



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

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APRIL 2009

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

April 5 Leader Barbara (Boe) Meyerson, "In the Face of Death or Disablement"

Samuel Johnson said "...he is to be hanged in a fortnight — it concentrates the mind wonderfully." Clearly Johnson is being somewhat glib here. However, the words are deadly serious and, I dare say, quite true. Confronting the possibility of early or untimely death or severe disability does indeed have a way of focusing the mind. It is a stimulus for one to consider what is most important and most valuable. It is a powerful impetus to do those important and meaningful things that in the course of the duties of daily life are all too frequently neglected or postponed. It can also result in novel realizations of what is truly important to oneself. Similar but less drastic challenges are posed by the prospect of oncoming disablement, whether physical or mental. In either case a person is challenged to think seriously of what is most important to accomplish or experience in the time remaining. As grim as this sounds, there is yet a positive dimension to this process. If sufficient time remains, one can accomplish things of great value which otherwise might never have seen the light of day.

Boe will discuss the various aspects of this process in this platform address.

Boe is the Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County. She is also the Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

April 12 and April 19, "Global Warming and Climate Distress"

The Society will have its first two-Sunday platform with presentations and discussions of global warming and climate distress and why we should be taking it personally.

The first platform will be presented on **April 12** and will feature West Orange's **Ron Pate**, who will facilitate a thought-provoking and insightful discussion and show excerpts from the environmental documentary "The Eleventh Hour". The film and our discussion will explore how humanity has arrived at this moment; how we live, how we impact the earth's ecosystems, and what we can do to change our course. A preview is available at Ron's website www.ronpate.net, and he can be contacted at ron@ronpate.com.

The film features dialogues with experts from all over the world, including former Soviet Prime Minister Mikhail Gorbachev, renowned scientist Stephen Hawking, former head of the CIA R. James Woolsey and sustainable design experts William McDonough and Bruce Mau.

Ron is a long time Sierra Club leader, committed environmentalist and community activist. He is president of the West Essex Park Conservancy, a local business owner for the past 30 years, a member of Kiwanis, youth group volunteer and Sunday school teacher. Most importantly, he is the father of three beautiful children.



It's his concern for his children and of all our children, that has moved Ron to devote his life to environmental activism.

Following up Ron's presentation in the second week (**April 19**) are our own members **Barry Zack** and **Mira Stillman**, who is assisting in putting this together.



In this segment, we will discuss just what global warming means to us, our children and future generations. We will

focus on what actions we can take to reduce the effects of the climate crisis. The platform will conclude with a group discussion and ideas that individuals among us can contribute.

Both Mira and Barry have been active organizing and participating in community events focusing on environmental issues. Before her retirement, Mira taught English at Rutgers University and courses in World Literature at Drew University. Barry is the editor of Environment South Orange, a website hosted by the town (www.southorange.org/environment) and a member of the South Orange Energy Policy Committee. Barry's own website is www.earthcare-web.com.



April 26 Steven Goldstein, "Taking the battle for gay marriage to the State House"

Steven Goldstein will present an update on the battle to win full marital rights for gay couples, not through the courts — as has happened elsewhere

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 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

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

Attention members! Please submit your email addresses to ethicalessex@netscape.com to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

in the country with very mixed results — but through legislation from Trenton. Civil unions, which President Obama has championed, have failed to provide true equality and might have generated more problems than they solved.

Steven Goldstein is chair and CEO of Garden State Equality, the statewide organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex civil rights. He worked as a senior staffer for US Senators Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Chuck Schumer (D-NY), and for Governor Jon Corzine (D-NJ) in his successful earlier



campaign for Senate. Steven is also a former television news producer who has won 10 Emmy Awards. Fulfilling a lifelong dream, he is studying to be a rabbi at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Mr. Goldstein writes about New Jersey politics, gay rights and other public policy issues.

EVENTS/FUNDRAISERS

Friday March 27, 7:15 p.m. Stirling Duo Concert, "An Invitation To The Dance" —



Classical masters and duo Joe Gluck and Mary Babiarez in performance, featuring the works of Strauss, Brahms, Wieniawski & more. \$25, Advance tickets recommended. Call or email office, to reserve. (Sorry no credit cards accepted)

Back by popular demand, *The Appalachian Miner's Dinner*, at the home of **Andy Weinberger & Sue Willis**. There are only 10 spots available for this spectacular dinner. The date is **April 25 at 6 p.m.** Donation is \$25. Please sign the list at the society or contact Nancy Bohn.

Garage Sale, May 2 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. We need your donated items! Please bring them from March to April 26 to the Society, marked "Garage Sale" and your name. Place them in the small sun room next to the parlor. If you have items not listed below that you would be willing to sell and donate, you may set up our own table. You will be respon-

sible for set up, selling and clean up. All proceeds will go to the Society.

The items we want must be new or nearly new, small saleable items to be placed on tables, e.g.: jewelry, tools, knick-knacks, games, toys, stationary, cosmetics, toiletries, unopened gifts.

We will not accept large items, or any books, records, garden items, furniture, computers, typewriters, electrical appliances, clothing, shoes, handbags etc.

For information, call Nancy Bohn at (973) 762-0513 or Jeanine Rosh at (973) 258-9395.

LEADER'S ARTICLE

Respect: Two Dimensions

The concept of respect for persons generally refers to standards of conduct and expressions of feeling in relation to another person. Respect can be shown in conventional ways: in language by using special forms of address (e.g., Sir and Mam, Your Majesty, Your Eminence etc.) It can be shown in actions such as giving one's seat on the bus to a pregnant woman. In this case one is not only being respectful but also being compassionate and caring about the other person's welfare. The two do not always go hand in hand. One can act respectfully in order to conform to conventional standards of conduct because one acknowledges the validity of the standard or rule. On the other hand one can act respectfully because of genuine concern for the welfare of another person. Here the actor is less concerned with standards of conduct or acting as a gentleman than he is with helping another person. In the former case the person is acting in obedience to a rule and in the other, the person is acting out of care and concern for the other person's needs. These are not mutually exclusive motives. (One can have both motivations at the same time.) Yet they are quite different. The two motives illustrate and conform to two different ethical theories. Acting in order to address a need and bring about greater well being for all



(the greatest happiness for the greatest number) characterizes the ethical theory of Utilitarianism. Alternatively, being motivated by respect for an ethical standard or rule characterizes the non-naturalistic or Deontological approach. These two major theories comprise two different conceptions of ethics.

[If you are interested in learning more about ethical theory, please call the office and leave a message stating that you would like to attend a course in Ethical Philosophy. If enough people sign up, I will give such course.] — Boe

FROM THE UN

Sixty Years of Claiming Rights

Sixty years ago, in response to the horrors of World War II, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This remarkable historic document declared “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” — a first global statement. All persons should be treated with dignity simply because the person is human. It has inspired and energized human rights workers worldwide. It spurred the creation of the International Criminal Court, and inspired the creation of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

The UDHR introduces two very important new features. First, it is universal. Some human rights ideas go back a long time as in 1740 BC when the Babylonian king Hammurabi codified his laws against unfair trials, torture and slavery. However his laws applied only to his own people. His enemies the Assyrians fell outside the code’s protection. They could be tortured and enslaved without compunction. Similarly, The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen guaranteed rights for the French, and the US Bill of Rights eventually guaranteed rights for all Americans.

CALLING ALL ENCAMPMENT FOR CITIZENSHIP ALUMNI!

Pull up your socks, put on your shoes, grab your camp mementos, and run over to the NY Society for Ethical Culture on Saturday, May 16, 7–10 p.m., for a Camp Reunion. You have kept in touch over the years by phone, e-mail, snail mail and Facebook. Now it’s the time to get together in person. The NY Society is located at 2 West 64th Street on the corner of Central Park West. The reunion will be held in Ceremonial Hall on the fourth floor. We will have drinks and light refreshments and a table on which to display your photos, scrapbooks, souvenirs, etc. Check Facebook and MeetUp for invitations and RSVP to Leader Anne Klaeyesen at the NY Society: aklaeyesen@nysec.org or 212-874-5210 ext. 118.

Encampment for Citizenship was a summer youth program founded in 1944 by Algernon Black, a leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture. The program was organized as a summer camp “at which young adults of many religious, racial, social and national backgrounds learned the principles and techniques of citizenship in a liberal democracy through lived experience.” It encouraged political activism and volunteerism and sought to educate its participants about civic responsibility, participation in government and tolerance of diversity.

Eleanor Roosevelt was an early supporter of the Encampment for Citizenship and in its first years she routinely invited the program to workshops at Hyde Park. As a long-time member of the Society for Ethical Culture’s board, ER felt naturally attached to the aspirations of the project, and she heartily defended it when the Encampment program came under attack from McCarthyite forces in the early 1950s.

One such incident involved the American Legion, which accused the Encampment for Citizenship of being un-American and socialistic. ER was outraged by the criticism and she marshaled other Encampment supporters to speak out in its defense. They pointed out that the American Legion’s accusations were paranoid, that there was nothing inherently un-American in listening to representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union and assured them that they would continue to support the Encampment’s work. Several months later, ER reiterated her support by serving as honorary chairman of the Encampment’s anniversary gala.

The Encampment for Citizenship has since become a nationwide program that continues to conduct citizen workshops to this day.

Sources: The New York Society for Ethical Culture. Internet on-line. Available From <http://nysec.org/handbook.html>; Lash, Joseph. Eleanor: The Years Alone. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972, 236-237; <http://www.nps.gov/archive/elrol/glossary/encamp-for-citizenship.htm>

The UDHR is revolutionary precisely because it is universal, and so takes precedence over every political ideology and parochial claim. It transcends national borders and spells out rights regardless of race, gender or class.

A second significant new feature is

that the declaration encompasses positive rights as well as negative rights. Negative rights are limits to what harms can be done to restrict an individual. For example freedom of speech, freedom from arbitrary detention and torture, free assembly, *(continued)*

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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(continued from page 3) freedom of the press and a fair trial, as expressed in the US Bill of Rights. These are important civil and political rights. But of great importance is the concept of positive rights, social and economic, such as education, health care, food and housing, necessities because they are required for the dignity of every human being. This concept articulates a serious responsibility of governments toward its population.

In the discussions leading to the formulation of UDHR, the Soviet Union objected to the civil and political rights, the US government did not support the social and economic rights. Saudi Arabia objected to equal rights of men and women in marriage, and also freedom of religion. Southern senators in the US shared with South Africa unhappiness with civil rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt led the commission of Human Rights in the formulation of the UDHR. Under her brilliant guidance and the difficult discussions, especially with the Soviet Union, she managed to craft an historic document. For example she convinced the US State Department to support the social and economic sections by reminding them of her husband's 1941 state of the union address stressing both freedom from fear and the free-

dom of want. Together they form an organic unity.

It is remarkable that in 1948, while these discussions were taking place, the world was experiencing major changes. The Soviet Union consolidated its hold over Eastern Europe, the Middle East war erupted when the Arab armies invaded the fledgling State of Israel. In China the totalitarian Mao was on the verge of gaining power. In spite of all this the General Assembly passed the declaration with no negative votes and only 8 abstentions: the Soviet bloc, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

These rights were later spelled out in greater detail in two International Covenants, one on Civil and Political Rights and one on Economic and Social Rights. Many countries have ratified them. Unfortunately the US has never ratified the Economic and Social covenant. Human rights are easier to endorse than to enforce.

The UDHR comes perennially under attack, as for example the justifications offered for torture in the US — a moral outrage. The most recent attack on the idea of universality comes from resurgent Islam. In December 2007,

the Organization of Islamic Conference, representing an important bloc of 56 Islamic states, renewed their opposition to the universality of human rights focusing on the status of women and freedom of religion.

The new and potentially revolutionary feature of economic and social rights is one of the UN's major focuses in their manifold humanitarian activities in fighting poverty, hunger, disease, unclean water and poor sanitation. All these blights undermine civil and political freedoms. In Eleanor's words, both types of rights go hand in hand and are required for dignity and the betterment of humanity.

The principles embodied in UDHR underlie the beliefs and concerns of humanists. They need constant and vigilant defense.

A basic pillar for ethics is empathy. The struggle for human rights is the ongoing effort to enlarge the circle of empathy.

— Phyllis Ehrenfeld, *President National Service Conference of the American Ethical Union and representative to the UN*; Dr Sylvain Ehrenfeld, *International Humanist Ethical Union representative to the UN*

“all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION
OF HUMAN RIGHTS