



ETHICAL CULTURE

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LEADER'S MESSAGE

The philosopher George Santayana defined fanaticism as “redoubling your efforts after having forgotten your aim.” I have not been inclined to see our current government as fanatical no matter how misguided, ignorant, unjust, anti-scientific, or unnecessarily aggressive its actions and opinions may have been. However, under Santayana’s definition of fanaticism, I have concluded that our “staying the course” in Iraq is fanatical.



Boe Meyerson

Our military intervention in Iraq began when our President came to the conclusion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. That conclusion was based partially on his belief that Iraq had attempted to purchase high grade uranium from Nigeria. However that was found to be false by former Ambassador Wilson before the war began. After we invaded Iraq, it was found to be false because we never found any evidence whatsoever of a bomb or even fissionable materials. However, that finding did not lead us out of Iraq. Our aim changed to liberating that nation from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. Even after he was captured, tried and executed, we still did not leave. While he was imprisoned, we had changed our focus to creating a democracy in Iraq. After a democratic election was successfully completed, we still did not leave. Our aim changed again to that of stabilizing the country and stopping its full scale civil war (enabled by our intervention) between Sunnis and Shiites which the elected government has been unable (or unwilling) to curb. The problem

here is that the militants of both sides see us as obstacles in the way of their war and their goals of triumphing over the other side. Even if we could stop their war, it would likely continue as soon as we left. So, given the above, I think Santayana might have agreed with my characterization of our efforts as fanatical. What do you think?

— Boe Meyerson

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The January 28 platform at the Essex Ethical Society was an historic event. Matthew LaClair, a 16-year-old former student of our Sunday School, clearly knew about democracy, separation of church and state, and had the courage to challenge his history teacher, school principal and board of education where these sacred democratic principals were repeatedly violated at his Kearney (NJ) high school. He spoke eloquently about his experiences without notes (he has received rejection from most of his classmates and



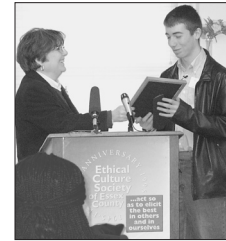
Betty Levin

even a death threat) and answered some elegantly pointed questions during discussion time. One of his most telling comments: in response to the question, “has this fire storm of comments affected your personal life?” “No, it has actually helped me to know who I really am and has motivated me significantly as I make plans for college ('08) and my professional career.” It is clear that the power of our Ethical Culture teachings augment the essence of democracy and propel young people into their future. Matthew was awarded the “Humanist Hero Award” from the American Ethical Union at this event (also granted

recently to Wesley Autrey, who saved a young man fallen onto the subway tracks). An overflowing crowd cheered our Ethical Culture event and many asked later, “When are you going to resume your Sunday School?” We are working on it. Keep tuned.

— Betty Levin

The AEU identifies itself as a federation of Ethical Societies “dedicated to ethical action and bringing out the best in individuals.” Ethical Hero Awards are



given to recognize “individuals who took an ethical action at significant personal risk to themselves for a higher good.” In facing massive rejection and a death

threat for challenging his teacher, Matthew took an ethical stand at great personal risk.

The following is an excerpt from “Putting God in His Place” by Nat Hentoff, *Village Voice*, January 1, 2007

While the First Amendment insists there be no law “prohibiting the free exercise” of religion, it also forbids any law “respecting an establishment of religion.”

What that means was clearly explained in a New Jersey case, *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), by Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black: “Neither a state nor the Federal Government can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another... No tax, in any amount, large or small” [such as those that fund Kearny High] “can be levied to support any religious activities... or teach or practice religion.”

And, in speaking of public schools, Justice Felix Frankfurter put it as plainly as possible why Matthew LaClair is so valuably instructing his high school and the nation as he stands up for the Constitution— (continued on page 2)

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 (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.

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ourselves**

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even as some of his friends forsake him. There must be, said Frankfurter, "strict confinement of the state to instruction other than religious, leaving to the individual's church and home indoctrination in the faith of his choice." (Emphasis added.) Also left to our choice is to have no religious faith at all. The Constitution protects atheists, too.

To those in and out of Kearny, New Jersey, who scorn and rebuke Matthew LaClair, I urge attention to what Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson wrote, as it applies to the teacher Matthew recorded:

"We start down a rough road when we begin to mix compulsory education with compulsory godliness."

Matthew's own road is currently, as he puts it, "a little tough." He continues, "My faith is in this democracy we have in America, but we have to work at it to keep it. I don't want to see this kind of teaching in this school now, or when I leave, or anywhere across this country." He then read to me from a booklet, "The Program of Studies at Kearny High School," that, he says, every student receives. Among the goals of instruction are "to think critically [and] understand the role of a good citizen in the practice of democratic ideas and ideals." In view of Matthew LaClair's outstanding dedication to those goals, I would hope that Principal Al Somma would call a school-wide assembly at which to present Matthew with an award named for the chief architect for the First Amendment, James Madison, who started his road to the Constitution at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).

James Madison said of the First Amendment that it "strongly guarded . . . the separation between Religion and Government in the Constitution of the United States." If he were still here, I think Mr. Madison might well be glad to meet Matthew LaClair.

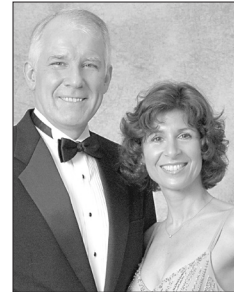
FUND-RAISING EVENTS

Dinner at Pat Thompson's March 18 at 4 p.m. Enjoy a leisurely dinner with great food, drink and lots of stimulating conversation. Donation is \$20. Please call Jeanine or the office for reservations.

On Saturday, April 14 at 7:30 p.m. soprano Marjorie Berg and pianist John Pi-

varnik will perform "Songs of Contemplation". The program will feature the Hermit Songs of Samuel Barber, and the Four Serious Songs by Johannes Brahms, as well as piano music of Brahms.

Marjorie Berg is no stranger to the Ethical Society. We first met her as guest artist with the Stirling Duo, then in her own concert presentations here at the society. She has been a soloist with the Baroque Orchestra of North Jersey, The Masterwork Chorus, Harmonium Choral Society and New Jersey Concert Opera. She has also been a guest so-



loist at Ogden Memorial Presbyterian Church in Chatham and St. Mary's Abbey at Delbarton, St. Rose of Lima Church and Christ Church in Short Hills.

John Pivarnik is Organist and Music Director at Christ Church in Short Hills. His undergraduate degree in piano performance is from Susquehanna University, and his graduate study was at Temple University. He studied vocal accompanying at Cologne Musik Hochschule in Cologne, Germany, and most recently studied at the Franz Liszt Piano Academy in Hungary.

The evening begins with crackers and conversation, then the concert, followed by dessert and discussion with the artists. What an evening of music and mingling! Suggested donation is \$20; call now to reserve tickets.

Soup and Strollers May 6 at 2 p.m. The Maplewood Strollers present 'The Violet Hour'. It's that time — that wonderful New York hour when the evening's about to reward you for that day — Denis (Denny) McCleary explaining the title for his colossus of a novel to his friend John Pace Seaver — and by extension, the title for Richard Greenberg's play about a fateful day in their lives. The greater the participation, the less it will cost. Help bring up participation. Come to the platform and stay for lunch and the show. Mark the date on your calendar.

Also coming in May, **Betty Levin's amazing Azalea display**. More information to follow.

White Elephant Sale The date is set for Saturday June 2: It's time to bring all of your

unwanted treasures to the society for sale at our biggest fund raiser — The White Elephant Sale — an opportunity for everyone to recycle and reclaim some space for yourselves. Spend a little time going through drawers and closets to make room and make some money for the Society. Create lots of extra space at home by passing along those unused treasures — to bring happiness to someone else (you know, *just buying* can make one happy) and bring funds to the society. Who knows what treasures you will uncover? All items except clothing can be brought at any time. Do you have a large item you can't handle? Call us and we will give you a hand. Remember: "One person's junk..."

Call the office or Jeanine (973-258-9395) for information and reservations. —*Jeanine Rosh*

FROM THE UN THE GLOBAL WATER CRISIS

Every year the UN issues a Human Development Report — really a summary of the state of the world, providing a store of information on a vast number of human welfare issues, with special attention on one. This year, 2006, the focus is on access to clean water and adequate sanitation. Like hunger and malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and adequate sanitation is a silent crisis. But a silent crisis has its fallout of devastating health consequences for millions, most especially for children.

1.8 million children die each year as a result of diarrhoea. Deaths from diarrhoea in 2004, one year alone were some six times greater than the average annual deaths from armed conflict from the whole of the 1990s. Close to half of all people in developing countries suffer at any given time from disease, severe health problems such as cholera, typhoid, trachoma, parasitic worms. One billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to clean water. 40% of the world's popula-

tion, 2.6 billion, lack basic sanitation. Inevitably this results in large economic losses in terms of health spending and reduced productivity.

This report highlights the less well known but vital point that, in a large number of cases the water needs have institutional and political causes, not created by scarcity. The problem is mostly man-made, either through mismanagement or political favoritism. The report notes that when it comes to water and sanitation the world suffers from a surplus of conferences and a deficit of credible action.

What would it cost to improve this situation with known and targeted action? The authors' estimate that it would cost \$10 billion a year to halve the percentage of people without access to safe drinking water, and to provide them with simple pit latrines. But that cost is less than five days worth of global military spending and less than half of what rich countries spend each year on bottled water. It would save more than one million children's lives over the next decade. The human development gains would be immense — economic benefits of about \$38 billion annually. What a bargain!

Is there precedence for effective social action? Just over 100 years ago, infant mortality rates in Washington, DC were twice what they are today in sub-Saharan Africa. Water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery and typhoid accounted for 1 in 10 deaths in US cities in the late 19th century, with children the primary victims. In the UK and elsewhere, the industrial revolution helped people to become wealthier but not healthier. The poor moved from rural to urban areas to benefit from the boom, while overburdened cities turned into lethal open-air sewers. Epidemics of typhoid and cholera swept through cities like New Orleans and New York.

By the end of the 19th century, governments recognized that diseases associated with water and sanitation

could not be isolated in the cities' poor tenements. It was to the public's interest to take action. In the UK and the US and elsewhere massive investments were made in effective sewage systems and purification of water supplies. No period of US history has witnessed such rapid declines in mortality rates. The report gives examples of limited local community actions. In India and Pakistan slum dwellers associations have collaborated in innovative programs to bring sanitation to millions of people. The total sanitation campaign in Bangladesh has been scaled up from community-based projects to highly effective national programs.

Cambodia, China, India and Zambia have also adopted national programs. Brazil was successful in promoting safer sewage systems, bringing sanitation to millions of people through community programs. Still, community led initiatives alone, though important, are not sufficient, and are not a substitute for government action. South Africa is an inspiring example of government action. Some 83% of the population now have access to clean water compared to 59% at the end of apartheid in 1994. Now some 70% have access to acceptable sanitation. This is a substantial improvement compared to 48% in 1994 when access to water was used as a tool of apartheid by the white racist regime.

Governments should not be permitted to let millions die, when targeted action can work. Mahatma Gandhi once commented that "the difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems." If you would like to help, UNICEF has a program targeted for children. Others can be found by googling clean water and sanitation programs.

Phyllis Ehrenfeld AEU's National Service Conference Representative to the UN. Sylvain Ehrenfeld IHEU Representative to the UN.

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ETHICAL CULTURE

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

March, 2007

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.

March 4 Boe Meyerson, Leader, *“Iraq — the way in and the ways out: an exploration”*. Boe will explore our nation’s troubled history in Iraq and explore reasonable options for closure. Boe is the Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County and the Ethical Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

March 11 Anja Moen, *“Women’s achievements in Scandinavia and around the world”*. In a general context of life in Norway, Anja will discuss how women’s positions are affected politically, socially, and economically in the Norwegian environment with its version of political, social and economic justice for all.

She says, “Too often we only hear of the hardships women face in other countries and cultures. There are nations with positive stories to tell about their women. For example, all the Scandinavian countries do. While definitely Scandinavian, Norway is also unique. It stands outside the European Union and has major energy resources in oil from which it derives significant revenues. Norway uses these revenues to strengthen social equality for all its citizens.”

Anja Moen was born and grew up in Oslo, Norway, moving to the United States (Alaska) in 1989 and New Jersey in 1999. Throughout her life she

has been interested in politics and social action issues. She will describe the positive accomplishments by and for women in Scandinavia by focusing on Norway.

March 18 Leslie Kandell, *“In your face: smooth personal tactics in urban spaces”*. Leslie Kandell will discuss some ingeniously diplomatic approaches to use in those petty but aggravating moments that tempt you to abandon ethical principals — for example when you see someone drop garbage on the street, or steal a parking space.

Leslie Kandell is familiar to New York Times readers from her weekly features on music and dance in New Jersey from 1994 to 2002 and her articles in other sections of the Times. Her most recent talk at the Ethical Culture Society was about her work in locating and reconnecting with students she once taught on the Lower East Side. Leslie Kandell is a graduate of Ethical Culture’s Fieldston School.

March 25: Fred Profeta, *“The greening of Maplewood from top to bottom.”* The Mayor of Maplewood will outline the various initiatives planned or underway to protect our environment and conserve our natural resources, some technical and some social.

Fred R. Profeta is a lawyer with a practice in Manhattan, in the areas of

Trial and Appellate Litigation. He is also serving his second term as Mayor of Maplewood.



Mayor Profeta was born in Flushing, New York, attended Yale University (A.B., 1961) where he was an NCAA Silver Medalist as Captain of the Fencing Team, and Harvard University (LL.B., 1964; LL.M., 1965). He has been a member of the Planning Board since 1986, elected to the Town Council in 2003 and Mayor since 2004.

Mayor Profeta received Maplewood’s Distinguished Citizen Award (1999), having served on innumerable Boards and Committees, some of which he was instrumental in establishing, including: South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race, Inc. (founder, trustee and first chairman); Maplewood Village Alliance (founder and director); Springfield Avenue Partnership (founding trustee); Columbia High School Alumni Association, Inc. (founder and first president). In addition, he has served on the South Orange/Maplewood Board of School Estimate, Economic Development Advisory Committee, Historic Preservation Committee, Transportation Committee and Neighborhood Preservation Program.