



# ETHICALLY SPEAKING

53 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn NY 11215 (718) 768-2972

Volume 94, no. 5

## Universal Health Care Platform February 20

On February 20, 2000, BSEC will host a platform on *Single-Payer Universal Health Care* with special guest Dr. Oliver Fein, Associate Dean of Cornell Medical College, Chair of the New York chapter of *Physicians for a National Health Plan*. (PNHP) Dr. Fein was a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellow during 1993-1994, when he worked as a legislative assistant in the office of Senate Democratic Majority Leader, George Mitchell. He has done a great deal of research on the access (or lack thereof) to adequate health care for vulnerable populations. *Physicians for a National Health Program* is a nationwide, single issue organization advocating a universal, comprehensive single-payer national health care program. PNHP includes members with widely differing political views, united by their dismay at the nation's widening gaps in income and access to medical care, the deteriorating public health infrastructure, and the corporate takeover of the health sector. They are convinced that most Americans, and most physicians, support health care reform based on precepts of social justice and medical need, not the current reforms driven by Wall Street. They have a very informative website at <<http://www.pnhp.org>>.

Mark your calendars for what promises to be a most enlightening discussion.

## Leader Notes: First Things and Hard Choices by Lisel Burns

In last month's Leader's Platform meeting, hoping to rivet attention on real life priorities, I asked folks to imagine they had 100 days to live and the knowledge that their loved ones would be financially cared for. Free to be away from a workplace, what would they do and why?

Planning the program with my friend Blanca, I had a couple of immediate responses to this question myself. I said that the next Sunday I would find a way of communicating my deep gratitude to everyone who had made a positive difference in my life. I wanted them to hear how much their actions or attitudes had meant to me. Then I would spend the rest of the time relaxing, and investing whatever resources I have amassed to date in the local and global development groups I most believe in.

My other, more private response I'll confess here. I knew that by simply ignoring the news and keeping up my present pace I and a lot of New Yorkers might avoid feeling the depth of the situation, thereby missing the chance to really do or let happen our most important, unrealized priorities. But stopping the rush of life to face off impending death might not work either. What if I felt what was happening to me so strongly, that I had a nervous breakdown from the terror at soon losing the only life I actually had? Maybe I'd miss most of the three months I had left in a nervous collapse!

If not a win/win, given the projected situation, the resolution that came to mind was to take the first week in a very quiet place, with a close

person like Blanca helping me find courage to work out for myself the thoughts and feelings that would make my response to the hard life was dealing me really my own, neither dazed by overactivity, or psychological shock.

With a meaningful plan, I could return to daily life with a compass, self created knowledge of my own direction and deepest priorities, regardless of the situation to come. In that response, my most important desires turned out to be for:

1. My own truthfulness, to myself and others
2. My own planfulness, or foresight
3. My own sense of responsibility to help myself and others secure "fullness of life"

To me this last insight is deepening my self-understanding — perhaps this concern with development of possibility, in the sense of not only moral fulfillment but also creative, paradoxical fulfillment (e.g. getting the most out of life) is underneath my longtime community development activities.

Curt Collier, an impassioned younger Leader from Texas who is currently serving at the Riverdale Society, has issued a challenging invitation to other Leaders in the Ethical Culture movement — to help him find what it is in the current Ethical movement that adequately answers the religious or moral questions people are actually trying to answer in this modern and post-modern era. These questions include:

- What guarantees my sense of worth and self-esteem for myself, and for others?
- Where will purpose and meaning come from, in my life and that of my children?
- Why be moral?

People come to religious groups, he says — ours as well as those more traditional — with these and other basic yearnings and questions. These are denied or ignored at our peril as a movement intending a future. He is therefore resistant to basing any Ethical Society's community life largely upon shared "external" ethical action concerns, without engaging people also in active community-building, personally-energizing practices which create an ethical culture among participants almost regardless of the shared activity.

*continued on back page...*

## WWW Resources on the Ecological Crisis



To all BSEC Web Surfers:

BSEC Environmental will host one of five interlinking websites in January and February 2000, each carrying parts of a special feature concerning endangered butterflies, particularly Nabokov's Blues, around the world. There will be a new BSEC Environmental website, its URL to be announced at the other participating sites, which are:

- A popular butterfly and gardening site ([www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/butterfly\\_gardening](http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/butterfly_gardening))
- The Nabokov website ([www.libraries.psu.edu/iasweb/nabokov/zembla.htm](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/iasweb/nabokov/zembla.htm))
- Save the Pine Bush website ([www.wizvax.net/lynjax/SPB.html](http://www.wizvax.net/lynjax/SPB.html))
- The Zoland Books website ([www.zolandbooks.com](http://www.zolandbooks.com))

Two other sites, the Lepidopterists Society and North American Butterfly Association will also link in with shorter features (their URLs will be announced on the sites listed above). The main BSEC website ([www.bsec.org](http://www.bsec.org)) will also have the URLs as soon as they are available. Have fun with these colorful and informative features on the ecological crisis worldwide!

**THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY  
FOR ETHICAL CULTURE**

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(718) 768-2972  
<http://www.bsec.org>

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*Ethically Speaking* is published six to ten times a year by BSEC. This issue was produced by Bob Strock, Lisel Burns, Anne Klaeysen, Marshall Dubin, Chris Jacques, Martha Hoffman, Abe Lieberman, and Kurt Johnson.

*Ethically Speaking* is written by a number of BSEC members. Views expressed in this publication are always open to friendly discussion. Our newsletter staff, like the membership at large, may vary in their thinking on many issues, yet we are all committed to putting deed before creed, and to strive constantly toward living out, each in our own particular way, the Ethical Ideal of eliciting the best from ourselves and others.

**Don't forget the March 26 auction! Please contact the office if you have any services to offer or products to donate!**

**Ethical Travelers: Strengthening the Network**

Michael Bleiweiss, from the Ethical Society of Boston, is proposing a program where Ethical Culture Societies across the country provide resources to other Ethiculturists planning to travel to their cities, possibly providing hospitality or simply advice on the area they are visiting.

Michael would act as national coordinator. He expects that the program could be successful on a minimal budget, provided there are enough people willing to act as hosts, and that there is a local coordinator for each area. New York is likely to be a popular destination, but it seems that the many area societies should be able to pool their resources and be quite effective.

Questions to members: would any of you be willing to be hosts? would anyone be willing to act as a local coordinator or Brooklyn tour guide? and how many members be interested in using this service if offered? Please contact the BSEC Office with your responses, or send an e-mail to <BSECOffice@aol.com>.

**VIEWPOINT**

**Time's "Person of the Century": Science, Technology, Culture, and Ethics**

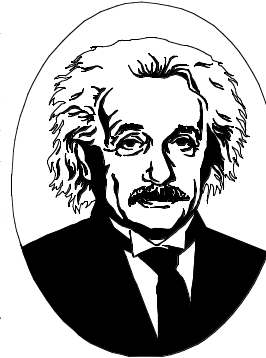
Those instrumental goods which should serve to maintain the life and health of all human beings should be produced by the least possible labour of all. The satisfaction of physical needs is indeed the indispensable precondition of a satisfactory existence, but in itself is not enough. In order to be content men must also have the possibility of developing their intellectual and artistic powers to whatever extent accords with their personal characteristics and abilities. — *Albert Einstein*

I don't even read Time magazine, but I was pleased to hear of their selection of Dr. Einstein as the Person of the Century, over such political luminaries as Roosevelt and Churchill, and such not-so-bright lights as Hitler and Stalin. I would have been hard-pressed to choose between Einstein and Ghandi, but their reasons for going with the scientist are worth noting.

Before anything, they split the selection process into three categories which represented, in their eyes, the three most important "themes" of the twentieth century: the triumph of democracy over totalitarianism, the popular uprisings for the rights of individuals across the world, and the explosion of scientific knowledge and technological achievement. They selected one finalist from each category: FDR for Democracy, Ghandi for popular resistance, and Einstein for science. Einstein really won because the selection board felt the most significant theme in this century was the advancement of science and technology.

First of all, I think many people would like to take issue with the notion that the triumph of democracy over totalitarianism was even a major theme in this century. The real triumph was not political but economic: the triumph (for now, at least) of capitalism over all other economic forms. Totalitarianism was not banished in the twentieth century, it just picked up and moved out of the parliament halls and into the board rooms, with the parliament's full complicity. And since this is Time-Warner talking, all we're supposed to see is the democratic window-dressing.

Thinking about the struggle of individuals for their basic civil rights, rightly exemplified by Ghandi, to me this theme seems inseparable from that of the expansion of the capitalist economy. As power



gets concentrated in disembodied empires and corporations, the rights of real people become essentially meaningless in the cold and rational materialism of the marketplace. Individuals need to more or less incorporate themselves (in mass movements

and the like) if they want to fight this power, and thanks to the democratic ideals that seem to be a necessary piece of the capitalist structure (if only in principle), they are able to get away with it, and when they fight hard enough, they are able to succeed.

The ideal world that Einstein describes above, in the statement of a truly enlightened humanist, is a world that technology and capitalism may eventually take us to as their collaborative fire gradually cools off. But what do we do in the meantime? The lives of people today are at least as important as those of that far-off generation who may never even come at all. How can we secure, for ourselves and others, not only our life and health, but also a culture where our intellectual and artistic spirits are allowed to flourish?

In the words of the runner-up Ghandi, "We must become the change we seek." In our relatively privileged position, this is within our power, thanks in no small part to science and technology, and the economic forces that continue to drive them to ever greater heights. Whether or not the world will follow us, only time will tell. Maybe with the person of the twenty-first century.

*Bob Strock*

**Ethical Santa Claus Celebrates Hannukah Too**

Santa Claus, his ways are shocking.  
Imagine filling a poor kid's stocking  
And going out in the dead of night  
To visit homes, both black and white;  
(Churches and synagogues too.)  
And doing this yearly without a Sabbatical.  
He must be some kind of radical.

*Marshall F. Dubin*

# JANUARY 2000 BSEC CALENDAR

1/1 – 1/9

**Sunday 1/2**

NO Sunday School Classes: Winter Break  
**11AM:** Sunday Platform with BSEC Leader Lisel Burns: *Hard Choices and Their Consequences*.  
**12:30PM:** Lunch with the Bunch.

**Tuesday 1/4**

**7:30-9PM:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus* directed by Bev Grant. We believe every woman can sing! Join us. 768-2972 for info.

**Wednesday 1/5**

**6:30-10PM:** *Pinewoods Folk Open Sing* with potluck supper & snacks. Bring your voice, instruments, friends, neighbors, and family. Free Admission.  
*But Is It Right?* moved to 1/19 this month.  
**8-9:30PM:** *The Creative Process*, a series of discussions with guest speakers in the fields of literature, music and art. Tonight's guest is illustrated novelist Greg Ruth, creator of *Sudden Gravity*.

**Thursday 1/6**

**7PM:** Monthly Board of Trustees Meeting.  
**7-9PM:** T'ai Chi Chuan with J.P. Harpignes. \$12/class; \$40 for 4; BSEC members free.

**Friday 1/7**

**7PM:** Y.E.S. Youth Group Meeting. Contact Rita Wilson at 284-0241 or Tony Severo at 854-0710 for information.  
**8PM:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents an evening of acoustic guitar music with singer-songwriters *Frank McGarry* and *Jon Kolleeny*. Donation \$8.

**Saturday 1/8**

**10-11AM:** *The Art of Belly Dancing* taught by Salome. Free to BSEC Members. Call 399-1732 for information.

**Sunday 1/9**

**10AM-12:30PM:** Children's Assembly.  
**10-11AM:** Parents' Discussion Group.  
**11AM:** Sunday Platform with Bergen County Leader Joseph Chuman: *Have We Been Too Kind to Religion?*

You have to draw a distinction between hope and optimism. Vaclav Havel put it well when he said "optimism" is the belief that things are going to turn out as you would like, as opposed to "hope", which is where you are thoroughly convinced something is moral and right and just and therefore you fight regardless of the consequences. In that sense I'm full of hope but in no way optimistic.

*Cornel West*

1/10 – 1/16

**Tuesday 1/11**

**7:30-9PM:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*.

**Wednesday 1/12**

**7:30PM:** Wedding Couples Workshop with BSEC Leader Lisel Burns. For further information call 783-2298.

**Thursday 1/13**

**7-9PM:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

**Friday, 1/14**

**6:30PM:** Membership Potluck Supper.  
**8PM:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents *Future Primitive* with Richie Guerrero and drummers Ted Epstein and Annamaria Mejia. Donation \$8.

**Saturday 1/15**

**10-11AM:** *The Art of Belly Dancing*.

**Sunday 1/16**

**10AM-12:30PM:** Children's Assembly  
**10AM-3PM:** *Martin Luther King's Legacy*  
 10AM: Library Group Reflection  
 11AM: Platform with Ventura Simmons  
 1:30PM: Remembrance

1/17 – 1/23

**Tuesday 1/18**

**7:30-9PM:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*.

**Wednesday 1/19**

**6:30-8PM:** *But Is It Right?* an open discussion focusing on basic ethical notions and everyday moral dilemmas. Led by Vanda Bozecevic.

**7:30-9PM:** *Games Galore Night*. Family entertainment with games and light refreshments. Admission \$8 per person or \$6 if you bring your own game. Call Bruce Leibowitz at 336-3683 for information.

**Next Faith Conversations 2/16.**

**Thursday 1/20**

**7-9PM:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

**Friday 1/21**

**8PM:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents Third Friday with the Park Slope Food Coop: *Tomas Rodriguez Trio* performing flamenco and the *Andy Middleton Group* performing jazz. Donation \$8.

**Saturday 1/22**

**10-11AM:** *The Art of Belly Dancing*.

**Sunday 1/23**

**10AM-12:30PM:** Children's Assembly.  
**10-11AM:** Parents' Discussion Group.  
**11AM:** Sunday Platform: *The American Ethical Union and You* with AEU President Ellen McBride.

1/24 – 2/2

**Tuesday 1/25**

**7:30-9PM:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*.

**Wednesday 1/26**

**6:30-8PM:** *Newcomers' Workshop: The Eight Commitments of Ethical Culture*.

**8PM:** *Core Values Workshop*, with Leader Lisel Burns and Anne Klaeyesen.

**Thursday 1/27**

**7PM:** The Richard Price Book Discussion Group discusses *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day* by Pearl Cleage. Call Constance Pigozzi at 331-1137 for info.

**7-9PM:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

**Friday 1/28**

**8PM:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents an evening of fine fiddling with *Sam Zygmuntowicz and Friends*. Donation \$8.

**Saturday 1/29**

**10-11AM:** *The Art of Belly Dancing*.

**Sunday 1/30**

**10AM-12:30PM:** Children's Assembly.  
**10-11AM:** Parents' Discussion Group.  
**11AM:** Sunday Platform: *Ethical Culture's Odd Couple, Felix Adler and Algernon Black* with Mark Bernstein.

**Tuesday 2/1**

**7:30-9PM:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*.

**Wednesday 2/2**

**6:30-8PM:** *But Is It Right?*

**8-9:30PM:** *The Creative Process*

**Notice:** Newcomer Linda Techell has volunteered to organize some "matchmaking" activities for people who would like to combine socializing with volunteer activities:

*Service Matches:* have fun building a diverse local network of people and community development groups who want to help each other over the long term.

*Personal Matches:* help single do-gooders find matches with people who share their values, between community groups and people with needed skills and time slots.

*Alternative Economic Matches:* exchange on a time-sharing basis to supplement the cash economy, and offset some of the inequities that penalize those with lower incomes.

For starters, a weekly Spanish conversation group is starting at Coco Roco in partnership with the 5th Avenue Committee. Other ideas are in the works. Contact Linda via the office if you are interested or if you have any ideas.

## January Platforms

### January 2:

#### *Hard Choices and Their Consequences*

With BSEC Leader Lisel Burns. Raising key distinctions between the life images of crossroads and “the road not taken” versus the multi-tasking view that we can have and do and be everything at once. Authenticity involves finding and following one’s own path to the neglect of other desirable ones.

### January 9:

#### *Have We Been Too Kind to Religion?*

With Joseph Chuman, Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County. America is currently having a romance with religion. Have we ceded too much unwarranted respect to initiatives undertaken in the name of religion?

### January 16:

#### *Martin Luther King Legacy*

### January 23:

#### *The American Ethical Union and You*

With AEU President Ellen McBride.

### January 30:

#### *Ethical Culture’s Odd Couple*

How the parallel lives of philosopher Felix Adler and social reformer Algernon Black converged. With Mark Bernstein, PhD.

*Coming in February:* more Lisel, Universal Health Care, poetry, and the youth group.

This Season’s Platform Theme is *Finding Rooted, Responsible, and Reflective Ways of Living Amid the Challenges of the Year 2000.*

Platforms are held every Sunday morning from 11AM to 12:15PM in the main hall of the Meeting House on Prospect Park West, followed by a convivial and delicious buffet lunch. Please stop by!

*Leader Notes continued from first page...*

I agree with Curt, for somewhat different reasons. Having or being a moral project in this particular world and time is a challenge on a good day, for individuals and for Ethical Societies alike. Without more than a vague notion of what we mean by this project, and a reluctance to set limits or expectations on each others activity, we can hardly expect to be each other’s trust and harvest as Gwendolyn Brooks put it so well. I think we must find and reclaim not only our own important things, but also our sense of Ethical Culture’s most important things, to secure truthfulness, planfulness and fullness for the rest of the days of our lives.

How to accomplish this? We are doing it step by step. Our increasing racial diversity is partly truthfulness, saying how much it means to us to be less segregated and isolated from

each other’s tribes. Our increasing planfulness speaks loudly of our intention to include newer members in open and inclusive structures and decision-making processes. Our growing Sunday school staff and new Wednesday evening Values and Culture discussions expand the scope and depth of our intergenerational conversations.

It doesn’t have to be hard work, but it takes patience and attention to detail, letting go blame or judgement in most cases. If we are willing to be truthful about our difficulties as well as successes, detail their elements and subject our present BSEC arrangements to continuous improvements, I think we can eliminate the obstacles to the quality experience we all yearn for, meaningful life in a freely chosen community and tradition, engaging in practices we have come to prize, on our own and the world’s behalf.

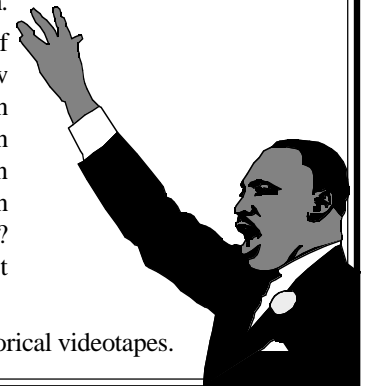
## Celebrate the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday January 16 at the BSEC Meeting House

Come for a day of reflection and participation in BSEC’s annual MLK Legacy program!

**10:00 Library Group Reflection:** racial issues taken from a moral perspective: What ought we to do and why? With Joel Cohen and Lisel Burns. Join folks who want to come to a thoughtful consensus and lay the groundwork for possible future action.

**11:00 Hear Ventura Simmons,** Assistant Professor of Mathematics at Medgar Evers College of the City of New York. Like the celebrated high school calculus teacher in the film *Stand and Deliver*, Professor Simmons left an engineering career to teach mathematics in nearby Crown Heights. How does he view Dr. King’s legacy, his own life choices, and today’s challenges in urban education? Also with community educator Rita Wilson and poet Marshall Dubin, and an exhibit of children’s artwork.

**1:30 Remembrance:** library discussion and viewing historical videotapes.



CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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