

# Dialogue

American Ethical Union - January 2003



## DECLARATIONS WITHOUT ACTION

*Curt Collier, Leader, Riverdale-Yonkers*

**Felix Adler** was elected president of the Free Religious Association in 1878, two years after founding the Ethical Culture movement. The purpose of the FRA was to investigate the heart of liberal religion and to work toward the creation of new types of congregations that embodied such enlightened understanding. The FRA was a remarkable organization filled with

tion and inquiry. In the above situation we are left with the question "What is justice?" Once again, for Adler the answer emerges as we engage others in the discussion and by working with them to bring about justice: Inquiry to action and through action, further inquiry in a harmonious symbiosis.

***For Adler, religious declarations without action were empty statements, and quite possibly morally bereft.***



We are hoping to create the conditions within our Society for meaningful discussion and opportunities to act upon the insights and shared values that emerge from this process. Both are needed.

some of the brightest religious thinkers of its day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Octavius B. Frothingham, Samuel Weiss of the Free Synagogue, and Lucretia Mott, the suffragette and Quaker spokeswoman. We know from its publications that the FRA was truly remarkable in the progressiveness of its thought. Conferences and conventions were held annually to create opportunities for rich discussion and deliberation. Adler, however, was dissatisfied. After serving as president for four years, he resigned. He explained that while the FRA was exceptional in its polemics, it never *did* anything. For Adler, religious declarations without action were empty statements and quite possibly morally bereft. His resignation marks a pivotal point in our history, for it was after this date that Adler began to build Ethical Culture congregations across America. Adler believed in the value of collective inquiry. He was a tireless champion for eliminating the barriers that prevented others from participating in the process, but he didn't stop there. For Adler, the values that arise principally out of communal exploration must be followed by a change in behavior or action; else the words are empty promises. His position holds true for us who carry out this vision today. If we hold fast to values such as "justice" but never work towards creating a just world, that vision of justice is lifeless. Adler sought to create a morally active and engaged way of life. Notice that there is a reciprocal relationship here between ac-

This is the heart of Ethical religion, and it is my belief that this process can transform the world because in the process we ourselves are transformed. It is to embody much of what we hold as holy and sacred as humans: caring, compassion, justice, honesty, integrity, and love.

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## REPORT ON THE 2002 GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

*Hank Gassner, Brooklyn*

Forty-six participants from sixteen Ethical Societies attended the Thirteenth Annual Growth & Development Conference on November 1 and 2 at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. These annual conferences, organized by the AEU membership committee, are designed to help society officers, board members, and committee chairs improve their knowledge and skills in promoting their societies' development. This year's conference included workshops on what people are looking for in an Ethical community (Curt Collier), improving society publicity (Dorothy Lockhart), membership growth techniques (Hank Gassner), welcoming and fostering diversity (Lisel Burns and Donna Roberts), responding to tough issues of social concern (Jim White), and designing full-service Sunday morning programs (Fritz Williams and Bart Worden). Judy Toth, AEU growth and development coordinator, chaired the opening and closing sessions.

In addition to the formal program these con-

ferences provide an opportunity for getting to know members of other societies dealing with similar challenges and sharing ideas, experiences, problems, and solutions.

Please send suggestions about next fall's conference to Hank Gassner, chair, at [kargas@earthlink.net](mailto:kargas@earthlink.net).

*I certainly felt a renewed sense of enthusiasm and involvement after meeting members from around the country who are working towards the same goal of guiding a stronger Ethical movement. AEU meetings help broaden our scope and make us feel part of a larger group. Members who are traveling should see if an Ethical Society is nearby and take the time to visit. I plan to do so whenever I can.*

**Alice Spivak, Bergen**



Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture

*Plan to attend the*  
**89th NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
of the American Ethical Union**  
at the  
**PHILADELPHIA Ethical Society  
and the nearby Radisson Hotel**  
**Memorial Day Weekend**

**May 23 - 26**

*Theme:*



**OUR COMMON FAITH  
Building a National Ethical Pres-  
ence**

**We are soliciting proposals for workshops** to be held on Saturday afternoon and Monday morning of the weekend. They should be 90 minutes in length if possible. Please send proposals to: Assembly Committee, AEU, 2 West 64th Street, New York, NY 10023.

## Dialogue

### Newsletter of The American Ethical Union

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**Dialogue** is on the AEU website;  
click on [Latest News](#) and follow the links.

**Dialogue** welcomes letters and original articles  
on themes that would be of interest to AEU members.

Email to: [leesma@optonline.net](mailto:leesma@optonline.net),  
or mail or fax to the AEU office.

Submissions deadline for the next edition is February 3

# IHEU PRESIDENT LEVI FRAGELL VISITS STRIFE-TORN NIGERIA



Less than a week after the recent religious conflagration in Nigeria, Levi Fragell, president of the **International Humanist and Ethical Union** ([www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org)) arrived in the country. He held press conferences and met with university academics, NGO leaders, Humanists, and addressed students. Fragell used his visit to defend Humanist principles, to oppose fatwas and to

call for an immediate abolition of the harsh Sharia laws in twelve of Nigeria's 36 states. He also addressed 3,000 pupils of the secular Mayflower School.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation with 120 million citizens, 250 languages, and Islam in the north and Christianity in the south as the major religions. The country's slow recovery on the path of freedom and democracy after several years of debilitating military despotism is now significantly hampered by the introduction of barbaric Sharia laws and the enmity between religious communities that this has engendered; sectarian riots have already resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 people in the last two years. The country's federal constitution is secular, but in the 12 northern Nigerian states Islamic punishments exist: flogging for consuming alcohol, amputation of limbs for theft, and stoning to death for adultery.



It is such legislation in the state of Katrina that led to 30-year-old Ms. Amina Lawal's death sentence after being tried for adultery and for bearing a child outside

of wedlock. The Upper Sharia Court judge ruled that Amina be publicly executed for adultery. Punishment will be implemented after her seven-month old baby is weaned. If the federal government does not intervene, Amina will be buried up to her neck and stoned to death. The father of the "illegitimate" child has been discharged, having sworn by the Koran that he was not the father of the child. Sharia law does not recognize any scientific paternity tests. There is a worldwide campaign to save her life and to oppose the brutality of this law.

Amina's case was the backdrop to the widespread boycott of the Miss World contest in Nigeria's capital city, Lagos; many foreign contestants refused to participate in an event held in a country with such barbaric punishments. Mainly Islamic fundamentalists opposed the holding of such an event\* described as degrading and insulting to women and to their religion during their holy month of Ramadan. An allegedly blasphemous statement in the fashion page of the national newspaper, *ThisDay*, referring to the Prophet Mohammad while commenting on the unreasonable protests by Islamic fundamentalists, sparked uncontrolled rioting by angry Islamic thugs, resulting in conflict between Christians and Muslim communities in Kaduna city. Over 200 people died, and 30,000 people, both Muslims and Christians, lost their homes. The deputy governor of Zamfara State in northern Nigeria issued a fatwa calling on Muslims to kill Isioma Daniel, the London-trained journalist who wrote the newspaper article. Ms Daniels fled the country.

This tense and explosive situation was the immediate context of Levi Fragell's visit to Nigeria. Welcoming Mr Fragell to his country, IHEU's growth and development representative in Sub-Saharan Africa and executive director of the Nigerian Humanist

Movement, Leo Igwe said that a pluralist and predominantly religious country like Nigeria had no option but to accept the liberating message of Humanism, which is based on the recognition of our common humanity. Humanism provides the philosophy of human rights and progress.\*

Addressing a press conference at the Lagos headquarters of the influential weekly magazine *Tell* and recalling the salutary role of the press during the period of military dictatorship, Levi Fragell emphasized that the "fatwa issued against journalist Isomia Daniel is an assault on human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly the freedom of the press and freedom of expression. To condemn to death any person for the mere utterance or writing of words, however reckless they may be, is unthinkable in today's world. No religion should enjoy the privilege of special protection or immunity from comment or criticism." Terming it "another sad indicator of Nigeria's regress into an Islamic dark age," Mr. Fragell demanded that the federal government intervene to save

Nigeria from being irretrievably thrown into the savagery of religious intolerance.

Recalling a 2000 judgment by the Supreme Court in Bangladesh, an Islamic country, that banned all fatwas, Levi Fragell said that fatwas have no legitimacy in a modern world, and those seeking to deal rough 'justice' in this manner in defiance of civilized law must be punished for incitement to murder. He further called for legislation to draw its inspiration from the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights rather than

outdated books claiming to have divine provenance, be they the Koran, the Bible, or the Vedas. Referring to Amina Lawal's case, Levi Fragell extended the IHEU's solidarity with her plight and made it clear that the choice of a life partner or the decision to have a child is a fundamental human right and an intensely personal one, which cannot be abrogated by any religious or political dictat or doctrine.

The IHEU and its member organizations will step forward to help Amina and Isomia in the same way they came to the defense of the rights of Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin. The worldwide Humanist community will continue to fight for the strictest separation of religion and state, which is the sole guarantor for the freedom of conscience and of expression of all peoples, irrespective of their creeds. The fight against Sharia laws will continue.

\*Leo Igwe's article "Muslims Turn Back the Clock on Nigeria" can be read in the October 2002 issue of *The Freethinker* ([www.freethinker.co.uk](http://www.freethinker.co.uk)).

IHEU is the London-based international umbrella organization for Humanist, Rationalist, Freethinkers, Atheist, Laïque, and Ethical Culture organizations. IHEU represents its nearly one hundred member organizations from thirty-seven countries at the UN, UNICEF and the Council of Europe, where it has NGO Consultative Status. IHEU also maintains operational relations with UNESCO and campaigns for human freedoms through the media and its member organizations.



-From an IHEU press release

## A E U Calendar

### BOARD MEETINGS

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

### AEU NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

May 23 - 26  
Philadelphia

### STATES IN FISCAL CRISIS - PROGRAMS CUT

Normally the Washington Ethical Action Office focuses on pending federal legislation of ethical concern. At this writing Congress is in recess, having left most appropriation bills in "Continuing Resolution" status. The important TANF (federal welfare) reauthorization that was scheduled to be completed in September, 2002 remains on the legislative docket. The shift back to a Republican Senate, along with the strengthened GOP House, does not bode well for the bill's final outcome when it comes up in early 2003. Watch for alerts on the Ethical Action listserv as the bill comes back into the legislative hopper.\*

Meanwhile, we call your attention to the fact that state governments across the nation have suffered substantial revenue losses while demands for public expenditures, including those that support individuals and families with low incomes, continue to grow. The resulting fiscal crisis among states has its origin in massive tax cuts—largely personal income tax cuts—enacted by most (43 out of 50) states during the economic boom of 1994-2001 together with the recession of 2001-02.

The states felt secure in cutting taxes in the late 1990's because the economic boom rapidly expanded the income base, while the accompanying explosion of stock share prices yielded large taxable (as well as unrealized) capital gains. Unfortunately, the states regarded the gains as permanent, despite past experience of business cycles and bear markets. In fiscal year 2002 (July 2001 to June 2002), the recession, combined with a steep bear market, yielded a revenue loss of \$38 billion or 7.9 percent in state revenues. Only \$8.4 billion of enacted tax increases in FY 2002 serve to partly offset this decline.

Among states showing above average revenue declines—including California (19 %), Massachusetts (13.5 %), New Jersey (9.3 %), and New York (12.6 %)—only a few (including Massachusetts and New York) have enacted "significant" increases (over 3 percent). Increases have centered on cigarette taxes, rather than income taxes or sales taxes, out of political fears over raising general taxes and a concern over possible negative effects on the economy.

**Consequences of failure to raise taxes.** By avoiding a tax increase in the current situation, policymakers are hurting their constituents rather than helping or protecting them. This follows, in particular, from the fact that most states face balanced budget requirements. Thus, failing to raise taxes in a revenue crunch typically leads unavoidably to spending cuts. According to a survey, at least 29 states enacted spending cuts to balance their 2002 budgets and 26 to balance their 2003 budgets.

Specifically, states' spending cuts impact such welfare benefits as health care (by tightening eligibility requirements for Medi-



caid or by increasing co-pay requirements}. Iowa, Missouri, and Washington are among states that both enacted tax cuts and reduced their health care benefits; had any of these states rolled back some or all their 1994-2001 tax cuts, the health care cuts could have been averted or minimized. Further, a Children's Defense Fund study showed that states that won't increase taxes have cut their child care benefits. Notably, Florida and Texas have added, respectively, over 12,000 and 5,000 to waiting lists for child care coverage.

Cuts in states' discretionary spending are not confined to low income groups. They reach into the middle class, specifically in the form of lower subsidies for state colleges and universities. Tuitions are scheduled to rise at Northern Virginia's George Mason University (16.5 %), the University of Iowa (36 % over two years), the University of Missouri (10 %), Penn State University (35 %), Texas A& M (26 %), and the University of Washington (16 %). Such large increases potentially deprive lower income high school graduates of educational opportunities and personal achievement.

**ACTION:** Contact your state representatives and governors to let them know that you support necessary income and other tax increases (including closing loopholes on corporate taxes, extending sales taxes to services, and decoupling state estate taxes from the scheduled elimination of the federal estate tax) to restore and avoid future cuts in public services.

\* To subscribe to the listserv, go to the AEU website, [www.aeu.org](http://www.aeu.org). Click on "Discussions", then email lists, and follow the instructions for the "Ethical Action" list.

### OPPOSE IMMUNITY FOR THE GUN INDUSTRY

**BACKGROUND.** Legislators opposed to gun control have introduced companion bills in the House and Senate that would grant broad immunity from civil liability to the firearm industry, HR 2037 and S 2268. These bills could be brought up early in the next session.

These bills will grant special protection for the gun industry not enjoyed by any other industry in America. These bills seek to bar city, county and even individual law suits against the gun industry. Advocates for better gun control action feel that we need to be able to hold the firearms industry accountable for problems of criminal distribution, defective products and industry negligence.

**ACTION.** Call or email your Representative and Senators and urge them to VOTE NO on HR 2037 and S 2268.

For more information contact the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, 1023 15th St. NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005 phone: 202-408-0061 x 105 fax: 202-408-0062 [www.csgv.org](http://www.csgv.org) / [www.efsgv.org](http://www.efsgv.org)



## A PURPOSE WITH OUR NAME ON IT

*Fritz Williams, Leader, Baltimore*

I can remember only one occasion when my mother asked me why I had left the church. As gently as I could, I told her that, largely as a result of my biblical and theological studies, I no longer believed in most of the things the church teaches. She looked at me sadly. You could see she felt sorry for me. "But wouldn't you like to pretend?" she asked.

People hold on to a belief in God, I think, not because the evidence for God's existence is convincing, but because it's hard for them to imagine not believing. Life would be empty and sad, they assume, without faith in a God who made us and cares for us. And death would be unbearable without believing in another life beyond this one.

But the members of our religious community have discovered that this widely held assumption is wrong. We get along well enough without believing in God or in eternal souls destined to live on in another world. Faith in a divinely ordained purpose for our lives is an acquired need.

What we can't get along without, however, is a personal sense of purpose and a belief that there is some

small contribution we can make. It is not a universe lacking in divine purpose that is intolerable, but a life lived without something to live for. We need a purpose in life with our name on it--our own individual match of talents and interests with opportunities and needs.

Ethical Culture revolves around this quest for purpose and meaning. It finds this purpose in unfulfilled human wants and needs; in the deficiencies, inequalities, and injustices that pervade the lives we are living; in suffering and in joy; and in a vision of what this life could be.

We human beings have a knack for not seeing the stuff that is right there in front of us. The world's religions are staring out the window and missing what is going on in the same room. They have become like absent-minded professors forever looking for the glasses they've pushed back on their foreheads.

Our faith is not in some preordained purpose, but in the purpose that arises out of our humanity, its potential and its neediness. It takes shape in the events and issues of our everyday lives. My mother's sadness was misplaced: I was not losing my faith, I was finding it.

***It is not a universe lacking in divine purpose that is intolerable, but a life lived without something to live for.***

## A PROGRAM FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

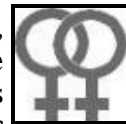
*Marc and Marlane Bernstein, Bergen*

**THE BERGEN SOCIETY** has taken on an important new responsibility — the sponsorship of a weekly program for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning youth. Until now we have been merely hosting this activity, providing a space for the Sunday meetings, but sharing oversight with another group.

It is hard to overestimate the value these regular Sunday meetings have for the youngsters, aged 14 to 21, who attend. Jeered at school, struggling for acceptance at home, or just too fearful to tell their parents about their sexual orientation, they have more to cope with than typical teenagers. The Sunday group provides a haven, where they can



be themselves, where they get the support of peers who share their



concerns, as well as the support of volunteers, both gay and straight, who help organize discussions and who provide a bit of guidance. We know this program speaks to the needs of the teenagers because they attend, summer or winter, bad weather or good. We have been getting as many as two dozen youngsters on a given Sunday.

The Society has supported the cause of gay and lesbian for close to a decade. In the early 1990's, our Task Force on Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Awareness began offering forums and movies about gay and lesbian issues. After years of successful events for our own members, the Task Force got involved in GALY, a program for gay and

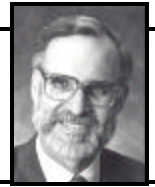
lesbian youth already running in New Jersey. Many of the same people who served on the Task Force began to volunteer at

GALY, an activity the Society hosted in our meeting house on Sunday afternoons. In a natural evolution from education to direct service, the GALY program eventually displaced the Task Force.

Bergen Rainbow Youth (B-RAY), the new program, emerged when our volunteers had hopes for the activities that were not shared by those supervising the GALY program. These volunteers decided to ask the board of the Ethical Society to consider taking on the program as part of the Society's public affairs committee. The program was given an enthusiastic endorsement by the board and is now a Society activity.

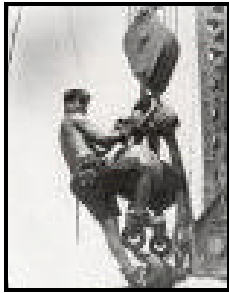
## BLACK AND WHITE AND SEEN ALL OVER

Dr. Marc A. Bernstein, New York & AEU Archivist



**Does American photography know what it owes to the Ethical Culture School?** ECS helped shape the careers of three distinguished photographers: Lewis Hine, Doris Ulmann, and Diane Arbus. Although each of them encountered the school in different ways, they all drew from it something indispensable to their work. Hine mastered camera technique; Ulmann learned to seek a hidden humanity in her subjects; Arbus developed her inchoate talent.

**Lewis Hine** was the most acclaimed of the three. Critic Irving Howe called him "a major American artist, worthy of comparison in his role as portraitist of native life with Edward Hopper, Theodore Dreiser, William Carlos Williams." Hine's images of Ellis Island immigrants, sweatshop workers, and especially laborers dangling from the girders of an emerging Empire State Building have become icons of twentieth century America.



Hine was hired to teach nature study and geography at the Ethical Culture School in 1901. But at the request of the school principal, Frank Manny, Hine developed a photography program. It was in this program and in his work as school photographer that Hine developed his great documentary style.

At the school's suggestion, Hine went to Ellis Island to record images of immigrants arriving daily by the thousands so that he could share their story with his innocent, privileged students. Hine's immigrants, though torn from their homelands, belong to their visual environment. Paperwork in their hands, numbers tied with string to their coats--they are, momentarily, creatures of Ellis Island's labyrinthine way station.

In 1900, a year before Lewis Hine joined the faculty of the Ethical Culture School, **Doris Ulmann** enrolled in a teacher-training program at the school. Though she was not yet a photographer, Ulmann, writes curator David Featherstone, was exposed to a philosophy "that accepted and championed the inherent worth of all individuals." This philosophy, he argues, influenced her camera work.



During her lifetime, Ulmann won her reputation as a portraitist ("one of the foremost photographers in the United States", said *The New York Times* in her 1934 obituary). Her subjects included Albert Einstein, Sinclair Lewis, Robert Frost, William Butler Yeats, Paul Robeson, Martha Graham, Helen Keller, John Dewey, President Coolidge, and Felix Adler. Today, how-

ever, a new generation of admirers has discovered Ulmann's social photography, a body of work that more clearly reflects Ethical Culture values.

Here her subjects are ordinary Southerners: a barefooted North Carolina boy in overalls and a cap, straddling a log fence; a Georgia chair maker working wood on a sawhorse. Her soft focus gives these photos great warmth and a less documentary quality than Hine's--she wants to reveal the humanity of peoples of different cultures, not to expose social conditions. Ulmann shares with Hine, however, a gift for melding subject and setting. Her figures belong to their rural environment as much as weathered mailboxes and kudzu.



**Diane Arbus** handles the relationship between subject and setting in a different way. The celebrated photographer of freaks, misfits and outcasts, either places her subjects squarely before the camera, giving us almost no setting at all, or she emphasizes the subject's estrangement from his immediate environment, as in "A Jewish Giant at Home With His Parents" (1970).



Her art had a bizarre streak even at the Fieldston School, which she attended in the 1930's and where her talent was nurtured by her art teacher, Victor D'Amico. Algernon Black, another influential teacher, taught her the importance of myth, stimulating her artistic interest in pagentry and ritual (her photos often capture people at circuses, weddings, and carnivals).

Although Arbus is best known for her photos of the bizarre, she took superb shots of ordinary Americans, particularly those in the working class. Her "Young Brooklyn Family Going for an Outing" (1966) shows a mother, heavily made up, and in a beehive hairdo, holding a baby, while her husband holds his son's hand, as the boy contorts his face. It is an off-putting depiction that makes us wonder what the American dream holds for them.

Arbus' style and technique may differ from Hine's and Ulmann's, but she shares with them a keen social sensibility. The Ethical Culture School fostered such a sensibility by taking students to settlement houses and teaching them the dangers of prejudice. Had Hine, Ulmann, and Arbus never encountered ECS, American photography might have been deprived of compelling social images that are now part of our visual culture.

# TO THE EDITOR

November *Dialogue*

I think in retrospect Bart Worden and "Ethicalites" will somewhat regret the tone of his lead essay. The Ethical Culture Movement does not have a good record in dealing with issues of war and peace in the last half century or so.

Recall that in the mid-1930s a campaigner for disarmament received the Nobel Peace Prize, just when Hitler was rearming the Wehrmacht! As George Orwell later pointed out, all those pacifists, among whom were the young men who signed pledges never again to fight for "King and Country", were "objectively supportive" of Fascism. By disabling the resolve of the Western democracies to oppose Hitler's early moves (in the Rhineland, at Munich, etc.) they more nearly assured his triumphs of 1940, which were a close thing for Democracy.

Far more prescient and ethical was Winston Spencer Churchill, who refused to duck the reality of a rearming Germany, opposed Chamberlain and Munich, and called for ramping up UK forces and arms. (Even with friends supporting private work on radar, which was probably decisive in the Battle of Britain, itself decisive in the struggle for freedom for democracy. In a sense, the "bumbling" "language-challenged" G. W. Bush continues the Churchillian tradition!

**Winthrop Drake Thies,**  
*Essex, November 11, 2002*

Thank you to Richard Kiniry for "Ethical Culture 101," which is a wonderfully concise statement to help newcomers to...EC/humanism better understand its "religion" position.

Thank you also to Annabelle Glasser and Arthur Dobrin for their strong and intelligent statements concerning the Pledge of Allegiance of the U.S. I found this "World Pledge" among some 1980's papers from my children's Ethical Culture Sunday school days:

I Pledge Allegiance to the World  
To Care for Earth and Sea and Air,  
To Cherish every Living Thing  
With Peace and Justice everywhere!

**Joanne R. Polner,** Bergen,  
*November 26, 2002*

Arnold Fishman's article reminded me of how I've long wondered about and mulled over some of Ethical Culture's core concepts. Some, which seem rather simple at first, yield deeper rewards when we start using them in our lives.

So it is with "Act so as to elicit the best in others, and thereby in ourselves." To me, this precept in no way implies self-neglect or self-sacrifice. Nor do I see in it a world view that extols suffering or glorifies trauma and adversity. (Life will supply enough of these -- no need to add!) Adler's idea may be multi-faceted, but I've seen it as a guide for breaking through destructive log jams in our relations with others -- friends, spouses, colleagues, fellow Society members, fellow Board members, and so on. It's especially helpful when those others, in our view, are being disagreeable, unreasonable, obnoxious, hurtful to us or the group.

Eliciting the best .." means steadying ourselves to look closely and carefully at the other, discerning some positive quality or strength and then appealing to it. Sometimes all that's needed is to get out of the way. Sometimes it takes a lot more effort. This is a most demanding job! It requires lifting ourselves over our own impatience, anger, ego needs and absolute conviction that we are right. (For me it means restraining a growing tendency with age to not suffer "fools" gladly.)

Obviously this is not a panacea for all global problems. It isn't applicable to Hitler, Stalin, Saddam, or anyone bent on real destruction. I have failed oftener than I've succeeded in this, but when I remember, I turn to it in my present situation of group living. When I see it in action, I understand much more fully what it means to use my own best potential through eliciting the best in others.

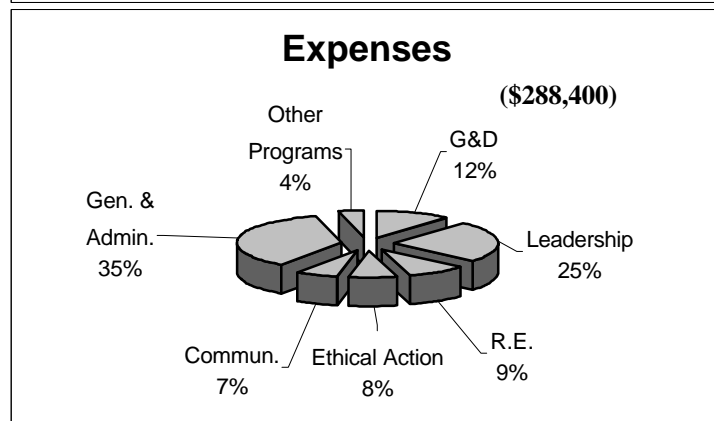
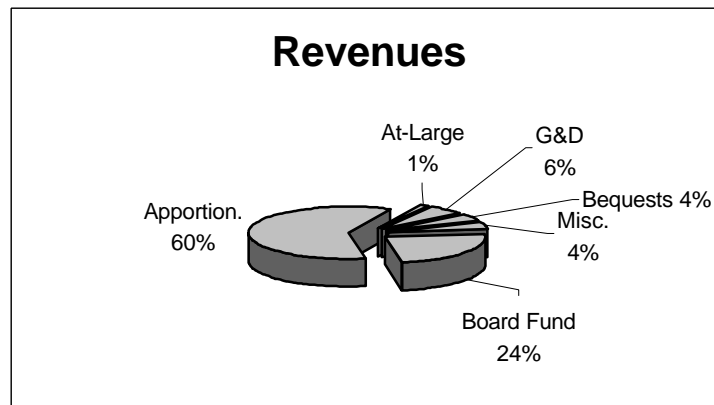
And sometime in the not-too-distant future, I'd like to exchange thoughts with my fellow "Ethicals" about the intrinsic worth of every human being -- which I think does have universal application. What exactly does this mean and how does it oblige us to act, if we accept it?

**Meg Gold,** Cleveland  
*Ethical Circle*  
*November 28, 2002*

## AEU Revenues & Expenses

10/1/01 to 9/30/02

**Greta Gladney, Treasurer**



# HIGHLIGHTS of BOARD of DIRECTORS MEETING

October 24 - 25 at Murray Grove, Lanoka Harbor, NJ.



The AEU Board of Directors welcomed two new members, Jone Johnson of Northern Virginia, elected by the National Leaders Counsel as president and representative to the board, and Arnold Fishman, elected by the board to fill the remainder of the term of Mimi Henry, who had resigned.

Betsy Weir, of Northern Westchester, was elected to the board of directors to fill the term of Brenda Henderson, who had resigned. There were five applicants for the vacancy, and all others are urged to reapply for election in May when the Assembly will select a new board of directors.

The president reported that we have signed onto an amicus brief in a Philadelphia case involving the Ten Commandments.

The search for executive director yielded more than sixty applicants. After much work on the part of the search committee, two candidates have been selected as outstanding. They will be interviewed a second time and a background check completed after release by the candidates. (References

have already been checked.) The board approved by consensus the hiring of whomever of the two candidates is chosen. The personnel committee will then prepare a contract.

The treasurer reported a diminution of our investments, some of which have declined 20%. The auditors have nearly completed 1997-98 and hope to have three years completed by February. Unaudited balance sheets will be available for the years not completed by the time of the May assembly. Computers in the AEU office have been repaired, anti-virus programs installed, and two new Dell computers will shortly be purchased.

The Leadership Committee has stated that a new class of leaders-in-training will be necessary to fulfill coming needs. The committee will propose a provost position for the training program.

Sharon Sarles has resigned as a Leader of the AEU. The board approved the recommendation of the Leadership Committee granting leadership certification to David Reis. Approval was given for training three additional ad-

junct leaders.

The Assembly Committee is in need of a chairperson for the upcoming assembly in May in Philadelphia. This may be anyone from any society who has a good sense of organization. Sue and Scott Walton of Chicago are already doing the basic logistics work. The committee has five working members who have had experience with previous assemblies.

The board spent much of the two days in retreat dealing with office issues, preparation for the new executive director, and other subjects.

**Annabelle Glasser**, AEU Board Secretary and a member of *Dialogue's* Editorial Board, who usually writes *Highlights of Board of Directors Meeting* and *Around the AEU*, is ill. We hope that she will soon be rejoining us in the preparation of future issues.

*Ellen & Lee*

## ANNUAL AEU FALL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONFERENCE

**"More Important Than Any Holiday"**

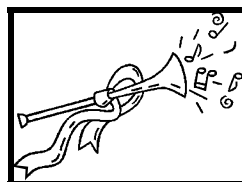
**Stony Point, New York - November 8 - 10**

**Carol Wolff**, AEU RE Director

This year's annual AEU Fall Religious Education Conference in Stony Point, NY, was a big success. Bart Worden, leader of the Westchester Society, celebrated the theme, "A Festival of Festivals," with an enlightening keynote address. Bart gave some background history into the human need for festivals and their development since the founding of the Ethical Movement by Felix Adler in the 1800's.

We talked about festivals and where the need for them comes from. They are based on a human need to celebrate and join in community around a commonly shared joy or sorrow. Some of the reasons for early festivals were harvests, mysteries (the sun, light returning, birth and death), valuing and sharing resources such as objects or food, survival, reunion, victory/relief, and a simple need to disturb the normal routine.

Felix Adler looked at the historical use of festivals: natural phenomena we have no control over, such as natural occurrences,



and religious/moral infusion of humanity—a need to celebrate the human qualities common to us all.

What holds a festival together? Some elements are food and drink, music, ritual, purpose/theme, planning/preparation, connection from the past to the future (tradition), sense of community, fun, and spirituality.

Ethical Culture's infusion into this formula is about the "intentionality" of the human experience. It's theater. Remember, it should be rehearsed and polished, have a common purpose, encourage participation, and celebrate the best in everyone using the talents available.

We had a great turnout, with 38 adults and children ages 3 to 12 attending from as away as Texas, St Louis, and Boston. Alan Berger, RE committee member, led the children's activities, and Linda Napoli, RE committee chair, and Carol Wolff, AEU RE director, coordinated the conference.

We were pleased that AEU President Brian King, his wife, Donna Cushing, and their daughter, Lydia, who has been attending since before she was born, were able to make it at the last minute. Lydia is the source of the quote in the title because when learning that they might not be going to the conference, she exclaimed, "But it is more important than Christmas or Halloween!"



# HONESTY

**Richard Kiniry, Leader, Philadelphia**

Being honest should be uncomplicated. Honest people tell the truth as far as they know it. They don't embellish or hide the facts. But of course it is not that easy. We do hold back. We color our remarks. And we blatantly lie to accomplish our ends.

I think of myself as an honest person. I value honesty, but I also know I can get in trouble by being honest. I know my honesty can be used against me. It is one of the facts of life; I live not in a world of principles but of self-interested flesh and blood people. Taking care of my needs and interests is my primary concern. The truth belongs to me and I spend it carefully. Honesty is a noble ideal, but other people have their own agendas, which may conflict with mine. So, as I try to live by the noble principle of honesty, I also worry about keeping my world safe and secure by keeping my truth close to the chest. The rest of you don't have to know everything I think or feel.

Of course, sometimes I keep the truth even from myself. I know I'm going to lose twenty pounds by being careful with my diet once a week. There are some truths just too difficult to accept. I may know I'm going to die, but I avoid that truth as I go about my day's work.

The truth can also be a weapon. To be honest can mean being evil. You can use the truth to manipulate and hurt people. We can climb onto the honesty principle and create havoc in other people's lives. I can occasionally admire brutally honest people; I envy their self-assuredness and

boldness, but I wonder if they know how much the rest of us can dislike them.

Another familiar human habit is pretending our opinion is accepted fact. Other people's words and deeds are self-serving opinions next to our obvious objective truth. "Everyone knows I'm a good driver." Oh yeah, I wouldn't be caught dead in your car. Being truly honest means knowing your truth is always opinion. Abuse for the sake of your truth is still abuse.

So, what is an honest person? When I was seven or eight, I told a lie that I can still feel. I am still shamefaced by the lie, and I've told quite a few lies since then. But I still think I'm a fairly honest person. As I think back on that occasion so many years ago, and I consider my options, I notice a bigger picture. Honesty would have brought punishment. It would not have been rewarded. I was supposed to tell the truth in a world full of lies.

Honesty, like so many values, is an approach, an ideal. It is not just telling the truth. It is being open and responsive to those around you, trusting them to be themselves. Honesty is an attempt at being genuine and involved with others. It is holding up your part in relationships. It is being consciously aware of, and responsible for, what you are doing. Being honest is taking care that your part of life is a place where people can tell their truth. Honesty is a gift we give to ourselves and to others. Sometimes they don't deserve it, and other times they don't make it possible. Honesty is knowing we are all liars. Honest people take responsibility for their actions and try again.



## BUDDHA HEART, ETHICAL MIND

**Carol Smith Pincus, Long Island**



"I tramp a perpetual journey,  
My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes,  
and a staff cut from the woods.  
No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair,  
I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,  
I lead no man to a dinner table,  
library or exchange.  
But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll.  
My left hand hooking you round the waist,  
My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road,  
Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you.  
You must travel it for yourself"

*Walt Whitman*

There is a strange mixture of order and chaos among the great religious philoso-

phies of the world, and they are always expressed in some way by good or great poetry. Even though there are inconsistencies in Whitman's adamant plan, the thought is that each of us must find her or his own way. There is very little likelihood of arriving at personal "answers" unless you examine the great questions for yourself — that is, travel the road.

The heart of Buddhist philosophy has a beautiful simplicity, as does the heart of Ethical Humanism. These religions have in common the belief in personal responsibility and the innate worth of each human being. There is no god in either philosophy; the Buddha was simply an enlightened teacher. Every sentient being has a Buddha heart; every person has innate, intrinsic worth in Ethical Humanism.

So why am I particularly captivated by this double dose of religion? There are for me subtle differences and some not so subtle. I am able to feel Buddhist passion, to share happily in rituals, to study Dharma teachings, to meditate, to understand the constant call for gentleness, non-violence, and true love. For me, Ethical Humanism is more grounded in thought and active participation in the work of humanity and the Society of which I am a part. But the ethical demands of both religions are not easy. They expect me to live my life compassionately, fully, and ethically in every moment. I feel joy in my successes and sorrow in my failures. That response, in both religions, is a reality to me.

"Buddha heart, Ethical Humanist Mind" - is becoming a way for me to pull out the golden threads of both philosophies. But they are so intertwined that the result is a joyful blend.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF UN CONFERENCES AND THE AEU'S NSC PARTICIPATION

*Phyllis Ehrenfeld, Bergen, National Service Conference*



Turning our understanding of world issues into action is a challenge.

The AEU's National Service Conference has met that challenge for decades. Our long serving Rose Walker and, more recently, Martha Gallahue, have persevered with unflagging attention to the constantly changing picture of a number of world issues. They have participated in numerous committees and world conferences, the only voices for ordinary citizens that are both global and legitimate. Conferences are an important part of an effort to mobilize civil society all over the world.

Astonishing as it may seem to self-styled realists, valuable global visions have emerged. After difficult negotiations, the Rio Conference produced both a vision and a program of action. A dramatic example of a change in attitude was that highly trained environmental scientists listened to native women farmers to learn what they could from traditional practices. The Millennium Summit document compiled in 2000 set realistic goals that are being monitored. Through the advocacy of Martha Gallahue, the A.E.U. became part of a coalition supporting the International Criminal Court. The court has since come into existence, with some of the world's most troubled countries participating in its ratification.

Lyndon Wilberg, born in Guyana and a member of the Queens Society, brings a personal perspective as a human rights activist to his organizational work with the Subcommittee for the Elimination of Racism at the Conference on Racism in Durban. The primary focus was to make sure that the gains made in Durban, as well as the other instruments for the elimination of racism and other scourges, are put to use within the context of the

U.N. as well as civil society in general. Lyndon serves as co-coordinator for the subcommittee.

Richard Hobbs is a member-at-large, a lawyer who works for Citizenship and immigrations programs and the Immigration Action Network for the Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations. Richard attended the U.N. International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterey, Mexico. Richard's perspective: The National Service Conference's drop of water helped swell the tide of support for the proposals of human rights organizations. Innovative thinking by NGO's representatives both jars and raises consciousness. The call for a worldwide minimum wage, for example, represented a clear response to the race to the bottom fostered by multinational investment and trade policies. Politically, the the National Service Conference and other representatives were given the chance to express solidarity with the victims of globalization in the streets of Monterey with workers and women who demanded justice. As always the conference provided for networking and permanent contacts with the likeminded through the Internet. It served as impetus for talks to the community on obstacles to third world development in San Jose and Palo Alto, CA, and Denver, CO. Martha Gallahue has participated in the Women's Conference in Beijing and the World's Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Martha reports that the NSC became part of a coalition of forty nongovernmental organizations called the Earth Values Caucus, a large group illustrating by its very existence the core values of interdependence, diversity, and cooperation. The caucus lobbied to have these principles included in the final document and implemented.

## **VIOLENCE**

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing that it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

America at the moment seems to be paralyzed by its obsession with the idea that the threat of violence will bring peace.

**Fr. Robert Drinan, just before September 11, 2001**



# AEU NEWS & HAPPENINGS

Gleaned from oral reports, newsletters, and Stan Wayne's AEU "Clipping Service"

**AUSTIN** The board plans to have Sunday meetings every week. Consulting Leader Judy Toth will conduct a workshop on "Building Good Relationships Through Creative Conflict Skills".

**BALTIMORE** met for the first time on November 3 in new quarters in the Old Congress Hotel, 306 Franklin St. Baltimore, MD 21201. There is now more space for all activities: greeting and socializing, child care and instruction, study groups and other small group meetings, and most importantly, Sunday morning platform meetings.

**BROOKLYN** A daylong meeting on Iraq in a community coalition was held by the Ethical Action Committee.

**CLEVELAND** Meets at 4 PM on the 2nd and 4th Sunday at a Unitarian-Universalist Congregation.

**ESSEX** is developing a memorial garden.

**LONG ISLAND** A series of Sunday afternoon courses is being offered by several members with academic credentials. A potluck brunch was held on December 15 in honor of Richard Kiniry for his much appreciated role as part-time Interim Leader. The morning's collection was donated to the Philadelphia Society's Camp Linden.

**NEW YORK** Archivist, Marc Bernstein, found that James Weldon Johnson was a member of the NY Society. Johnson was the composer, in 1912, of the black national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and wrote the great novel of the era, "Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man"... David Kaczynski (brother of the "Uni-Bomber") spoke about his work against the death penalty.

**NORTHERN VIRGINIA** Judith Eckerson is on leave as a Leader. Anyone wishing to contact or make a gift to Judith, who suffered a stroke,

can do so through the Caring Committee of Northern Virginia Ethical Society, PO Box 984, Vienna, VA 22184.



**PHILADELPHIA** The society has "adopted" a public school; their membership is increasing and they have a new web site. Dr. Dale Drews: Traditional concepts of God are clustered together... shepherd, force, parent, judge, order-maker, ruler, creator-inspired by the prejudices of people. Humanists are "asemantheists" -those who place no importance on the words used to describe God. Religion is the belief that there is something sacred beyond the individual.... Humankind has been punished long and heavily for having created gods... Our aim as Humanists is the advancement of the human race from all godheads.



**RIVERDALE-YONKERS** Leader Emeritus Dr. Ies Spetter said "As Ethical Humanists we do not go out looking for hope as if it were some far off land waiting to be discovered...Rather we build hope within the hearts of others...To merely hope for a better world without attempting to improve the human condition is to cheat hope of its greatest ally..."



**ST. LOUIS** Bob Greenwell has been chosen Leader of a new society to be started by the St. Louis Society.... A regional Public Health Forum was recently held on "Our Broken Health System and How Do We Fix It?" "Most of the uninsured have low income jobs and work for companies that do not offer health care benefits... the number of uninsured has now risen to 41 million nationally"

**SUFFOLK** "Can You Have Morals and Spirituality Without A Supreme Being?" presented by the Long Island Multi-Faith Forum.

**WASHINGTON DC** Annual Camp Soles Winter Weekend planned for MLK weekend. A rustic Y camp provides the setting for square dancing, sledding and cross country skiing... International Partnership gathering books (Spanish) and school and art supplies for delivery to El Salvador.

**WESTCHESTER** Leader Bart Worden: "I am distressed by many of the actions of our government in recent times but heartened to find solidarity with other concerned individuals. It may be that other voices will prevail and our nation will lead the way to war, but that does not mean that dissent will have no power. As we lurch forward as a nation we must be prepared to hold aloft the values and principles that are worthy of pride-democracy, freedom and equality- and assure that they are not corrupted."

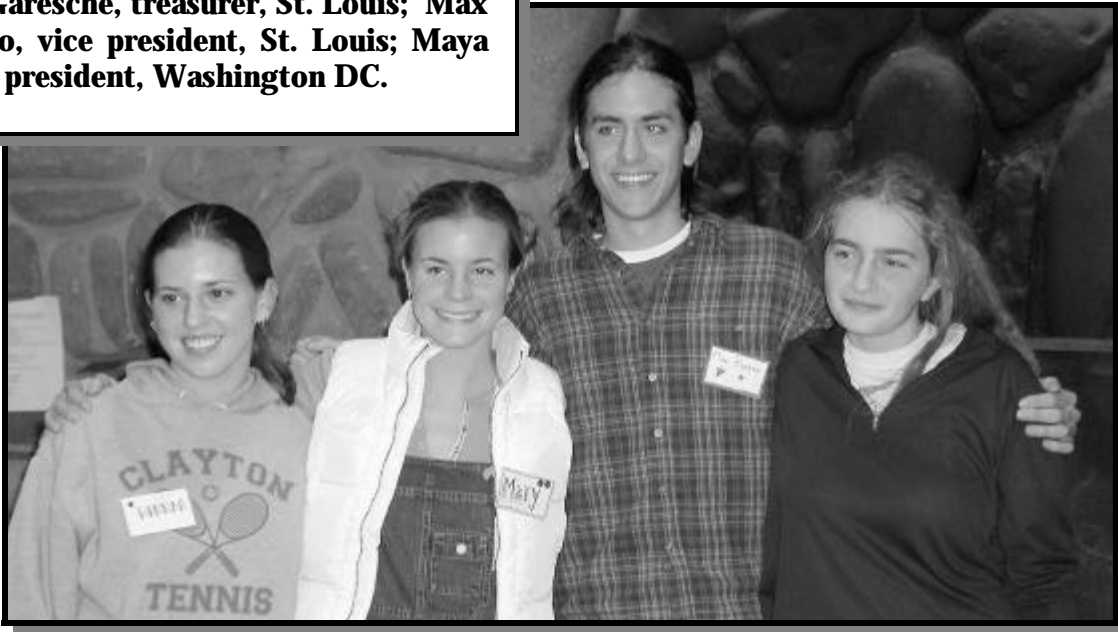


**AEU** The Publications Committee reports that many Leaders have submitted platform addresses and photos in preparation for an anthology of Leaders' platforms. The Religious Education Committee is preparing a workbook for primary grades... The Ethical Humanist Chaplaincy at Columbia University has been officially recognized, and Essex Leader Boe Meyerson was made an employee of the University. Jim White has been helping with the chaplaincy since Anne Klaleyson is leaving. The National Leaders Council of The American Ethical Union elected the following officers at their October meeting: Don Johnson, President, Bart Worden, Vice President, and Bob Greenwell, Secretary.



## 2003 Y.E.S. OFFICERS

**L to R: Hannah Katz, secretary, St. Louis; Mary Garesche, treasurer, St. Louis; Max Romano, vice president, St. Louis; Maya Kosok, president, Washington DC.**



## Dialogue

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