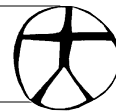


Dialogue

American Ethical Union - May 2003



THE CHALLENGE OF NONTHEISM

Anne Klaeyesen, Leader, Long Island



After a recent platform, I was approached by a man who stabbed at the front of the Sunday program with his index finger. "It says 'religious' here," he said.

"That's a real turn-off for me. Religion means worship of a supreme being." I found myself wondering just how he had been hurt by traditional religion. I flashed him a smile and said, "Well, we'll just have to help you expand your definition of religion." "No!" he countered. "That's what it means. You can't just change it." I tried again with "Ours is a nontheistic religion," and was ready to launch into an explanation, but he wasn't buying it. I have a feeling that he needs to hold onto his anger about religion a while longer.

That afternoon I met with two graduating Youth Ethics (Sunday school) students and their parents. We discussed the personal journey of discovery they are on this year, the ethical action projects they are developing, and the relationships they will form with their adult mentors. I asked them to consider not only the external work of graduating—project and ceremony—but also the internal work of reflection, awareness, and connectedness, what some might call "spirituality." One mother exclaimed, "Finally! I've been trying to find spirituality here for years, and I've felt so alone."

I understood. Our language in Ethical Culture is mostly rational. We are nontheistic in

theory, but our practice often excludes spiritual expression. This woman has a strong image of a personal god with whom she has a relationship. To experience this relationship more fully, she is studying Jewish mysticism. I invited her to explore with me a way of experiencing spirituality that would be true to our tradition. It is a challenge. Even as metaphor, "god-language" is too heavily weighted; it doesn't seem authentic and feels uncomfortable to most Ethical Humanists. But it works for her, and she has had to find other places to hear and speak it.

"Believe or disbelieve..." Felix Adler said at the inception of the Ethical Movement in 1876, "we shall at all times respect every honest conviction — but be one with us where there is nothing to divide—in action. Diversity in the creed, unanimity in the deed. This is that practical religion from which none dissents. This is that platform broad enough to receive the worshipper and the infidel. This is that common ground where we may all grasp hands as brothers united in

mankind's common cause."

In order to make the Sunday platform broad enough to hold the common ground of both believers and unbelievers, Adler excluded prayer and every form of ritual. He did this in what he called the spirit of reconciliation and raising the movement "above the strife of contending sects and parties." I understand Adler's aim to gather people from different backgrounds in a way that didn't violate other religious traditions. He saw a large population of the "unchurched" that he could inspire and motivate to action with a message of ethics separate from belief, and he chose a means to communicate that worked well for him personally and was popular at the time—the lecture.

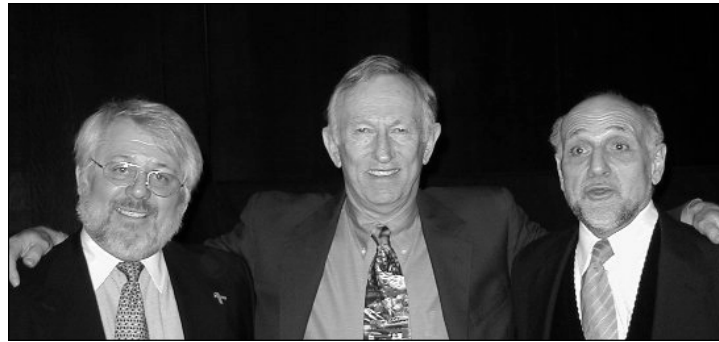
And it worked. Diversity within Ethical Humanism is still recognized. We meet on the common ground of ethical deed and are free to work out a personal creed. But do we actually respect every honest conviction? And do we feel free to share our differing creeds with each other? Adler wrote that his studies and personal reflection led him not to atheism, but to "the definite and permanent disappearance of the individualistic conception of Deity." He replaced it with the notion of a spiritual and social whole, what he called the "ethical manifold," the model of democratic society. This may not be my personal creed, but I like knowing that it was his. I would like to know what other people believe and how it works for them, to explore spirituality from a humanist perspective, and to experiment with forms of communication other than the lecture.

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SENATOR JEFFORDS RECEIVES HUMANIST AWARD

On March 9, 2003, at its annual Ethical Humanist Award Ceremony, the New York Society for Ethical Culture presented the award to United States Senator Jim Jeffords "in recognition of his courage in taking a principled stand causing him to leave the Republican party and become an Independent."



Jeffrey Wigand, Sen. Jim Jeffords, Khoren Arisian

The largest for me is education. I come from the state of Justin Smith Morrill, a U.S. senator from Vermont who gave America its land grant college system. His Republican party stood for opportunity for all, for opening the doors of public school education to every American child.

The welcome and opening remarks were given by Dr. Khoren Arisian, Senior Leader, and the award presentation was made by Michael Bogdanffy-Kriegh, president. In his May 2001 announcement of resignation from the Republican party Senator Jeffords stated:

Looking ahead, I can see more and more instances where I'll disagree with the President on very fundamental issues--the issues of choice, the direction of the judiciary, tax and spending decisions, missile defense, energy and the environment, and a host of other issues, large and small.

Now, for some, success seems to be measured by the number of students moved out of the public schools.

In order to best represent my state of Vermont, my own conscience and principles I have stood for my whole life, I will leave the Republican party and become an Independent."

In attendance was the 1996 recipient of the award, Jeffrey Wigand, who exposed the tobacco industry's cover-up of the health risks of smoking. He was the subject of the 1999 motion picture *The Insider*.

Dialogue Newsletter of The American Ethical Union

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Dialogue is on the AEU website.
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Dialogue welcomes letters and original articles on themes that would be of interest to AEU members.
Email to leesma@optonline.net,
or mail or fax to the AEU office.

Submissions deadline for the July issue is June 4

AEU Calendar

BOARD MEETINGS

May 24 & 27
Philadelphia

AEU NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

May 23 - 26
Philadelphia

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

THE WASHINGTON ETHICAL ACTION OFFICE

Albert A. Hirsch

This month we look at how the Administration— the Iraqi war costs notwithstanding—is matching its fiscal irresponsibility on the revenue side with compassionless conservatism on the expenditure side. The House Budget Resolution, mirroring the President's intention, requires various congressional committees to pass legislation that mandates \$265 billion of cuts over 10 years in entitlement programs other than Social Security and Medicare. This means that the bulk of the cuts— 62 percent or \$165 billion, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities—has to come from programs for low-income families in the forms of reduced health care, child care and nutrition, assistance to the elderly and disabled, and low-income tax credits. Affected programs include: Medicaid; Supplemental Security Income (for disabled persons); Earned Income Tax Credit (refundable portion); food stamps; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (a core welfare subsidy to already pinched states); child nutrition (including school lunches); foster care and adoption assistance; child support enforcement; Child Tax Credit (refundable portion); and child care. The burden of these cuts would be split between fewer

eligible recipients and smaller benefits per recipient. For example, the reduction in Supplemental Security Income could be achieved alternatively by disqualifying 475,000 poor elderly persons or by reducing the maximum benefit from 74 percent of the poverty line to 70 percent— hardly palatable alternatives. The choices for the other components are similarly bleak.

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.aeu.org, click on Discussions, then E-mail lists, and follow the instructions for the Ethical Action list.

The (relatively) good news is that the Senate, as of this writing, has not endorsed these cuts. While any split is surely like to be largely along the partisan divide, keep in mind that it was moderate Republican senators who helped defeat the President's full tax cut. The ACTION MESSAGE is, therefore, mainly to urge these same Sena-

tors— including Olympia Snowe (ME), George Voinovich (OH), and Lincoln Chafee (RI)— to oppose program cuts (especially Medicaid, TANF, Food Stamps, and SSI) for the poor and disabled. Contact your own senators also, of course, even if they're Democrats, to show the strength of public opinion against these unconscionable cuts.

ETHICAL CULTURE

Who We Are— What is an Ethical Society?

Undated statement from the St. Louis Society, discovered by AEU & NY Society Archivist Dr. Marc A. Bernstein

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of inducing people to think more about conscience, duty, justice, the cultivation of the higher nature, working for others, about High Conduct in all its phases, and Morality in all its aspects. It exists for the purpose of persuading people to *do* more than they are doing toward making themselves better men and women and toward improving the rest the world.

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of keeping public attention on the moral aspects of the Questions of the Day, and not allowing people to judge on such matters from their own personal interests or from purely material considerations.

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of organizing practical educational work in social reform on a basis which shall be strictly neutral on all matters pertaining to religion... .

An Ethical Society exists in order to serve as a meeting ground for people who are unable to agree in their religious

beliefs and yet who are warmly interested in working together for their own moral improvement and for the moral improvement of the whole human race.

An Ethical Society exists for the sake of cultivating the sense of reverence and fostering the moral and spiritual nature of all people, while allowing them to think as they please or as their judgments may compel them to think.

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of awakening and fostering higher scruples in one's conduct in the home, personal life, in public affairs, commercial life, and in all one's relations to the city, the State or the nation to which one may belong... .

An Ethical Society represents a world movement to foster an ethical spirit among individuals and to organize educational and reform efforts along ethical lines.

Edited for gender equality

FAITH

David Nichols, President, Boston

Let us consider Faith in a supreme power or being. I will capitalize this word to distinguish it from other kinds of faith. The modern scientific and secular view of the world does not preclude Faith. Rather than driving out Faith, the modern world view creates the basis for an unshakeable and irrefutable Faith.

Once the priests of Faith tried to prove the existence of God. But every proof was demolished, for there is no evidence of God in the observable natural world. There is ample evidence of the human yearning for gods and of the power and creativity of those deep emotions. But by modern standards, there is no trace of the gods themselves. Instead, the evidence available to our senses disproves all superstitions.

But what is a superstition? It is a belief about the way the world works that is demonstrably wrong, inconsistent with the laws of nature. Superstitions can be disproven. But the existence of an ultimate supreme power cannot be disproven, nor can the notion of an incomprehensible world beyond the given world, nor even the belief that the self survives life.

Fundamentalists are entitled to seduce the gullible, of whom there are very many indeed. Fundamentalism may be on the increase. Superstition may be on the increase. I do not know. But I do know that any religious, fundamentalist, or superstitious claim about any action or event in our world is ultimately tested by the secular rules of evidence that are supreme in every area of interpersonal human activity. Not only our science, but our law, our medicine, and indeed everyday business are all based on a pervasively secular world view.

In *The New York Times Magazine* of January 5, a woman who was born in India, but lives in the West, reflects on the fact that she is going to live beyond the age of death that was fixed in the life horoscope read to her when she was a child. The common sense of experience, with some help from modern medicine, disproves Bharati Mukhedee's horoscope.

None of the myths of any of the religions, old or new, is remotely plausible. No old or new age psychic claim has ever withstood modern scientific or legal scrutiny. But Faith is more secure than ever.

For if Faith comes from within, if it is based purely on profound emotion, and if it makes no claim about, nor requires, any result in the observable world, it is literally irrefutable. Many people who are not gullible, who have great common sense, who have no faith in miracles and great faith in science, who are keenly intelligent, and who are committed humanists are people of Faith.

If I had Faith in a supreme force, and especially if I believed in a personal destiny beyond nothingness, I might be more comfortable from day to day. But I suspect such Faith will continue to elude me.

Like many intentional movements, Ethical Culture does not yet have an articulated philosophy that is fully developed and internally consistent. One of the functions of Ethical Culture is to provide a community that is welcoming and embracing of those without Faith. That is not a stated purpose, yet it is a vital function. Ironically, the closest this function comes to acknowledgment is in the principle that Ethical Culture is welcoming of those of Faith.

BEAUTY TIPS

Audrey Hepburn



For attractive lips, speak words of kindness. For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people. For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry. For beautiful hair, let a child run his/her fingers through it once a day. For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone. People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone. Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of each of your arms. As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands: one for helping yourself and the other for helping others.

From Riverdale-Yonkers "Focus".

Can Humanism Survive Individualism?

Dick Reichart, Princeton

The 1980 Statement of Purpose of the American Ethical Union begins with the words *Ethical Culture is a humanistic religious and educational movement...* Does this realistically describe Ethical societies and fellowships?

"Educational"? Certainly. As a 1997 nation-wide survey of AEU members indicates, a very large part of societies' activity consists of platform meetings and other means for developing our knowledge and sensitivity to social issues, along with Sunday schools.

"Humanistic"? Yes, in two senses. First, Ethical societies adhere to the nontheistic philosophical viewpoint that focuses on the centrality of ethics and simply avoids the subject of whether humanity's and the universe's origin and destination are governed by a supernatural force. Second, we concern ourselves with *this world and this time* and, in the words of the AEU Statement, "...the ideal that the supreme aim of human life is to create a more humane society."

"Religious"? That blade has two edges. As Felix Adler said, for some (including himself) Ethical Culture is a religion, while for others, it is a philosophy. It is definitely, however, a *congregational movement*, not primarily a humanist school of philosophy, nor even the humanitarian and social-welfare activities and organizations to which it inevitably gives rise. Ethical societies are local institutions in a nontheistic style intended to have a mission and character like that of the traditional religions' churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques.

Yet in its congregational character, in which (again the Statement) "Members join together in ethical societies to assist each other...." Ethical Culture often presents a questionable record of achievement. Most of the local ethical culture organizations

started since 1867 no longer exist. New members often find the philosophy engaging--but not the experience. So, fine people, both Leaders trained as clergy or philosophers and lay persons trying to do the societies' work have not managed to gain for the Ethical Movement a growth comparable to that of other religions also begun in the 19th century.

Many reasons have been given for this experience. I believe that a major one is the idea expressed in the third paragraph of the AEU Statement of Purpose: *Our commitment is to the worth and dignity of the individual and to treating each human being so as to bring out the best in him or her.* Let me be clear. I absolutely and without cavil support this commitment. It joins the most valuable ethical principle from the traditional religions, with the supremely practical advice for supporting it through individual action, which Felix Adler derived from his philosophy of ethical idealism.

I believe, however, that the glorification of the individual has the effect of seriously inhibiting our ability to operate effective organizations. By encouraging each of us to establish our own personal set of values, individualism tends to diminish the significance we give to our membership in the congregation (society, fellowship, circle) of which we are a part, and our contribution to it. Traditional religions value active participation in the congregation, even to the point of inventing actions, forms, and rituals that are intrinsically group activities not to be carried out alone.

Because such group activities tend to reinforce the power and authority of the communal structure independent of the individuals who make it up, they often appear "anti-individual" to the humanist. Commonly each of us will pick and choose which aspects of the congregation's existence we like

and will take part in. As humanists, we value the individual, and so individualism becomes the very badge of our membership. Our behavior shows it--individuality is what we celebrate! For many of us, freedom in expressing "This Is What I Think" comes close to looking like a ritual observance!

Moreover, humanist religions, among them Ethical Culture, remain relatively weak in an era when even theistic religions justify their beliefs in humanistic terms (i.e., as leading to a more humane existence on this planet, at this time). Isn't a main reason that, to our members, belonging carries with it little obligation to the organization's continued success?

Humanists may see such obligations also as "subordinating our individuality"--the reason many of us avoid other religions--though members of traditional religious congregations often feel rewarded by them. Certainly there is reward from a common faith and participation in joint ceremonies that demonstrate that faith. But much of it is the result of participating--investing time, effort, and money-- in doing the congregation's work.

So the challenge is this: How can a humanist group, valuing its members' individuality, provide us with an equally rewarding congregational experience? Can belonging to an Ethical society or fellowship carry with it a welcome sense of obligation to support its organizational goals? I think each of us, as an individualist, must decide we will participate for the organization's success.

That's my Ideal Humanist Way.

From the Princeton Ethical Humanist Fellowship Newsletter, May 1998



From the UN

Sylvain and Phyllis Ehrenfeld, Bergen;

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



This is a critical period for the UN. Underlying the discussion about the war on Iraq is a struggle for the governance of a world order. Will the unilateralism of the U.S. as the main superpower dominate or will decisions be made multilaterally through the UN?....

Public opinion is strongly in favor of an effective UN retaining sovereignty, but with important limits. The world has taken a long time to recognize that the UN should have had international support to respond quickly to the horror of genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia. Without the support of its most powerful members, the UN lacked the ability to act. If crimes against humanity occur in spite of sovereignty, humanitarian intervention should be justified. Given the many conflicting interests of its membership, the UN is the only institution that can bring legitimacy to the management of complex international crises. The war on Iraq is not analogous to Rwanda and Bosnia.

Multilateralism provides legitimacy and world support, which the United States needs. Increasingly, problems are global. The spread of disease, refugees, global warming, damage to the environment, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation are problems that will continue to haunt the future.

Ironically, America's belligerent rhetoric, "axis of evil," only increases fears of American domination and stimulates the desire of countries to protect themselves with nuclear weapons. Active world cooperation will be needed for the many difficult problems ahead. This cooperation depends on multilateral participation in decision making. The UN is the only setting where this can happen.

In addition to the demands of negotiation, the UN and its various agencies are currently planning the enormous task of meeting the humanitarian crisis that inevitably follows a war. The secretary general has pleaded for \$120 million to pay for contingency planning. Many more millions may be needed. At this moment the UN relief agencies are desperately short of money.

The problem is acute. The number of civilian casualties is totally unpredictable. Iraq's deeply divided multiethnic composition does not bode well for the avoidance of chaos. After 11 years of sanctions, Iraq's economy is paralyzed, with about 60% of the population depending entirely on the UN program for their food. The program uses income from oil to buy food and medicine. If war disrupts the flow of oil, this will become another serious problem. The UN also reports that infant mortality in Iraq is two and a half times the level in 1990. With the onset of war, the UN predicts a particularly terrible situation for children because malnutrition is already high. One million children under five are chronically undernourished. About five million Iraqis already lack access to safe water and sanitation. It is estimated that the aftermath of war will result in at least 2.6 million refugees... .

The UN has experience in coordinating relief efforts to meet a humanitarian crisis. Whatever the outcome of the conflict between the preemptive unilateralism of American policy and the multilateralism of the Security Council, the humanitarian work of the UN will continue.

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In a UN briefing on the topic: "Prejudice: A Psychoanalytical Perspective on Arab-Israeli Relations," psychoanalysts from a variety of backgrounds spoke from their personal experience on the psychological background of today's difficult political climate. A Belgian Jew who had spent time in a German concentration camp, and had lost his family in Auschwitz, began with the memory of "Sale Juif!" --- dirty Jew--shouted at him. He traced malignant prejudice back to a natural source, beginning with the infant's attachment to the mother, continuing as a preference for the like and the familiar. Repeated experience of hurtful events creates the demonizing--essentially dehumanized image of the outsider, the Other. Hate and fear produce internal stress, which promotes illness and extremes of behavior. This

self-destructive violence is now instilling terror in the Israeli public and inflaming Arab-Israeli relations... .

A Palestinian Arab analyst described himself as an outsider in a Moslem world because he was raised as a Christian. Now his beliefs are secular, and he views his multiple identities as a blessing. But his parents still prefer to live in the familiar Moslem section of west Beirut, rather than the more modern Christian section of east Beirut. The younger members of his family do not share his secular outlook... .He explained that Palestinians feel they were forced to pay for the crimes of Europe. As a stateless people, they existed outside of the protections of international law. While negotiations for a solution of the conflict continue, new settlements arise, destroying belief in the possibility of a fair outcome. The U.S. posing as an honest broker bullies the United Nations. This is the Palestinian perspective... .

For both sides, rage and terror are humiliating and traumatizing feelings. The need to protect the image of the self as good creates the separation of good and evil, with all evil projected onto the Other, intensifying the basis for malignant prejudice... .

All the analysts stressed the value and impact of positive interventions. In the media, honest and accurate information can reduce tension. Political leadership can be very powerful. A dramatic example: A peaceful transition for change in the government of South Africa came about because President De Klerk arranged secret meetings with Nelson Mandela, taking him out of jail to negotiate, in order for the Union of South Africa to relinquish the white supremacist role without civil war. Perhaps this happened because of a balance of fear. Yet it could never have happened without wise leadership and in-depth understanding... .

Dialogue can become possible when the subjectivity of each side is a mutually acknowledged reality.

# Why Not Write Your Own ETHICAL Will?

*Richard L. Koral, former President, Westchester*

So many of us have wistfully uttered that plaintive exclamation, "I could write a book"! Indeed, each of us is filled with a book's worth of experiences. What we have seen! If only we could do justice to all that we have lived through and all that we have learned. If only we could pass *that* on to our children.

Very few of us ever succeed in writing that book. But nevertheless we all contain within us a vast anthology of memoirs and stories and a thick compendium of philosophical truths that we have collected along the way. Whatever each one may have attained by way of schooling, it was in the University of Hard Knocks that the most profound lessons were learned!

So, why not write a book? It is possible to write your feelings and views and leave them to the leisurely reading of your progeny long after you are gone. Considering that your kids never listen to you now any-

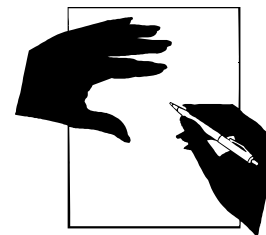
way, your message would endure better in written form so that it will be available when they finally are ready to dip into the well of your experience. Just as you probably regret not having your folks around any more to talk to--to question about your more distant roots or to settle the mysteries surrounding events of long ago--your kids will feel the same way about you several decades from now.

It certainly does not have to be a whole book. It may be only a few pages. And you do not need to find a publisher. You won't have to endure the squinty-eyed scrutiny of a reviewer at the *New York Times*. Forget the outside world. Just tell your stories and explain yourself to a distant descendant. It is through your stories that your cache of wisdom will glow.

This kind of writing is sometimes called an ethical will. In contrast with a testamentary will that dis-

poses of your material goods, an ethical will passes down your spiritual legacy. Indeed, you really do have more than mutual funds and municipal bonds to leave behind to future generations. Were you to describe the things of greatest importance in your life, it is likely that your savings and brokerage accounts would shrivel into insignificance beside your precious collection of hard-earned gems of understanding about love, fidelity, courage, creativity, and perseverance.

An ethical will renders into a tangible form your very spirit, preserving your voice and enabling you to speak to the future. While it's not quite immortality, it may be the next best thing.



## AN ETHICAL CULTURE LOVE STORY

*Monica Weiss, former president, Queens*

**He came here from Vienna in 1937 at the young age of seventeen.** The Nazis had taken the family's business and the writing was on the wall. His parents sent him ahead to waiting family in New York. Bewildered, broke, and speaking no English, he began the immigrant's journey towards becoming American. He was grateful to be safe and in awe of what he found here.

**She came from Rio in 1949.** Her parents had fled pogroms in Romania before she was born and landed in the north of Brazil where they would have a small hotel before moving to Rio, where they ran a boarding house. She grew up in a land where beauty was brown— many shades of red and brown and black all mixed together. She was fair with flaming red hair and freckles— the beautiful "other."

He was born into a life of privilege with a tutor, a nanny, and doting parents. She grew up surrounded by traveling salesmen, intellectuals, prostitutes, and all sorts of

colorful and transient people. Her education consisted of private parochial schools, Jewish, Catholic, and Baptist. By the time she came here, she had seen most of what life was about. He had never even seen brown skin or the ocean or baseball. He had, however, seen the ugly face of hatred up close and would carry that vision with him forever.

They met in 1949 and were married two years later by Algernon Black at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Dan and I were married there thirty years later by the same man. He was 80 years old when he officiated at our wedding in 1981. I'm always amazed by the way life's journeys unfold before us and grateful that our lives have turned out to be a story of possibilities and opportunities. When my parents celebrated 50 years of marriage, Dan and I celebrated a mere 20 years. I'm especially grateful to be part of this wonderful community that believes in the endless potential and essential goodness of people.

**The American Ethical Union, through its Board of Directors and the National Leaders' Council, the professional association of Ethical Culture Leaders, strongly opposes an American war against Iraq. In its stead, we advocate international containment of the Iraqi regime.**

*(National Leaders Council, March 13, 2003; AEU Board, March 15, 2003.)*

**1. Philosophical Commitments**

Though not a pacifist organization, Ethical Culture considers violence and war the last resort to resolve disputes between nations. Ethical Culture's highest value is vested in reverencing the dignity of human beings, and in preserving human life, on which that dignity, with rare exceptions, depends. Ethical Culture is also committed to creating a world community founded on mutually-fulfilling relations on all levels, including relations among nations. We consider war, resulting in the wholesale killing of both combatants and defenseless civilians, and reflecting the most severe dissolution of the human bond, as the most egregious violation of the values we hold most dear.

We consider the planning for war, requiring the employment of human ingenuity in the service of destruction, a perversion of the dignity of the human spirit. It demeans both its victims and its perpetrators while subordinating the value of human life to instrumental and strategic ends.

Yet we recognize that the interests of self-preservation, and the protection of human rights, reluctantly make the use of force, on occasion, necessary. We express a general kinship to the international consensus which recognizes that war can only be justified in the service of national self-defense, and pre-emptive war, only when an assault on one's own territory is imminent.

We conclude that a war against Iraq fails to meet the criteria of a justifiable war.

**2. The Dangers We Confront**

We affirm that Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, presents significant dangers that require an international response. We recognize that his regime has, and continues to be, a gross abuser of human rights, and that he has perpetrated the wanton offense of employing chemical weapons against his own people and against the people of Iran. We also find it likely that he continues to stockpile chemical and biological weapons, while employing resistance, deception and mendacity in the face of international inspection efforts, both in the 1990s and currently.

We proclaim our opposition to a war against Iraq with a sober understanding of the dangers posed by international terrorism and the potential consequences posed by an Iraqi regime unchecked by a response from the international community. We believe, however, that the American administration has not

made a compelling case with regard to Saddam Hussein's nuclear capacity nor with regard to significant linkage to the al-Qaeda terrorist network. We affirm that the Iraqi regime does not present an immediate and direct threat to the safety of our country.

**3. The International Community and American Unilateralism**

While the United States has sought endorsement by the United Nations Security Council for an assault on Iraq, we remain apprehensive that the policy of unilateralism pursued by the Bush administration will trump the will of the international community. We are concerned and fearful that a pre-emptive war against Iraq is not only a violation of the United Nations charter, to which the United States is a signatory, but will prove detrimental to America's security interests in the long range. We are alarmed at the aggressively unilateral designs of the American administration, of which a war against Iraq is a defining moment. A new doctrine of American unilateralism, dedicated to the creation of American military and economic domination on a global scale, is ominously resulting in the alienation of our traditional allies. This policy of the United States potentially undermines the good will and cooperation necessary for the successful pursuit of international terrorists. We are also concerned that a war on Iraq will divert efforts from the necessary pursuit and destruction of terrorist networks, while potentially augmenting the ranks of international terrorism. Moreover, the waging of pre-emptive war, in violation of the United Nations charter, will set a dangerous precedent that will encourage other state actors to initiate pre-emptive wars for interests of their own. American action against Iraq, especially undertaken without international sanction, will bring more violence to an already dangerous international scene.

Various wavering rationales have been proffered by the administration in defense of a war against Iraq. Among them have been the need to depose Saddam Hussein, the dismantling of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and the creation of a democratic regime in Iraq as a springboard to seeding democracy in the Middle East region. Despite these manifest rationales, we are concerned that the prevailing interest of the Bush administration is the establishment of military and economic hegemony over the region inclusive of Iraqi oil resources. We see a new "pax Americana" enforced by American military might in accordance with

the doctrine that will not tolerate any loci of power other than our own. Again, we are fearful of American unilateralism, which will further inflame our enemies while eliciting resentment among our allies.

**4. Post-War Iraq**

There has been little deliberation and less debate about a post-war Iraq.

An American occupation of Iraq, either directly or through an Iraqi proxy government, will incur a monumental economic burden at a time when the American economy is experiencing deep stress.

We recognize that Iraq is an ethnically divided country held together through centralized, autocratic power. We are fearful that a post-Saddam Iraq will be characterized by intergroup violence and score settling among the Kurdish, Sunni and Shiites populations, which will render Iraq dangerous to govern, if not ungovernable. Refugee flight will likely be a source of further violence and instability in the region.

While we are opposed to the war, we recognize that America's "going it alone" especially in a post-war reconstruction phase is one of the strongest arguments against an assault on Iraq.

**5. Conclusion**

Ethical Culture's regard for human life and its commitment to mutually fulfilling relations among nations inspires us to oppose war and seek solutions to the current crisis through international cooperation.

We recognize that in an age of terrorism security cannot be achieved through a policy of unilateralism and the brute display of military force. Peace and stability will only be attained through the democratic states working cooperatively, through international arrangements, and adherence to international norms. We call on the United States to take leadership in this initiative through moral example and diplomacy.

We join with numerous religious and secular organizations, and millions of Americans and individuals throughout the world, in opposition to a war against Iraq. In its stead, we call upon the American administration to support increased and intensified United Nations inspections to be continued indefinitely. Recognizing the dangers posed by the Iraqi regime, we maintain that the response needs to be containment of the Iraqi regime, supported by the threat of force and validated by the international community.

# HIGHLIGHTS of AEU BOARD of DIRECTORS MEETING

New York, March 15, 2003

*Tom Hoepfner, Secretary*

The Board has endorsed the Essex resolution entitled "Physician's Aid in Dying." (See *Dialogue*, November 2002.) It has also approved a resolution to Repeal Phase II of President Bush's Ten-Year Tax Cut of June 2001 and a resolution entitled: "Opposing the American War Against Iraq" (infra, page 8). The Board has also approved the following human rights resolution proposed by the National Service Council: "The American Ethical Union calls upon the United States to abide by the Geneva Convention with respect to treatment of prisoners whether they be of war, suspected terrorists or detainees; that these prisoners not be tortured or deprived of medical care and be given full rights as allowed by American tribunals prior to 2000."

The National Leaders Council is developing a document addressing same sex marriages; it will also help societies to obtain recognition of their tax exempt status as 501(c)(3) religious organizations; and it is progressing on the generalized ethical program, which will be presented at the Assembly.

The AEU website, [www.aeu.org](http://www.aeu.org), has new content: It includes the Assembly brochure and the Board nomination application. A page for commentary by Leaders is being planned.

The Religious Education Committee reports that galleys of a primary workbook will be available at the Assembly.

## Charitable Bequests

Each year, in their estate plans, many members designate a portion of their assets to benefit the American Ethical Union (AEU). Bequests made through wills or living trusts play an important role in securing the future of AEU by helping build the endowment, helping the Ethical Culture movement grow and develop, creating new societies, supporting general operating expenses, or providing for a specific purpose that the AEU board of directors has endorsed or promoted. These commitments also enable members to make gifts that may not have been possible during their lifetimes.

Bequests can take various forms:

A *specific bequest* directs that the American Ethical Union receive a specific piece of property: "I give 500 shares of XYZ stock."

A *residual bequest* designates all or a portion of whatever remains after all debts, taxes, and expenses have been paid: "I give 50 percent of the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate."

A *contingent bequest* takes effect only under certain conditions: "In the event that my spouse does not survive me, I give to the American Ethical Union the sum of..."

If you are drafting a new will or codicil or establishing a trust, the following is sample language that can be used in making a bequest to AEU. Here is a sample:

*"I give to the American Ethical Union, a New York corporation, with principal offices located at 2 West 64 Street, New York, New York 10024 (Insert here the sum, description of property, or percentage of residual estate.) This gift is to be placed in said American Ethical Union's endowment, from which a spending portion will be used to support the American Ethical Union's activities and programs."*

Unless further directed by the donor, the spending portion will be directed to support the AEU as determined by AEU's board of directors.

AEU cannot provide you with legal or financial advice. We urge you to meet with your legal representative or financial advisor to determine the appropriate way to give and the best language to use when making a bequest.

Please allow the American Ethical Union to thank you by letting us know of your plans once your commitment is finalized. For further information contact:

**John F. Hartman, Executive Director**

**American Ethical Union**

**2 West 64 Street, Suite 406**

**New York, New York 10024**

**212-873-6500**

**Email: [office@aeu.org](mailto:office@aeu.org)**



# AEU NEWS & HAPPENINGS



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

**AUSTIN TX** The Texas Third District Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed the lower court's ruling of ESA's status as a religious organization. The judges disavowed the Supreme Being test imposed by the Comptroller. The court focused on the constitutional issue, emphasizing that our pluralistic society cannot uphold the Comptroller's narrow interpretation of religion... **(An excerpt from the decision is on page 11.)** The Ethical Action Chair urges all to use truemajority.com. "It is self explanatory and provides a very convenient way for individuals to register their support or opposition to controversial bills in Congress...and it only takes two minutes of your time per month."

**BERGEN N.J.** "Socrates Cafe" meets two Monday evenings each month to contemplate such questions as "How tolerant do we need to be of other's religious practices?".... The U.S. government is using an abandoned factory in Elizabeth N.J. as a warehouse for refugees who sought asylum in the U.S. but who do not have proper documents. Toilet facilities are in the open. 24 hours of fluorescent lighting and no outside exercise. The INS refuses to release the names of people it is detaining there, under these conditions. The Public Affairs Committee is trying to help and is organizing visits, care packages and protest vigils that are sponsored by the Society of Friends... The first additional Platform was held on March 30.

**BROOKLYN NY** All the religious faiths in the city have objected to a war. The UN action to remove the armament that Hussein has will advance world peace. An attack by Bush is medicine worse than the disease it is proposed to cure.

**CHICAGO** Activities include: Friday Night Film Series; Ethnic Dinner Out; Fiction Circle; Creative Writers Group; Film Discussion Group; Humanist Seder. "Confronting the Ethical Dilemmas in Everyday Life" was the topic of a group discussion program on February 23. Topics were suggested by Society members and from "The Ethicist" column in the *New York Times*. On May 5 John Randall Salter, Jr., the grandson (by adoption) of the first Leader of our Society and colleague of Felix Adler, will speak. Mr. Salter Jr., aka Hunter Gray, a Native American, retired professor, participant in the Civil Rights movement, and Socialist,

will speak on "Always an Activist: My Life as a Native American and Humanist." In September, in our 121st platform year, we will, with the help of Howard Radest, dedicate our newly-expanded building.

**CLEVELAND** Joseph Algrant recalled his experiences of teaching at the Fieldston School in New York City, which was started by Felix Adler as the Workingmen's School. It became one of the famous pioneering schools in the US.

**ESSEX NJ** Boe Meyerson: "Historically, in both western and eastern culture, the great human virtues have always been identified as traditionally male in character. The universal or generic was identified with the masculine. So-called feminine virtues were inferior at best. With the emergence of feminism, two approaches arose. On the one hand, some writers upheld the traditional masculine values but simply stripped them of their gender identification... On the other hand, other writers denigrated the traditional male values and substituted traditional female values...I do not believe that the conventionally assigned virtues of either sex are the sole possession of either sex...I believe that the full flowering of humanity is possible only by blending and mixing of both conventionally identified feminine and masculine virtues..."

**IOWA** The state organization has dissolved; the "Ethiccluster" is continuing informally.

**LONG ISLAND NY** "SPICE" is an acronym for "Splendid Parties In Congenial Environments." Currently it is 18 activities ranging from an Orchid Show to a personal tour of Jamaica Bay in Queens to a backyard Luau -- all to raise funds and camaraderie among "Ethicals."

**NEW YORK** Koren Arisian: "The Administration's dismissal of the importance of budget deficits is again glaringly on the horizon n as it prepares to propose the total elimination of taxes on corporate dividends...the centerpiece of a roughly \$600 billion euphemistically disguised "economic stimulus" package...Our citizenry is looking for something better, more generously equitable, less unequal American vision"....

**NORTH CAROLINA** Cooking at a homeless shelter on January 23, we served

102 guests. Christian Saade, Director of The Intentional Living Institute: "Confucius said that building respectful relationships with others is by itself a sacred act. Martin Buber, a Jewish theologian, wrote that the sacred resides between two people who relate to each other as true human beings. Jesus taught that to genuinely relate to our neighbor is a way to worship. Mohammed said that community-making is an act of the highest religious value. Rumi, the Sufi master, extolled human communication as a dance of great soulful elegance. Almost every, if not all, spiritual and wisdom traditions have asserted that the most precious human asset is the quality of our relationships with each other."...

**NORTHERN VIRGINIA** Judith Eckerson on her stroke: "I woke up on a summer's day and for some reason, I couldn't get out of bed. I've thought about the people who have come to bring me dinner.... the people who have come for four months, and came on Thanksgiving, and took me to the doctor's, and took me to the hospital for blood tests, and helped me get dressed, and helped me get into bed, and cut my food. They have made me understand the Ethical Society in a new way." YES stands for "Youths for an Ethical Society." All five members teach Sunday school classes. Two are members of the Society's board of directors.

**NORTHERN WESTCHESTER NY** Robert Berson: "There may be times when nations must fight, but surely it is better to limit those times, to do the utmost to find other ways to resolve conflicts, to develop and enforce norms of international law, to reduce if not eliminate the ever more destructive weapons of modern war. As we seek to cure the madness of mental illness, so must we seek to cure the m a d n e s s o f w a r ."

**PHILADELPHIA** "The Philadelphia Ethical Society declares its opposition to a war against Iraq. As religious humanists, our most sacred value is respect for the worth of every human being. Aggression against Iraq would repudiate that value by treating the Iraqi people as expendable pawns in a geopolitical game. Although the government of Iraq is cruel and tyrannical,

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

nical, its people do not deserve the added cruelty of death and destruction at the hands of the American military. As the most powerful economic and military power on earth, the United States has a responsibility to lead the world in finding peaceful avenues to resolve disputes...War would only heighten the possibility of revenge-driven terrorism by escalating violence."

**PRINCETON** The new website, pehs.org, states: The Fellowship was founded in 1986 to represent the Ethical Culture Movement in central New Jersey. Members reside not only in Princeton Borough and Township but throughout the surrounding region. The Fellowship meets each Sunday at 10:45 a.m. in Stuart Hall at Princeton Theological Seminary.

**RIVERDALE-YONKERS NY** Leader Curt Collier: "President Bush chided Sadaam Hussein for failing to adhere to the wishes of the majority of the nations of the planet... The irony is the fact that America has yet to sign on to most of the significant accords of the United Nations, including a ban on landmines, a reduction of green-house gases, the rights of women and children, and a right to free access to information on contraception, to name a few. We too have failed to honor the wishes of the world. What exactly are our values?" "I have never been prouder of being a servant of this Ethical community than I am now. I'm proud that this community, once again, has taken upon itself the burden of living ever more ethical lives by actively demonstrating that it cares for others. The opening of the Temporary Overnight Men's Shelter will come with some controversy... ."

**ST. LOUIS** The new name for the spin-off Society is "MIDDRIVERS." At a peace vigil held in St. Charles, Leader Bob Greenwell spoke of the Society's vision of an ethical world in which peace would rule, and the guiding principle would be the worth of all.

**SUFFOLK NY** "The Nassau Human Rights Commission and the Fight Against Discrimination on Long Island," David Harmon. At a member's home, "An Evening of Love and Friendship" expressed in live music.

**WASHINGTON DC** Several members are going to El Salvador in July. They will start with a fiesta, a tour and then residence in Nuevo Consolacion. They will build book shelves and playgrounds at four small schools, a house, tables and chairs, and prepare a broadcast at a radio station; all part of the work of WES International Partners.

**WESTCHESTER NY** Bart Worden: "We are not used to giving things up in this country. Whether we are talking about taxes, cars, computers or fast food--there is an expectation that what we've got, we keep. But I'm assuming that real peace and real security cannot be achieved without real change in our lifestyles. We simply use too much and care too little about the impact of our choices upon others to attain long term good will."

**EXCERPT FROM THE DECISION OF THE TEXAS COURT OF APPEALS, THIRD DISTRICT, AT AUSTIN:** "...Ethical Culture has the marks of a traditional religious organization. Indeed, with a history dating back to 1876, Ethical Culture does appear to function in a way analogous to more established religious groups. It maintains a *bona fide* separate corporate existence. It possesses a coherent literature. Ethical Culture groups meet regularly, typically on Sundays, for services including ceremonial practices. Those services are led by a group of clergy, most of whom have been educated at theological institutes and seminaries. The same trained clergy perform life cycle rituals, including marriages and naming ceremonies. The services are supplemented with religious instruction for children. The Ethical Society of Austin has such meetings, coordinated by professional clergy, and meets regularly on Sundays. Taken together, these factors indicate to us a sincere attempt by the Ethical Society, and its sister groups, to undertake to provide the benefits of a traditional religion. In light of our understanding of the structure of Ethical Culture's principles, these external indications of religious faith mark an important factor for determining whether the Ethical Society is a religion... ."

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TO THE EDITOR:

In the (*Dialogue*, March 2003) article on the Austin case, because it was written by a newspaper reporter who didn't quite understand our position on theism, there are statements about "an attorney for the godless," that the Society "does not believe in a supreme being," and that our "spiritual quest expressly begins with the rejection of a deity," as if that represents Ethical Culture's stance.

The members of the Society and I who testified in this case, as well as the lawyers, were very careful not to misrepresent Ethical Culture's stance in such a way. Ethical Culture does not teach that God exists, nor make any deity central to our common life, nor does Ethical Culture teach that there is no deity. Members are free to believe or disbelieve, and the Ethical Culture movement as a whole cannot be said to either believe in or disbelieve in "God, gods or a higher power." Individual members do take positions on this issue -- and we don't all agree. That Ethical Culture is "atheist-friendly" is true-- so it is true that some members believe in some concept of God or deity, and that for others, the issue cannot be decided or is irrelevant.

It is Ethical Culture's affirmation that ethical living is the center of our religious quest and our community life. Commitment to pursuit of the "spiritual" or ethical ideal is primary. Attributing worth to other human beings is a primary value, as is the importance of working to make the world more humane. We have described our movement as "nontheistic," meaning that "as a community we take no position on the existence of God, gods or higher power or their importance to the ethical ideal."

As a Leader I've already had some questions from members who wanted to know whether the position expressed in *Dialogue* was Ethical Culture's position-- and whether their beliefs excluded them from membership. I've assured them that the reporter who wrote that piece, not a member of the Austin Society, simply missed the subtlety of our position.

Jone Johnson Lewis
Leader, Northern Virginia

THERE'S STILL *TIME*
TO REGISTER FOR THE AEU'S
89th NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Memorial Day Weekend, May 23– 26

at the Philadelphia Ethical Society and nearby Radisson Hotel

**Workshops, Presentations, Elliott-Black Award, Board Elections,
Sightseeing, Meals, a Tour of Camp Linden...and more!**

**Details and printable registration form are available at the
AEU web site: www.aeu.org; click on Latest News.**

Or call the AEU office - 212-873-6500

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News & Views of the AEU

