



ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 1

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SEPTEMBER 2004

Leader's Message

I look forward to our first Sunday meeting after our long summer recess learning about your experiences during this period. I hope your summer was refreshing and renewing. If not so, if it has been troubling and filled with cares, then I hope our reunion may offer some solace or diversion.



My summer has been filled with both care and refreshment. I am still helping my aging parents as they struggle with more and more challenges. Together, we have weathered many storms this summer and hope for calmer weather. Yet I have still managed to take some time to vacation with friends of mine who live on the other side of this continent. I was in Alaska for about a week with my friend who was giving a field course on Mountain Ecology and Glacier life cycles. This was my first trip to Alaska. I would like to tell you a little about that trip as it inspired the subject of my first address this season.

At first Anchorage appeared not terribly different from other airports in the "lower 48" or "outside" as they say in Alaska. Yet what I was to later learn and what was not then observable was the fact that 42 percent of the population of the state lives in Anchorage. This is quite a revelation when one realizes that the state covers over 350 million square miles. This state was not called the "last frontier" for nothing. Those who do not live in Anchorage or the other major cities of Fairfield or Juno, etc., have the full benefit of the rest of the

country's wide open spaces or rather "the bush" as Alaskans would say. One can rarely expect government services to be available in the "bush" and the services needed (whether physical or social) must be supplied by those who live there. The "bush" can be quite unforgiving. In the winter above the arctic circle, temperatures of minus sixty degrees are not uncommon. In other parts of the state winter temperatures of minus thirty-five degrees are not considered at all unusual. When you combine those numbers with wind-chill factors, we are looking at conditions that do not permit much room for error. These open spaces, the ways the people (both Native-Americans and non-Native-Americans) coped with these challenges, and the unique cultures formed by the interaction of these peoples and their land fascinated me deeply. Under these conditions in which survival itself is such a prevalent factor, moral norms stand out in greater relief. It was the moral aspects of these norms which interested me the most.

Basic issues of sheer survival informed standards of personal and social conduct in both cultures (native and non-native). Both emphasized the importance of self reliance and personal skills as essential. One could not expect others to do for you what you are capable of doing yourself. Personal responsibility is rated highly in this part of the world. Personal irresponsibility general need not be punished socially;

nature generally takes care of that. In this sense the native and other cultures have a great deal in common. To varying degrees they also share another cultural trait, although not as pervasively. That is the social cohesion needed to maintain survival of both individuals and the community. It is here that we can see a more vivid contrast with mainland culture. I was told that it is almost unheard of for a motorist to fail to stop to aid the occupant of a disabled vehicle in the bush. Similarly, hitchhikers are routinely picked up. This is not the case in the lower forty eight! There is a deep sense of obligation to help those in danger. Similarly, most Alaskan Native American cultures have norms that insure survival: either patterns of

total sharing of all food or patterns of gift giving that redistribute wealth.

These dramatic patterns of ethical behavior raise interesting questions about the ethical motivations of the people and the culture. Is it a matter of respecting life, that leads the motorist to stop? Or is it care for the other person as brother

or fellow member of the community that motivates the action? A secondary question is which motivation or justification is better, more moral, more sound? In short which principle is more fundamental and ought to be the primary one? Or should a spirit of plurality prevail? Think about it and share your thoughts during the discussion period following my address on Sunday, September 12 at 11:00am. *Till then all the best, Boe*

"...issues of sheer survival informed standards of personal and social conduct..."

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 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.,
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Visit our web site:
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Fund Raising Committee Rises to Fall Challenge

With a full understanding that the committee will have to work overtime to come close to the fabulous Gourmet Lunch hosted by Boe at her place this summer, we forge ahead and move toward another banner season of funds and frolic.

Our first fall fundraiser will be off to an early start in August, when you receive your list of fine homemade foods for purchase late summer through October 1st. Members and friends will be offering special food treats for you to buy – with delivery to be arranged by November 30th. Goodies offered will include entrée items as well as special dishes, secret recipes, breads and desserts. What a painless and delicious way to support the work of the society. Watch your mail for the list of goodies.

Next on the list will be a repeat performance of Jim Quigley's "Café au Jim" — a fun-filled evening with food and frolicking at Jim Quigley's place complete with all the ambiance of café dining. October is the month — watch your Sunday announcements for exact date and time. Don't miss Jim's great cooking and his gracious hosting.

The committee plans to bring back

some of the old favorite events, as well as to introduce several new and exciting projects. See the article in this issue about a fun-filled weekend offer. Keep watching the newsletter for upcoming projects, enjoy the rest of your summer and we'll see you in September.

Marie Weber & Mike Siegel Offer Wine Country Weekend as Fundraiser

Planning on being on the West Coast? Or maybe you'd just like to get away for a great weekend. Through the generosity of Mike and Marie, we have available a 3-night weekend with full breakfast and a wine country tour in Santa Rosa, CA, North of San Francisco. Bed and Bath places in that area go for at least \$150 a night. We're offering the package for \$250, proceeds to go to the Ethical Society. Naturally, arrangements must be made in advance with the hosts. Maybe you can work it into your schedule. It's a wonderful opportunity to see the area and visit with dear people. Contact Nancy Bohn, Jeanine Rosh, or call the office.

—Jeanine M. Rosh

Letters

Doug Proops writing from Dhaka

The flood waters are receding for now, so perhaps this year's monsoon season will not be more terrible than it already has — the season lasts for another month typically. Hopefully, we'll escape any typhoons later in the year. Although we live in an upscale neighborhood, the floods have also affected this area — several key roads under water, many people displaced by the rising lake levels, and other folks homes/businesses under some water. To help our adjustment, we have a car and driver for the month of August. Our driver's home was under 2

meters of water and now his 7 month old baby is ill with diarrhea. She is getting better he said, though the medical expenses are considerable. I haven't figured out the best way for us to help him — I need to talk to Judy about this. 8/3/04

Gratitude

My deepest thanks for being so responsive to my recent accident. Your cards, phone calls and good wishes were touching and meant a lot to me. Your thoughtfulness will always be remembered.

—Freda Fink Armstrong

From the Education Committee

As of Sept 12, our Ethics for Children “explorations” will be in the hands of Dick Varker (with the older children) and Carol Varker (with the younger ones), assisted by me and other members of the education committee. We hope to find a qualified RE teacher, but for now this is an arrangement we hope will provide any child coming to ECS with value-oriented fun and companionship. Thanks to Jill Fox and her co-educators, we’re equipped with a fascinating curriculum. To deepen our own understanding of Ethical culture and what we’ll be imparting to the children, we plan to meet for discussions each Thursday, guided when possible by Boe. All are welcome!

—*Elaine Durbach Norstein, Chair of the Religious Education Committee*

Oh, This Place Where We Meet

This house was crumbling to all’s dismay, when Marshall the caretaker began to play. Windows were fixed (they’d been broken for years). Coffee and creamcheese ground into the rug were steamed off EC with the push of a plug. The meeting room, the meeting room, the color’s all wrong! Well, I’ve changed it. And that’s where it will stay, until it gets dirty some other day. The kitchen floor was broken and yucky; now it is new. Aren’t you lucky!



Rain, rain, go away.

The basement is flooded, I need a canoe,
water is dripping right into my shoe
(I went to Home Depot, and moved all the rain spouts
away from the house. Now the basement is dry)
but what do I do with a bright-yellow-greenish canoe?
There were many things done, but space is too tight.
I’ll tell you about them some other night.

—*Marshall Norstein, ECS Caretaker*



Excerpts from AROUND THE AEU

AUSTIN TX

Three strikes and the Texas Comptroller is out. The Texas Comptroller asserted that a faith without a god is not admissible as a religion in Texas for tax exemption purposes. Tax-exemption for the Ethical Society of Austin was upheld this month by the Supreme Court of Texas! That was the initial ruling in the Trial Court; then the Texas Court of Appeals; now the Supreme Court of Texas. The Comptroller may now file with the US Supreme Court if he wishes to waste time and money. (This editor recalls that the US Supreme Court held in the case of conscientious objection that a person’s humanist belief’s are “equivalent” to a “religion.” The Seeger decision and general US laws recognize many religions broadly including Scientology)... Indeed, one Sunday meeting this month is entitled “Changes in the

Conception of God: Adler and Others” ... another Sunday is given to “Understanding Transcendence”... another is a Colloquy on “Community: In What Way Is Your Life Enriched by Others?”

BALTIMORE MD

President Bob Corbett links two books: “War Is A Force Which Gives Us Meaning” by Chris Hedges and “Man’s Search for Meaning” by Victor Frankl. From the first book, “If war is so horrible, why do we keep doing it? We end one horror determined never to repeat it, only to find a generation later that we have forgotten the lesson and are condemned to commit the folly once again.... because it gives us meaning.”

BERGEN NJ

Joe Chuman, “...For humanism, the process of coping with change, loss

and grief does not end with self-reliance. We are social beings, and to look into ourselves for strength is not to deny our dependence on others also... . If humanism teaches anything, it is the strength that comes from the human bond. ... Sometimes those who are going through great loss or tragedy are merciful with us — they don’t want us to do anything, but to simply be present with them. Sometimes human presence is all that is needed...”

“The International Criminal Court, once considered a utopian dream, is NOW in operation.” The court is now looking for cases, report the Ehrenfelds from the UN. Not every case will be tried but the ones that fit the aims of the 92 signatory nations. The list of signatories is expanding and someday may include the US.

— *courtesy Stan Wayne, AEU Clipping Service*

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

Sunday Morning Platforms

Platforms begin 11 a.m. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. Sunday School 11 a.m.—12:15 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 12 BOE MEYERSON

The Primary Ethical Principle: Caring or Respect? This address explores the competing first principles of the Feminist school of ethics and the Kantian rationalist school of the Enlightenment. Both schools offer profound but wholly different answers to the question of what is the primary principle of ethics. Boe Meyerson is the Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex and holds a graduate degree in philosophy from Columbia University where she is now the Humanist Chaplain.

SEPTEMBER 19 JAN KREGEL

Ethics of Economic Development. International trade: who benefits under what conditions? Free trade? Fair trade? Under what rules? How do the international institutions — World Bank and International Monetary Fund — work, and to whose benefit? Dr. Kregel will describe the underlying issues determining winners and losers. Dr. Jan Kregel works in policy analysis and development in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Kregel received his training in eco-

nomics at Rutgers University and the University of Cambridge; he has held lectureships and senior lectureships in universities in the UK, chairs of economics in the US and Netherlands and visiting chairs of economics and finance in Belgium, France, Germany and Mexico.

SEPTEMBER 26 MIRA STILLMAN

The Great Russian Novel. Member Mira Stillman is a teacher (retired English instructor from Rutgers University and Drew University) and writer. Mira has lead wonderful book discussion groups at our Society.

OCTOBER 3 BOE MEYERSON

Our Nation's Place in this World. This address explores, from a moral perspective, our nation's past and present trends in foreign relations as well as our future options.

OCTOBER 10 JANET ALBRIGHT

interviewed by Joe Gluck & Barbara Heisler Williams about the musical composition she is preparing. Commissioned by the Maplewood and South Orange Community Coalition, "Continental Harmony" —

At Essex Ethical:

Please call the society office for up-to-date information:

Folk Music September 10

7:30pm every 2nd Friday
Always the second Friday, but please call the society number or email lnovemsky@comcast.net to check in advance.

Philosophy Group

9:30–10:30 a.m. every 2nd and 4th Sunday

Poetry Series

7:30 p.m. every 3rd Monday.
Contact Tom Obrzut 973-275-0929

OCTOBER 10

PLATFORM COMMITTEE

MEETING 1:00 pm
following platform

the musical composition Ms. Albright will compose for our two towns — will debut July 3, 2005.

OCTOBER 17 JIM WHITE

Leader emeritus of our Ethical society, Jim is the principal attorney for Mental Hygiene Legal Services representing psychiatric patients in New York Stat. He is a community activist in Harlem and participates in the Coalition Against the Violence Initiative.

OCTOBER 24 BETTY LEVIN

The UN and the 75-year connection to Ethical Culture.