



# ETHICAL VIEWS

March 2024 Vol. 138, No. 7 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us \*

**Sunday, March 3, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)**

***Reproductive Rights and Humanism***

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

**Philadelphia Ethical Society**



Ethical Humanists strive to make the world a better place by minimizing suffering and enhancing the dignity and autonomy of all people. On the issue of reproductive justice, Ethical Culture has long defended the right of women to control their own bodies and opposed draconian religious and sexist assaults on this principle. As we

continue our defense of women’s reproductive rights, what secular political tactics should we employ? Should we promote reproductive choice as part of humanists’ religious freedom? Hugh explores these questions and more.

**Sunday, March 10, 11 AM (zoom only)**

***The Supreme Court and the Future of American Democracy***

**Anthony Grasso**

**Assistant Professor of Political Science**

**Rutgers University, Camden**



What is the Supreme Court’s standing as an institution; and how will that affect the future of democracy? Anthony Grasso will discuss recent controversial Court decisions, major cases on its docket, and the sorts of cases we should expect to see in this election year. His expertise includes American political history, the politics of

constitutional law, racial and class inequality, and criminal law. Grasso’s forthcoming book, *Dual Justice*, examines features of the modern American legal system that have roots in eugenic ideas.

**Sunday, March 17, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)**

***Good Feels Good***

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

Ethical Culture urges us to be good, in the moral sense, by honoring the worth of others, nurturing ethical relationships, and building social justice. Ethical Culture *also* celebrates lives filled with meaning and joy. How are those two pursuits related? Should we try to balance ethical actions and personally fulfilling ones: separating each day into “ethical time” and “me time”? Or should we approach doing good as part of a rewarding life? Hugh suggests that it may be this simple: good feels good.

**Sunday, March 24, 11 AM (zoom only)**

***Women, Politics, and Policy in the 2024 Elections***

**Shauna Shames**

**Associate Professor of Political Science**

**Rutgers University, Camden**



What can political science tell us about the role of gendered public policy and women as candidates in the upcoming elections? Shauna Shames will share research and insights about some key gendered issues—including reproductive rights, gun control, and child care—that may motivate turnout and choice of candidates. Shames studies

and teaches about American politics, with an emphasis on race, gender, class, and LGBTQ+. She has published and co-edited work on, among other subjects, women as political candidates, women of color in politics, and gendered public policies.

**Sunday, March 31, 11 AM (zoom only)**

***Opening the Door for Democracy with YVote All-Societies Platform***

Sanda Baladan, co-founder of [YVote](#); and Audrey Kindred, of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, will explain how they bring voter- and civic-engagement activities to hundreds of youth in democracy reinforcement programs. They also will offer guidance for other Ethical Societies interested in similar actions. Pre-register [here](#) to receive your Zoom link.

### \* 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.)

## LETTER FROM THE LEADER

### The Importance of Professional Leadership

By Hugh Taft-Morales

For as long as any of you have been part of this Ethical Society, you have been served by a professional Leader. People like myself, Richard Kiniry before me, and Judith Eckerson before Richard, are trained and certified as Clergy Leaders by the American Ethical Union. You may not be aware that other Societies practice alternative models of leadership.

Last month, I participated in a panel discussion about the importance of professional leadership in Ethical Culture. The other panelists were Nori Rost, Leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture; and KC Slack, Leader of the Washington Ethical Society. It was the last of three discussions exploring approaches to organizing Ethical Societies.

It won't surprise you that Nori, KC, and I all emphasized the importance of professional Leaders. We have, after all, dedicated our professional lives to nurturing humanist communities. Societies like Philadelphia and Baltimore, for the present, remain committed to this model of leadership.



Each Society, however, is unique, with its own distinct resources and culture. Each must chart its own path. Over time, we all must reassess our chosen models. For example, the services provided by professional Leaders *could* be offered by a lay leader team. In an earlier panel, Jill Aul described the impressive community organized through volunteers at the Ethical Society Mid Rivers.

I am concerned, though, that without trained clergy, some elements of congregational life could atrophy. Ethical Societies are generally small; so, most Leaders are jacks-of-all-trades. I play the roles of teacher, preacher, pastoral counselor, ethical action activist, social-time host, organizational consultant, program administrator, custodian of Ethical Culture philosophy, and Ethical Culture ambassador to society.

Teaching and preaching are the core of my work: how I guide members toward thinking and acting in ways that reflect Ethical Culture values. Sometimes, they are part of my pastoral counseling. Mostly, they come through my two monthly Sunday-morning presentations, as well as classes and book discussions.

My most recent ethical-action engagements have been with Peace Day Philly, POWER, and Trinity Church's Open Heart Café and Clothing Closet. I also offer organizational support to the Philadelphia Society Board and committees, attending meetings and consulting with chairs.

My pastoral work is usually informal but pretty constant. It may take the form of words shared in passing or of longer conversations in my office or over the phone. I support people going through life-stage transitions, often incorporating ritual or meditation.

Frequently, I help people process the challenges of working with others. Tensions arise when opinions differ about the purpose and priorities of Ethical Culture. Almost always, miscommunication is involved. Feelings get hurt. Despite our earnest efforts to live meaningful, ethical lives, we are limited and flawed creatures. I hope that I nurture patience and resilience in our shared dedication.

I participate on the national level, as well. In the National Leaders Council, I serve as secretary, lead one task force, and am a member of another. I am part of the American Ethical Union's Education Team. Half of this denominational work I consider part of my contractual obligation to Philadelphia and Baltimore. Half I think of as volunteering.

Can alternative leadership arrangements fulfill all those functions? I honestly don't know. Models based on shared leadership might make available more person-hours and energy. But members would not be served as well if some of what I offer now fell by the wayside.

I dearly hope all Ethical Societies think long and hard about the role of professional Leadership. Ethical Culture is important for those seeking lives that are more than purely secular but also independent of theism. Professional Leaders play a vital role in nurturing ethical spirit and supporting community, so that we can better help heal this broken world.

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

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Make Us a Priority! Please!

By Michael Black-Smith

Those who pay close attention during our platforms will have noticed that we've been changing the language with which we ask you for money. Until recently, the "Collection" request in our Order of Service—just after Rollin finishes his second piece and before our announcements—had been so consistent that it felt like a mantra. Repeat after me:

*The Philadelphia Ethical Society relies upon the support of its friends and members. You can mail your contribution to the Ethical Society or click on the "Donate" button at the bottom of our web site. Thank you for your support!*

Yes, the "Donate" button is a relatively new way to send us money. And yes, after a long pandemic hiatus, we have brought back physical collection plates\* for use during in-person platforms. However, the content of the "big ask" that comes amid the community updates, the music, the talk, and the Ethical Action reports has been the same for a very long time. If you like what we're doing here, please help us pay for it!

The emphasis on financial contributions goes deeper than our Sunday script. Where our Society's Bylaws talk about the obligation of members, they refer exclusively to money. The Bylaws require an annual minimum contribution sufficient to meet the expenses of the Society but does not specify what that minimum is. Our current Board has an almost visceral dislike of any such requirements. We have discussed bringing a Bylaws amendment to our May Annual Meeting that would rewrite these obligations by giving weight to members' non-financial contributions.

Though relatively easy to measure, members' dollar contributions are a crude metric for what they bring to the Society. Among that oft-repeated trinity of "time, talent and treasure," the Board has been trying to figure out how to encourage more of the first two types of contributions: the ones that don't require your checkbook. Personally, I place the greatest value on members who regularly attend our platforms; engage in ethical actions; introduce our congregation to opportunities for ethical actions; compassionately support each other; and help organize and participate in Society activities. (While I have your attention: we have an aching need for that last one. Would anyone out there be willing to help bring back our post-platform coffee hours?)

Getting back to our "big ask" each Sunday: the language continues to evolve. Trying to distill in a few sentences what our community needs from its friends and members is not easy. More than money, we need your commitment and your energy to help us thrive. At its simplest, the Ethical Society needs to be a *priority* for all its members. What that looks like will be different for each one of us. We cannot all afford to donate an equal amount. We do not have the same number of hours to devote. Everyone has different gifts and talents. That is completely fine. Give what you can. Do what you can. Help where you can.

And take a close listen during our next Collection announcement. If you have thoughts on a better way to say "please give," then let me know.



\*There are about a dozen velvet-lined collection plates stored in the Administrator's Office. Someone in the Society's past may have hoped that the more—and the fancier—plates they circulated, the more money they'd collect.

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

## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### Black Women Saying “And... ACTION!”

By Kate Esposito

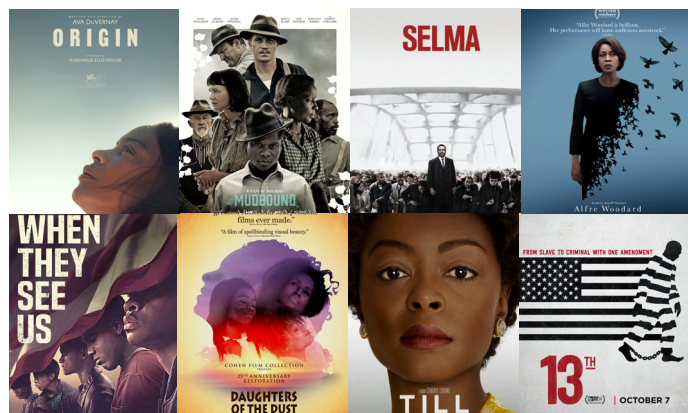
Black women filmmakers are making their mark, finding their power in today’s cinematic constellation. Their complex and layered perspectives challenge us to understand themes on a deeper level. Hopefully, enlightenment ensues.

After sinking millions of dollars into producing a film, studios hope to make a profit at the box office, through rentals and sales, or from streaming platforms. Success depends on good storytelling: primarily good writing and directing. The best storytelling, I think, has something to say about the human experience of struggle and survival. Black women filmmakers are uniquely positioned to tell those stories.

By tackling issues that range from human trafficking and domestic violence to lack of visibility in politics and leadership, Black women filmmakers challenge cultural narratives, according to Mojisola Sonoiki, an Atlanta filmmaker and founder of the African Film & Arts Foundation. Quoted in an article on the web site UrbanGeekz, Sonoiki explains that “being a marginalized group wherever we, as Black Women, find ourselves—be it back home or in the West—we are bound to bring different perspectives on how stories are presented and explored.”

Their history is long. I was surprised to discover that, in 1935 and 1936, the acclaimed novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston shot documentary footage as part of her fieldwork in Florida and Haiti. It incorporates rare ethnographic evidence of the Hoodoo and Vodou religions.

Other Black women were producing, directing, or writing films as far back as the early 1900s. They included Eloyce King Patrick Gist, Maria P. Williams, Madame E. Touissant, and Tressie Souders, who wrote, directed and produced the feature film *A Woman’s Error* in 1922.



Fast forward to the modern era:

- Julie Dash wrote, produced and directed *Daughters of the Dust*, a 1991 independent feature that was the first nationally distributed film directed by a Black woman. In 2004, it was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry, by the Library of Congress.
- Chinonye Chukwu, a Nigerian-American director, was inspired to write *Clemency*, released in 2019, by the 2011 execution of Troy Davis. (She also directed.) The first Black woman to win the U.S. Dramatic Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, Chukwu also co-wrote and directed the 2022 movie *Till*.
- Dee Rees, a queer Black woman, directed and co-wrote *Mudbound*, which earned four Oscar nominations at the 90th Academy Awards, including Best Adapted Screenplay. Rees was the first Black woman nominated in that category.

Finally, in a category of her own, is the powerhouse Ava DuVernay. Among other films, DuVernay has given us *Selma* (director); the documentary *13th* (writer and director); and *When They See Us* (co-writer and director). Last year, she directed and wrote the screenplay for *Origin*, based on the book *Caste: The Origin of our Discontents*, by Isabel Wilkerson. DuVernay is a recipient of a Primetime Emmy Award, two NAACP Image Awards, and a BAFTA Film and TV Award. She has been nominated for an Academy Award (for *13th*), a Golden Globe and—for *Origin*—the coveted Golden Lion at the 80th Annual Venice International Film Festival.

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been told, ‘Don’t apply to Venice. You won’t get in. It won’t happen,’” DuVernay said at a press conference during that competition. “And this year, something happened that hadn’t happened in eight decades before: an African American woman in competition. So, now, that’s a door open that I trust and hope the festival will keep open.”

We trust and hope so, too. We all love a great movie. And our movie-going experiences will be richer so long as Black women continue to challenge us with their powerful talent behind and in front of the camera.

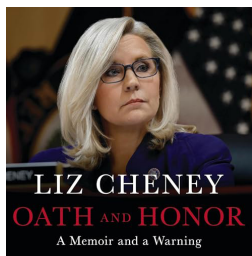
*Kate Esposito is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday, March 2, 10:30 AM - 12 PM (zoom)**

**Book Discussion Series: *Oath and Honor***

If you worry about the future of democracy, this important new book by Liz Cheney won't set your mind at ease. But it will make you better informed. "The warning Cheney issues is clear and persuasive," writes Carlos Lozada, in *The New York Times*. "A second presidential term for Donald Trump would pose great risks to the nation's democratic practices and identity. A retribution-minded, Constitution-terminating leader buttressed by unscrupulous advisers and ethically impaired lawyers could... 'dismantle our republic.'" This second of two meetings, led by Hugh, will cover Parts IV and V.



**Sunday, March 3, 7 PM (in-person)**

**An Introduction to Ethical Humanism**

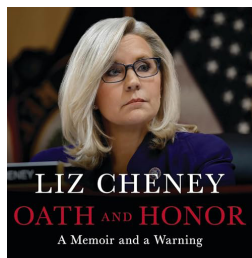
Hugh will lead this conversation about Ethical Humanism: its history, philosophy, and current manifestation at 1906 Rittenhouse Square. Light refreshments will be served. All are welcome. Meet in the Leader's Office.



**Tuesday, March 5, 12:30 PM (in-person)**

**Lunch with Hugh**

Come to the Leader's office for an informal conversation about whatever is on your mind. Bring your lunch.






**Tuesday, March 5, 5 PM - 6:30 PM (in-person)**

**Book Discussion Series: *Oath and Honor***

See March 2 event description, above. This second of two meetings, led by Hugh, will cover Parts IV and V. Meet in the Leader's Office.



**Open Seats:**

-  President
-  Vice President
-  3 Trustees at Large

**Contact our  
Nominating Committee**  
Harry Doris Jeffrey  
Thorn Dabrowski Dubb  
**By April 28th!**

**Wednesday, March 13, 12:30 PM (zoom)**

**Lunch with Hugh**

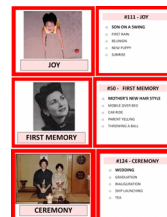
Share your lunchtime virtually with members of the Philadelphia and Baltimore Ethical Societies.



**Wednesday, March 20, 1 PM - 2:30 PM (in-person)**

**Peeling the Onion**

Get to know other Ethical Society members and some of our Philadelphia neighbors through this fun activity. Peeling the Onion lets participants share stories from their lives, creating opportunities for conversations and new friendships.



Meet in the Leader's Office. Space is limited, so RSVP to **Woody**.

## Wider Community Events

The following cultural events, presented by others, will be held in the Ethical Society Auditorium.

**Sunday, March 3, 4 PM**

**Re/Calibrate**

Relache presents an improvisational performance in a range of genres by piano/keyboard virtuoso Ron Stabinsky. For tickets, visit [Relache](#).

**Sundays, March 3, 10, 17, and 24, 6 PM**

**Bridge to Leon**

An evening of short plays inspired by the music of Leon Bridges. For tickets, visit [Ticketleap](#).



**Hungry for conversation:** In February, a Lunch with Hugh get-together attracted to the Leader's Office (clockwise from top left) Julia Gokalp, Jack Schwar, Erik Younge, Eugene Charrington, Yasemin Akis (a theology professor from Villanova, visiting for the first time), John Horkel, Stan Horwitz, Betsy Lightbourn, and Dan Hoffman.



## 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](mailto:office@phillyethics.org).

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

Building Committee  
Michael Black-Smith  
no meeting this month

**Camp Linden Committee**  
**Jeffrey Dubb**  
**Wednesday, March 27, 5 PM**

**Education Committee**  
**Betsy Lightbourn**  
**Wednesday, March 6, 5:30 PM**

**Ending Racism Task Force**  
**Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge**  
**Saturday, March 9, 11 AM**

Ethical Action Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

**Finance Committee**  
**Nick Sanders**  
**Wednesday, March 13, 5 PM**

**Media Committee**  
**Drew Snyder**  
**Thursday, March 21, 6 PM**

Social Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

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

## Attitudes That Divide

On February 5, about 100 people gathered to hear Leader Hugh discuss racism at Foulkeways at Gwynedd, a life plan community. Berit Lakey, a resident member of Foulkeways' Diversity Community, interviewed Hugh on the topic "The Impact of the Color Line on All Americans." The conversation ranged from Hugh's own experiences in anti-racism work to changing forms of racism, resentment of multicultural efforts, and Hugh's *400years.today* blog. As a thank-you, Foulkeways generously donated \$250 to the Society.



## Seeds That Multiply

Society members got a leg up on spring by helping Camp Linden prepare its organic garden. In February, half-a-dozen people gathered in the 1906 kitchen to plant tomato and pepper seeds in peat pellets, which Amy Johnston (left) and Sharon Wallis arranged in a tray. Later this month, members will be able to bring the seedlings home and nurture them. The plants' final destination is Camp Linden. There, young campers will study the vegetables' growth and, then, harvest and eat them.

