat to the precious right of freedom of expression. They did not succeed. The final document did not include the proposed references to defamation of religion or identify Israel as a racist state. Instead it focused strongly on freedom of expression.

The positive tone of the document finally adopted was not reported in the mainstream press. The conference news disappeared from public attention.

The conference did have flaws. It did not adequately list the many situ-

Save the Date — October 3 — A Gathering to Honor Boe

Please save Saturday, Oct. 3, at 3 p.m. for a gathering of friends, family and colleagues and dinner to honor Boe Meyerson at Ethical Culture. Come one, come all! More details to follow. Contact Rosalie Sussman (908) 686-3782 or Lisa Novemsky (973) 763-8293 or lnovemsky@comcast.net.

ations of racism and human rights abuses worldwide, such as hostility and violence towards women, gays and the 250 million untouchables. Darfur was ignored in the final document.

There was discussion of the history of the terrible transatlantic slave trade, but it focused only on West African slaves shipped to the Americas and the Caribbean. There was no acknowledgement of the slave trade of North and East Africa across the Indian Ocean, involving mostly women. Westerners were not alone in the vice of the slave trade!

How best to respond to such serious divisions? The policy of a total boycott doesn't seem to be valid or useful. Almost all of those delegates who walked out during President Ahmadinejad's speech returned to work on drafting an ethical final document. In spite of the omissions, the final document was acceptable, though incomplete. A more recent example of the possible benefits of participation is President Obama's decision, unlike former President Bush, to seek a US seat on the Human Rights Council. The new and severely flawed council is a permanent body organized on geographic regional and totally political lines. Hopefully, the voice of the US will be heard speaking out on the most explosive, divisive and usually neglected issues on the world scene.

Folk Fridays at Ethical

Singalong with friends, Sept. 11 and every second Friday of the month at the Society. No Admission fee. (973) 763-1905 · lnovemsky@comcast.net

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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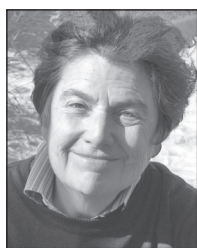
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TWO TYPES OF COMMUNITY

by **Boe Meyerson**

When we raise the question “What is the ideal community,” many diverse ideas can come to mind. People’s ideals differ greatly on this subject. Some seek a community in which all values are held in common. Such a community helps to powerfully reinforce and support commitment and realization of those beliefs and commitments. Let us call such communities “Uniform Communities.” Others seek a community in which great diversity of belief and commitment among members provides opportunity for vital exchange and exploration of new ideas and conceptions. Let us call such communities “Pluralistic Communities.” These are the two conceptual poles. They both have significant virtues and drawbacks.

The great virtue of the Uniform Community is that it helps its members by reinforcing commonly held values and enabling them to act in concert when striving to realize them and share them with others outside their group. Such communities enable members to feel supported in their



commitments and to work with others to share them with those outside the community. The disadvantage of such communities, on the other hand, is that they tend to discourage critical or probing inquiry into their own beliefs. Members often feel threatened by such inquiry. The perceived threat is to the integrity of the beliefs and values which hold them together. These attitudes can have negative consequences for the Uniform Community. Refusal to engage in critical discussion can prevent members from exploring ways in which their common beliefs can be strengthened by modifying those aspects which are not well grounded. In the long run, rigid belief systems can undermine a community by discouraging members from questioning and developing their common beliefs. Such communities discourage creative and critical thinking and thereby limit the opportunities for intellectual and emotional growth.

The great virtue of the Pluralistic Community, on the other hand, is the openness to new ideas which can result in greater development of the values and commitments which the group holds in common. Diversity of views and challenges posed by such views are not automatically rejected.

Rather they are explored in order to learn to what extent such views might enhance their own views and goals as a community. They are also explored in order to determine to what extent those views might be incompatible with the groups existing commitments and beliefs. When this is the case, those views will not be accepted as communal doctrine. But those who may continue to hold them are not expelled so long as they do not claim that their belief is shared by the larger community or in any way represents what the community stands for.

The distinction between the two groups is centered on the degree to which each permits diversity of individual belief. The Uniform Community will not tolerate members who do not support the core beliefs. The Pluralistic Community will tolerate some diverse beliefs so long as (1) the individuals holding them accept that the Community does not share their views and refrain from any misrepresentation of the Community and (2) continue to share some of the Community’s core commitments or beliefs.

There is doubtless far more to be said on this topic. Consequently this brief statement is only the very beginning.

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