



ETHICAL VIEWS

October 2024 Vol. 139, No. 2 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, October 6, 11 AM

Dying to Vote

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader
Philadelphia Ethical Society**



Voting is the most fundamental power in any real democracy. Yet Americans have been killed for using the vote to challenge systemic racism. Octavius Catto in 1871. Herbert Lee in 1961. Vernon Dahmer in 1966. To honor those slain activists, we must overcome voter suppression and apathy, demand greater ballot access, and encourage broader participation. Doing so may

determine the outcome of this year's Presidential election. (On Oct. 7, Hugh will screen the short film *Dying to Vote*. See Page 5.)

Sunday, October 13, 11 AM

***International Actors and Americans' Trust in Elections*
Sarah Bush, Associate Professor of Political Science
University of Pennsylvania**



Foreign influence on elections is widespread. Drawing on evidence from surveys of Americans and others over the past decade, Bush will explain how and why such outside interventions affect local trust. Bush's research focuses on ways in which international actors try to aid democracy, promote women's representation, and influence elections globally. She is the author, with Lauren

Prather, of *Monitors and Meddlers: How Foreign Actors Influence Local Trust in Elections*.

Sunday, October 20, 11 AM

Superstition

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Almost a third of Americans admit to being at least somewhat superstitious. People knock on wood, throw salt over their shoulders, and avoid walking under ladders. Should we challenge such remnants of magical thinking, as Freethought Society founder Margaret Downey does at her Friday the 13th parties? Do superstitions harm anyone if—deep down—we don't believe in them? On Halloween Eve, Hugh Taft-Morales explores our relationship with silly habits and irrational practices.

Sunday, October 27, 11 AM

***The Future of Journalism in a Democratic Society*
Victor Pickard,
Professor of Media Policy and Political Economy
Annenberg School for Communication**



The plague of misinformation is a threat to democracy, made worse by the loss of local journalism. Pickard, co-director of the Media, Inequality & Change Center at University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School, explores the need for new approaches to mainstream news and social media. He is the author of *Democracy Without Journalism? Confronting the Misinformation Society*.

* *Where They'll Be*

The Philadelphia Ethical Society gathers in-person every Sunday. Platforms are delivered simultaneously in the Auditorium and over zoom. When guest speakers appear on zoom, attendees in the Auditorium can view their presentations on a screen while experiencing the rest of the program in real life. Please continue to check your Weekly Bulletins for updates.



Pet Project: Kate Esposito transformed the August 25 platform into an improv class: challenging us to think on our feet and experiment with non-verbal modes of communication. The program culminated with a series of interviews in which members portrayed their own cats. Paw-ticipants included (from left) Julia Gokalp, Betsy Lightbourn, Stan Horwitz, and Kate.

LETTER FROM THE LEADER

The Paradox of Autumn

By Hugh Taft-Morales

I love autumn. I find it the most spiritual season. As an atheist, I don't wrap up my spirituality in god-talk. Rather, I experience it through a powerful, natural force: the passage of time. As fall ushers in darkening days, cooling temperatures, and falling leaves, I ponder the temporary nature of existence. Fall reminds me of the past and motivates me to think more intentionally about my future.

Nostalgia often is triggered by something as mundane as a smell. When we step outside and breathe deep the fall air, we know the seasons are changing. Scientists explain that plants and trees "exhale" as they prepare for winter: releasing gases that include hydrogen, carbon, and terpene. As the piles of leaves begin to decompose, their emissions trigger emotional shifts tied to our personal memories.

Baking spices, which also are pervasive in autumn, have the same effect: something that marketers at Starbucks figured out when developing the company's spiced-pumpkin latte. They leveraged the power of nostalgia with Starbucks' patented mixture of coffee, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves. The result is as endearing as grandma's potpourri or your favorite pumpkin pie. When this now-ubiquitous beverage was introduced in 2004, few would have predicted that two decades later it would generate over half a billion dollars in sales!

While fall reminds us of the past, it also encourages fresh starts. We look forward to what a new school year or football season might bring. I experienced deeply this seasonal renewal each September during my 25-year teaching career. After a summer away from the classroom, I was always ready to innovate. Similarly, as I return to 1906 Rittenhouse Square for my final year as Leader, I ponder how our traditions—such as our Humanist Thanksgiving and Winter Solstice ceremony—can be made fresh and different. (Let me know if you have any new ideas that excite you.)

Looking back and looking forward—feeling nostalgia and anticipating change—creates the potential for paradox. The writer Rachel Syme noted that autumn can feel emotionally ambiguous: at once sad and joyful. As Adrienne Matei put it, writing in *The Guardian*, "We may feel a heady mix of nostalgic yearning, renewed optimism, and abstract melancholy. We may be sentimental, remembering long-gone school days or how excited we used to be as children, knowing Halloween and Thanksgiving were round the corner."

The fall also can feel at once familiar and novel. Matei suggests that such ambiguity flows out of the transition from a carefree summer to the thoughtfulness of colder months. This combination of joy and melancholy actually may *be good for us*, according to Krystine Batcho, a psychologist at Le Moyne College. Paradoxical mixtures of reflection and anticipation, of sadness and happiness, bond us with others seeking to process the mysteries of life.

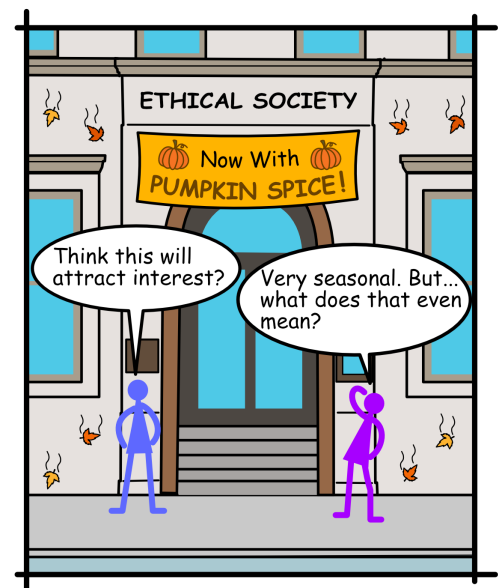
To embrace the ambiguity of autumn, then, we need help from both our emotions and our senses. That approach is fundamental to Ethical Culture, our humanist alternative to traditional religion. Though we are embedded in an intellectual tradition, we know that reason alone is insufficient.

We at the Ethical Society must strengthen those relational bonds that weakened over the pandemic years. Why don't we do so by exploring together what fall means to each of us? Invite one or two other members to go on a walk. Or share a picnic in Rittenhouse Square, enjoying the colorful trees, crisp air, and fall's signature scent of rain, earth, tree bark, and leaves. Such experiences—touched by nostalgia for the robust community of our past and the promise of new adventures together—offers spiritual energy even to a skeptic like me.

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

The Philly Ethicals

a Mike Black-Smith procrastination



BEHIND THE SCENES

All About the Numbers

By Cheryl Desmond

This month, I'd like to discuss the financial position for the Society's fiscal year, which ended on June 30.

Financial support is one of several interconnected challenges the Society faces. Enrolled membership is small, at about 70 individuals. Last fiscal year, member contributions were \$40,000. So, did each member contribute \$573? Well, no. Of course not. Some members are generously able to contribute more to balance those who give less. Should the membership do more?

Programs such as the Sunday platforms reach well beyond the membership. And the Society is pleased to offer programming to the community. But do we need mechanisms to bring in more financial support from those served? Is it possible for people to show they value what the Ethical Society offers without becoming members?

Aside from our two properties (1906 Rittenhouse Square and Camp Linden), the Society's endowments, which provide operating funds, are not large. The last fiscal year they brought in about \$25,000. Imagine that the Society had just \$64,000 to accomplish all it needs to do, from hiring a full- or part-time leader to compensating Sunday guest speakers

and musicians to—hopefully—bringing on more office and program-support staff and—maybe, someday—launching a Sunday School. How would that even be possible?

As the chart on this page shows, rental income from our weekly groups and public events is significant. But, oh so much of that goes back into operating the building: repairs, utilities, cleaning, staffing, and so forth. From the numbers, it might appear that the Ethical Society is operating as a community center. Is that desirable? As I offer questions without answers, I hope the community will rise to the challenge.

A final note: the rumors of my retirement are true. I plan for my last day to be December 30. We have begun the search for a new rentals and office manager. This is a part-time position: probably three days a week. Roughly 75 percent of the work is related to managing building rentals. Every day brings something different. It's a great job for meeting new people and problem solving. For a full position description or to suggest a candidate, [email](#) me.

Cheryl Desmond is the Office Administrator at the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Philadelphia Ethical Society Activity vs. Budget Report

July 2023 through June 2024, Cash basis

Jul '23 - Jun 24 : \$ Over Budget : Annual Budget

	Jul '23 - Jun 24	\$ Over Budget	Annual Budget
Income			
▶ 4-1000 Program Income	2,548	(2,052)	4,600
▶ 4-2000 Members Contributions	40,212	(19,788)	60,000
▶ 4-3000 Building Income	179,239	19,839	159,400
▶ 4-5000 Investment Income	25,015	9,015	16,000
Total Income	247,014	7,014	240,000
Expense			
▶ 6-1000 Program Expense	21,058	(6,822)	27,880
▶ 6-2000 Administration	31,853	(4,177)	36,030
▶ 6-3000 Building Expense	59,567	(9,093)	68,660
▶ 6-4000 Personnel Expense	119,741	12,311	107,430
Total Expense	232,219	(7,781)	240,000
Net Income	14,796	14,796	0

In Good We Trust

a podcast about being human
hosted by Hugh Taft-Morales

PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY

Our Ethical Podcast

Back for its second year, Hugh's podcast, *In Good We Trust*, promotes thoughtful reflection about the challenges of living an ethical life. If you haven't yet tuned in, then you can catch up [here](#) or from the Philadelphia Ethical Society [home page](#). Record a comment on Voice Memos for inclusion in future podcasts. Share your thoughts and questions: be part of the conversation.

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

The Trials and Triumphs of Black Athletes

By Erik Young

In 2001, at the prestigious Indian Wells tennis tournament, a disturbing racial incident exploded. Rising superstar sisters Venus and Serena Williams were set to compete against each other on the court in the most anticipated match of the year. Unfortunately, Venus suffered an injury and had to retire. Serena won in a walkover.

When Serena came on to play in her next match, a small but loud contingent of fans erupted in a shocking torrent of boos, taunts, racist name-calling and abuse. The N- word rained consistently on the 19-year-old Black athlete.

"I looked up and all I could see was a sea of rich people—mostly older, mostly white—standing and booing lustily, like some kind of genteel lynch mob," Serena wrote in her autobiography.

Through bitter tears, Serena won the match. The Williams family, led by the sisters' angry father, Richard, decided to boycott Indian Wells. They were protesting both the racist tirade of the crowd and the tournament officials' weak response. That boycott lasted for 14 years.

This incident vividly illustrates the turbulent, troubled, yet often glorious and lucrative road traveled by Black athletes in America. William Rhoden gets at that paradox in the title of his provocative book *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*. How can athletes earning multi-million-dollar salaries be compared to enslaved people? "The elevated compensation of some players obscure[s] the reality of exploitation and contemporary colonization," Rhoden writes.

Rhoden says that athletes transitioned from playing on literal plantations—where owners introduced sports to distract enslaved people from thoughts of rebellion—to the modern, figurative plantations of college and professional teams. White wealth continues to exploit Black labor, he writes. Only the circumstances have changed.

After the Civil War, Black athletes used their growing wealth and success to help their families and communities. But white resentment viciously struck back. Professional baseball and

the National Football League, both initially integrated, became all-white in 1889 and 1933, respectively. Black jockeys won more than half of the Kentucky Derbies held before 1902. Then attacks by white jockeys during races drove them out of the sport.

The 1947 integration of Major League Baseball by the heroic Jackie Robinson began to turn the tide. Black athletes were essential activists in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the human rights struggles of the 1970s. Today, Black athletes use their bodies, brains, wealth, talents, celebrity, and influence to fight white supremacy, discrimination, legal segregation, and other forms of racism.

Sometimes, they face recrimination. In 2016, Colin Kaepernick took the knee during the National Anthem to protest systemic racism. His teammate Eric Reid followed his lead; and both were blackballed by the NFL. But their defiance inspired similar gestures in other teams and other sports. On September 24, 2017, more than 200 NFL players took the knee after then-President Donald Trump called for protesting athletes to be fired.

LeBron James and Michael Jordan were among the very influential athletes who spoke up about the 2020 murder of George Floyd. "I stand with those who are calling out the ingrained racism and violence toward people of color in our country," Jordan said at the time. "We have had enough."



Serena Williams

Rhoden, the author of *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, anticipates that a new generation of athletes will have even more impact: using its popularity and wealth to help raise up "the vast majority of African Americans who sit on the periphery of society." There's hope in that, writes Rhoden, "because, as every athlete knows, as long as you struggle, as long as you keep up a fight, no victory is impossible."

Erik Young is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

UPCOMING EVENTS



Sunday, October 6, 5-6:30 PM

Ethical Culture Happy Hour

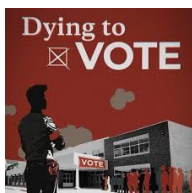
Come for conversation and a brief presentation about our alternative to traditional religion. Hugh Taft-Morales will share his perspective on our humanist history, values, and community. Snacks and beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, are provided.



Tuesday, October 22, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh (in person)

We'll eat. We'll talk. Bring your own lunch and a topic of conversation. Meet in the Leader's Office.



Dying to VOTE

Monday, October 7, 5:30 PM

Video Screening: *Dying to Vote*

Hugh Taft-Morales hosts a screening of *Dying to Vote*, the latest documentary from Emmy-winning filmmaker Loki Mulholland, of the Joan Trumpauer Mulholland Foundation. This 30-minute film explores racism, violence, and vote suppression. A short discussion will follow. Meet in the Collier Room.



Wednesday, October 9, 1-2:30 PM

Peeling the Onion

Get to know other members of the Ethical Society and our neighbors from Friends in the City through this fun activity. 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 [Hugh](#) or to [Woody Kardon](#), who is Peeling the Onion's creator.



Wednesday, October 16, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh (zoom edition)

We'll eat. We'll talk. Bring your own lunch and a topic of conversation.



Sunday, October 20, 2 PM

Practical Lessons for Personal Excellence and Tranquility

Join the Philadelphia Ethical Society and [Philadelphia Stoa](#) for the second of four seminars focused on practical exercises for cultivating virtue and excellence. Stoicism and Ethical Culture both are philosophical traditions that champion rationality, ethical living, and the pursuit of moral virtues. These seminars also draw parallels with positive psychology and explore the Stoic disciplines of Desire, Action, and Judgment. Meet at the Ethical Society building. And mark your calendars for the final two seminars, on November 17 and December 15, both at 2 PM.

Workshop: Aging Gracefully

Can we live more joyfully as we age? Believe it or not, we can, even as increasingly we experience the realities of human frailty. Hugh Taft-Morales will lead a six-session workshop that explores how to flourish by cultivating new ideas, projects, and personal connections; how to leave a legacy for future generations; and how to manage fragility and the process of dying. In preparation, please get a copy of the book *Wise Aging: Living with Joy, Resilience, and Spirit*, by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Linda Thal.

Participants can choose either an in-person or a zoom track. Here is the current schedule, although dates and times may shift depending on people's commitments:

The in-person track will meet at the Ethical Society from 5:30 PM to 7 PM on the following Mondays: Nov. 18, Dec. 2, Dec. 16, Jan. 6, Jan. 20, and Feb. 3.

The zoom track will meet on either Fridays from 12:30 PM to 2 PM or on Saturdays from 10:30 AM to noon. Dates to be determined.

Wise Aging

Living with JOY, RESILIENCE, & SPIRIT



Rabbi Rachel Cowan
&
Dr. Linda Thal



SUNDAY SERVICES

11 am

Ethical Views is published monthly except July and August.

Executive Editor: Leigh Buchanan
Proofreaders: Betsy Lightbourn,
Henry Pashkow, Nick Sanders,
Hugh Taft-Morales

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

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(215) 735 - 3456
office@phillyethics.org

PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEES

Our Society is sustained by all of its volunteers who serve on the many committees that fulfill our purpose and guide our decisions. The following generous members serve as chairs of the committees, which meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Check with chairs for meeting venues.

Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org.

Board of Trustees
Michael Black-Smith
Sunday, Oct 20, 6 PM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
Wednesday, Oct 16, 6 PM

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, Oct 9, 5 PM

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, Oct 30, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
no meeting this month

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, Oct 2, 5:30 PM

Social Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, Oct 12, 11 AM

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

Stop the Land Grab!

At least a dozen Society members were among thousands of protesters at the Save Our Chinatown Rally outside City Hall, on September 8. Speaker after speaker praised the resilience and contributions of the Chinatown community while warning about the unprecedented threat posed by a proposed 76ers arena. "This city ain't for sale!" chanted the fired-up attendees. Pictured clockwise from upper left: Sylvia Metzler, Leigh Buchanan, Nick Sanders, Denise Marx, Kate Esposito, Julia Gokalp, and Drew Snyder. (The guy holding the sign just happened to be there.) Not pictured: Erik Younge, Sharon Wallis, Kimiko Doherty, Harry Thorn, and Irene Putzer.



Commence the Chaos!

Around 45 people hurried in confusion and growing panic as they tried to land a job, meet with their probation officers, get screened for drugs, and complete myriad other tasks before their time ran out. On September 11, participants in the Society's re-entry simulation got a taste of struggles faced by those returning home from prison. Below, Kimiko Doherty tried to raise a little cash at the blood donation station, run by Denise Marx. Members Ruth and Barry Dubinsky, Kate Esposito, Michael Black-Smith, Leigh Buchanan, Joe Bullock, and Julia Gokalp—and their friends and relatives—also volunteered.

