



ETHICAL VIEWS



June 2022 Vol. 136, No. 10 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Summer Sundays on the Square

This summer, the Philadelphia Ethical Society will offer a series of informal but stimulating programs showcasing the talents and interests of our members, coordinated through the Education Committee. While we miss our home on Rittenhouse Square—where we seek to become informed, inspired, and engaged—our virtual stage continues on Zoom with these June Sunday platforms. For July and August platforms, check your *Weekly Bulletin*.

Sunday, June 5, 11 AM

Exploring the Architecture of Our Building

Michael Black-Smith, President

Philadelphia Ethical Society



Mike will share some of the history of 1906 Rittenhouse Square that he has discovered, cleaned off, and polished-up while working on our historic home. Mike trained and worked as a preservation architect and still carries a love of the built environment and appreciation for the craftsmanship of older buildings.

Sunday, June 19, 11 AM

Recognition of Juneteenth

Aissia Richardson,

Director of Outreach and

Community Development

Office of State Senator

Sharif Street

Aissia will talk about the successful campaign to have Juneteenth recognized as a statewide holiday and the ongoing effort to make it a paid day off of work.



Sunday, June 26, 11 AM

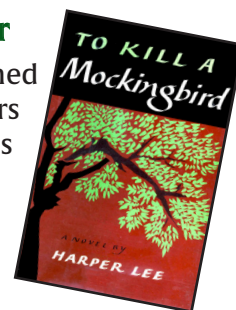
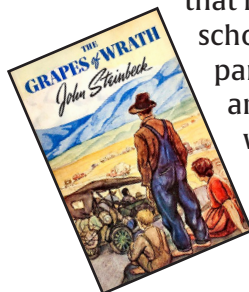
Banned Books, Now and Then

Betsy Lightbourn, Prolific Reader

Betsy, a long-time consumer of banned books, will enlist a panel of reviewers to discuss 20th and 21st century titles

that have fallen afoul of school administrations, parents, librarians, and politicians. These

worthwhile—sometimes classic—books have been pilloried for strong language, and racial, ethnic, and homophobic slurs as well as descriptions of sex, violence, or other “immoral” content.



Sunday, June 12, 11 AM

“Musical Something”

Bob Steinfert,

Professional Musician

At press time, Bob (aka Robert Edwin) had no idea what he will present. But knowing Bob's musical virtuosity, we're sure it will be entertaining and informative.



► ***Where They'll Be***

To attend platforms on Zoom, join us just prior to each session at www.tiny.cc/phillyethics. July and August are uncharted territory at this writing, so check your *Weekly Bulletin* for platform updates.

On the banner: Sunflower, beloved symbol of Ukrainian national identity. Photo by Fir0002

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Should we shake up our Sunday programs? How a beloved summer rite perpetuates a deadly form of racism. A volunteer helps out at a medical clinic in Honduras.

FROM THE LEADER Creativity and the Future of Ethical Culture

By Hugh Taft-Morales

ON MAY 8, THE ETHICAL SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS HOSTED the provocatively titled Sunday program, “Does Ethical Culture have a Future?” In the presentation, which more than 180 people from Ethical Societies around the country attended via the internet, Leader James Croft made three points. First, Ethical Culture’s membership numbers are shrinking. As a movement we are doing something wrong and must change. Second, we need to learn from those who know how to grow congregational movements. Third, we must be more creative, especially regarding Ethical Societies’ main public gatherings: our Sunday morning programs.

While I agree with all James’s points, I want to focus on that last one, about creativity. It interests me because I LOVE creativity. I adore making music, enjoy doodling, and relish constructing absurd puns. My vocation involves crafting essays and talks that help us all think in new and unusual ways.

So why, I ask myself, am I resistant to shaking up our Sunday morning program? Did I inherit a more conservative mindset than I care to admit? Does my inclination to make people feel comfortable override my impulse to experiment? Or am I reacting to what I perceive as a resistance to change in our community? Most likely, it’s a bit of all three.

Despite my nine-month-a-year contract, I have worked much of the last two summers helping our community survive pandemic times. This summer, however, I am going to travel, refuel, write, and contemplate more creative approaches to Ethical Culture.

I will ponder more deeply James’s suggestion that we envision our programs less as an opportunity to explain intellectually the precepts and implications of Ethical Culture and more as a chance to create a welcoming, inspiring, interpersonal, and emotional experience. What secular rituals might appeal to both our skeptical, rationalist members and to folks seeking an emotionally fulfilling non-theist community?

I will also consider how to share creatively our community *outside* of Sunday meetings. What service opportunities and fun events can we offer that express our values, like Ruth Dubinsky and Reva Stover’s Women’s History Month celebration in March? How can we spread our message via videos, podcasts, and



Shaking up Sunday morning: Veronica Hudson vibes player extraordinaire, filled the Society auditorium with ethereal sounds before a recent platform.

an upgraded online presence? What’s the best way to foster more vibrant relationships with our Rittenhouse neighborhood and the city of Philadelphia?

So, I will spend a couple of months thinking about creative change. But I also want to recommit to what originally drew me to Ethical Culture: opportunities to build—in person—ethical relationships that inspire us to live closer to our ethical ideals. I hope that every time we enter our community space, we recognize the irreplaceable, unique, and inherent worth of every person present.

I don’t want to put ideas first. I want to build relationships *inspired* by the ideas and values we all hold dear.

I hope you have time this summer to shift gears. I look forward to playfully creative conversations in September that suggest fresh perspectives and unexpected possibilities. And maybe, if I can recharge my own batteries, I will be bolder about pursuing those possibilities and creatively growing Ethical Culture.

Hugh Taft-Morales is the Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

ADVENTURES IN VOLUNTEERING A Clinic for La Entrada

By Garry O'Rourke

In 2003, A GOOD FRIEND FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND HIS partner went to Honduras to do volunteer work. Both were dentists, and they had spent years traveling and volunteering in some of the world's most impoverished regions. My friend's partner was about to retire, and he wanted to do something for Honduras, which was among the poorest places they had seen.

The partner and a guy he knew from Astra Zeneca decided to start a medical and dental clinic in La Entrada, a town of about 2,000 people. At first, they worked out of a rented office. But after a few years they outgrew it and raised money to build a state-of-the-art facility about 10 miles outside of town. I spoke Spanish, so in 2008 I made my first trip to Honduras as a volunteer translator.

A lot of nonprofits will go into some under-served area with a we-know-best attitude. My friends' organization, which is called **Serving at the Crossroads**, wants to hear the true needs of the people they help. There are boards of directors both here in the United States and in Honduras; and great deference is paid to the board in Honduras.

The needs are immense. On my first trip we were talking to staff at hospitals and dental offices. There were women in labor lying two to a bed. They didn't have good labs so they could barely get basic blood work done.

I met a Honduran dentist who told me that while he was in school, at times, he didn't have enough money to buy food. He promised that if he made it through then he would practice in the poorest parts of the country. So, he bought a portable dental chair and two horses. He tied the dental chair to one horse and rode the other into the mountains to treat people there.

I also helped with some of the bureaucratic stuff. Officials from the town would come out to ask questions about what was going on, and I would translate. There was a large bakery that employed a lot of people. The baker was a big help in cutting through red tape.

By 2010, construction on Manos Amigas Clinic was done. I went down again, mostly to help assemble

medical and dental equipment. The clinic provides primary care seven days a week and offers oxygen therapy for severe wounds. They do everything from eye exams to root canals. There is an on-site pharmacy so patients can get hard-to-obtain medications.

I made two more trips to Honduras, in 2012 and 2014. By that time the clinic was fully operational. I would travel down with brigades of dentists from the United States, including oral surgeons and endodontists. Those specialties are in short supply locally. I would translate among the American dentists, Honduran dentists, and patients. Brigades of other medical specialists also made the trip, for example, general surgeons and ophthalmologists.

By 2019, the clinic had had 180,000 patient visits. People would come in who had suffered from toothaches for months. For some it was their first time seeing a dentist. You don't realize how good you have it until you see how things are in other parts of the world. I think every American should spend some time in a developing country. The experience inspired me to do Habitat for Humanity in Guatemala.

I always say I want to go back to Honduras some day before I die.

Garry O'Rourke is a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.



A social denture: Garry helped Honduran dentists at the clinic talk to their American counterparts.

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

How Swimming Pools Perpetuated Racism

By Sylvia Metzler

THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE ENCOURAGES everyone to visit *POOL: A Social History of Segregation*, on display at the Fairmount Water Works, near the Philadelphia Museum of Art. *POOL* weaves together history, site-specific artwork, storytelling, scholarship, and place-based learning to illuminate the history of segregated swimming in America. The exhibit investigates the role of public pools in our communities, deepening our understanding of the connections among water, social justice, and health.

The ERTF organized two group trips to the exhibit. There, we learned how a sunny summer pastime once enforced and—to this day—perpetuates the injustices of racism. Safety issues are key. Generations of Black people in America did not learn to swim because of segregation at pools and beaches. Many communities chose to drain rather than integrate public pools, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court in 1971.

The consequences are intergenerational. A USA Swimming Foundation study shows that if parents do not know how to swim, then there is only a 13% chance their children will learn. Black children, not surprisingly, have a much higher rate of accidental drowning than white children. In Pennsylvania, the rate is 50% higher: 1.2 drowning deaths per 100,000 population for Black children versus 0.8 per 100,000 for white children. That disparity has remained unchanged for more than 20 years.



A courageous stroke: Mamie Livingston (right) led efforts to desegregate Baltimore's public pools by seeking admission to a whites-only pool near her home.

POOL inspired a conversation between me and my ERTF co-chair, Erik Younge, about our own experiences growing up. I am white. Erik is Black. At an early age I took swimming lessons at the Flanders Pool in Ocean City, New Jersey. Not only were Black people not allowed, they also were barred from all the local beaches except one, referred to as the “colored beach.” At home in suburban Philadelphia, I swam every summer in a nearby community pool. It charged a nominal membership fee of about 50 cents, which we all understood was intended to “keep the colored out.” My high school had a pool and a swim team, though I was not involved.

Today I am a fairly strong swimmer and do laps every week in our pool here at the Philadelphia Protestant Home (PPH). My three children learned to swim when young and still enjoy the sport.

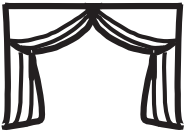
Erik, by contrast, never had formal swimming lessons. As a child in South Philadelphia, he cooled off during hot summer months beneath the spray of a fire hydrant. His local public pool set aside a few hours each day for “colored people.” But few took advantage for fear they might accidentally stay past the allotted time and get beaten up as a result. The Christian Street YMCA did welcome Black swimmers; but Erik’s high school had no pool.

As a result, Erik says, to this day he is “very cautious around water.” Fortunately, Erik’s three children can swim. And they are making sure his three grandchildren take lessons. I’m so glad his family has beaten the odds!

I’m also glad that the children who attend the Philadelphia Ethical Society’s Camp Linden have access to a wonderful pool and swimming lessons.

Recently, a friend who observed me swimming in our PPH pool asked if I had ever considered entering the Senior Games. While I don’t plan to become a competitive swimmer at age 84, I’m glad that I would have a fighting chance to survive a boating accident. Would Erik? Is this another example of my white privilege?

*Sylvia Metzler is the co-chairperson of the Ending Racism Task Force. The exhibit *POOL* runs through September and is free of charge*



BEHIND THE SCENES

A Reminder and an Update

by Cheryl Desmond



LAST MONTH IN *ETHICAL VIEWS*, OUR president, Mike Black-Smith, was eloquent about our need for conversation. He urged us to better manage our communication in the digital world, where nuance so often is difficult or even missing.

So, this month, I am taking the opportunity to remind you that we at the Philadelphia Ethical Society can stay informed and connected in many ways. They include *Ethical Views*, the newsletter; PhillyEthics.org, the web site (especially the home and events pages for the latest news); *The Weekly Bulletin*; and the Members' Listserv. If you are missing out on any of these communications, please contact the office.

Briefly updating some of my recent columns: the

refurbished Community Room now has a small upright piano, making it even more useful for rehearsals and artist warm-ups. The Auditorium has a brand-new air-conditioning system. And the contractor is installing an ultra-violet germicidal system in the ductwork that kills viruses and bacteria as air circulates.

Finally, to my disappointment, not one person has contacted me to learn more about the Philadelphia Foundation as a way to support the Society. (See "Behind the Scenes" in our [April newsletter](#).) Consider this a gentle reminder. It's a great opportunity!

Have a wonderful summer!

Cheryl Desmond is the administrator of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

GRAY AREAS Should We Expand the Supreme Court?

EVERY SO OFTEN WE PRESENT MEMBERS WITH A QUESTION ON which Ethical Humanists might reasonably differ. With the potential demise of *Roe v. Wade*, it seems like a good time to ask, should we expand the Supreme Court?

I am beginning to feel that the only way we can balance our Supreme Court is to add more justices. Our country's population has grown exponentially over the years, so that nine justices cannot represent the diversity of the American people. I also question two things. First, given the deceitful confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh, how is his seat not challenged? Second, how can a lifetime position, which is based solely on the premise of impartiality, be offered to justices who have stated agendas?

— Rhoda Forté

Yes. And we should do the same to all the lower federal court districts—to at least 21 justices each. That way no ideological bloc can sway decisions. It would also speed up the long queues of pending cases.

— Stan Horwitz

I believe there is presently an impossibility of achieving a balanced debate on any issue before the Supreme Court because the Court is influenced by people who rigidly follow religious doctrine. We need justices who don't adhere to a predetermined opinion. We have no choice but to increase the number of justices so there is a legal and intellectual chance of fairness for all.

— Diann Brown

Expanding the Supreme Court would set a bad precedent. Whenever there is a decision that the current majority party doesn't like, it can simply expand or shrink the Court or delay its approval of new justices. Better to pass a law or Constitutional amendment to implement changes. I suggest we keep nine judges serving 18-year terms, with one term ending every two years. That makes it difficult for either party to control the court's decisions by changing the number of judges to favor itself. Allowing parties to manipulate the size and the makeup of the Supreme Court just politicizes it.

— Chuck O'Neil



BART WORDEN WANTS TO HEAR your story. The American Ethical Union's executive director will be in Philadelphia on June 14 as part of a whistle-stop tour that will take him, by year's end, to all 23 Societies. He invites Philly members to come tell him what's on their minds. *Ethical Views* asked Worden about his visit here.

What do you hope to get from this trip?

For many people, the AEU is a foreign body. They don't think anyone in the national office is engaged with the cares and wonders of members at the local level. This is an opportunity to collect narratives about people's lives with their Ethical Societies. The AEU is looking to make a plan for the future that meets the needs of our members. Having a rich sense of the experiences people care about will help the leadership in their efforts.

What are those "cares and wonders" you mentioned?

Concerns about changes at their Societies. A number of Societies have reported struggles with their Ethics for Children programs. There's a sense that membership is not growing or that it's declining. Concerns about not enough people stepping up to do the kinds of work needed.

On the other hand, people have strong connections with their Societies. They are pleased to have a community to do things with. They feel there is a purposeful quality to what the Society does. That there are opportunities for leadership and doing good works.

There's been a recent surge of concern around racial injustice. Do you expect to see signs of that?

Traditionally, members have bemoaned the fact that people of color weren't attending their meetings. With 2020 there is a greater realization that our groups are participating in a culture that is kind of exclusive. I hope

to see members getting comfortable being in other spaces where people of color are and are able to talk about that experience.

The other big change is the incorporation of Zoom. What might you see there?

What's happening in Westchester may be a good example. A number of people felt so strongly that we need to focus on being in person that the Zoom community is getting shorter shrift. We are having food again, trying to do enjoyable things in the building. More than half our folks now are in the room Sunday mornings. But with Zoom we've brought back people who had moved away or not participated regularly. We have folks that are not very mobile or didn't want to be vaccinated. So, we have something for everyone. But it doesn't please anyone fully.

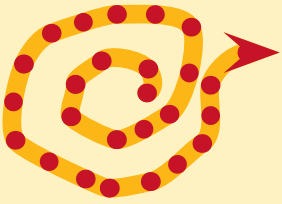
When we started you said you hoped to collect people's narratives about their connections to their Societies. What kinds of narratives?

The most frequent one I hear is the origin story. People's first visit to an Ethical Society. For me, it brings to mind how often we are open hearts looking for other open hearts. Those are the stories I treasure the most.

HUMANIST HUMOR

"Saying spirituality cannot exist without religion is like saying hamburgers cannot exist without McDonald's."

~ Steven Barnes, writer



UPCOMING EVENTS



Some in-person events may migrate to Zoom, for obvious reasons. Know before you go, people.

Sunday, June 5, 4 PM

Book Discussion: *Unthinkable: Trauma, Truth, and the Trials of American Democracy* by Jamie Raskin.

Part 3 in our continuing discussion of this important book. Learn the inside story of Donald Trump's second impeachment trial, skillfully managed by U.S Representative Raskin. [Email](#) Hugh if you plan to attend in-person. Or tune in via [Zoom](#).

Sunday June 5, 7 PM

Introduction to Ethical Humanism

The session, Hugh's last for the season, is titled "What Ethical Culture Means to Me." We'll ask members to present elevator pitches on that subject. Those new to Ethical Culture can ask questions. We'll meet in the Leader's office: wine and cheese will be served. Please RSVP to Hugh via [email](#).

Monday, June 6, 7-8:30 PM

An Ethical Lens: *Justice and the Constitution* with Kim Roosevelt

Join Hugh Taft-Morales in a conversation with preeminent law professor Roosevelt. Roosevelt will discuss the arc of American Constitutional history with a focus on rights violations by the U.S. government, such as the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII and the detention of accused enemy combatants at Guantanamo. Fully vaccinated people are invited to this in-person program. (Please wear a mask.) Participation via Zoom and/or Facebook Live may be available.

Tuesday, June 14, Time TBA

A Sit-Down with Bart Worden

Bart Worden, executive director of the American Ethical Union, touches down in Philadelphia as part of his whistle-stop tour of the nation's Ethical Societies. Come meet him at our building and talk about your experience with the Philadelphia congregation. (See related article, Page 6)

Wednesday, June 15, 7 PM

Deep Convos: Mortality, Love, and Purpose

Christian Hayden will lead this three-part, deep-sharing exercise that explores both deep questions and the difficulty of dealing with them. Guided conversations will take place in large and small groups. The goals are experimentation and community-building. Subsequent sessions are

scheduled, tentatively, for **July 6** and **August 19**, at 7 PM. Attending all three is strongly recommended. All sessions are both in-person and on [Zoom](#).)

Saturday, June 18, 9 AM

Poor People's March

A delegation from the Philadelphia Ethical Society will travel to D.C. for The Poor People's and Low-Wage Workers' Assembly and Moral March on Washington and to the Polls. Protestors aim to raise the political will to address the interlocking injustices that plague this country. To join our group, [email](#) Sylvia Metzler.

Sunday, July 3, 7 PM

Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Christian Hayden conducts this class, in-person and on [Zoom](#). A second session will be on **August 7**, 7 PM.

Sunday, July 10, noon-5 PM

Summer Picnic at Camp Linden

Join us for the annual Philadelphia Ethical Society picnic and cookout at Camp Linden! Activities include socializing, swimming, and eating. Also on tap: folk-singing, outdoor games, and tours of the property. Recommended contribution for the picnic is \$15 for adults and teenagers. Children 12 and under are free. We provide hot dogs, hamburgers, veggie burgers, fixings, soft drinks, and beer. Participants are encouraged to bring a dessert or side dish to share. Rain date is **July 17**.

Tuesday, July 26, 4 PM

July Book Discussion: *How to Be Animal, a New History of What It Means to be Human* by Melanie Challenger

Challenger, a chronicler of natural and environmental history, tackles deep questions about what life is and why it matters. At the heart of our psychology, she argues, is a profound struggle with being animal. Christian Hayden will lead the discussion, both in-person and on [Zoom](#).

Where to Find Us

All links to Zoom sessions appear in the event descriptions on the [calendar section](#) of our web site.

All in-person events take place at the Philadelphia Ethical Society at 1906 Rittenhouse Square.



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. Committees meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org. Join meetings at www.tiny.cc/phillyethics

Board of Trustees
Michael Black-Smith
No meeting this month

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
No meeting this month

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
No meeting this month

Community Committee
Ruth Dubinsky
Sunday, June 19, 12:30 PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
No meeting this month

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, June 25, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
Open Chair
Thursday, June 16, 3 PM

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, June 8, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
No meeting this month

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



Pondering progressivism: City Councilmember-at-Large Helen Gym said she entered politics in 2015 not because she reflected a moment but because she wanted to change a moment. In an Ethical Lens event at the Society on May 23, Gym told Hugh Taft-Morales that she would rather be defined by her work than by the label “progressive,” slapped on her by others. As a politician, Gym sees her responsibility as bringing people “who have long been neglected, unloved or marginalized” back into the embrace of society. “Populism minus morality can be a mob,” said Gym. But “progressivism, as a political ideology, minus the people is hollow.”