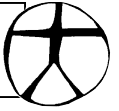


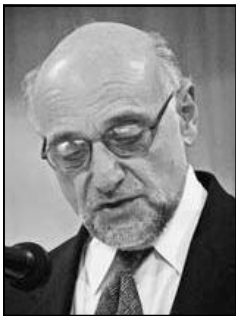
# Dialogue

American Ethical Union - September 2003



## THE CONTINUING NATIONAL EMERGENCY Proposal for an Advocacy Forum

*Khoren Arisian, Leader, New York*



***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”***

— **Margaret Mead**

Even if a bare majority of the American citizenry is generally not desirous of their country being transformed into a quasi-theocratic entity, courtesy of the American Right’s unrelenting evangelical extremism, the fact remains that if they allow themselves to remain inert and accept the Bush Administration’s benign rhetoric at face value, they may continue to believe all is well. We cannot afford to be naive here. This nation of ours was conceived in hope, trust, and skepticism in equal measure; it’s essential we not lose sight of that fact, that necessity and that truth. Otherwise we’ll be played for suckers,

and one day in the not too distant future we’ll wake up and find ourselves living in some ludicrous equivalent time warp circa 1690 or 1898: back to the future, forward to the past—whatever!

I agree with Paul Kurtz that we could profit from an extended emergent neo-Enlightenment period, and I don’t believe it would be inordinately difficult to bring that off. Such a perspective would allow us as the world’s greatest superpower to re-envision our past, present, and future with regard to civil liberties and human freedom; the constitutional principle of checks and balances; the enduring place of an independent judiciary; the proper function and exercise of relig-

ion in civic life; the moral and political folly of imperialism, whether old or new style, as a major aim of American democracy; the possible desirability of liberal humanitarian interventionism—not unilateral pre-emption—as a limited but useful instrument for maintaining a civilized world order under accepted international auspices in a global environment; revisiting unsettled issues of the 2000 presidential election in light of the future of voting rights for all Americans without exception; installing lasting safeguards against oligopolistic concentrations of power in the communications industry—the press, radio, and television, and so on.

I suspect that whether we

face the daunting prospect of a clash of civilizations, or of religious ideologies, or of cultural differences over what is sacred and what is secular, we might best resolve such binary challenges, whatever their scope, by perceiving them, at bottom, as struggles over ideas. Ideas that significantly move people have consequences, of that we may be sure. The radical Right has a clear vision of what kind of country it wants us to be; secular liberals basically want America to keep being the nation as they have known it but don’t know how to present their argument on its behalf. It’s at this juncture that an advocacy forum dealing with our continuing national emergency, explosively precipitated into being by the conjoined forces of the religious and political Right, comes into play. We, no less than our adversaries, have to take the long view and prepare ourselves for the long haul, doing so with gusto and persuasive conviction for our own immediate well-being and for that of our posterity. For better or worse, a new chapter in

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# 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 subjects of interest to AEU members.

Email to [editor@aeu.org](mailto:editor@aeu.org),

or mail or fax to the AEU office.

Submissions deadline for the November issue is October 3

## AEU Calendar

### **BOARD MEETINGS**

September 19 - 21 Retreat

November 8

January 10, 2004

March 13

May 8

### **AEU GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

October 24 & 25

Long Island, NY

### **Y.E.S. CONFERENCE**

November 7 - 9

Frost Valley Center, NY

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONFERENCE**

November 14 - 16

Stony Point Center, NY

*(Continued from page 1)*

the history of the world is opening up, beckoning us to enter the lists and be part of the action and passion of these tumultuous times.

As I have viewed various liberal to radical responses to the perils facing the democratic way of life as we've experienced it,...I've been struck by a refreshing earnestness on the one hand, and a lack of sufficient focus and follow-up on the other. To be sure, uncoordinated one-shot actions and public meetings have value in and of themselves, but tend to be bereft of synergistic punch... . For this reason, I believe that under such a rubric as "the continuing national emergency" we can cumulatively focus on various aspects of the Right's tactics and strategies, and espy the structures which support them, allowing us then to dismantle their foundations logically piece-by-piece and expose the motivations behind their creation... .

This way we can begin to seed the general culture with original secular democratic ideas or with original approaches to existing compelling ideas, with the intention of constantly enriching the public conversation and keeping it going until a competing overall vision of American freedom and democracy becomes clear, enabling us to rise to the next step—*influencing public opinion*. Our aim is part Emersonian and part Adlerian: in short, social change through the power and reiteration of ideas that matter because they are pertinent.

Lest I be misunderstood, what we are aiming for is the gradual grass roots establishment of a freshly conceived, ethically cogent progressive national platform and agenda. When Senator John McCain was running against George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential primaries he noticed a growing number of people who no longer identified strongly with conventional politics—that is, with either of our two principal parties. Weary of seeing little difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, they yearned not for a third party so much as for a real second one that would revive the abandoned role of loyal opposition to the dominant party. Energized by the prospect of turning back the clock to the likes of the McKinley era, Republicans have frankly trumped Democrats so effectively that, almost like some Leninist political configuration, party and state are well on the way to becoming the same: a one-party government..

It's time for us to bless our own lives with deeds that may help enliven the lives of others. What we do reveals who we are far more than what we say.

Meanwhile we have a democracy to keep!

*Excerpted from an article in the June issue of Ethical Outlook, the newsletter of the New York Society for Ethical Culture.*

*The full text may be read at*

[www.nysec.org/newsletter/jun\\_2003.pdf](http://www.nysec.org/newsletter/jun_2003.pdf)

# THREE EXCITING AEU FALL EVENTS

## 14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SOCIETY GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

Friday evening & Saturday  
**October 24 & 25**

**Ethical Humanist Society  
of Long Island**

**Attracting Young Families**

**Improving Society Publicity**

**Membership Growth  
Techniques**

**Attractive & Inviting  
Society Web Pages**

**Society Stewardship  
(Time, Talent, & Treasure)**

**Accessing Ideas & Resources  
From Around the Movement  
on the Internet**

**...and More**

The goal of these conferences is to share information on a variety of topics to strengthen society skills and knowledge in creating effective and growing ethical communities.

You will also have opportunities to network with people in other societies dealing with similar concerns.

Partial travel subsidies are available for one or two members of societies that are more than 300 miles from Long Island.

**Home Hospitality Available**

**Save the Date.  
Plan to Attend!**

**Conference brochures will be issued in the fall. Meanwhile, contact Hank Gassner, Chair AEU Membership Committee at [kargas@earthlink.net](mailto:kargas@earthlink.net) with any questions.**

## Y.E.S. CONFERENCE

**November 7 - 9**

**Frost Valley Center, NY**

Driving directions:  
[www.frostvalley.org](http://www.frostvalley.org)

### TEENS!

Mark your calendars for November 7-9, 2003. You and other teens from Ethical Societies across the country are invited to come and participate in the annual Y.E.S. (Youth of Ethical Societies) Conference, which will be held at the beautiful Frost Valley YMCA family conference center in Clareville, New York.

This year's topic is Violence in American Society, and we will be focusing on the question, "What should an ethical person do?"

Curt Collier and the Riverdale - Yonkers Society have invited us to spend the pre-conference night (Thursday, November 6th) with them.

We are looking forward to this year's conference for the friendship and inspiration we find there each year. We hope you will join us.

Look for the registration packet when you return to your society in September.

***Susan Buzek,  
National Youth Advisor,  
American Ethical Union***

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONFERENCE

**Friday November 14 to  
Sunday November 16**

**Stony Point Center  
Stony Point, NY**

Driving directions:  
[Horeb.pcusa.org/spc/location.htm](http://Horeb.pcusa.org/spc/location.htm)

***Teaching and parenting tools for  
promoting Ethical values in an  
atmosphere of free inquiry***

The Annual AEU Fall Conference will feature **Anne Klaeyesen**, newly installed leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, who will speak on "**Raising Ethical Citizens in a Conflicted World.**"

As usual, the weekend will include lots of sharing time, good food and fellowship. Families are encouraged to attend. Children ages 6-12 will be involved in activities led by Alan Berger. Children under the age of 6 will have child care.

We invite anyone who will be teaching or leading RE this year to make every effort to attend this once-a-year opportunity to be with others who are doing similar work, to consult with the AEU RE Director, and to share what has or has not worked with your program this past year.

The weekend begins with Friday dinner and ends with Sunday lunch. We welcome RE people from across the United States, and it's especially convenient and affordable for those in the New York area. Be sure to save the dates Nov 14-16 — We look forward to another wonderful renewing, religiously educating weekend with YOU!

***Watch for the flyer  
Questions? — Call Carol Wolff,  
AEU RE Director  
618-462-0897***

# ETHICS BEGINS WITH CHOICE

*Marvin Miller, Boston*

One of the principles of Ethical Culture is that ethics begins with choice. From one point of view that is a simple concept -- the question of what we ought to do is meaningless if there is only one thing we can do.

But the question of choice is itself not simple. People often talk about the choices we make as if they were completely free, unprompted and unconstrained. This is clearly not the case. For each of us a lifetime of experience inclines us to prefer certain choices to others. B. F. Skinner argued that all of our choices are as predetermined as those of other animals, though their causes are much more numerous, complex, and unknown. This may be true for those choices we make without thinking about them. It may not be true for those we think about. The whole advertising industry today consists of making itself and its images a powerful part of our life experience so that we will buy what their clients want to sell.

In addition to our spontaneous and internalized biases, there are always external constraints which limit our choices. We can choose only from the available alternatives. When the local hardware store closed it became necessary to go several miles to Home Depot for a fluorescent light bulb. Recently I wanted to buy boxed fruit juice for my grandchildren. The store offered Libby's, a brand owned by multinational Nestlé, and Minute Maid, a brand owned by multinational Coca-Cola. In November 2000 Americans had to choose Al Gore or G. W. Bush as their next president. Everyone knew that none of the other candidates would be elected.

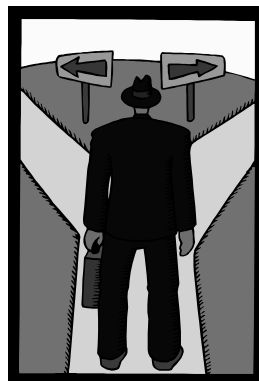
Jessica Lynch, the soldier who was captured and then rescued in Iraq, didn't join the army because she wanted to be a soldier. She wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. She chose to join the army because it seemed to be a way to get the necessary college education that was

not otherwise available to her.

An extreme example of external choice is depicted in the movie "Sophie's Choice." There the sadistic Nazi captor demands that a mother choose one of her children to be taken away and killed. If she refused to choose he would kill both of them.

Pro-choice is the designation used by those who favor the right of a pregnant woman to have or not to have an abortion. This choice is always made under external constraint, but the degree of constraint is different for different people. Rich celebrities can have babies while unmarried and suffer no adverse economic or social consequences. But our society is stingy and punitive in its treatment of poor families. This is a socio-economic constraint pressuring poor women to have abortions. Religious and political constraints, and their result, a shortage of available providers, pressure them not to. Under such circumstances, choice must be regarded as something less than free.

Ethics involves making judgments about the rightness or wrongness of choices people -- we ourselves and others -- make. Consideration of the different circumstances under which an action is chosen can lead us to different conclusions about whether the choice was ethically right or wrong.



## PHILADELPHIA SOCIETY PRESIDENT'S WELCOME TO THE 89th ASSEMBLY

Welcome to the Philadelphia Ethical Society. We are honored that the AEU selected Philadelphia to host our 89th Assembly.

According to the Mission Statement for AEU Assemblies, this weekend is intended "...to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of Ethical Culture... (and) to building relationships between and among...members attending...." In other words, it is an opportunity to recharge our Ethical Culture batteries.

Our shared beliefs that the universe and our place in it can be explained scientifically, not supernaturally; that ethics and morals are man-made, not revealed; and that life can have meaning and purpose without resorting to god, will unite a fragmented world. Adler's admonition to "act so as to bring out the best in others thereby bringing out the best in ourselves" is a core value in any belief system in which ethics is central...

This Assembly is historic. Its theme "Our Common Faith -- Building a National Ethical Presence" is most appropriate. Never before has a humanist perspective been more urgently needed.

Some time ago a physicist named Frank Drake attempted to calculate the probability of extra-terrestrial intelligent life. He was able to estimate with some known degree of precision the number of galaxies, stars within ..., planets around ..., planets close enough for liquid water, etc., until he came to an incalculable term. The probability of a technologically advanced civilization to self-destruct is unknowable. We have but one example, and for it my prognosis is guarded. On that subject, you and I are comprised of atoms which were spread throughout the universe in the supernovae explosions of second generation stars-- in a real sense, we are made of star stuff. According to latest calculations, this universe is 13.7 billion years old. It took that long for us to get here. It would be tragic for that time line to end and shameful if it were to happen on our watch. Accordingly, the uncertain component in the Drake Equation is of no small consequence. Extinction is not an option!

It is also the first assembly under our new executive director, John Hartman. Today will be remembered as the turning point in the growth of our movement as a voice of reason in these troubled times.

**Arnold Fishman**

# ASSEMBLY REPORT

Compiled from articles by **Oliver & Beverly Swift, Westchester,** and **Christine Swann, New York.**

The 89th Assembly of the American Ethical Union was held May 23-26 at the Philadelphia Society and the nearby Radisson Hotel. The theme of the Assembly was "Our Common Faith: Building a National Ethical Presence." Its focus was the need for unity across the movement.

A major part of the opening evening was devoted to the General Ethical Platform. In accordance with its visionary theme, the AEU leaders have been developing a statement of ethical religion entitled "An Invitation to Action: A Vision of Ethical Culture," prepared by the National Leaders Council of the AEU. This document is the result of an exhaustive compilation of many materials. It is seen as a work in progress and is under comment and revision. It was presented by society leaders at the opening session and later discussed in a roundtable discussion with several groups taking parts of it to work on. Copies are available from the AEU office.

The Saturday business meeting began with a statement of board tasks: articulating the vision of the organization; setting policies; and oversight of management.

AEU President Brian King introduced the new executive director, John Hartman, who sees himself as the first empowered executive director of the AEU in many years.

Mr. Hartman's intent is to make a real difference and to make the AEU important to the Ethical Culture movement, to each society, and to individual members.

He has already made changes in the operations of the AEU office with new tools to increase services to members. Two of these are a new data base and new financial reporting software. He made a strong case for starting with a full evaluation and information collection, starting in October, which would last about two years and lead to an in-depth strategic plan. The hope is to include every member. Mr. Hartman stated that we need a common vision, common action, and a unity as never seen before. The delegates then voted for what he and the board saw as necessary to start this new plan of action — a budget for the evaluation and strategic planning and a bylaws change allowing the AEU to solicit members directly for funds.

At the National Service Conference Luncheon, Susan Benesch of Amnesty International spoke on "Refugees in the New World Order."

On Sunday morning, Jone Johnson Lewis, NLC president, spoke on the "Emersonian Roots of Ethical Culture," which was followed by a certification ceremony for new leaders Robert Greenwell (Mid Rivers), Anne Klaeyen (Long Island), and David Reis (Queens). Following their talks and that of Joe Chuman, (*July Dialogue*) all leaders who were attending the assembly gathered on the platform in a moving candle-lighting ceremony.

The election of new board members took place during the Sunday afternoon business meeting. Sam Daley-Harris, president and co-founder of RESULTS Educa-

tion Fund, dedicated to strategies for ending world hunger, received the Elliott-Black Award. (See *July Dialogue* for excerpts of his remarks.)

Workshops were given by Joe Chuman, Leader, on the wall of separation between church and state; Lois Kellerman, Leader, on her book *Marriage From the Heart*; The National Service Conference of the AEU — Using our core convictions to create visibility: How the NSC does it at the UN; Stan Wayne and Tom Hoepfner, adjunct leaders — Sharing our successes as adjunct leaders and continuing ceremonial training; Fred Edwards, Editor of *The Humanist and Free Mind*, on making Humanism relevant; Dr. Marc Bernstein, AEU Archivist, on how to use Ethical Culture history to enrich your society; Dale Drews, Leader — Humanist and Feminist Responses to the Masculinity of God; Carol Wolff, AEU Director of Religious Education — The Past to the Future.

While the 2005 Assembly site has not yet been set, we hope that more members take the opportunity to participate and see what the larger movement has to offer. Also, start thinking about the Lay Leadership Summer School next year, a popular program in which members learn to build community and find their lives transformed. It includes deep learning about Ethical Humanism, networking, congregational development, and personal growth.

# Empathy – Concern For “The Other”

*Randy Best, Leader-intern, St. Louis; former president, North Carolina*

The limits of our collective ability to care about others is something that concerns me. I struggle to recognize the worth in others – to realize the ethical ideal of intrinsic human worth.

Like many of my quests for knowledge and wisdom, my examination of Empathy has produced more questions than answers. I feel that I have been exploring the margins of a vast area of thought with only occasional forays into true insight. Empathy, sympathy, compassion... what allows us to have concern for others? I believe that our ability to care about others is part of our “humanness.”

Empathy is an evolved, biological capacity of the human species. The potential for empathy is part of our nature. We are born with an undeveloped concept of self. Our sense of self emerges as we begin the process of differentiating ourselves from our mother, and from others. We are defined and we create ourselves in the social context of self and other. As we grow up, we develop the capacity to attribute mental states to ourselves and others and to understand our behavior in light of these attributions. In a social context, we develop a basic empathy that allows us to understand others and function in society.

But how do we move from understanding others to caring about others? I once had a boss named Rudy who had a populist philosophical bent. He once told me: “There are two kinds of people in the world, those who give a damn and those who don’t.” I had always thought that the two kinds of people in the world were those who divide people into two kinds and those who don’t. Nonetheless, there may be something to what Rudy said. What makes us see ourselves in others? What makes us give a damn? How do we increase our identification with others – heighten our level of concern for the other? How does empathy, understanding the other,

lead to sympathy, identifying with the other, and deepen into compassion, concern for the other? I believe that for us to engage our full potential we must approach others with an attitude of caring. We must use empathy and sympathy to recognize the essential humanness that we share in common with others. And sometimes, if we are fortunate, we will experience true compassion. But we can never get there if we don’t start by caring. We need to give a damn. Yet there are limits. One of the frustrations of being human is that we do not always act in accordance with our beliefs. I remember once as a rising young executive in my early thirties I was rather full of myself. I dressed well and had a job that made me feel important. We hired a clerical temp who was in his 40’s, and I remember looking at his slightly frayed brown sport coat, wondering what his story was, and feeling smugly superior.

I remember walking at lunchtime with some of my smart colleagues and passing by an old man who looked homeless and who appeared to be drunk. I noticed him totter off a street bench and slide onto the sidewalk. It didn’t even occur to me to help him. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the temp walk over to the street person and help him into a sitting position. It struck me that here was a person who I had felt superior to demonstrating a level of concern that I was incapable of. Maybe his circumstances allowed him to recognize himself in that street person and see him as a fellow person who could use a little help. All I knew was that he had compassion for the other. He gave a damn about that street person. My feeling of superiority instantly vaporized and was replaced by humility and shame. I am far from perfect. I do not always act in ways that are consistent with my values. Yet I strive to maintain an ideal of caring. Of seeing others as falling within my circle of caring. Cultivating an attitude of caring is part of my religious

practice. Part of how I practice Ethical Culture.

The philosophy of Ethical Culture is based, at its core, on concern for others. Felix Adler saw the welfare of others as an object of ultimate concern. People are worthy of respect and should not to be used as a means to achieve our ends. Adler saw concern for others as our means of personal fulfillment. He expressed this idea in his ethical maxim: Act so as to elicit the best in others and thereby elicit the best that is in your self. Adler’s statement calls us to be concerned about others – to reach our own enlightenment through developing others. Central to the philosophy of Ethical Culture is that exercising ethics begins with choice. We make significant choices in our lives. We choose how to treat each other. I choose to approach others with an attitude of caring. To see others as included in the circle of humanity. I choose to struggle to exercise empathy, sympathy and compassion for others. I choose to be part of that group that gives a damn.

Hannan Ashwari, the spokesperson for the Palestine Liberation Organization, said, “Until we stop seeing each other as ‘the other’, there will never be peace.” I cannot agree more.

I believe that unless we include others in our circle of humanity, there will never be peace. Until we begin to approach others with an attitude of caring, there will never be justice. Until we live the ethical ideal to “bring out the best in others” we will not realize our best selves. Until we engage in the struggle to live lives of empathy and sympathy, we will not know our true potential. Until we are able to transcend ourselves and experience compassion with the other, we will not experience the transforming power of love.

May you give a damn. May Peace be upon you.

*Excerpted from a 2002 platform address.*

# THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Ken Novak, Chicago

1969 was the first summer I went by myself into New York City. I was 16 and lived about 12 miles west of Manhattan, and I loved to walk in the city all day. As I was walking in the West Village past what looked like a restaurant/bar, I noticed a handwritten sign out front asking for people to be calm because they didn't want any trouble or for anyone to get hurt. It was a fairly long and pained message, and really puzzling. When I saw the Village Voice that week, I understood why the management of the place, the Stonewall, had posted the sign.

Almost two years later, near the end of our senior year, Michael Beck walked over to my friend Art and started massaging his shoulders. A teacher we knew well asked later if they had set that up to freak him out. Art said, no, it wasn't planned and he didn't exactly know how to react. But it was my first experience of someone I knew "coming out", at least implicitly.

Michael and about 20 other boys I graduated with died in the first ten years after our high school graduation. Some of them were always "weird", some really smart, some really good actors, some really good football players. I now suppose that many of them were gay and died of AIDS, and I'm sad that I never really knew them in high school.

I'm inspired that my neighbor Charley at 14 wore a T-shirt saying "I Like Boys" to high school, but he doesn't

take gym any more. Middle school gym was a level of hell for him, as I understand it. But in high school he's found a community of boys and girls and parents who know him better than anyone knew Michael Beck in high school, who love him and who cheer him for all that he is.

Seventeen years following Stonewall, the Supreme Court rejected equal rights, and seventeen years following that, after lawyers all the way to Supreme Court clerk staffs discarded their camouflage, and after two men fought back legally after a neighbor called in a false weapons report on them that led to an arrest for sodomy, that Court has unequivocally dismantled the legal structure that supported the New York police bringing their billy clubs into the Stonewall and the Houston police dragging two loving men out of their bed.

There is clearly still much work to do. But today I applaud the brave men and women who refused to hide, who refused to quietly take the shit hurled at them. I don't think I could do it. But, for Charley and for millions others living today and yet to be born, I am deeply grateful.

*You can sometimes count every orange on a tree but never all the trees in a single orange.*

A.K. Ramanujan

## WHO DECIDES?

I spell my name with a capital L and a capital S. Ethical Culture tends to spell its professional clergypersons and each of its local organizations also with a capital L (Leader) and a capital S (Society) — as in "Our Leader will be speaking at your Society."

I recently received some text for *Dialogue* from Joe Chuman wherein he used the lower case "l" in references to the generic Ethical Culture clergyperson. When I "corrected" him by capitalizing the "L", this was Joe's response:

"Lee, your editing looks fine to me. One point of honest disputation: **I tend not to**

**capitalize "leader"** as I would not "rabbi" or "minister" unless the descriptor is part of the title. For example: 'I met Rabbi Samuel Adler, the religious head of Temple Emmanuel.' Or: 'Respectfully yours, Samuel Adler, Rabbi.' BUT: 'Samuel Adler is the rabbi of Temple Emmanuel.' I would think that the same rule governing capitalization would follow for an Ethical Culture leader. What do you think?"

I replied: "Joe, I couldn't agree more, but I've been told that in EC, Leader is spelled with a capital L to distinguish it from the generic sense of the word. I've been doing it for that reason, and now, for consistency. It's your writing, though,

and if you'd like me to lower case it, I'll be glad to."

Joe's answer to that: "Please lower case it. It is not up to Ethical Culture to proclaim its own grammatical kingdom, divorced from the conventions of correct English form."

And so I shall, unless and until a consensus firmly leads me back to EC's own convention, the more liberal use of the capital L.

*Lee Smalley, Editor*

**I tend to capitalize Leader** when it means professional leader, as it cuts down on the misunderstandings. We have had, for instance, people who thought that the "lay leadership summer school"

was for people considering adjunct or professional leadership positions.

Our word "leader" has special issues that "rabbi" and "minister" don't have. The president of a synagogue is not also known as the "lay rabbi" of that organization, for instance.

I tend toward the theory that language is to communicate clearly, and if the general rule doesn't fit, then we need to either find new words or a new way to communicate the words accurately.

*Jone Johnson Lewis, Leader,  
Northern Virginia, President,  
National Leaders' Council*

# ***IN THESE TIMES, ETHICAL CULTURE COULD NOT BE MORE RELEVANT, OUR MISSION MORE IMPORTANT!***

***Joseph Chuman, Leader, Bergen***

Humanism uses words as pointers to direct us to something that words, even concepts, cannot reach. It seeks to bring us into contact with the ineffable human essence of the human being, of which our manifest personalities, our gestures and expressions, are in some sense mere symbols. We sense that beneath the visible manifestations of men and women there resides an indescribable core of human operation and subjectivity that compels appreciation and respect. It is as if we stand on the event horizon of experience beyond which we know that there is something precious, though vague.

Undoubtedly this intuition is a basis for the belief in a human soul that transcends the sinew and expressive dimensions of human existence. The philosopher Kant named this quality "dignity" and Felix Adler called it "worth." For these thinkers, the human being is priceless, meaning totally outside the world of barter and exchange. To affirm worth is to predicate value beyond value. In religious parlance, it is the sacred dimension resident in human beings that denominates us as holy beings.

It is the overarching purpose of Ethical Culture to preserve, sustain and nurture this ultimately ineffable, but vital quality. In my professional work, I come closest to this appreciation when constructing eulogies for those who have recently died. In the presence of death, we gaze into the infinite and eternal. It is then that I most starkly touch upon the inadequacy of words to embrace a reality that words can merely point to but never fully envelop or describe. The attributes and contributions of the person who has entered eternity are in some sense irretrievable and fixed, and I struggle hard to verbally grasp the

distinctive and holy dimension of that unique and irreplaceable individual, recognizing the ultimate impossibility of the task — for words are only metaphors and can never reach far enough.

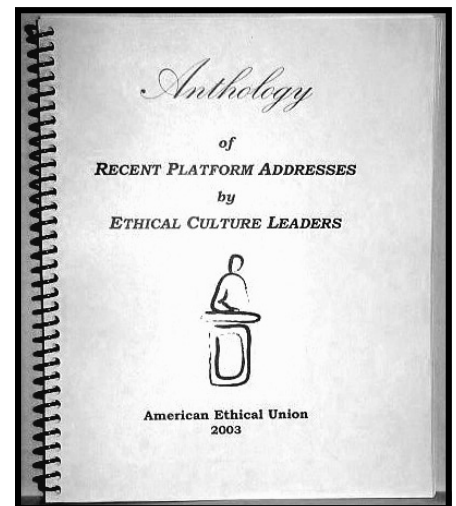
It may seem a long way from here to the world of politics. But for the Ethical Culturist, politics is never merely politics. All political ideologies, movements, doctrines and programs are ultimately the vessels and containers that carry the precious content of humanity. By the political forms we collectively create, the humanity of men and women will either be preserved and nurtured or will be oppressed and violated. Hence, Ethical Culture demands engagement with the world, the hard world of political and social struggle, and not retreat from it. Our mission is to rescue the human from the dehumanizing pressures threatening to stifle and obliterate it.

The year just passing has been one of unprecedented energy and vitality for our Ethical Society. And I surmise that our vitality has been fueled by brooding realization that the political environment we inhabit in America and globally aggressively menaces those political structures, those containers that preserve the values equitable with our humanity. World peace, international cooperation, ecological preservation, civil liberties, the secular state, economic justice, democracy — all these are not simply political causes, they are the scaffolding by which our ultimate concerns are supported and the ground on which they flourish.

Sensing that these values are under orchestrated assault, people are seeking out Ethical Culture (and rightly so) as a community in which they can find support — communal,

intellectual and spiritual — to reaffirm what they hold most dear, for their own sakes and for the sake of the society on which our destiny depends. We come together to educate ourselves, to commune, to be inspired, to celebrate and to reinforce commitment to our highest ideals.

In these times, Ethical Culture could not be more relevant, our mission more important!



**The 2003 ANTHOLOGY** of Recent Platform Addresses by Ethical Culture Leaders (138 pages) is available from the AEU office for \$10, which includes the cost of mailing.

# From the UN

*Sylvain and Phyllis Ehrenfeld, Bergen*

*Delegates to the UN from IHEU and AEU's National Service Conference*

World Press Freedom Day, which was observed on Friday, May 2, began on a somber note -- participants were asked to stand for a moment of silence in tribute to the journalists who died covering the Iraqi war. Fourteen journalists have been killed, with two still missing. Not all deaths are the accidental results of the chaos in armed conflict. Worldwide, most journalists who die are specifically targeted for exposing corruption and crime. By the end of 2002, 136 were imprisoned, with hundreds more facing physical assault and many dangers.

Louise Frechette, Under-Secretary General substituting for Kofi Annan, who was unable to attend, spoke on the difficulty of the journalist's task. Because of their great influence, they bear enormous responsibilities. Press freedom is a fundamental human right. The right of everyone to have opinions and to express them is protected and maintained by Article 19 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Journalists constantly face difficult choices. They include, among others, challenges such as: objectivity versus propaganda, overviewing a situation versus creating a single dramatic image, producing saturation coverage which gives fidelity to facts, but dulls and damages feelings. Journalists can tell us how war impacts on people. Seventy percent of all casualties are civilians, and two thirds are women and children. A primary goal of journalism must be to reject being incorporated into hate media.

A varied group of correspondents spoke on the topic of The Media and Armed Conflict. The panel included, among others, a reporter

from CNN, a reporter from the Arab News media (Al Jazeera), the reporter from the Daily Times (Lahore, India), and Tony Jenkins, President of the UN Correspondents Association. A French journalist commented that there are many wars with great loss of lives that go almost totally unreported, for example: Somalia and the Congo.

The panelists were unusually outspoken in their condemnation of US TV coverage. They regretted that the Iraqi correspondent at the UN, Mohammed Assad Allawi was accused of being a spy, but was not permitted to see the evidence against him or to use his legal right to protest. Allawi told his colleagues that if he attempted to protest, under immigration laws he would be sent to an immigration jail without access to his lawyer or his family. Under UN rules, the decision to accuse Allawi of spying had to come directly from Secretary of State Powell, who had to personally certify that Allawi was a spy. Tony Jenkins observed that the Anglo-American campaign had not proved that Saddam Hussein was involved in 9/11. No other nations believe in this threat. Jenkins observed that in press conferences, American reporters did not pursue questions about motives for the war. In one conference, the president was asked if his faith had helped him with the decision to go to war. Jenkins stated that every religious denomination in this country, including the president's own denomination, has opposed the war.

TV in particular came in for sharp criticism. The concept of "embedding" reporters in military units under prescribed limitations

of information creates loyalty to the group, which limits objectivity of news, with no opportunity for an overall view. On American TV, the media has been entranced by graphics and dazzling technology presenting the war as a video game. News has become entertainment. On TV it appeared as if America's precision bombing had produced a bloodless war without casualties, with Fox and CNN as cheerleaders of the game.

It should be noted that Secretary of State Powell's son heads the Federal Communications Commission. The present trend is to further consolidation under conditions of corporate ownership, reducing the independence of individual voices. For those committed to a free and independent media it is discouraging that both the Arab and the American media skewed the news and distorted the reality of the war. Although the tone of the meeting was unusually outspoken and critical, some journalists were able to create live coverage interviewing the Kurdish population. The CNN reporter complained of limited access. She felt, however, that the press may have learned a lesson from the experience of "embedding" and hopefully will do better in the future. As an example of in-depth coverage, tribute was paid to an Israeli journalist, Amira Hass, who has lived among the Palestinian population and reported on conditions there. This was seen as a rare example of free access and long term reporting on the conditions of a population.

# THE WASHINGTON ETHICAL ACTION OFFICE

*Albert Hirsch*

## HOW SHOULD WE REACT WHEN THE REASON FOR A POLICY CHANGES?

A political leader or group propounds a certain policy together with its purported rationale. The policy wins support and is adopted. Circumstances change and the rationale loses relevance or acceptance. Yet the leader or group remains committed to the policy and offers a new rationale in order to shore up continued support. It is a familiar sequence that too often meets with little concern or even awareness that a shift has occurred.

As observant and ethically sensitive citizens, how should we respond to such a scenario? An easy, if cynical, assessment is that the policy's protagonists have a hidden agenda for which both the original and new rationales serve as cover, and so the policy is inherently suspect. Is a more discriminating response possible? Consider the following recent examples.

**The Bush tax cuts.** In 2000-01 President Bush propounded a large 10-year tax cut, mainly based on projections of sustained fiscal surpluses, proclaiming that the money rightfully "belongs to the taxpayer; who knows better how to spend it than the government." When the projected surpluses rapidly dwindled and ultimately turned into deficits, due largely to economic recession and the first (2001) tax cut itself, recession and a lagging recovery with rising unemployment became the justification for further tax cuts that were really extensions or acceleration of the original cuts and were proffered in 2003 as a "jobs and growth" stimulus package.

**The war in Iraq.** The original justification for the war was to protect America's and other nations' security against Saddam Hussein's potential use— directly or by terrorist surrogates— of his presumed store of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including a potential nuclear weapons capacity. As the evidence of a nuclear potential and terrorist connections weakened, the argument for war increasingly emphasized liberation of the Iraqi people from the Baathist tyranny and some sort of democratization that would hopefully spread through the Middle East. It must be noted, however, that the administration has not abandoned its concern about nor its search for unaccounted for stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. Indeed, the original and newer

rationales are not mutually exclusive.

**Affirmative Action.** Affirmative action (AA), a policy of preferential college and university admissions for African-Americans and other disadvantaged minorities, was originally justified on the premise that it would compensate for past inequities and that a more aggressive policy than mere enforcement of anti-discrimination laws was needed to achieve upward mobility of blacks into the American middle-class mainstream. However, as whites became increasingly resentful of AA, because of its (reverse) discriminatory aspect, a new rationale — one given strong support by universities — has come to dominate at least the rhetoric that supports the policy, *viz.*, the notion that AA lends "diversity" to the college campus; and without AA, the wanted minorities would be "underrepresented." A recent Supreme Court decision gave the court's blessing both to the constitutionality of AA and to the importance, as well as legitimacy, of diversity as a goal.

### **Assessment of Rationales**

In the tax cut example, both the original and revised rationales are weak. Both the 2001 and 2003 cuts are not well designed as either a short-run or long-run stimulus to the economy, while being inordinately tilted towards the wealthy. The likely true motive behind these tax cuts, whose realistic potential budgetary impacts were willfully understated, is to force expenditure cuts and thus curb the role of the federal government.

As regards Iraq, it can be argued, at least with hindsight, that the revisionist rationale is more solidly grounded than the original (WMD) argument, as it is now apparent that there was nowhere near an imminent security threat — but the humanitarian horror within Iraq was greater than we imagined. Because of overstatement of the security threat, however, there was ample reason for both greater patience in seeking more allies before the war and certainly for more careful advance postwar planning. And there remains a strong need to internationalize the reconstruction effort.

The original (compensatory) argument for AA, although controversial, is at least forthright. The diversity argument, in

contrast, is a travesty. Under the latter, the lingering and corrosive racial divide, whose historic roots are slavery and the abuses that followed, is recast as a benign boundary across which the groups are said to be "diverse," *i.e.*, "different" (presumably aside from skin color) in ways that purportedly benefit members of both races through an ill-defined process of mutual "enrichment." But who can say that (enriching) differences between racial groups dominate those within them; if not, a racial mixture adds nothing to meaningful diversity. Finally, by emphasizing racial differences, we needlessly perpetuate race consciousness.

These examples have resulted in three different judgmental outcomes as regards revised vs. original rationales for given policies: Is there a guiding principle for making these choices? Certainly. When a new rationale is advanced for an existing policy, we should assess it on its merits, irrespective of the original rationale, not dismiss it out of hand because of suspicion about underlying motives. Thus we oppose the tax cut policy — our suspicion notwithstanding — on the basis of the likely adverse impacts. We may accept current Iraq policy, conditional upon reforms needed to enhance its likely effectiveness, whether or not the missing WMD are ever found. If "diversity" is the only basis for AA, the practice cannot be justified; if we believe, however, that the compensatory argument remains valid, we should abjure overlaying it by a gratuitous and confusing platitude about diversity. Concretely, we should oppose any quota-like admissions practice that is intended to assure "adequate representation" of a minority.

**Timely "ACTION ALERTS" from the Washington Ethical Action Office are available to subscribers to the Ethic Action listserv. To subscribe (all AEU members are eligible) go to the AEU website, [www.ethicalaction.org](http://www.ethicalaction.org), click on [Ethical Action Alerts](#), then Email lists, and follow the instructions for the Ethical Action list.**

# AEU NEWS & HAPPENINGS

**Austin** Before the platform address, members and visitors take a few minutes to discuss an "ethical dilemma," a decision to be made between two goods or positives. The decision can be personal or public in nature. ESA takes great pride in presenting the ethical dilemma during each platform meeting. This particular segment of our platform is unique to the Austin society and receives wonderful reviews from members and visitors alike.

**The Bergen and Essex Societies and the Princeton Fellowship** jointly sent a petition endorsing a New Jersey Death Penalty Moratorium bill to all state legislators and the governor a couple of years ago. The State Assembly has passed it, and now the Senate Judiciary Committee will take it up in the Fall.

**Boston** Summer fundraising events included a baseball game; ice cream party; pool party; discussion of the film "Gandhi"; and a cookout.

**Brooklyn** The society presented an Alternative 4th of July Celebration of poetry, music, and refreshments featuring local writers and musicians as well as an open mike.

**Chicago** Sunday morning programs continued through the summer, including "Current Issues and Events -- What's Your Opinion?" which opened with a point-by-point condemnation of the Bush administration in its conduct of both domestic and foreign affairs; a fiction circle book discussion; and "A Look at the Historic Victories Over Infectious Disease." Summer events included a picnic; film discussion; and ethnic dinner out. Members of the creative writers group meet to share their original short works. The new auditorium, garden, and office will be dedicated on September 14th. (*The November issue of Dialogue will chronicle the event.*)

**Long Island** "Summer of Reflection, Recreation, and Renewal" included poetry workshops; lunch discussions with Leader Anne Klaeyesen; sumi-e brush painting classes; storytelling workshop; movie group; and colloquies. The Public Affairs Committee has been working on: 1 - the environment, 2 - the consolidation of media and 3 - Clean Money, Clean Elections.

**New York** Outline of August 17 address, "Democracy, Endangered Species" by Robert B. Tapp, Dean of the Humanist Institute: Rejecting absolutisms of the old countries and religions, the new American society demanded a secular federal government. It relied on reason, conscience, and compromise—and upon educated voters. An ethic of equality, combined with a commitment to the common good, was eventually applied to all citizens. Public education was created to assimilate children to these new values. Today, increasing corporate manipulations threaten this democracy as they control media, surfeit us with consumerism and entertainment, and vocationalize education. Humanists and their liberal and progressive allies need to rethink their communicative strategies if we are to counter the pushes toward theocracy, corporate dominance verging on fascism, and a permanent war economy.

**Northern Virginia** On September 14 NoVES will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Leader Jone Johnson Lewis will deliver the opening platform. A festive buffet will follow. Throughout the year there will be ceremonies and celebrations, including a 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retreat in Sharpsburg, MD next May.

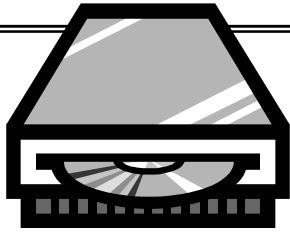
**Riverdale-Yonkers** Summer activities included yoga; discussion groups; colloquy; pool party and potluck; sing-alongs; a barbecue;

and classes on The History of Western Mythology, The Psychodynamics of Early European Religion, The Mystical Power of Language in Mythos, and The Paganization of Christianity.

**St. Louis** July platforms: "Venezuelan politics;" "Music as Worship;" and "Restorative Justice." The first Summer Solstice Celebration at the Ethical Society was held with an estimated 300 people who came to participate in the festivities that included banjo playing, Morris dancers, Native American flute, singing bowls, a labyrinth, face painting, games, the rousing Ethical Society Band, storytelling, singing, dulcimer, yoga, tai chi and Nia demonstrations, and drumming.

**Washington** The annual community dinner was a great success thanks to the high energy of many dedicated members. Attendance was the highest in the society's history, and members who pledged that evening increased their pledges by 34 percent over their last year's pledge contributions. There's excitement about the future of WES, as evidenced by the 57 percent pledge increase by the WES trustees prior to the dinner.

**Westchester** Some summer events: lunch group; men's night out; book group; women's night out. From Leader Bart Worden: Events planned for the fall include our second "Ethical Chefs" night. We will strive to include more live music on Sunday mornings and include new songs for everyone to sing. I am also working on an Ethical Culture songbook with Anne Klaeyesen, Leader of the Long Island Society.



## THE SOUNDS OF ETHICAL CULTURE

Generous funding from the New York Society and the American Ethical Union has permitted us to put on compact disc some of the great speeches and events that have enlivened Ethical Culture in the past 75 years. Want to hear Algernon Black at his best? Jerome Nathanson? Just make an appointment to borrow one of 14 CDs now in our archives. A selection of the best of this material (including the voices of Adler, Elliott and Henry Neumann) is now available on one CD that can be purchased from the AEU office for \$10. AEU phone: 212-873-6500; fax: 212-362-0850. Happy listening!

## A GIFT TO THE ARCHIVES

A gift of 35 volumes of writings by Ethical Culture Leaders and other related works has been made to the archives of the American Ethical Union and the New York Society. Many of the volumes are new to the archives, and all are of limited availability. They were donated by Marvin Glasser of Queens from the library of his late wife Annabelle, former AEU president, a long time member of the AEU board of directors, and a member of the editorial board of *Dialogue*. Bookplates acknowledging the donation are being placed in each volume.



## Dialogue

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**News & Views of the AEU**

