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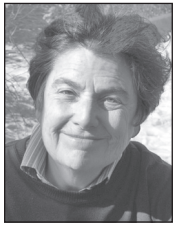
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NOVEMBER 2007

LEADER'S MESSAGE

Some Thoughts on Truth and Manners

As you all know by now, sparks were flying at Columbia University over



President Bollinger's invitation of the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to speak at Columbia University at the request of its Middle East Department.

Much controversy followed the undiplomatic introduction of Ahmadinejad by University President Bollinger who called him a man who exhibited "all the signs of a petty and cruel dictator" and whose denial of the holocaust was "either brazenly provocative or astonishingly uneducated." What he said I believe to be absolutely true. However, there has been much controversy about whether he should have said it, the way he said it, and the context in which he said it — i.e., an introduction of an invited guest.

First, it should be noted that what Bollinger said was perfectly true. Ahmadinejad is a dictator (yet under the auspices of the Ayatollah Ali Khomeini). He is also a holocaust denier.

Secondly, it should be emphasized that Bollinger had invited him. Bollinger himself surely did so on principle insofar as he is legal scholar and an expert in freedom of speech to which is highly committed.

Now, my take on this is as follows.

1. Bollinger was right to invite him at the request of his Middle East department. That is what academic freedom is all about. Ideas should be shared, defended and challenged openly.

2. Bollinger was exercising his right

to speak freely and honestly when he described Ahmadinejad as a "petty and cruel dictator" whose denial of the holocaust was either "provocative or astonishingly ignorant."

3. However, he did violate a norm which is sacred in Moslem culture and respected in our culture. That concerns our obligations to an invited guest, especially while introducing him. One is not supposed to insult one's guest when introducing him. There is nothing wrong with his having made clear his strenuous disagreement with Ahmadinejad and his disapproval of his actions and his autocratic method of ruling. Such vigorous and challenging discourse is expected in open academic discussion. Yet that discourse is very different from the name calling exhibited in the pejorative phrase "petty dictator." The inappropriateness of Bollinger's words come from the context of introducing an invited guest. It would be altogether different if they were simply engaged in vigorous debate about the value of his leadership or his values, etc. Rather this is an introduction, not a debate.

4. Is this an ethical issue? If you invite someone to your institution and then introduce him in truthful but insulting manner are you behaving ethically or have you simply set him up. Context here is crucial.

5. Context is the key to this issue. What is acceptable in the locker room or the soccer field is not necessarily acceptable in the living room with one's grandmother. Similarly the level of familiarity and intimacy and mutual acceptance which could be normative in a family setting may not be acceptable in a formal work setting. Truth telling

is a virtue but not always. Walking up to a woman at a party which you are giving (and to which you invited her) and telling her in front of others that she dresses like a slut is both bad manners and bad ethics. Taking her aside and giving her fatherly or motherly advice privately in a sympathetic way is not unethical and not bad manners.

6. Lastly there is a matter of style or phrasing. Here the language of 'I statements' vs. 'you statements' comes to mind. For the sake of Bollinger's integrity, and avoiding outright insult, it would not have been inappropriate for him to frankly express his own beliefs as an 'I statement' such as: 'We have invited you out of our deep respect for academic freedom and our commitment to be free to hear and affirm or challenge all and any views. I, personally, find your denial of the holocaust to be a product of either a desire to provoke or of simple and astounding ignorance. I also disapprove of your authoritarian style of leadership. Yet you are still welcome here to compete on the open battleground of ideas.' Notice here there is no name calling and he is making statements about his own beliefs rather than engaging in direct insult.

7. I wish to emphasize the subtle but important issue of context and style not as an aesthetic concern but rather as an ethical one. There is a big difference between saying "You are an idiot." and saying "I fail to see any evidence for your dramatic claim."

8. I am reminded of an old saying, "Do the least harm." I would add, do so consistent with your own integrity.

— Boe Meyerson

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 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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as to elicit
the best
in others
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Attention members! Please
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"When I came to understand that there are mythic patterns in all our lives, I know that all of us, often unbeknownst to ourselves, are engaged in a drama of soul which we were told was reserved for gods, heroes and saints." — Deena Metzger, "Miracle at Canyon de Chelly"

This quote describes most of the folks in the Ethical movement, that at some crucial time in our lives we identified ourselves as having a higher consciousness about moral authority and wanting to participate in a community that is trying to create a more humane world.



And here we are at our Essex Society, participating in just such a community but too often neglecting our own personal "drama of soul".

We were addressed by just such an individual, profoundly involved in his personal drama of soul. Dr. Edward Tick has been working for over 30 years to heal veterans who are survivors of our many wars. Through seven return visits to Vietnam, he has helped many of those traumatized warriors to find forgiveness, restoration and healing, even as they discover that the Vietnamese (most of whom are Buddhists) have long ago forgiven us. There was hardly a dry eye in the room when Ed spoke of this healing work and we remained long into the afternoon listening to how we can become a community that loves the soldier even as we hate the war.

For more information about this program as it unfolds here at Essex, please call our office (973-763-1905) and leave your name, phone number and e-mail and we shall be in touch.

— Betty Levin

War and the Soul and Soldier's Heart Excerpted from www.soldiersheart.net

The New England Journal of Medicine reports that one in eight returning Iraq veterans suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder. These vets typically can't hold jobs, are incapable of intimacy, creative work and self-realization. Some can't leave the house. The key to healing, says psychotherapist Ed Tick, is in how we understand PTSD. In war's overwhelming violence the true self flees and can become lost for life. Dr. Tick redefines PTSD as an identity disorder with radical implications for therapy. He establishes the traditional context of war in mythology and religion and then describes PTSD as an identity issue and a soul wound. Finally, he presents ways to nurture a positive warrior identity based in compassion and forgiveness.

From Kate Dahlstedt, Soldier's Heart co-director:
[Soldier's Heart provides counseling, training education and community organizing for Veterans and their families]

Community plays an integral part in healing our veterans. There are innumerable ways we can contribute to helping veterans reintegrate well on their return from the war zone and support their families while

they are gone. These can be as diverse as vendors giving free or discounted goods and services to military families. People from the community can volunteer to do household chores such as shovel the walks and mow the lawns of military families living in our neighborhoods.

Beyond this kind of giving, church groups and community organizations can offer emotional and spiritual support. This doesn't require professionals or specialists. All of us are able to lend a compassionate ear. A hallmark of the healing arts teaches us that storytelling is essential to healing; storytelling to those who can really listen, feel the truth of what is shared, refrain from judging and agree to help carry the story in their hearts.

Over and over again we hear from veterans that their healing became possible when they could finally let out the truth of their experiences and have it received by the rest of the community with love and respect. Once a community agrees to carry the stories and the emotional burden they evoke veterans can release the shame, guilt and horror of what they have been through. Honored as chief witnesses to the realities of war, our veterans can transform from wounded soldiers to embrace the identity of the True Warrior.

THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

By Phyllis Ehrenfeld and Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld

Thanks to almost-President Gore, Katrina, and the UN's accumulation of warnings from scientists all over the world, climate change can no longer be ignored. The new UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has placed the potential impact of climate change first on his agenda. The UN's annual major General Assembly in September adopted climate change as its central theme. 150 nations participated in a session to prepare the groundwork for serious negotiations to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The next effort for an international accord to limit the emission of greenhouse gases will take place in December, in Bali, Indonesia.

Unfortunately the US has lagged behind many other countries both by not signing the Kyoto treaty and by proposing a voluntary approach to a problem that threatens the world as we know it. This response is as absurd as a voluntary speed limit for drivers. Since climate change does not concern itself with national borders, cooperation between nations is obviously necessary. In response to President Bush's objection that such agreements will inhibit economic growth, Secretary-General Ban observed that the costs of inaction will far outweigh the costs of early action.

The problems are difficult. How comprehensive and far-reaching is the science? What will be the impact of climate change? Above all, what can we do?

Reports from working groups

The UN has sponsored a major global assessment of global change by the IPCC (Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change) in reports from three working groups. The first report, the

scientific assessment report, was a monumental undertaking of findings from more than 2,500 scientists from all over 130 countries, summing up the last 6 years of research. The report confirms that since the year 1750 the marked increase in atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide is the result of human activity.

Worldwide Effects

The second report concerns the effects on ecological systems and especially the effect on human beings. In the short run, there will be winners and losers. In the long run, everyone will lose.

Temperature increase will impact agricultural productivity and the availability of food, as will hurricanes, flooding, losses of coastal wetlands. Water supplies, stored in glaciers and snow cover, are projected to decline, aggravating the already serious competition for water. Approximately 20 to 30 per cent of plant and animal species may become extinct. Areas already affected by drought will increase. WHO, the World Health Organization, warns that health conditions worldwide will worsen. A rise in infectious disease is expected, particularly in tropical regions, including asthma, respiratory diseases and more cases of malaria. Since poor people already live in areas more vulnerable to climate extremes, they will be more affected.

Proposals for Action

The third report offers proposals to mitigate some of these consequences.



Phyllis Ehrenfeld is AEU's National Service Conference Representative to the UN, and Dr Sylvain Ehrenfeld is IHEU Representative to the UN.

The first proposal is to move from our fossil-fuel and carbon-based economy to cleaner technology, renewable energy and energy efficiency. A recent report by the UN Environment Program shows that the combination of

high oil prices and increasing government support is fuelling soaring rates of investment in renewable energy and efficiency. This produces potentially great business opportunities, an investment rising from already \$80 billion in 2005 to \$100 billion in 2006. New technology can be an enormous boon, but poorer countries will need help to make the necessary transition.

Global action is vital. Local communities can contribute. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, and the Mayor of Delhi, Ari Mehra, reported on their innovative efforts. California, the world's seventh largest economy, is planning groundbreaking emissions standards and the world's first-ever low carbon fuel standard. California and 13 other states are proposing new rules to reduce greenhouse gases from cars and light trucks. Delhi has the world's largest bus fleet running on clean fuel.

The world is moving towards massive changes in the way we live, the way we use energy and the way we relate to the earth. The transition will be less or more painful. We do have some degree of choice. A commentator at one UN meeting summed up what humanity needs to respond to the challenge — "pessimism of intellect, and optimism of will." The acknowledgement of the danger is a necessary beginning.

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

November, 2007

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.

Nov 4: Boe Meyerson *"Happiness: What Is It and Is There A Path?"* Boe will explore a variety of concepts of human happiness and the paths they lead us down. She will also consider to what extent happiness can be pursued and to what extent it is given to us by fate.

Boe Meyerson is the Leader of the Ethical Society of Essex County and the Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

Nov 11: Michelle Bobrow *"Eminent Domain Abuse, Personal and Philosophical Views"*. Since 1996, Michelle and her husband Harold have been fighting the "redevelopment" designation, with the implied threat of taking for luxury development, of their home. She and Harold were founders of several anti- eminent domain abuse organizations, informing and involving the general public about the pervasive issue of eminent domain abuse. As she has said, "If it can happen to me, it can happen to you."



Michelle Bobrow

A community activist and advocate, Michelle Bobrow has had an interest in public affairs on all levels as well as ethical issues. Ms. Bobrow is a long-time resident of Maplewood and is active

in several community organizations, including the League of Women Voters and the National Council of Jewish Women. She is a child advocate for CASA (a volunteer trained as a citizen advocate to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court) and is a trained parliamentarian.

Nov 18: Matthew LaClair *"Preaching in a Public School: Part 2."*

Matthew LaClair will outline what happened when he dared to object to his history teacher imposing his religious beliefs on his students, and the long battle he and his family faced before they were finally vindicated this past spring. After months of being treated as a pariah at school and in the town, he has been commended by the Board of Education for his "courage and integrity," and the board has agreed to train teachers and students about the separation of church and state, and about the difference between the theory of evolution and the doctrine of creationism.

From Matthew: "I am a senior at Ke- arny High School. I have done a lot of acting including plays at Studio Play- ers in Montclair and an off-Broadway play. I have taken on a strong interest in Constitutional and legal issues and politics. In my freshman year I cre-



ated some controversy by refusing to stand for the pledge of allegiance. The current episode, involving a proselytizing history teacher, has generated five articles and two editorials in the New York Times, along with a flurry of local print, television and radio coverage, and appearances on Anderson Cooper 360, Air America, Brian Lehrer, BBC international radio and several others. I have been selected to receive the Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award from the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the Ethical Hero Award from the American Ethical Union, the Ethical Humanist Award from the New York Society for Ethical Culture and the James Madison Religious Liberty Award from the Center for Inquiry."

Nov 25: *"The Joys and Challenges of Thanksgiving Fellowship"*. Annual post- Thanksgiving thanksgiving discussion, led by Boe; all attending are invited to participate.

Courses

"Ethical Decision Making: A Study of Different Philosophical Approaches," **Tuesdays at 7:30 pm on Nov. 13, 20 and 27.**

"Nonviolent Communication," based on Marshall Rosenberg's book, **Tuesdays at 7:30 pm on Dec. 11 and 18.**