

E T H I C A L O U T L O O K

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Sunday Morning Programs **11:30 AM – Ceremonial Hall**

September 7

Retrospect and Prospect: “Tis Not Too Late To Seek A Newer World” (Tennyson)

Dr. Khoren Arisian

Senior Leader

Michael Bogdanffy-Kriegh presides

September 14

“The Prospects for Democracy When Evangelical Religion Gets Out of Hand”

Dr. Khoren Arisian

Senior Leader

Dr. Charles H. Debrovner

Presides

September 21

“Against the Odds: The Need for Militant Humanism”

Dr. Matthew Ies Spetter

Leader Emeritus

Dr. Khoren Arisian Presides

September 28

“A New Medical Ethics: Why Competence and Compassion are No Longer Enough”

Dr. Richard Bernstein

Health Care Consultant,

Member Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County

Joseph Marvel Presides

WQXR-FM (96.3)

Broadcasts

1st and 3rd Sundays of the month at 7:30 am

September 7

“From State Shinto to Suicide Bombings: The Militarization of Religion”

Curt Collier

Leader, Riverdale-Yonkers Society

September 21

“Compassion: The Heart of the Good Life”

Bart Worden

Leader, Westchester Ethical Society

From the Leader’s Desk

Dr. Khoren Arisian

The Shape of Things to Come



One of the most unattractive and morally ruinous habits we humans have when faced with a difficult decision is to take the easy way out: we often choose first to deal with the politics of a problem and then, if at all, with the problem—the actual challenge—itsself. I have no doubt that the present Bush Administration, for example, distorted intelligence reports and knowingly invoked manufactured data to support a steady drumbeat in behalf of the war against Iraq. The airy dismissal of dissident opinion, stating that it is suddenly irrelevant whether weapons of mass destruction are found or not is an obvious but unacknowledged admission of a bankrupt and desperate strategy. Nonetheless, the usual disciplined effort will be made by the Administration to finesse so embarrassing a predicament.

The “Bushies” clearly intended to divert people’s attention from the perilous state of the economy and its absurd tax-cut schemes, which have contributed to millions of jobs lost and the middle class being even further drained of financial security, not to mention the continued disempowerment of the poor; all that counts now is “the investor class.”

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Sunday Morning Meetings

11:30 AM – Ceremonial Hall

September 7 Retrospect and Prospect: “Tis Not Too Late To Seek A Newer World” (Tennyson)

Dr. Khoren Arisian

Senior Leader

One of the most compelling of modern martyrs was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a distinctive and different kind of Lutheran cleric, who was hanged in April, 1945 for his public opposition to Adolf Hitler and his involvement in the plot to assassinate him the previous year. Bonhoeffer envisioned a religionless Christianity, seemingly an oxymoron. The Christian life, he believed, must be free of preoccupation with religiosity *per se* and, instead, must open itself to “worldly holiness”; to live is to act.

By the same token, in taking our ethical humanism seriously, we, too, must pursue a life of action and passion. So much keeps happening every day that we wonder how we can keep up with it all, how we can generate some perspective that will enable us to maintain a sense of personal responsibility without losing heart.

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Ethical Culture: Who We Are
The Society for Ethical Culture:
Its Aims and Purposes from a Layman's Point of View
Louis M. Greeley, March 1908
Discovered in the Archives by Dr. Marc A. Bernstein

The Society for Ethical Culture professes to be and is a religious organization. It is essentially religious in the attitude towards life, which it teaches and cultivates. It values supremely the religious spirit, the spirit of reverence, the spirit of consecration to the higher ideals, the spirit of strict self-examination and of strict self-judgment. But while the Society is a religious organization, it is without dogma. It has no creed. It demands the acceptance of no philosophic or theological formula whatever.

The Society is founded upon the moral law and the moral instinct of mankind. Its one article of faith is faith in the moral order of the universe, in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, or the possibility of such a triumph through the faithful efforts of men and women. It teaches that the moral law is the supreme law of the world, that its obligations are paramount.

It is on these lines that the Ethical Society is striving to reconstruct the religious life, to re-create a church broad enough to include all earnest people, however much they may differ in their philosophic, or economic, or theological views....

While the Society would preserve the religious life and the religious spirit, it would, at the same time, seek to give a greater depth and breadth to that spirit. The religious spirit of the past was, perhaps, too exclusively a matter of personal salvation. The Society would make that spirit less purely personal and more social in its aim and scope. The regeneration of society is its ultimate ideal. A personal salvation apart from the social salvation, it deems scarcely possible, though recognizing that the salvation of the whole can only be accomplished through the perfection of the parts. The social regeneration which the Society looks forward to, it looks for, not in some other world or as the result of some miraculous intervention. It believes that that regeneration is to come in this world and by the slow and painful efforts of faithful and devoted men and women, working toward that great end....

The Society is constructive, not destructive; positive, not negative. It does not assail the churches or their creeds. It desires to cooperate with the churches as powerful moral agencies. It, however, places the insistence upon ethics, not upon dogma, and while it respects honest opinions, seriously held, it teaches the duty of intellectual and moral honesty and courage, and condemns the acceptance of a creed not held as the result of serious reflection and sober conviction, but adopted for the sake of conformity, or upon mere grounds of sentiment.

The attitude of the Society towards social and economic reforms is most friendly and sympathetic, recognizes that reform is indispensable to the progress and regeneration of society. It welcomes the widest and freest discussion of social and economic matters. It prizes most highly the spirit of reform....

To sum up in a few words, the Ethical Society exists to inspire mankind with faith in and reverence for the moral law, to teach unswerving obedience to that law, and to unite mankind in a religious fellowship based only on that faith, that reverence and that obedience.

From the Leader's Desk

Continued from page 1

Be that as it may, should weapons of mass destruction be found at all, they will have had to be planted by our own hand, which would quickly prove to be a costly political mistake. Better to keep lying that Iraqi weaponry certainly has to be somewhere! Which, of course, in the ultra-conservative lexicon means that the Administration was only exaggerating claims about Saddam Hussein's nuclear ambitions in order to better protect the American people from the possibility of annihilation. Presumably we are to be thankful for every terror alert that comes our way.

And that's where the issue rests as I write this column at the very end of July. Will the Administration's characteristic posture that it is always right because God is the ultimate guarantor of its probity be acceptable to the American public? I dare say this affair

dies all along, and that our invasion of Iraq was just another and bigger phase of our war on terrorism. Is it any surprise that President Bush on July 29th refused to declassify a 28-page redaction of a Congressional report regarding the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center? What was the presidential rationale? That disclosure of the deleted section, which focuses on Saudi Arabia's plausible deniability in financing the deadly plane hijackings, "would help the enemy" and disrupt the campaign against terrorist forces. Evidence of the enduring connections between Saudi Arabia and Al Qaeda has consequently been blurred, if not suppressed, by Administration officials.

Author Joan Didion has recently written a controversial essay on the fixed ideas she perceives as comprising the Bush mindset, which runs counter to that of many U.S. citizens. She refers to "the hinge of history" as the Defense Department mumbles on about possibly

to deal with the mere *politics* of a problem. In addressing the *problem*—whatever it may be—to begin with, we embed ourselves in what might be called first-order reality. This grounds us in our own being and subsequently provides a basis for generating a principled political environment in which to present realistic and effective solutions or responses to the challenges we face. To deal with a problem on its own merits, therefore, is a great timesaver!

Because the Bush Administration begins with a politically filtered, pre-existent, and undeviating agenda, it is beyond bipartisanship, beyond compromise, and beyond tolerating dissent. That's what makes it so dangerous to other countries and to the open-ended democratic faith we cherish in the United States.

All this may sound unpalatable to many of us, nonetheless most of it cannot be evaded. The shape of things to come is not likely to change unless we choose to change the order of priorities with regard to "the continuing national emergency," as I like to call it. That's what the proposed Advocacy Forum is designed to address (please read my up-to-date remarks about it in the August Annual Reports issue of the newsletter).

Everything I've said about the folly of approaching the *politics* of a problem first, rather than the *problem* itself applies also to how we go about resolving the issues and decisions that will face us as a Society as we begin our new season in September.

I eagerly anticipate our forthcoming time together. If my position as Senior Leader is a sacred trust, and I believe it is, so is the position of each of you as a member of the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Felix Adler was right on: Wherever "people meet to seek the highest is holy ground". » » »

...we imperil ourselves every time we choose to deal with the mere *politics* of a problem. In addressing the *problem*—whatever it may be—to begin with, we embed ourselves in what might be called first-order reality.

represents the first truly serious crisis of credibility to penetrate the hitherto teflon-coated Republican right-wing armor. Meanwhile, the President will probably be granted yet another pass as CIA Director George Tenet and others offer to assume blame and fall on their respective swords.

What a convenient, if thus far unresolved, scenario! On the one hand, no one is held accountable for intelligence failures prior to 9/11; on the other hand, Hussein has been slyly substituted for Osama bin Laden as the mastermind of that horrific event, thus creating public opinion to the effect that Saddam and Al Qaeda must have been bosom bud-

using nuclear weapons in its pursuit of sporadic war without end carried out in our name and for our benefit. In the February 13th issue of *The New York Review of Books* former *Times* columnist Anthony Lewis writes: "To an extent that we could not at first imagine, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have transformed the politics and the policy of the United States. A president of dubious legitimacy has used his wartime aura to silence critics, greatly enlarge presidential power, and suppress civil liberties."

I believe, and I'm sure many of you do too, that in light of all the above, we imperil ourselves every time we choose

Sunday Morning Meetings

Continued from page 1

One day in late July a Brooklyn Councilman, James Davis, was bizarrely shot to death publicly in broad daylight—why? Saddam Hussein’s two sons, monstrous offspring of a monstrous tyrant, were finally hunted down and killed by the American military. There’s ample evidence that our intelligence agencies were half-asleep at the wheel of professional responsibility before 9/11. Meanwhile the “Bushies” keep behaving predictably—arrogantly and with contempt for most people who are not mirror images of themselves. There’s also a troubling past to remember: 2003 represents the 40th anniversary of JFK’s assassination and the 30th anniversary of the Watergate conspiracy, a sobering reminder of which was shown in a Channel 13 documentary.

What is one to do? For starters, let’s refuse to succumb to the self-defeating proposition that nobody cares, that the public as a whole is utterly indifferent to its own best interests, etc. Not true! Such unnecessarily cynical assessments merely create that familiar bubble of unreality known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. It’s never too late to create a newer and better world—whether or not we actually can, we’ll never know until we try. So let’s try! And let us remember, too.

September 14—“The Prospects for Democracy When Evangelical Religion Gets Out of Hand”

Dr. Khoren Arisian, Senior Leader

On the evening of May 28th I participated in a panel in our auditorium on the broad topic, “The Crises of Democracy,” in conjunction with the Center

for Constitutional Rights and radio station WBAI. The audience, numbering about 300, was warmly receptive to the entire panel.

I decided to take a radical tack and demonstrate how an unblinking scrutiny of what’s really going on politically in our country under the

leadership of an unapologetically right-wing Administration

requires us to inquire into its ultra-conservative religious agenda and the theological presuppositions supporting it. This led us into a brief look at our Puritan past and how major elements of its Calvinist roots extend directly into almost every aspect of what the “Bushies” are attempting to establish, albeit via new packaging and linguistics.

The appalling fact is that hardly anyone in public or religious life today is willing to tackle this matter without apology. This is where the unrestricted freedom of our Ethical Culture platform comes in—I had a field day for about 15 minutes! This Sunday I want to enlarge the whole picture and bring additional facts to substantiate my view of the rightist take-over of American life in religion and politics, which may illuminate a basic outline of the right’s brazen grand plan and the ways in which we may become adept at dismantling and exposing its most dangerous aspects.

September 21—“Against the Odds: The Need for Militant Humanism”

*Dr. Matthew Ies Spetter
Leader Emeritus*

There is a sense of discontent and doom in liberal circles. It is said that the country is going to hell and liber-

alism has to be postponed. These are illusions. There are cycles in American history. What matters is that we have the potential to work for change. We must liberate ourselves from the illusion of defeat and doom.

Dr. Spetter has earned the title of “Patriarch” of the Ethical Movement.

There is a sense of discontent and doom in liberal circles. It is said that the country is going to hell and liberalism has to be postponed. These are illusions.

He has long been Leader and Leader Emeritus of both the Riverdale Yonkers Society and the New York Society. He remains a favorite Sunday speaker.

September 28—“A New Medical Ethic: Why Competence and Compassion are No Longer Enough”

*Dr. Richard Bernstein
Health Care Consultant; Member
Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County*

Managed care has created political and ethical concerns. From the latter perspective, it is often framed as an unwelcome intrusion in the autonomy of the doctor-patient relationship and an interference with physician decision making. But all managed care systems, including national health systems in other countries, must struggle with the fundamental economic reality that resources are limited and do not allow everyone to receive all the health care they may want or even need. How then should such limited resources be fairly distributed? Underlying the managed care debate is the question of justice in the allocation of finite resources: who should make such allocation decisions and how? Can physicians ignore the unmet needs of the broader community while focusing only on the needs of their patients? ■

Women's Group

Bernice Cornyetz

Are you interested in joining the Society's Women's Group? If so, we currently have room for two new participants and we invite you to join. If you are interested, please contact Dr. Bernice Cornyetz at 212-595-7107 in early September and leave your name, telephone number, and address so we can contact you about the first meeting. We meet on the second Tuesday of every month from 6:15 pm to 8:00 pm in Room 408 at the Society. The group members determine the agenda, and we have a list of topics that we use to stimulate our discussions.

Letter to the Editor

Food for Thought

Eva Yachnes

The July 6 program led by Amy Schwarz on the subject of "How I Value Independence," and the discussion which followed, really started me thinking. My attention was particularly caught by two remarks from the floor.

The first of these was that we should value our freedoms more because of the many people who died to maintain them. On the surface there would seem to be no arguing the point. But is dying for one's beliefs an automatic validation of those beliefs? Didn't people also die who were fighting for other beliefs, whose values were opposed to ours but who believed just as fervently that they were right? It would seem to me that we should believe in our values because we have given thought

to what they are, regardless of how they were attained. It isn't so much that the death of soldiers makes the cause just; it is the just cause that ennobles those who fight for it.

The other statement that I've been mulling over is that we should value our freedoms because they are unique to our country. Is that really true? I often wonder at the narrow vision of some Americans who think that this is the only democratic nation in the world. In fact, we are *less* democratic than some countries. In a democracy, the individual who gets the most popular votes is elected. If that were true in the United States, Al Gore would be our president now.

And what if you hold an opinion that is not represented by either of the two major parties? In countries having proportional representation, minor parties also have a voice in government. That may not be the most expedient way of doing things, but isn't it more democratic? Just because we love our country, we don't have to believe that

Just because we love our country, we don't have to believe that it is the only one where freedom and democracy live.

it is the only one where freedom and democracy live. As it says in the song set to *Finlandia*, our land is beautiful, but so is theirs.

Pledge Drive

Bonnie Bean

As we prepare to begin our 2004 pledge drive, we want to let you know how vital this drive is to the long-term

health and survival of the Society. As our board president, Michael Bogdanffy-Kriegh, pointed out at our Annual Meeting, this is a crucial year in fundraising for us because of the expensive

The Society is at a critical point in our organization's history, and this year, more than ever, we need every member to make a pledge to keep our Society whole and growing.

building renovations under way and the shrinking of our endowment. The Society is at a critical point in our organization's history, and this year, more than ever, we need every member to make a pledge to keep our Society whole and growing. It's hard to over-emphasize the importance of this year's pledge drive, so we ask all members to think about what the Society means to them and then make the most generous pledge they can.

In order to give members the opportunity to hear about our fundraising plans and discuss their ideas about ways to increase funding, we will kick off this year's pledge drive with small gatherings hosted by board members either in their homes or at the Society. During the month of October each member will receive an invitation to one of the gatherings. They should be great fun, and we look forward to seeing each member at one of them.

Crossing an Educational Divide

Abe Markman

You are invited to participate in a discussion on Crossing an Educational Divide, to be held on Sunday, Septem-

ber 21, at 1:30 pm, in Room 514. Dolores Schaefer, president of the Lower East Side District One Community School Board, and Shelley Holtzberg, a retired supervisor of special education, and a teacher trainer will be on a panel commenting on a paper that I will present. On one side of the divide are those who believe that the public schools are failing our children. They are advocating vouchers, privatization, home schooling, or private schools. On the other side are those who believe these alternatives will drain essential funding from the system.

Is there a way to address the concerns of those seeking alternatives to the public schools? I will present a radical proposal for discussion. Some of the elements of the proposal are already being implemented by the Bloomberg administration. Other proposals that will be presented for discussion are quite controversial. Among these are a case for: (1) changing principal and teacher tenure to a contractual system; (2) giving principals authority to hire and fire teachers and all on-site workers, including custodians; and (3) instituting differentials in pay based on merit, specialized skills, and a willingness to teach in failing schools. I will argue that public school advocates should take the lead in promulgating changes such as these. Unless such a process is undertaken in and for school districts all around the country, the public school system may lose not only many children and a substantial part of its present funding, but also a chance for a substantial increase in vitally needed funding.

I want to make it clear that the points of view expressed in the paper are mine, and not those of the New York Society for Ethical Culture. After the panelists have spoken, audience criticisms, ideas, and suggestions will be

solicited for inclusion in a paper that is still being written.

Follow Up

Barbara Litke

One Week Later. It happened! Seats were scarce. I found myself sitting behind the speakers (their backs to me), and not one word was missed. The hearing aids had passed with flying colors—I was elated. Everything was clearer, sound (adjustable), words, and tonal quality. Somehow my feet held the ground more firmly.

One Month Later. The time for decision-making has come and gone. In noisy restaurants or rambunctious gatherings I can adjust the hearing aids for personal comfort. I now carry a small pouch with me (in case I decide to remove the aids) and a hoard of batteries for security. It's not a perfect 10. It doesn't matter that I have worn out my friends (several of whom could use an aid) with my proselytizing. The hearing aids are here to stay.

Our Ethical Family

Ben Bean and Members

New Members:

Kenneth Gans has retired from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He found us through WQXR and *The NY Times*. He frequently attends the Sunday meeting.

Jirina Ribbens is an events manager with international flair. She appreciates the humanist movement and found us through Randi Kopp.

David Wellen Ph.D. is a psychologist who found us through the Internet. He first came to the evening discussion groups, then the ethics salon, and finally the Sunday morning meeting.

News of Members:

Senior Leader **Khoren Arisian's** article "Religious Zealotry and the Crisis of American Democracy" has been posted on the Open Democracy website (www.opendemocracy.net). The article has sparked a wide-ranging debate on the website's message boards. *El Pais*, one of Spain's largest publications, has now requested permission to reprint the article.

Fred Garel's autobiographical book, *Lighting the Lamps*, was published by Xlibris Corp. in January.

Glory Van Scott was offered the 2003 National Black Theatre Festival's Living Legend Award in August for her "contributions to black theatre and American theatre in general."

Congratulations to all on these outstanding achievements!

Mona Roset has had another brief hospital stay and is home recovering. Your cards would be most welcome.

Rene Lacoste will become a Friend.

Members dropped:

Dorothy Barker
Richard Bruno and Catherine Hyland
Peggy Foner
Brian Monahan
Mr. and Mrs. Ludwig Mondesky
Helen Sheldon
Vivian White Soboleski
Dr. Marvin Wolfman

Members resigned:

Roberta Bessey
Claudia Rogers
Marilyn Sharp

We regret to announce the deaths of members:

Rita Aronowicz who was active in the NY Society, and Edward and Marian Gottlieb who were active in the NY and Brooklyn Societies for many years.

Ethical Culture is a humanistic religious and philosophical movement in which people share a core of common values: the worth of each individual, ethics as central to our lives, eliciting the best from each other and doing good in the world.

We seek truth as a growing, changing body of knowledge based on experience, reason and scientific observation, and seek to use it in support of human well-being.

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