

# BESpeak

MAY 2012

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## Ethical Culture in the Humanist Landscape

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

On March 24, amongst the 10,000 people at the Reason Rally down on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. were over a dozen Baltimore Ethical Society members and friends. They included members Lisa Alderson, Kati LaClair, Ken Brennehan and his son Matthew, Brian England, Ron Solomon, Mav Vaughan, Emil Volcheck, Kathleen Wilsbach, Diana and Bob Corbett, and Joan Bromberg, and friends Sheryl Eury, Kimberly Sheridan, Karen Brick, Ed Hess, Kyle Horning, and probably some others I left out!

Many were able to meet at my house in Takoma Park for bagels and coffee before heading down to the rally. More information and photos of the rally can be found on the website [reasonrally.org](http://reasonrally.org). Also, find out more about it by reading my article in the next edition of the *AEU Dialogue*.

For the rest of this column, however, I want to focus on the common ground of the rally. You see, on March 24th it wasn't always easy to find all the other BESers in the crowd, let alone to meet up with other Ethical Culturists from Washington, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. But maybe this is a good metaphor for an important challenge before Ethical Culture. As the voices of skeptics, freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, and humanists gather strength in our nation, it is important to clarify where Ethical Culture fits in "the humanist landscape."

While the Reason Rally was a great success from many perspectives, from my point of view there was not enough of Ethical Culture's unique voice. That is to be expected given our very limited role in the event. So why were we there?

Well, given Ethical Culture's emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual, each of us who attended had different reasons. I would like to suggest one issue Ethical Culturists and the wide range of participants can agree on: the importance of maintaining the wall of separation between church and state.

The American Ethical Union has passed numerous resolutions over the years in support of Jefferson's wall, including the following:



CELEBRATING

60

YEARS

**SUNDAY PLATFORMS**

10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

**MAY 6**

**"The Role of Women  
as Peace Makers"**

Susanne Riveles, PhD

*Sociologist and Human Rights Activist*

**MAY 13**

**"Reflections on  
Celebrating 60 Years"**

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

**Membership Meeting**

**MAY 20**

**"For Country, Sans God:  
Humanism and Religious  
Hegemony in the Military"**

Ryan Matthew Jean

*Captain, US Army Reserve*

**MAY 27**

**"Can Capitalism be Fixed"**

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

**ETHICAL HUMANIST  
SUNDAY SCHOOL**

**WITH LINDA JOY BURKE**

Every Sunday, 10:30 a.m. – Noon

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# BESpeak

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## Issue 419

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**Hugh Taft-Morales** *Leader*  
**Fritz Williams** *Leader Emeritus*

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**Contacts by e-mail:** use President,  
VicePresident (one word), Treasurer,  
Secretary, Poet, or Admin followed  
by @bmorethical.org. For general  
questions: askBES@gmail.com.

[www.bmorethical.org](http://www.bmorethical.org)

# Clean, Evident, & Common as Mud

by *Rosemary Klein, BES President*

“The work of the world is common as mud.” That statement rings so true, as though it’s been often heard. Probably it’s applicable in many venues but, given the column’s parameters, I’ll consider it from the BES context alone.

A happiness, a belonging, an intelligence are among the qualities to be found in BES work. I’ve seen it over and over again in the efforts put forth by so many to maintain and grow our congregation.

In growing, we do reinvent ourselves. I have lived through enough things – and long enough – to know that that is true. And as we reinvent ourselves, what we obtain as an organization are always the products of failure, innovation, and rejuvenation.

Each of us learns to be receptive to being of use in a group. One aspect of that is sidelining our individuality or individual views when doing so might compromise or risk the larger community or hinder broader realizations. Heck, the community we’re entrusted with already exists in a fragile world.

We lean often on the words “to bring out the best in others” – what can be problematic about doing so? Nothing – unless we too often permit anything and everything proposed as viable by any of us to come about without adequate regard to how it might affect the vision or the whole of the organization. Reflection as to how our larger community mission and viability might be affected should be a standard criterion, entered into as the thoughtful course more likely to sharpen our action than to blunt it.

It is very easy to retreat positively and emphatically beyond the notion that our importance lies in “bringing out the best in others” without the slightest comprehension of the responsibility entailed or of whether or not we are successful when doing so. I’ll risk heresy by saying that letting each individual in regard to our Ethical Culture do whatever he or she proposes without at least considering how that action might resonate in terms of our organization as a whole or among its individuals is folly.

Every group can be brought down by its individuals, and every group must be made and maintained by its individuals. Within that paradoxical contradiction, BES will perish or continue to survive.

Recently, I read a summation of an example that Michio Kaku used in his book *Hyperspace*. The story told was of fish swimming inside a bowl with no sense of the confines that they were in or that its contents were water. They took it for granted that their world was the one in which they swam. But when one fish was lifted above the rim, the perspective of that fish instantly became larger, enabling her to see the world she had come from was part of a larger world and that water was not the only element that movement and life occurred in.



*(continued on page 7)*

# Bidding the Corbetts Adieu

The BES Board has voted to nominate Bob Corbett for the AEU Anna Garlin Spencer Volunteer Award. Some twenty-two years ago Bob Corbett and his wife Diana joined the Ethical Culture society in Boston. With a move to Maryland a decade ago, they joined BES, then housed in a small, poorly laid out downtown storefront. When BES decided a place that could house a Sunday school was needed, Bob joined forces with long-time Ethical Culture adherents Ron and Carol Solomon in a property search that had them following many leads in numerous excursions primarily within the city.

As an architect and planner, Bob was intrigued by the renaissance envisioned for west side downtown and attended the first public meeting devoted to showcasing projects for attention and renovation. One day, alone, he found himself at the Congress Hotel – a beautiful, historic, early 1900s building on the west side outskirts. The place intrigued him, and when others in BES agreed, Bob did sketches portioning the space according to BES needs that met the developers' approval. Thankfully, he even convinced them of the necessity of public restrooms, not then in the first floor plans!

In 2001 a building committee formed with Bob chairing. Given

about \$30,000, he set about transforming the six rooms of the space. Ron Solomon recalls that without Bob's "passion which was basically unlimited, [BES] wouldn't have gotten as good a quality design." For what Bob provided, Ron says "We would have paid a fortune."

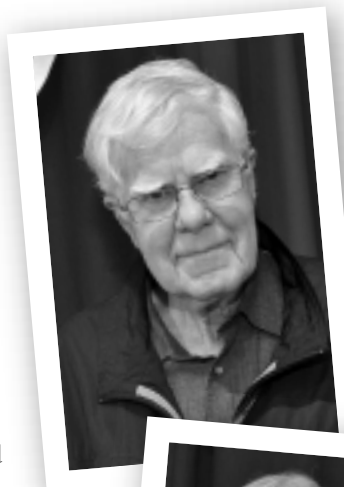
Over the years, Bob continued to serve as building committee chair. He also gave platforms, led book discussions, championed ethical action regarding the environment, served on BES's board and as its president, and did much other volunteering.

Now the Corbetts move again, issuing this invitation to BES members: "It has been a great 15 years.

We love our Ethical friends and will miss you so much. Bob has found that Austin Ethical has an exciting opening for janitorial services; a big step in his career and one he can't resist. I will miss the dishwasher and snacks

and all the dear Deist dishists. Come visit us in Lockhart, the bar-b-que capital of Texas!"

Ron Solomon relayed that when the Corbetts moved 10 years ago "We were delighted when Brian King on the AEU Board said 'Boston's loss is Baltimore's gain,'" adding "And he was right." Now Baltimore's loss is Austin's gain!



## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Poetry Group

Sunday, May 6, 9:30 a.m.

### Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, May 10, 5:45 p.m.

### Moveable Treats

Sunday, May 13

### Membership Meeting

Sunday, May 13, 12:00 p.m.

### Board Meeting

Sunday, May 13, TBA

### Video and Discussion Series

Sunday, May 13, 4:00 p.m.

### Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, May 20, 9:30 a.m.

### Social Media Tutorial

Sunday, May 20, 12:30 p.m.

### BES Ironweed Film Club

Wednesday, May 23, 7:30 p.m.

### Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, May 27, 12:30 p.m.

### Book Discussion

Tuesday, May 29, 7:30 p.m.

## SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

Last names starting with:

A to F	May 6
G to L	May 13
M to R	May 20
S to Z	You Pick!

## AEU ASSEMBLY

June 14–17, 2012  
Albany, New York

This year's theme is "Creating Communities of Hope and Justice." The registration deadline is May 22, 2012. Visit [aeu.org](http://aeu.org) for more information.

## SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

MAY 6

### “The Role of Women as Peace Makers”

Susanne Riveles, PhD

*Sociologist and Human Rights Activist*

Following a summation of the span of events that make up the history of the struggle by women for women's rights as well as the achievements that to date have resulted from that struggle, Ms. Riveles will describe her involvement in education and advocacy that have advanced women's participation in peace negotiations and also political decision making in general. Particular focus will be placed on her work with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. This Resolution, passed unanimously just over a decade ago, is notable as the first to have specifically acknowledged that war impacted women and asserted the necessity of women's participation and empowered involvement in sustainable peace building and security maintenance.

**Susanne Riveles** was born in Berlin. Her family suffered severely at the hands of the Nazis; her father was executed for his role in resistance activities. Riveles earned her PhD in African studies at Howard University. She has worked with Amnesty International and led the Southern Africa Coordination Group in the defense of prisoners of apartheid. She has served as director of the Africa desk for Lutheran World Relief and also as Church World Service director of education and advocacy for international justice and human rights, roles that entailed traveling to Africa and writing, testifying, and advocating to improve conditions for development and human rights. Riveles is currently on the board of the International Alliance of Women (IAW), for which she also serves as regional vice president for the Americas and convenor, commission on peace. Locally, she has been on the board of the Charles Village Community Benefits District and chaired its Outreach Committee and is on the board of the Abell Improvement Association, for which she chairs the Housing Committee.

#### POTLUCK LUNCH

Sunday, May 27, 12:00 p.m.

A “potluck picnic” within our lobby space will follow Hugh's talk. Please consider bringing something to our “lunch without ants.”

MAY 13

### “Reflections on Celebrating 60 Years”

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

The core of this talk will be recommendations for ways in which honoring our past can give us impetus as we build for the future! Selections from some special videos along with some reflections on our 60th Anniversary celebration are planned.

**Note:** *The platform program will end at 11:30 so that we may move to our annual membership meeting in a timely fashion.*

**Hugh Taft-Morales** serves as Leader for both the Baltimore Ethical Society and the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and also works as Consulting Leader to the Ethical Society Without Walls (ESWoW). A Yale College graduate (1979), he also earned a Masters in Philosophy (1986) from University of Kent in England and for twenty-five years taught philosophy and history in high school. Following his mid-1990s discovery of Ethical Culture, he served the Washington Ethical Society as a board member from 2003-2006, the last year as president. In 2009 he completed a three-year leadership certification program with the Humanist Institute and in 2010 became a certified Leader in Ethical Culture. Other current Ethical Culture positions are faculty member of the 2012 AEU Lay Leadership Summer School and secretary of the National Leaders Council of the American Ethical Union. Taft-Morales and his wife Maureen, a specialist in Latin American affairs for the Congressional Research Service, live in Takoma Park, Maryland; they have three children, Sean, Maya, and Justin.

MAY 20

### “For Country, Sans God: Humanism and Religious Hegemony in the Military”

Ryan Matthew Jean

*Captain, US Army Reserve*

*Pro Deo et Patria* [for God and Country]? Since the earliest days of the republic, the Constitution's First Amendment has furnished a source of endless debate regarding religious intermingling in government affairs. Nowhere does this result in a sharper point of contention than in the rigid and demand-

## SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

ing environment of the military. In its attempts to thread the needle between the limitations on establishment and the duty to support free exercise, the military has typically erred on the side of more religion, creating an environment of sustained hostility to those of minority faiths or no faith at all and using the authority of command to entrench a predominantly Christian vision within the armed services. In the last few years, however, significant inroads have been made against this Christian control of everyday military life and the privilege this hegemony supports. From a Wiccan circle at the Air Force Academy to an atheist concert at Fort Bragg, religious minorities of all kinds have started to find a voice and insist on not being ignored for the sake of conformity. In this talk, Captain Jean discusses his take on the grand promise for true religious freedom in uniform and why the old adage of "no atheists in foxholes" is an argument against foxholes, not atheists. He'll navigate the complex legal landscape used to keep at bay the forces of positive social change, and – using his own story of how he turned a berating for his lack of faith into a passion for activism – will show how Humanism can bring us closer to achieving a truly secular military.

**Captain Ryan Jean** was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, in a mainstream Protestant family. Intensely curious, he began to seriously question the family religion in his early teens, eventually abandoning belief entirely. He has a BA in computer science from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and works primarily as a contract software developer for the Army. He was commissioned in the Army in 2003 as an intelligence officer. While deployed in 2009, he experienced an encounter with a negative chaplain that catalyzed his desire to advocate openly for better atheist and Humanist treatment in the military. This led to his volunteering in 2011 to be a Humanist Lay Leader at his station at Fort Meade, Maryland. In doing so his intent is to ensure that the Chaplaincy's secular services and benefits are as available to non-theistic service men and women as they are to their religious counterparts – but without added religious pressure. To date, the military has not approved any applications for Humanists in this role. Captain Jean's hobbies include programming, puzzle-solving, and anything science related as well as pursuing research on cryptology and security. He is married to Sergeant Christine Jean, and they live in central Maryland with their two children, Lucas and Logan.

**MAY 27**

### “Can Capitalism be Fixed”

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

The Occupy Movement feels like a cry of anguish and a plea for justice. It results from seeing greed rule and people suffer. What should we do? Is capitalism so broken that we need to replace it? Can it be fixed through oversight and regulation? Can it be saved from within through responsible stewardship? Explore these questions and more with Ethical Culture Leader Hugh Taft-Morales.

### TREASURER'S FORECAST

As we get closer to June 30, the end of our current Fiscal Year, it appears that BES will have a \$14,000 deficit. At the start of the year the Board knew there was a chance we would have a shortfall. We thought it important to stretch ourselves so we could professionalize our Sunday school, pay our Leader, and fully maintain all our other programs.

While we didn't expect the shortage to be this large, budgeted shortfalls are not new for us. This year the deficit is due to a shortfall in our initial estimate of income, primarily pledges. You might want to know what we have spent our money on this year: 43% went for rent, light & heat, 23% for Leader, 14% for newsletter, advertising & PR., 8% for the AEU, 7% Sunday school, and 5% other. As a % of total expense, our income breakdown is: pledges 64%, donations 5%, other 5%, *shortfall 26%*.

Fortunately, we have a small endowment created from the sale of a building we once owned. This spring – while we celebrate our 60th anniversary – let us remember to thank our forebears in BES not only for founding this organization for us, but also for giving us the fiscal wherewithal to absorb such a financial loss.

Whatever you can do to help reduce our shortfall and rebuild our endowment is appreciated!

– *Stephen Meskin*

**IRONWEED**

# Film

**CLUB**

**Wednesday, May 23,  
7:30 p.m.**

Join us this month at the BES Ironweed Film Club when we screen *Children of the Tsunami*.

On March 11, 2011, Japan woke up to a new and very frightening world. Through the eyes of the children who managed to survive the terrible disaster, we see the pain-tinged environment in which they have to forge their futures. From the child who has forgotten how to speak to the eight-year-old who wants to become a radiation researcher, the film presents a touching and horrifying vision of Japan's tsunami generation. (Director: Dan Reed, 60 minutes) View the film's trailer at <http://www.ironweedfilms.com/current-films-s/46.htm>

Screenings are open to members of BES and the BES Ironweed Film Club. Ask Emil about free membership in the film club (email [volcheck@acm.org](mailto:volcheck@acm.org), or call 410/929-3399). Donations are requested for refreshments. The Club meets monthly on the 4th Wednesday.

Join the Film Club Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/8JNzR>.

**MINDFULNESS**

# meditation

**Sunday, May 20, 9:30 a.m.**

Mindfulness is a tool we can use in our daily lives to act in a more ethical way. We practice mindfulness meditation so that mindfulness comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to some words from Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.



## **BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST**

**Thursday, May 10, 5:45–8:00 p.m.**

Moveable Feast will be looking for double the usual number of volunteers to bake cookies for the riders participating in the Ride for the Feast bike ride, so please plan on coming out to help this great organization (check out their website at [www.mfeast.org](http://www.mfeast.org)). Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming ([lialderson@gmail.com](mailto:lialderson@gmail.com)) and show up at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Ave., Baltimore, MD, at 5:45 p.m. Park on the street in front of building. Enter through the door closest to Ashland Street. Let Lisa know if you'd like to carpool, and she'll try to match you up with another BES participant.

## **RIDE FOR THE FEAST**

**Saturday–Sunday, May 19–20**

Ride for the Feast is a 2-day, 140-mile bike ride event throughout the state of Maryland, from Ocean City to Baltimore City. The ride is 140 miles because that is the exact distance a Moveable Feast driver must go to deliver to the farthest client. The ride began in 2003 and has become one of Moveable Feast's largest fundraising events. Volunteers are needed both before and during the ride. Join Lisa Alderson and other BES friends to help Moveable Feast and all the riders to make this another successful event. Learn more about the ride at [www.rideforthe Feast.kintera.org](http://www.rideforthe Feast.kintera.org). Please let Lisa ([lialderson@gmail.com](mailto:lialderson@gmail.com)) know if you are interested in helping.

MONDAY, MAY 13, 4:00–6:00 P.M.

# *The Day the Universe Changed*

*A philosophically fun video and discussion series!*

Come view and discuss a video series by James Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed*. Burke entertainingly explores links between knowledge and reality. Join Ethical Culture Leader Hugh Taft-Morales Sunday, May 13, at 4:00 p.m. for this ninth installment

called, *Making Waves: The New Physics – Newton Revised*. Open to the public.



## Ethical Culture in the Humanist Landscape

*(continued from page 1)*

- In 1961 the AEU “vigorously oppose[d] all federal and state aid to church-related schools and at the same time continue[d] the fight for separation of church and state” by opposing “prayers in public schools, religious symbols displayed inside and outside public schools, and the phrase ‘under God’ included in the Pledge of Allegiance.” This was reinforced in 1962 when the AEU said, “the separation of Church and State in every area is of paramount importance for the insuring of the religious freedom of all individuals.”
- In 1967 the AEU demanded recognition for non-theistic conscientious objectors.
- In 1971 the AEU said that ending government aid to private and parochial schools is an important way to “uphold the principle of free public schools as a cornerstone of our democracy.”
- In 1983 the AEU condemned President Reagan’s cold war theology and his claim that the United States was compelled by scripture and the Lord Jesus Christ to oppose Russia with all military and political means!
- In 1986 the AEU defended the wall of separation by specifically criticizing school prayer, tuition tax credits for religious schools, and the “use of government funds and land for erection of religious holiday symbols.”
- In 2000 the AEU again called for an end to vouchers for religious schools.

Given our history, it is no surprise that the American Ethical Union is a member of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) earning the AEU a spot on their board. The SCA was a sponsor of the Reason Rally. This helped me understand Ethical Culture’s place in this landscape when wandering around the Reason Rally. Our movement fully supports the separation of church and state. We agree with a fundamental goal of the SCA: “protecting and strengthening the secular character of our government.”

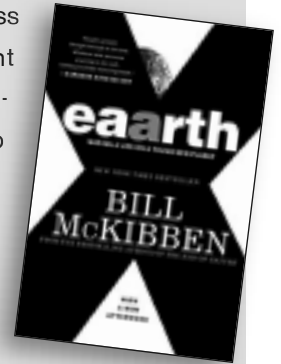
It is for this reason that starting in the fall I would like to offer the Baltimore Ethical Society and Baltimore area a series of programs on “The U. S. Constitution and Humanism,” with some specific focus on church/state issues. If you are interested in helping plan and organize this program, please contact me at [leader@bmorethical.org](mailto:leader@bmorethical.org).

## EAARTH BOOK DISCUSSION

Tuesday, May 29, 7:30 p.m.

Come discuss an important environmental call to arms: Bill McKibben’s latest book *Eaarth: Making a*

*Life on a Tough New Planet* (2010). Get informed and get engaged in saving our planet! Dessert will be provided. RSVP to [leader@bmorethical.org](mailto:leader@bmorethical.org).



## Clean, Evident, & Common as Mud

*(continued from page 2)*

Clearly the fish when lifted above the rim was not simultaneously swimming in the bowl. As we do our work that is common as water – or mud, we can build BES within a bowl (the world and circumstances will certainly allow us to). A larger perspective – albeit with larger responsibilities – is also possible.

Lucky that on our journey we can carry with us the wisdom found in Marge Piercy’s poem “To Be of Use” (often quoted by Hugh Taft-Morales) as a beacon in confusion and darkness. The poem that reminds us that massive patience; straining in the mud and the muck to move things forward; doing (or revisiting) what has to be done, again and again is what is required.

# BESpeak

**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**

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

## **NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!

**TIME VALUE**

## **SOCIAL MEDIA TUTORIAL**

**Sunday, May 20, 12:30 p.m.**

Want to learn how to use the tools of social media? Then join us for a hands-on, small group tutorial on Twitter and Meetup. Computer novices welcome! This is a repeat of the March tutorial. One student who took it then called it "enormously helpful and informative." Space is limited, so if you wish to come, please contact Emil Volcheck at volcheck@acm.org or 410-929-3399.

## **NEWCOMERS MEETING**

**Sunday, May 27, 12:30 p.m.**

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Come to the Newcomers Meeting and learn more about Ethical Culture and about our Society.

## **SUPPORT MOVEABLE FEAST AND MOVEABLE TREATS**

**Baked Goods – Sunday, May 13**

**Other Items – Every Sunday**

Support Moveable Feast in its work to feed people with AIDS, blood cancer, or breast cancer and their families. Guidelines for donations can be obtained at the Society. For more information about Moveable Feast and their many additional programs, visit them on the web at [www.mfeast.org](http://www.mfeast.org).



# **bmorethical**

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