

ETHICALLY SPEAKING

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

Volume 95, no. 1

Stronger Societies for a Stronger Ethical Movement Annual Society Growth and Development Conference October 27 & 28 NYSEC

Who:

Ethical Society Presidents, officers, Leaders, board members, Membership Committee Chairs and other committee members, other committee chairs, AEU Lay Leadership Summer School graduates, and other committed volunteers.

What:

Workshops on Membership Growth and Retention (avoiding the revolving door), Effective Public Relations and Publicity, Creating Financially Sound Societies, and Dealing with Conflicts. Plus learn about various innovative ethical action programs of our societies. An opportunity to learn skills and share your experiences with members of other societies dealing with similar challenges. There will also be a Saturday evening social event.

Cost:

\$65 registration postmarked by October 10, \$75 thereafter.

Brochures with details are available at the BSEC office. For further information, please contact Margaretha Jones at the AEU office, 212-873-6500 (aeuoffice@aol.com) or Hank Gassner at 202-265-2476 (Kargas@clark.net).

Senator Schumer to Speak on Single Payer Health Care

New York's soon-to-be-senior Senator and local Park Slope resident, Charles Schumer, has accepted an invitation to speak at BSEC on the topic of Single Payer Universal Health Care at an upcoming Platform this fall. A definite date has yet to be arranged.

Single Payer has always been a long-term goal of the Committee on Universal Health Care at Brooklyn Ethical, and we are honored to have such a distinguished public servant speak on the topic at our Meeting House.

Stay tuned to this page for more information.

Dear Friends,

Haiti Projects in Partnership (HPP), an Ethical Action program of the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture (BSEC) since 1994, is discontinuing. Most of its members, however, will continue working for Fonkoze USA, its largest economic development partner in Haiti.

Over the years more than 350 people supported us. We educated ourselves about Haiti and its hardworking people. Three separate delegations visited our partners including Fonkoze, an alternative bank for the poor, a progressive school in Fort Royale, Petit Goave, and various projects in Leogane. We raised money and identified resources and helped our partners network. And we enriched our lives in the process.

Fonkoze's goal is to sustain democracy in Haiti through economic development with grassroots organizations. It provides micro-credit lending, savings, currency exchange, money transfers, and technical and legal services to its 650 member organizations. They include women street merchants, peasant associations, cooperatives, and credit unions. Since constitutional government was restored in 1994, it has set up 16 offices in all nine departments of Haiti and employs 120 Haitian workers. Fonkoze has lent over \$1.6 million and trains its members (80 percent of whom are illiterate) in literacy and business skills. It invests in small businesses to help each region of the country develop a sustainable economy. When Fonkoze began, it was completely dependent on private loans and grants. Now, it hopes to be self-sufficient within five years.

HPP thanks Emmanuel Alexander, our Coordinator in Haiti, our Haitian American and North American friends, and the following groups for their support: BSEC members and leaders, members of the St. Louis, Baltimore, and Westchester Ethical Societies, the AEU Ethical Action Committee, and the Trickle-up Foundation.

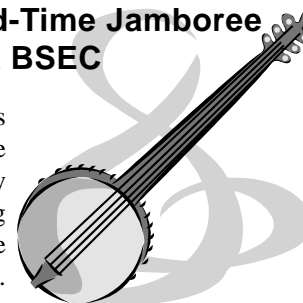
With deep appreciation,

Janine Anas, Charles Horwitz, Rose Castro, and Steeve Coupeau

(For the HPP Coordinating Committee)

••••• Third Annual Brooklyn Bluegrass & Old-Time Jamboree September 29th & 30th at BSEC

••••• Brooklyn might seem an unlikely place for an old-time bluegrass music festival, but it will be like a homecoming party when the Good Coffeehouse celebrates its *Third Annual Jamboree* on Friday and Saturday, September 29th and 30th at the BSEC Meeting House. The Jamboree brings together musicians and fans of the traditional American music born in the mountains of Appalachia. James Reams, who conceived of the Jamboree and is himself an old-time and bluegrass musician of some renown, said, "We plan to keep things on a small scale. We want people to feel at home and have a good time. The only thing 'big' is the big time we hope everyone has! That's why the Jamboree's motto is: *Just a big old time.*"



••••• Last year's celebration attracted more than 250 musicians and fans from all across the Northeast. It was held both inside the meeting house and outside in the garden where passersby, attracted by the music, stopped in and stayed for the day. The jamboree kicks off Friday at 8pm with a concert featuring *James Reams and the Barnstormers*. Admission to the concert is \$8 at the door or \$7 in advance. Saturday will be a full day, starting at noon and going on until 10:30pm, with activities including music workshops, jamming and song swaps, clog dancing, children's activities, an evening of concerts, a fiddling contest, and a performers' showcase, all for only one dollar for the whole day.

**THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY
FOR ETHICAL CULTURE**

53 PROSPECT PARK WEST
BROOKLYN, NY 11215
(718) 768-2972
fax (718) 768-3278
<http://www.bsec.org>

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Youth Group: Rita Wilson & Tony Severo

Ethically Speaking is published 6-10 times a year by BSEC. This issue was produced by Bob Strock, Lisel Burns, Anne Klaeysen, Vanda Bozicevic, Charles Horwitz, and Abe Lieberman.

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>

But Is It Right? A Sample from the Wednesday Night Program

Last season, Vanda Bozicevic led a monthly discussion for our Wednesday Night Program with the intriguing title "But Is It Right?", where she would pose some very difficult and often very specific moral questions to the assembled group, and then steer an hour-long conversation where each of the participants were challenged to be as clear and honest in their approach to the question. She presented a report to the Membership last June which included a synopsis of each month's discussion. Here follows an excerpt from the description of the April discussion, where the group weighed the merits and defects of "relative" versus "universal" ethics:

Is there such a thing as a universal standard of right and wrong, or are we bound to adopt a relativistic stance concerning morals?

If we stick to the view of the so-called "cultural relativism" which recognizes the fact that different societies have different moral codes, we should infer from this that there is no universal moral standard. From the relativist perspective, everyone has the right to develop their own code of behavior and proclaim this to be their moral standard; nobody has the right to preach to others what they should do or how they ought to behave.

Some participants felt this attitude is plausible and is actually what happens in reality, so it can't be ignored. They pointed out that any universal standard would mean imposing values on others, so it would soon turn into a dogma. Others felt that adopting a relativist approach would justify listening to the voice of their own conscience, following their internal moral guidance no matter what anyone else says. They felt they would not need to consult any moral authority to know what is right. This attitude however does not necessarily imply a relativist stance. On the contrary, it often indicates a strong conviction that one's own view is the only right one, which would oblige everyone else, if they only saw the truth. Such a conviction implies a universalist belief that there is a true answer to the question "What is right?"

Those of us who sided with the universalist approach warned of the problematic consequences of moral relativism, and that it would force us into

admitting that any adopted standard is right within its own community. From this perspective moral progress would not be possible. Since any common practice would justify itself, there would be no objective standard according to which we would be able to state that, say, female mutilation or human sacrifice is wrong.

These consequences prompted participants to suggest a compromise view, one that would agree on some basic values as universal, whereas the rest would be left to individual choice. Some people pointed out that we all share certain values, and that the ways societies progress is by mutual cooperation which involves some shared beliefs. Of course, the problem then arises of where to draw the line between what values should be universal and what should be considered optional. Controversial cases such as polygamy, same-sex marriages, abortion, and cloning indicate that the problem is not an easy one.

In this context, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was mentioned as an effort to define some basic rules which should be universally adopted by all societies. This, some of us believed, is the basis for moral progress. The discussion ended with our estimate of whether we see any moral progress when comparing the situation in the world now to that of 100 years ago. Some people believed that the abolition of slavery and the equality of women are indisputable signs of moral progress. Others felt that advances in those domains are countered by the decline in other values, so they saw no progress.

For those of you who can't make Wednesday nights, Vanda will be leading a session of "But Is It Right?" Sunday afternoon, September 17, at 1PM. Check back with next month's newsletter for more information on the Wednesday Night Program, including "Faith Conversations" with Chris Jacques, and an Ethical Culture Reading Group, offering historical insights from 125 years of the Ethical Culture movement.

AEU Volunteer Opportunity: a Call to New York Metropolitan Area Residents

The American Ethical Union is forming a volunteer work cadre to do monthly mailings, and is asking interested members of Ethical Societies who are within easy and convenient travel distance to the AEU office (64th & CPW in Manhattan) to sign up. If you want to volunteer for this activity you must be available during the Monday to Friday work week and normal business hours.

A small work crew will be solicited by telephone from the cadre listing on a rotating basis. It is expected that *no* member on the cadre list will be requested to serve more often than once every three months. It is hoped that by soliciting volunteers from the Greater New York Metropolitan area the cadre list will be sufficiently large to allow such a low level (or even lower, depending on the size of the cadre) of requested volunteer service.

The work schedule will involve approximately two and a half hours at the AEU Office and will involve the following activities: 1) meeting at the AEU office at 10am on a specified date, varying with the printing schedule of the publication, 2) applying bar coded mailing labels to the publication and stacking them in assigned trays, and 3) carrying the trays down to a car or van and transporting the mailing to the post office.

The work crew will do the mailing of *Dialogue* (the AEU member publication published 4 to 5 times per year) and/or the mailing of the *Washington Ethical Action Office Reports* (published 10 times per year). This volunteer activity will save the AEU approximately \$4,000 to \$5,000 in the AEU Annual budget. A volunteer sign-up sheet is at the BSEC Office. Remember, many hands make light work, so sign up if you can!

SEPTEMBER 2000 BSEC CALENDAR

Sunday 9/10

10AM-1PM: Super Sunday. Children's Sunday Assembly and Membership Open House. Learn all about our Sunday School and membership activities by joining us for breakfast and an orientation.

Sunday 9/17

11AM: Opening Platform: *Living Our Ideals* with BSEC Leader Lisel Burns.

1PM: Discussion: *But Is it Right?* Vanda Bozicevic leads a conversation on moral topics and dilemmas.

Saturday 9/23

1-4PM: Workshop: *Ethical Living - Going Beyond Good Intentions.* BSEC Leader Emeritus Lois Kellerman leads a workshop that will focus on eight core commitments upon which Ethical Culture rests and looks at how these commitments give us confidence to move forward in fresh new ways as we build relationships.

Sunday 9/24

11AM: Platform: *The Future of the Family* with BSEC Leader Emeritus Lois Kellerman.

1PM: Colloquy, followed by a workshop and exchange on Inner Work Practices.

Friday 9/29

8PM: The Good Coffeehouse kicks off the season with *James Reams and the Barnstormers*. \$8 donation.

Saturday 9/30

12-10PM: A full day of American Traditional Music at *The 3rd Annual Bluegrass Oldtime Jamboree*. Donation one dollar.

Sunday 10/1

11AM: Sunday Platform: *A Family Story* with BSEC Leader-in-Training Anne Klaeyen, introducing the storytelling workshop series to be held on Thursdays in October.

1PM: Platform Reflection, followed by Wednesday Night Program workshop.

The interests of society require the observation of those moral precepts only in which all religions agree (for all forbid us to murder, steal, plunder, or bear false witness), and that we should not intermeddle with the particular dogmas in which all religions differ, and which are totally unconnected with morality.

Thomas Jefferson

The Elliott-Black Award: Nominations Sought

The AEU National Ethical Action Committee seeks nominations for the 2001 Elliott-Black Award. The award, named for the late Ethical Culture leaders John Lovejoy Elliott and Algernon Black, is made in recognition and tribute to an individual or group in the larger community who has made a significant ethical contribution to society at personal risk and hardship. It is the AEU's highest honor. The 2000 recipient was the Innocence Project of Cardozo School of Law, which uses exculpatory DNA evidence to free the wrongfully imprisoned. The 1999 recipient was Daryl Davis, a black musician who has befriended members of the Ku Klux Klan.

We encourage all members of Ethical Culture to suggest names of worthy candidates for the 2001 award. *Nominations should be sent to the address below by October 31.*

A nomination must include the nominee's full name, a complete address at which we can write to the nominee, and a statement

of up to 500 words that details the candidate's organizational affiliation(s) and the specific ethical action or program that merits recognition. The committee will write to the nominee, explain the award's history, and ask whether he or she would be able to accept it in person at the 2001 AEU Assembly. The committee will then vote on recommendations to the AEU board, making efforts to include representatives from as many Societies as possible. No potential nominees have been automatically "held over" from last year, but members are free to renominate persons previously considered.

Give some thought to who might be a fitting recipient of this important award, and send in your choice (before October 31!) to:

Tim Beardsley
Washington Ethical Society
7750 16th St. NW
Washington D.C. 20012
e-mail: tmb@ioip.com

Dear *Ethically Speaking* Readers,

The good news is that many of you have asked to be on our mailing list (almost 2000!). The bad news is that we can no longer afford to send newsletters to so many people. The further good news, however, is that we have an excellent website, bsec.org, that includes downloadable (PDF) copies of our newsletter, including back issues. So for those of you with internet access, we encourage you to access our website and communicate with us via e-mail. For those who either do not have internet access or would prefer to receive a printed newsletter, we ask for an annual donation of \$10 (or more) to help defray the printing and mailing costs.

We are also interested in learning more about you. If you are interested in learning more about Ethical Culture, and/or receiving a printed newsletter, please complete the form below and return it to our office at the address below. If we do not hear from you by the end of October, we will assume that you are able to access *Ethically Speaking* via the internet (or simply no longer wish to receive it) and will remove your name and address from our mailing list. Ethical Culture members and friends will continue to receive our newsletter as usual.

Thank you!

Please return this form to:

Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture
53 Prospect Park West
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Yes, I want to continue to receive *Ethically Speaking* by mail! Enclosed is a donation of \$10 (or more) to help defray the costs.

I can access *Ethically Speaking* via the internet, but I would like more information about Ethical Culture. (donation optional!)

I am a member or friend of BSEC, and will continue to receive the newsletter regardless, but enclosed is a donation (in addition to the annual pledge, for members) to help defray costs.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Task Forces Moving Forward: Volunteer Opportunities Abound

The task forces set into motion at the two membership retreats held last spring are moving forward into the new Season:

Communications

Kurt Johnson and Bob Strock are working on proposals which will help streamline communications processes, including database enhancements and increased use of the internet.

All-Day Sunday Activities

Joel Cohen will be coordinating and delegating responsibilities to a staff of volunteers to make sure that every Sunday is a great day at the Meeting House, beginning before Platform and continuing through the afternoon programs and workshops.

Long-Range Fundraising

Incoming Finance Chair Tony Severo and Treasurer Donna Roberts will be looking at new and creative ways for BSEC to generate income, and will make self-sufficiency of most if not all BSEC programs a long-term goal.

All three task forces will work closely with the board, each other and all other BSEC groups and individuals, ensuring that the task of making BSEC a stronger organization is as open and enjoyable a process as possible.

BSEC is asking that all members devote at least four hours each month of volunteer time to the Society. In particular the All-Day Sunday Activities task force can use people each week to help make Sundays run smoothly. Volunteers are also needed for office work or reception, or to act as a reliable backup to crucial committee chairs.

Contact the BSEC Office and let us know which areas you'd like to devote your time to.

Membership News

Longtime members Joe and Josie Radosta will be leaving Brooklyn the end of September to live closer to their son's family in New Jersey. We will celebrate their time with us at lunch after the platform on September 17th. We wish them both well.

Losses: Constance Pigozzi's husband George passed away in August. A memorial service was held at the Meeting House August 13. Charley Horwitz lost his father over the summer. We extend our love and sympathy to Constance, Charley, and their families.

Greta Gladney's son Steven and daughter Alison have joined her in Brooklyn, flying in on August 26th from New Orleans where they had been staying with their grandmother. They are subletting on 17th Street in Park Slope, down the street from the Jean-Baptiste Kosoff family.

Storytelling Workshop: Thursdays in October

Learn the power of storytelling from a master of the art. Mary Savage repeats her successful workshop held at BSEC last spring. The first session is Thursday October 5th, and continues on Thursdays throughout October, ending with a celebration November 2nd. The sessions run from 7:30-9pm, and are free to BSEC members, \$7-\$10 each for non-members.

Ms. Savage has published articles on storytelling and literature and has a doctorate in Medieval Narrative. She is the founder of the *Henry Street Parent Storytelling Workshop*, a community storytelling project, and also directs *Stories in the Land*, the Storytelling Institute at Hofstra.



September Platforms

September 17: *Living Our Ideals*

Lisel Burns introduces the First Sundays series for this Season, based on the theme chosen by the BSEC Platform Committee: *Living Our Ideals: an Exploration of Paths and Resources for an Ethical Life*.

This Season's focus will be on a BSEC community-wide, bottom-up collection of questions, resources, themes, and practices to help us assess and achieve our own aspirations for ethical living, however onerous the external conditions, or misguided our national or global authorities.

September 24: *The Future of Family*

Is the family as we know it obsolete? As we enter a new century, BSEC Leader Emeritus Lois Kellerman explores the nature and purpose of family from an ethical perspective. This platform will be completed by a Baby Welcoming ceremony conducted by Lois.

Be sure to check out Lois's workshop on Saturday 9/23 1-4PM, called *Ethical Living: Going Beyond Good Intentions*.

October 1: *A Family Story*

With Leader-in-Training Anne Klaeyen, sharing her insights into the art of storytelling and the gift of narrative, as an introduction to Mary Savage's October workshop series.

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!

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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53 Prospect Park West
Brooklyn, New York 11215

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