



# ETHICALLY SPEAKING

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

Volume 95, no. 5

## Ethical Action:

### Colombian Drug War and U.S. Involvement Evaluated at BSEC January 28, 1:30pm

BSEC is sponsoring a talk and video program on Sunday, January 28, 2001 at 1:30pm on the U.S. government's war against drugs—the Colombia Plan—which is rapidly developing into a Vietnam-type civil war.

Jesus Avirara, a Colombian Indian Movement leader, and journalists Mario Murillo and Victoria Maldonado of the Colombia Media Project will evaluate the Plan and discuss the history of the decades-old civil war and drug problems in the country. Videos will be shown about the role of the drug lords, the rebel armies, the paramilitary forces, the Colombian government, and the indigenous people and other war victims.

Although the U.S. has voted to spend \$1.3 billion to fight drug trafficking in Colombia, experts have questioned the Colombian government's capacity to stop it because of its incompetence and history of corruption and the growing worldwide demand for drugs.

Thousands of Colombian Indians, human rights activists, journalists, politicians, and civilians have been killed, wounded, and displaced because of the war that has been funded by the narcotics industry.

There is no charge for the program. BSEC is planning other programs on the Colombian civil war and its implications on our country and the Americas in February and March.



## Leader Notes: President of the World by Lisel Burns

Evan Pritchard's book, *No Word for Time*, describes the language and philosophy of the Algonquin peoples who inhabited what is now called New York State and New England. In the Micmac tribal tradition, to keep creation going, two elements were understood as crucial: one was to honor the ongoing balance of giving and receiving; the other, to honor life with truthfulness and direct speech—a call to speak and act always from the heart.

People found their own authenticity, their own roles in relation not only to each other, but to these standards for a good and honorable life. These were the cultural ideals to which all generations were accountable. Community ritual and traditions honored this circle of culture, and asked all people to keep the circle whole. I am hungry for such foundational ethical ideals, put into modern community life. Perhaps we need cultural as well as physical shelter from the storms of modern society; I want such circles of honorable attitude and behavior to fill our lives and communities with significance and meaning again.

This influences my attitude toward a lot of things, U.S. elections included. With the European media riveted to the antics in Florida, my Basque friend Jorge (who lives in Spain) often teased me about our recent 36-day national election drama. He occasionally offset the derision with more modest comments: "You know, your U.S. winner will be not only your President," he said one day, "he will be my President also— because your nation's leader will be President of the World."

I agreed with Jorge. Somewhat unwittingly, we find ourselves not bystanders but "along for the ride" in this nation where world leadership is picked more by corporate strategy, voter's pique, and political reaction than a sober assessment of human needs, national resources, or global options.

Though grating at times, I think that his European perspective is morally helpful to me, for it reminds me that we in the States are hardly powerless outsiders in the global context. The people with the blue USA passports are all part

of a nation elite in the era of *Pax Americana*, all travelling in the same plane.

It's a relatively small plane, and reminds this WWII pilot's daughter of those aircraft they send into hurricanes to do weather studies. We all fly along with the US governance team in the eye of the economic hurricane we call globalization, and the managers and navigators paid to steer the plane are either US-based or answerable to international groups overwhelmingly influenced by this nation's economic and political power structure.

Relative to the rest of the world we are in the air elite. To ourselves we are more like those characters in a cartoon I remember where Donald Duck's nephews are caught up in the airplane ride, with their heads sticking out the back window while several big white fellows (on the loose from prison I believe) with striped outfits have control of the stick.

Governance issues are not so far away from any of us whose judgment is trusted by others or who have had a proposal accepted at home or work lately. Problems in governance are never far away either.

But to the extent we use our little BSEC community and ourselves (its main assets) to work out our own responsible relationships - both within the community (members, leaders, staff) and between the BSEC community and the larger society— we can give each other those experiences (of place, time, and people who do live their ideals) that soften cynics of all ages. We can do this by putting ideals into our real-life community policies and procedures.

My wish this month? As U.S. citizens let's be conscious of our responsibilities and options as 14% of the world population with the power to elect or boot out the guy currently functioning as President of the World. As members of the BSEC community, let's be counted as folks who can defend each of our projects, policies, and procedures on moral grounds (as well as, but not instead of, on their practicality). In both maxi and mini democracies, may we live to make those coming after proud.

## THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE

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Dubin, Charley Horwitz, and Martha Hoffman.

*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.

<http://www.bsec.org>

## Welcome New Members!

**Selma Richmond** is a microbiologist and has been an active volunteer in Jr. High Schools, where she encourages young people to consider science. She's an active auxiliary police officer in her neighborhood of Bensonhurst. She will work with the Long-range Fundraising Task Force on the service auction.

**Michael Brennan and Janice Novet** recently bought a house on 17th Street after renting in the neighborhood for some time. With their four-year-old son Kevin, and another child expected in March, Janice and Michael have joined the BSEC and registered Kevin in the CSA. Janice was active previously in the New York Ethical Society, and will share some of her thinking at the January 21 Platform on the moral education of children. Janice is a national teacher trainer for the Edison Project. Michael is a lawyer at Downstate Hospital in Brooklyn.

Welcome to you all!

## VIEWPOINT

### Faith and the Fullness of Life

Paul Tillich, the great Protestant theologian, spoke of life being guided by one's "ultimate concerns." A person's ultimate concern is what she or he values above all things and to which all other things are therefore subordinate. Health, justice, love, righteousness, God, one's country, baseball, and money can all serve as ultimate concerns. Needless to say, Tillich believed that some concerns that served as ultimate were better and more far-reaching than others.

For Tillich, faith has to do with one's degree of commitment to what one considers ultimate. As he defined it, a belief is what one intellectually assents to, but faith involves a dedication of one's total being. As Tillich put it, "Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality." Faith guides life. It centers it. It is a dynamic process.

I think we can apply this understanding of faith directly to Ethical Culture. We can say that you *believe* in Ethical Culture and its premises such as human worth as a mere proclamation to which you give your assent. In a similar way, you can say that you believe that Lincoln was a good president or that Trenton is the capital of New Jersey. But to have *faith* in Ethical Culture is to say that its ideals compel your ultimate concerns; that you live your life inspired by and dedicated to its ideals of respecting human dignity and the flourishing of humankind.

A faith held in this way becomes manifest in one's daily practice, by how one orients one's self to the world and relates to other human beings. In this sense, Ethical Culture moves beyond the realm of ideas and principles to reside in the human heart and add richness, depth and purpose in life. It becomes a religious way of life as compelling as any.

*Joseph Chuman*

*leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County*

*excerpted (without permission, as usual) from the  
December issue of Focus, ECSBC's newsletter.*

### The Crisis In Our Country

As of this moment (Dec. 2) the United States of America is facing the most serious crisis since the date of our birth as a nation. An election has been held with the results so inconclusive that both sides claim victory. Tension is rising.

Right now we are in the midst of a frenzied struggle for power. Many votes in Florida have not been counted yet the forces of George Bush are already claiming the Presidency. The supporters of Al Gore are crying "foul" and maintaining that they have a valid claim to office. Many people, especially labor unionists, support this claim.

As ethical people we have the obligation to think clearly and to profit from the lessons of our own nation's history so that we can assist those forces who work for a sane and humane solution.

*Marshall Dubin*

### AEU News

At its meeting on Sat., Dec. 9, 2000, the Board of Directors of the American Ethical Union unanimously re-affirmed the following Resolution which was originally adopted by the AEU Assembly in April 1975:

"The American Ethical Union recognizes the critical nature of issues in the Middle East, constituting a potential threat to World Peace. We call upon all parties to this dispute to enter into a dialogue to try to reach a peaceful settlement under which the valid claims of the Palestinian people for self-determination and a land of their own are recognized and the security of the State of Israel is guaranteed and its legitimacy as a government acknowledged by its neighbors."

### Membership News

Lorraine Theodor's son Brian is looking for work to keep him above water as he goes through a difficult period of transition. He has management experience, but is willing to take on any number of situations, including (but not limited to) chauffeuring. Please call 917-534-0164 with any offers or leads.

The following winter events are being planned. You should check with Lisel (liselburns@aol.com or 783-2298) if you have any questions or suggestions:

- Dance lessons and ethnic supper either 2nd Wednesday evenings, or 2nd Sunday afternoons.
- Couples Communication Workshop Saturday, either Jan. 20 or Jan. 27.
- BSEC Community Building Retreat in February.

# JANUARY 2001 BSEC CALENDAR

**1/1 – 1/13**

**Tuesday, 1/2**

**7:30–9pm:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus* directed by Bev Grant. Come sing with us! Call 965-3611 for information.

**Wednesday, 1/3**

**6:30–10pm:** *Folk Open Sing* with potluck supper and snacks, co-sponsored by the Pinewoods Music Society. Bring your voice, instruments, friends, neighbors and family. Free admission.

**7–9pm:** *T'ai Chi Chuan* class taught by J.P. Harpignes; \$12 per class or \$40 for 4 classes. Free to BSEC members.

**6:30–7:30pm:** quiet workshop and reflection

**7:30–9pm:** Women's Leadership Support Group. Call 783-2298 for information.

**Thursday, 1/4**

**7pm:** Board of Trustees Meeting.

**Friday, 1/5**

**8pm:** Good Coffeehouse concert series newcomers' showcase: Mayan troubadour Juan Avila, vocal/instrumental trio *Rhythms of Aqua*, and local favorite Ray O'Neill on acoustic guitar. Donation \$8.

**Saturday, 1/6**

**9–11am:** *The Art of Belly Dancing* taught by Salome. Free to BSEC members. Call 399-1732 for information.

**Sunday, 1/7**

**Monthly Membership Sunday**

**10am–12:15pm:**

Children's Sunday Assembly

**11am:** Platform with Leader Lisel Burns: *Mensches, Mavens, and Moral Effectiveness*

**12:30pm:** Lunch with the Bunch, celebration of January birthdays, and a Newcomers' Circle.

**Tuesday, 1/9**

**7:30–9pm:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*

**Wednesday, 1/10**

**6:30–7:30pm:** quiet workshop and reflection

**7–9pm:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

**7:30–9:00pm:** *Members & Friends Dinner*: call 783-2298 for information.

**Friday, 1/12**

**8pm:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents a rollicking evening of traditional American string music with *Unce John's Band*, featuring John Cohen, Bill Christopher-sen and James Reams. Donation \$8.

**Saturday, 1/13**

**9–11am:** The Art of Belly Dancing

**1/14 – 1/31**

**Sunday, 1/14**

**10am–12:30pm:**

Children's Sunday Assembly

**11am:** *Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy Platform*, with guest speaker Ventura Simmons.

**12:30pm:** Lunch with the Bunch

**Tuesday, 1/16**

**7:30–9pm:** *Brooklyn Women's Chorus*

**Wednesday, 1/17**

**6:30–7:30pm:** quiet workshop and reflection

**7:30–9pm:** *Faith Conversations*, an on-going discussion series centering on the place of traditional religious beliefs and practices within a humanist religion.

**7–9pm:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*.

**Friday, 1/19**

**8pm:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents Third Friday with the Park Slope Food Coop: *Zen Music Zen Words VI*.

**Saturday, 1/20**

**9–11am:** *The Art of Belly Dancing*.

**Sunday, 1/21**

**10am–12:30pm:**

Children's Sunday Assembly

**11am:** Platform: *Approaches to Moral Education: Raising Ethical Children*, with Janice Novet and Lisel Burns.

**12:30pm:** Lunch with the Bunch

**Tuesday, 1/23**

**7:30–9pm:** Brooklyn Women's Chorus

**Wednesday, 1/24**

**6:30–7:30pm:** quiet workshop and reflection

**7:30–9pm:** *Ethical Culture Readings*.

**7–9pm:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*

**Friday, 1/26**

**8pm:** The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents contemporary singer-songwriters Jane Barnett and George Wurzbach. \$8 Donation.

**Saturday, 1/27**

**9–11am:** *The Art of Belly Dancing*

**Sunday, 1/28**

**10am–12:30pm:**

Children's Sunday Assembly

**11am:** Platform: **Orensanz Foundation**

**12:30pm:** Lunch with the Bunch

**1:30pm:** *U.S. Involvement in the Civil War in Colombia* talk and video program.

**Tuesday, 1/30**

**7:30–9pm:** Brooklyn Women's Chorus

**Wednesday, 1/31**

**6:30–7:30pm:** quiet workshop and reflection

**7–9pm:** *T'ai Chi Chuan*

**2/1 – 2/4**

**Friday, 2/2**

**8pm:** Good Coffeehouse concert series presents an evening of jazz with trombonist Kevin Schmidt and friends. Donation \$8.

**Saturday, 2/3**

**9–11am:** The Art of Belly Dancing.

**Sunday, 2/4**

**Monthly Membership Sunday**

**10am–12:15pm:**

Children's Sunday Assembly

**11am:** Platform: *Freedom to Doubt: the Life and Humor of Dr. Richard Feynman*, with Anne Klaeyesen.

**12:30pm:** Lunch with the Bunch, celebration of February birthdays, and a Newcomers' Circle.

## BSEC Assets and Resources: Long-term Questions

Our long-range fundraising committee has approved the review of all of our resources at BSEC, what they are, and how they are being utilized:

### Human Resources

- Our Members And Friends
- Our Renters
- Our Community and Rental Partners

### Physical Assets

- Building and Grounds
- Our Investments
- Our Individual Material Assets

### Community Assets

- Our Group and Subgroups at BSEC
- The Larger Community and Our Ties To It
- Our Programs

What are our real assets and resources, and what are ways of increasing them, building on our strengths?

What are our real underemployed resources, and why? What resources can we build with mutual support and exchange?

What opportunities are we missing? (marketing, followups, advertising?) What questions do the number-crunchers ask in considering whether something is a good investment?

We will be asking each other these questions (and others) during the coming weeks and months. If you want to help answer these questions, or have a few more to ask, contact task force chair Marie Yoleine Esposito at 768-1282 to see how you can contribute.

## Children's Sunday Assembly

In December, the Children's Sunday Assembly theme was Holiday Traditions. We started with Ramadan which began right after Thanksgiving this year (speaking of the latter, we collected almost \$200 for OXFAM at our Wampanoag Festival!). We specifically focused on charity as one of the common elements in many religious traditions.

From the focus on charity and helping people, we also explored how people of goodwill can come to different conclusions when making decisions about whom to help. We acted out a scenario where a rescue boat could only take two out of 4 people adrift on a raft: a child, an old person, a rich man, and a pregnant woman. A very good discussion ensued with every possible combination being picked with good reasons. Happily, one child asked why the rowboat couldn't tow the raft (talk about thinking outside the box!) so we got to rescue everyone in the end.

Our Winter Festival was a slight variation this year. Instead of activities around different religious traditions, we participated at stations around common ways human beings like to celebrate: getting together with friends and relatives; beautifying the house with decorations, special food (cookie decorating in this case), plus music and dancing. Gift giving was for others. We wrapped member-donated items for the local homeless shelter with paper the kids had made the previous week.

We look forward to a quiet January when our theme will focus on reflection: "A hero is more than an action figure."

*Remi Gay, CSA Director*

Meditating among liars, and retreating sternly into myself, I see that there are really no liars or lies after all,  
And nothing fails its perfect return— And that what are called lies are perfect returns,  
And that each thing exactly represents itself, and what has preceded it,  
And that the truth includes all, and is compact, just as much as space is compact,  
And that there is no law or vacuum in the amount of the truth— but that all is truth without exception;  
And henceforth I will go celebrate anything I see or am,  
And sing and laugh, and deny nothing.

*Walt Whitman*

## January Platforms

### **January 7:** *Living Our Ideals: Mensches, Mavens, and Moral Effectiveness*

BSEC Leader Lisel Burns looks at how we can become the center of a world community or network with relatively little work, if we take advantage of the technology that is already available to us, and use it to enhance the relationships that we already have.

### **January 14:** *Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy*

BSEC's annual celebration of the life and legacy of the great civil rights leader. Ventura Simmons, Math Professor at Medgar Evers College, will speak. Lisel Burns will provide a reflection on the writings of the late political philosopher CLR James, who advocated commitment to moral development as the responsibility of all progressive people.

### **January 21:** *Approaches to Moral Education: Raising Ethical Children*

Janice Novet and John Teehan, both Children's Sunday Assembly parents, will coordinate a reflection on approaches to the moral education of children. Janice is a national teacher trainer at The Edison Project, which uses a core values and model/mentor approach. John is a philosophy professor at Hofstra University, specializing in the thought of the American philosopher John Dewey. We will review Arthur Dobrin's presentation on this topic at the religious education fall workshop, and explore approaches and options we can use in the BSEC community in the coming period.

### **January 28:** *Roots of Ethical Culture: Congregation Anshe Chesed and the Orensanz Foundation*

The Orensanz Foundation is a cultural center on the Lower East Side that makes its home in the synagogue (built in 1849) which was the original house of worship for Felix Adler's family; before they moved to Fifth Avenue and Temple Emanuel, and long before Adler split from the congregation to found Ethical Culture. Al Orensanz, director of the Foundation, will discuss the reform congregation in the context of Jewish immigration to New York during the mid-1800s, and their attitude of "open humanism," a tradition which the Foundation continues to observe.

### **February 4:** *Freedom to Doubt: The Life and Humor of Dr. Richard Feynman*

Presented by Anne Klaeyens: Richard Feynman, who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1965, was not only a brilliant scientist, but also one of the great humanists and educators of the 20th century, who approached life with openness, originality, and great wit.

Platforms are held every Sunday morning from 11AM to 12:15PM in the main hall of the Meeting House at 53 Prospect Park West, followed by a convivial and delicious buffet lunch. Please stop by!

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