



ETHICAL VIEWS

April 2020 Vol. 134, No. 8 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society



*It will come as no surprise to our readers that
all April events have been canceled. We all know why.
We have re-conceived the entire newsletter to reflect that reality.
Hope you like it! I wrote the connecting narratives, and
Celeste Hardester did a bang-up job with the layout.
– Henry Pashkow, Editor*

Opening words from Hugh Taft-Morales:

The coronavirus is an unprecedented challenge to human civilization. People with limited resources will be particularly at risk, so let's make sure our government leaders know that we want them to look out for those least able to respond to this challenge. Over the next days, weeks, and months, each one of us will be challenged personally and our social bonds will be tested.

What better time to follow the golden rule?

Please use caution, and get information from reliable websites, such as:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov> Customer service: 1 (800) 232-4636

WHO | World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int>

WHO's primary role is to direct international health within the United Nations' system and to lead partners in global health responses.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

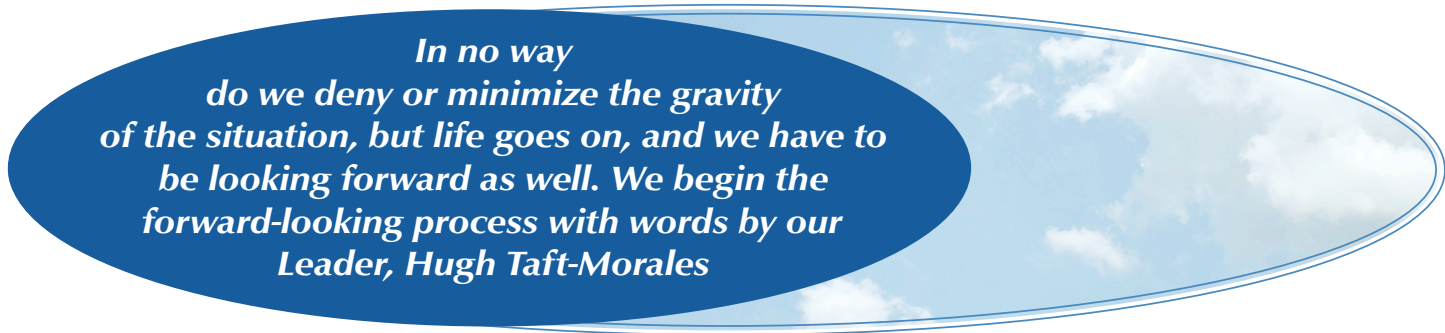
City of Philadelphia

<http://phila.gov> has local updates on the coronavirus situation

This is a quickly moving situation, and things change on a daily basis.
If you reference other reliable sources of information,
please keep us up to date on them.

Please note that the memorial service for Richard Kiniry, originally scheduled for April 18, 2020, had been postponed until further notice.





*In no way
do we deny or minimize the gravity
of the situation, but life goes on, and we have to
be looking forward as well. We begin the
forward-looking process with words by our
Leader, Hugh Taft-Morales*

LEADER'S COLUMN

BEYOND BORDERS: OUR GLOBAL HUMANIST CULTURE *Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Philadelphia Ethical Society*

At the time of this writing the fast-moving news about COVID-19 virus makes it hard to plan travel and attendance at conferences. By the time this newsletter is published in two-weeks' time, the status of the pandemic could be remarkably different. I am hoping that sensible health precautions by individuals and governments, along with the advent of spring and more outdoor time, will ease the crisis. So, I just bought my plane tickets to Miami for the **World Humanist Congress in August!**

Every three years, humanists from around the world gather at such meetings. **Humanists International** (HI), formerly called the International Humanists and Ethical Union, is bringing this year's Congress to Miami from August 6-9. The American Humanist Association is hosting the event, and our federating organization, the American Ethical Union (AEU) is a sponsor. The AEU will be holding our annual meeting on August 6th, just before the main program of the Congress.

At our August 6th meeting we will vote on our next AEU budget, new members to the AEU Board, and any resolutions that might arise. There will be lots of opportunity to discuss these items as we chart the future of Ethical Culture. And, of course, there'll be opportunities to socialize with members of many different Ethical Societies. (How about at the beach?)

I am looking forward to meeting and speaking with humanists, skeptics, and atheists from around the globe. There were Ethical Societies active in Europe prior to WWII – including the Vienna Ethical Society, one of the founding members of the International Ethical and Humanist Union. Ethical Culture's association with Jewish people, however, made it a prime target for Nazi harassment. That, along with the devastation of World

War II, chased Ethical Culture from mainland Europe. While there were dozens of Ethical Societies in Britain at one point, for multiple reasons by 1970 there were none. Today, connecting with Humanist International is our best opportunity to understand the humanism flourishing in Europe.

I want to learn more about the great work Humanist International is doing to protect Humanism in Asia, Africa, and South America. Humanists in developing nations are often oppressed by fundamentalism of many forms. This year HI has supported those on the front line of humanist activism. For example, grants were made to *Filipion Freethinkers*, *Atheist Bogota*, the Prometheus Society of Slovakia, and the Peruvian Atheist Association. For many people these organizations are the only freethought alternatives for intellectual and political engagement. Come learn more about what HI does to support apostates and end blasphemy laws.

Ethical Culturists are on the speakers list, including Je Hooper, Bart Worden, Anya Overmann, and Emily Newman. Our congregational form of humanism has a lot to contribute to international humanism, especially as people in our fractured world seek deeper personal relationships. Ethical Humanism has a lot to teach the world about reason, tolerance, and compassion. Come help connect Ethical Culture to the world again. As Mark Twain said, "Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

Register for the World Humanist Conference here.
<http://www.cvent.com/events/world-humanist-congress-2020-registration/event-summary-9df2175caab74377a14bfec93f55752.aspx>

*While we look forward,
we remember and dwell upon the experiences
that shaped us, and made us the caring people
we have come to be. To that end, we continue
with a powerful article by the co-chair of our
Ending Racism Task force*

FROM THE PES ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE THIS TRAGIC DEATH WAS TRULY NOTEWORTHY

by Sylvia Metzler

While preparing to move from my two-story house to a small one bedroom apartment, I came across this article I had written about a boy I knew well, who was shot when he was sixteen. The article I wrote was published in the *Philadelphia Daily News* in 1997. To my dismay, it tells a story as relevant today as it was then. This is an edited version. No important part has been left out.

Ms Sylvia, how come they write about Eddie Werner, a white boy, getting strangled in New Jersey, but not about me getting shot in North Philly?

This is what I imagine this young man would have said, had he lived to say it. But he didn't.

Let's start at the beginning. He was ten when I first met him, loud, quick to take offense, curious, bright and painfully honest.

He said to me, "I need sneakers and Payless is having a sale. I don't care if the kids laugh at me. Can I do some work for you?"

They did laugh at him. His clothes were off-brands. He had no gold chains. He was overdue for a haircut. He didn't mind. He worked to earn money. He washed my car, and repaired some things around the house. We bought the sneakers. Then I took him for a ride to the suburbs. He looked around.

"Where's the trash? Where's the graffiti. Do they have drive-by shootings here?" These were some of his

questions. "Why are black people's neighborhoods so dirty and ugly?" This was another. In response to this, I drove him to middle and upper class black neighborhoods and to poor white neighborhoods and talked to him about class and race. When he was twelve he asked, "will you be my mentor?"

Why would a black kid from North Philly want a fifty-six year old white woman to be his mentor? Did he even know what a mentor was? I accepted this honor with humility and some trepidation.



***Demetrious, 1981-1997
¿HASTA CUANDO?
How long?***

His aggressive behavior frustrated his mother and me. His father had been in prison for most of his son's life and was a negative role model at best. His mother struggled to raise him alone and did the best she could.

I knew he got tired of begging for enough to wear, enough to eat, school supplies, deodorant, laundry money – things my grandchildren take for granted. He was always looking for work, but jobs in his neighborhood were hard to come by for adults, let alone young black males.

He fought the lure of the streets and our preoccupation with material things for a long time. But that didn't last forever.

So a year or so later he began to sell marijuana. That was when he was thirteen. He wore nice clothes and bought his mom groceries. He grew tall and lost weight, and the girls chased after him.

Continued on page 4

I told him his life was at risk. I argued, pleaded, reasoned and begged him to stay away from the drug scene. He did for a while, but the lure of easy money was too powerful.

A few weeks later his mother called me at 5:00 AM and said he'd been arrested for selling marijuana. While waiting for a hearing before a judge, he said the cops had roughed him up. During his fifteen hours in custody, he faced cold, beatings and hunger.

We talked about his last trip to the suburbs, where we visited a young friend in the hospital and played miniature golf. He wanted to know why there were no miniature golf courses in North Philly and why we couldn't build one. He wanted to know why his friend was on dialysis three times a week and asked if he could give her one of his kidneys.

In the waiting room, crowded with other young people and their parents, I asked him, "are you trying to play out 'Third and Indiana?' Either the cops or the dealers are going to kill you." 'Third and Indiana' was a then current play by then *Inquirer* columnist Steve Lopez about a fifteen-year old protagonist who gets pulled into the drug world and eventually killed.

The judge released him with a court date for the following Monday. The next day he went back to the drug house, ostensibly to retrieve his expensive sneakers. Four hours later he was found shot in the eye. I spent the night in the ICU with his comatose body as his life oozed away, his blood and brains staining the bandages and sheets. I held his hand and told him that I loved him and his mother loved him and his sister loved him and we didn't want him to die, but we knew he would.

His mother, remembering his offer of a kidney to a friend, agreed to his becoming an organ donor. In death he saved six lives with his heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and kidneys.

Thank you, my friend, my child, my teacher. You were only sixteen, but as much my teacher as I was yours. Maybe we can build that miniature golf course in your memory, instead of another prison.



The mural honoring Demetrious, on Palethorp St.

QUOTABLE

"In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."

~ Albert Camus

*And, here's
what Sylvia's writing led
me to reconsider*



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK THE STEREOTYPE TRAP

Henry Pashkow

Reading Sylvia's column brought to mind an experience I had when I worked at the shelter, about twenty-five years ago. There was an attractive young black woman working as a case aide at the shelter hospice next door. This hospice, accessible by our driveway, was home to men with life threatening illnesses. Since we shared some functions, their employees were in and out of our building, and I would see her usually in the kitchen from time to time. She was strikingly vivacious; and seeing her was a bright spot in the middle of the day.

She was raising two children in one of the worst ghettos in the city. I never detected a hint of anger or self-pity in her. She had spunk. Her spirit was infectious. Nothing seemed to bring her down, and there was no falseness or pretentiousness about her.

One morning I learned that she was beaten to death in her home with a baseball bat by someone who had broken in the night before.

I had seen no change in the mood of the place when coming in that morning. Someone told me about it during the day. We had a ceremony to mourn her death a few days later, in the chapel. About half of the staff was gathered there. The priest read a prayer and recited a passage from the liturgy and opened the proceedings to anyone wanting to speak. It took a few moments for people to step up. A few men from the kitchen said a few things in remembrance. What they said was heartfelt, though restrained. Our supervisor's brief oration was heartfelt as well; he had grown up not too far from where she had lived.

And then no one. The priest glanced at his watch. So I got up and when I got to the front of the room I didn't know what to say. I looked around and said I couldn't believe she was gone. She had been here just the other day. I had seen her just two days ago and now she was gone forever. I couldn't believe this.

She was not a statistic, a woman living in one of the most crime-ridden black ghettos in the city, where you might expect these things to happen. She was more than that to me. She was a real, live human being. People had loved her; people were grieving her loss, people felt an empty hole where she had once been.

One of the kitchen guys gave me a brief snort of acknowledgment as if to say, so you're finally waking up to what's going on all around you.

Well, that wasn't quite accurate. I had seen it, though at second hand. I went to graduate school in West Virginia, while my ex-wife worked in the ICU at the hospital. She had seen it first hand. She had seen a lot of it.

Those people in Appalachia, where I went to school, one of the most downtrodden poor white areas in the country, where you might expect these things to happen, were not statistics. They were real, live human beings. People had loved them; people were grieving their loss, people felt an empty hole where they had once been.

You might see men and women from our poorest black neighborhoods described on television as drug dealers or juvenile delinquents, drug addicted whores and the like, with the token police chief thrown in to satisfy the need for political correctness, all the usual stereotypes. You rarely see the average man or woman from these neighborhoods described as a functioning, normal, caring human being, like you or me.

You might see people from Appalachia portrayed as hicks or lowlifes, all the usual stereotypes, not as functioning, caring human beings like you or me.

Please turn off the TV for a little while and reconsider. The people out there we may be all too ready to derogate are human beings, just like you and me.

I close with words from our much esteemed and beloved Leader Emeritus Richard Kiniry, who died on December 18, 2019. His dedication to the tenets of Ethical Humanism were an inspiration to us all.

LEADER EMERITUS RICHARD'S WORDS OF WISDOM (AND WIT)

Compiled by Betsy Lightbourn

Sometime in 1998 these *Philadelphia Inquirer* occasional columns by Richard Kiniry attracted my attention and brought me to the doors of the Philadelphia Ethical Society along with my life partner Dale Drews, who was seeking to reconnect with Ethical Culture. We first attended a book discussion on Edward O. Wilson's *Consilience* and then Sunday morning platform several times a month. Before the year was over, we had both become members. Recalling these columns, I contacted Jim Remsen, retired *Inquirer* religion editor, who had edited the series written by clergy of various faith traditions. Together Jim and I sifted through all the old tear sheets of the 1990s religion pages –inclusive in its coverage from Ram Das and Marianne Williamson, through Christianity and Judaism, to Ethical Humanism.

Richard's experience of encountering a group of people praying in a South Jersey diner follows: He did not agree with their religious point of view, but felt a connection with people searching for meaning. *"To me they were saying their life had a plan for the better. . . . Whether you are a religious conservative or liberal, or just a good person who wouldn't touch religion with a ten-foot pole, you should worry about religion being shoved to the edge of society. If we make a backwater out of the part of our culture that handles meaning and purpose, then we will become a land of superficial twits."*

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A reasoned approach to goodness, not a blind leap (Dec 27, 1998)

"As I moved from Catholicism to Religious Humanism, I

found a new understanding of the meaning of my life, but it was no great leap into my feelings about life."

On confusion about self-interest and the right thing to do.

"The superficial life can be tempting, but we need to leap into a life of purpose. For me that is where a leap of faith is needed."

I'm happy to say I know many such people, young and old, who have taken that leap. Some of them may not have lots of the goodies of life, but they are all living satisfied, happy, rewarding lives.

So whether you ease into it, flop into it or leap into it, a committed life is its own reward."

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From the dying, lessons about life's true meaning: Aug 16 1998

"I learned from the lives of those who have passed that it is possible to live a good life without dreams of connection to some great chain of being. You can have all the meaning you need within the confines of the life you have lived."

"Dying people have taught me that the big picture is composed of a lot of common, ordinary people like ourselves doing big things. Nature has no plan. It isn't going anywhere. It just keeps rolling along. It's up to us to add the meaning. . . ."

The joy of living is in the doing and not in the finishing. It is the creative doing each day that makes life good and worth living."

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*I did say
“we close”, but there is one more
question to consider. Should the healthy among
us limit their activities and shelter in place? Should they
leave home only to buy necessities?*



*I would say
no, let's not go quite that far.
Here is a picture of the “intrepid four” getting
ready to enjoy a bike ride, while observing the necessities
of care. I will add that when they stopped for something
to eat, they remained six feet apart.*

*Once again,
looking to the future, hoping, perhaps against hope
that we may see ourselves close to resolution.*

***Save The Date
Sunday May 3, 2020
Annual Ethical Society Meeting***

*Every year our Society is required to hold an annual meeting. We will elect a
President, Vice President and three Trustees at Large for our Board. In addition we
will review our finances and approve our budget for 2020-2021.*

*For our members, please plan on attending:
Sunday May 3, 2020 at 12 noon, immediately following our platform.
Please plan on attending virtually or in person if conditions allow.
We will notify you with details as we know more.*



SUNDAY SERVICES
11:00 a.m. will return when
the health crisis abates

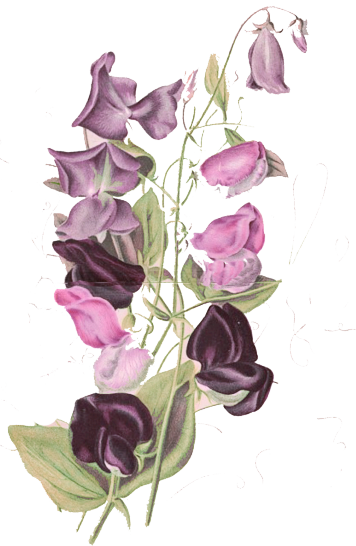
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Executive Editor, Henry Pashkow
Copy Editor, Betsy Lightbourn
Web Master, Copy Editor, Nick Sanders
Layout, Celeste Hardester
Production, Cheryl Desmond

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader
PES Board of Trustees
Bob Bueding, President
Betsy Lightbourn, Vice President
Vincent Russo, Treasurer
John Marshall, Secretary
Kate Esposito
Susan O'Connell
Michael Black-Smith
Ron Coburn
Drew Snyder
(215) 735 - 3456
office@phillyethics.org
www.phillyethics.org

For suggestions regarding this
newsletter, contact Henry Pashkow
hpashkow@gmail.com



*April's flower,
Sweet Pea*

READING IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

With time on our hands, minds full of thoughts, and hearts full of worry, now could be a time to read what others have made of the experience of pandemic. The reading options are large. This is just a sampling:

Pale Horse, Pale Rider - Katherine Anne Porter's short novel about a romance between a newspaper reporter and a soldier during the 1918 influenza epidemic is considered one of her best works. The title is a reference to the famous line from the New Testament's Book of Revelation, about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. A bonus of the book is that it deals with the fight of a woman to be taken seriously as a journalist.

Station Eleven, Emily St. John Mandel (2014) Set in the Midwest two decades after a super flu pandemic has ravaged human life and dismantled civilization, Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* ponders the possibilities of what new cultures and societies might emerge in a post-apocalyptic world. Through the perspectives of interconnected artists, *Station Eleven* considers the sufficiency of survival after a major collapse and how art can remind us of our humanity in the face of unimaginable circumstances.

The Plague, Albert Camus's 1947 novel is considered a classic of existentialist literature but it can also be read simply for its plot, its beautiful writing and its complex characters. The book tells of a contemporary outbreak of a plague carried by rats in Oran, an Algerian city. It is grounded in the details of a city and its daily life that Camus, a Frenchman born in Algeria, knew well. The eeriest similarity to the events of today is that the population is quarantined and stuck inside the plague-ridden city for months.

The Weight of Ink, This critically acclaimed 2017 novel by Rachel Kadish tells a very Jewish story set in 1660s London and in the present day. Helen Watt, a historian who has Parkinson's disease, is researching centuries-old letters written by Ester Velasquez, an emigrant from Amsterdam, who was the scribe for a blind rabbi as a plague hits the city. At nearly 600 pages, it's a book that will keep you busy for quite a while.

I Contain Multitudes, Ed Yong's (2016) non-fiction explores the intricate relationship between microbes and the rest of the natural world, using elements of science and history to explain the wonders of the human body. Using humor and intellect, Yong encourages his readers to challenge their understanding of nature and how we exist in the world not as individuals, but rather as groups that are interconnected and interdependent.

The Decameron, Giovanni Boccaccio (1353) *The Decameron*, a series of stories written in the wake of Italy's Black Plague, is a reminder of how important storytelling has always been for humans in times of upheaval. The novel contains 100 stories in total, following characters from different social strata and backgrounds to ultimately construct a large-scale exploration of how society functions in the face of crisis.

Descriptions excerpted from

<https://pen.org/literature-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-reading-list/>
<https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Culture/Books-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-621409>