



# ETHICAL VIEWS

March 2025 Vol. 139, No. 7 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us \*

**Sunday, March 2, 11 AM**

***In Democracy We Trust?***

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



In his first inaugural address, Ronald Reagan said, "Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem." That drumbeat of opposition has continued, from Newt Gingrich to the Tea Party to today's MAGA movement. Is villainization of government a permanent trend? Can we rebuild trust in democracy? Are progressives so worn out that they are

losing faith? Hugh Taft-Morales explores responses to the anti-government movement that is sabotaging our political system.

**Sunday, March 9, 11 AM**

***Resentment and Repair***

**Sukaina Hirji, Professor of Philosophy  
University of Pennsylvania**



Anger keeps us safe. When someone treats us badly, anger reminds both us and the person who hurt us that we deserve better. But anger also gets in the way of love. If we're angry at someone, then it is difficult to feel closeness or compassion towards them. Sukaina Hirji, an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania specializing in moral

and ancient Greek philosophy, asks: When should we give up our anger against someone who has hurt us? When is loving someone more important than keeping ourselves safe?

**Sunday, March 16, 11 AM**

***Confucianism and Ethical Culture***

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

There are historical and philosophical connections between Confucianism and Ethical Culture. Both philosophies are rooted in the secular world, defying the presumption that religion must involve supernatural powers. And both emphasize the importance of personal virtues and responsible relationships as a way to build a positive, flourishing society. Indeed, Felix Adler, the founder of Ethical Culture, lectured about the most dominant worldview in China. Hugh Taft-Morales explores links between these nontheistic paths to living an ethical life.

**Sunday, March 23, 11 AM**

***Preserving Public Education in the Age of Trump***

**Barbara Ferman, Professor of Political Science  
Temple University**



Public education has been under attack by promoters of privatization for many years. Labeled "education reform," these attacks have come in the form of charter schools, school vouchers, and school closures. Now, the Trump administration has declared an all-out war on public education. What lessons have we learned from grassroots challenges to the first

wave of privatization? Are those lessons still applicable; or is this a whole new landscape? Barbara Ferman, a political science professor at Temple, is founder and executive director of the University Community Collaborative, a social-justice initiative for students.

**Sunday, February 23, 11 AM**

***The Brick Wall Brain: Why Facts (Usually)  
Don't Change Minds***

**AEU All-Society Program**



When presented with solid data, some people go blank, get angry, or walk out. Why isn't evidence breaking through? Seth Andrews, creator of The Thinking Atheist online community, discusses "identity beliefs" and suggests how to crack open the barriers they create and let in some light. (Use this [AEU Zoom link](#) to register for this program.)

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### \* Where They'll Be

*The Philadelphia Ethical Society gathers in-person every Sunday, at 1906 Rittenhouse Square. 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.*

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## LETTER FROM THE LEADER

### Finding Courage in Dark Times

By Hugh Taft-Morales

It's natural, in these times, to be afraid. Threats to our democracy, our society, and our lives seem to lurk around every corner. Turning on the nightly news feels like walking into a scary movie. Each day, when I bring in the newspaper, I take a deep breath and steel myself before looking at the front page.

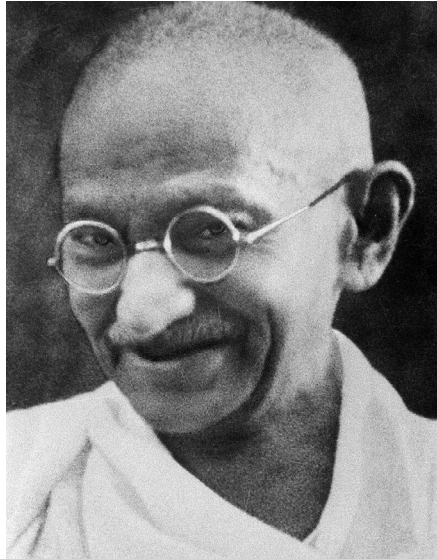
It may be possible—just barely—to pretend the situation isn't so bad. A lot of terrible things have happened in world history. So, there's always something worse you can compare our present situation to. Those of us with resources have options for distracting ourselves from the chaos. Spirits and screens offer a cozy cave, like the one Plato described. We'll embrace the shadows on the wall. "Pour me another and turn on Netflix!"

Distraction and denial are ways to avoid feeling fear. But not to be fearful in a dangerous world is, itself, dangerous. We risk becoming ignorant, insensible, or foolhardy. Complacency sets in. Compassion dwindles.

Most important: without fear, we'd never get the chance to be courageous. There are different types of courage. Physical (think skydiving). Social (think public speaking). Personal (think self-awareness of our dark sides).

What we need in these dark times, however, is the sort of courage demonstrated by Mahatma Gandhi: political courage. Political courage is built on a foundation of moral courage, which "comes from identification with the intrinsic good in oneself," wrote Keshavan Nair in his book *A Higher Standard of Leadership: Lessons from the Life of Gandhi*. "The greater the identification, the more courage you will have. When you identify yourself with your belief of what is right, you will have the courage to do it. Complete identification makes an individual feel there is no other choice."

So, with belief comes the courage to act. But a different kind of fear is bound up in action: particularly in consequential action. Such fear is produced not by external threats but by internal doubts. Am I doing the right thing? In the right way? Am I the right person to take this on? What if I make a mistake? Who could get hurt?



To act courageously, in doubt, is to accept that you will never know enough to be infallible. As Goethe points out, people always make mistakes if they are striving after something worth achieving. Kierkegaard saw greater stakes. "To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily," he wrote. "Not to dare is to lose oneself."

Some of my historical heroes accepted their fears and kept going. Jane Addams, for example, was afraid that she didn't know how best to help impoverished neighborhoods in Chicago. But she didn't let that trap her in what she called the "snare of preparation," which can lead to endless study at the expense of action.

Today, every citizen must be more politically courageous. That requires action, whether it's calling your representative, attending demonstrations, or contributing to causes despite a dwindling savings account. Few can be as brave as Gandhi, the father of independent India. But as Nair reminds

us in his book, "We are all leaders. Each one of us is setting an example for someone else, and each one of us has a responsibility to shape the future as we wish it to be."

Let's remind one other that we can help to shape the country we desire. That's both the magic and burden of democracy. It requires citizens to have the courage to lead.

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

#### **The AEU Seeks a Developmental Director**

The American Ethical Union (AEU) is soliciting applications for a Developmental Director to drive organizational growth and strengthen connections among member Societies. This transitional position will lead strategic initiatives, cultivate partnerships, and enhance the AEU's impact over four years. We will consider current or former AEU staff, directors, Leaders, and Society members. If no internal candidate is recommended, a second solicitation will include external candidates. To apply, please provide a statement of interest and a resume to [recruitment@aeu.org](mailto:recruitment@aeu.org) by March 15.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### A New Season of Grants Helps Kids and Leaders

*By Michael Black-Smith*

In January, our Board awarded grants to three deserving organizations from funds generated by the bequest of member Rose Rappaport Long. Rappaport Long's endowment, made in 1956, targets two of her chief concerns: the opportunity for worthy individuals to pursue general or professional education and the promotion of leadership within our humanist movement.

This is the first round of grant decisions that uses guidelines adopted by the Board to impose greater consistency. They create a task force as well as biannual deadlines by which to advertise, collect, and report applications. These structured winter and summer "Granting Seasons" will help us honor the intent of Rappaport Long's incredibly generous gift to the Society.

The 2025 Winter Granting Season's recipients are (drum roll, please...)

#### **The Lantern Theater Company**

*Classroom teaching-artist residencies and student matinee performances*

The Lantern Theater Company is known for producing plays. But it also has an education program, called Illuminations, that draws on the organization's expertise with dramatic and literary texts—as well as theatrical language and techniques—to enrich learning.

Our education grant will support the training of "Classroom Connections" teaching artists, who work in classrooms or run afterschool programs at under-resourced schools. Our grant also will help the Lantern offer special student matinees, followed by discussions about the ideas and issues raised in the performances. For the 2024-2025 school year, the Lantern expects that up to 500 students will work with Classroom Connections teachers, and up to 1,000 will attend the matinees. Our grant will allow it to serve the same number of students in the 2025-2026 school year.

#### **Mighty Writers**

*Afterschool literacy programs for underserved children and youth in Philadelphia*

Mighty Writers is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit that provides evidence-based afterschool programs at safe and inclusive writing centers. The organization says its goal is to "promote full and equal participation in school, family, community, and society."

Our grant will allow Mighty Writers to extend its services by supporting the instruction of 3,500 children and youth in social- and emotional-learning out-of-school programs. Most programs run daily during the school year as part of Mighty Writers' After-School Academy. The organization also offers college- and career-prep workshops, trauma-informed mindfulness workshops, and six-to-eight weeks of summer programming. Specifically, our grant will help cover the cost of personnel and supplies, so that each writing center can be staffed by a full-time literacy director and literacy manager, responsible for creating fun and innovative programming.

#### **American Ethical Union**

*Leadership Initiative Program*

The fund also supports leadership development within Ethical Culture. Consequently, we have awarded a grant to the American Ethical Union (AEU) for its Leadership Initiative Program.

This program aims to empower leadership, inspire Societies, and strengthen the broader movement through skills development and education in attracting and utilizing funding and resources. The aim is to create a curriculum with three tracks: 1) Organizational Management, 2) People Management, and 3) Ethical Culture Identity Formation. The first two tracks may be offered through the AEU or external organizations. The third track will be produced and offered through the AEU. The coursework and resources developed for that third track likely will be invaluable to us during our leadership transition.

We hope this curriculum will shorten the distance between our professional Leaders and our lay-leaders and members. For example, it could help members wanting to learn how to run a committee or Leaders seeking continuing education about pastoral care.

To learn more about these organizations or get involved with the task force, please contact Kate Esposito, Sylvia Metzler, or Henry Pashkow.

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



## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### Honored for Her Life in Activism

*On February 1, at the Germantown Friends Meeting House, Sylvia Metzler, co-chair of the Ending Racism Task Force, was presented with the Dove Award from the Philadelphia branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Sylvia was honored for her years working for peace and justice. The following is an edited excerpt of the speech she delivered at the ceremony.*

Many people ask me when I started my life of activism. My first memory is when I was a sophomore at Upper Darby High School and boycotted and protested the sorority system. I felt it was too exclusive and caused too many hurt feelings.

But I didn't really wake up as an activist until the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, in 1968. At that time, I was 31 and married, with three young children. I was not paying much attention to the news. On the evening of Dr. King's murder, I was attending a PTA meeting at my children's grade school. I was astounded that the news of his death was never mentioned by any among the all-white group of parents or teachers that night. I knew then that I needed to educate myself and become involved.

I didn't know quite where to start. But I attended the Central Presbyterian Church of Norristown; and I remembered that the pastor, Rev. Jeff McConaughy, and his wife, Ann McConaughy, were part of a bi-racial study group that met at the Norristown Friends Meeting. I asked to join them. There, I learned about the work of the Delaware Valley Fair Housing Council. They needed people to volunteer as "testers" to gather evidence about the discriminatory practices of real-estate offices and landlords.

So, I became one of the "sandwich" people. When a house or apartment was listed for sale or rent, a white couple would inquire about its availability. Then a Black couple would do the same, followed by another white couple. When the residence was made available to the two white couples but not to the Black couple, we were able to document racial discrimination.

My three young children were involved in my activism as a matter of course. I used a fake identity with the realtors and landlords. So, the kids had to play along if they answered those phone calls. Sometimes, community members who disapproved of what I was doing would give them a hard time. (I like to caution young activists not to let their work take needed time and attention from their children. I'm afraid that I sometimes neglected my kids. In life, we need to carefully balance what we do!)



Over the many years and causes and campaigns that I was involved with, I always had people who served as examples and mentors. Hopefully, they will continue to inspire me—and all of us—as we face the incredible challenges before us.

Jeff and Ann McConaughy not only served as mentors for me on combating racism but also in my response to the war in Vietnam. Many people will be surprised to learn that I used to vote Republican and believed in the "domino theory" concerning that war. Rev. Jeff and Ann, meanwhile, were standing alone on street corners in Norristown, protesting the Vietnam War despite disapproval from many people in their congregation. We need to emulate their courage today and stand up for what we believe is right and just. Even when—or especially when—we are met with opposition and condemnation from those around us.

These words were the first of many in the sharing of my life of activism. I was strongly encouraged by those attending this award ceremony to write a memoir. I want to do that. But, for now, being an activist takes precedence over being a writer!

*Sylvia Metzler is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force*

## We Remember Bob Bueding

Bob Bueding, who for more than a decade devoted much of his time, energy, and talent to our Society, died early on Christmas morning, at age 79. He is survived by his wife, Liz, and—in Liz’s words—“a cohort of very fine friends.”

Bob was born in New York City, on November 1, 1945. His adoptive parents were both from Europe. They met in Paris after their families fled from—in his mother’s case—the Russian Bolshevik Army and—in his father’s case—the Nazis. Bob’s father was a physician and pharmacologist who specialized in research on tropical diseases. He is credited with finding a cure for schistosomiasis.

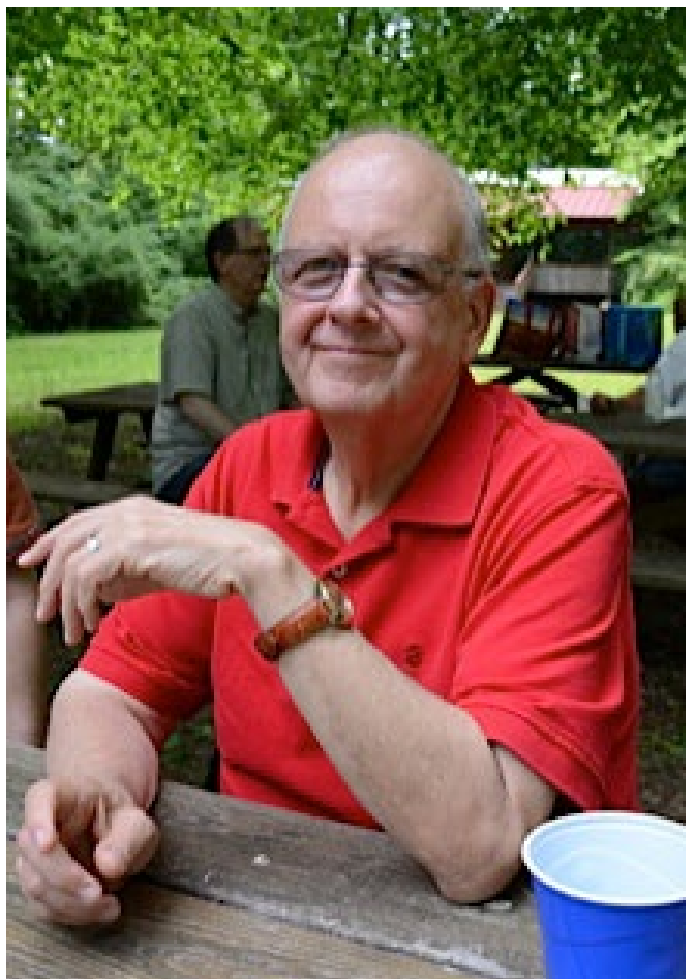
Bob was an ardent photographer, whose love for the art blossomed while he was a boarder at North Country School, in Lake Placid, New York. He graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art, in 1969, with a BFA in photography. Over the years, Bob photographed everything from industrial scenes to weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. One of his award-winning photos was displayed at the National Geographic building, in Washington D.C. “I always strive to take a picture that tells a story,” he once said.

Bob worked for a number of years in 3M’s Graphic Arts Department and—in the 1970s and ‘80s—owned a small chain of camera stores in the Baltimore area. After moving to Philadelphia in 2000, he managed several camera stores for Larmon Photo.

It was through photography that Bob was introduced to the Philadelphia Ethical Society. In 2012, Hugh Taft-Morales had been hired as the Society’s new leader; and Betsy Lightbourn was searching for someone to photograph his installation ceremony. Nina Diamond suggested Bob, who recently had moved in down the hall from Betsy at Penn Center House. “He not only accepted the assignment but, soon after, joined us,” said Betsy. “I know Bob as both a friendly and helpful neighbor as well as a highly competent president.”

Bob held several leadership roles at the Ethical Society. Working with Janice Moore, he chaired the Collier Room Art Gallery exhibitions that started in 2013. Bob also joined the Board and, in 2016, became Society president, a role he held until the summer of 2021. “His style was cooperative and calming,” says Hugh. “He always would tell people that ‘we’ll work things out.’

“Bob was gentle, generous, and kind,” says Hugh. “He really wanted to bring out the best in others.”



Liz says Bob “loved the time he spent as president of PES. But he didn’t like getting up in the middle of the night when their alarm went off.” Bob continued to support the Society after his term ended. He became less active only when his illness progressed.

Liz called Bob “a tech and gadget geek.” As a result, she said, “I have a huge pile of totally incomprehensible stuff now hiding in a closet.” He grew up around cats and maintained a lifelong affection for them. “In our 56 years of marriage, we have had five long-lived, much-loved cats,” said Liz.

Bob “was one of the kindest and most considerate people I know,” said Temma Fishman. “When we were unable to occupy our apartment, he watered our plants for years and cleaned up any debris from them. He kept in touch with Arnold and me during our recent difficult times and always offered to help us.

“He was a true friend,” said Temma, “and a fine example of what it means to live the life of ethical humanism.”



## Dancing to Klezmer. Eating Crickets. That's February at the Society.

Trees and tortoises. Noah's pudding and primordial soup. Last month, Society friends and members enjoyed two nature-themed potlucks, one welcoming the spring, the other commemorating a pioneer of modern science.

On February 12, we celebrated the New Year of the Trees, an agricultural holiday marking the approximate time when tree sap starts flowing upward to nourish the development of leaves. A fundraiser for Camp Linden, the event featured fruit-forward dishes like Ashure (Noah's pudding) and apple kugel, prepared by Sharon Wallis. After dinner, we watched a short film about klezmer music, then joined hands and danced around the Auditorium. Attendees also started seeds for replanting in the camp's garden.

Hugh revived Darwin Day—a Society favorite—on February 15, to honor the naturalist whose theory of evolution underlies modern biology. Lee Maclvor's vegan primordial soup—complemented by plant, fish, meat, bird, and insect toppings—was the meal's centerpiece. For the evening's main entertainment, three teams (the Neanderthals, the Regal Beagles, and Survival of the Winningest) competed in a trivia contest about Darwin's life and work. The Regal Beagles (Julia Gokalp, Tara Swartz, and Leigh Buchanan) walked away with the prize: a stuffed monkey. We united for the singalong: "Glory, Glory Evolution!"



Clockwise from top:  
Lee Maclvor and her primordial soup;  
Hugh eats crickets;  
Darwin Day celebrants;  
Kicking up heels to klezmer;  
Amy Johnston and Sharon Wallis.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Unless noted, events take place at the Philadelphia Ethical Society, 1906 Rittenhouse Square.

**Sunday, March 2, 2 PM**

## Remembering Bob Bueding



Members of the Philadelphia Ethical Society will hold a memorial celebrating the life of Bob Bueding, who passed away in December. Bob served as President of the Society for five years and volunteered in many other capacities. His steady hand and gentle, kind demeanor are greatly missed. (Bob's obituary appears on Page 5.)

**Sunday, March 2, 3 PM - 4:30 PM**

## Forsaking Reason: The Perils of Following the Mob



Stoicism advises us to be wary of crowds, whose influence can erode or disrupt our judgment. How can we engage in public spaces and collective dynamics without compromising personal virtue and integrity? Join members of the Ethical Society and

Philadelphia Stoa to examine the corrupting power of crowds and learn how Stoics maintain inner strength through selective interaction with the world. Discover strategies for safeguarding your own ethical direction and character amidst the complexities of social environments.



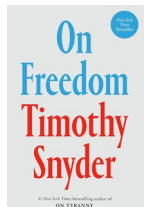
**Sunday, March 2, 5 PM - 6:30 PM**

## Ethical Culture Happy Hour!

All are invited to this introduction to the history, philosophy, and current practice of Ethical Culture. We'll explore our non-theist alternative to traditional religion over beverages and snacks.

**Tuesday, March 4, 2 PM - 3:30 PM**

## Book Discussion: *On Freedom*, by Timothy Snyder



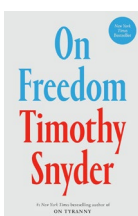
Join Hugh in the Leader's Office for our concluding discussion of Timothy Snyder's new book, an exploration of what it will take to create a functioning, compassionate system of governance. Snyder challenges us to work towards not only a negative freedom—freedom from restraint—but also a "positive" freedom: one that offers

opportunities to live full, rich, and ethical lives. This session will cover material from pages 162 through 277.

**Thursday, March 6, 5 PM - 6:30 PM (zoom)**

## Book Discussion: *On Freedom*, by Timothy Snyder

A virtual version of our March 4 book discussion. See details, above.



**Monday, March 10, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM (zoom)**

## Lunch with Hugh

Join Hugh for casual conversation. In honor of Women's History Month, we will share thoughts and stories about our favorite women in history. Bring your own lunch.



**Saturday, March 15, 7 PM**

## The Ethics of Star Trek

*Star Trek*, in its myriad iterations, challenges viewers to consider such subjects as virtue, self-determination, and individual responsibility. Join Julia Gokalp and Stan Horwitz in the Collier Room to watch two *Star Trek* episodes, followed by a discussion of their ethical themes.

**Sunday, March 16, 12:45 PM - 2 PM**

## Our Society and the Larger Community: Looking to the Future



As the Philadelphia Ethical Society faces a period of transition, we invite our stakeholders—members, long-term and regular renters, residents of the Rittenhouse neighborhood, and allied organizations—to help us envision the future of those relationships.

**Sunday, March 16, 3 PM - 4:30 PM**

## Beyond Stoicism: A Guide to the Good Life—Ancient Philosophies for Modern Times

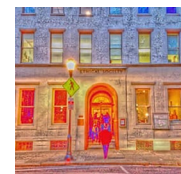
Join the Philadelphia Ethical Society and Philadelphia Stoa as we explore existential questions through ancient philosophical perspectives. Dr. Amjol Shrestha, from Rowan University, leads this discussion about navigating life's complexities, with a focus on themes of pleasure, virtue, and doubt. Copies of *Beyond Stoicism: A Guide to the Good Life with Stoics, Skeptics, Epicureans, and Other Ancient Philosophers* can be purchased at the event or [in advance](#).



**Monday, March 17, 7 PM - 8:15 PM (zoom)**

## Our Society and the Larger Community: Looking to the Future

A virtual version of our March 16 discussion. See details, above.



**Wednesday, March 19, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM**

## Lunch with Hugh

Bring your lunch and topics of conversation to the Leader's office for this informal gathering.





## 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

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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. Check with chairs for meeting venues.

Email us to learn more at [office@phillyethics.org](mailto:office@phillyethics.org).

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

Building Committee  
Michael Black-Smith  
no meeting this month

**Camp Linden Committee**  
**Jeffrey Dubb**  
**Wednesday, March 26, 5 PM**

Community Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

**Education Committee**  
**Betsy Lightbourn**  
**Wednesday, March 5, 3:30 PM**

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

**Ethical Action Committee**  
**Julia Gokalp**  
**Sunday, March 9, 1:30 PM**

**Finance Committee**  
**Nick Sanders**  
**Tuesday, March 11, 5 PM**

**Media Committee**  
**Drew Snyder**  
**Wednesday, March 19, 6 PM**

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



### A Rally for Democracy

On February 17, Society members joined several hundred protestors waving signs and chanting at a rally to protest actions of the current administration. People furious about issues including DOGE; Project 2025; firings; freezes; and attacks on immigrants', women's, and LGBTQ rights gathered at City Hall, then marched to the Art Museum. Bearing the Ethical Society banner were (left to right) Sharon Wallis, Stan Horwitz, Leigh Buchanan, Hugh Taft-Morales, and Kate Esposito. (Not pictured: Sylvia Metzler).



### A Concert for Immigration

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy, a sold-out concert in our Auditorium, on January 20, deployed the power of music to drown out hate. HIAS Pennsylvania hosted the event, in which immigrant and refugee musicians celebrated the richness they bring to our community. Hugh spoke with Cathryn Miller-Wilson, executive director of the nonprofit, about the most pressing issues facing immigrants. He incorporated her insights into his platform, "Ethical Immigration," last month.