



# ETHICAL VIEWS



January 2022 Vol. 136, No. 5 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us



**Sunday, January 2, 11 AM**  
**Memorial Sunday**  
**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader,**  
**Philadelphia Ethical Society**

Our Memorial Sunday program celebrates the gifts bestowed by those who have died. You are invited to present a brief remembrance about a family member, friend, or famous person whose life taught valuable lessons or enriched you or the world in other ways. Consider sharing an object that represents the honored person: their favorite mug, a photo, a painting they did, or a book they liked.

**Sunday, January 9, 11 AM**  
**Embattled Freedom**  
**Jim Remsen, Author**

Remsen's book *Embattled Freedom* tells the remarkable true story of a group of enslaved men who escaped the South and settled in the author's hometown near Scranton. During the Civil War, the men joined the Union Army, returning South to fight for their people's freedom. The retired religion editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Remsen will reflect on the animosity those fugitives faced, the bravery and moral purpose they displayed, and the lessons learned by both him and his little hometown.



**Sunday, January 16, 11 AM**  
**The Beloved Community**  
**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

How can we overcome the divisiveness tearing at the fabric of our communities, especially surrounding racism and oppression? Martin Luther King Jr. proposed an answer: "the beloved community," founded on economic and social justice. While not unachievable, his vision demands daily inner discipline to remove the roadblocks

to love. Join Hugh as he explores "the beloved community," with sources ranging from King to pragmatic philosopher Josiah Royce to the Buddhist perspectives of Thich Nhat Hanh and Tara Brach.

*Be*loved  
Community

**Sunday, January 23, 11 AM**  
**Climate and Equity: Dodging Despair by Acting Locally to Tackle the Twin Global Crises of Our Time**  
**Amy Sinden, Temple University**

Climate and equity are inextricably linked. The climate crisis is both driving and driven by increasing disparities of wealth, income, power, and privilege and threatens to drive similar inequities across generations. The global scale of these twin crises can overwhelm us. But a focus on the local aspects can soothe us while also producing progress. Sinden writes and teaches in the areas of environmental, climate, and natural-resources law, and serves on the board of the Center for Progressive Reform. She has published widely in academic, public-policy, and popular outlets.



*Platforms continue on page 2*

## IN THIS ISSUE . . .

The joy of daily celebrations; Hollywood in the hallways; the trouble with "soul nerves;" and the unexpected connection between psychoanalysis and humanism.

### 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.*

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**Join us just prior to each session at [www.tiny.cc/phillyethics](http://www.tiny.cc/phillyethics)**

## FROM THE LEADER A New Year and Renewed Resolutions



By Hugh Taft-Morales

**A**T 64, I AM RECYCLING NEW YEAR'S resolutions. With so many years behind me, it's hard to come up with new annual commitments. So this year I'll reaffirm one resolution I've made before: that I will celebrate each day as a precious gift, while

working to make the world a little better with less suffering and more joy.

We set aside times for celebration or commemoration. At the Ethical Society, those include our Winter Solstice program and Memorial Sunday, when we remember those who have died. Lovely as such moments are, we should not constrain within them our expectations for joy, gratitude, and giving.

I remember as a child, after the presents were opened, collapsing on the floor amongst the crumpled wrapping paper and ribbon and sighing. "It's over." Now that I am definitely older and—perhaps—a little wiser, I care less about such bursts of frenetic festivity. Instead, I seek calm and more consistent appreciation. I know I shouldn't waste the simple gift that greets me each morning: another day.

Of course, it is difficult to leap into this daily celebration when life is hard and burdens are heavy. Some of you carry a lot on your shoulders. I appreciate that this call to gratitude sometimes feels out of reach. I hope our community can lift your spirits. I urge you to join me, join us, as we try to gather more often both

in person and on Zoom in 2022. Sometimes it takes a village to celebrate.

As members of the Ethical Society begin this year, may we together recommit to bring out the best in others and thus the best in ourselves. In honor of this effort, I'll end with one of my favorite poems; "Daily Celebration," by Jeanette V. Adams.

**Take off the tinsel  
See thru the cellophane  
Untie the ribbons  
Rip off the paper  
Get over the gifts  
Grasp the giving  
Look to the living  
See the how/why/who/where  
You are going  
Year after year  
Celebrate life  
Liberate love  
Every day every way you can  
Costs less than you think you can afford  
No cash/credit/welfare required  
Costs more than you can afford to ignore  
If you are to survive  
Take your hand out of your pocket...and extend  
Take your mind out of storage...and extend  
Take your heart out of hiding...and lend it  
To exposure back it up with your soul  
Celebrate life, liberate love  
EVERY day, every way...You can**

*Hugh Taft-Morales is the leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*

Platforms  
continued from  
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**Self-portrait**  
Signe Wilkinson

### Sunday, January 30, 11 AM **Ethically Sourced Cartoons** **Signe Wilkinson, Journalist**

Political cartoonist Wilkinson will share the highs and the *this-is-a-new-low-in-journalism-how-dare-you-publish-its* of her nearly 40-year career chronicling local and national politics for the *Philadelphia Daily News* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. In 2021, she illustrated the book *Free Speech and Why You Should Give a Damn*, written by Penn's Jonathan Zimmerman. Wilkinson will display her cartoons and take your questions and brickbats. If you'd like to see cartoons on particular issues, send those topics to [office@phillyethics.org](mailto:office@phillyethics.org) by January 21.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT    Our Society as Employer



By Michael Black-Smith

I AM PLEASED TO REPORT ON AN important Society development: the reconvening of two standing committees established in our bylaws. Among the more complex roles our Society plays is as an employer. Our revived

**Personnel Committee** will shape

and formalize employment policies and help answer questions about employee relationships as they arise. Doris Dabrowski, a longtime member and practicing employment attorney, has agreed to chair the committee on an as-needed basis.

Our focal employment relationship, of course, is with Hugh. It feels odd to think of Hugh as an employee. (I imagine him punching a philosophical time clock on his way to the ethical factory floor.) But he is one; and as such he and the Society have obligations to one another. This often informal but nuanced relationship is now the purview of our **Leader Advisory Committee**. Temma Fishman, Denise Marx, and Chuck O'Neil have agreed to serve as liaisons between our

leader and the membership. Together, the Personnel and Leader Advisory committees have begun to clarify Hugh's duties and compensation to keep us all happy and productive in the years to come.

Moving to the resumption of in-person events: we are all balancing the benefits of closeness with the changing risks of proximity on a personal level. Our Board is doing so on an organizational one. Given the ever-shifting landscape, I will keep you apprised of decisions through our email lists so that the information is up to date.

Finally, progress continues on the *Our Path Forward* plan. In Operations, the Board is working on recommended standards for committee documentation. Committee chairs will join that conversation shortly. Our community life coordinator, Reva, is preparing for an organizational meeting of the Community Committee. That is an important first step for the Volunteers and Membership parts of the plan.

As always, feel free to contact me with any concerns.

*Michael Black-Smith is the president of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*

## BEHIND THE SCENES    Lights, Camera, Action

by Cheryl Desmond

LAST FALL AT THE ETHICAL SOCIETY, WE WERE "BEHIND the scenes" in more ways than one, thanks to several film-related public events and private rentals.

In October, actor Nick Nolte made local headlines when he came to town to film the movie *Rittenhouse*, in which he plays a homeless man living in Rittenhouse Square. For six weekdays the production crew rented the large rooms in the Ethical Society as a base for extras, meals, and wardrobe. The newly refurbished Community Room was among the spaces used. I might add that Nolte was spotted in the Square, although not in our building.

Next, Jersey Style Films teamed up with Philadelphia Juneteenth to show trailers for *The Knights of Graterford* to investors in our auditorium. *Knights*, which is currently in pre-production, is the true story of award-winning 1970s funk band Power of Attorney, whose members were serving life sentences at Graterford Prison.

Then Philadelphia Jewish Film and Media (formerly the Jewish Film Festival) screened several films in our auditorium as part of its annual fall series held at locations around the region. *The Conductor*, a documentary directed by Bernadette Wegenstein; and the shorts *An Unorthodox Education* and *We Made Matzah Balls for the Revolution*, received public, in-person showings.

Most recently, our building was actually in the movies! Bravo Studios, based in New York, is producing a documentary about classical pianist Haochen Zhang, who moved from China to Philadelphia to study at the Curtis Institute of Music. In November, the production company spent a day on-site filming Zhang playing our fine Steinway piano; in another scene he was interviewed. While Zhang is the film's star, our lovely, light-filled auditorium windows enhanced the scene in a supporting role.

*Cheryl Desmond is the administrator of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*



By Doris Leicher

**M**Y FAVORITE DEFINITION OF ETHICS APPEARED IN THE Jewish publication *Tikkun*, which described it as “the art of proper relations.” Even as a child I struggled to establish such relations in a family challenged by incidences of bipolar disorder and the stresses brought on when one expected child turns out to be twins. As one of those twins, I was also intrigued by questions of fairness and balance. From childhood I determined to devote my life to tending to others’ emotional needs.

Against my parents’ objections I studied psychology and, later, Modern Psychoanalysis. Modern Psychoanalysis posits the root of mental illness not in sexual conflicts but rather in excessive, early, unexpressed frustration. Such patients fear that if their anger breaks through they will kill off all of their relationships and become isolated—virtually shunned. That triggers existential fear, especially in children. Consequently, people take out their anger on themselves to protect those relationships.

I found in the practice of psychoanalysis, then, a way to further the Ethical Culture goal of building strong relationships. (I had been introduced to the Philadelphia Ethical Society in the late 1980s by my husband, Howard Peer.) I would help people discharge their anger in non-destructive ways and learn to win over others who can help them pursue socially constructive goals.

Working with clients was both challenging and satisfying, sometimes in surprising ways. I became curious about some clients who made me furious.

Trying to maintain my analytic stance, I forced myself to imagine a situation where the position they had taken that made me so angry was appropriate. Usually, I was able to find one. That experiment produced two interesting results. First, I found I had often correctly identified an actual life experience of the patient. Second, I realized that I had learned lessons opposite to theirs from some events in my own life.

From that mind experiment, I concluded that feelings are very important. But they are not “facts.” Rather, they are more like music, which we may or may not like but is never “wrong.” My work also taught me the role played by emotions in strengthening social relationships. Many of us Ethical Humanists have an Enlightenment bias toward reason as opposed to emotion. Emotions, after all, have been manipulated by assorted elites with very bad results. But emotions are part of our evolutionary heritage. We need to socialize them so emotion and reason work together.

More recently I have gotten excited about new research into consciousness, which begins in structures in the brainstem and is tied in with emotions. That means that we share consciousness with other animals, which greatly expands the range of those we should treat ethically and perhaps even engage as ethical partners. It is nice to see yourself as part of a gigantic symphony of life. Our ethical objective becomes “live and let live.” It is a grand balancing act that assures we will never be bored!

*Doris Leicher is a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society*

### HUMANIST HUMOR

**“I recall the story of the philosopher and the theologian... The two were engaged in disputation, and the theologian used the old quip about a philosopher resembling a blind man, in a dark room, looking for a black cat, which wasn’t there. ‘That may be,’ said the philosopher, ‘but a theologian would have found it.’”**

**~ Julian Huxley, evolutionary biologist**

## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### The Trauma We Inherit

By John Marshall

**L**AST FALL, I PARTICIPATED IN A FIVE-SESSION Philadelphia Ethical Society workshop discussing a book entitled *My Grandmother's Hands*, by Resmaa Menakem, a trauma therapist. This book explores the ancestral and generational trauma experienced by both Black and white families. Menakem argues that trauma is held in the body rather than in the conscious mind. If trauma does not reside in the mind, then we can't "logic our way out of racism," to use Menakem's words.

Christian Hayden, who was facilitating the workshop, explained that before it reaches the conscious brain, trauma hits people through what the author calls the "soul nerve," which extends from the stomach to the brain stem. The soul nerve triggers the fight-or-flight response that—if not checked—can lead to bad, too-often deadly consequences. For example, a white body or a police body may experience discomfort in the proximity of a Black person. If the soul nerve interprets that discomfort as a lack of safety, then the body may react with violence. To avoid that, we must heal our bodies so that we are more open and less afraid of one another across racial lines.

Black and white people must do their own work to identify and heal trauma. Throughout the book, Menakem provides exercises for "settling" the body, which he describes as a process of tempering and conditioning. Practitioners move away from experiencing "dirty pain" (responding from fear, with blame and avoidance) to "clean pain" (responding with integrity, in a way that produces growth).

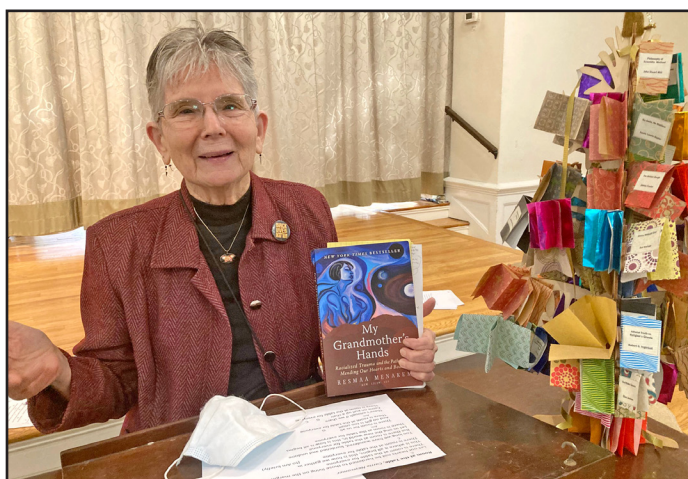
During the workshop, we shared our understanding of the bodily trauma passed down to each of us and then passed by us to the next generation. I'd like to share my own story as a white person. My mother's ancestors lived in Alsace-Lorraine, a region long contested by Germany and France. From 1847 to 1855, ethnic and economic unrest caused a mass German migration to the United States. My mother's ancestors were part of that migration.

After World War 1, my mother's family ran a successful business in a town north of Pittsburgh. Her grandfather forced the family to move to an abandoned farm, where they suffered hardships. My mother experienced body trauma there. I believe that that trauma was passed down to me, and that I express it as anxiety and procrastination.

I was in college during the Vietnam War and received an exemption from the draft. Bombarded by media coverage of the casualties suffered by less privileged combatants during an increasingly dubious conflict, I experienced guilt. I turned to alcohol to settle my body, and my grades suffered. Fortunately, I soon stopped the alcohol. But the trauma of that guilt in my life and in my body still affects me.

My understanding of Ethical Humanism gained from the Ethical Society helped settle my body during the pandemic and recent period of political polarization. Now I have a solid foundation for healing my body trauma. Thanks to the lessons from *My Grandmother's Hands*, I am continuing to learn and to heal.

*John Marshall is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force of the Philadelphia Ethical Society*



**Reporting live:** Sylvia Metzler—flanked by a diminutive Tree of Knowledge—delivered the first in-person Ethical Action Report in 21 months on December 5.



## Many Returns of the Season



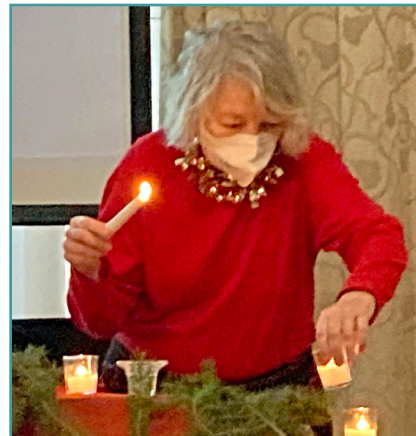
**A few more humans at our humanist platforms!** Betsy Lightbourn, Dan Hoffman, and Stan Horwitz enjoyed sweet treats provided by Community Life Coordinator Reva Stover on December 5.



**Sign of the season:** Hugh Taft-Morales urged members to lean into both darkness and light at the annual Solstice platform on December 19.



**What are friends for?** When Sally Redlener needed an assist setting up her Christmas tree, Doris Dabrowski and Stan Horwitz answered the call. Sally rewarded them with a home-cooked dinner of salad, salmon fillets, risotto, and apple pie.



**Here comes the sun:** Kate Esposito assisted with the light to celebrate the Solstice.



**Camp Linden is still giving:** Sharon Wallis passed out produce from the Camp Linden garden on December 5. (That's Sally Redlener scoring some colorful carrots.)





# UPCOMING EVENTS

With one exception, Hugh won't teach the usual roster of classes this month so he can take time to reimagine his approach to educational opportunities. However, he will host a program in tandem with the Center City Residents Association and is kicking off a series of gatherings to foster personal connection. Read more below.

**Sunday, January 2, 7-8:15 PM**

## **Introduction to Ethical Humanism**

Be part of a small group conversation, led by Hugh Taft-Morales, about our Ethical Society community, history, and philosophy. This informal Zoom gathering is open to everyone

**Sunday, January 16, 12:30 PM**

## **Inaugural Community Committee meeting**

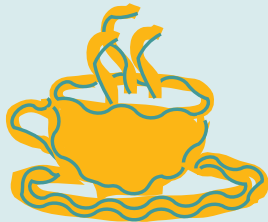


The Community Committee is back in action, putting the fun in Ethical Humanism! Help us begin the planning process for Humanist Holidays, Members Only events, volunteer celebrations, new-member welcomes, and more! Chat, laugh, and forge our fun and festive future over refreshments. No

idea is too big or too small, and we can't wait to hear them all! The meeting takes place after coffee hour. If you attend the platform at the building, then you can participate in-person. Otherwise, join the conversation via Zoom. If you have questions or care to learn more about the Community Committee, reach out to Community Life Coordinator Reva Stover at [revaclc@phillyethics.org](mailto:revaclc@phillyethics.org).

## **Dates throughout January** **Tea Circles**

Hugh seeks hosts for a series of "tea circles," either in-person for fully vaccinated Society members or on Zoom. He may host some gatherings at the Ethical Society and, when possible, join others at members' homes. The purpose of these informal get-togethers is to renew connections and create new ones, including with recently joined members. Hosts of in-person events will set health parameters (number of guests, social distancing, and mask requirements) and provide tea (or coffee, or whatever). Zoom hosts just invite folks.



Please email [LeaderHugh@phillyethics.org](mailto:LeaderHugh@phillyethics.org) if you are willing to host virtually or in-person on January 2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, or 19.

## **Sense in the City**

### **A Zoom discussion series with the Center City Residents' Association**

**Wednesdays, January 19, February 9 and 23, March 9 and 23, 12-1:30 PM**

How can citizens nurture constructive dialogue that respects everyone and helps make our society more equitable and inclusive? How can we live more meaningful, engaged, and responsible lives? Join Hugh Taft-Morales, leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, on Zoom for a series of guided conversations about community, difference, and justice. Hugh will offer a humanist perspective about our ethical and personal challenges, followed by whole- and small-group conversations. Come share what inner resources, spiritual traditions, or behavioral habits help you live more fully and fairly when navigating life in Philadelphia.

### **First session: Public Spaces and Thoroughfares (January 19)**

In an increasingly privatized world, how can public spaces become welcoming and inclusive oases open to people of all backgrounds and identities? Why are what sociology professor Elijah Anderson calls "cosmopolitan canopies" so important? How can thoughtful urban design and lighting improve our town squares? How do pedestrians, bicycles, and cars navigate our shared thoroughfares?

For links to all Zoom sessions, visit the calendar section of our web site at [phillyethics.org/events](https://phillyethics.org/events)



## SUNDAY SERVICES

11 AM

*Ethical Views* is published monthly  
except July and August.

*Executive Editor*, Leigh Buchanan  
*Copy Editor*, Henry Pashkow  
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Philadelphia Ethical Society  
1906 South Rittenhouse Square  
Philadelphia, PA 19103

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(215) 735 - 3456  
[office@phillyethics.org](mailto:office@phillyethics.org)  
[www.phillyethics.org](http://www.phillyethics.org)

## 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 the committees, which meet on the dates shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Contact [office@phillyethics.org](mailto:office@phillyethics.org). Join meetings at [www.tiny.cc/phillyethics](http://www.tiny.cc/phillyethics)

**Board of Trustees**  
**Michael Black-Smith**  
Sunday, January 16, 6 PM

**Building Committee**  
**Michael Black-Smith**  
Tuesday, January 25, 5:15 PM

**Camp Linden Committee**  
**Jeffrey Dubb**  
Wednesday, January 26, 5 PM

**Communications Committee**  
**Drew Snyder**  
Wednesday, January 19, 6 PM

**Community Committee**  
**Reva Stover**  
Sunday, January 16, 12:30 PM

**Education Committee**  
**Betsy Lightbourn**  
Wednesday, January 5, 3 PM

**Ending Racism Task Force**  
**Sylvia Metzler**  
Saturday, January 15, 11 AM

**Ethical Action Committee**  
**Denise Marx**  
Thursday, January 20, 3 PM

**Finance Committee**  
**Nick Sanders**  
Wednesday, January 12, 5 PM

For suggestions regarding this  
newsletter, email Leigh Buchanan  
[leighebuchanan@gmail.com](mailto:leighebuchanan@gmail.com)

## Where's That?

Every month we challenge  
readers to identify a sign, scene,  
or architectural detail within a  
three-block radius of the  
Philadelphia Ethical Society.

We'll collect all the right  
answers and pull one out of a  
hat. The winner receives a \$10  
gift card for the online store of  
Uncle Bobbie's Coffee & Books, a  
Black-owned business in Philly.

Respond to  
[leighebuchanan@gmail.com](mailto:leighebuchanan@gmail.com)

Dr. Gwendolyn Blackshear won last month's  
contest. She identified the Neptune spout in  
the fountain in Rittenhouse Square.

