



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 8

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APRIL, 2005

Leader's Message

Dear Members,

On March 1, The US Supreme Court ruled that the imposition of the death penalty upon persons under 18 years of age at the time of the commission of the crime was not consistent with the 8th amendment to the US Constitution.



It thereby reversed its prior ruling made 16 years ago when it ruled such punishment to be constitutional. The majority opinion cited two reasons for its decision. One was the body of scientific evidence supporting the findings that adolescents lack maturity, have an underdeveloped sense of responsibility, and as a consequence act impetuously, without appropriate consideration of the nature and consequences of their actions. Insofar as adolescents have less capacity to make judgments than adults as a rule, it follows that the imposition of the death penalty on adolescents is therefore disproportionate.

Justice Kennedy asserted that the impetuosity of teenagers is something almost every parent has experienced. I am reminded of the joke about the question "when does life begin." The Priest answered "at conception," the Minister answered "not until the end of the second trimester," and the Rabbi answered "not until it graduates medical school." Unlike the Priest and the Minister, the rabbi was referring to the life of the parents and the ways in which their lives can be diminished by the immense care of not only adolescents but young adults as well.

The other reason cited in the majority opinion was the change in moral

sensibilities both at home and abroad. Justice Kennedy explained how the majority of states no longer support the death penalty for acts committed while under the age of 18. Furthermore he explained that since 1990 only 7 other nations in all the world imposed the death penalty on juvenile offenders. He then indicated that since then each of those countries has either abolished the death penalty for juveniles or disavowed the practice. (They were Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and China.) We stood alone in all the world in publicly supporting this practice.

There was a time when this nation was very young that one could readily say that we offered the world a moral model that was in many ways a beacon for other nations. (The great exception being the horrendous institution of chattel slavery.) Yet that time of this nation's youth seems very far off indeed these days. And when I think of the use of torture and the diminishment of our rights under the Patriot Act and other measures taken recently, we all have reason to mourn. In this context, it is not clear how much reassurance one should feel in light of this fine and thoughtful decision.

Best to you all, Boe

Fundraiser Calendar

Progressive Dinner Saturday April 16
What is a progressive dinner? It is an event that starts out with good food and great company, moves to greater heights with dinner, and ends up with cake and the icing on the cake — contented spirits. Keep your calendar free on Saturday evening, April 16, for our latest fund raiser idea. We start with a

cocktail party at the society at 6 p.m., and then we take it on the road — dinner, libation, desserts. You just need to be there, and we'll take care of the details. Donation for the evening is \$25. Call the society to reserve — you need to do this now to avoid the disappointment of finding that we're booked to capacity. For information call the society office (973-763-1905) or Jeanine Rosh (973-258-9395).

White Elephant Sale Saturday May 7

All articles, including clothing, can now be brought to the society. Please be sure clothing is clean and usable. Bring your things now — so that they can be sorted and priced. Leave no cabinet or cubby unsearched. Remember, this is our biggest money raising event, where we can get the public in to participate. — *Jeanine M. Rosh*

Coming in June:

Boe's Gourmet Lunch at the lake.

Social Action Committee Is Alive and Well!

Next meeting: April 3 at 1 p.m. after platform.

The Committee met February 27 over ziti with sauce and mussels provided by Win Thies. Chair Sue Willis called the group to order and made announcements about letters received from legislators in response to our December call for better oversight of elections.

Win reported that our nomination for the AEU Elliott-Black Award, Dr. Jack Kevorkian, was not chosen. The AEU chose instead Frank Kameny, father of the Gay Rights Movement. He will be honored at the AEU assembly during the Memorial Day weekend.

The group voted to rejoin NJ Citizen Action if we have a budget to do so. The group also voted to offer our

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.

Ethical Culture Society
of Essex County,
516 Prospect St.,
Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Visit our web site: www.essexethical.org

“One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

support for the ACLU-NJ suit about municipalities flying the “One Nation Under God” flags donated by the Knights of Columbus.

Boe volunteered to call the next meeting, which will be April 3 at 1 p.m. Also on that day, April 3, we will organize a card writing, giving people at the Society the opportunity to support the house bill to form a Department of Peace (HR 1673). New committee members Anja Moen and Joan Bernitz agreed to prepare postcards and addresses of representatives as well as to “person” a table to ask people to send letters. Other Social Action Committee members will support this effort.

We discussed Win's list of areas of interest to take on and decided to continue that discussion at the next meeting. Win will resend the e-mail listing the ideas. He also suggested planning some lunch discussions for self-education of our committee and Boe thought these might be broadened to include more people. Sue suggested that such discussions might lead to member platforms in the fall.

Full of plans, the group adjourned.

— Meredith Sue Willis

Welcome to Newest Member

Let me introduce our newest member, Anja Moen. Anja was born in Oslo, Norway, and from her earliest days was guided by her parents along a humanist path. She attended a very liberal school at which she learned about the individual's role in government.

Anja studied sociology and went on to become a special ed teacher. When she married, she moved north of Oslo and started a family. After living in Alaska, the family decided to move to New Jersey to “experience more of the world”. How lucky for us to have her here in Jersey, at Essex Ethical!

Rosalie Sussman, *Membership Comm.*

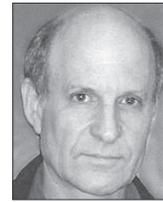
Telephone Tree Update

We all want to know about events affecting Society members requiring immediate attention. Should an event occur to a member or in a member's family, such as a death, sudden illness or hospitalization, call Rosalie at 973-763-3819. Using guidelines set by our board, Rosalie will then pass on the news to our membership by e-mail and phone.

Paul Surovell Honored

Maplewood issued a Proclamation honoring Paul Surovell, the 2004 recipient of the Essex County Ethical Culture Society's coveted Sal Santaniello Humanitarian Award.

A New York City mathematics teacher who has lived in Maplewood for 27 years, Paul served in the United States Army as a medic from 1969 to 1971, following which



he joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Paul has devoted himself for decades to the promotion of peaceful solutions to international disputes and has pursued this

goal locally through South Mountain Peace Action, supporting current efforts to bring a United Nations solution to the Iraqi War, which will allow United States troops to return home as soon as possible. Paul played a leadership role in the distribution of “Be About Peace” signs throughout Maplewood, South Orange, and the larger region.

The Proclamation noted that “it is appropriate to recognize these efforts of Paul Surovell ... and with thanks for his efforts in effectuating peaceful solutions, in bringing positive community change, and in anticipation of his future efforts and dedication to the Township of Maplewood.”

Paul said that he accepted the award “... on behalf of the hundreds of members of our community who have dedicated their time and energy to humankind's most cherished goal, the goal of peace.” He then thanked, among others, “12-year-old Jackson Roberts, whose elegant sign and message, ‘Be About Peace’, graces the lawns of so many homes in our community.”

“I also want to recognize those members of our community,” Paul said, “who share our commitment to peace, but who disagree with South Mountain Peace Action and our positions. Because what makes Maplewood truly wonderful and truly remarkable, is the absolute respect we show each other even when we disagree. A respect which is founded on our mutual reverence for democracy. And so I want to stress that the honor I'm receiving tonight is about democracy as much as it is about peace.”

Platforms (continued from page 4)

tional and visionary.

Fritz Williams is leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society. He brings an unusual combination of ministerial and broadcast communication experience to this work. Fritz is a graduate of the Philadelphia Lutheran Theological Seminary, has a Master's Degree in Biblical Studies from Princeton Theological Seminary and has served several Episcopal Churches in the Philadelphia Area as a parish priest. After leaving the Episcopal Ministry, Fritz wrote and produced television programs and videos at public television stations in Harrisburg, PA and Detroit, MI.

Fritz's talks deal with basic human issues in a direct, honest, and compassionate way and they are filled with moving first-hand accounts of his own experiences and feelings. He speaks regularly at the Baltimore Ethical Society on the first Sunday of the month.

Department of Peace

On Sunday, April 3, immediately following the platform, please join us for fellowship and "carding" (sending postcards to our legislators) to support the bill to create a cabinet-level Department of Peace. For information, consult the ECS website (www.essex-ethical.org) or call Betty Levin, 973-763-1033. Betty is coordinator of Tikkun, which also supports this bill and is arranging visits to legislators for additional co-sponsorship and support. At present, there are 52 co-sponsors.

What is Tikkun?

Tikkun, a biblical hebrew word meaning to heal and repair the world, is a resurgent social movement based on caring and compassion. These qualities represent "soft power", in contrast to the prevailing power of dominance by money and military might. The following workshop description (of a program Betty will present in May at

the NJ Counseling Association conference) expands on this theme:

"No matter how gifted and effective counselors we are with our clients, they still have to live in a society highlighted by these malignant qualities. Attention will be paid to the long tradition of social justice-oriented spirituality from Isaiah, Amos and Jesus, to Martin Buber, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Participants will be asked to share their wisdom, gleaned from spiritual practices that enrich their individual lives and society as well. Hopefully, this approach can help build a network of spiritual progressives who can count on one another. Together we shall try to restore hope and possibility in our age of cynicism."

Thus far, we have had three Tikkun Teach-ins. For information, call Betty Levin, 973-763-1033.

Mark your calendars:

April 8 Folk Singing

7:30 p.m. second Friday of the month with Lisa Novemsky. Check in advance by calling the office (973-763-1905) or email Lisa at lnovemsky@comcast.net.

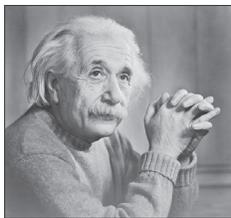
Free Consumer Education Program on Linux at Society

A presentation at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 22 by Martin Power from Plainfield and Dan Bender from Maplewood will establish that "Linux is free, legal and now about as easy to use as Windows, and will save you many hundreds of dollars."

Every modern Intel / Microsoft Windows computer is capable of running other operating systems. First among them is Linux. It can be downloaded for free, and you will never need to buy software. Your home computer can be set up to run both Windows and/or Linux. This is a fact that commercial interests would rather you not know.

This presentation will show actual Linux application doing things like internet browsing, email, word processing, text editing, programming, audio editing and recording, accounting, spreadsheets, and database applications. You will learn how you too can participate in, and benefit from, this extremely successful international, collaborative, non-profit project.

For information, contact: Martin Power (908) 755-4022.



Albert Einstein, (March 14, 1879 – April 18, 1955)

"Science has been charged with undermining morality, but the charge is unjust. A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death."¹

"...But science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding."²

"One knows from daily life that one exists for other people — first of all for those upon whose smiles and well-being our own happiness is wholly dependent, and then for the many, unknown to us, to whose destinies we are bound by the ties of sympathy. A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving..."³

¹ "Religion and Science", *New York Times Magazine* (November 9, 1930); also used in the obituary in *New York Times* (April 19, 1955)

² "Science, Philosophy and Religion, A Symposium", published by the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc., New York (1941)

³ "Mein Weltbild" (1931) translated as "The World As I See It" in *Ideas and Opinions* (1954)

Photo by Yousef Karsh (February 11, 1948)

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE

SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

April, 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.

April 3 Boe Meyerson *In the Service of a US Department of Peace.* Boe Meyerson is the Leader of the Ethical Society of Essex and is the Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University. In her address, she will present the outlines of Congressman Kucinich's unprecedented idea of creating a US Cabinet-level Department of Peace as contained in his bill currently pending in the US House of Representatives. Then she will analyze the reasons why a government agency with such a mission could potentially have a revolutionary impact on both domestic and foreign affairs. Were it successful, it might serve as a model for other nations. The human race has long devoted itself to the arts of war. We are still in our infancy regarding the arts of peace.

Social Action Committee will meet Sunday April 3 after platform.

Reminder: April 3 (the first Sunday of April) Daylight Saving Time begins.

April 10 Steve Goldstein *Supporting Marriage for Same-Sex Couples from an Ethical Perspective.* Steven Goldstein is chair of the statewide lesbian and gay advocacy organization Garden State Equality. For the past three years, Steven has also worked as director of Lambda Legal's campaign to institute a domestic partnership law and marriage equality for lesbian and gay couples in

New Jersey. The domestic partnership law was enacted last year by the largest margins for comprehensive gay rights legislation in US history, and the fight continues in the courts to allow lesbian and gay couples to marry. Steven has served as senior staff member to three United States Senators and ran Jon Corzine's successful campaign for the US Senate in 2000. Steven is also a former television producer who holds 10 Emmy Awards and once worked for Oprah Winfrey. Steven and his partner Daniel, together 12 years, also made history in 2002 when they became the first same-sex couple ever to be included in the wedding announcements of the New York Times. Steven is a lawyer by training who is also studying to be a rabbi. He'll be entering the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College this fall.

April 17 Phyllis Ehrenfeld *What I Learned About Women at The UN.* Ms. Ehrenfeld explores historical and religious images of women and connects them to the struggle for human rights that began at the UN with Eleanor Roosevelt and continued with Mary Robinson, former High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UN has undergone a significant development in thinking — changing concern for women's needs into an empowerment concept recognizing the importance of

women worldwide both in economic development and in peacekeeping negotiations.

Phyllis Ehrenfeld has done post-graduate work at McGill School of Social Work and Dept. of Contemporary Literature at Columbia University. She received the Arnold Gingrich Award for the most highly recommended Fellowship in Prose from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Five of her plays have been presented in Bergen County. For ten years she was Editor of the American Anorexia Bulimia Association Newsletter. She is a contributing editor to the Ethical Culture Review of Books. As Representative to the UN from the AEU's National Service Conference she reports, together with husband Sylvain Ehrenfeld, on the UN in monthly articles which appear in a number of newsletters and websites.

April 24 Fritz Williams *A Living Faith.* Mr. Williams attempts to liberate faith from its escapist bondage to supernatural beliefs. He proposes a new and more dynamic definition of faith. It is a definition that grounds faith in our real life experiences and responses. Thus, these humble raw materials are woven into a transformative commitment to making something of our lives. Real faith, he says is both ra-

(continued on page 3)