



Ethical Views

January 2007

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Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

January Platforms



Sunday, January 7 MEMORIAL SUNDAY

This is the time to remember those whom we love but who have left us behind, a time to feel ourselves in the stream of life. Guided by **Richard L. Kiniry**, Leader of the Ethical Society of Philadelphia, we will remember and honor our members who have died in the past year and others who have played a significant part in our lives. Members are invited to come and share their stories and memories.

Sunday, January 14 JOBS, NOT GUNS

Bilal Qayyum, of Men United for a Better Philadelphia, will speak.

Sunday, January 21 IDENTITY IN TODAY'S MIDDLE EAST

Roger Allen, Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania, and Executive Editor of the *Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*, will explain how the concepts of different identity in the countries of the Middle East affect the ways in which these countries respond to the different challenges with which they are confronted.

Sunday, January 28

Jennifer Pennington, Community Education Manager of Planned Parenthood, will speak. ◇



Leader's Message

by Richard L. Kiniry

To make a short story long, I was surprised recently by a personal feeling of empathy for Sylvester Stallone. I had appreciated the first Rocky movie but what with five more of them, the hateful Rambo movies, and Stallone's insistence that his statue be considered art, I thought of him as a bad joke. But there he was on National Public Radio, speaking with sincerity about his new movie in which a 60 year old Rocky makes a comeback in the ring. The plot is preposterous but he spoke of the character with such feeling that it might have been his actual story. It may not be my cup of tea but it is the dream of so many people — the little guy who makes it and is still able to remain himself. Stallone's "sincerity" may just be hype but for a moment I felt empathy for a fellow human being telling his story.

That feeling of empathy got me thinking: well, how about President Bush or Benedict XVI? How about my habit of not looking beyond my dislike of certain people? It is an

accepted ethical theory that a moral sense starts with empathy, but that is an abstraction and in real life my ability to feel for others is limited by my personal prejudices. It's not just me, either. Reflecting on our present world, I notice a huge deficiency in empathy: senseless wars, cruelty and barbarism seem to be the order of the day.

Empathy is so basic. Except for the few, we all learn at least a little empathy early on, but how is it that we also learn to be so stingy with our empathy? Obviously there is war going on between our personal self interest and our connections to others. We are encouraged to think of ourselves and our needs and to relate to others from the perspective of our feelings. We remain on the surface of others. We often hear that people should take responsibility for their actions but there is little appreciation of the world of feelings and thoughts that explains their actions. The same person who puts money in the Salvation Army kettle sends their son or daughter off to kill Iraqis. Can we understand the connection?

When people speak of spirituality they usually mean a connection to a higher reality or to an invisible unity; thus they miss the actual spiritual reality in front of them, the inner life of all those other human beings. That spiritual reality is the flow of living that creates our human world. Until people arise out of their self absorption, beyond the search for

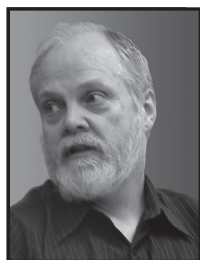
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Leader's Message (Continued)

happiness as an individual journey and expand their empathic feelings to include all those other people, there is little hope for the future.

If you are searching for the unique message of Ethical Humanism, one that distinguishes us from other liberal religions, it is the focus we place on the communal, relational experience. That is the arena of our ethical, spiritual lives. Although each of us is born alone and we imagine we create ourselves, we live in a web of relationships; that is where we create a life. It is in the thoughts, joys, troubles, and richness of the lives of others that we live. And empathy is the doorway into that reality.

I can feel empathy for President Bush and Benedict XVI; both of them are a little lost and unsure that they are up to their jobs. I may run in horror from the thought, but I can even feel a bit of empathy for the young men doing the killing in Iraq and Darfur. I also empathize with all the caring people who feel helpless in the presence of so much evil around the world but empathy without action is frustration. Empathy without action is sympathy and we have to do better than that. ◇



President's Message

by Howard Peer

The holiday season, the New Year: the shopping behind us and the bills ahead of us. How to avoid the clichés? No matter how I try I end up summing up the past year. What has been accomplished? Did I make my goals? Did my life go in the direction I wanted? And what will next year bring? Can I control it, or is the mere idea of control an illusion that keeps us going in the face of inevitable forces?

This past year I have many times felt overwhelmed at work, which I have come to see as a small human world of its own. Good people, all trying to do their best, generally working in a worthwhile cause. Yet bickering, fighting, posturing, exhausted, driven by internal demons and external currents. Are we making progress? Yes, I think. Then again, I'm not so sure. And this is just my work life, which is a fairly benign situation. There may be despots and tyrants, but they are just little puff balls of power and fury and might that can exist only

within their protected ecosystem. Take them out of that system and few would survive. They just don't compare to "real world" tyrants and despots. How lucky I am.

Here's a little tidbit of info that I stumbled across only because I read weird things. Silver Don Cameron, a contributing editor to the Halifax (Nova Scotia) *Herald*, recently looked at the UN's requirements for a sustainable planet and asked whether any country actually met them. He looked at two criteria in particular. First, the ecological footprint, which should be less than 1.8 hectares (about 7 acres) per person. Canada, roughly similar to the US, uses about 7.7 hectares per person. Second, there is a UN metric that weighs several factors (e.g., longevity, literacy) to define a highly developed society as one with a score of .8 or above. In the whole world, Cameron found only one country that met these criteria. It had a high standard of living, but went through a severe economic crisis that forced it to become self reliant in order to maintain its standard of living. That country was Cuba. The message? It's not so much how much you have but how effectively you use what you have.

This brings me back to considering the New Year. We each have different resources. Some of us are better off financially, some have excellent health, some have time. Few of us have all three. And there are so many out there, or here for that matter, that are in need. We are willing to help and share. But to what end? How do we really change anything? When we give to the homeless on the street are we making things better, or worse?

(Continued next page)

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• **Why We Fight: Free viewing at the Ethical Society**
• **of Philadelphia -- Sunday, January 14, 2:00 PM.**

- Did you know that Dwight D. Eisenhower's warning about
 - the military-industrial complex was not just a remark made
 - within a longer speech but was instead the whole sum
 - and substance of his farewell address? And who would
 - have known the danger of this threat better than the 34th
 - President of the United States, Supreme Commander of
 - the Allied Troops who liberated France on D-Day, 1944?
 - Do you think things have changed? See *Why We Fight* for an update on
 - the situation by those today who should know the score. Featuring Senator
 - John McCain, security advisor Richard Perle, and others with inside
 - information, this 99-minute documentary film was the Grand Jury Prize
 - winner at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. PG-13
-



President's Message *(continued)*

Don't infer my answer for I don't know. I'm befuddled.

So I leave you with this thought. Good memories of the past year, good cheer for the holidays, and good luck in the new. Be careful, plan well, spend wisely, have fun.



SCHOOL FOR ETHICS

(All in the Weston Room)

THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

This is a lively discussion group. We have been examining the evolution of ethical systems through history. This year we are discussing what passes for Humanist Philosophy. We began by asking what is wrong with Sam Harris' book, *The End of Faith* and now we move on to Postmodernism with Richard Rorty's, *Philosophy and Social Hope*. In December we will read Craig Eisendrath's book, *At War with Time*. All are invited.

Third **Thursday** of the month,
January 18, 7:30 PM

ETHICS FOR CHILDREN

Our children's program is growing quickly. We now have a staff of three with our new lead teacher, **Josh Bickford**. We strive to challenge the child's understanding of right and wrong and not brainwash them. If you know of any parents who might be interested, we can send them our Ethics for Children brochure. Call the office with the information, 215 735 3456.

Each **Sunday** morning, 10:45 AM

(See recent project done by the children on the calendar page.)

***Happiness is the only good.
The place to be happy is
here. The time to be happy
is now. The way to be happy
is to help make others so.***

--- Robert Ingersoll



The Dictionary Project



On Wednesday, October 25, 2006 Pat Leopold and I delivered dictionaries to the third grade students at the Robert Morris School at 26th & Thompson Streets. This has been an ongoing effort of the Ethical Action Committee of the Ethical Society of Philadelphia for several years.

This year, there were only two third grade classes to visit. After distributing the books, we led a brief lesson on the use of dictionaries, with the children enthusiastically contributing much of the information. Besides the usual pages of words and definitions, these books have maps, drawings of the solar system, tables of weights and measures, a paragraph about each of the US presidents, and much more. Especially captivating to the children, was the page on Sign Language, displaying drawings of hands forming each letter of the alphabet. The children had a great time using their hands to spell their first and last names.

As always, this was a delightfully rewarding experience. You can read about the Dictionary Project, founded by Mary French, at www.dictionaryproject.org

— **Temma Fishman**



Get to Know Us Social

Wednesday, January 3,
7:30pm

Every other month we hold a casual informational event for those who are curious about the Society and its philosophy. Members will be there to talk about their involvement and growth. Leaders of the Society will be present to answer your questions. Refreshments will be served.

REMINDER

New Lunch Plan



We're trying something new and exciting in the New Year! Beginning in January, we will be asking each member to help provide lunch once a month. In this way, everyone can pitch in and take the burden off the few who have been doing it for so long. The meal doesn't have to be elaborate.

The membership list will be divided into groups by the first letter of their last names, and each group will be assigned one Sunday per month to make lunch, **and to make coffee:**

1st Sunday of the month - letters A-D

2nd Sunday of the month - letters E-K

3rd Sunday of the month - letters L-O

4th Sunday of the month - letters P-Z

This new plan will start on Sunday, January 7 with the First Sunday folks (A-D) and will continue through May. Please check your membership list for those in your group. We think it will be most efficient, fair, and enjoyable for everyone if group members consult and work together.

The cost of lunch will be \$4 and will continue to benefit our Handicap Access Fund.

Reimbursement for expenses is available. For questions or concerns contact Temma or the Society office at 215-735-3456.

JANUARY 2007



<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thu</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>
	1	2	3 Meeting - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Community Committee Get to Know Us Social  7:30 p.m.	4	5	6
7 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Richard L. Kiniry Memorial Sunday	8	9	10 Meetings Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Ethical Action Committee 7:45 p.m. Education Committee  Carol Love	11	12  Lyle Murley	13
14 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Bilal Qayyum Jobs, Not Guns	15	16	17 Meeting Weston Room - 6:30 p.m. Executive Committee 7:30 p.m. Board Meeting	18 Class The History of Ethics 7:30 p.m.	19	20
21 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Roger Allen Identity in Today's Middle East	22	23	24	25	26	27
28 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Jennifer Pennington , Community Edu. Mgr. of Planned Parenthood	29	30	31			

Cat Toys for Animal Shelter

Photographs by Janice R. Moore



Recently, the PES Sunday School class was hard at work making cat toys out of socks to be donated to a local animal shelter. They also wrote letters to the cats. Some of the participants are pictured here. Above left: **Lily Locke**, assistant teacher and **Marlee Orange**. Center: **Audrey Orange**. Bottom right: **Noah Cox**.



Platform Summaries



Doris Leicher

Photograph by Temma Fishman

On Sunday, October 8, **Doris Leicher** recounted the story of the opera "Margaret Garner" and related its themes to human interactions in real life, focusing on love, possession, and the psychological payoffs of power in a platform address titled "Love & Possession in 'Margaret Garner' and What It Means for the Rest of Us." The opera is based on the true story of a slave who is raped by her owner. After she escapes with her husband and two daughters, she is recaptured and kills her children to prevent them from being returned to slavery. For the killings she is tried for theft rather than murder, as the children were considered only as property of the slave owner.

Doris drew parallels between the story and reality in the confusion of love with possession and the psychological rewards of power. In the opera, the slave owner's deceased wife made him promise never to remarry, perverting love to control her husband. The slave owner rapes Margaret in a misguided attempt to find intimacy. The slaves are not humans but merely possessions.

Doris observed that similar dynamics are evident in her work as a psychoanalyst. For example, forced reunifications with mothers are unsuccessful as they are based on control, not love. Killers often force others to endure psychological trauma as they have. Social policy often does not give impoverished individuals adequate resources to escape poverty. This makes those more fortunate feel better because others can be considered inferior.

The opera's themes and their relationship to real life situations can challenge us to make ourselves and others more humane, through not confusing love and power and being aware of the psychological rewards of controlling others.

— **Amber Anderson**



Kathy Kelly

Photograph by Janice R. Moore

Kathy Kelly, winner of the 2006 AEU Eliot Black Award, is a master of storytelling and dialect. She held us spellbound on October 29 throughout her platform address, "Voices in the Wilderness," in which she illustrated the senselessness and cruelty of war using the words of the survivors. Kathy said that she grew up in Chicago, an American paradigm of sexism and racism. Yet somehow she became a teacher, a member of the Catholic Workers Movement, an international peace activist, and founder of Voices in the Wilderness, a small grassroots organization dedicated to stopping the sanctions against Iraq.

She spoke about her Irish mother who denies her daughter's reality and instead believes that the Iraqis should be grateful to America for their liberation. Her brothers and sisters are also contented with this version of events. Kathy explained that her family is good at shutting out bad news that is too painful to talk about or accept. They (like many Americans) don't want to deal with environmental issues or the festering hatred of the U.S. caused by our belligerent foreign policy. Kathy reminded us that we have a history of social change — woman's suffrage, the formation of unions, the equal rights movement — and that now, as in every great historical advance, we must accept that the old views no longer work.

In her opening words she told the story of Father Abraham who prepares to kill his beloved son Isaac. An angel comes and tells Abraham that instead of doing this horrible thing, he can sacrifice animals to appease god. Abraham ignores the angel and sacrifices Isaac because that is what he thinks god wants. The moral Kathy drew from this Biblical story was timeless: "Offer up pride instead of the lives of our sons and daughters."

She ended her talk with a beautifully clear and soft rendition of *We Shall Overcome* in Arabic; something she had heard young Iraqis sing in hopes of a better future.

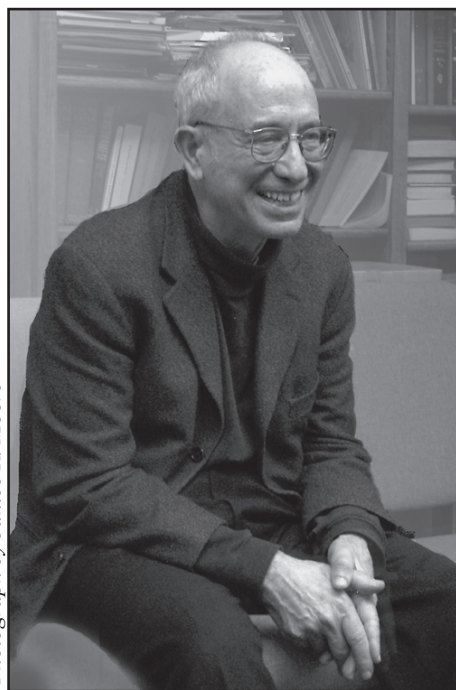
— **Jean Bradley**

Craig Eisendrath, a former diplomat and now director of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, gave a platform on November 12 based on his book, "At War with Time." In that book, and in his talk, Eisendrath, a long-time friend of the Society, described the history of myth, religion and philosophy as a narrative of mankind's search for an unchanging truth.

Starting with the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, and going all the way through the Greeks to Descartes and Hegel and finally to modern times, Eisendrath traced philosophy's loss of absolute certainty and a belief in human immortality, and different responses to it. Eisendrath offered an activist alternative to immortality and certainty: compassion and social involvement and engagement.

In the dialogue after his talk, Eisendrath, in response to questions, discussed Bush Administration politics and compared it to his own experience of international affairs. "They taught us that diplomacy meant talking to the other party," he said.

--- **Bob Moore**



Craig Eisendrath

Photograph by Janice R. Moore

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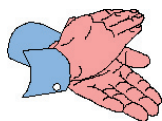
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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

January 7 - Pat Leopold: In honor of
the birthdays of her daughter Nancy
and granddaughter Julie.

January 14 - Susan Jo Klein: In memory
of her father, Victor Klein.

January 21 - Ken Greiff: Just leave me
alone. I don't want presents. I don't
want cake.

January 28 - Remy and Scott Reese: In
honor of Brian Daniel and Barbara Tynan,
who are both suffering from cancer.

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Head Usher
T.B.A.

Greeters - Saul Machles, Head Greeter

January 7 -
January 14 -
January 21 -
January 28 -

Coffee Hour Lunch

January 7 - Group A-D
January 14 - Group E-K
January 21 - Group L-O
January 28 - Group P-Z

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