

# BESpeak

APRIL 2013

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## Apathy About Wealth Inequality

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

How is it that Americans seem almost inured to the economic inequality that makes a mockery of our nation's alleged dedication to opportunity and fairness? Over the past three decades, those in the lower half in terms of wealth have become poorer and those in the top 1% have seen huge gains. As two respected authors report: "Most scholars agree that wealth inequality in the United States is at historic highs, with some estimates suggesting that the top 1% of Americans hold nearly 50% of the wealth, topping even the levels seen just before the Great Depression in the 1920's." And yet, most people think that wealth is *more* equitably distributed than it was in the Roaring Twenties. Why are we so apathetic about inequality?

A YouTube video about wealth inequality in the United States sent to me last week by Kate LaClair offers one intriguing answer. On this topic I had seen some videos, heard some speeches, and read countless articles, but this video impressed me deeply. It has supposedly gone viral, garnering more than three million views. It's based on the article "Building a Better America – One Wealth Quintile at a Time" by the two authors quoted above – Michael I. Norton of Harvard Business School and Dan Ariely, a psychology professor at Duke.

Published in a 2011 edition of *Perspectives on Psychology Science*, the article reported how Americans responded to two questions. One question was about what individuals *assumed to be the reality* about the distribution of wealth in the country. Although this is a bit oversimplified, responses basically painted a portrait of a country where the wealthiest were much better off than those on the bottom half of the economic ladder. It was a portrait consistent with America's self-image as a land of competition that rewarded the few and at the expense of the many, but at least in this portrait even the worse off got a small share of the American pie.

A second question concerned what Americans thought was the *ideal* distribution of wealth. *This* portrait was far more equitable. It indicated a more just distribution of wealth which, while still allowing for great differences between the very rich



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### SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

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APRIL 7

**"Ethics and the Environment –  
It's Difficult but Not Impossible"**

Rich Reis

Washington Ethical Society

APRIL 14

**"Ethical Ecology  
and Indigenous People"**

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

APRIL 21

**"My Fifty-one Years  
in Ethical Humanism"**

Ron Solomon

Baltimore Ethical Society Member

APRIL 28

**"The Need for a Moratorium  
on Fracking in Maryland"**

Megan Jenny

Maryland Field Coordinator,  
Chesapeake Climate Action Network

### ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday

10:30 a.m. – Noon

Children of all ages are welcomed.

For those between the ages  
of one and three, separate  
supervised activities are offered.

# BESpeak

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## Issue 428

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

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**On the web at bmorethical.org**

# Fulfilling Humanism's Promise in Baltimore

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



**B**uild ethical communities that embody Reason, Compassion, and Hope. These communities advance human progress and thereby fulfill the promise of humanism. This is the inspirational message that James Croft delivered to our society in his recent platform address “Building the Temple of the Future: Fulfilling the Promise of Humanism.” During his visit to Baltimore during the first week of this month, our society lived up to his vision of healthy and vibrant humanist communities of the type he works to promote through the Humanist Community Project at Harvard University. I’d like to share some highlights of his address and hope that you will visit bmorethical.org to hear a podcast or see a video of his talk.

Croft began with his own expression of joy “to be in a community that embodies so much of what I am going to be talking about.” He asked why we came to an ethical society on Sunday mornings, when we could be sleeping late? His answer was that we come “to honor ... the promise humanism holds for the human future and the promise that we make as humanists to bring that future about.” Humanism is based on reason and compassion, guided by hope for the human prospect. These are the values that Ethical Culture embodies. Reason is the best way we know to understand the world, and science is an expression of our reason. He saluted outstanding scientists and quoted Sagan: “the Cosmos is full beyond measure of elegant truths.” Compassion is the active commitment to other people’s good, exemplified by Felix Adler’s conception of worth, where each person is an end in themselves. He credited reason, compassion, and hope as “responsible for every advance in human happiness and well-being that our species has ever accomplished.”

The title of Croft’s address pays respect to Felix Adler and the great agnostic orator Robert Green Ingersoll. Both used the phrase “the temple of the future” in speeches to convey an ideal community that emphasized reason, justice, peace, and goodwill. Croft said: “We’ve not yet built the Temple of the Future, but we could build it, and that’s why we’re here today. This will require us to see Humanism as more than an abstract philosophy. It will require us to get out of the armchair and into the streets. That’s what Ethical Culture is really all about.” He revisited Adler’s founding address from 1876 by quoting Adler’s six principles and then reading passages from the speech, linking it to present circumstances with a slide show of modern images. He concluded with a call for us to reignite our moral vision and to build moral communities in every city and town. “Adler had a vision of it. He showed us we could do it. And now is the time for us to build it.”

That weekend Croft experienced first-hand how our society is active and grow-

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## LINDA JOY BURKE INDUCTED INTO WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME



Five honorees including our Sunday school teacher Linda Joy Burke (second from left) were inducted into the Howard County Women's Hall of Fame in March. Past inductees include Diana Ulman, whose father Ken Milford founded BES, and Liz Bobo, Maryland State Delegate, who has been a platform presenter. Congratulations to Linda Joy!

## CELEBRATE ANOTHER YEAR OF BES AT THE ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Sunday, April 28, 12:30 p.m.

Please stay after the platform address on April 28 for our annual membership meeting at 12:30 pm. At this meeting, we celebrate a year of success by reporting on our growth and achievements over the past year. We welcome the new leadership team. We renew our commitment to the society and to each other when we review and approve the society's budget and pledge campaign goal for the next fiscal year. We encourage questions, comments, suggestions, and volunteering. We hope you can join us!

## BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, April 11, 5:45–8:00 p.m.

Join BES members and others for this enjoyable outing at a 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 in front of building and 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.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### “Drinking Ethically” Pub Night

Thursday, April 4, 6:30 p.m.

### Poetry Group

Sunday, April 7, 9:30 a.m.

### BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)

Sunday, April 7, 1:00 p.m.

### Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, April 11, 5:45 p.m.

### Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, April 14, 9:30 a.m.

### Board Meeting

Sunday, April 14, 12:30 p.m.

### Fun with Western Philosophy

Sundays, April 14 & 28, 4:00 p.m.

### Baltimore TimeBank General Meeting and Potluck Dinner

Thursday, April 18, 7:00 p.m.

### Potluck Dinner and Family Game Night

Saturday, April 20, 6:30 p.m.

### Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, April 21, 9:15 a.m.

### Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, April 21, 12:30 p.m.

### BES Ironweed Film Club

Wednesday, April 24, 7:30 p.m.

### Earth Day Tree Planting & Picnic

Saturday, April 27, 9:00 a.m.

### Membership Meeting

Sunday, April 28, 12:30 p.m.

### Constitution Series

Tuesday, April 30, 7:30 p.m.

## SNACK SCHEDULE

All are invited to bring snacks. They are especially welcome from those whose last names start with:

A to F	April 7
G to L	April 14
M to R	April 21
S to Z	April 28

APRIL 7

## “Ethics and the Environment – It’s Difficult but Not Impossible”

Rich Reis

*Washington Ethical Society*

This Earth Day address covers a range of environmental challenges, reasons that they are critical, and humanity’s role in the problems and the potential solutions. Reis will identify stakeholders that transcend normal boundaries and address the role of humanity Mark Lynas identified in *The God Species*, specifically that we profoundly affect global processes and the viability of life as we know it. When considering what we can do and how we should respond, Lynas believes we must use all technology toward maintaining a habitable planet. Reis, however, feels that many forms of technology recommended are far too risky. He will explore criteria for satisfactory solutions, difficulties, dead ends, and many realistic answers, ultimately offering that there are many reasons to become energized, engaged, and hopeful.

**Richard (Rich) Reis** – a long-time member of the Washington Ethical Society (WES) – helps lead its earth ethics committee. As a licensed professional engineer, Reis has developed systems for satellites and pacemakers and now helps small businesses reduce their energy consumption, utility costs, and environmental impact. A longtime member of the Maryland Sierra Club, he serves as its chapter energy chair, writes articles on energy and conservation for *Chesapeake* as well as serving on its editorial committee, is an outings leader of hikes and bicycle rides, and is an executive committee member. He has also testified for energy efficiency and conservation before state officials and the Environmental Protection Agency and formed Sierran Bicyclists.

APRIL 14

## “Ethical Ecology and Indigenous People”

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

As we approach our 43rd Earth Day April 22, the tragic irony of our nation’s relation with American Indians is clear: a most abused cultural group, marginalized and segregated, holds the key to our survival and the future of our land, water and air. Without a *revolution of respect toward nature*, we may

be committing suicide of the species. How can we better integrate the people and the wisdom of indigenous populations so as to acknowledge the past and save the future? How can Ethical Culture’s commitment to relationships contribute to this cause? Hugh Taft-Morales explores these questions and share appreciation for indigenous people of the Chesapeake.

**Hugh Taft-Morales** joined the Baltimore Ethical Society as its professional leader in 2010, the same year he was certified by the American Ethical Union as an Ethical Culture Leader. He taught philosophy and history for twenty-five years in Washington, D.C., after earning a Masters in philosophy from University of Kent at Canterbury, England (1986) and graduating from Yale University (1979). In 2009 he completed a three-year leadership certification program with the Humanist Institute. His presence in Ethical Culture has been termed “invigorating.” He has been active in the Washington Ethical Society, serving as director of its Coming-of-Age program (2009-2011), a Board member (2002-2005), and Board president (2006). He has also been engaged in American Ethical Union work, serving on the AEU planning committee for two years, as co-coordinator for the Presidents Council AEU for a year, and as secretary of the AEU National Leaders Council at present. He also serves as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia. Taft-Morales lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, with his wife Maureen, a Latin American Analyst with the Congressional Research Service, with whom he has three beloved children, Sean, Maya, and Justin. Singing and playing guitar, practicing yoga, and watching “way too much sports” are among his enjoyments.

APRIL 21

## “My Fifty-one Years in Ethical Humanism”

Ron Solomon

*Baltimore Ethical Society Member*

To mark the 61st anniversary of the Baltimore Ethical Society, long-time member Ron Solomon will share recollections, experiences, and anecdotes from his 51 years in Ethical Culture and Humanism.

**Ron Solomon** has served as an officer in the Baltimore Ethical Society, the American Ethical Union, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and the Secular Coalition for America. A retired actuary he lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with

## PLATFORMS *(continued)*

his wife Carol (also a long-time BES member) and their three dogs Blaze, Bailey, and Bella who “bark for peace.” The Solomons have four grandchildren.

**APRIL 28**

### “The Need for a Moratorium on Fracking in Maryland”

Megan Jenny

*Maryland Field Coordinator,  
Chesapeake Climate Action Network*

Fracking is a controversial natural gas drilling practice, where gas companies force tons of water, toxic chemicals, and sand thousands of feet underground to fracture rock formations and release natural gas. In states like Pennsylvania and Ohio, fracking has been linked to drinking water contamination, climate pollution, and even earthquakes. Gas companies have leased land in western Maryland, and the state is currently considering fracking here. This talk will address the risks that fracking poses to Maryland and the legislative solutions being considered at the state level.

Megan Jenny was born and raised in Verona, New Jersey. She graduated from Dickinson College with a BA in English (and is living proof that you can do anything with a degree in English!). Right out of college, she began organizing with Toxics Action Center, helping residents put together campaigns dealing with local pollution threats such as dirty fossil fuel power plants, trash incinerators, and contaminated drinking water. She organized also with Groundswell, where she recruited more than 100 District of Columbia residents to invest in energy efficiency measures in order to build a strong clean energy economy in their area. She joined the Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN) team in October 2011 as its Maryland Campus Organizer. In this capacity, she engaged students and youth in the fight to bring the offshore wind energy industry to Maryland. In August 2012, she transitioned into the Maryland Field Coordinator position, where she works with people of all ages to pass legislation that brings us closer to a stable climate. In her free time, she likes to curl up with a good book, take a yoga class, or go adventuring.

#### **DON'T MISS OUT!**

If you would like to receive emails about upcoming events, register on our MeetUp site at [meetup.com/bmorethical](http://meetup.com/bmorethical).

## POTLUCK DINNER AND FAMILY GAME NIGHT

**Saturday, April 20, 6:30 p.m.**

Share a meal and board games with family and friends at the next in our series of family game nights, organized jointly with the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup. Sign up to bring a dish or a game at <http://ur1.ca/d2pxi>. This evening long-time Baltimore Ethical Society member Ron Solomon will join us. Solomon who now lives in Wisconsin will also speak the following morning. Parking is free on Franklin St. starting at 6:00 p.m., and doors will open shortly thereafter.

## BES EATERY SOCIAL (B.E.S.)

**Sunday, April 7, 1:00 p.m.**

Members and friends are invited to come together on the first Sunday of the month to visit a local restaurant for an informal luncheon. At about 12:45 p.m., following the day's platform and social gathering, those interested in the lunch get together in the Congress Hotel lobby to decide which restaurant to visit. Wearing BES shirts or other items of visibility to help promote our organization are encouraged. If you have any questions, please contact Paul Furth at [pdqblues@aol.com](mailto:pdqblues@aol.com).

## BALTIMORE TIMEBANK GENERAL MEETING AND POTLUCK DINNER

**Thursday, April 18, 5:00 p.m.**

Meet people who are using the time bank to exchange services and build community in Baltimore when the Baltimore TimeBank holds a general meeting and potluck dinner at BES on Thursday, April 18 at 7:00 p.m. For more information, see BES members Lisa Alderson or Richard Lewis or visit [letsbmore.org](http://letsbmore.org).

IRONWEED  
film  
CLUB

Wednesday, April 24,  
7:30 p.m.

Join us for a screening of *Girl Model* from the award-winning PBS Point-of-View documentary series. *Girl Model* reveals complicated truths about the world of modeling, the relationships between wealthier and poorer nations, and a seemingly insatiable craving for young girls in many different societies. This is a rare inside look that strips away the façade of the modeling industry telling the story of the deeply conflicted Ashley, a former model who now scouts for a behemoth Russia agency, and thirteen-year-old Nadya, whom Ashley has plucked from a remote Siberian village and promised a lucrative career in Japan. An Official Selection of the 2011 International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam. Winner, 2011 POV | Alpha Cine Award. Produced in association with American Documentary | POV. Ask Emil about free membership in the film club which meets every fourth Wednesday (email [volcheck@acm.org](mailto:volcheck@acm.org), or call 410-929-3399). You can also check with him to find out how you can help select films.

“DRINKING  
ETHICALLY”  
PUB NIGHT

Thursday, April 4, 6:30 p.m.

Join BES-YA for the next “Drinking Ethically” social. Spend time with old friends or meet new ones at the Owl Bar located at 1 E. Chase St. We look forward to seeing you!

## Wealth Inequality

(continued from page 1)

and very poor, offered the middle class a pretty good life and provided the worst off with at least the basic necessities. It was reassuring to see that most Americans prefer more equitable distribution. But, if that is the case, why aren't things getting better – or, more urgently, why are they continuing to get worse? The answer may be that our assumptions about reality are far from reality itself!

The *reality* about the wealth distribution in the land of the free is that inequality is *much* greater than Americans assume. Part of this is because people are familiar with *income* inequality, which is much less dramatic than wealth inequality. For example, according to Norton and Ariely, “the top 1 percent has about twice as large a share of the national wealth as it does of national income.” We continue, however, to see the situation as much more equal than it actually is.

So even if Americans had the will to work for moving from the current reality towards the ideal, they have a lot further to go than they think. When I watched the video, I was embarrassed to be a citizen of a country so seemingly ignorant of such basic injustice. A number of BES members were outraged by the video, prompting Stephen Meskin to ask the most important question: “What are we going to do about it? Is there anything we can do?”

I admit that I don't have a good answer to this question, besides speaking out about the obscene level of inequality in our state and nation and supporting services for the disadvantaged, such as job training and welfare benefits for the poor. Paul Furth underscored the importance of getting educated about this issue, and perhaps we can organize a teach-in about this issue, maybe next fall. It can help us speak out in confidence against the “austerity budgets” that hurt the most those with the least.

Kate offered one other suggestion that is in line with our recent advocacy for time banking – investing directly in our local communities such as through farm shares and community-supported agriculture that keeps “our money, time, and other resources out of the hands of big corporations.” As she astutely puts it: “The type of capitalism we have is destroying our society, and somehow, we're going to have to push back.”

I urge you to help others understand the state of wealth inequality in America by sharing the video forwarded to me by Kate. It can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP-KKQnijnsM&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP-KKQnijnsM&feature=player_embedded). It may infuriate you, as it did me. But maybe we need a bit more fury! How else are we going to overcome the apathy that keeps us from working harder to move from a very grim reality to a more ideal distribution of wealth that brings out the best in us all?



## EARTH DAY TREE PLANTING & PICNIC

### BES Joins with Blue Water Baltimore!

Saturday, April 27, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.



Kate LaClair invites you to help plant trees at City College High School, 3220 The Alameda, 21218. All ages welcome! Blue Water Baltimore will provide gloves and tools. Each volunteer should bring a water bottle and wear clothes and sturdy shoes that can get dirty/wet. Planting will take place rain or shine, so Kate suggests wearing sunscreen or a rain jacket if appropriate. Pack a lunch and at the end of our work we will all gather for a picnic. Contact [katherine.laclair@gmail.com](mailto:katherine.laclair@gmail.com) to sign up.

## Fun with Western Philosophy

Sundays, April 14 and April 28, 4:00–6:00 p.m.

These last two classes of this series will focus on “Questions of Mind” (April 14 will investigate epistemology, the study of knowledge and truth) and “Questions of Meaning” (April 28 considers philosophy of self and existentialism). *IMPORTANT NOTE: Classes take place at the Baltimore Free School space at 512-516 W. Franklin St., a couple of blocks west of BES.*



## Electing New Leadership

Each spring the membership elects the team that will lead the society in the coming year. Election ballots will be sent out in early April, and election results will be announced at the annual membership meeting on April 28. The Nominating Committee has nominated the following candidates:

### BES Officers:

President: Emil Volcheck

Vice-President: Kathryn Sloboda

Secretary: Lisa Alderson

Treasurer: Stephen Meskin

### Members-at-large of the

#### Executive Board:

Karen Helm (two-year term)

Kenneth Brenneman (two-year term)

Paul Furth (two-year term)

Frederick Compton (one-year term)

## Fulfilling Humanism's Promise

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ing. He loved our potluck dinner and family game night. A father and son visited the society that evening to play games. The next morning, the son came back with his mother, who praised Croft's talk on her blog, writing “An Ode to Getting Out of Bed.” Croft saw over forty people hear his platform address and afterward had lunch with about a dozen. We know how much our society has grown recently, with twenty-two people joining us in the last two years. But Croft could see in one weekend that our community is fulfilling the promise of humanism in Baltimore.

## We the People

insure domestic Tranquility provide for the common defence

### CONSTITUTION SERIES CONTINUES

Tuesday, April 30, 7:30–9:00 p.m.

The Constitution Series continues with an important discussion of the **Death Penalty**. We will discuss Maryland's campaign to end capital punishment as well as the national and constitutional issues surrounding the death penalty. Among the questions we will consider: *What is the current national legal status of capital punishment, and what does the future hold? Should we consider the death penalty “cruel and unusual punishment?”*



**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**

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

**NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!

**TIME VALUE**

**ETHICAL ACTION MEETING**

**Sunday, April 21, 9:00 a.m.**

Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

**NEWCOMERS MEETING**

**Sunday, April 21, 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. See Karen Elliott or Hugh Taft-Morales for more information.

**MINDFULNESS**

meditation

**Sunday, April 14, 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 it comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.

**bmorethical**

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