

BESpeak

SEPTEMBER 2011

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Ethical Inspiration

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

What did I do on my summer vacation? I experienced an existential moment as I surveyed a zip-line over Mexico's Copper Canyon that would soon hold my children 1000 feet above the rocks. They were thrilled. I was terrified.

Escaping into philosophic daydreaming, I recalled our July discussion at the Ethical Society about *The Little Book of Atheistic Spirituality*. What I like most about it is how the author's "atheist spirituality" is rooted in existentialism. Like him, I draw strength from acceptance of our short, mortal existence. Rather than inducing in me pessimism or nihilism, the fact that our existence is dwarfed in time and space creates "cheerful despair," a more noble and bearable appreciation of the human condition.

Where I part with the author, however, regards his one-sided view of ego. He sees the ego as the main enemy of our quest for spiritual experiences. Of course it is true that often "the self is a prison." It is true that the idea that the self is totally autonomous is an "illusion." He often cites Buddhist thinkers, and reminds me that each ego is like a wave on an ocean, there but inevitably temporary and doomed to sink back into the ocean. So he asks, "Why get attached to such a transitory thing?"

As the transitory things known as my children sailed over the canyon valley, I did not want to be unattached to them. In fact, it meant a lot to me that I ached for them, felt joy for them, loved them, even more than usual. Their wonderful waves of life thrilled me, and continue to thrill me. While I want to "let go" of them, in the sense of allowing each of them to be their own person, I don't ever want to let go of them in my heart.

Although I appreciate the destruction that egoism can wreak in the world, the romantic in me finds a beauty in all the waves before my eyes. While we may only be a wave on an immense ocean—a tiny speck in time and space—we are a unique wave. Embracing the joy of being the wave that I am helps me appreciate all the other waves. While the author and I can agree that the universe is "indifferent" to our existence, I find little indifferent about my existence or the existence of others. Both are precious.



CELEBRATING

60

YEARS

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

(details on page 4)

SEPTEMBER 4

"Labor is No Picnic"

BES will not be holding a Labor Day Picnic this year. Platforms will resume on September 11.

SEPTEMBER 11

"Ethical Humanism and Terror – 9/11 Ten Years Later"

Hugh Taft-Morales
Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

SEPTEMBER 18

"Homelessness and Alienation"

Adam Schneider
Health Care for the Homeless

SEPTEMBER 25

"America's Racial Divide: Are Reparations the Solution?"

Ronald Peden
Organization for American Unity

**ETHICAL HUMANIST
SUNDAY SCHOOL**

Every Sunday, beginning Sept. 11
10:30 a.m. – Noon

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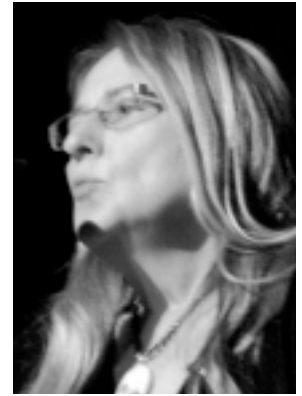
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Seasonal Success

by Rosemary Klein, BES President



Loong days full of sun, casual clothing, and vacations are among the joys of summer. Some loong years ago (1793-1806) in France, the “cult of nature” was accorded particular esteem in a secular calendar, materializing as a Gregorian calendar replacement and ceremonializing, among other items, the summer months by renaming them: June became harvest; July, summer heat; and August, fruit. For BES, summer is a season less formal than others, one that comes to fruition only through the particular dedication of its members.

Stephen Meskin put together another rousing roster of Sunday Soirees, informal discussions facilitated by our members and leader that replace our usual platforms/lectures. For instance, the catch of the day July 31st was Lisa Alderson on sustainable seafood; Hugh Taft-Morales lead a lively discussion on Comte-Sponville’s philosophic ruminations on atheist spirituality; a series of stimulating questions posed by Joan Bromberg lead to a thoughtful examination of what constitutes the scientific method; Bob Corbett had us dreaming of the best earth possible; and by popular demand Richard Campbell was brought back for a second summer presentation on the virtues and nobility associated with karate. Stephen presenting Sunday Soirees three times and Emil Volcheck twice along with Karen Elliott editing a June through August BESpeak provided the main trusses allowing BES to bridge gracefully from spring to fall.

Our presence at the June Charles Village Festival was once again productively coordinated by Emil. A breath of fresh air was brought to the heat of July by Karen Elliott who arranged a potluck picnic between the Northern Virginia Ethical Society (NoVES) and BES. The following week she followed up by seeing that BES participated for its first time in the 18th Annual Hamilton Street Festival and was ably helped by fellow Hamiltonian John Reuter and by Don Helms and Bobbi Hahn.

The BES Board took a month off in June, resuming in July with new members Lisa Alderson, Ken Brenneman, and Bernie Brown; a new secretary Emil Volcheck; and a new vice-president Kathryn Sloboda, who also did an able job – even while out of town – of keeping her eye on the BES website and newsletter, with help on the latter from Joan Bromberg.

Without fail John Reuter, membership committee chair, held monthly Newcomers meetings, and a well-received discussion focused on presiding was facilitated by Hugh in July. Our popular poetry workshops were ably hosted without a break – not even a line break – by Kirk Mullen, Ethical Action kept moving with Moveable Treats, Bob Corbett along with the usual intrepid crew of members made a clean sweep of our annual clean-up days, movie nights remained “reel” because of Emil, and the Caring Committee kept on caring with Em Sabatiuk at its helm.

Because of such major league hitting by its able members, BES was able to keep a hot streak going this summer, one that gives us a rousing start in our 60th anniversary year.

Parenting Beyond Belief

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

The Baltimore Homeschool Community Center in Pikesville is hosting a half-day workshop by Dale McGowan, editor and co-author of *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Raising Freethinkers*.

Over nine million parents in the U.S. are raising children without theistic religion. This Parenting Beyond Belief Seminar offers a unique opportunity to gain encouragement and practical solutions for secular parenting in a religious world.

Dale McGowan, PhD, holds degrees in the arts and sciences from UC Berkeley, UCLA, and the Uni-

versity of Minnesota. In addition to a 15-year teaching career, he was editor and featured essayist for the Family Issues section of the Atheist Alliance WebCenter.

The registration fee is \$50 for this Parenting Beyond Belief Seminar, which is being hosted by The Community of Ethical People, an organization formed in May of this year. For more information and to register, visit www.baltimorehomeschool.org/upcoming-events.html.

McGowan will also be signing books at the BES table at the Baltimore Book Festival that Saturday, September 24.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Ethical Action at Moveable Feast
Thursday, Sept. 8, 5:45 p.m.

Moveable Treats
Sunday, Sept. 11

Board Meeting
Sunday, Sept. 11, 12:30 p.m.

NEW!

Video and Discussion Series
Monday, Sept. 12, 7:30 p.m.

Baltimore Book Festival
September 23–25

Ethical Action Meeting
Sunday, Sept. 25, 9:15 a.m.

Newcomers' Meeting
Sunday, Sept. 25, 12:30 p.m.

Parenting Beyond Belief Workshop with Dale McGowan
Sunday, Sept. 25, 9:00 a.m.

BES Ironweed Film Club
Wednesday, Sept. 28, 7:30 p.m.

Joint NoVES/BES Summer Platform Fun for All!

Many thanks to Ellen Dinerman and Jim Perdue for hosting the joint North Virginia Ethical Society/Baltimore Ethical Society summer platform. Thanks also to North Virginia Leader Jone Johnson Lewis for spending some of her vacation time planning and delivering her platform. The



Pictured left to right: Diana Corbett, George Kirlin, Sheila Kirlin, Laura Abbott, Marianne Moerman, and Bill Lewis.

event was a wonderful opportunity to get to know our fellow Ethical Culturists in a neighboring state.

Attending from BES were: Diana Corbett, Stephen Meskin, Karen Elliott, Emil Volcheck, Kathleen Wilsbach, Ken Brenneman, Bernie Brown, Bob Corbett, and Katie LaClair.



Pictured left to right: Jone Johnson Lewis, Amy Anderson, Kathleen Wilsbach, and Ellen Dinerman.

SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

Last names starting with:

A to F	Sept. 11
G to L	Sept. 18
M to R	Sept. 25
S to Z	You choose!

Poetry GROUP

The Poetry Group of the Baltimore Ethical Society will not meet on Sunday, September 4th. It will resume meeting on Sunday, October 2nd.

SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

SEPTEMBER 4

“Labor is No Picnic”

This year – in view of the facts that we are not holding a Labor Day picnic and Baltimore traffic is projected to be difficult with the Baltimore Grand Prix, an IndyCar Series race, taking place in the city – BES will be taking this Sunday off and resuming on September 11.

SEPTEMBER 11

“Ethical Humanism and Terror – 9/11 Ten Years Later”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

In the decade since the horror and suffering of the 9/11 attacks, what have we learned about the intersection of humanism and terrorism? It is no surprise that humanists, a group as diverse as any in America, have no single answer. But from my perspective, our nation relies too much on polarization and violence, and too little on peacemaking. As BES Leader Emeritus Fritz Williams explained on the first anniversary of 9/11, civilization is caught in the cycle of taking sides in the name of morality and demonizing opponents. Can we ever learn to minimize terror by bringing out the best in everyone?

Hugh Taft-Morales serves as Leader for both the Baltimore Ethical Society and the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and also works with the Ethical Society Without Walls (ESWoW). He taught philosophy and history in high school for twenty-five years, graduated from Yale College in 1979, and earned a Masters in Philosophy in 1986 from University of Kent in England. Taft-Morales, who lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, received a certificate in Humanist Leadership from the Humanist Institute in 2009.

SEPTEMBER 18

“Homelessness and Alienation”

Adam Schneider

Health Care for the Homeless

Contemporary homelessness is directly related to poverty and the continued disinvestment in housing affordable for people with extremely low incomes. More deeply, however, the phenomenon of homelessness is the result of economic and social alienation. How are we to overcome not only the significant policy challenges but also the more fundamental issues?

Adam Schneider is Coordinator of Community Relations at Health Care for the Homeless, where he works on state and local public policy and community initiatives related to issues of health and homelessness. He has studied philosophy and social work – and teaches courses on both at area colleges and universities.

SEPTEMBER 25

“America’s Racial Divide: Are Reparations the Solution?”

Ronald Peden

Organization for American Unity

The wealth divide between Blacks and Whites continues to increase even in the Age of Obama. Is this an unavoidable consequence of multiculturalism, or is there reason to hope for real change? Peden, author of *Notes on the State of America, Black to the Future or White from the Past?*, believes the time has come for America to seriously consider and implement a program of reparations to address this historic, intractable inequality.

Ronald Peden is a member of the Ethical Society of Boston. He has been active in neighborhood development and community organizing with Americorps and with various community development corporations and non-profits in Philadelphia and greater Boston. Peden founded the Organization for American Unity. A Philadelphia native, he now resides with his wife in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Congratulations Karen Elliott

Karen Elliot, seven-time former president of BES, was elected to the American Ethical Union (AEU) Board this past June at the AEU's 96th Annual Assembly held in Ohio. Comprised as a federation of Ethical Societies, the AEU, a religious organization, is dedicated to promoting the growth of the Ethical Culture movement through support of existing and cultivation of new Ethical Societies. We congratulate her and look forward to her reports and thoughts as an AEU representative.



AEU 2011 RELIGIOUS FALL CONFERENCE

The American Ethical Union's 2011 Religious Fall Conference and Family Weekend will be held November 2–6 in Stony Point, New York, at the Stony Point Conference Center. Titled *Ethically Talking So Kids Will Listen and Listening So Kids Will Talk*, the conference and weekend will feature workshops and conversations based on the ideas outlined in Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's book *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Contact Aimee Neumann, the AEU Religious Education Director, at aneumann.aeu@gmail.com or visit the American Ethical Union website at www.aeu.org for more information.

The Day the Universe Changed: A Personal View

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 7:30–9:30 P.M.

The first in a yearlong video and discussion series about *The Day the Universe Changed: A Personal View*, by science historian James Burke.

Come view episodes from this wonderful series, followed by stimulating philosophical discussions with Ethical Culture Leader Hugh Taft-Morales. Free and open to the public.

The title—*The Day the Universe Changed*—comes from the idea that you perceive the universe on the basis of what you know. If new knowledge causes you to change your perception

of the universe, have you changed the universe itself? James Burke tells various stories of important discoveries and new ideas that fundamentally altered how western civilization perceives the world. The series runs in roughly chronological order, from the Greeks to the present.

Our first meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, September 12, with the episode "The Way We Are: It Started with the Greeks." Final times for the rest of the series will be announced soon.

HELP NEEDED!

Want to deepen your connection to the Baltimore Ethical Society and Ethical Culture? Ready to express the leader in you by volunteering at BES? Want help matching your experience and skills with the important work of helping BES flourish so that it can serve the world? Contact Leader Hugh Taft-Morales or any BES Board member to find out all the ways that you can help during the historic 60th anniversary program season!



IRONWEED

Film

CLUB

**Wednesday, September 28,
7:30 p.m.**

Join us this month at the BES Ironweed Film Club when we screen two short documentaries, followed by discussion.

Rethink Afghanistan is a feature-length documentary about the war in Afghanistan. The film fosters discussion, debate, and dissent and is often described as the work that “laid the tracks” for public opposition to the war. The documentary is part of Brave New Foundation’s contribution to the movement to change misguided policy in Afghanistan. (38 min.)

Koch Brothers Exposed is a multi-media multi-platform creative campaign focusing on the billionaire Koch brothers and the ways their money is harming our democracy. Brave New Foundation recently released the fifth of its series of exposés revealing the many issues the Koch brothers attack. (24 min.)

Screenings are open to members of BES and the BES Ironweed Film Club. Ask Emil about free membership in the film club (volcheck@acm.org or 410-929-3399). *Donations are requested for refreshments.*

Member News & Updates

There have been a number of happy events to celebrate this past summer. Our treasured member **Helena Wright** celebrated her 90th birthday. Though she suffered a serious stroke several years ago, she has fought and persevered to achieve a remarkable long life.

Also celebrated this summer was the 75th birthday of our leader emeritus, **Fritz Williams**. The membership honored the occasion with a gift to help complete the production and editing of his revised stories, many of which we have enjoyed at Sunday meetings over the years.

Other good news is that **Ben Busby** and wife **Lena Pons** – along with baby Alice – have moved back to their house in Baltimore. We welcome them most warmly.

Our one serious concern was the health of **Ann McAlpin** who suffered a cerebral hemorrhage while traveling in Europe with her sister. Her husband **Richard Campbell** was able to bring her back to Johns Hopkins Hospital where doctors declared her able to go home. We are very happy to report that she is progressing in her recovery.

Baltimore Book Festival

FRIDAY–SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23–25

BES will once again be a presence at the Baltimore Book Festival, September 23–25. Four beautiful, landscaped parks surrounding Baltimore’s Washington Monument (at the intersection of N. Charles Street and Mt. Vernon Place) provide the setting for the festival that runs from noon to 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and from noon to 7 p.m. on Sunday.

The festival features hundreds of author appearances and book

signings, 100+ exhibitors and booksellers, non-stop readings on multiple stages, cooking demos by celebrity chefs, poetry readings and workshops, panel discussions, walking tours, storytellers and hands-on projects for kids, street theater, live music, and a delicious variety of food, beer and wine.

If you would like to volunteer to help at our booth, contact Emil Volcheck at volcheck@acm.org or 410-929-3399.

SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?

The Baltimore Ethical Society has a Leader and a team of assistants who are trained and licensed to conduct weddings, same sex commitments, memorials, and other life passage ceremonies. For more information about our ceremonies or to make arrangements, please contact our Officiant Team Coordinator, Kathryn Sloboda, at weddings@bmoreethical.org.

New Focus on Sunday School

BES is making a strong commitment to revitalizing its Sunday School program for the coming year. In May, Linda Joy Burke, a well-known published poet and writer, was brought on board as a “guest” Sunday School teacher. She was so enthusiastic and effective that Kirk Mullen, then Sunday School Committee chair, proposed that the Board hire Ms. Burke for the coming year. That proposal passed at the Board’s July meeting. In addition, the Board passed a proposal granting a one-year curriculum development stipend to Ms. Burke.

Ms. Burke has long been active in education. At Carver Center for Arts and Technology, the Baltimore County public magnet high school, she served as the English department’s Poet in

Residence for many years. Her school poetry residencies also include several elementary schools, a middle school, and the Good Shepherd Center (where she also did a Life-Skills Residency).

She has presented workshops, done storytelling, given speeches, and read her poetry and prose at numerous colleges and universities as well as at settings as diverse as the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Association of American Women in Psychology, the Maryland Writers’ Association Conference, and the Harford County Drug/Alcohol Impact Program. Ms. Burke is a recipient of the Distinguished Black Marylander Award for

Art (2002) and the Legacy Award (2004), and has also been a nominee for the Coca-Cola Company/National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts Distinguished Teachers Award.

Recently, Ms. Burke shared some thoughts about what she plans to bring to the BES program: “I’ve begun creating visuals for the classroom and lesson plans that correlate with ethical principles. I anticipate that students will be able to create a portfolio of



New Sunday School teacher, Linda Joy Burke.

their experiences which they will take with them at the end of the year.” She is designing a curriculum that will use both traditional and original activities such as vocabulary building, dialogues, audio/video storytelling, journal keeping, drama, and collages. She also has plans to “include a reading list for students which will be developed as we go along. Books in the existing library will be used, and there will be different lists for different age groups.” As Board member Bernie Brown observed, Ms. Burke is a true and engaging “presence,” and BES looks forward to what she will bring to our Sunday School.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Highlighting the focus BES hopes to bring to the Sunday School, the Board unanimously approved establishment of a Religious Education Task Force (RETF). The task force will work on reconstituting a vital Sunday School, one that emphasizes student recruitment and retention of children of multiple ages. It will also develop a religious education brochure. Kathryn Sloboda and Rosemary Klein will co-chair the RETF, which welcomes anyone who wishes to serve on it. Those so inclined should express their interest to one of the co-chairs prior to the first RETF meeting, projected for September 18th.

BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, September 8,
5:45–8:00 p.m.

Join the volunteers at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Avenue, on Thursday, September 8, from 5:45–8:00 p.m. Moveable Feast provides nutritious foods and other services in order to preserve the quality of life for people with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening conditions. We will be helping Heide Morgan who organizes the once-a-month “baking night.” For questions contact Hugh at leader@bmoreethical.org.

BESpeak

BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

NEWCOMERS' MEETING

Sunday, September 25, 12:30 p.m.

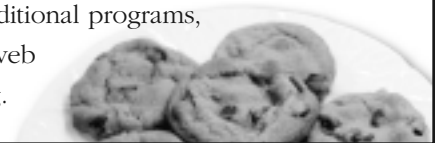
New to the Society and interested in learning more? Attended a meeting or two? Thinking about joining? Come to the Newcomers' Meeting, held following the last platform of every month, and learn more about Ethical Culture and about our Society—its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and attendance is recommended before becoming a member.

HELP MOVEABLE FEAST

Baked Goods – Sunday, September 11

Other Items – Every Sunday

Support Moveable Feast in their work to feed people with AIDS, blood cancer, or breast cancer and their families. Guidelines for donations are posted at the Society. For more information about Moveable Feast and their many additional programs, visit them on the web at www.mfeast.org.



ETHICAL ACTION MEETING – OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS!

Sunday, September 25, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

Come one and come all! We will review last year's work and plan our focus for the 2011–2012 season.

Welcome to BESpeak, the newsletter of the Baltimore Ethical Society, free to members of BES. If you have asked for a paper copy, the date to the right of your name is the last month you will receive the newsletter unless you request that it be extended. We also ask that you make a contribution to help defray the costs of printing and mailing. Send checks payable to BES to: BESpeak, 306 W. Franklin St., Ste. 102, Baltimore, MD 21201. Thank you.