



ETHICAL VIEWS



October 2021 Vol. 136, No. 2 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us

Sunday, October 3, 11 AM

Celebrating Courage

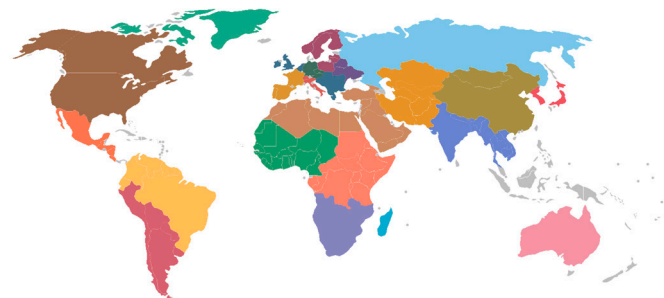
**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader,
Philadelphia Ethical Society**

Courage often is exemplified by acts of physical bravery. Other times it is described as the absence of fear. But courage, particularly moral courage, need not involve overcoming bodily risk and suffering. And as Mark Twain put it, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear— not absence of fear." For Felix Adler, the founder of Ethical Culture, real courage emanates from the inner self and arises in the faith that "there are locked up within us stores of moral power that are practically infinite." Hugh Taft-Morales explores the nature of courage and vulnerability and how both help us lead more ethical lives.

Sunday, October 10, 11 AM

The Social Impact of Genetic Ancestry Testing

**Wendy Roth, Professor of Sociology,
University of Pennsylvania**



An estimated 15% of all U.S. adults—approximately 30 million people—have taken genetic ancestry tests. Roth, author of *Race Migrations: Latinos and the Cultural Transformation of Race*, explains how such tests influence people's perceptions of their ethnic and racial identities. Research demonstrates that people pick and choose new identities they like from their test results. Depending on people's knowledge of science, ancestry tests can also affect their understanding of what race is.

Sunday, October 17, 11 AM

The Persistence of Ghosts

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader



From ancient Egypt to modern Halloween, humans have told stories about spirits that haunt our houses and fill our imaginations. Some, like Casper, are friendly and fun. Others threaten and terrorize. Why are ghosts so ubiquitous in culture? What purpose do they serve in our society and in our psyches? How should humanists deal with the

idea of specters? As children once again prepare to trick or treat, Hugh Taft-Morales explores the history and culture surrounding these scary superstitions.

Sunday, October 24, 11 AM

Why Doesn't Everyone Have a Bank Account? What I Learned Working as a Payday Lender.

Lisa Servon, University of Pennsylvania

Nearly 28% of Americans have no bank account or use services such as payday lenders, pawn shops, and check cashers in addition to banks. Much energy has been expended trying to get these people to use banks exclusively without first understanding why they make the choices they do. Servon, chair of Penn's City and Regional Planning Department, spent months working as a teller at a check casher in the South Bronx and as a payday lender in Oakland, California, in order to understand these choices. She'll unpack her findings in this platform.



Platforms continued on page 2

TO ZOOM OR NOT TO ZOOM

Although we remain largely Zoom-bound, some small meetings this month may take place in-person. Check with Hugh or your Committee Chair.

Join us just prior to each session at www.tiny.cc/phillyethics

By Cheryl Desmond

THIS MONTH, I THOUGHT A review of finances might be in order. The Ethical Society fiscal year runs from July through June, and we ended June 2021 in a positive cash position. Back in February the Society received money from the second round of the Paycheck Protection Program. As it was designed to, the PPP grant covered approximately three months of payroll expenses, which was extremely helpful. A significant gift from a member added to the positive number. At the same time, total expenses for the last fiscal year were kept to a bare minimum at \$176,500. That's the lowest annual spending since 2013.

Turning to the current fiscal year, I have been looking at 2021-2022 in two parts. In the first part, from July through December, we can expect small operating deficits every month (averaging less than \$2000). That is because special event rentals are not back, and who can blame people for that? As for the second part of the year... well, does anyone have a crystal ball? Seriously, we will continue to work to keep expenses down until earned income returns.

While the income side of things is below pre-Covid levels, discretionary spending is on hold. Our building

care list is not small; we want to do the kitchen cabinets, the Assembly Room floor, exterior painting, and more. For now, all of that will wait. Such projects are tackled every normal year. But postponing them helps hold the line on an almost balanced budget. As for rentals, remember June, when everyone hoped reopening would start? Bookings for September and October had started to come in. Then the Delta variant surged, the city re-masked, and as a result bookings crashed. Cancellations followed.

One bright spot is an increase in small-group use. In addition to AA meetings, which have largely continued, small groups of vaccinated people have been getting together for such activities as comedy improv practice, French conversation, and film discussion. Students from Arcadia University meet bi-weekly before exploring the city. And long-time regular renters such as the ballroom dance teacher are back. This does not entirely make up for the loss of parties. But it helps a great deal.

The last part of the financial calculation—the continuing support from member donations—remains crucial. Thanks to each of you for that support.

Cheryl Desmond is Philadelphia Ethical Society administrator

Platforms continued from page 1

Sunday, October 31, 11 AM

Preventing Gun Violence Through Better News Reporting, Jim MacMillan, Philadelphia Center for Gun Violence Reporting

Can changing the way journalists and news organizations report on gun violence prevent shootings and save lives? The Center for Gun Violence Reporting at Community College of Philadelphia was created to explore this question.



The Center helps journalists find experts, data, and other resources; pairs community reporters with advanced professionals; and brings together universities for research. A 17-year veteran of the *Philadelphia Daily News*, MacMillan photographed the war in Iraq for the Associated Press, coverage for which his team was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

HUMANIST HUMOR

Eskimo: "If I did not know about God and sin, would I go to hell?"

Priest: "No, not if you did not know."

Eskimo: "Then why did you tell me?"

~ ANNIE DILLARD, AUTHOR

POSITION OPENING

Community Life Coordinator

Please email office@phillyethics.org for information and full job description

This position is part-time.

Some Sunday work is required.

FROM THE LEADER In Search of Renewal? Escape Into Nature.

By Hugh Taft-Morales

MY SUMMER WAS BOOKENDED BY day hikes on the Appalachian Trail in June and along the bluffs of the St. Lawrence River in late August. The latter experience, in particular, was nearly transcendent. I can still feel the cool breeze as I stood on the shore, an hour northeast of Quebec City, scanning the vast Canadian seaway at the point where it broadens to 12 miles. The white beluga whales arcing through sparkling water brought me deep joy and wonder. The visceral relaxation this view induces, combined with a deeper appreciation for the miracle that is our biosphere, fills me with philosophical perspective and returns me this fall to my Ethical Culture work renewed and refreshed.

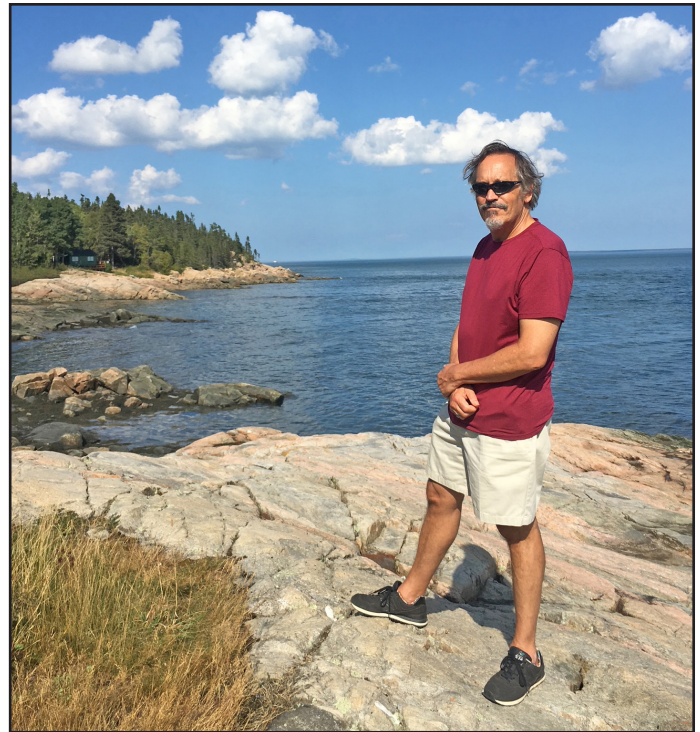
One hundred years ago, our Ethical Culture community invested in the natural world to nurture such renewal. Two decades after the 1897 founding of the Hudson Guild Settlement House in the working-class Chelsea neighborhood of New York City, Ethical Culture Leader John Lovejoy Elliott sought out opportunities to connect young people with nature. Soon the Ethical Culture movement had acquired 500 acres in rural New Jersey, and the **Hudson Guild Farm** was born. Families and teenagers came to the farm and worked a few hours each day planting, harvesting, and maintaining trails. Not only did the food help feed hungry folks back in the city, but also many young people were given the chance to breathe clean air, taste fresh produce, and commune with nature.

Now more than ever, young people need opportunities to connect with nature. As climate change heats our biosphere, slows ocean currents, and whips up destructive weather patterns, the natural resources on which we depend are shrinking. In April, just before Earth Day, Curt Collier, the interim leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, pointed out that “civilization” has left us with only 9% of our forests, 3% of our marshlands, and about 1% of our prairie land. Such depletion is what makes our Camp Linden summer camp so important for so many children in our area. Kudos to Sharon, Leonard, and the camp staff for their persistence through the pandemic.

Curt, who also serves as the national youth program director for Groundwork USA, a collaboration of the National Park Service and the EPA that helps communities deal with local environmental

challenges, is calling for a more biocentric Ethical Culture. He believes that by connecting to the planet our humanist movement can help bring humanity back from the brink of climate catastrophe. In his **comments** to the New York Society for Ethical Culture, he emphasized the interrelatedness of nature and also of human society: something we desperately need in these times of social division.

While climate catastrophe was not commonly discussed a century ago, conservationist Benton



Spout Spotting: *Hugh at a favorite beluga-whale-spotting site in Port-au-Persil, Quebec*

MackKaye appreciated the importance of nature for human flourishing. That’s why he convened a meeting at Hudson Guild Farm on July 10, 1921. The meeting became a “landmark event in American conservation and planning,” according to Ben Minter, an environmental conservation professor.

Those gathered searched for what MacKaye called a “new approach to the problem of living.” MacKaye believed that connecting with nature would help us see industry “in its true perspective—as a means in life and not as an end in itself.” The harried work life of so many Americans would be blessed, he believed, by balance with opportunities to appreciate the great outdoors. Minter **wrote** that MacKaye “recognized

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ADVENTURES IN VOLUNTEERING

An Ethics Class Ends with Dinner for Grandma

by Arnold Fishman

ONE DAY IN THE MIDDLE of the summer, Temma and I got an email from Leader Hugh inviting us to “volunteer” to talk to some kids about Ethical Culture. “No pressure; just let me know,” it said. We were intrigued. After being assured that we were expected to Zoom (not drive) to the meeting, we agreed. Hugh sent us a script but promised we would have no difficulty filling the allotted half hour. Temma, of course, went into immediate training. She spent long hours huddled up with her computer, composing her “what if we run out of conversation” speech. I, of course, chose to wing it.

Meetings have never been easier. We have almost made it to the “beam me up Scotty” stage. We even had a “pre-meeting” meeting before our meeting to make sure our meeting went well. We made introductions all around and got a brief overview of the program, called Mosaic 2021. Sponsored by Interfaith Philadelphia, Mosaic 2021 “empowers youth to explore their neighborhoods in new ways, learn about the religious and cultural diversity of their peers, and strengthen their identity and leadership skills.”

They gave us insight as to what to expect from the group of 11-to-14-year olds that they would assemble.

The time arrived. I clicked the link and voila! A dozen or so of the cutest junior high kids you ever saw appeared. Talk about bright eyed and bushy tailed! Leader Hugh was prescient: the time flew by. The “what if” speech remained unspoken. For me, the highlight came when we asked students what one thing they would do before going to sleep that night to bring out the best in others. One boy said he was going to make his grandmother dinner.

One of the many benefits of Ethical Society membership is the opportunity to do some good in small, manageable bites. You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. You only have to play a small part in an already constructed program. Talking with these children was a warm and enriching experience for the both of us. And it was a great reminder that you don’t have to be a trained teacher to introduce young minds to ideas that can help them lead kinder, more ethical lives.

Arnold Fishman is an attorney and longtime member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

Continued from page 3

that the ability to cope with nature directly—unshielded by the weakening wall of civilization—is one of the admitted needs of modern times.”

From that 1921 meeting emerged the campaign to create the Appalachian Trail. In October of that same year, the Journal of the American Institute of Architects published MacKaye’s [article](#) that laid out the grand plan. In 1923 the first section of the trail opened in New York State. Today nearly 3 million people walk parts of the trail every year to strengthen their bodies and replenish their spirits.

It was while hiking through nature, north of the Appalachian Trail in New York, that the founder of Ethical Culture, Felix Adler, found his own source of renewal. I am a less serious hiker than Adler. But from my summer sojourns, I return this fall to my Ethical Culture work more inspired to explore our naturalist alternative to traditional religion.

Hugh Taft-Morales is the leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society. You can read his 2016 [article](#) about Felix Adler’s summers in the Adirondacks.



Source of Renewal: *The view from Pointe-au-Pic southeast across the St. Lawrence River*

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

How Racism's Legacy Lives in Our Bodies

By Leigh Buchanan

THE TITLE OF RESMAA MENAKEM'S 2017 book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, evokes the moment when, as a child, the author learned that his grandmother from a very young age had picked cotton in the fields. As Menakem touched her hands—still damaged a lifetime later—"he realized that the exploitation of Black people had affected the body of his loved one, and that the trauma was not just in the past but very much in the present," says Sarah Tielemans, a leader-in-training with the American Ethical Union. Beginning this month, Tielemans will conduct a series of discussions of *My Grandmother's Hands* with Philadelphia and Baltimore Society members. (Check Upcoming Events for details.) *Ethical Views* asked her how racism creates trauma in the body.

When people talk about trauma and the body in the context of racism I think of violence committed against people of color by police and others: bullets and beatings and "I can't breathe." Is this different?

It's all part of a complex system of traumatic experience and racial oppression. George Floyd and Eric Garner and Sandra Bland are obvious examples of traumatic interactions grounded in race. Trauma inflicted by one body on another. There is also vicarious trauma. What happened to George Floyd was a global experience because we all witnessed it. That was trauma we shared. Then there is this intergenerational trauma of racial oppression: 400 years of the violent oppression of Black bodies. Police brutality against Black bodies is a symptom. It becomes, in effect, a kind of traumatic reenactment.

You talk about intergenerational trauma. Can the physical effects of trauma be passed down?

Scientific research shows that the memory of trauma gets retained genetically. Menakem cites a study of gene changes in the children of Holocaust survivors. There is an actual genetic transformation that gets programmed into our viscera, our bones, our muscles and brains. There is also body-to-body communication, through mirror neurons and subtle energetic interactions that we are still learning about. It is how we communicate with one another what is safe and what is not. If I—as a white mother—am passed by a Black man and my body reacts, then my children will feel that. They pick up that Mom is

unsettled. And they notice the context: this person with Black skin walking through. That is subconscious, brainstem-level learning of racial trauma.

Does racial trauma embed in white bodies as well?

Menakem makes the point that racial trauma didn't start when Black bodies were stolen and brought to this country. He posits that the violence of medieval Europe created this horrific trauma that got blown through other bodies. All individuals in this country have different stories of racial injustice depending upon where they came from and when. My family came to the United States really early. My mom is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. So there is a story of persecution in my family history that I don't have the details of but that is embedded in my DNA. So violent persecution within and between European communities is a precursor to the racial trauma inflicted in this country on Black bodies by bodies of European descent.

How do we begin healing racialized body trauma?

First acknowledge that we all carry it around. Then start to feel it. That's where it gets hard. Because it is super unpleasant. When you encounter racial trauma in your own body, it starts to react. As white bodies we feel afraid of the Black body on the sidewalk. Or a Black body feels afraid of a police officer that has just crossed their path. Your heart races. Your palms sweat. Fear or anger starts to take over. Menakem offers settling techniques, so we can have the emotional experience but not be overwhelmed by it. We calm our biophysical response and engage our cognitive brain, and then we can choose what to do. Without those techniques you will never be able to respond from your values.



Tielemans: Trauma memory embeds in the genes.

Leigh Buchanan is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

THIS IS US Our Building Becomes a Canvas for Immigrant Rights

SAMIR SALEM WAS SCOUTING PHILLY on Google Street View when he virtually rounded the corner onto Rittenhouse Square. “I saw your Black Lives Matter poster and the words ‘Ethical Society,’” said Samir. “And I said, ‘that’s our partner.’”

So, on a drizzly morning in early September, a truck parked in front of 1906 Rittenhouse Square, and a small team began assembling a pop-up photo studio. For the next six hours that team—part of the **Inside Out Project**—would capture Philadelphian faces in glorious large-format black-and-white portraits for display across the Ethical Society façade.

Inside Out, dubbed “the people’s art project,” was launched 10 years ago by the French artist JR. Since then it has created more than 400,000 portraits of people in 138 countries, comprising more than 1800 group actions, typically to promote progressive causes. Each project conveys a community’s beliefs and values expressed through the faces of community members.

This summer’s tour, which visited 16 U.S. cities, “is an opportunity to urge Congress to create a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants,” said Salem. (Salem is field coordinator for the Emerson Collective, an Inside Out partner.)

Despite the dispiriting weather, passersby began posing for their close-ups shortly after 10 AM. As



Picture Day: A façade of faces (top); Councilmember Helen Gym, who delivered a passionate pro-immigrant speech, with members (above); and Kate with Kate (below)



photos printed, a project worker slathered a wheat-and-water-based paste on the building and carefully positioned each portrait. (No worries: the paste leaves zero residue. Inside Out has used it on the Louvre Pyramid and London Bridge, among other landmarks.)

About a dozen Ethical Society members stopped by or volunteered; and five or six took turns in front of the camera. “It’s been a long time since I’ve done anything with the Ethical Society except on Zoom,” said Chuck O’Neil. “I thought this would be a chance to see a few people and do some good.” Betsy Lightbourn got photographed to support immigrants and also those members who helped organize the event. But she was somewhat leery about seeing her picture displayed. “It’s too big, and I don’t want to be on the ground,” said Betsy. (She need not have worried. The wet weather foiled plans to post portraits on the sidewalk.)

Kate Esposito, characteristically, was all in. “I want to do anything at any point in time that shows I am in solidarity with immigrants, essential workers, folks not making enough money to survive, people of color, Black Lives Matter...all of it,” said Kate. “E Pluribus Unum. We are supposed to be one. A project like this really speaks to that.”

“I am so proud,” said Kate, “to be a member of the Ethical Society where we have welcomed this.”



UPCOMING EVENTS

Choose your exotic Zoom background
and join us at www.tiny.cc/phillyethics

Sunday, October 3, 7 PM

Introduction to Ethical Humanism

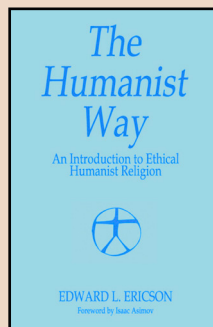
Join Hugh Taft-Morales for another introduction to Ethical Humanism. The informal session is particularly for newcomers, but all are welcome! This month Hugh discusses the connection between Ethical Culture and the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Monday, October 4 and 18, 7 PM

Fall Ethical Culture book discussion:

The Humanist Way by Ed Ericson

Hugh Taft-Morales continues his group exploration of *The Humanist Way*, by Ethical Culture Leader Ed Ericson. On October 4 we'll focus on chapter 3, about the forerunners of humanism. On October 18 we'll delve into chapter 4, which looks at the more modern expressions of humanism that developed within Ethical Culture societies. If you are unable to attend on October 4 or 18, email Hugh for information about alternative times for these discussions.



Tuesday, October 5 and 19, 11 AM

Discussion series: *On Good Behavior*

Join Hugh Taft-Morales and members of Friends in the City (FitC) for another series of "On Good Behavior." On October 5 we'll discuss "Being Wrong: The Virtues of Humility and Doubt." On October 19 the topic is "Being Mortal," with wisdom drawn from Atul Gawande's book of the same name.

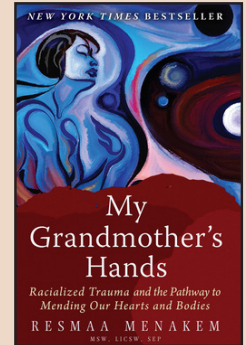


"In the midway of this our mortal life
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray"
The Inferno, by Dante Alighieri

Thursday, October 7, 7 PM

Circle series: *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem

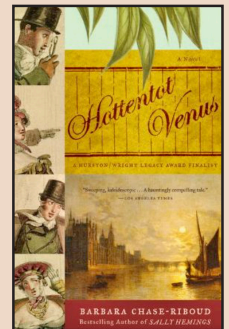
Members of the Baltimore and Philadelphia Ethical Societies are invited to join a five-session circle exploring *My Grandmother's Hands*, by psychotherapist and trauma specialist Resmaa Menakem. This book examines white supremacy in America from the perspective of trauma and body-centered psychology. Sarah Tielemans from the New York Ethical Society will host. (See an interview with Sarah on Page 5.) Registration deadline is October 4 at noon. To register, email Sarah at stielemans@aeu.org. Subsequent sessions, all held from 7 PM to 9 PM, are October 21, November 4, November 18, and December 2. Contact Hugh Taft-Morales for more information.



Tuesday, October 19, 5:30 PM

Book discussion: *Hottentot Venus* by Barbara Chase-Riboud

Join Hugh Taft-Morales for a discussion of Barbara Chase-Riboud's novel *Hottentot Venus*. It's the story of a resilient woman burdened by prejudices that follow her from a village in South Africa to a Europe that exoticizes and exploits her. As the *Washington Post* put it, Chase-Riboud "conjures the pain of some of the most sensitive and hurtful relations between the powerful and the powerless whatever their color, whatever their gender.... In this chilling and mournful novel, Chase-Riboud brings back to life a woman whose existence as a symbol has obscured her essence." We will discuss the book again on Tuesday, November 2 at 5:30 PM.



For information or to RSVP, please email Hugh Taft-Morales
at LeaderHugh@phillyethics.org



SUNDAY SERVICES

11 AM

Ethical Views is published monthly
except July and August.

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PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEES

Our Society is sustained by all of its volunteers who serve on the many committees that fulfill our purpose and guide our decisions. The following generous members serve as chairs of committees, which meet on the dates shown.

Board of Trustees
Michael Black-Smith
Sunday, Oct, 17, 6PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
No meeting this month

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, Oct. 27, 7 PM

Communications Committee
Drew Snyder
Wednesday, Oct, 20, 6PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, Oct. 6, 3 PM

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler
Saturday, Oct. 16, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
Denise Marx
Monday, Oct. 18, 3 PM

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, Oct. 13, 5 PM

Join all programs and meetings
at www.tiny.cc/phillyethics

For suggestions regarding this newsletter, contact Leigh Buchanan
leighebuchanan@gmail.com

Where's That?

Every month we challenge readers to identify a photo taken within a three-block radius of the Society building. We'll collect all the right answers and pull one out of a hat. The winner receives a \$10 gift card from the online store of Uncle Bobbie's Coffee & Books, a Black-owned business in Philly. Respond to leighebuchanan@gmail.com

Dr. Gwendolyn Blackshear won last month's contest. She identified the leopard statue at the side door of a pet store on the corner of 20th and Manning Streets.

