



ETHICAL VIEWS

April 2023 Vol. 137, No. 8 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, April 2, 11 AM

Reflections on the Philosophy of Richard Kiniry

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Philadelphia Ethical Society



Richard Kiniry (1943-2019) served the Philadelphia Ethical Society for 20 years. He was a beloved self-described curmudgeon and a philosopher. Though thoroughly naturalistic and deeply skeptical, Richard promoted Ethical Humanism as a religious response to a broken world.

In preparation for a celebration of Richard's life on April 15, Hugh reflects on aspects of

his philosophy, particularly "Ethical Humanism as a Religious Approach." This talk will explore Richard's insights about consumerism, capitalism, human nature, and more.

Sunday, April 9, 11 AM

Resurrecting Poetry

Anne Klaeysen

New York Society for Ethical Culture



Today is Easter Sunday, a reminder that belief in the power of miracles can change lives. This is also National Poetry Month, a celebration of the comparable power of poetry. As poet Jane Hirshfield put it, "Poetry is the attempt to understand fully what is real, what is present, what is imaginable, what is feelable, and how can I loosen the grip of what I already know to

find some new, changed relationship." Anne Klaeysen, Leader Emerita of the New York Society for Ethical Culture and humanist chaplain at Columbia and New York Universities, will share poems that celebrate life and instill hope.

Sunday, April 16, 11 AM

Intuition and Leaps of Faith

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Many who adopt a naturalistic, rational perspective to life feel uncomfortable acting on anything other than evidence and reason. Ethical Culture does not dabble in supernaturalism; and leaning too hard into the irrational is unwise. Yet some aspects of experience that exist beyond reason enrich our lives. Think of love, beauty, and even ethics, all of which touch something in us untethered to the stake of science. A generally rational Hugh explores his interest in intuition and leaps of faith.

Sunday, April 23, 11 AM

Camp Linden at Rittenhouse Square

Camp Linden Committee

The Children's Summer Program at Camp Linden, the Society's major community-service project, introduces inner-city children to the wonders of nature through a program of environmental education and swimming at our property in rural Chester County. Learn about its impact and experience highlights of our engaging environmental curriculum. Retrieve nectar (candy) from a model flower! Watch a flying pig demonstrate solar energy! We will adjourn to Rittenhouse Square for the camp's closing ritual: donning animal hats and bouncing an inflatable globe on a multi-colored parachute. (Attend in person to participate fully.)

Sunday, April 30, 11 AM

Our Climate Future

All-AEU Event

In 2020, 16 young people from Montana asserted in a lawsuit against the state that, by supporting fossil-fuel-based energy, it is violating their constitutional rights to a clean and healthy environment; to the pursuit of safety, health, and happiness; and to individual dignity and equal protection of the law. Meet the lawyer and some of the plaintiffs from this historic suit.

To register and get the link, click [here](#).

* Where They'll Be

As a general rule, we'll run hybrid platforms when Hugh is the speaker. Platforms with guest speakers will remain on [Zoom](#). In-person attendees should be up-to-date on vaccinations, wear masks, and maintain six feet of separation. Please, read your emails and check the website before you come.

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Warming weather and relationships; the oldest Black-owned bookstore in Philly; our new member (and past president) Marion Steininger!

FROM THE LEADER

The Renewal of Spring

By Hugh Taft-Morales

Rebirth is a common theme this time of year in sermons delivered in houses of worship. From the Passover story of escaping slavery, to the resurrection of Christ, to the Islamic festival of Navroz marking the first day of spring, we honor the renewal of life.

At the Philadelphia Ethical Society, we traditionally welcome spring on a Sunday morning. With poetry, music, and reflections, we celebrate the vernal equinox, cheering on the advent of longer days and shorter nights. Warmth is returning to the air. And warmth, too, is returning to our relationships, as we renew our personal connections after the long, cold, harsh winter of pandemic isolation.

The danger of Covid is not over. I still take precautions. But as I get together with more and more of you in person, I can't help but feel we are, in a sense, being reborn.

March 5 was a notable day. For the first time since we initiated hybrid platforms, more people were present in our auditorium than on Zoom. Immediately after that platform, members crowded into the Collier Gallery for an art exhibit and sale supporting one of the Society's most communal endeavors: Camp Linden. Thanks to Kate Esposito, that afternoon a group of members attended a play together at the Azuka Theater. Two days later, I joined five others for the Society's inaugural chair yoga class, held at the building by our Community Life Coordinator, Oliver Jane Jorgensen.

Zoom held us together through the worst of the pandemic. As we move forward, I hope we remain accessible online. Among other things, Zoom allows people who can't make it to 1906 Rittenhouse to participate in our community. Still, our ability to convene in the same spaces—supporting each other, enjoying each other—reflects a principle of Ethical Culture. As a humanist congregation, we do not just commit to live ethically and with integrity. We commit to live ethically and with integrity *together*.

Commitment to a congregation means sticking together through thick and thin: having fun and working hard. For a congregation to be vital and vibrant, its members must practice community-building. The communal element is both challenging

and rewarding. After more than two years of pandemic isolation, in an era of toxic culture wars, we need congregational rebirth more than ever.

Spring also is a time for individual rebirth. Personally, I embrace it as an opportunity to renew my commitment to ethical values. I want to reconnect with what brought me to Ethical Culture in the first place.

We all arrived at the Philadelphia Ethical Society seeking different things. Some of us were attracted to humanism's unique non-theism. Others wanted to participate in cooperative

projects. Most probably hoped to enrich our lives by joining a community that shares our values.

I invite you to mark this season of renewal by reconnecting with the source of your original commitment. Look within yourself for the spark of curiosity, the sense of longing, the determination to act that started your journey here. Remember how energized you felt. Draw on that energy to recommit yourself to our shared values.

Then bring that energy back into our congregation. Shake off the lethargy of hibernation and reconnect. Forge new friendships and deepen old ones. Help others live by their new commitments; and let others help you live by yours. Get involved. Get excited. By doing that, together, we can make congregational humanism blossom more fully in Philadelphia.

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



Reconnecting through play: The Leader's Office has become a social spot for games. At a recent Dictionary match, Tara Swartz, Erik Younge, Hugh Taft-Morales, Cornelius Escaravage and Leigh Buchanan (behind the camera) faked each other out about the definition of words like "forby" and "empennage."

BEHIND THE SCENES

Smell the Flowers. Crunch the Numbers.

By Cheryl Desmond

Some things happen every spring. Daffodils appear (mine are blooming now). So does the first robin. Daylight Savings Time returns to confound us. And, for me, there is one more thing to look forward to: the AEU's request for our Annual Financial and Statistical Report appears in my inbox.

I'll explain that last one. Our parent organization, the American Ethical Union, collects reports and compiles statistics from its member congregations for its own planning and to determine our annual apportionment payment. ("Apportionment," in the churchy sense, refers to our membership.)



In my first few years at the Society, I approached with trepidation the process of pulling together all our information. Now, over the course of the year, I save the financial information and file the AEU requires, so the work of completing the form goes quickly.

We provide the AEU with information on our finances: specifically, our income and expense report for the most recently completed fiscal year, the current fiscal-year budget, and our Statement of Financial Position. That last one is comparable to a company balance sheet, only it is specifically for non-profits. Have your eyes glazed over yet? I love this stuff!

In addition to our finances, we report on the following: attendance at platforms and other programs, the breakdown between member and non-member attendees, and statistics on other sorts of outreach. Did you know this newsletter and our bulletin reach over 700 people? We also send our membership list with changes and updates. That's why members receive monthly announcements and other emails from the AEU.

"What's the point?" you may well ask. Well, first, we can use that information internally as a bit of a health check-up. How are we doing membership- and attendance-wise? Second, the AEU organizes data from all Societies into charts and tables, which it presents at its Annual Meeting. Those compiled statistics are available to meeting delegates; but they are not a secret. On the AEU web site, you'll find reports such as the engagingly titled "Society Membership Counts 1969-2020" and "AEU CPI Apportionment Calculator for FY2021-22." The Society used AEU resources as documentation for our grant application in 2021, when we sought funding for the Community Life Coordinator position.

Here is what I consider the most important point. We do this annual reporting because by joining together with other Ethical Societies in the AEU, we become part of something bigger than ourselves. And that is great!

Cheryl Desmond is the Office Administrator of the Philadelphia Ethical Society. You can find the Society's income and expense reports and Statement of Financial Position on our web site's [Members' Page](#). Non-members wishing to view our financial information can make an appointment with the [office](#).

The Service Auction Is Open!

Here's your chance to bring a little education, entertainment, or exercise into your life while benefitting the Ethical Society. This year's edition of the service auction isn't technically an auction. Multiple people can sign up for one activity, and—in most cases—prices are set.

Visit our web site's [Members' Page](#) for information about the offerings and instructions. Email [Ruth Dubinsky](#) for the Members' Page password and for additional information.

Among our offerings:

- A visit to the African American History Museum in Philadelphia
- A private tour of the Morris Arboretum
- A Phillies game
- A Zoom discussion of *The Topographic Map Mystery* with the book's author
- A historical walking tour and lunch
- A private yoga or singing lesson
- A conversation with Hugh to choose a platform subject

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

A Historical Treasure in West Philly

By Leigh Buchanan

In the late 1950s, Dawud Hakim, an accountant for the city of Philadelphia, read with astonishment and pride *100 Amazing Facts about the Negro* and *The Five Negro Presidents*. Those books, by the journalist Joel Augustus Rogers, revealed a rich history of Black achievement. “My father became aware that our true story wasn’t being told,” says Yvonne Blake, one of Hakim’s daughters. “It lit a fire under him.”

With guidance from Rogers, Hakim began tracking down other titles about African American history and selling them from the trunk of his car. At the time, such books were scarce: many of them self-published. The subject was invisible in public schools.

“What my father was saying was foreign to people,” says Blake, who back then was a student at Girls’ High. “If you didn’t learn it in school, then it didn’t happen. And they taught us nothing about our history.”

In 1959, Hakim opened the brick-and-mortar *Hakim’s Book Store* in West Philadelphia. That business, which moved to 210 S. 52nd Street about 60 years ago, recently was awarded a state historical marker as the first and oldest Black-owned bookstore in the city.

But for the store’s first few years, such endurance seemed unlikely. Business was so slow that Hakim did taxes on the side: setting up folding chairs for those clients while bookstore customers browsed around them. Things improved during the Civil Rights Era. The Revolutionary Action Movement met at the store, and Hakim befriended its founder, Maxwell Stanford. He became active in civil rights organizations. For a while in the ‘70s, FBI agents would stand across the street, taking pictures.

Hakim was particularly popular with young people, who sought from him knowledge they were denied elsewhere. “He would give them books if they didn’t have money to buy them,” says Blake. “But then you had to come back, and he would ask you questions about what you read.”

The store also launched a service shipping to prisons. “I have had people say that because my father kept in contact and sent them books, they were able to reform themselves once they came out,” says Blake.

Over the years, Hakim opened several more book stores, including one in Germantown and one in Atlanta. He also established House of Knowledge Publishing, which put out books that included Hakim’s own about Arabic and African names.

Hakim died in 1997. Blake took over the store, which she runs with a volunteer and family members. She has greatly expanded the children’s section and added gift items, including Kwanza candle sets, dolls, and wooden carvings. Otherwise, the selection—African American studies; memoirs of people like Angela Davis and Assata Shakur; and books about holistic health and religion—remains largely unchanged.

The store’s fortunes have risen and fallen with the economy, experiencing a surge of mail order business from around the country after the murder of George Floyd. It is open four days a week. Other times Blake sells off-site at churches, schools, and places like the Paul Robeson House & Museum.

The recognition of Hakim’s historical significance arrives at a moment when education is emerging as a critical battleground for racial justice. In states like Florida, politicians, parents, and others have attacked critical race theory, an AP course in African American studies, and the teaching of books like *Brown Girl Dreaming* and *The Hate U Give*. “It makes me angry,” says Blake. “I am even more determined that people get the knowledge we have here in the store; that they read; and that they understand they have to make their own destinies.”

Leigh Buchanan is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force



Black books matter: Dawud Hakim at his West Philly store in the 1970s; Hakim’s daughter—and the store’s owner—Yvonne Blake; Hakim’s today: a neighborhood touchstone and historic landmark.

ADVENTURES IN ACTIVISM Being Mother Nature for Racial Justice

By John Marshall

As an employee of the Social Security Administration, I was part of the unit expediting survivor claims after 9/11. Those months of bearing witness to people's suffering made me more socially aware. The destruction of the Towers also released huge amounts of contaminants. That got me thinking about the environmental threats to people who live near big sources of pollution.

I joined POWER and worked on Live Free, a campaign focused on criminal justice for people of color. Then I switched to the Climate Justice and Jobs team. We fight against environmental racism and for sustainable green jobs and energy.

In 2014, POWER sent several busloads of people to Manhattan for the People's Climate March, an activist response to the upcoming United Nations Climate Summit. We marched alongside more than 300,000 people from all over, carrying signs, banners, flags, and balloons.

My first major initiative on the Climate Justice team was Nicetown. SEPTA had received a permit to build a natural-gas-burning plant in that North Philadelphia neighborhood, which would create air pollution and increase reliance on fossil fuels. POWER filed a civil rights complaint against the city to stop it.

I attended a number of hearings about Nicetown and got a first-hand education in how majority Black and brown neighborhoods are disproportionately injured by pollution. Local residents already were affected by diesel exhaust generated by the bus depot there. I was impressed by how many community members showed up to testify. They talked about how they or their family members were suffering from increased incidences of asthma and cardiovascular events like strokes and heart attacks. Pollution had damaged them psychologically, too. Lawyers for the gas industry, meanwhile, were challenging them to produce statistics. The EPA got involved.

POWER held a rally for Nicetown outside of City Hall, and I volunteered to be Mother Nature. They strapped a sign on me that read, "You can't fool Mother Nature. Natural gas is a fossil fuel!" As I walked around, lots of people stopped me to take my picture and ask questions. This struggle continues.

I also got involved in POWER's Just Transition team. It works on managing the move from dirty to sustainable energy in a way that is just and equitable, redresses past harms done to communities of color, and creates opportunities there, for example, by generating green jobs and making homes more energy efficient with things like solar paneling.



Nicetown neighbors: Protesters rally against a SEPTA gas plant in 2019.

During the pandemic I attended several hearings related to Just Transition over Zoom. One hearing highlighted community testimony; and one was with members of city council. The most contentious focused on the board of Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW). It really put them on the spot about how they would change their business practices and be more transparent in their budgeting.

At the meetings, hearings, and rallies I have met many wonderful, welcoming people. Rabbi Julie Greenberg, in particular, has been very helpful putting me in touch with the right people as I have tried to educate myself.

Back at the Ethical Society, I have become the de facto liaison between our congregation and POWER's climate work. When I do the Ethical Action Committee announcements, I incorporate relevant updates and notify members of upcoming events. And I encourage people to get involved with POWER's good work trying to make our planet both just and livable.

John Marshall is a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

Welcome Marion Steininger!

I understand you were living in Germany during the rise of the Nazi Party?

I was a little kid. It didn't mean anything to me. We left for Palestine, now Israel, when I was 5, and came to the United States in 1939, when I was 8.

Did you arrive in Philadelphia?

New York. I grew up there. I went to school and learned English.

At that time, the City College system was charging \$0 per credit. That we could afford. So, I went to Brooklyn College. Then I got a PhD from NYU.

Did you teach?

Not right away. I was married and wanted to have children. When the children were in school, I started teaching part-time. Eventually, I became a professor at Rutgers, the Camden campus. I was teaching social psychology, dealing with things like behavior in small groups and the development of prejudice. I taught at Rutgers for almost 30 years.

When did you join the Philadelphia Ethical Society the first time?

I was probably 50, so around 1979. My marriage of 29 years had ended, and I wanted to be with people like me. I knew about Ethical Culture from growing up in New York. Although I didn't go to the New York Ethical Society, I always knew that was the only kind of "church" I would ever be interested in. I was active in the Society back then. I went to one of the [American Ethical Union's] annual meetings. And I ended up as president of the Board in Philadelphia.

Do you remember what issues the Board was grappling with back then?

Money. Always money, of course. Somebody who had a son at Curtis and was very interested in music drove us to get a new piano. I wonder if you are still using the same one?

What other political or social movements have you been involved with?

I got very involved in my National Organization of Women chapter. When I was younger, I would go on marches. I wrote for the newsletter. I was chapter president for a couple of years. I was also leader of my Amnesty International group, although that collapsed a long time ago.



Marion Steininger
A return to Ethical Culture

And I've been very involved with Americans United for Separation of Church and State, including starting a small, local group to discuss current issues and court cases. I am afraid that after the Supreme Court hands down this term's decisions, we will find we are living in a theocracy.

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy reading. Sometimes serious books, like Jamie Raskin's recent one. Sometimes, less serious. The [book-discovery service] BookBub will show me a book about someone adopting a kitten with special needs. And I will think, that is just what I want to read!

I'm also a news junkie: NPR and *The New York Times*, which I get digitally. When I want to really escape from the universe, I do crosswords and other word puzzles. I enjoy KenKen but am not smart enough to do the hard ones. And I enjoy being with people. But most of that is Zoom.

Any chance we will get to meet you in person?

I am 93. I never come to Philly. I think my daughters would collapse if I started to traipse all over the countryside.

Is there anything else we should know about you?

I have four grandchildren; and two of my grandsons are now expecting their first children. In August and September, I will finally be a great-grandmother!

UPCOMING EVENTS



Sunday, April 2, 12:30 PM

Game Time: Peel the Onion

Join Hugh and Society member Anne Hartford in the Leader's Office for this get-to-know-you activity. Our lives comprise layers of experiences and stories. Share what you want as we peel those layers together. After a few rounds, we'll switch to general socializing. RSVP to [Hugh](#). Space is limited.

Sunday, April 2, 7 PM

An Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Want to know more about the history, philosophy, and current community of Ethical Culture? Attend this session in-person at the Ethical Society or on [Zoom](#).

Monday, April 3, 6:30 PM– 8:30 PM

Under-40 Philosophy Film Night

Hugh hosts a video screening and discussion for folks under 40. RSVP to [Hugh](#) by April 1—no foolin'—and you can help choose the short video that we will view and discuss over snacks.



Tuesday, April 4, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh

Join Hugh in his office for a casual brownbag lunch and conversation. We'll also talk more about the Ethical Humanism of Richard Kiniry.

Tuesday, April 4, 2 PM

Creating the Richard Kiniry Lending Library

Join Hugh to dust off and sort the books of Richard Kiniry, left to the Ethical Society for curation. We'll create a mini-lending library in the Leader's Office and prepare others for possible distribution.

Tuesday, April 4, 5:45 PM

Reflections on Yoga

Join Hugh for an informal conversation about how yoga has supported his personal and ethical development. Meet in the Leader's Office prior to Oliver Jane's 6:30 PM yoga class.

Tuesday, April 4, 11, 18, 25, 6:30 PM



Chair Yoga with Oliver Jane

Our Community Life Coordinator will teach chair yoga at the Society. The hour-long classes are accessible to all ages and abilities. Free for Society members; \$20 for non-members; \$10 for students and over-60s. Half the fee goes to charity. Venmo, check, or cash accepted. Vaccination required.

Monday, April 10, 8 PM

Recovering from Religion

Hugh participates in an online series hosted by Recovering from Religion, a non-profit supporting those struggling with or harmed by religion. He will discuss his work in Ethical Humanism and explore spiritual pain, existentialism, and religion's positive and negative impacts. Join [here](#).



Wednesday, April 12, 12:30 PM

(Virtual) Lunch with Hugh

Join Hugh and members of the Baltimore Ethical Society for a lunchtime conversation over [Zoom](#).

Saturday, April 15, 2 PM

Celebration of the Life of Richard Kiniry

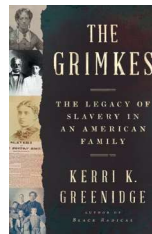
We will share fond memories, music, and a reception in honor of Leader Emeritus Richard Kiniry. This memorial, long-delayed by Covid, will take place at the Ethical Society, with additional access by [Zoom](#). To attend in person, RSVP to the [Society Office](#).



Sunday, April 16, 1:30 PM-5:30 PM

Under-40 Ethical Action and Social Event

If you are under 40, please join Community Life Coordinator Oliver Jane Jorgensen for socializing, snacks, and a community-service activity. Activity and location to be announced. If you are interested, email [Oliver Jane](#).



Monday, April 17, 7:30 PM

Book Discussion: *The Grimkes*

A second chance to talk about *The Grimkes: The Legacy of Slavery in an American Family*, by Kerri Greenidge. Join Baltimore Ethical Society members on [Zoom](#) to discuss this complex family story of slavery, privilege, and denial.

Tuesday, April 18, 4 PM

Parlor Games and Tea

Join Hugh in the Leader's Office for tea, cookies, and silly parlor games. RSVP to [Hugh](#) by April 15.



Saturday, April 29, 2 PM-4 PM

ERTF Potluck

Join members of the Ending Racism Task Force for their monthly in-person potluck. Bring something delicious.

Saturday, April 29, 4 PM

ERTF Movie

Following the potluck, the Ending Racism Task Force will screen a movie. Title to be announced.



SUNDAY SERVICES

11 am

Ethical Views is published monthly
except July and August.

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Hugh Taft-Morales

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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 the committees, which meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org.

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

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
Wednesday, April 19, 6 PM

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, April 26, 6 PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, April 5, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, April 8, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, April 12, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
no meeting this month

Social Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

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

Theater with a Conscience:

In a South American forest, three generations of women battle and bond, dance and dream in the bilingual play *All My Mothers Dream in Spanish*, by AZ Espinoza. Attending the show at the Azuka Theatre last month were (from left) Leigh Buchanan, Susan D'Alessio, Hugh Taft-Morales, Stan Horwitz, Janet Horwitz, Bob Steinfert, Betsy Lightbourn, Faith Steinfert, and Kate Esposito.



Music for a Cause:

Hugh, widely known as “the humanist clergy version of Miley Cyrus,” performed a parody of the song “Wrecking Ball” with members of the Save Chinatown Coalition. The [video](#) expresses opposition to the planned sports arena that threatens Philadelphia’s Asian American community. To learn about the movement, visit the [Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance](#).

