

BESpeak

MAY 2013

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Fundamental Sharing

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

A recent conversation with a BES guest re-awakened my respect for the complexity, paradox, and uniqueness of Ethical Culture. The conversation began around a phrase in our platform opening words. They are words many of you have heard often: “The Baltimore Ethical Society is a humanistic religious and educational fellowship inspired by the ideal that the supreme aim of human life is working to create a more humane society.”

While these words are generally positive and reflect much of the spirit of Ethical Culture, our visitor noted that designating “working to create a more humane world” as “the supreme aim of human life” felt a little overly *singular*. He wondered, in so many words: *Is there really only one supreme aim of human life? Might such emphasis on one aim promote a doctrinaire approach less sensitive to a diverse collection of values we all might admire? Why use categorical language – the kind of language that encourages the narrow path toward fanaticism?*

Being a lifelong skeptic myself, I appreciated this perspective. First, it is so important that visitors and new members feel free to share their perspectives on the culture of BES. Sometimes after being inside a subculture for years, one needs fresh sets of eyes to point out how the culture looks from outside the culture. But, second, the comments reminded me of my own resistance to worldviews that reduce the complexity of life to *one* answer or *one* solution. I always step back when a salesman for anything – whether a cleaning product or a metaphysics – tells me that this is “the ONLY thing you’ll ever need!”

It reminds me of discussions I have had regarding theologian Paul Tillich who greatly liberalized social understanding of religion by removing the requirement that it necessarily involve the supernatural. Tillich described religion as dedication to an “ultimate concern.” If one’s ultimate concern is promoting environmentalism or civic engagement, for example, either concern could be one’s religion. It mirrored the words (*Our Part*, 65-66) of Felix Adler, founder of Ethical Culture: “Religion in a broad sense may be taken to mean any cause in which we are supremely interested.”



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SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

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MAY 5

“Re-humanizing Race”

Bruce Jacobs
Author and Speaker

MAY 12

“Pro-Choice and Pro-Life: Politics and Awe”

Hugh Taft-Morales
Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

MAY 19

“Atheist Discrimination (And What Humanists Can Do About It)”

Maggie Ardiente
Director, Development and
Communications, AHA

MAY 26

Memorial Day Remembrance

Hosted by
Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader
Karen Elliott, BES Board Member

Memorial Day Picnic

Hosted by
Dianne and Stuart Hirsch

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

is published monthly
September through June by
the Baltimore Ethical Society
306 W. Franklin St., Suite 102
Baltimore, MD 21201-4661
410-581-2322

Issue 429

Managing Editor: Kathryn Sloboda
Copy Editor: Rosemary Klein
Proofreading & Circulation:
Judy Katz
Deadline: 10th of the prior month

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On the web at bmorethical.org

Friends and Allies

by Emil Volcheck, BES President



The community of Humanists will thrive in Baltimore if our city develops a healthy ecosystem of humanist and nontheistic organizations. The Baltimore Ethical Society promotes the growth of this ecosystem by supporting our partners in the Baltimore Coalition of Reason (CoR). This is the right thing to do. It brings out the best in us as a society, and it helps us grow.

Ethicals generally interpret Adler's ethical maxim on an individual level. We strive to bring out the best in others and to elicit their distinctive worth. We hope that by doing this, we will bring out the best in ourselves. Adler extended this principle to the level of nations and cultures. In his address to the Universal Races Congress in 1911, Adler stated that "...the flaws, as well as the excellent features, of any type of culture may be best detected in the effect it produces on other types." This principle that applies both to individuals and to cultures also applies to organizations and units smaller than nations. I believe Adler would agree that the features of our Ethical Society can be discerned by the effect we produce in other organizations.

BES has helped incubate two startups in the CoR: the LGBTQ Humanist Council (HC) of Baltimore and the African-American Humanist Society (AAHS). We've enabled their use of Meetup.com, offered free use of our space, and jointly sponsored events with them. Our relationship with the LGBTQ HC helped us connect with the campaign for marriage equality and led us to officially support legislation that prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity. The AAHS and BES organized our first joint meetup in April, and I hope that we will do more together. Thanks to the efforts of our ethical Leader Hugh, we partnered with First Unitarian Church of Baltimore to host a discussion group on Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. Hugh's outreach sparked a whole discussion series, and First Unitarian invited Baltimore CoR to participate.

Events at BES that we sponsor jointly with Baltimore CoR have recently displayed good attendance that exceeds what the Society typically achieves on its own. HumanLight, two Sunday platform addresses celebrating Charles Darwin, and the Roy Zimmerman concert each had 40 to 50 attend. BES is helping to grow and connect the community of Humanists in Baltimore by hosting these events. As a result, more people are visiting and learning about us. When we publicize events with CoR partners, we profit from the size of their communities. The meetups for the Baltimore Atheists, Baltimore Secular Humanists, Drinking Skeptically Baltimore, and BES have respectively 459, 209, 193, and 94 members.

Supporting our Baltimore CoR partners not only matches our ethical principles, but it helps bring new ideas, connections, and people to our society.

Cooperating with CoR partners comes naturally because we share values of reason, compassion, and hope. I've been asked whether BES overemphasizes

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Register for AEU's 98th Annual Assembly!

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

I hope many members of the Baltimore Ethical Society will register for Ethical Culture's Annual Assembly taking place this 2013 in nearby Fairfax, Virginia, June 13 through 17. The theme chosen for the Assembly is *Inspiring Action: Making a Difference!*

Not only will the Assembly be a time for Ethical Culturists to gather in friendship and for inspiration, it will provide lots of opportunity to learn about practical ways both to help BES flourish and to work toward humane criminal justice, a cause we began exploring as a movement last year at the Albany Assembly.

As one of the program planners, I am truly excited about the great workshops and activities that are being offered. Bart Lubow, director of the *Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative* for the Annie E. Casey Foundation will be discussing ways to reduce juvenile incarceration, an important concern addressed by both our Society and its Ethical Action Committee this year. The Assembly will feature such outstanding workshop leaders as

Marc Mauer, executive director of *The Sentencing Project*, Linda Gustitus, president of the *National Religious Campaign Against Torture*, and Paula Cole Jones, director for racial and social justice for the *Unitarian Universalist Association*. If congregational development is an issue of interest to you, consider attending the workshop on membership growth and retention offered by Leader Mary Herman and Leader-in-Training James Croft. Sharing inspiration through the Ethical Culture story will be a topic discussed by Joe Chuman, Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, NJ since 1974 and part-time Leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture since 2008, and me. Also, I'll get to host leading progressive State Senator Jamie Raskin (D-MD) speaking on "One Nation Under the Constitution," an address that will follow a pre-conference day of advocacy. Join Emil and me as we receive basic training in advocacy from the *Secular Coalition for America* (SCA) and visit Capitol Hill offices on Thursday, June 13.

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OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

Sunday, May 5, 9:30 a.m.

BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)

Sunday, May 5, 1:00 p.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, May 9, 5:45 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, May 12, 9:30 a.m.

Baltimore TimeBank General Meeting and Potluck Dinner

Thursday, May 16, 7:30 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, May 19, 9:15 a.m.

Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, May 19, 12:15 p.m.

Board Meeting

Sunday, May 19, 12:30 p.m.

BES Ironweed Film Club

Wednesday, May 22, 7:30 p.m.

Memorial Day Picnic

Sunday, May 26, 12:00 p.m.

Constitution Series

Tuesday, May 28, 7:30 p.m.

SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

All are invited to bring snacks for our coffee hour following platform. Snacks are especially welcome from those whose last names start with:

A to F	May 5
G to L	May 12
M to R	May 19
S to Z	May 26

GETTING MARRIED?

For information about our officiants & ceremonies or to make arrangements, please contact Kathryn Sloboda at weddings@bmoreethical.org.

BES WELCOMES...

Membership Committee chair – Karen Elliott (left) – welcomes new member Lucas McCahill to the BES community. In an effort to help everyone get to know our newest members a little better, we are running a series entitled "New Member Profiles" on our website, bmoreethical.org.

Meet more new members on page 6.



SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

MAY 5

“Re-humanizing Race”

Bruce Jacobs

Author and Speaker

This talk will explore how we can reclaim the ability to know and care for one another across manufactured barriers and how we can use this as the foundation for confronting one another's bigotries and blindness. Bruce will speak with both mind and heart, drawing upon his own personal experiences, what he has learned from others, and his perspectives on our society.

In a society that has dehumanized so many of our interactions, author and speaker **Bruce A. Jacobs** re-humanizes the ways in which we advance what we believe. Jacob's latest book – *Race Manners for the 21st Century* – offers ways to compassionately challenge ourselves and others as well as the rules by which we have been taught to live. Once we begin to peel away the influence of our society's manufactured bigotries, we all have what it takes to start to truly know one another. Jacobs speaks nationally to audiences of good will, doing so in venues that include NPR and C-SPAN. Also a performing poet, a professional jazz drummer, and a very-slowly-improving saxophonist, Jacobs lives in Baltimore. His blog about race, justice, and humanness is aliasbruce.typepad.com.

MAY 12

“Pro-Choice and Pro-Life: Politics and Awe”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

Many humanists find inspiration in the wonders of nature; the beauty of biology and the poetry of physics can bring much joy. But often those defending reproductive rights avoid discussing the amazing process of human reproduction – from conception, through pregnancy, to birth. To avoid unintentionally providing fuel to those denying women the right to choose, they remain silent about this awe-inspiring process. Taft-Morales explores this important and perplexing tension in honor of Mother's Day.

Hugh Taft-Morales joined the Baltimore Ethical Society as its professional leader in 2010, the same year he was cer-

tified 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.

MAY 19

“Atheist Discrimination (And What Humanists Can Do About It)”

Maggie Ardiente

*Director, Development and Communications
American Humanist Association*

Studies show that atheists, people who do not believe in the existence of a god, are the least trusted minority group in the United States. As a result, humanists and other nonbelievers have been subjected to various forms of discrimination, from bullying in classrooms to loss of jobs. Maggie Ardiente of the American Humanist Association (AHA) will highlight such mistreatment by citing illustrative cases that range from the strange to the serious and will argue why the right to be “without a god” is the new civil rights movement.

Maggie Ardiente is the director of development and communications at the AHA, where she is also editor of its popular weekly e-zine *Humanist Network News*. She has appeared in the *Washington Post*, *National Public Radio*, and *Voices of America*. At James Madison University, she served as vice president of the JMU Freethinkers, a student group

PLATFORMS (continued)

for atheists, agnostics, and humanists, and graduated with a BS in sociology. She is a former board member of the Secular Student Alliance – and a graduate (Class 15) and board member of The Humanist Institute.

MAY 26

Memorial Day Remembrance

Hosted by

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Karen Elliott, BES Board Member

Memorial Day Sunday is chance for BES members and guests to remember those who have died. While such loss can be painful, memories can inspire us and warm our hearts. Whether we are thinking of loved ones, historical heroes no longer with us, or those who died in military service to our nation, we are left to honor these precious parts of our lives by bringing out their best. It is up to each of us to make the most of our memories, and today we do so as a community.

During this program, any member or guest who chooses can place a flower, provided by BES, into a vase in memory of someone important to them who died this year or long ago. It can be in honor of a relative, friend, mentor, or historical figure. When placing the flower in a vase, participants may share a few words about this person, or just their name, or they can simply place a flower in the vase silently honoring the person without publicly saying anything.

Karen Elliott is a long-time member of the Baltimore Ethical Society. She has served a number of times as BES president. Currently, she serves on the board of the American Ethical Union as well as on the board of BES and chair of its Membership Committee.

Memorial Day Picnic

Hosted by

Dianne and Stuart Hirsch

Join us for food, fun, and fellowship following the special platform at BES, which will end earlier than usual at approximately 11:30 a.m. Members Dianne and Stuart Hirsch have graciously agreed to open their home (and yard) to us once again and so we will gather for our annual Memorial Day picnic from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The picnic is potluck so please bring a dish to contribute. Directions will be handed out and/or provided on request.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR SUMMER SUNDAYS

During the summer months, BES Sunday morning meetings feature talks that are less formal than platform addresses. These talks run 10 to 30 minutes in length and are commonly offered by BES members or friends. The speaker usually invites discussion following their talk. The Program Committee encourages BES members and friends to suggest topics for talks they'd like to give and invites you to contact Lisa Alderson, Hugh Taft-Morales, or Emil Volcheck with your ideas and suggestions. Please note that May 10 is the date by which the Committee will be attempting to finalize its June, July, and August schedule.

BALTIMORE TIMEBANK GENERAL MEETING AND POTLUCK DINNER

Thursday, May 16 at 7:00 p.m.

The Baltimore TimeBank will hold a general meeting and potluck dinner at BES on Thursday, May 16 at 7:00 p.m. Meet people who are using the time bank to exchange services and build community in Baltimore. For more information, ask Lisa Alderson or Richard Lewis or visit letsbmore.org.

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THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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blue, and white

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IRONWEED

film

CLUB

Wednesday, May 22,
7:30 p.m.

Join us for a screening of *Bidder 70*, a documentary that centers on an extraordinary, ingenious and effective act of civil disobedience. In December 2008, Tim DeChristopher effectively safeguarded thousands of acres of pristine Utah land that were slated for oil and gas leases when he disrupted a highly disputed Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Oil and Gas lease auction. Not content to merely protest outside, DeChristopher entered the auction hall and registered as bidder #70. He outbid industry giants on land parcels, winning 22,000 acres of land worth \$1.7 million before the auction was halted. He was indicted on two federal felonies, was convicted, and is now serving a two-year sentence. This film follows DeChristopher from college student to incarcerated felon and challenges viewers to consider how they define justice.

Ask Emil about free membership in the film club (410-929-3399 or volcheck@acm.org). Would you like to help select films? Please ask Emil.

Welcome New Members!



Membership Committee chair – Karen Elliott (center right) – welcomes three new members to the BES community: Christian Hurst (far left), Abigail Taggart (center left), and Alan Shapiro (right). At right, Dedrick Samuels shows off a copy of *The Humanist Way* which was presented to him by Karen during his new member welcoming in November 2012.



BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, May 9, 5:45–8:00 p.m.

You are invited to join BES members and others as they bake cookies for the riders who will be participating in **Ride for the Feast**, a two-day (May 11–12), 140-mile bike ride that is one of Moveable Feast's largest fundraisers. These monthly baking nights are also an enjoyable outing that gives help to a great organization (just check out their website at mfeast.org.) Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming (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.

BES EATERY SOCIAL (B.E.S.)

Sunday, May 5, 1:00 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to come together on the first Sunday of the month for an informal luncheon social. Following the 10:30 a.m. weekly platform, we will gather about 12:45 p.m. in the Congress Hotel lobby to decide which restaurant to visit. We encourage you to wear your BES shirts or other items of visibility to help promote our organization. If you have any questions or restaurant suggestions, please contact Paul Furth at pdqblues@aol.com.



We the People

insure domestic Tranquility provide for the common Defense

CONSTITUTION SERIES CONTINUES!

Tuesday, May 28, 7:30–9:00 p.m.

The Constitution series continues with an important discussion of **Reproductive Rights**. Leader Hugh Taft-Morales will lead us in an exploration of questions such as “*What is the current status of a women’s right to choose to use contraception and abortion? Where are these rights in gravest danger? What does the future hold?*”

Fundamental Sharing

(continued from page 1)

What made me uncomfortable about Tillich’s description was similar to our guest’s reaction to claims that there is **one** ultimate concern. As I shared in a talk at BES about two years ago, I’m concerned that “ultimate concern” implies a kind of narrow dedication I find unattractive in many religions and philosophies. Life is full of concerns: my marriage, my family, my profession, my health, relationships with friends and strangers, the environment, world peace, and more. Choosing any one, or even any small collection, of these concerns seems to ignore life’s complexity.

Of course one could argue that

“working to create a more humane world” is broad enough to encompass life’s complexity, but that’s not the point I want to pursue here...or with our guest. What is more important is that Ethical Culture respects both the individual and the community. We need an on-going conversation about the values and language necessary to hold the community together while remaining open, questioning, and respectful of new perspectives. Whether or not visitors find BES to their liking and join our community as members, their candid, respectful sharing is fundamental to our future as a flourishing home for humanism in Baltimore.

Friends and Allies

(continued from page 2)

work with the CoR. BES does partner with organizations outside the Secular Movement. BES supports the Baltimore Time Bank. Hugh offered a course on Western philosophy through the Baltimore Free School. In the future, we should look to work with a wider range of organizations. Two years ago, we seriously considered joining Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), a non-partisan, interfaith organization dedicated to improving our city. The time was not ripe then for us to pursue the opportunity, but our society is reaching the point when we can reconsider this opportunity.

AEU Assembly

(continued from page 3)

You will also be able to take part in and enjoy informal sing-alongs and morning colloquies as well as hear from a representative of the Southern Poverty Law Center, this year’s winner of the Elliott-Black Award, for its dedication in the fight against hate and bigotry and its commitment to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. On Saturday morning, Leaders of the Chesapeake Region Ethical Societies – Mary Herman, Jone Johnson Lewis, Amanda Poppei, and I – will offer a platform that explores how we nurture inspiration that sustains ethical action.

So, join me in Northern Virginia to help move Ethical Culture and BES forward! Register on line at www.aeu.org or look for the hard copy of the Assembly brochure in our Society’s lobby.



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, May 19, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

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

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, May 19, 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, May 12, 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.

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