

Sunday Morning Meetings 11:15 AM-Auditorium

February 3

Where From Here?

Tony Hileman, Senior Leader Muriel Berger Presides

February 10

Good Without God: Building Humanistic Congregations for the Nonreligious

Greg M. Epstein, Humanist Chaplain of Harvard University Dr. Judith D. Wallach Presides

February 17

Race, Politics and Prisons: How NY's Rockefeller Drug War Affects Us All

Robert Gangi, Executive Director of The Correctional Association of New York Joseph Marvel Presides

February 24

The Supreme Court Abortion Decision – The Big Picture

Charles H. Debrovner, M.D. Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at NYU Medical Center

Carol Nadell Van Deusen Presides

Bring a Friend on Sunday

TWO WEST 64TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10023 TEL.212 874-5210 E-MAIL OFFICE@NYSEC.ORG

February Happening

Conversation With the Leader - On Wednesday, February 6, at 6:00 pm, Senior Leader Tony Hileman invites all members to come and share openly their thoughts on various aspects of our ethical life together. (See page 3)

From the Leader's Desk

Tony Hileman, Senior Leader



Reflections On Science

With February comes Darwin Day¹. And next year, the 200th anniversary of his birth, has been designated the Year of Science², a national yearlong celebration of knowledge and how we acquire it—how we know what we know. These events serve as reminders that life poses large questions, and how we approach them says a lot about who we are.

Where do we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die? Matters of origin, destiny, and purpose have perplexed humankind since evolution first endowed us with the capability of considering them. In answer, numerous mythologies, legends, and traditions have arisen. Most of those we now consider quaint superstitions. Some still play an active role in the lives of many. And for other people, Ethical Humanists among them, the questions themselves have lost relevancy. They've been replaced with an even larger one: Who knows? That's one I think I can answer: No one, at least not with certainty.

(Continued on page 2)

Sunday Morning Meetings

11:15 AM-Auditorium

February 3-Where From Here?

Tony Hileman, Senior Leader

This is an era of reconsideration of matters broad and narrow, each of considerable consequence. Globally, nations and peoples are realigning. Nationally, we are in the midst of elections that will impact the direction of our country. And, the stakeholders of our Humanist Movement-lay Leaders, clergy Leaders, and other interested and affected parties-are reexamining the very nature and identity of Ethical Culture. There is a certain sense of urgency to all these undertakings, as each is fraught with promise and peril. Is there a common thread to them? And, more importantly, is there a common solution, or at least a common approach to them?

(Continued on page 3)

Contents

Sunday Programs	1
February Happening	1
From the Leader's Desk	1
Sunday Morning Meetings	1
Conversation with the Leader	3
Early Sunday	4
Sunday Afternoon	4
January Board Meeting	
Highlights	4
Grace, a Panel with the Leader	5
Our Ethical Family	5
Ethics and the Theater	5
Drawing Class	5
Open Letter to PIC Members	5
Women's Shelter	6
Unforgotten Voices	6
Save the Dates	7
Jean Somerville Memorial Terrace	7
Mapping Hazards in America	7
Cultured Comedy	7
Upcoming AEU Events	7
AEU's 2008 Assembly, Austin	7
2008 AEU Lay Leadership	
Summer School	7
Calendar	8

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Sheleigah Grube	118
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Leader's Desk

(Continued from page 1)

It is simplistic but nonetheless profound to say that we accept the universe as self-existing and this life as all and enough. Those statements embody not only our recognition of our own limitations, but our comfort within them.

Ethical Culture is an expression of Humanism that rests on a natural interpretation of human experience. "Guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience," we hold that "knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.³"

This distinguishes our worldview from that of the majority who rely instead on subjective and emotional insights, many of which are held to have been received by ancient prophets from mystical sources. Unfortunately, conclusions thus "revealed" and held are not responsive to reason or our expanding knowledge of the universe. They are, however, all too prone to ossification.

And that's the hardening of cultural attitudes that draws my attention when I think of the milestones of human realization we are preparing to celebrate in 2009: the 150th anniversary of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*; the 200th anniversary of the birth of Darwin and of Abraham Lincoln, a man equally advanced in his own right who was responsible for ending slavery in the

United States and for the founding of the National Academy of Sciences; the 400th anniversary of the publication of Johannes Kepler's *Laws of Planetary Motion*, and of Galileo's first use of a telescope to study the skies.

These cataclysmic events shook the secular and religious thinking of their times, eliciting decidedly different reactions, the consequences of which are still very much with us today. In a nutshell, the scientifically minded welcomed these discoveries and advances enthusiastically, seeking to build upon them a new and better world. Those who had a more fixed worldview found their beliefs threatened and tried to protect them.

That centuries-old struggle continues unabated, leaving in its wake a world divided. One segment of humanity thrives on challenges to its thinking and sees science as an ally. Another rejects any argument that is at odds with its judgments and sees science as a threat. In response to this perceived threat, it mounts increasingly strident initiatives, which attack and threaten science and hinder its explorations.

Those with a fixed idea of truth cling to it with a desperate certainty and tend to press their worldview on others, seeking to influence them in what and how to think. Those more hospitable toward new knowledge and with a respect for the fluctuating diversities of personal conviction tend to encour-

age others simply to think. That makes for a situation that time will likely do more to dissipate than will our efforts. But that doesn't mean we should sit idly by and wait. Speaking up for the scientific worldview and the Humanist life stance, as the Ethical Culture Movement does, is a valuable contribution to that effort.

- 1. February 12, 1809, www.darwindav.org.
 - 2. www.yearofscience2009.org.
- 3. Humanist Manifesto III, www. americanhumanist.org.

Sunday Morning Meetings

(Continued from page 1)

February 10-Good Without God: Building Humanistic Congregations For the Nonreligious

Greg M. Epstein, Humanist Chaplain of Harvard University

Greg Epstein will preview and discuss his upcoming book, Good Without God (Morrow/HarperCollins, 2009), which presents Humanism as a philosophical and moral tradition affirming the values of atheists, agnostics, and the nonreligious. Mr. Epstein burst into the national scene in 2007 as a leading advocate for a more positive alternative to the often-strident "new atheism" of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, asserting that most of the world's 1.1 billion nonreligious people are not antireligious. He will explore the history, values, and future of Humanism as an ethical and inspirational form of atheism, emphasizing human reason, compassion, and creativity, while firmly rejecting the assumption that one must worship God in order to be good.

Can we build thriving communities and congregations that are good without

God? Can we unite the world's nonreligious people, especially now that one in five American young adults has no religion? Join us for a discussion of what may just be the tradition of the future.

Building Tour–Then, following the morning meeting, please join us for a tour of our landmark building, led by member Ruth Cohen. The building was erected early in the career of architect Robert D. Kohn, who was born into the philosophy of Ethical Culture. This building is notable as an example of

clientcentered architecture, visually exemplified by the lack of orna-



NYSEC's landmark building

mentation on its eastern façade, whose only unifying element is the roll molding along the eastern wall, and the building's location on West 64th Street. Also notable is the configuration of the auditorium. Felix Adler, the founder of Ethical Culture, wished to speak to his audience—he didn't wish to tower above them—hence the Auditorium's resemblance to an amphitheater.

February 17-Race, Politics, and Prisons: How New York's Rockefeller Drug War Affects Us All

Robert Gangi, Executive Director, Correctional Association of New York

Robert Gangi will speak about the intersection of race and politics within New York's criminal justice system, with a specific focus on the impact of the harsh, ineffective, and unjust Rockefeller Drug Laws on low-income communities of color. He will discuss strategies to create a criminal justice system that is balanced, fair, and just.

For over 25 years, Mr. Gangi has been Executive Director of the Correctional Association of New York, a long-standing citizens' organization that does policy analysis and advocacy on criminal justice issues. Previously, he was a program officer for the John Hay Whitney Foundation, an organizer for the community Day-Care Movement in New York City, and a youth worker among the city's street gangs.

February 24—The Supreme Court Abortion Decision—The Big Picture Charles H. Debrovner, M.D.

The Supreme Court recently reversed a decision that had been made by an earlier court concerning a type of abortion procedure called "partial birth abortion." The ethical implications of this decision on maternal and fetal rights and the role of women in our society will be discussed from both the medical and sociological points of view by Dr. Debrovner and Caroline J. Debrovner, Ph.D.

Dr. Debrovner, Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at NYU Medical Center, specializes in human reproduction. He is a past President of the New York Society and the Humanist Institute and is currently on the Board of Directors of the American Humanist Association. Dr. Caroline Debrovner is an Adjunct Professor of Criminal Justice at Pace University. She received her B.A. from Vassar College, her M.A. from Yale University, and her Ph.D. in Sociology from New York University.

Conversation With the Leader

Tony Hileman, Senior Leader

Over the course of our gatherings, our conversations have gone from sharing our concerns for our Movement and

our Society to consideration of primary areas, continuity, and identity.

We discussed the importance of the continuity of an inspiring message, consistency of the Sunday morning experience that is the core of congregational life, and, of course, continuance of financial viability.

We also considered four aspects of our Society: religious (animation of the deeper qualities of life), social agency (service and activism), community (activities and personal support), and education (personal growth). These are not mutually exclusive, to be sure, but we have yet to come to terms with which, if any of these, is the one that informs the others and thus constitutes our identity.

Our next conversation is scheduled for Wednesday, February 6, at 6:00 pm. I invite all members to come and share openly your thoughts on these and other important aspects of our ethical life together.

Early Sunday 10 AM

February 3–Singing Practice–All voices, big and small, are welcome. Led by Pat Debrovner and Jerry Ranck, we'll practice the songs we sing on Sunday mornings, and get some tips to improve our singing technique. It's always a lot of fun, so join us! Ceremonial Hall.

February 10–Colloquy: "Last Look On Life"–John Hwang presides. Room 408.

February 17–Poetry Readings—We'll read poems by African-American poets to celebrate Black History Month. Cheryl Gross presides. Room 408.

February 17-Singing Practice-Ceremonial Hall.

February 24–Coffee 'n Chat. Room 408.

Sunday Afternoon 1:45 PM

Ceremonial Hall (Except as noted)

February 3–PIC: Religion: Myth or Reality? See a video of a great debate with Dinesh D'Souza and Christopher Hitchens. Abe Markman presides.

February 10–Open PIC Meeting. Abe Markman presides. Room 514.

February 17–Life With Health. Jacqueline Pope presides.

February 24-The Life and Art of Marc Chagall. Marcella Montaruli presides. Room 514.

January Board Meeting Highlights

Sheila Abrams Kleinwald

The regular monthly reports to the Board by the President, Senior Leader, and President of the Social Service Board were sent to Trustees by e-mail in advance of the meeting and were not available to be read by other members.

In anticipation of the increased need to call upon the Leaders of other Ethical Societies after our own Senior Leader, Tony Hileman, departs in September, the **Sunday Program Committee** requested and was granted a significantly increased budget line for honoraria to additional Sunday platform speakers.

House Matters: Executive Director Robert Liebeskind reported on recent plumbing problems in the basement and fourth floor of the building. House Committee chair Bob Berger reported on ongoing repairs to the Auditorium. We have also engaged a professional building manager to review previous building reports and assist us in setting priorities for future repair and

improvement projects. A cleaning service has been hired.

Dr. Aaron Balasny was approved as a new Society member.

The **Public Issues Committee** presented a motion that was approved, as amended. The amended resolution reads as follows:

"The Board of Trustees of the New York Society for Ethical Culture endorses paid sick leave for employees under the following provisions: employees earn one hour of paid sick leave for every 20 hours worked; employees can earn a maximum of seven days, or five days in firms with fewer than ten employees. As a member of the New York Paid Family Leave Coalition, NYSEC will join the Coalition's new campaign to urge the New York City Council to adopt a paid sick leave policy."

The meeting was adjourned briefly to allow for a meeting of the **United Social Service Board** chaired by
Dr. Phyllis Harrison-Ross. Eric
Wayne Norlander was nominated and approved as a new member of the SSB.

By a rare six-to-five vote, a proposal was approved to cosponsor a meeting of the New York Map Society.

Sunday School Committee chair Meg Chapman reported that a teen program is being developed as an Ethical Leadership Program.

A number of **new business items** were raised by Heather Grady (Pledge Committee), Pat Cohen (Nominating Committee), and Henryka Komanska (Scholarship Committee).

The Board adjourned to an Executive Session to discuss issues regarding the search for and selection of a new Leader.

Grace, a Panel With the Leader

Tony Hileman, Senior Leader

On March 4, I will be part of a panel discussion following the performance of *Grace* at the Lucille Lortel Theatre. Featuring Lynn Redgrave in the title role, Grace is a frank and intellectually stirring examination of familial intimacy, seen through the distorting lens of disparate theological perspectives. Grace Friedman is a mother, a wife, and a brilliant professor. Her bold assertions on the "absurdity" of religion have propelled her to center stage in the public debate over the existence of God. But Grace's private calm is severely shaken when her son, Tom, announces a career change from civil rights attorney to priest.

Tickets can be purchased at www. ticketcentral.com, or by calling 212-279-4200. A NYSEC discount has been arranged for this special evening, as well as for all performances through March 8. The NYSEC discount code is HUMN.

Our Ethical Family

Suzy Frazer

Please welcome the following new member, **Dr. Aaron Balasny**. Aaron is a psychologist, now semi-retired. His interests include sports, politics, and choral singing. He has attended many Sunday platform meetings and is attracted by NYSEC's humanist philosophy.

On Tuesday, January 1, our very festive New Year's Day party was held in Ceremonial Hall, featuring much music, socializing, dancing, and prize-winning! Many thanks to Bonnie Bean and Barbara Levenson for their valiant and creative event making, and to Virginia Arnold and Michelle Rickborn for their fine decorating efforts. This New Year's afternoon celebra-

tion is becoming a joyous tradition at NYSEC—don't miss the next one.

Are you a member or friend who would like to hear from our Caring Committee on a regular basis? Or do you know of someone who might need some assistance and attention? If so, please call me at the Membership office or Virginia Scherer at 212-222-2086.

* * *

It is with a heavy heart that we inform you of the loss of **Sheldon Ackley**, Senior Leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture from 1984 till 1986 and founding Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island in 1950, who died on January 9, at the age of 88. Dr. Ackley played a vital and valuable role in the Ethical Movement and will be missed and remembered by many. Plans for a memorial service are pending and will be announced.

"All values exist in persons and therefore exist in a pattern that is unique, different from everyone else and different from every possible person."

- Sheldon Ackley

Ethics and the Theater

Patricia Bruder Debrovner

On Wednesday evening, February 27, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm, Ethics and the Theater will present a reading of Henrik Ibsen's intriguing play, *The Wild Duck*. Is the "idealist" in the play justified in unveiling the deceit beneath a family's apparent happiness? Should the truth be pursued no matter what the cost? Come and see what happens when all the skeletons are forced out of the closet.

Guest director Jesai Jayhmes will direct our talented cast, which includes John Lovelady, Vince Navarro, Eric Norlander, Francis O'Flynne, Betsy Ungar, Tom Weishaar, and Scott Willett. Following the reading, join in as Muriel Berger leads a lively discussion of the ethical issues raised. Admission is \$5.

Drawing Class

Barbara Litke

Our very popular eight-week drawing course, of which I am the instructor, will resume on March 18 and run until May 6. For a lot of fun and a most productive challenge in expressing your personal artistic creativity, dust off your pencils, pens, and paints and bring your enthusiasm.

Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings, from 6:00 to 8 pm. More precise information will be forthcoming. The cost is \$80 for members and \$130 for nonmembers. Call Gloria Chandler in the Administration Office, 212-874-5210, ext. 117, or go to the Ethical Culture Society, 2 West 64th Street, Room 510, to let her know that you are interested in attending.

Open Letter to PIC Members

Abe Markman

A Welcome to the New Year (Originally sent to PIC members on January 1, 2008)

First of all, I want to tell you how much I have enjoyed working with you. I will value the friendships we have made for the rest of my years. I think the bonds we have forged with one another and with other members of the New York Society represent the heart and soul of the Ethical Movement.

Speaking of our Ethical Movement, there has been some controversy as to whether social action can be an ethical, religious, or spiritual endeavor. I cannot speak for all that is thought of as social action, but I want to speak for what we have endeavored to do. Although we have only taken initial steps, we have

chosen and researched positions that not only envision a more just world, but we have chosen an ethical means toward the creation of such a world.

Starting with ourselves, if we create a bond out of a shared vision and an attempt to bring out the best in each other, and with groups near and far, are we not expanding our spiritual capacity? If we use empathy to transcend ideology, are we not using a powerful vehicle that could move us to a more humane society? If we lend a hand in the stewardship of the earth and its nurturing energies, are we not performing deeds that can be identified with the highest realm of our Movement?

As we go forward, we will need to focus on what we can actually accomplish. Otherwise, we can be accused of taking on too much and accomplishing too little.

My goals for 2008/2009 are four-fold: 1. Encourage Ethical to become green; 2. Hold a breakfast or luncheon for elected officials to promote our

At the January 6 PIC event: (L-R) Carol Rost; Pat Debrovner; Heather Grady; Jessica Walker Beaumont, of the American Friends Service Committee, the speaker; Abe Markman; Pat Berens; and Rich Sander

family-friendly issues; 3. Explore the possibilities of this country adopting a single-payer, government-run health care system; and 4. Continue with speakers, films, books, and discussions to sharpen our understanding of the positions we have taken. We have established a framework for action; now is the time for us to act!

Unforgotten Voices

Maria Fridman

On December 12, the NY Society once again (for the 22nd season) hosted the Unforgotten Voices Creative Workshop, an evening of poetry, art, singing, and music by a collective of talented artists who are or have been homeless. The coordinator of this program, Judith Ginsburg, also invited special guests from the Volunteers of America Ward's Island Community Theatre Arts Workshop, and



John Pinder, coordinator of the Volunteers of America Ward's Island Community Theatre Arts Workshop, and Judith Ginsburg, coordinator of Unforgotten Voices

Fresh Start Cultural Theatre Productions to participate.

All of this made for a lively and inspiring evening. These groups under the auspices of the Keener Shelter Program, John Pinder, coordinator, help uplift the artists and showcase their talents.

The event was cosponsored by the United Social Service Board. (I have had the pleasure of helping to coordinate this program since its inception.) Bravo to all!



Ray Gant, artist, pianist, and singer presents the CD he created to Maria Fridman



(L-R) Maria Fridman, John Pinder, and guest artist



(L-R) David and Valerie Leiman and guest John Pinder

Women's Shelter

Maria Fridman

A heartfelt thank you to the following members, who served as Shelter volunteers during October, November, and December, 2007: Ben Bean, Pat Cohen, Susanna Frazer, Margaretha Jones, Chester Lane, Andra Miller, Marcella Montaruli, and Jane Ungar.

Please call me c/o NYSEC at 212-874-5210, ext. 113, to see how you can help in this vital effort.

Jean Somerville **Kotkin Memorial Terrace**

Ruth Cohen

The Coordinating Committee for the Friends of Jean for the Dedication of the Jean Somerville Kotkin Memorial Terrace is pleased to announce that a ceremony will be



Jean Someriville Kotkin

held at the Society on Sunday, March 23, at 2:00 pm, in Ceremonial Hall. Please join friends and members as we dedicate the Terrace in Jean's memory and look ahead to our continued growth.

The committee will be in touch with all our members and Jean's family and friends. We look forward to seeing you all with us there

Save the Dates

Mapping Hazards Cultured Comedy in America: Earthquakes, Coastal Storms, and Sea Level Rise

Mark Monmonier, Distinguished Professor of Geography Syracuse University

Join us on Wednesday, March 12, at 6:30 pm, in Ceremonial Hall, for a talk by Professor Monmonier, who will use a variety of maps to explore cartographic strategies for coping with earthquakes, coastal storms, and rising sea levels.

Environmental cartography can be a platform for informed discussion of ethical issues related to restrictions on living or investing in high-risk areas. This event is open to the public and admission is free.

Come to the Cultured Comedy Club on Saturday, February 2, for an evening of political comedy. Listen and laugh as Scott Blakeman and some of NY's sharpest comedians skewer current events and social issues. For more information call 212-874-5210, ext. 113.

Where? Our CCC Basement Lounge. The doors open at 7:30 pm. The cost of \$15 for members and \$20 for nonmembers includes two drinks (wine, coffee, or soda).



Upcoming AEU Events

AEU's 2008 Assembly, Austin

Join members from across the country, from April 17 to April 20, in Austin, Texas, to socialize, learn, teach, and celebrate our history and our ethical values.

Some of the many workshops that will be offered are: "Biocentric Ethics," with Curt Collier; "An Ethical Humanist Religious Approach to Living," with Richard Kiniry; "Religious Education"; "Growing and Sustaining Society Membership"; and "Society Financial Management"; "Ethics in Pop Culture: The Ethics of Harry Potter"; "Communication Skills in Ethical Society Life," with Jone Johnson Lewis; and "Out of the Box: Brainstorming to Reinvigorate Ethical Culture," with Hugh Taft-Morales.

Our plans also include: a keynote speaker, an opening reception, the NSC luncheon, the Elliott Black Award Banquet, a Sunday Platform, a Liberation Festival-A Humanist Seder, and entertainment held both on and off the Assembly grounds.

You may have already received the brochure describing the event. We hope you'll come to Austin; you can count on having an experience you will long remember. For more information call the AEU at 212-873-6500.

2008 AEU Lay Leadership Summer School

Katharine Archibald

The AEU Lay Leadership Summer School, August 9-16, is one of the Ethical Movement's most successful programs, and 2008 will mark its twelfth year. Together we can develop and improve the skills needed to increase our Movement's size and make it more widely known. Brochures giving more information are being sent to Ethical Societies.



February 2008 Office hours for the month are: Monday-Friday, 9:00 am – 6:00 pm Shelter: Monday-Thursday, 7:30 pm Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday **Great Books**: February 6 – Bible, *The Book of Job* St. Augustine, The City of God 9:30 am and 1:30 pm ECRDG: (Ethical Culture Reading Discussion Group) Supervised Visitation 8:00 pm – Cultured Comedy February 13 – Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Idiot Club **Great Books: Great Conversations I** February 20 - Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave 3 8 9 10:00 am – Singing Practice 11:00 am – Ethics for Children 9:30 am and 1:30 pm Supervised Visitation 11:15 am – Morning Meeting 12:45 pm – Social Hour 1:45 pm – PIC: Is it Hard for 6:00 pm – Men's Group 6:00 pm – Conversation With The Leader 6:30 pm-Board of Trustees 6:30 pm-Monday Writing Workshop 7:00 pm-Thursday Writing Ethical to be Green? 7:30 pm - Great Books Workshop 10 12 13 14 15 16 10:00 am-Colloquy 11:00 am-Ethics for Children 11:15 am-Morning Meeting 12:45 pm-Social Hour 1:45 pm-Open PIC Meeting Darwin Day Lincoln's Birthday No Supervised Visitation Today 3:00 pm-ECRDG 6:30 pm-Monday Writing 7:00 pm-Thursday Writing Workshop 6:00 pm - Women's Group Workshop 17 19 20 21 22 23 10:00 am-Poetry Reading 10:00 am-Singing Practice 11:00 am-Ethics for Children 9:30 am and 1:30 pm Supervised Visitation Presidents' Day Society offices closed 11:15 am – Morning Meeting 12:45 pm – Social Hour 1:45 pm – Life with Health 6:00 pm – Socrates Café 7:30 pm – Great Books: 6:30 pm - Monday Writing 7:00 pm-Thursday Writing Great Conversations I Workshop Workshop 24 25 26 28 29 10:00 am - Coffee 'n Chat 11:00 am – Ethics for Children 11:15 am – Morning Meeting 6:00 pm-Ethical Culture 6:30 pm-Monday Writing

Today? 7:00 pm – Ethics and the

Theater

7:00 pm-Thursday Writing

Workshop



12:45 pm - Social Hour

1:45 pm – The Life and Art of

Marc Chagall

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Workshop 6:30 pm – Social Service

Board