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Humanist Invocation for People's Climate March

Excerpt from Ethical Culture Leader Algernon Black's book, "Unburnt Offerings." Edited with gender-neutral pronouns and read by Anne Klaeyesen, Leader of New York Society for Ethical Culture, on September 21, 2014

This is the call to the living,
To those who refuse to make peace with evil,
With the suffering and waste of the world.

This is the call to the human, not the perfect,
To those who know their own prejudices,
Who have no intention of becoming prisoners of their own limitations.

This is a call to those who remember the dreams of their youth.
Who know what it means to share food and shelter,
The care of children and those who are troubled,
To reach beyond the barriers of the past
Bringing people into communion.

This is a call to the never-ending spirit
Of common people, our essential decency and integrity,
Our unending capacity to suffer and endure,
To face death and destruction and to rise again
And build from the ruins of life.

This is the greatest call of all
The call to a faith in people.
To believe in freedom, we have to believe in people.

Additional Words from Anne Klaeyesen

We people created this climate disaster. We are responsible for destroying our environment for ourselves and every living creature. Today we make an ethical commitment to repair the world for generations to come. Today, which is also the International Day of Peace, we commit ourselves to loving and compassionate relationships. Together we can and must take care of each other and the world we share.



Letter from Executive Director Bart Worden



For decades our Ethical Societies have pressed for greater environmental awareness, reduced consumption, environmentally sustainable living, and support for efforts to reduce pollution. In recent years we have been especially concerned over climate change and the urgent need to reduce CO2 emissions into the atmosphere. While we haven't been alone in having these concerns, the road to change has been a long and often disappointing one. Despite near unanimity of opinion in the scientific community that human behavior is resulting in rapid climate change, and despite the belief by the majority of people in the United States that global warming is occurring, climate change remains near the bottom of people's concerns about threats to the country, according to a Pew Research poll in February 2014.

But that will change. The [People's Climate March](#) in New York City on September 21st drew hundreds of thousands of marchers to Manhattan in an inspirational display of public concern. Though estimates vary, the organizers reported 400,000 marchers. And that's just in New York City. There were over 2,600 solidarity events in 162 countries marking the largest ever mobilization for climate concerns.

The American Ethical Union was there in force. Although our groups were in multiple places during the March, I have gathered the names of almost 200 people from 11 Ethical Societies who attended. And our contingent of marchers was strongly bolstered by a number of humanist and atheist groups who gathered on West 64th Street to march along with us, including people from the American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry, Harvard Humanist Community, and Sunday Assembly to name a few. In addition, members of the Ethical Society of St. Louis participated in large numbers at a solidarity event in Missouri.

And that is not all—the New York Society for Ethical Culture packed its auditorium for three major March events: a summer clergy breakfast, a vital planning meeting in September, and a fabulous panel on the Saturday before the March. The panel, co-sponsored by 350NYC, was entitled “A Global Climate Treaty: Why the U.S. Must Lead.” The energetic crowd responded with enthusiasm to speeches by Bill McKibben (a founder of [350.org](#)), the United Nations Special Envoy for Climate Change, the President of Earth Policy Institute, United Nations Ambassador from the Alliance of Small Island States, two New York City Council members, and many others. Hats off to NYSEC for truly inspired organizing!

One of the powerful messages of the Saturday event was the injustice of climate impact: the people who will suffer the most from climate change are not the ones who contribute the most to the problem. Countries such as the United States are dumping the lion's share of CO2 into the atmosphere, but the effects are realized most powerfully in parts of the world that contribute little to the problem and have few resources to bring to bear on the issue. Ambassador Marlene Moses of the Alliance of Small Island States spoke to the environmental impact of climate change that is having disastrous effects on a number of islands in the Pacific.

There is so much to do and we must be loud and persistent in our efforts if we are to ensure our leaders awake to the climate crisis that is upon us. Climate change deniers have already dismissed the People's Climate March as a gathering of hypocrites who burned fossil fuels getting to the March and left a trail of garbage behind them. We got to get and stay serious about this, and will do well to follow the lead of the organizers at the New York Society to partner up with organizations such as [350.org](#) and continue to press our concerns. Are you ready to organize?

**See photos from the
People's Climate March
on the next page.
Submit your photos to
communications@aeu.org
to see them posted on
AEU website.**



St. Louis Society Goes Solar!

To create a more sustainable world, one of its Core Values, the Ethical Society of St. Louis covered most of its building's roof with solar panels. Here's an excerpt from the report in the Society's newsletter:

“There are a total of 100 modules, each rated at 250 Watts. The system is expected to produce enough energy to power almost 3 homes or 20-25% of the Society's total energy needs. The system is currently being leased from Microgrid Solar to whom we will be paying \$2,000 per year for the next 5 years. Because of the rebate from Ameren, the system will be fully depreciated by that time and Microgrid will transfer the ownership to the Ethical Society.

During the period of the lease, we are guaranteed electrical utility savings of \$3,235 per year during the first year of operation for a net savings of \$1,235. The guaranteed savings increases each year with the presumption of increasing utility costs. Total savings over a period of 25 years are estimated to be in the vicinity of \$145,000. As our electrical power is produced by coal, we will also be saving more than 50 pounds of carbon dioxide from being added to our atmosphere for each hour of operation.”

Reach out to the [Ethical Society of St. Louis](#) to learn how your Society can become more sustainable too.

Letter from AEU Board President Richard Koral



I was caught off guard when asked why I attend my Ethical Society with such regularity. Why indeed? For good works I could go to volunteer events, which I do from time to time, but that doesn't quite suffice or take its place. For intellectual stimulation I could take a course, go to a museum, or read something. Well, I do that, too. And yet, that doesn't quite get it, either. Potluck dinner is what I get every evening at home, so it can't be for that especially. I certainly meet people at work and in the neighborhood. But what is different about the Ethical Society? What is the draw?

In his September 21 op-ed article, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks posed an interesting notion that I think gets closer to pin-pointing that special quality that makes me continue to return to my Ethical Society. It has to do with the art and practice of friendship.

Brooks imagined what if he suddenly had a half billion dollars to use for good works. What would he do? After seeing that all the good diseases were taken and world peace is still too distant a hope, he concluded that the one issue, the one signal matter that underlies everything that is good and which most needs support in the world is friendship.

Friendship is what civilization is made of—that interaction between friends who stand side by side and face the challenges of life together with mutual help and encouragement. It is friendship that enables a human being to grow, to develop self-assurance and to express oneself.

How else can civilization form, democracy function, or the arts flourish absent the glue that binds people

and unites them towards common purposes? It is through friendship. Friendship is the medium through which dreams are conveyed. It is the support of friends that gives one courage to pursue one's passion. Ideas alone do not induce people to commit themselves—it is the reflection from trusted friends that engages the spirit. You can't be fully realized in solitude. It is in friendships that people come into their own. Friendship is both an end and a means. It gratifies and at the same time it fortifies one to go further.

It is said that friendship is in decline. According to one survey, in 1985 people reported having three close friends on average. Twenty years later, the average fell to two close friends and the number of people who say they have no close confidants at all tripled over that time. So Brooks imagined that, if he had the means, he would fund the development of places where adults could congregate in order to make friends.

Of course, here at the Ethical Societies we have created that very place that Brooks discusses. My closest friends are both in and not in the Society. But nevertheless, it is in my Society that I am guaranteed to find someone who will understand what I am talking about or someone who can help me in a new plan I might devise. Or, I can find myself drawn into someone else's idea that I never imagined on my own. It is in my Society that I can discover new perspectives and share the excitement of lifetime learning in the company of people who appreciate the things I value. It is here that people know my name. These are very good

people, and very good friends. As Felix Adler's simple phrase expressed it, "The place where people meet to seek the highest is holy ground."

So what does it take to cultivate democracy, promote world peace, and advance civilization? It is in constructing communities where people can fully realize themselves—yes, and also where they can do good works, find intellectual stimulation, and enjoy some potlucks too.

But why would David Brooks invest the half billion dollars? Because a community always takes investment and support to create and maintain a fertile and secure atmosphere. It takes welcoming facilities to serve its participants. It takes knowledgeable people to make it function. It takes organization.

The AEU acts as the central clearinghouse of skills and experience and it fosters the sharing of the nuts and bolts that enable the Societies to realize their role. As president of the AEU Board, I have been gratified to see how the successes of one Society are made accessible to the others. Through the Annual Assemblies, the Lay Leadership Summer School, the National Leaders Conference meetings, the AEU Membership and Growth Workshops, Ethical Education Weekends, YES conferences, etc., etc., the work of organizing is carried on.

It is with funding that these tasks can be fulfilled. That is why I give money not only to my own Society, but to the AEU as well. The Societies are the community centers, but the AEU is the center of Ethical Culture as a Movement. I hope you can join me by being generous in your support of the Movement through gifts to the AEU.

Through our participation and our investment, Ethical Culture will serve its goal of encouraging the advancement of the good life and the life of the good by being a meeting place for good people.



Eliciting the Best in Our Societies: The Heart of the Pledge Drive

Society Board Members, finance folks, pledge & fundraising officers, and new volunteers were invited to a special AEU Membership and Growth workshop October 24-25 at the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester. They learned how to run successful pledge drives that engage members and build community.

We opened with a cocktail hour and dinner, hosted by the gracious Westchester Society. During the 2-day workshop, we helped develop timelines, volunteer roles, communications, and useful strategies. This event was sponsored by the AEU Membership Committee and facilitated by congregational stewardship consultant Mark Ewert. Mark has worked with the Washington Ethical Society, the AEU Board, and UUA congregations. He is also the author of the book "The Generosity Path: Finding the Richness in Giving." Learn more at www.aeu.org.

Continuing to Engage Young Adults Elizabeth Collier, Mossler Fellow

The second phase of my Mossler Fellowship involves working directly with the Baltimore Ethical Society and the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture to make those communities more welcoming and receptive to newcomers, especially young adults. We will be experimenting with outreach strategies such as: using more social media for publicity, co-sponsoring hands-on social justice events with other humanist and like-minded action groups, forming relationships with nearby colleges and chapters of the Secular Student Alliance, organizing and publicizing social events for younger adults, and doing more publicity to the public for Sunday platforms that would most likely appeal to young adults.



Within the Ethical Societies in Baltimore and Brooklyn, I will lead workshops on welcoming visitors, explaining Ethical Culture to newcomers and new members, and encouraging intergenerational connections. I am looking forward to supporting both of these Ethical Societies to improve their exposure to young adults and to increase their numbers of young adult visitors and members. At the end of my project in Spring 2015, I will analyze the success of our efforts and their implications for the rest of our Ethical Societies. My results will then become available by Assembly 2015. I look forward to sharing what I learn with the Movement.

Save These Dates

For details visit www.aeu.org

Board Meetings

Individual members of member Societies are always welcome to attend meetings.
Saturday, Jan. 10, 9am NYC
Saturday, Mar. 14, 9am NYC
Saturday, May 9, 9am NYC
Thu-Sun, June 25-28
Assembly

Ethical Education Weekend

Nov. 7-9 Stony Point, NY
 Develop your Society's Ethical Education program.

Youth of Ethical Societies (YES) Conference 2014

Nov. 14-16 NYC
 Teens will meet up this fall to discuss "Medical Ethics."

Future of Ethical Societies (FES) Conference 2015

May 22-25 Washington, DC
 Connect with young adults across the Ethical Movement for a great weekend.

American Ethical Union Assembly 2015

June 25-28 Stamford, CT
 Celebrate the 100th AEU Assembly in June 2015!

Support the American Ethical Union

With your generous support members are able to learn, share, grow, and make a difference in our Societies and the world. Donate [online](#), send a check to the AEU at 2 West 64th St, Ste 406, New York, NY, 10023, or call 212-873-6500 with your credit card information. All financial contributions to the AEU are tax-deductible.

Thank you for helping the AEU thrive!

Notes from Your AEU Board

Karen Elliott, AEU Board Member

At the September Board meeting in New York City, National Leaders Council President Jone Johnson Lewis reported that the Leaders are working on an updated mission statement as well as workshops for the 100th Assembly, which will be held June 25-28, 2015 in Stamford, CT. AEU Director of Administration Lawrence Miller reported that the Assembly Committee is already looking at locations for 2016, including somewhere we have never had an Assembly before.

Digitizing of key documents from our archives continues. Over 200 platform addresses, mostly by Ethical Culture Movement founder Felix Adler, are done and will be available soon on the AEU website, www.aeu.org. Members of the AEU Board, staff, and committees received training in the work-collaboration tool Podio. This will allow for more flexibility and at the same time more structure than some other collaboration tools we've used in the past.

Bart Worden, AEU Executive Director, reported that he and Leader-in-Training Paulo Ribeiro have presented their new organizational development

workshop to the Riverdale-Yonkers Society. The workshop and possible follow-up consulting is intended to help Societies experiencing a decrease in membership. The AEU has recently received multiple inquiries about starting new Societies, including in Louisville, KY and Dayton, OH.

Bart also reported he continues to keep in touch with many other like-minded groups. Recent interactions include talking with the Humanist Institute about working together on officiant training and online learning, talks with the UU Humanist Association's director, and representatives of the Openly Secular campaign, for which the AEU is a participating group although we are not secular.

The Board discussed revamping the way the AEU budget is developed to ensure that our Committees and staff have the necessary resources. Upcoming events were also reviewed, including the Membership and Growth Workshop in October and the Ethical Education Weekend in November. Scholarship money or flexible rates are often available for AEU-sponsored events.

We discussed at length how best to gather information about the AEU and its affiliates and disseminate it to new Society Presidents. No matter how many services or information are available, it doesn't matter if people don't know about them. A lot of resource information is

stored in a Presidents Dropbox account, as well as the email listserv and Presidents Council meetings (both virtual and in person), but sometimes information does not get to the correct person or the AEU doesn't hear about election results in a timely manner. AEU Vice President Scott Walton is the Board liaison to the Presidents, and the entire Board will continue to work with Scott to try to find better ways to support the Society Presidents.

The AEU Committees are doing more than the very visible weekend gatherings. The Personnel Committee is updating the AEU Personnel Manual and including in it information for AEU Office volunteers as well as contract employees. The Leadership Committee asked the Board to approve its recommendation that two Leaders-in-Training, James Croft and Richard Koral, be named as Leader Interns, so that they could fully perform their duties as Leaders while interning in St. Louis and Bergen, respectively. Board president Richard Koral recused himself from the decision, which was agreed to by consensus. The Board itself has formed several task forces and is working on developing stewardship within the Movement and creating a more sustainable Union.

The next AEU Board meeting will be held on Saturday, November 8, 2014 in Stony Point, New York, at the same time as the Ethical Education Weekend.

You Can't Spell DEED Without EE! Ethical Educators Gather for Retreat

Dale McGowan, National Director of Ethical Education

Ethical educators and other stakeholders in the AEU Ethical Education program will gather for the EE Weekend at beautiful Stony Point, NY, November 7-9. This annual event is an important opportunity to renew friendships and re-engage the vital work of ethical education for all ages that is the lifeblood of our Societies.

This year we will focus on the transition from Religious Ed to Ethical Ed—what is different, what remains the same, and how to embrace best practices in ethical education, anchored in the best of human knowledge and informed by empathy and compassion. The weekend will include presentations on starting an EE program from scratch, adult ethical education, marketing your EE program, and the Ethical Diploma program planned for a September 2015 launch.

As always, there will also be time for morning yoga, an intergenerational scavenger hunt, and special programming for the kids. So register now for your place in an inspiring weekend building a better Ethical Education program in the beautiful Hudson Valley. See you there! For more details visit www.aeu.org/event/ethical-education-weekend.



Teens Explore Ethics in Science and Medicine this November

Trish Cowan, YES Coordinator

We are busy planning the final details of the AEU's Youth of Ethical Societies (YES) Conference, which will be held in New York this November 13-16. YES brings together teens, in 9th-12th grades, from Ethical Societies across the country. YES provides humanist youth with the opportunity to discuss our place in the world, issues that affect us, and how we can be a part of real solutions. Together we enjoy a full weekend of discussion, play, brainstorming, performance, ceremonies, campfires, and bonding.

This year's theme is "Ethics in Science and Medicine" and we will have more opportunities for sharing our knowledge and opinions than ever before. Our officers and reps are preparing breakout groups on such topics as assisted suicide, ADHD, depression, universal healthcare, addiction, STDs, and animal/human testing. We would love to see you at the conference to share your thoughts on these and other important issues! Please don't let travel expense hinder your involvement; reach out to L Miller with any questions about financial assistance for long-distance travel.

Kudos to 2014 YES Officers Edith, Io, Sabrina, Reid, and our Society reps for all of their hard work! And very special thanks to L Miller and Donna Pang who always do so much to assist with the planning and implementation—especially in years when we meet in NY. For more details visit www.aeu.org/event/yes-conference-in-nyc-nov-2014.

Assisting Our Ethical Societies

Karen Elliott, Baltimore Ethical Society

As individuals, we can turn to others in our Ethical community for support when we need it. We know it is in relationship to others that we have the opportunity to live our ethics. But what about when an Ethical community itself is in need of support? This is when the greater Ethical Community, as manifested in the American Ethical Union, can provide assistance.

Twenty-five years ago the Baltimore Ethical Society was not struggling, but it wasn't growing either. Its members agreed that they could use the help of a professional Leader—but the Society was too small to be able to afford even a part-time Leader's salary unless they hired someone perhaps 1/8 time—which would not be enough to make a significant difference in programming. They were working hard just to provide platform meetings September through May.

Baltimore had been able to hire Leadership once before with the help of a subvention from the AEU, so their lay leadership contacted the AEU and were granted another subvention. With that help from the AEU, which it was able to make primarily due to the donations received from individuals, they hired Fritz Williams as a part-time Leader. When asked about what a difference Fritz's hiring made to the Society, long-time Baltimore member Stephen Meskin's face lit up. Fritz's talks contained "a sense of spirituality on an Ethical Culture level." Fritz's Leadership, said Stephen, provided members with a deeper experience, and Fritz "was subtle but he gave us direction. He was outstanding." Judith Katz agreed about the benefits of hiring Fritz. "It gave us a philosophical focus and consistency." Judith recalled that the subvention paid for part of Fritz's salary—she thought it was half to begin with and then decreased over time, with the assumption that professional leadership would help to bring more people into the Society and keep them as members.

Fritz's remembrance of that time agrees with what the members said, and his words serve as both an explanation and an example of the benefits professional Leadership can provide. "I think my presence really altered what people experienced at our Sunday morning meetings and our educational activities. They now had a religious leader and became the kind of fellowship where people experience their own equivalent of what traditional religious congregations derive from the voice and presence of their minister, priest, rabbi, or imam. The Baltimore Ethical Society became a fellowship where people were challenged to examine their lives and relationships. I brought a profoundly human dimension to what transpired in our meetings and discussions. And this was not just an occasional happening. It became an ongoing, sustaining component of the Society's life...It's a role even the most capable lay leader is not likely to play."

Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture asked the AEU for assistance in 2006 when a conflict among members became too tangled for the Society to resolve it on its own. Diane Kirschner, who was then President of Brooklyn's Board, asked AEU interim Executive Director and Leader Jone Johnson Lewis for help. Jone and Leader Boe Meyerson listened to people on both sides of the conflict before working together to provide Brooklyn with suggestions about how the AEU could help the Society move toward a resolution. It was suggested that it might be best to hire outside resources, rather than use support from the AEU's Mediation Committee, and the AEU offered to split the cost with the Society. "It was a life saver," said Diane.

Consultants from the Alban Institute were engaged and, working with the Society, developed a plan that was later reworked into the more generic document *Considerations for Society Governance*. The members in Brooklyn used the document provided by the consultants to "get our house in order." One of the many very specific and workable suggestions from the report: "Part of the training that a Board can offer itself and its members is skill building in the area of conflict resolution, communication,

and interpersonal relations. This kind of investment of time and money may be one of the best ways to create a healthier immune system in the Society, equipping leaders and members to become more effective and able to diffuse higher levels of conflict in the future." Diane recalls that *Considerations for Society Governance* was distributed to the other Societies by the AEU, after receiving permission from the Alban Institute for the use of some of its materials—another instance of the AEU providing a way for Societies to share information of use to all instead of each reinventing the wheel—or, worse, reliving the difficulty.

It is no surprise that professional Leadership made a difference in both of these instances. The AEU trains Leaders in a variety of skills needed to help Societies and the people in them to, in the words of Felix Adler, "challenge and bring to light the hidden best in" themselves. Judy Katz of Baltimore mentioned the additional benefits Baltimore received from hosting Leaders-in-Training Judy Toth, John Daken, and Hugh Taft-Morales, whose salaries were partially covered by the AEU and whose efforts all helped the Society in different ways, from providing programming to conflict resolution to being a face for the Society for the greater community. Our Leadership training is individualized so that each Leader-in-Training receives the additional knowledge they need without having to relearn lessons they already know well. And the costs of that training have been covered by donations specifically for developing Leadership that were given to the AEU by individuals with much forethought for the future of the Movement.

Although the AEU is supported in part by the apportionments paid by its member Societies, it is only with the help of individuals like those who set aside special funds for training Leaders that the Union can provide the kind of well thought-out programs like Leadership training. As I became active on the national level of the Ethical Culture Movement, attending the first Lay Leadership Summer School in 1996 and then all but one Assembly since then, I realized more and more how much

[Continued on next page](#)

of a difference our contributions to the AEU make. I give generously to my home Society of Baltimore and don't want to stop my support locally, so I find myself cutting back on other things (sorry, Starbucks, Barnes and Noble, and Southwest Airlines).

This enables me to also give generously on a national level to the AEU and see the benefit those dollars make for the entire Movement—whether they are used to help subsidize the cost of the Ethical Education Weekend, or to pay for some of the training of one of the many gifted new Leaders that the Movement is so fortunate to have, or cover some of the cost of the Lay Leadership Summer School that started me on the path to national-level lay leadership. And with lay and professional Leaders working together in Ethical communities, we can help create that truly ethical culture of which the founder of our Movement dreamed.

The Impact of Summer School: EHST's Story

Jan Broughton, 2002 LLSS graduate

This year's Lay Leadership Summer School (LLSS) was the tenth session held at the Mountain in Highlands, North Carolina. The 15 participants have returned to their Societies with fresh ideas and renewed enthusiasm for the Ethical Culture Movement. New friends were made and new skills learned with a commitment to use these skills back home for the betterment of the local Society.

To illustrate the impact that attending LLSS can have on one Society, I offer the example of my own group, the Ethical Humanist Society of the Triangle (EHST). Over the years we have sent 13 members to summer school and 9 of them have served as board president—in fact we haven't had a president since 1996 who hasn't been to LLSS. Almost all have had multiple terms on the board, in other offices, and on committees, giving untold hours of service.

An important effect of the summer school experience has been to give people the inspiration and confidence to try something new. Graduates have introduced new meeting formats including the development of ceremonies that have enlivened our platform Sundays. We have had more small groups, including one

based on the Journeys model. Many people report that LLSS has been a transformative experience, both in terms of personal growth and also in what they are able to contribute to the Society.

Recognizing this value, EHST has always budgeted funds to assist its people in attending summer school and tries to identify and encourage those who would most benefit. In an especially unique situation, two of our members went on to Leadership Training after their summer immersion in Ethical Culture. Kate Lovelady now serves the St. Louis Society and Randy Best became our part time Leader several years ago.

Finally, my own involvement in the national Movement began around the time of my summer school experience. I began attending Growth and Development workshops to get ideas to apply to our Society. As a local board officer, I attended the Assemblies as a delegate and a few years ago I was invited to run for the AEU Board. I've been serving as AEU secretary since then. In an illustration of what goes around, comes around—I am now on the summer school staff myself—leading some of the Organizational Development sessions along with other duties.

I'm always impressed at the AEU Assembly when the participants are asked to stand if they have gone to summer school. From a third to half

of the group rises to their feet. We all realize the impact that this has on our Societies and the Movement. The AEU Board is making plans for a concerted effort to ensure funding for scholarships so more of our members can attend. I encourage all Societies to include assistance in their budgets for the 2016 session. You won't regret it.

The AEU recognizes the importance of LLSS to the Movement by making it part of its budget, even subsidizing the costs when scholarships solicited from the membership don't make up the difference with what participants can pay. This year the AEU covered almost half of the expenses involved. The office staff plays a big role in promoting the LLSS session by handling applications and compiling the notebooks and other materials used during the week.

Because of the impact that Lay Leadership Summer School had on me, I've regularly given to the appeal for scholarships so that others might have the opportunity for their own experience. I also give to support the AEU general activities that come back to my Society through the training of Leaders, workshops, the Assembly, and participation in the larger Humanist world. I want to contribute to the success and growth of the Ethical Movement so it is there well into the future so it is paramount in my giving. I invite you to do the same.

Ethical Action Feature

Freedom of Thought & Expression: A Report from World Humanist Congress 2014

Randy Best, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of the Triangle

“Freedom is the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

- George Orwell

This past August 7-10 I found myself in Oxford, England, attending the British Humanist Association’s 2014 World Humanist Congress (WHC). It was held in conjunction with the annual General Assembly of the member organizations in the International Humanist and Ethical Union where the American Ethical Union is one of the founding members. I was pleased to represent the AEU in Oxford.

Even in America’s polarized political environment, freedom of speech is a right that I take for granted. My experience in Oxford increased my insight into the challenges many people in other countries face when speaking out about controversial or unpopular ideas. These insights are valuable to us in the United States if we are to continue defending our tradition of free expression.

The WHC plenary sessions featured luminaries such as A.C. Grayling, Richard Dawkins, and Phillip Pullman. There was even a mini Sunday Assembly experience led by co-founder Sanderson Jones. As enjoyable as these presentations were, they were not what I found most inspiring at the World Humanist Congress. The less famous speakers were more illuminating—along with the more intimate panel discussions that provided a forum for presenters to share their personal experience concerning challenges to freedom of thought and expression.

One of the speakers that I particularly enjoyed was Nick Cohen, a British journalist and author who spoke on “Religion-Inspired Censorship.” Cohen pointed out that the most pernicious censorship is self-censorship because it is unseen and unquestioned. Misguided respect for religious sensitivities may silence media criticism of what are perceived as religious ideas or practices.

Cohen outlined the difference between deferential “Religious Respect” and “Religious Tolerance.” Religious Respect is based entirely on a desire not to offend. It can stifle public critique and limit discourse. He provided the example that Pakistan which has a death penalty for Blasphemy and a death penalty for criticizing the death penalty for Blasphemy. He advocates for “Religious Tolerance” which promotes non-discrimination and non-preferential treatment for beliefs. Everyone is entitled to speak out or argue. No one has to bite his or her tongue.

For Nick Cohen, placing criticism off-limits because of “Religious Respect” intimidates and eliminates free expression. It is a respect that is not earned, a “Gangsta Respect” held out of fear. If civil society is to nurture the wisdom that only comes about through the free exchange of ideas, you cannot begin selective censorship. In Nick Cohen’s words, “Freedom means that you are going to hear the arguments of your opponents.”

This perspective was shared by one speaker after another. British philosopher A.C. Grayling explained that “The problem is that open societies are tolerant of intolerant views, particularly if cloaked in religious ideas and values.” Author Phil Pullman, a past winner of the IHEU Distinguished Service to Humanism Award, warned us that, “Governments distrust imagination and think that they should be in charge of it. Thank goodness that in some places they aren’t.” Matt Cherry, past Executive Director of the Institute for Humanist Studies, warned of the slippery slope that awaits us should speech be outlawed: “When thought is a crime, no other human

right can long survive.” In the words of Danish lawyer and social commentator, Jacob Mchangama, “In an environment with Religious, Ethnic, and cultural diversity, social peace requires a commitment to tolerance and social equality.”

The World Humanist Congress ended by issuing The Oxford Declaration on Freedom of Thought and Expression. Here are two excerpts:

We assert the principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and secularism as providing the firmest foundation for the development of open societies where freedom of thought and expression will be protected and promoted.

We commit ourselves in all our work to uphold and promote existing rights to freedom of thought and expression within the international human rights framework and to resist national and international restrictions on the right of individuals to think for themselves freely and to openly express their views without fear.

While the United States has long been a shining example of a society dedicated to freedom of thought and speech, since 9/11 these freedoms are under fire. I recommend that all Ethical Culturists in the United States learn more about the on-going international efforts to defend the open society. You can begin by reading the whole declaration on the [IHEU website](#). Explore other areas of the IHEU website and learn more about the activities of our international connection.



Observations on Global Humanist Movement

Xavier Mack, *Future of Ethical Societies*

I have not been involved with the Ethical Humanist Movement for very long. So correct me if I'm wrong when I say that my observation is we have a very introverted and locally driven Movement. Which is why I'm not surprised that most Ethical Humanists in the US have no idea that there are thriving movements across the globe.

Not only are these movements thriving, they are growing in network and ambition. In many countries around the world apostasy and blasphemy are crimes; in some nations they are punishable by death. Out of those social climates come stories of courage shown by those with an unquenchable thirst for truth. Around the world there seems to be a trend of growing resilience and audacity to secularist organizations, with humanism spearheading the effort as the most influential of the secular philosophies.

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), of which the American Ethical Union is a founding member, has done a great job in maintaining and organizing this global network. IHEU leadership is made up of devoted and very capable individuals including Sonja Eggerickx from Belgium, Andrew Copson from the UK, also chief executive of the British Humanist Association, and Rein Zunderdorp from the Netherlands.

From [IHEU website](#): "Through IHEU, humanists have a place at the table in international affairs. We are able to speak as humanists from a specifically humanist perspective, representing our members and supporters at international bodies like the United Nations in Geneva and New York, the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, the Council of Europe, and others. This means we are able to influence international law and the human rights framework, and this is a core area of our policy work. We produce an annual report on discrimination against atheists and the non-religious known as the Freedom of Thought Report."

Here are some observations from the IHEU 2014 World Humanist Congress. The next WHC will be in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 2017.

EUROPE

The European Humanist Federation, based in Brussels, and founded 1991, oversees over 50 Humanist and secularist organizations from about 20 countries including France, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

In the Netherlands, for example, there are about 60,000 organized Humanists and about a million people who identify as Humanists without being formal members of organizations. The Humanist Historical Center archives Humanist cultural heritage from 1850 to the present, although they specialize in 1940's and above. And the University of Humanistic Studies, founded in 1989, is centered in the Humanist school of thought and the only university offering a degree in humanistic studies.

AFRICA

In Uganda, the Humanist Association for Leadership, Equity, and Accountability (HALEA) advocates for secularist philosophies in one of the most hostile environments. There are Humanist and Secular organizations in Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, South Africa, and Nigeria.

Nobel Laureate and staunch defender of freedom and humanism, Wole Soyinka, joined Pakistani women's rights activist, Gulalai Ismail, in being honored with the International Humanist Award at the WHC 2014. Presenting the award to Wole Soyinka, British Humanist Association trustee Patricia Rogers argued that "In the sharpest possible contrast to the terrorist Boko Haram's dichotomous disavowal of 'western education' as alien to their world, Soyinka has long been the intellectual leader of distinctively African voices within the universal Enlightenment tradition."

ASIA, AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AMERICA

Gulalai Ismail is an amazing young lady I was honored to meet at the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO) general assembly. She is a co-founder of Aware Girls, an organization promoting gender equality, women's rights, and peace in Pakistan and is well known for her work in girls' education, advocating for women's rights, and democracy. She is an award-winning activist whose story is an episode of courage and diligence. She has been working to defend human rights for more than 10 years, despite receiving threats from the Taliban and other extremist groups in her area.

According to the IHEU's Freedom of Thought Report, "In some countries, it is illegal to be an atheist....Many other countries, while not outlawing different religions, or no religion, forbid people from leaving the state religion. And in these countries the punishment for apostasy—leaving the faith—is often death." Fortunately, there are also humanist and secularist organizations in Singapore, Australia, India, New Zealand, Nepal, the Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, and Peru.

NORTH AMERICA

The American Ethical Union (AEU) is very talented and our Societies, though we may be small, are just as talented and devoted to their communities. As we build our Movement it is important that we keep an eye on the developments around the world. Not so much for documentation but more so for the hope it brings to see that this is a global movement advocating for reason, compassion, and rational thinking in these difficult times.

I would like to voice my appreciation to Andrew Copson and the British Humanist Association for sponsoring my trip to Oxford. Thanks to them, the Future of Ethical Societies (FES) and humanist youth from all over the country have a place at the table of international Humanist affairs.

Also, my gratitude to the AEU for the scholarship to attend Lay Leadership Summer School in the Smokey Mountains and facilitating my travel to and from the Board retreat in Stamford, Connecticut.

Wall of Remembrance

Compiled from Societies' newsletters and websites

John Langsdorf (*New York*) – Longtime member John Langsdorf was a “cradle” Ethical Culturist; his parents and other relatives and friends were members of the New York Society, and he greatly valued our Ethical community. John was a gentle, kind, and thoughtful man who exemplified Ethical Culture principles. After serving in the US Army and working in Philadelphia and New Jersey, John retired to his birthplace, Manhattan, and rejoined the New York Society. He served in a number of volunteer capacities, most recently on the Pledge Committee, and on the board of Hudson Guild, the settlement house founded by Leader John Lovejoy Elliott. He is survived by his wife, Constance Berman; his daughters, Robin and Holly; and his brother Roger, and their families.

Leah Lieberman (*New York*) – Leah Lieberman, a very devoted and longtime member, died on June 29. She possessed a wonderful, funny and open-minded spirit. As Heather Grady said: “Leah was everything we aspire to be in Ethical Culture.” She had gotten married at the Society and had sent her only son, Danny, to NYSEC’s Sunday School. Leah was joyful, funny, warm, and extraordinarily kind.

Rebecca Pardo (*Washington DC*) - Rebecca Pardo, daughter of Sue Jacobson and Jeff Pardo and sister of David Pardo, died September 3 as a result of a

rapid-growing brain tumor. Becca began coming to WES before she was born (her mother grew up in the Westchester Society), and was a graduate of our Sunday School and Coming of Age program and a member of a delegation trip to El Salvador. In her brother David’s words, “She will always be remembered for her incredible empathy, her love of all things friendly and fuzzy, and most of all her creativity and courage.”

Robert Irl Recht (*St. Louis*) – Member Robert Irl Recht died on July 9. Our condolences to his wife Barbara Krell Geller and family.

Helena Wright (*Baltimore*) – Helena E. Sawyer Roberts Wright, a retired city elementary school teacher and principal (and education specialist) who was a longtime member of the Baltimore Ethical Society died August 18 at her Lochearn home of complications from heart disease. She was 93. Brought into the Society and Sunday School by founding member Marian Banfield in the early 1950s, Helena was praised as “an educator extraordinaire,” a woman who “was always a teacher by nature” as well as professionally. Because African-Americans were not allowed to attend graduate school in Maryland during the era of segregation, she traveled to New York City on weekends and during summer to study at New York University, where she earned her master’s degree in 1945, while teaching in Baltimore.

Member’s Perspective

“Do we need a mythological heaven or a reward of ‘pie in the sky when you die,’ to get people to behave and live together in peace? Many wars have been caused by people trying to impose their irrational religious beliefs on others. If the Golden Rule, ‘do unto others as you would have others do unto you,’ were taught as part of everyone’s basic education, there would be no need for any other religion.”

— Leonard D. Harris,
Ethical Culture Society of Westchester

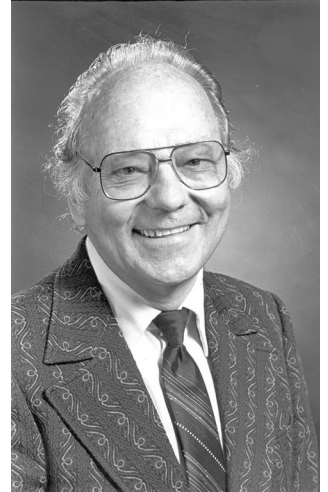
Leader’s Milestone

Congratulations to Arthur Dobrin, Leader Emeritus of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, for passing the 500,000 view mark for his [Psychology Today blog!](#)

Arthur is a Professor Emeritus and Adjunct Professor at Hofstra University. His blog includes thoughts and opinions of how to live an ethical life.

Farewell to Gerald Larue

Gerald A. Larue, an ordained minister who became an agnostic, an archaeologist, a religious scholar, and a debunker of biblical claims, died September 17 in Newport Beach, CA at the age of 98. During an academic career (mostly in Canada and California) spanning five decades, he became a widely cited expert on topics including Satanism, visions of Mary, and death and dying. In 1980, he became founding president of the Hemlock Society, conceived by “Final Exit” author and right-to-die movement pioneer Derek Humphry to provide information to the terminally ill and legalize physician-assisted suicide. For some years, starting in the early nineteen eighties, Gerry served as the professional Ethical Culture Leader of the Los Angeles Ethical Society. He gave weekly talks to a group of loyal followers who often numbered over 100. Gerry, along with Paul Kurtz and Vern Bullough, were “the globe-hopping brain trust of secular humanism.”



Jean Somerville Kotkin Memorial Fund

“It is one thing to teach about democracy and citizenship. It is another thing to learn by living it,” said Algernon Black, former Leader of the York Society for Ethical Culture and co-founder of the Encampment for Citizenship (EFC). The EFC came from the Ethical Culture Movement in 1946 and has always been strongly linked to the values, beliefs, and Leaders of the Movement for the past 68 years. This unique program provides youth from across the country—from urban, suburban, and rural settings, and from a variety of racial, ethnic, and tribal backgrounds—the opportunity to live and learn together. To support young people in need who wish to attend the EFC, the American Ethical Union Board established the Jean Somerville Kotkin Memorial Fund in Spring 2014.

Jon Kerner (EFC '65) and Beth Kotkin (EFC '69) initiated the fund in memory of their mother Jean Somerville Kotkin. Jean, who served as the first female Executive Director of the American Ethical Union in 1976, and one of the first female Senior Leaders in the New York Society for Ethical Culture, was an ardent supporter of the Encampment for Citizenship (EFC). In the 1960s and 1970s, Jean organized regular charity art auctions and annual dinners in support of the EFC, in response to support requests from her dear friend Algernon Black. Jon Kerner remarks,

“Beth and I felt that it would be fitting and consistent with our mother’s values if we could work with the AEU to build a memorial fund in Jean’s name to

support young people in need of financial support to attend the EFC.

For me, at 15 years of age, the EFC experience expanded my world and transformed me in ways that continue to influence me all these years later. For example, I and my fellow high school students in 1965 picked strawberries in California fields with migrant workers being organized by Cesar Chavez; spent a weekend at Synanon experiencing firsthand the challenges faced by drug addicts trying to kick their habit; and were exposed to the contrast of wealth and power with a field trip to Standard Oil of California...



Encampment alums leave their summer experience knowing it’s possible to live in a true democracy and they come to care deeply about issues and people they never would have known otherwise. This is the power of the Encampment: You know a better world is possible because you lived it, and you go out into the world finding ways to take your Encampment experience and translate it into working for a more just and equitable world wherever you go.”

Donate to the Jean Somerville Kotkin Memorial Fund by selecting it on the [AEU donation page](#) or sending a check made out to the American Ethical Union, with “EFC–JSK Memorial Fund” on the notation line, to 2 West 64th Street, Suite 406, New York, NY 10023. Learn more on the [Encampment for Citizenship website](#) or call us at 831-515-6775.

Ethical Culture's View of Life

**Joe Chuman, Leader
Ethical Culture Society of
Bergen County**

*Originally printed in Bergen
Society newsletter*



Ethical Culturists are the kind of people who are interested in the world: the state of society; politics; global issues; and the welfare of human beings, near and far away. At the current moment, when one cares to look at the larger picture, as we are compelled to do, it looks grim: murderous terrorist groups taking over swaths of territory for which the United States for years expended its blood and treasure piling futility upon futility; simmering racism resulting in killing unarmed victims by militarized and brutal police; Vladimir Putin enacting a redo of the Cold War; the Ebola virus spreading with grotesque aggression worthy of a horror movie; and our domestic politics, stagnant and sclerotic, yielding no hope of restoring optimism, if not sanity, to our political future. These don't feel like good times for America.

Yet, despite the state of the world, our personal lives are fated to go on. We rise each morning, fulfill our domestic chores, care for our children's needs, worry about daily matters big and small, and seek rest and relaxation. The personal dimension of life ensures that Ethical Culture remains relevant to us. What I mean is that despite the

big picture, we remain responsible for charting our own lives, for living out our values, for determining by our choices the types of people we want and strive to be.

As we know well, Ethical Culture does not require that one view it as religious or not. I have always interpreted "religiously" as a way of emphasizing that Ethical Culture is intended in the fullest sense to be a lived philosophy. In my view, its purpose is not merely to place before us values that are important, but rather to live them out; to inspire us to become living embodiments of the values we profess.

And what are those values in the broadest sense? I commend two. The first is to not be a mere spectator to life and the world, but to live life actively, with engagement, strenuously, fully. In other words, Ethical Culture, as I interpret it, inspires us toward a life of fulfillment, both our own, and to the extent that we can, to enable others to live full and fulfilling lives as well. This is the essence of Ethical Culture's humanism.

But in my view, an ethics of personal fulfillment is not sufficient. We can strive to fulfill our potentials, but we can do so for good or evil. So I think we need to invoke ethics in its more traditional sense, that is, through an understanding of what values are good and bad, right and wrong, and then strive to live our lives accordingly. To be an Ethical Culturist, in other words, is in part is to seek after righteousness, that is, to do the right thing.

How are we to achieve this? I propose three rules, so to speak. As we move out into the arena of ethical action, we need to ask ourselves: "What if everyone did this?" Take lying, for example. If every time I lied when it was convenient, because I felt like it or to avoid personal harm or embarrassment, and I universalized my behavior so that everyone would adopt a rule for action as whimsical as my

own, the consequences of such general behavior is that society would cease to function. Overall society is predicated on the assumption that people generally are being honest with one another, even if many often are not, or extreme circumstances compel us to lie, as I assume we would do to save a life or offset some other great harm. So my first rule for ethical living involves universalizing my behavior and then imagining what the consequences would be. If they would weaken social trust and erode the social bond, it is probably something I should not be doing.

Second: Ask yourself the question: "What would it be like to stand on the opposite end of my own behavior?" This involves an act of projective imagination of which we are all capable. If the answer is: "I wouldn't like it," maybe it is something I ought not be doing.

My third question is: "What kind of person do I want to be?" One of the gifts of being a human being (as opposed to other sentient life) is that we can ask this question. Not only can we ask it, we also have some ability (perhaps more limited than we would like) to actually mold ourselves into the type of person we would want to be. My favorite quote from the philosopher Aristotle is found in his *Ethics*, wherein he says: "The virtues are not natural to us, nor are they contrary to nature. But we are by nature fitted to receive them, and we perfect them through habit." In other words, to be an honest, compassionate, caring or courageous person is something we can strive for. But like learning any skill, it takes practice.

This, I believe, is Ethical Culture's view of life: To live life fully, for oneself and others. But to live a life also dedicated to doing the right thing. Regardless of the storms raging around us, we can find refuge in the framing of a sturdy life philosophy and striving to live in accordance with our highest ideals, values and convictions.

New Plaque Honors Felix Adler's Birthplace

On November 2, the city of Alzey in Germany will unveil a bronze plaque honoring the birthplace of Felix Adler. The Adler family lived in Alzey until 1857 when Samuel Adler, Felix's father, accepted the call to be the rabbi for Temple Emmanuel in New York City (only after his mother Sara, nee Nickelsburg, died and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Alzey). The unveiling ceremony will include a presentation on Felix and his life, a statement by the American Ethical Union (provided below), and words from the Mayor of Alzey and other city officials.

The project was initiated by the Altstadtverein of Alzey, an association mainly concerned with the restoration of old houses and in general with the outward improvement of the town. The Alzey Museum possesses a portrait of Felix Adler in his later years, which a member of their historical society acquired at an auction in California.

Statement from American Ethical Union:

As members of the Ethical Culture Movement in America, we are delighted and gratified that the City of Alzey has chosen to memorialize the founder of our Movement, and its native son, Felix Adler. Alzey can be proud of its son for he is respected by thousands of people who still pursue his life project more than eighty years after his death. Adler created something of lasting value and we honor his origins.

Although Adler immigrated to America at the age of six, he did not abandon his German roots. He returned to Germany for his advanced education studying in the great University at Heidelberg in the early 1870s. There, he became enchanted by the works of Kant and preoccupied by the uproar of the labor movement. It was in Germany that many of his important ideas of the "ethical imperative" and about engagement in reform movements were first formed. He merged German mysticism and Anglican transcendentalism with American pragmatism to develop a modern philosophy of life now called Ethical Culture or Ethical Humanism. He believed that only in the great universities of Germany could one obtain a rich and thorough education, so for many

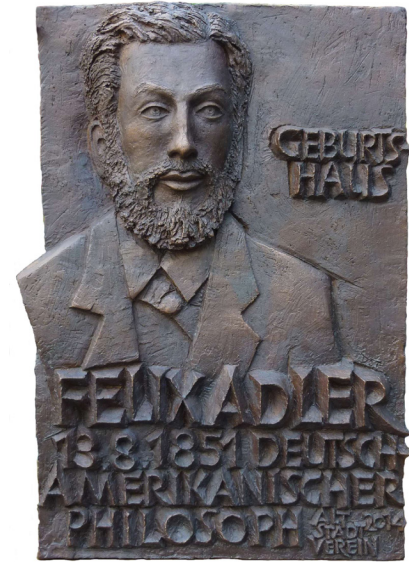
years he required up-and-coming leaders in his Ethical Movement to come to Germany to earn advanced diplomas. He also served as a professor at the University of Berlin holding the Theodore Roosevelt Chair in 1908.

As the Movement of Ethical Societies grew in America, individual Societies were established in Berlin, Vienna, and London. An International Ethical Movement was organized which had its first meeting in Eisenach in 1893. It eventually established its headquarters in Zurich. It is said that Albert Einstein attended meetings as a young man.

Many of Adler's important contributions to American culture originated in Germany. He strongly promoted the free kindergarten for all children, especially the poor, and he established several kindergartens in New York. He wrote tirelessly about the importance of a broad education that blended classical studies with practical skills and he started his own schools to demonstrate his theories. The Ethical Culture Fieldston School remains one of the most respected schools in New York. His ideas sound modern and even radical today.

Sadly, the Ethical Societies on the European continent did not survive World War II and we, in America, had expected that he would be entirely forgotten in the land of his birth. So, we are pleased to see that he is remembered and still appreciated.

Felix Adler brought us a unique creation—a movement in which people are encouraged to appreciate the spiritual quality in the interdependence of all life, to reject divisive and dogmatic theologies, and to accept the centrality of ethics in all our relationships and in all our deeds. If ethics were the primary guidepost in all we do, the world's civilization would be more just, more equitable, and more sustainable for all peoples. It is hoped that the enduring memory of Felix Adler will enable this dream to be realized one day.



Write for the Dialogue
We are accepting submissions for Winter 2015!

Send submissions to communications@aeu.org
 by Thursday, December 25, 2014.

Please include a headshot and relative images with your submission.

Remembering Dr. Howard Radest



The American Ethical Union mourns the death of Dr. Howard B. Radest, longtime Ethical Culture Leader and receiver of the 2011 Felix Adler Lifetime Achievement Award. He passed on the evening of Saturday, October 11. Howard was a graduate of Columbia University whose doctoral dissertation was about the educational philosophy of the founder of Ethical Culture, Felix Adler.

Howard lived a life of Humanism and was actively involved with the Ethical Culture Movement for over seven decades. Following graduation, he became the founding Leader of

the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County from 1956-1963. He was later the Executive Director of the American Ethical Union and one of the Presidents of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. During his tenure as Executive Director his first book, "Toward Common Ground: The Story of the Ethical Societies in the United States," was published. He continued to write several books and articles on humanism, ethics, and Ethical Culture.

Howard served as Director of the Ethical Culture Schools, founded the Moral Education Center at Columbia University, was a founder and Dean of the Humanist Institute, a lecturer with Highlands Institute in North Carolina, a professor of medical ethics at South Carolina University, a senior fellow with the Institute for Humanist Studies, and Chairman of the Ethical Community Charter School in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Perhaps no other person has made a greater contribution to building and sustaining institutions within Ethical Culture and the Humanist world over the past half-century. All of us who cherish Ethical Culture are incalculably in his debt. Howard is survived by Rita, his wife, sons Rob and Michael, their wives, and numerous grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at the [New York Society for Ethical Culture](http://www.newyorkethicalculture.org) (2 West 64th Street & Central Park West) on Saturday, November 15th at 10am. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to The Humanist Institute (write "The Rita Radest Scholarship Fund" in the memo field and mail to The Humanist Institute, PMB #220, 8014 Olson Memorial Highway, Golden Valley, MN 55437-4712) or donate online at www.humanistinstitute.org.

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*Thank you to Richard Reichart,
 our Dialogue Copy Editor!*

