



ETHICAL VIEWS

October 2023 Vol. 138, No. 2 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, Oct 1, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

The Power of Place: Civil Rights Tourism

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Philadelphia Ethical Society



Hugh Taft-Morales loves reading about American history, from first settlements to today. He is particularly interested in the civil rights movement. This past summer, Hugh took his first civil rights tour. Here, he offers some reflections on that profound experience, explaining why it affected him so deeply and how he processed “the power of place” at sites in Alabama and Georgia. Hugh also will discuss the danger of reducing such tours to mere voyeurism and virtue-signaling.

Sunday, Oct 8, 11 AM (zoom only)

Joy Is an Act of Resistance

Greg Bonin, Ethical Culture Leader



What is the work of human relationships? What role does joy play in resistance, survival, and thriving? Greg Bonin will explore “durable joy,” a concept defined by poet Toi Derricotte. Greg specializes in institutional and organizational facilitation, bringing a practice grounded in embodiment, humanistic interdependence, and reflective inquiry as a method for lifelong formation. He is especially curious about “queering” practices that create spaces where transformative paradigms can emerge.

Sunday, Oct 15, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

Women Talking

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

From mundane mansplaining to systemic silencing, men regularly ignore the voices of women. That is made tragically clear in Miriam Toews’ book *Women Talking* and director Sarah Polley’s 2022 film, which the book inspired. The #MeToo movement has produced some progress. But when it comes to who commands an audience, we are still a long way from gender equity. Hugh is fully aware of the irony that he, a man, will be talking.

Sunday, Oct 22, 11 AM (zoom only)

Why We Host a Secular Day of the Dead

Margaret Downey, President

The Freethought Society



By creating a Day of the Dead celebration, Margaret Downey and her team—Victoria de la Torre, David Tamayo, and Memo Benumea—seek to honor the cultural traditions of Mexicans

and Mexican Americans. This meaningful celebration conveys the message that death is not to be feared. A non-theist leader for over 30 years, Downey’s secular events include a celebration of the Tree of Knowledge, Thomas Paine Day, and May Day for Humanity.

Sunday, Oct 29, 11 AM (zoom only)

The Unrealized Egalitarian Vision of Felix Adler

Sam Pizzigati, Associate Fellow

Institute for Policy Studies

Felix Adler promoted a more egalitarian America. An advocate for capping the income of the very wealthy, he hoped to tax away “pomp and pride and power.” Yet today we are more unequal than ever. Labor journalist Pizzigati will explore new approaches to reforming our economic and political order. This is an all AEU-platform, so [zoom](#) here.

* Where They’ll Be

As a general rule, on Sundays when Hugh is the speaker, the 11 AM platform will be in-person only.

Hugh will offer the address a second time, live, on [zoom](#) only, at 2 PM that afternoon. (This is Hugh’s personal zoom link.)

Guest speakers will appear on [zoom](#) only. (This is the Society’s zoom link.)

In-person attendees should be up-to-date on vaccinations and remain masked.

Check your emails and our website to make sure you know how to join us.

LETTER FROM THE LEADER

Fire Up Your Phones! It's an Ethical Culture Podcast!

By Hugh Taft-Morales

People seem hungry for what Ethical Culture has to offer. When they first learn about our movement, many say something like, “This makes so much sense! Why haven’t I heard of it before?” Yet, we members of Ethical Societies regularly bemoan our relative obscurity. Once a staple of newspaper columns, our movement today is an all-too-well-kept secret. My Sunday morning talks—which I consider the heart of my work—reach a live audience of only a few dozen. Discovering them on the Internet requires persistence or serendipity.

So, I’ve decided to start a podcast! I know, I know...another podcast? So many already exist that this might be a quixotic gesture. But I think I still have something worthwhile to say in my remaining time on this planet. And podcasts are a remarkably accessible format that people manage to fit into their busy days.

One particularly promising audience for this series, called *In Good We Trust*, is the “nones.” Nones are people who consider themselves religiously unaffiliated; and they are the nation’s fastest growing “religious” demographic. They include atheists, agnostics, and people with a variety of spiritual beliefs who don’t subscribe to an organized religion. Ethical Humanism is a logical home for many nones. However, research indicates that they are unlikely to attend a weekly congregational gathering.

If they won’t show up on Sunday mornings, maybe they’ll tune into short ethical explorations available anytime on their phones. For some crazy reason, I think this might work. Joey Sweeney, creative director of the creative agency Doin’ Great, agrees. Of course, since the Ethical Society has engaged his company’s services to produce and manage this series, Joey has a vested interest in our shared optimism. But he also has considerable experience in social-media-content creation and branding. He thinks our message can find a home in the podcast universe.

Our goal is to produce and promote 36 episodes, each running from five-to-15 minutes, through May 2024. Joey will track which topics and styles garner the most attention, allowing our product to evolve. I envision each episode as a snappy, quirky, content-rich exploration of everyday ethics. While I may dip into current events, I hope to address mostly evergreen subjects. Avoiding abstract, academic language is also a must.



Above all else, I want to avoid “othering.” To “other” is to identify a group as different from one’s own and label them the problem. Goodness knows, there is plenty wrong with the world. It is both easy and tempting to find folks to blame. Some people do, in fact, cause harm. They must be confronted and, if possible, constrained from hurting people. But we also must act carefully, with as much compassion as we can muster.

To make things right in the world, we first must make things right within ourselves. That work should be a priority. This podcast will emphasize the internal struggles with which most of us wrestle, especially when we explore—openly and honestly—our ethics, behavior, and consciences.

When Felix Adler founded our alternative to traditional religion, he hoped it would offer people a way to process “spiritual pain.” By that, he did not mean a ghostly presence or supernaturalism. Rather, he was referring to an all-too-common pain that arises when, with many setbacks and unsteady progress, we try to build a life of meaning, belonging, and justice.

Most humans have a deep hunger for a place in the universe where goodness reigns. If five minutes of audio can provoke listeners to question how they can satisfy that hunger, then it will have done its job.

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

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

No Clear Answers Emerge from AEU Assembly

By Michael Black-Smith

The American Ethical Union's 108th Annual Assembly was unlike any in recent history. Delegates confronted proposals that would, if enacted, reorganize and redirect the AEU, our movement's auxiliary, inter-Society organization. Just as unusual was the emotional context. The hurt and mistrust that in recent years has plagued the AEU suffused the Zoom meetings and email chains comprising this entirely remote event.

I'd like to devote this month's column to the proposals and results of the Assembly. In my next, I will address the disturbing breakdown of comity and communication among delegates. I want to make sense of what transpired within a movement dedicated to assuming the best in one another. I will seek an answer to the question: where do we go from here?

But first: the results. AEU Assemblies are where the movement's corporate business gets done. Members and Leaders from Societies around the country vote on candidates for the AEU board, as well as proposals on everything from budgets to bylaws. The Philadelphia Society was well represented. Our delegates were Stan Horwitz, Nick Sanders, and myself. Leader Hugh Taft-Morales and former AEU President John McCormick attended as well.

This Assembly, which followed months of work by the AEU's interim director, focused on resolutions and motions addressing the bleak outlook of Ethical Culture's national presence. Not unique in the landscape of religions, we are dangerously low on three critical things: energy, resources, and relevance.

Ultimately, six proposals—each authored by a Society—were presented to the delegates for consideration. Most addressed a few key questions. First, how long the reorganization would take and whether to suspend the AEU's normal operations during the process. Second, whether to hire an organizational-development consultant rather than a new executive director to lead the plan. Third, how to ensure engagement across the movement. With the help of a professional parliamentarian, we dug in.

Some proposals called for the maintenance of specific AEU programs. Others thought that that decision should come out of the process itself. Some suggested that a few of the larger Societies could take on national programs like Ethical Education and Leader Training. There were differences over whether the AEU would continue to fund itself through apportionments from member Societies or instead rely on existing and grant funding. Plans diverged over the need for the AEU to maintain physical offices. One proposal boiled down to a plea that we put off voting until a later Assembly, to be held after we'd all had a chance to consider everything further.

And the winning proposal was... none of them. Bergen County's plan just barely beat out Susquehanna Valley's plan in the ranked-choice vote. However, neither received a majority of "affirmative votes." (That's when enough delegates included a plan somewhere in their rankings. Translation: "I can live with it. I don't love it.")

So, we still don't have a blueprint for the future. But this Assembly did, at least, produce two significant results. A change to the AEU bylaws reconfigured the Board to include one representative from each Society. That seems likely to maintain some of the engagement we saw leading up to this Assembly. Stan Horwitz will be the first Philadelphia member to hold this role.

Additionally, delegates voted in new Board officers who consistently have called for reforming the AEU. This also is the most diverse Board leadership in the AEU's history. As the new board gets to work, it appears to be seriously considering many of the forward-looking ideas from across our movement that were set out in the proposals.

Michael Black-Smith is the President of the Philadelphia Ethical Society



FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

Gun Violence Solutions Are Out There

By Erik Younge

*Machine gun tearing my body all apart....
Yeah, machine gun tearing my family apart*
—from “Machine Gun,” by Jimi Hendrix

BY THE NUMBERS

71%

71 percent of Black adults or someone they know or care about have experienced gun violence in their lifetimes.

37%

Street outreach programs such as Cure Violence are associated with up to 37 percent reductions in gun injuries.

3x

Black people in America are nearly 3 times as likely to be shot and killed by the police than white Americans.

Everytown Research & Policy

The number of shootings and gun deaths in the United States has been climbing for decades. There are daily acts of violence in many cities. Mass shootings at schools, clubs, stores, and churches have left countless lives traumatized: families, friends, and children. We are left feeling numb, angry, helpless, and powerless.

In *The Philadelphia Citizen*, noted local activist Charles D. Ellison writes, “Communities and neighborhoods that enjoy the full range of investments don’t have gun-violence problems. Communities and neighborhoods that don’t enjoy that same full range of investments do have gun-violence problems.” The communities plagued by gun violence are, of course, chiefly those populated by Black and brown people. The disinvestment, past and present, is a result of racism.

Many politicians argue that just hiring more cops and jailing more people will reduce the crime rate. Facts prove otherwise. But effective solutions—solutions that save lives—are being implemented in many neighborhoods and communities. I believe we need to check them out.

In recent years, five cities in particular—Chicago; Camden and Newark, in New Jersey; Chester, in Pennsylvania; and Oakland, in California, have significantly reduced gun violence through a number of evidence-based initiatives. They include

Enacting robust, focused, citywide deterrence. Several cities, including Philadelphia, Oakland, and Chicago, have introduced some version of the CeaseFire program, whose strategies include public education, providing social services, and supporting collaboration among community and faith leaders, as well as law enforcement.

Supporting community-violence interventions: These programs focus on disrupting violence by identifying people at the greatest risk of perpetrating or becoming victims of gun crime. They provide interventions such as outreach and dispute mediation.

Enacting reforms for responsible policing and prosecution:

Training law-enforcement officers in community- and problem-oriented- policing and holding them accountable for their actions are among the reforms being deployed. Strategies for prosecutors include an emphasis on restorative justice and alternatives to incarceration.

Focusing on youth (especially young men): Specialized school-based programs teach children skills such as emotional control and conflict resolution. The goal is to help them think more clearly and act less impulsively: to make better positive decisions that could mean the difference “between jail and freedom, life and death,” in the words of my late mentor Reggie Schell, a leader in the Black Panther Party, in Philadelphia. One very effective local group in this space is ManUpPHL, founded by Solomon Jones, a WURD radio host, author, and journalist.

Ellison also points out a variety of place-based strategies that he says have been linked to a reduction in gun violence. They include vigorous trash clean-ups; the cleaning and greening of more than 25,000 vacant lots in Philly; the planting of thousands of trees; repair and renovation of low-income homes; and investments in solar-powered air conditioning for homes, schools, community centers, and libraries. Many of these solutions are in plain sight. They don’t require us to reinvent the wheel.

A more holistic vision treats gun violence as a public-health issue. That requires a significant infusion of resources and collaboration among all branches of government, criminal-justice agencies, social-service groups, community activists, faith-based congregations, elected officials, and other public servants. We can and must implement these and other solutions to, as Ellison says, “make the necessary commitment to make our communities whole.”

Erik Younge is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Very Rocky Road to a New Life

By Leigh Buchanan

The majority of people released from prison return within three years. A major contributor to recidivism is the insanely daunting obstacle course that confronts those trying to resume their free lives. In August, I got the merest taste of that ordeal through a re-entry simulation presented by the local U.S. State Attorney's Office, PAR-Recycle Works, and Eastern State Penitentiary, where the event was held.

On a steamy evening, about 50 people gathered in Eastern State's Surveillance Hub. There, we received packets containing our identities. I was Fahima, incarcerated 10 years for bank robbery. I had a GED, \$75 in (fake) money, a card for jewelry I could pawn, five transportation tickets, a birth certificate, and a social security card. Also: instructions for tasks I would have to accomplish every week for four weeks. Things like buying food, paying rent, checking in with my probation officer, being screened for drugs, paying restitution, and finding employment.

Fifteen tables, each representing a kind of reentry Station of the Cross, were arrayed along cell block C. They included an employment agency, social services, a pawn shop, a medical clinic, a church, vocational training, a regular bank, and a blood bank. We were to move among them, fulfilling our requirements and getting them checked off on our Life Cards. At every station, we had to surrender a transportation ticket and produce our birth certificates, social security cards, and state IDs.



But there was no state ID in my packet. Assuming a mistake, I approached a coordinator, who shook her head. Following her gaze, I observed an already long line snaking back from the ID station. Every participant faced different requirements and obstacles. For many, that included missing ID.

By the time I reached the front of the line, filled out a form, paid \$15, and handed over a transportation ticket, nine minutes had elapsed. Each "week" lasted 15 minutes. The parole line looked slightly shorter than others; so, I headed there, waited, and handed over another transportation ticket. But I had misread my instructions. I wasn't due at parole until week two. The coordinators announced the end of week one. I had accomplished nothing.

And, so it went. One step forward: three steps back. Treatment sent me to parole because a card said I'd shown up intoxicated. But I couldn't go because I was out of transportation tickets. Each time I approached the drug-test station, it was just closing up. I failed three times to get a job. Until the third week, I went without food. Because I never found the rent station I got carted off to a shelter.

I had to pawn my jewelry to buy new IDs after my wallet was stolen. I tried to sell plasma but was turned away (twice). All the church offered was AA meetings.

Out of money, I found myself in front of a station labeled Chance. Twenty cards were arrayed across the tabletop. Bank Robbery. Armed Robbery. Drug Deal. "You can choose to re-offend," explained the woman behind the table. "Maybe you will be successful. Or you will be back in jail. Or you will be dead."

An hour earlier, I could not have imagined endangering my freedom. Now, I turned over a Bank Robbery card. I ended the evening back in jail.

Afterwards, participants discussed potential reforms with leaders from the sponsoring organizations and people who had endured reentry in real life. Simulations like this are popping up around the country as government agencies and justice-reform advocates seek better responses to mass incarceration. Should the Ethical Society consider partnering to host one, open to the larger community?

Leigh Buchanan is the Editor of Ethical Views

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

Welcome Valérie Pry!

Where did you grow up?

Easton, which is in the Rust Belt part of Pennsylvania. It's more of a small town. But it has a Crayola attraction for kids, which is right next door to the National Canal Museum. Your parents would take you to the canal museum because it was educational; and then you'd get to go to Crayola. When I was 16, we moved to Lansdowne to make my dad's commute easier. He worked for Nutrisystem, the diet-food company. His job was answering calls from people who wanted to cancel and convincing them not to.

Education?

I went to Montgomery County Community College and then graduated from Temple, where I studied art history. Art history bridges a lot of disciplines in the humanities: history, anthropology, archeology, philosophy, literature, even science. I'm interested in everything; and art history rewards that.

What was your focus?

My capstone was about Josef Capek, a Cubist painter from what was then Czechoslovakia. That's where my family is from. The inter-war years were a peak artistic period in Prague. I wrote about a particular painting of his: "Face from Cinema." It has features of an African mask but was also inspired by how they used close-ups in silent film.

And after college?

I work in the admissions department at the University of the Arts. So, part of the art ecosystem, but not a particularly creative job. I handle the intake of documents related to people's applications. I'm a very organized person: I was the kid who would rather sort toys than play with them. Administration comes naturally to me.

How did you start practicing veganism?

I used to be much less healthy. I did a lot of research to figure out, if I'm going to start over, what is the optimal lifestyle? Then I started seeing the philosophical arguments as to why it's not ethical to eat animal products. And, of course, veganism is a lot better for the environment.

What do you do for fun?

I like trading-card games, especially Magic: The Gathering. The original version from the '90s was classic fantasy. Dungeons and Dragons stuff. The themes are more diverse now, with more influence from other cultures.

Books? Movies? Sports? Music? Theater?

I go to local theater. I love the Philadelphia Film Society. They've been screening *Sight & Sound Magazine's* 100 Greatest Films of All Time, so I've been catching up on the classics. I like classical music but am also very interested in electronic music. I used

to have a YouTube channel where I reviewed music. I hope to get back to that.

I enjoy reading. Growing up, I really loved science fiction: Arthur C. Clarke, Ursula LeGuin, Isaac Asimov. One of the great things about the University of the Arts is they have an inter-library system where you can order books and have them shipped.

What is your favorite place in Philadelphia?

Visual art is my bread and butter, so the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I also really like the Science History

Institute, in Old City. Their exhibits explain things like how the development of polymers and other sophisticated materials have made so many modern things possible. It is one of the city's most underrated attractions.

Anything else we should know?

I recently started beginner ballet. It's one of those things people think young children should experience. But when you're an adult they no longer consider it important. It's not geared toward performance. You do the moves and get a workout. Every week you do a little better than you did before.



Valérie Pry

UPCOMING EVENTS



Sundays, October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; 9:15 AM - 10 AM

Chair Yoga and Mindfulness Meditation

Oliver Jane Jorgensen leads these classes, which are held in the Ethical Society building. Chair yoga is accessible to all ages and abilities. Great for older bodies, stiff bodies, and bodies with limited mobility.



Sunday, October 1, 7 PM

An Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Join Hugh in the Leader's Office for an overview of our unique alternative to traditional religion. Ethical Society members are invited to attend and share their own experiences.

In-person only.



Tuesday, October 3, 12:30 PM

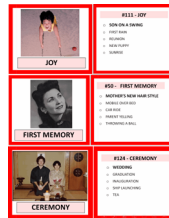
Lunch with Hugh (in-person)

Come for casual conversation about life, ethics, whatever! Bring your lunch.

Wednesday, October 4, 1 PM - 2:30 PM

Peeling the Onion

Join Hugh and facilitator Redwood Kardon in the Leader's Office for this get-to-know-you activity. We'll share some of the experiences and stories that shape us. Get to know others in our community in a fun and novel manner. Space is limited. RSVP to [Hugh](#).



Wednesday, October 11, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh (zoom)

Join us on [zoom](#) for casual conversation about life, ethics, whatever! Bring your lunch.

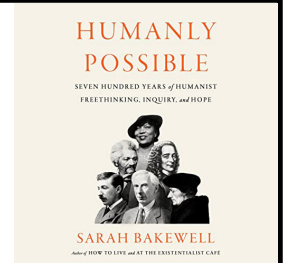
Saturday, October 28, 2 PM - 4 PM

ERTF Potluck Social

Join us at the Ethical Society for food and conversation. Bring something delicious!



Book Discussion Series: *Humanly Possible*



In *Humanly Possible: Seven Hundred Years of Humanist Freethinking, Inquiry, and Hope*, author Sarah Bakewell explores both the philosophical foundation and personal experience of our movement. Bakewell "delights in the paradoxical and the particular," said *The New York Times*, "reminding us that every human being contains multitudes." We'll begin our five-part series with an in-person discussion on Monday, October 2 at 5:30 PM at the Ethical Society. That will address the introduction and chapters one and two. A [zoom](#) session on Saturday, October 21 at 11 AM will cover the same material. We'll continue the series in November and December. October attendees can help determine that schedule. (In November and December, we also will discuss *Braiding Sweetgrass*.)



Snacks on the Square

On a sultry late-summer afternoon, members gathered for a happy hour on Rittenhouse Square. Among those enjoying drinks, snacks, and conversation were (from left to right) Betsy Lightbourn, Paul Sarita, Oliver Jane Jorgensen, Tara Swartz, Carolyn Prue, Irene Putzer, Ken Grief, and Kate Esposito.



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 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, Oct 15, 6 PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
Wednesday, Oct 18, 7 PM

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, Oct 25, 6 PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, Oct 4, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, Oct 14, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, Oct 11, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
no meeting this month

Social Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

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

Football for Firearms

More than 150 students joined with police officers who patrol their neighborhoods to enjoy sports, food, and—most important—take a stand against gun violence. The Eagles donated the footballs. The Police Department brought the food. And Hugh, pictured with Deputy Commissioner James Kelly, facilitated the event.



Food for Fridges

Stan Horwitz, Julia Gokalp, and Oliver Jane Jorgensen took a road trip around Philly to stock community pantries and refrigerators. Society members donated everything from toilet paper and fresh nectarines to packets of chocolate-filled crepes. Many of those who take the items are homeless or struggling financially.

