

Dialogue

American Ethical Union

November 2002



Mr. President:

I have been following your recent statements about the dangers of Iraq with great concern and consternation. As I understand it, you and members of your ad-

ministration believe that Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, has been secretly preparing to launch attacks with weapons of mass destruction and that this, coupled with the track record of attacking neighbors and attacking his own citizens, is cause enough to justify preemptive use of force against him. A second line of reasoning suggests that use of force in the near future is not preemptive but is, rather, a continuation of the action sanctioned by the United Nations a decade ago in response to Iraq's attack and occupation of Kuwait. Since Iraq did not fully comply with the demand for unimpeded inspections to detect the presence of weapons of mass destruction, use of military force is the consequence of Iraq's failure to abide by the U.N. resolutions.

While Saddam Hussein seems to be a man of well-deserved ill repute, the justifications offered for mounting a military attack to remove him from power and destroy Iraq's capacity to deploy weapons of mass destruction have been far from convincing. My own reservations are not over the possible success of such a venture. As the pre-eminent military power of the world, the United States has the capacity to wage a decisive war against Iraq or any other single country on earth.. It seems to me, however, that there has not been sufficient weight given to the consequences of using our forces in this manner.

As an American citizen I am proud of our ideals of freedom, equality and democracy. Our nation is a powerful leader and has great influence in world affairs. But leadership by force is bound to have disastrous consequences. It is particularly shortsighted to imagine, first of all, that a military attack on Iraq would not result in severe instability in the entire region. The United States is already seen in a bad light by many in the Middle East. Forcing our will upon Iraq is bound to greatly exacerbate our poor relations.

But there are other far-reaching consequences, too. Already other nations have followed in the footsteps of the recent U.S. war on terrorism, and have used our behavior to justify their own attacks, occupations and threats of force

against perceived enemies. As we turn to the use of military force, so too do other nations. If we are the world's leader, where, Mr. President are we leading the world?

In the past year much has been said of the terrible acts committed against civilians on September 11, 2001. The tremendous outpouring of grief over the victims of the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon drew our nation together and instilled a new resolve to look beyond our borders. We are, however, in great danger of promulgating a double standard in our attitudes about ourselves as against our attitudes about non-Americans. We have deeply mourned our losses but have barely acknowledged the many deaths of civilians at our hands in Afghanistan. We have proclaimed our need for justice but have refused to acknowledge the rights of those we have incarcerated in the effort to combat terrorism.

We cannot assure security by use of force or by stripping the rights of other human beings. Such actions will ultimately cause more ire on the part of those who live outside of our "gated community," spreading ill will among enemies and friends alike. If we are to truly lead the world let us put our best foot forward and seek ways to join with other nations in promoting freedom and justice. If we are to lead the world let us do so by putting into practice in our foreign relations the very ideals we so cherish at home.

Sincerely,

Bart Worden

Leader, Ethical Society of Westchester

In This Issue

Page

1. Mr. President
2. An Ethical Perspective
AEU Calendar
3. 2002 Summer School
4. The Anniversary of September 11
My Ethical Culture
5. Invincible Superstition
Be Merry Friends as Darkness Falls
6. The Standard Setter
7. Ethical Culture 101
Religion means...
8. Board of Directors Meeting 9/7/02
Non-Government Org. Conference
9. Nonbelievers Have Rights
One Nation Under Whose God?
10. From the UN
11. AEU News & Happenings
Physician Aid in Dying
12. The Most Necessary of All Faiths

CORRECTION: Part of the last sentence of Fritz Williams's article in the September *Dialogue* was inadvertently omitted. The complete sentence reads: **Refusing to engage in moral warfare is part of what we mean in Ethical Culture when we speak of honoring the worth of all human beings.** -Ed.

**An Ethical Perspective:
INSUFFICIENT REVULSION**
Stanley Wayne, Boston

What a terrible summer this was for two important American institutions. The Roman Catholic Church fell into its greatest crisis since its churches began to be constructed in every town in the United States. Wall Street and our publicly held corporations fell into their greatest crisis since corporations were first granted charters. In 1929, the American economy ground to a halt, which was ended by a government restart that got people back to work. Society had a world-wide money problem. Today we have a morality and personality problem with worldwide implications.

Francis Fukiyama only a few years ago wrote *The End of History* in which he believably regarded trust as the foundation for our new global peacefulness and economic order. McDonald's and Visa/MasterCard provided the paradigm for world commerce and travel. One standard made it possible for tourists to find reliable and healthy hamburgers anywhere in the world, and compensation and exchange became reliable and speedy. You could bank on the good practice of workers and employers all over the globe, because they followed one standard of good behavior appropriate for a secular, scientific and increasingly democratic world-class society. You could trust strangers in the new global economy even in matters of food and money.

This summer, the Church and Wall Street created an end to trust. The Roman Church previously had an identity as a caring institution providing shelter for the young and vulnerable. Then the Church's own records demonstrated that protection of priests took priority over protection of children. Sex, so often seen as a mortal sin for parishioners, was seen as a par-

donable defect in its priests. Wall Street, a place of worldwide investment, became a wild west show of dissimulation. Professional standards of accountants became deactivated. Government oversight through the SEC was slow in appearing if it was observed at all. A moral and institutional black hole held severe pain for those who were the victims of a regression to primitive money grabbing by corporation leaders.

Recovery of trust would have been facilitated by admissions of guilt. Some in the Church scandal and at least one officer of Enron committed suicide. But the Church and business establishments soon closed their ranks and their consciences. With Cardinal Law of Boston blaming others for inadequate decision-making and President Bush speaking of Wall Street as not being black and white issues, our leadership rejected any accountability. Moral ambiguity was claimed by the establishment while most people were shocked by betrayal.

Some day trust will be restored to our social institutions, but it will not accommodate moral ambiguity in matters of money and pedophilia. Calm and trust will be restored only when morality is restored. Law and Bush will stay or go depending on their ability to restore trust in the institutions they oversee. As this is written, one sees efforts to protect the old order by delay, hesitation, and calming of fears. Who could hope for healing and trust before there is mature acceptance of guilt? Felix Adler would have called the moral ambiguity of the present leadership "insufficient revulsion." Moral crimes have been committed. Statutes have been violated. The guilty cannot be allowed to create new standards of trust that will be credible everywhere in the modern world. Another year or more of suffering is ahead. We must as a people reach for a standard of behavior that does not violate our common sense and trust in religion or in commerce.

D i a l o g u e
Newsletter of
The American Ethical Union

President: Brian King

Editor: Lee Smalley

Editorial Board: Annabelle Glasser, Ellen McBride

Office Administrator: Donna Roberts

AEU office: 212-873-6500; fax: 212-362-0850

Website: www.aeu.org; e-mail: office@aeu.org

D i a l o g u e is on the AEU website;
click on Latest News and follow the links.

D i a l o g u e welcomes letters and original articles on themes that would be of interest to AEU members. Email to: leesma@optonline.net, or mail or fax to the AEU office.

Submissions deadline for the next edition is
November 15

A E U
C a l e n d a r

BOARD MEETINGS

January 11 & March 15: New York
May 24 & 27: Philadelphia

CONFERENCES

AEU Growth & Development Conference
November 1 & 2: Brooklyn, NY

Religious Education Conference
November 8-10: Stony Point Center, NY

Y.E.S. Conference
November 8-10: Frost Valley Center, NY

National Assembly
May 23-26:
Philadelphia

Impressions of the 2002 AEU Lay Leadership Summer School

Rich Harrison, Austin

If I had to summarize in a single word my overall impressions of the school that I attended in August, I believe it would be "memorable." I have always tried to persuade my family that it was better for our activities--such as vacations--to be memorable than to be enjoyable. Things enjoyed are often soon forgotten; memorable events are, by definition, etched into one's memory forever, and can be an enduring source of stimulation.



The AEU runs its summer school currently every two years. This interval reflects, perhaps, not only the limited number of candidates available for participation, but also the enormous amount of preparation by the staff to make the school a success and to set an example of a level of effectiveness for their students to emulate. It certainly met this objective.

The lectures were first class; the level of knowledge about Ethical Culture was most impressive; group activities were organized with careful mixing of the students; strict time-keeping was observed (a lesson for many of us); and the whole school was conducted in an atmosphere of careful consideration and support for us floundering fledglings. The essence of the exercise is, of course, leadership; that is, how to get people to act in unison for a particular activity or cause such as an Ethical Society.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there was great emphasis on group dynamics: the great diversity of personality types within a Society; what makes the differing types 'tick;' how to listen properly and understand the other person's point of view; how to get maximum benefit from others' strengths; and as inevitably occurs from time to time, what to do when people cannot agree. The theory was reinforced by daily exercises within a group of people who started from 'scratch' in their knowledge of one another at the beginning, but coalesced considerably as the week wore on. I learned quite a lot from being exposed in this way to personality types very different from my own.

The second major thrust was the history of religion and the place of Ethical Culture therein. I found this fascinating from several viewpoints. Such a history is tantamount to a history of the human race as it has evolved over the centuries, and would require an inordinate amount of reading to cover. It was therefore very helpful to have a convenient synopsis from an expert. The complex concepts invented by philosophers who give everyday words a specialized meaning rather than devise new terms, are well nigh impossible to decipher without a teacher's help. (Who, for example, could imagine what Adler meant by the 'ethical manifold' without being

given a clue?) In the 125 year history of Ethical Culture it is interesting to learn how the various Leaders have continued to mold it as society has changed.

The third significant slice of our time was allocated to what was called 'Journeys.' These consisted of still other groupings of individuals who met each evening to exchange experiences and thoughts on the life path leading them to the Ethical Culture movement. I found this by far the most moving of the personal interactions and feel that the other members of the group did, too. It was quite remarkable how, slowly but surely, we were able to reveal more and more of ourselves, and by so doing were able to connect to our fellow members. Tears were shed within our group on at least a couple of occasions as we learned more and more of each other's innermost being.

The school is held in the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina close to borders with Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee. A more idyllic setting is hard to imagine. The facilities--meeting rooms, cabin dorms, cafeteria, library, etc.--are perched atop a 4,200 foot high mountain with spectacular views of the forested hills all around covering some 10,000 square miles. We were very fortunate to have fine weather, since traditionally it rains at least part of the time; and as the darkness fell during the evening, 'journeys' discussion and the Milky Way displayed itself in all its glory, one felt privileged to be alive.

No account of the week would be complete without reference to the people who attended. There were thirty students from ten different societies including a couple of presidents and three leaders. Part of the interest lay in discovering how other societies operate. Ethical Culture has always emphasized an open attitude towards implementing activities within a basic set of guidelines, and this fact is certainly reflected in the field. As we got to know them, the students, apart from their interpersonal skills, revealed an impressive array of other talents: several instrumentalists, a singer, several actors, a natural comedian, a poet--to identify a few. The movement appears to have plenty of promising youngsters to fill leadership positions for the future.

I should also credit the AEU staff who, as already noted, worked diligently to give us the background and tools to help us be more effective. These were veterans of the movement who had many years of experience between them. Being exposed to their knowledge and wisdom was a privilege in itself. As I said at the outset, the whole school experience was memorable, and at my relatively late stage of life that fact is doubly appreciated.

THE ANNIVERSARY OF SEPTEMBER 11

Joseph Chuman, Leader, Bergen

The first anniversary of the September 11th attack on America has recently passed. Anniversaries are times of ceremonial observance and symbolic significance, and this somber milestone is no different. Symbolically, the attack provided an ominous preface to a new century and dashed the hopes for the dawning of a more peaceful era. After all, the century we were leaving was the blood-soaked century of killer ideologies; the era of Hitlerism, Stalinism, Maoism, and Pol Potism that sought to fit human beings into historically determined molds, and murdered them when they did not. The new century would bring us to a new era of greater tolerance and decency. So many believed.

The horrors of 9/11 rudely woke us up — once more — to the realization that there is no Golden Age. The political ideologies of the past century have been replaced, ironically, by the religious ideologies of the current one. The end of US-Soviet bilateralism has left the world with one remaining military and economic superpower to spread its influence and values uniformly around the globe. This process of globalization, in turn, has spawned a pluralistic counter-reaction with elements often turning malignant, xenophobic and violent. Irrationalism in the name of religion, ethnic loyalty and fervent nationalism fuels the flames of terrorism and violence, generating political instability in many regions of the world. We in the United States are not the only ones to greet the new century with feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.

The loss of confidence in the unbridled free market spurred by virtually unprecedented corporate corruption and scandal, the shrinking economy and growing unemployment have brought insecurity closer to home for

broad sectors of the American population. For millions of Catholic Americans, the revelations of sexual abuse and subsequent cover-ups have weakened if not religious faith, then faith in a trusted and previously assumed benevolent authority.

These are not the darkest times we have confronted, but they are among the most uncertain. For us humanists, the pillars of reason, egalitarianism, public purpose, civil liberties, even the idea of the secular state are under attack.

It is for these reasons I believe even more passionately that Ethical Culture is necessary. At times of threatening uncertainty, it becomes crucial to reassert our commitment to those truths and values in which we place our highest trust. In the face of growing irrationalism, we need to reaffirm our commitment to the clear light of reason, and eschew obscurantism even if it tempts us. In the face of violence, we need to continue to hold forth a vision of peace. As tribalism consumes the allegiances of so many, we need to reassert the universal dignity and rights of all human beings simply because they are human. We need to reconfirm our belief in these values and their strength to guide life, not because they are fashionable, but because we sense that there is something eminently lasting, right and decent in holding them. These are the values that ultimately given meaning to the good life.

We are Ethical Culturists. This means that we place ethical concerns before all others. It means that we recognize the irreducible worth of human beings and seek to enhance it. It means that we pursue the good as our highest dedication. And as we act the good in the service of humankind, we will assuredly believe in it.

MY ETHICAL CULTURE

Arnold Fishman

President, Philadelphia

Member AEU Board of Directors

When I bumped into Felix Adler's teaching, "Act so as to bring out the best in others, thereby bringing out the best in oneself", I was convinced he was wrong. In my judgment he reversed the process. By focusing on the other, Adler diverted our attention from the only beings who are susceptible to our control, ourselves, to objects beyond our control, everyone else. His guideline was, therefore, a prescription for failure.

If life is an ethical experience as Ethical Culture professes, then the focus of one's gaze is central. Should I be looking pri-

marily inside or outside in my efforts to live a meaningful life? Isn't the greatest good to society to develop myself? In doing so, don't I guarantee that I am in a position to contribute rather than take? The more people who are capable of making a net contribution, the smaller the number of people who need help and the larger the army of potential helpers.

If acting so as to bring out the best in others (*successfully or not*) is acting so as to bring out the best in oneself, then my philosophy and Adler's would mesh seamlessly. I could reach out to others without feeling that I was ignoring myself. I could then be confident that in concentrating on others, I was at the same time maximizing my own potential.

I know that life is about being good to oneself. I will not accept a worldview that extols suffering. While I agree that we are tested by adversity, I see no rea-

son to court it. Therefore, my resolve is to strive to live with empathy for others and integrity to myself.

Arnold Fishman is the newest member of the AEU Board of Directors. He is currently president of the Philadelphia Society and is a director of the Society's Camp Linden. Last summer, Arnold and his wife Temma attended the IHEU Congress in The Netherlands and the AEU Summer School for Lay Leadership Training. They have also attended several National Assemblies. Arnold is an attorney with a litigation practice and is admitted to the bars of New Jersey and Washington, D.C., and has appeared before numerous courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court. He regularly writes and lectures on municipal court issues.

INVINCIBLE SUPERSTITION

Larry Gray, Riverdale-Yonkers

A significant and personal reason why I became an Ethical Culturist is that I decided I shouldn't be alone in my war against superstition. Mind you, I don't think it's a war that can ever be won once and for all, either in oneself or in humanity. I have long ago concluded that superstition can never be more than contained or temporarily vanquished, and that it is similar to bad oral bacteria: one simply has to brush one's teeth every day and perhaps teach or encourage others to do likewise. I recognized my own frailty in this regard and realized that not even a good education could make me independently strong enough to withstand the occasional madness or silliness of superstition. I was compelled to seek some strength in numbers, those who also strove to be free from whatever lurked on the shadowy edges of their own minds.

My personal grudge is rooted in the memory of how my father's casual, half-baked interpretation of Christian Science may have deluded him into believing that he could safely put off a critical operation. In his proud independence and desire to be free from doctors and sickness, he gambled on Christian magic. He died of colon cancer.

Yet, as pathetic and dangerous as superstition can be, I sometimes am charmed by the quaintness of some of its forms. One summer evening as my father and I were strolling outside, I pointed at a star. My father gently, but hastily and firmly, brought my arm down. In a solemn tone, he forbade me to ever point at stars. It was his worried look and tone of voice, rather than any explanation he gave, that impressed upon me the peril of pointing at stars. I later asked my mother why one shouldn't point at stars. She, being no less superstitious than my father, explained that each star represents a human soul, and pointing would be disrespectful and maybe even harmful. She added that whenever there is a "falling star," it means someone is dying or has died.

As long as there exist superstition's three main ingredients, ignorance, fear and vanity, I dare say it's best we accept our tragic flaw, however grudgingly, just as we resign ourselves to the fact of microorganisms craving our comfortable oral darkness. But let's do keep our toothbrushes handy. And it doesn't hurt to smile at least a little.



BE MERRY FRIENDS AS DARKNESS FALLS

Tune:
"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"
Words by William R. Hafer

Be merry, friends, as darkness falls
In song your voices weave
Remember as the sun does set
Upon the solstice eve
Though this may be your darkest hour
You will not always grieve

Oh, oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy

Oh, on, tidings of comfort and joy

Our days upon this earthly stage
Are numbered from the start
And all too brief the play of life
Which one-day we'll depart
So play it now, you only get
One chance to play your part

Oh, oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
Oh, on, tidings of comfort and joy

One day we shall, each, like the sun
Set from each other's sight
And make one final journey
Into an endless night
But 'til the eve of that sweet sleep

Rejoice, dance in the light

Oh, oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
Oh, on, tidings of comfort and joy

So kindle ye a fire bright
And gather round your tribe
Raise high a song of yuletide joy
While spirits ye imbibe
And share a feast among good friends
'tis what wise folk prescribe

Oh, oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
Oh, on, tidings of comfort and joy

The WASHINGTON ETHICAL ACTION OFFICE Page does not appear in this issue because of publication time constraints. We hope to have it in all future editions -Ed.

THE STANDARD SETTER

Joel G. Sacks, Long Island

TODAY'S ETHICAL HEROES are simply people who do their jobs with honesty, diligence and respect for the public trust. But every day, news like that of the Enron epidemic demonstrates that villainy abounds and few are the heroes with the courage to oppose them. Honesty and bravery seem to be in short supply.



Levitt

ARTHUR LEVITT, the former chairman of the SEC was the standard setter. While he was in office, his agency fought a losing battle against a tide of corporate fraud. The

erosion of accounting standards encouraged many companies to issue financial statements that were intentionally misleading. Most of Levitt's efforts to reform the accounting profession failed. They fiercely opposed him. Their allies in Congress exercised a chokehold on his agency. To ward off reform, congressmen threatened to cut off his funds and tie up the SEC in endless rounds of congressional hearings. Against this pressure, Levitt was forced to retreat.

Toward the end of his tenure, four years before the Enron implosions, he made one last attempt to warn the general public, the investment community, and the accounting profession of impending dangers. If the accounting profession abandoned its watchdog role and deceptive financial reports became the norm, we could all expect great harm. His address, entitled "The Numbers Game," was given on September 28, 1998, at NYU's center for Law and Business. Reread today, his remarks are prophetic. He anticipated, in broad outlines, the possibility of an Enron-type event, though even he could not then imagine its actual

magnitude.

In his address he laid out the problem clearly. Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) were under intense pressure to meet stock analysts' earning's expectations. If they failed to do so, even by one penny, they could see the price of their stock decline as much as 15% in one day. The market was unforgiving. The stakes to appear always on target were very high. Bonuses, stock option awards, even loan covenants depended on targets being met. Persistent failure to meet goals might even put the company out of business.

Under these circumstances, more and more corporations were resorting to accounting gimmicks to make the numbers come out right. They were playing the "numbers game." Their financial statements, even if approved by outside accountants, could still contain serious misrepresentations. The actual state of the underlying business was kept a secret. To put it crassly, auditors were either approving or ignoring lies.

One specific technique of earnings engineering, recently uncovered in the WorldCom scandal can serve as a general example. The accepted way to determine a company's earnings for a quarter is to subtract from sales made during that period all the contingent expenses needed to conduct the business. What is left over, the bottom line, is the net earnings. However, the WorldCom Chief Financial Officer (CFO), constructed his financials using a device called "backing-in." He determined ahead of time the earnings figure he needed to satisfy analysts' expectations and worked the rest of the numbers backwards. In short, he allowed just enough expenses to appear on the income statement to produce the target. The real expenses? They were not disclosed.

Formerly, auditors would have

picked up non-standard gimmicks and disallowed them. Now however, they were caving in to their client's pressure to push the envelope. They either were ignoring bad accounting devices or creating them. This was especially the case when they valued the more lucrative "advisory" business over the auditing one. How could the same company that was performing both roles for a client, auditing and advising, be objective? Would the auditor of that company criticize what the advisor of the very same company had engineered?

Levitt was stressing the need to change the entire culture of accounting, not just the specific gimmicks highlighted in his report and now serving as indicators of possible fraud. Otherwise, today's gimmicks declared to be illegal would be replaced by newer gimmicks as yet to be exposed. The point was that financial statements that departed from the facts for whatever reason would ultimately be challenged by reality. Innocent investors who had relied on those statements would suffer serious financial harm. The fact that accounting firms had approved those statements would call into question the trustworthiness of the entire profession. Eventually, the erosion of standards would cause the public to lose confidence in the entire financial system and withdraw their funds from financial markets. In short, we would arrive at the point where we are today.

It seems to be the fate of today's heroes to be ignored and to be powerless to avert the catastrophes they foresee. In time, some are vindicated, but often this happens when it is too late. Unfortunately they are made to pay a very huge price for their bravery. Was George Bernard Shaw right when he remarked that in this world no good deed goes unpunished?

ETHICAL CULTURE 101

Richard Kiniry, Leader, Philadelphia

It has been suggested that I do a workshop about how to tell friends and family what an Ethical Society is, and how to explain Ethical Culture to the curious. Maybe I will organize such a class some day, but until then, I offer this explanation.



Here is my description of Ethical Culture:

It is a humanistic, naturalistic, nontheistic, religious movement. Humanistic because we accept that human beings create and live in a human world of feelings, ideas, values, philosophies, groups, and religions. We live in a human-made cultural world. We don't know what the ultimate meaning of the universe is, and as far as we can tell, it is only within our human world that anyone cares about ultimate meaning. We stay within our human world of relationships and are concerned with its joys and problems.

First, it may be an impossible task. For most people a religion without God is counter-intuitive. We are unusual. We are a religious organization without an ancient mythic story. In fact, we don't even have a modern mythical story like the Mormons, Christian Science, or Scientology. Since we don't fit into the normal categories of religious groups, we don't have the legitimacy that comes with familiar religion. People expect religion to be a world of obtuse mystery and we offer the mystery of every day living.

It is naturalistic because we don't believe in the supernatural. If it is in our human experience, it is natural, part of the natural reality we inhabit. It may be weird or sublime, but it's still natural.

And yet we function like other religious groups. We have weekly services. We have clergy people, called Leaders, who present sermon-type speeches and perform life-cycle ceremonies. We do not sacrifice or pray to any disembodied forces, but we do spend time in thoughtful reflection and self-examination.

It is nontheistic because we can't prove God one way or the other, and in fact, it doesn't matter. With or without God the primary issue of our lives remains, how do we become the best persons we can become, and how can we make the most of our time on this earth?

Ethical Culture started as an attempt to get to the essential core of religion without the exotic dogmas and rituals of the old religions. That attempt may have been a fantasy but it seemed to make sense at the time. Educated people of the nineteenth century wanted religion to make sense, but they still respected religion as the keeper of ethical values. Ethical Culture fit the times. It was practical and clean cut. It was about making people and their world better without worrying about the truth of partisan legends. In our time, though, people seem to want or need the old dogmas and rituals. Ethical Culture looks out of place and is hard to explain to people used to ordinary otherworldly religion.

It is religious because we deal with that part of the human experience that deals with meaning, purpose, and values—religion. I don't like calling us a religion, even though the government says we are, because religion connotes dogma set in stone. We are an open-ended religious perspective. We worry about each person finding his or her own purpose and fulfillment in the evolving human world. So our limited dogma is open to change when the spirit moves it.

An Ethical Culture Society is a group of people looking for meaning and satisfaction in natural human experience. The group's purpose is to help members have better lives by creative involvement with the hopes and struggles of others.

RELIGION means grappling with the deepest issues of life. It means creating purpose in a world that has no inherent purpose. It means tuning in to the mystery and beauty of the world and giving expression to those feelings. It means relating to the needs and aspirations of others and reaching out to them. It means letting science and the whole of human experience help us appreciate the connectedness of all life and respecting those profound connections in our public and private conduct.

Fritz Williams, Leader, Baltimore

HIGHLIGHTS of BOARD of DIRECTORS MEETING
New York, September 7, 2002 Annabelle Glasser, Secretary



1. Upon the recommendation of the Leadership Committee, BOB GREENWELL was certified by the Board as a full Ethical Leader. The ST. LOUIS Society has hired him to work full time in creating a new spin-off Society about 2 hours distant. Among the other Trainees, DAVID REIS, working with QUEENS, is expected to be certified this Fall; ANNE KLAEYSEN, completing her Internship at NEW YORK and LONG ISLAND, is expected to be certified in January and then become the Leader of LONG ISLAND. (RICHARD KINIRY continues as L. I.'s Interim Leader until she is certified.) The other two Trainees, RANDY BEST and KATE LOVELADY, are still in the module stage.

2. It was agreed that the Presidents of the AEU and National Leaders Council (NLC) may issue JOINT STATEMENTS IN THE NAME OF THE AEU in their roles as presidents of the two groups, on issues on which the AEU has already taken a stand.

3. The SEARCH for an EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR is proceeding. Of the 60 candidates who applied ten will be interviewed in the next month.

4. There is another VACANCY on the Board due to the resignation of Brenda Henderson for personal reasons. It is hoped that this vacancy will be filled at the next Board meeting. The President is assigning temporary liaisons to Societies that do not have any during this

period.

5. A contract has been signed with the Radisson Hotel in Philadelphia for the 2003 ASSEMBLY during the Memorial Day Weekend.

6. Several FINANCIAL items were approved: \$2,500 for Director's Insurance; \$3,000 for the Search Committee; \$5,000 for new and upgraded office equipment; up to \$25,000 to complete the outstanding audits; a change in the salary listed for Judy Toth as Membership Coordinator, to be at the rate of \$18,000/year or \$1,500/month. Financial records have now been centralized in the AEU office. Answers to member questions about how the AEU spends its money will be published in *Dialogue*.

7. The Board was informed that the WASHINGTON ETHICAL ACTION OFFICE is being re-organized. John Taylor has resigned as co-Director.

8. The functioning of the AEU OFFICE is being re-evaluated. Connie Flynn, who has been out sick for six months, will be given an indefinite Leave of Absence and a gift of appreciation for her long years of service. She has been replaced part-time by Michelle Abbott-Smith. Concern over the delay in publication of the Directory was expressed; oversight was assigned to the Publications Committee.

55th Annual UN Non-Governmental Organization Conference - September 9-11 2002

Rebuilding Societies Emerging from Conflict: A Shared Responsibility

Ellen McBride, Bergen, and Member AEU Board of Directors

At the conference there were many and varied workshops. Speakers from organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, Middle East Children's Association, and Oxfam gave excellent addresses. People from such places as Afghanistan, Guatemala, Poland, East Timor, and Uganda spoke compellingly of their first-hand experiences. Overall, the most important message that I received was that people who are being helped are often left out of the process. Without exception the message was that it is more important to educate people locally, thereby empowering them, than to provide them with services or money. The buildup of dependency is crippling; it breeds a lack of responsibility and accountability.

Other important points were that, in order to help, one must know the land, people, customs, traditions, cuisine, and much more; therefore, one must first listen. Also, that in conflict the loss of the intangible, such as relationships, is greater than the loss of the tangible.

The National Service Conference of the American Ethical Union was represented by Martha Gallahue in a workshop entitled "Rebuilding Societies: A New Approach." Nicholai Parker, a member of the New York Society, took part in a workshop on behalf of World Peace and Prayer Society. The workshop centered on meditation and dialogue as a spiritual approach to problem solving that could be used at the UN.

Our last day began in the garden as the UN's September 11 memorial took place. The bells of churches around the city tolled, and there was a moment of silence at the time the second plane hit. Ninety nations lost citizens on September 11. Inside the building there was a touching sculpture containing art by children from around the world.

There was extraordinary security this year, as we waited two hours in line to be photographed and receive our laminated tags.

“...under God...”

NONBELIEVERS HAVE RIGHTS

Annabelle Glasser, Queens
Member AEU Board of Directors

I cannot believe how intolerant the American people are toward those of other religious beliefs!

Today, because of the recent Circuit Court ruling against permitting the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, it's turned against the non-believers in the country: the humanists, the freethinkers, the atheists, the nontheists, etc.

How quickly people forget! Earlier in the 20th century the Irish Catholics were the low men on the totem pole; the Jews had quotas imposed against them; after 9/11, the Muslims became persona non grata.

I am doubly shocked at the mistaken direction offered by our political leaders, from the President and Congress on down. They are leading the parade of intolerance. Don't they realize that the Constitution's prohibition against "the establishment of religion" was designed to protect the minority against the tyranny of the majority? How dare they insist that this is a nation, which gets all its rights and powers from God!

Recent polls had indicated that non-believers represent between 10 and 15 percent of the American people. That's certainly a critical mass! Why are we being ignored?

The job of our political leaders is to guarantee that there is "liberty and justice for all," and to help the citizens of our country understand that this is what our country truly stands for.

The Queens (NY) Courier,
8/14/02

ONE NATION UNDER WHOSE GOD?

Arthur Dobrin, Leader Emeritus, Long Island

Recently the Ninth Circuit Court in California declared the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional. This has inspired some in the religious community to launch bitter attacks against the motives and character of those who would insist on a strict separation of church and state. The following is excerpted from a letter written in response to one such attack that appeared in a (Long Island) Newsday column. The column's authors, a rabbi and a priest, call themselves the "God Squad."

First, you equate the decision of the two judges from the Ninth Circuit with the religious fanaticism we have been living with since Sept 11th. To say that this decision is no different than the murders we have witnessed that were committed in God's name defies all logic. Is there no difference between the court's decision and the setting off a bomb in a shopping center? Is the court's decision the moral equivalent of flying airplanes into buildings? Are the circuit judges of California no different than Taliban judges? Is a school that recites a pledge without mentioning "under God" the equivalent of a Madrass that preaches the value of suicidal martyrdom?

Second, you state, "We Americans believe our rights come from God, not the state." Under this all-inclusive pronouncement, many Jains, some Buddhists, a majority of Unitarians, nearly all Ethical Humanists and every nonbeliever no longer qualify as Americans. I always thought that a good American was someone dedicated to freedom and justice for all. Evidently you believe that those who don't share your belief in God are, by definition, less than real Americans.

Third, you claim that without a belief in God as the basis for our rights we are left with the idolatrous worship of the state. This is patently false. I don't worship the state but I am a strong supporter of civil and human rights, and I

can make my argument on secular, not religious grounds. Neither the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, nor the charters of Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch claim that God is the basis for human rights. You can't even find that argument in the United States Constitution. I am glad that your God belief leads you to be a defender of human rights, but don't presume that because I don't share your theology I must worship the idol called the state. We all know where such language has landed us before.



In my experience, the belief in God, for most people, is independent of the defense of human rights. Do you really think that children will now be weaker defenders of personal freedom and less committed to social justice because "under

God" has been stricken? I was in school when the phrase was first introduced. We children weren't any more committed to "liberty and justice for all" after we were required to recite it. In reality, most children I've seen mumble through the whole thing, and it makes no difference to their ethical values. (Similarly, there is no evidence I am aware of that children would be more honest, etc. if the Ten Commandments were posted on blackboards or that children who attend parochial school are more ethical, or that church attendance correlates with ethical behavior.)

Since September 11th you have bent over backwards in your columns to defend Muslims in America but think nothing of attacking non-believers. It is as though a belief in God makes one a good person and, conversely, a non-belief in God makes one, if not bad, then untrustworthy. Religious people have killed the non-religious in the name of God; the religious have killed other religious people because they disagreed over the nature of God. Is it your position that those who believe in God are morally superior to those who do not?

From the UN

Sylvain and Phyllis Ehrenfeld, Bergen; Delegates to the UN from IHEU and AEU's National Service Conference

A vital issue facing the world today is the question: Can coordinated international effort reduce poverty by promoting development, while still preserving the earth's natural resources? The recent Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, is the third conference to confront this difficult problem. Not surprisingly, the meeting attended by many world leaders, and ignored by President Bush, was highly contentious. The most heated issue was the setting of firm timetables for reducing oil and gas consumption and greenhouse gas emissions from oil and coal. The world is facing the fear of possibly devastating climactic change, mostly induced by the industrially developed countries. The U.S., Canada and Japan, and oil producing countries, the heaviest polluters, successfully blocked efforts to set timetables for the conversion from oil and gas to renewable sources of energy.



assures that the Kyoto Climate Treaty will go into effect, although much weakened by U.S. non-participation. The U.S. is the producer of 25% of the world's greenhouse gases. The U.S. has aroused considerable anger and concern by resisting the Kyoto Treaty, claiming that it only applies to industrialized countries. The problem is made more difficult because unindustrialized countries need to use resources for development. However, anti-pollution devices that the U.S. is a leader in producing are too expensive for their economies.

Some good news: Russia and China will ratify the Kyoto Treaty, setting restrictions on the release of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases. This

One accomplishment: the Summit has promised to help supply affordable energy to some 2 billion people who have no access. Regrettably, there was no deadline, and not much support for the effort to boost renewable power.

Another contentious issue was trade. Secretary of State Powell, in his speech, repeated the usual mantra that trade is the engine of development. However, this is notably self-serving since the U.S. and the European Union are under no obligation to phase out their massive subsidies for agriculture and some industries - subsidies that make many Third World exports non-competitive, worsening their economies and promoting poverty.

Progress was made on the immediate bottom-line needs for improvement in primitive sanitation and impure drinking water, conditions that presently produce great numbers of illnesses and preventable deaths. The Summit agreed on several goals: Halving the 2.4 billion people without sanitation by 2015; minimizing harmful effects from chemical production by 2020; halving the decline of fish stock by 2015; significantly reducing the number of endangered species by 2010. This is important both as a measure of the total health of the planet and a reflection of the health of the people who inhabit it.

On the difficult issue of renewable energy, the conference was a disappointment to environmentalists. Kofi Annan responded that in spite of too high expectations, the world's agenda has moved forward. Although these conferences have their heated divisions and inevitable conflicts of interest, they are useful for several reasons. First, the persistent reiteration of these vital global issues is necessary to bring about real action. Second, they energize the groups promoting these issues, on whose advocacy the world's well-being may depend. Third, many leaders are persuaded into commitments that can be monitored as to their efforts for improvements.

Finally, where else in the public realm can world issues be discussed with so much passion and knowledge?

Available From the AEU BOOKS



- Love Your Neighbor: Stories of Values and Virtues**
by Arthur Dobrin. Illus. by Jacqueline Rogers.....\$ 15
- The Humanist Way: An Introduction to Ethical Humanist Religion** by Edward L. Ericson.....10
- Ethics as a Religion** by David Saville Muzzey15
- The Reconstruction of the Spiritual Ideal**
by Felix Adler.....10
- Religion of Duty** by Felix Adler10
- Our Part in This World: Interpretations**
by Felix Adler (Selections).....10
- Without Burnt Offerings** by Algernon D. Black10
- First Book of Ethics** by Algernon D. Black 3.50
- A Teacher's Guide to First Book of Ethics**
by Emily Thorn3.50
- Spokesman for Ethical Religion** by Henry Neuman.. .10

Please add \$5 for postage and handling

CD

- "At Home in the World: Songs of Celebration"**
Songs for singing at Ethical Societies with
Leader Bart Wordon on voice and guitar.....5
- Please add \$1.50 for postage and handling***

AEU NEWS & HAPPENINGS

*Annabelle Glasser, reporter, and member, Queens.
Gleaned from oral reports and newsletters.*

The RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMMITTEE has produced three new booklets for 6-7 year olds, based on incidents in the lives of Ethical Leaders Felix Adler, Anna Garland Spencer, and Algernon Black. The committee is also creating a primary level booklet on ethics, similar to a comic book, using a question and answer format. There will be another with the same format based on the writings of Arthur Dobrin for the middle and upper grades titled "Talking in the Garden with a Leader."

The AEU and other humanist groups have representatives at several non-governmental organizations at the United Nations. A group of NGO's from religious groups has formed a "Council of Faith-Based Organizations." Recently, representatives from various humanist groups have begun organizing a "Council of Ethical-Based Organizations."

PERSONALS: Speedy get-well wishes to: Ethical Leader JUDITH ECKERSON, who recently had a stroke and is undergoing re-hab. To MARGARETHA JONES, former Administrator of the AEU, who broke her ankle while in Switzerland following her attendance at the IHEU Congress. She is now back home in New York and slowly healing. To CONNIE FLYNN, Office Secretary, who has been ill for the past six months; she is now on an indefinite leave of absence.

C-SPAN taped one of the BOSTON Society's platforms in March. The topic was the "The Supreme Court and Freedom of Speech;" the speaker was William Wiecek, Professor of Law and History at Syracuse University. It was broadcast by C-SPAN in July.

The LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE is seeking members who are interested in training to become Ethical Leaders. The committee sees a need for more leaders in the near future, and there are currently only two in the early (module) stage. For an application, contact the AEU office.

The Social Action Committee of the Essex County Society recently sponsored a resolution on

PHYSICIAN AID IN DYING

After extended discussions, much debate, and several platform presentations, it was passed by the entire Society at its annual meeting on May 19, 2002. This is the text:

"Be it resolved that the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County hereby supports the decriminalization of the furnishing of a prescription for a lethal dose of drugs by a physician to an adult patient with full decision-making



capacity, at such patient's insistent and repeated request, where such patient is not treatably depressed and either terminally ill (within six months of expected death) or in intractable suffering, with reasonable protections against abuse. Such protections may well be modeled on those of the Oregon Death With Dignity Act and thus include the requirement of a second physician opinion, full disclosure of alternatives, waiting periods, full recording of all interactions with patient in medical records and report of the furnishing of such prescription to responsible authorities. The Society further commends that the American Ethical Union take like action in support of physician aid-in-dying."

TO THE EDITOR AND FELLOW ETHICAL CULTURE MEMBERS

...I have been out of contact with the movement for about thirty years except for my occasional financial contributions. But here after all these years I pick up *Dialogue* and see "In Memoriam - Arnold Sylvester." It was like a button being pushed. Suddenly I wanted to be back in contact with my friends and colleagues of so long ago. There is no way I can improve on Howard Radest's reminiscences and the tributes implicit in them... Another name that hit me was Annabelle Glasser...

So let me just say that after all these years, I want to reestablish contact. For the new members and for those who may have forgotten, I was president of the Bergen Society in the early sixties, with Howard Radest as our

leader... [and Executive Vice President of the AEU, the only person ever to have served in that role. -Ed.]

In 1974 I decided to "retire" and to become a ski bum in Aspen, Colorado where I lived until 1993 when I moved to Santa Fe... I do want to express my continuing concern and affection for the movement, my former comrades in arms, and for the values and ideas we stand for.

I have reached the "advanced" age of 80, and if in the future I feel I could make a solid contribution you will hear from me. In the meantime, I am enclosing a moderate check, and I would love to hear from anyone who would like to be in touch with me.

Walter H. Ganz

Mr. Ganz may be contacted through the AEU office. -Ed

D i a l o g u e
American Ethical Union
2 West 64th Street
New York, NY 10023
RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
GREAT NECK, NY
Permit No. 91

News
&
Views
of the
AEU

**THE MOST NECESSARY OF ALL FAITHS IS A FAITH IN PEOPLE,
faith that each individual can select his or her own aims
better than any other person can select for them.**

**Not faith that people will be wise, for people are often foolish;
but faith that people at their best are capable of wisdom,
and that they can be taught to be wiser than they are.**

**Not faith that people will be good, for people are sometimes wicked;
but faith that people can be inspired to greater goodness and compassion.**

**Not faith that people will always be strong and brave,
for the best of people are often weak;
but faith that people are capable of strength,
and through faith in the potentialities of people,
comes multiplied strength and genuine firmness.**

**Not faith that people are wise, or good, or brave, or strong;
but that they are capable of becoming
wise enough and good enough, brave enough and strong enough
to make a habitable and enjoyable world, together.**

GEORGE BEAUCHAMP (1906-1988), *Former Leader of the Washington Ethical Society*