

BESpeak

OCTOBER 2013

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Reflections on the Thoughtful Love of Life

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

At the Baltimore Ethical Society (BES), whenever the topic of Ethical Culture's unique place in the secular-religious spectrum comes up, people express a wide diversity of opinions. Some members embrace Ethical Culture fully as their religion. Others say that for them it is not a religion at all, but more of a philosophy or a way of living. While noting that Ethical Culture is legally designated as a religion, I always emphasize that **both** perspectives are totally consistent with an organization that prides itself on ethics, freethought, and "deed before creed."

What is more important, I always emphasize, is *how you live your life*. Do you behave in a way that respects and celebrates the inherent worth of people, including yourself? Or is that, more honestly, you **aspire** to life full of such respect and celebration? Obviously we don't always bring out our best, and we shouldn't beat ourselves up for having feet of clay. We are way past the asceticism of guilt-ridden, hell-fearing, self-flagellating martyrs. But we can be honest with ourselves and about how to live more ethically.

Some people find they can live more ethically through thoughtful contemplation. They may seek some activity that enhances clearer and more serene states of mind such as meditation, the arts, or yoga. (I wonder if anyone who attended our yoga summer program discovered a new path for self-exploration?) These more experiential left-brained activities sometimes work well for those who self-identify as "spiritual but not religious." They can be rich sources of inspiration for non-theists.

But for the many of us who are more rationally right-sided, I recommend to you a book I read over the summer: *Spirituality for the Skeptic: The Thoughtful Love of Life* by Robert Solomon. I met Bob about ten years ago when I was producing a cable access show called *No Dogs or Philosophers Allowed*. For a relatively well-known academic philosopher, he struck me unpretentious and down-to-earth. That is one reason why – despite being a card-carrying skeptic – I picked up his book with-



(continued on page 7)

SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4–5)

OCTOBER 6

"Facts, Consequences, and the Victory of the Status Quo"

Hathaway Ferebee
Executive Director, Baltimore's
Safe and Sound Campaign

OCTOBER 13

"The Inherent Worth of Everyone"

Hugh Taft-Morales
Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

OCTOBER 20

"Growing up with Ethical Culture"

Elizabeth Collier
Fellow, American Ethical Union

OCTOBER 27

"The Pursuit of Wisdom with Blinders On"

Desirée H. Melton
Associate Professor of Philosophy,
Notre Dame of Maryland University

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

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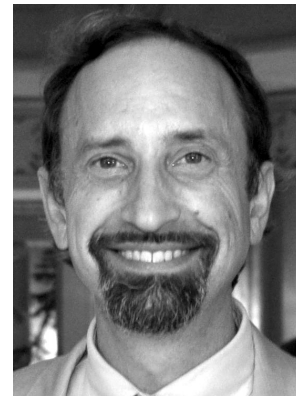
Dimensions of Community

by Emil Volcheck, BES President

Humanists across the United States and the United Kingdom are coming to realize that building local communities enriches the lives of their members and helps to grow the broader Humanist movement. Many have come to believe that forming more local communities is vital for Humanism to gain widespread popular support. Ethical societies have offered nontheistic communities for close to 140 years. However, we have not communicated our message as quickly to a broad audience as two younger efforts: the Sunday Assembly and the Harvard Humanist Community Project. Both efforts describe a vision of community that fits ethical societies very well. Their independent rediscoveries of the value of community validate our approach and create opportunities to work together for our mutual benefit.

The Sunday Assembly began in London this year (sundayassembly.com) and has spread to several cities throughout the UK. Their guidelines call for a Sunday program of talks, singing, a reading, and a moment of silent reflection. The leaders of this effort are two British comedians, Pippa Evans and Sanderson Jones, who are featured on the cover of the September/October issue of "The Humanist" magazine. They describe the Sunday Assembly as follows: "The Sunday Assembly is a godless congregation that meets to hear great talks, sing songs and generally celebrate the wonder of life. It's a service for anyone who wants to live better, help often and wonder more." The Sunday Assembly does not identify itself as an atheist organization. These characteristics describe ethical society meetings, in what might be a kind of convergent evolution of humanist communities. The London Sunday Assembly has chosen to meet at the Conway Hall Ethical Society, creating a nexus with the Ethical Culture Movement. The New York City Sunday Assembly has started discussions with the New York Society for Ethical Culture to inquire about the use of their space, so perhaps that nexus will grow.

The Humanist Community at Harvard under the leadership of Greg Epstein and James Croft has emerged as a powerful messenger of Humanism at a national level. They launched the Humanist Community Project, which seeks to promote the formation of local Humanist communities. Croft presented his vision of flourishing communities in his talk at BES this past March titled "Fulfilling the Promise of Humanism" (vimeo.com/65700489). Croft and Epstein recently announced a book deal with Simon and Schuster to publish *The Godless Congregation*, which will study successful Humanist communities and the attributes that contribute to their success. They plan to evaluate organizations based on five dimensions of community: gatherings, education (both youth and adults), service, political action, and ceremonies. BES scores positively for each dimension. We gather every Sunday morning. We offer Sunday School for children and classes for adults, such as Hugh's Moral



(continued on page 6)

“Pennies for Frisky’s” Campaign

by Linda Joy Burke, Sunday school teacher

In September of 2012, I proposed that our Sunday school take on a community project. We chose Frisky’s Wildlife and Primate Sanctuary (friskys.org). Since this five-acre, non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center in Woodstock, Maryland does not receive county, state, or federal funding, we decided to raise money through a “Pennies for Frisky’s” campaign.

Frisky’s does the good work of taking in wildlife that has been injured, orphaned, abandoned, or displaced. While Frisky’s does not accept cats and dogs, it does shelter abandoned domestic pets such as rabbits, hamsters, birds, and guinea pigs until a loving, lifetime home can be found for them. Additionally, Frisky’s provides a safe haven for primates, who live out their lives at the center and are not adopted out.

Throughout our Sunday school year, we talk about the natural world, animals, trees, our responsibility toward living things, and the mythical qualities that can be associated in identifying with animals: “If I were an animal, I’d be a bird; what would you be – why?”

Camille, a long-time student, cat lover and animal advocate, decorated a “Pennies for Frisky’s” can. The students took turns passing it around among the adults attending each Sunday and sometimes left it in the lobby during coffee and snacks time. We really didn’t collect a lot of pennies though. People mostly donated dollars, and by the time we ended our campaign in May, we had raised over 100 dollars.

Read about our visit to Frisky’s and view photos at bmorethical.org.

OPEN MIC NIGHT WITH BALTIMORE PARENTING BEYOND BELIEF

Friday, October 4, 7:00 p.m.

1777 Reisterstown Rd. Suite 50, Pikesville

Come and show your talents at Open Mic Night! All kinds of kid-friendly acts are welcome including music, poetry, readings, skits, or comedy. This event is FREE and open to the community. Kids are welcome and encouraged to perform. Sibling and/or parent/child acts are a lot of fun. Performers begin signing in at 7:00 p.m., and acts will begin at 7:30 p.m. Even if you don’t want to perform, come meet some new and old friends and relax with some great entertainment. Join the Meetup at <http://meetup.ps/1ZTLzz>.

We are located in the suites of The Community of Ethical People and the Baltimore Homeschool Community Center. Both organizations are secular, inclusive, and diverse.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Open Mic Night with Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief
Friday, October 4, 7:00 p.m.

Poetry Group
Sunday, October 6, 9:30 a.m.

BES Running Club
Sunday, October 6, 6:00 p.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast
Thursday, October 10, 5:45 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation
Sunday, October 13, 9:30 a.m.

Board Meeting
Sunday, October 13, 12:30 p.m.

Moral Philosophy Discussion
Sunday, October 13, 4:00 p.m.

Pigtown Festival
Saturday, October 19, 12:00 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting
Sunday, October 20, 9:15 a.m.

BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)
Sunday, October 20, 1:00 p.m.

BES Running Club
Sunday, October 20, 6:00 p.m.

BES Ironweed Film Club
Wednesday, October 23, 7:30 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting
Sunday, October 27, 12:30 p.m.

Moral Philosophy Discussion
Sunday, October 27, 4:00 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	Oct. 6
G to L	Oct. 13
M to R	Oct. 20
S to Z	Oct. 27

OCTOBER 6

“Facts, Consequences, and the Victory of the Status Quo”

Hathaway Ferebee

Executive Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign

Ms. Ferebee will present facts about the State of Maryland's decision to build a new jail for youth charged as adults. These facts support redirection of the funds toward alternatives that will produce better outcomes for less public expense while maintaining public safety. The facts reveal what Ms. Ferebee calls “the glaring insanity of the state's decision to build another jail despite what is known and counter to the common good.” The talk will focus on the persistence of the status quo that harms African Americans, destroys whole communities and is, in theory but not action, decried by advocates, universities and elected officials.

Hathaway Ferebee has served as Executive Director of the Safe and Sound Campaign since its inception in 1996. The Campaign builds sustainable funding for opportunities for Baltimore's children, youth and families. Through community organizing and public private financial contracts, the Campaign has enabled the reallocation of millions of state dollars from programs that don't work to those that do. She holds an MA in Community Planning from the University of Maryland and a BA in sociology from Mary Baldwin College. Prior to her work with the Safe and Sound Campaign, Ms. Ferebee served for eight years as the Executive Director of the Citizens Planning and Housing Association, Baltimore's oldest citizen action organization, where she lent her leadership to Baltimore's landmark success to restrict outdoor advertising of alcohol and tobacco products and the founding of Baltimore's New Schools movement.

OCTOBER 13

“The Inherent Worth of Everyone”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

At the heart of Ethical Humanism is a commitment to honor the inherent worth of every person. Of course we are flawed and frail creatures – and won't *always* live up to this commitment. But declaring that everyone has worth is important in a world that devalues people left and right: from the one million helpless infants each year that die the day they are born, to prisoners in solitary confinement for years, to many elderly we warehouse in substandard nursing homes, to those without money or power we mistreat. When will we create a society where the worth of every person is protected as precious? Hugh Taft-Morales explores this challenge and calls on Ethical Humanists, including himself, to do better.

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 also serves as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia.

OCTOBER 20

“Growing up with Ethical Culture”

Elizabeth Collier

Fellow, American Ethical Union

Elizabeth Collier will speak about her experience being raised in Ethical Culture and how it has shaped the person she is today. She will also offer her thoughts on how we can all do our part for the future growth of Ethical Societies.

Elizabeth “Liz” Collier, a young adult raised with Ethical Culture as her religion, was a founding member of the Future

HAVE AN IDEA FOR A SUNDAY SPEAKER?

Tell the Program Committee! Please see Lisa Alderson, Ronit Klemens, Angad Singh, Hugh Taft-Morales, or Emil Volcheck. Want to help choose speakers? Ask us about joining the committee!

PIGTOWN FESTIVAL

Saturday, October 19, 12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Please volunteer to help out at the BES table at the Pigtown Festival! This is our first year reaching out to the Pigtown/Washington Village community. Contact Ken Brenneman or Paul Furth.

of Ethical Societies (FES), a group dedicated to assisting young adults to stay connected to the Ethical Culture that many grew up in. Collier is currently a Fellow of the American Ethical Union, researching what will attract young adults and future generations to Ethical Culture. As a Certified Holistic Health Counselor, she runs her own private health coaching practice. In her spare time, Collier loves to broaden her knowledge of food and cooking and play her flute.

OCTOBER 27

“The Pursuit of Wisdom with Blinders On”

Desirée H. Melton

*Associate Professor of Philosophy,
Notre Dame of Maryland University*

In a time when we have moved toward accepting that not all women are physically inferior to men and toward the acceptance that people of color are not intellectually inferior by virtue of their color and/or culture, the exclusion of their perspectives from the discipline that pursues truth and wisdom, results in philosophic thought with a distinctly distorted view of reality.

Desirée H. Melton is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. at Binghamton University. Ms. Melton specializes in Critical Race Theory and Social and Political Philosophy. She has published articles in an anthology on the work of Iris Marion Young and in the Feminist Ethics and Social Theory Series.

Moral Philosophy Discussions Begin!

**Sundays 10/13, 10/27, 11/10, 11/24,
4:00-6:00 p.m.**

Free and open to the public

Join Hugh Taft-Morales for a fun exploration of four different ethical paradigms from the Western tradition. There is no required reading, but those attending are encouraged to explore some of the discussion topics prior to each meeting. While you can attend single classes, it is recommended that you commit to the entire series since references will be made to earlier classes and discussions.

OCTOBER 13

Being Good – The virtue of character

This first session will focus mainly on Aristotle and his concept of “the golden mean,” that mid-point one learns to reach between excess and deficiency of certain human characteristics. We will explore the concept of “goals” or “purposes” in life that come from our nature as human beings. Fulfilling that nature is, according to Aristotle, a well-lived life, one that will achieve happiness and flourishing, otherwise known as “*eudaimonia*.” We will also touch on a modern representative of virtue ethics, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre.

OCTOBER 28

Doing What We Know is Right – It’s the principle, stupid!

For our second session we will rely on Immanuel Kant, in particular his reliance on reason in determining right and wrong. We will examine different types of “deontology” – those moral theories of right and wrong that rest on “moral absolutes” that matter regardless of specific circumstance in addition to the more sterile version of Kant’s categorical imperative. Contemporary perspectives, we will discover, might not be as narrowly focused on reason, preferring to emphasize obligation and duty.

Our November explorations will be “Doing What Feels Right – The pleasure principle” and “Caring and Doing – Relational ethics and pragmatism.”

bmoreethical t-shirts

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TODAY!**

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blue, and white

ONLY \$15

IRONWEED

film

CLUB

Wednesday, October 23

6:30 p.m. Potluck Dinner

7:00 p.m. Screening

Join us for a screening of the documentary *Triple Divide*, co-sponsored by the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, and meet CCAN activists at a potluck dinner.

Triple Divide attempts to answer the question, "How are state regulations and industry handling impacts from fracking?" Actor Mark Ruffalo co-narrates this 18-month investigation by Public Herald, an investigative news non-profit. The film reveals how water contamination is being covered up by the industry and the state, essentially rewriting the history of water quality in Pennsylvania by dismissing predrill tests. View the trailer at triplivedividefilm.org.

If you're joining us for dinner, please tell us what dish you'd like to bring here: <http://ur1.ca/flqk2>.

Learn more about CCAN at www.chesapeakeclimate.org.

Ask Emil about free membership in the film club (volcheck@acm.org, or 410/929-3399).

BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, October 10, 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. 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.



Dimensions of Community

(continued from page 2)

Philosophy series starting this month. Our service activities include work for Moveable Feast, Blue Water Baltimore, and more. Our ethical action should score high on the dimension of political action, with Marriage Equality as a prime example. BES offers weddings and memorial services. BES also offers community along another dimension: pastoral care offered by Hugh and other members of the Caring Committee. James Croft was impressed with BES when he visited us and has expressed interest in including BES as one of the organizations to profile in their book. I think all members of BES can take pride in the fact that our society is a good example of a Humanist community, worthy of academic attention, and take this as encouragement to continue to build and develop our ethical society.

BES EATERY SOCIAL (B.E.S.)

Sunday, October 20,
1:00 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to go out together for lunch. We'll gather in the building lobby at about 12:45 p.m. following post-platform snacks to decide together which restaurant to visit. Everyone is encouraged to wear their BES shirts or other items to help promote the society. Please note that the BES Eatery Social is going to be held on a different Sunday each month both to provide members with opportunities to attend this fun event and to attempt to avoid conflicts with other BES activities. If you have any questions or suggestions about restaurants or the schedule, please contact Adam Garst at synxr-0nic@yahoo.com.

SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?

Contact our Officiant Team Coordinator at weddings@bmorethical.org.

Reflections on the Thoughtful Love of Life

(continued from page 1)

out worrying about finding new age mysticism. In this column I offer you some tidbits from his short but dense treatise in the hope that some of you might pick up a copy for yourself. (Or at least check one out from the library and read the first chapter, which I find is the best anyway!)

In making his case for what he terms a “naturalized spirituality,” Solomon does a good job of balancing the left and right hemispheres of our brain though he stresses that in Western philosophy *thoughts* and *feelings* are portrayed as completely distinct and often opposed. I am attracted to this more holistic approach he lays out because it fits my lived experience as well as a number of contemporary psychological perspectives. In the introduction, Solomon puts it simply “...just as thoughts without feelings do not constitute spirituality, dumb feelings no matter how exhilarating without adequate thought do not either.” (p. 6)

I also appreciate how Solomon dissolves the rigid distinction between self and other. Being an existentialist myself, I appreciate that part of my identity is individual and solitary. But I am committed to an identity that is

also defined by those relationships I value deeply – with my wife and family, my friends, and my fellow travelers in Ethical Culture. Embrace of both the autonomous and the relational parts of my personality has opened up to me, in Solomon’s words, “that passionate sense of self-awareness in which the very distinction between selfishness and selflessness disappears.” (p. 12)

Of course no exploration of spirituality would sit right with me if it did not include the dark side of life, so those of you who want to ignore tragedy and death, skip to the last paragraph! Solomon states the obvious – a skeptic cannot explain away tragedy by blaming god. How are we to process bad things happening to good people? There’s no magic wand here Solomon admits. Sometimes one must simply bear the pain that comes with loving that which can be fragile such as the people close to us.

Never forget, however, that it is precisely because we have a thoughtful love of life that things hurt. It is also that thoughtfulness that allows us to create meaning. Such meaning doesn’t make the pain go away, but it helps maintain the “majesty of our

existence” by celebrating our relationships. In nurturing a naturalized spirituality, Solomon urges us to have a good sense of humor, gratitude, and a “passionate engagement with the details and the people in our lives.”

Last month I had the honor of presiding at the memorial service for BES member Shirley Dale Patterson. There, friends and family shared memories that reflected Dale’s passionate engagement with them. Such comments were moving, particularly those of the children – nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. Afterwards I went back to *Spirituality for the Skeptic* searching for a line I remembered and found it on page 124: “Death is simply a part of life, and life goes on, for a short time anyway, in the hearts and minds of those who have loved or been affected by us. This is enough.”

It is enough for me. Is it for you? How do you seek to build meaning in life? What for you creates deeper connection? Whether you use the term “spiritual” or not to describe these sources or activities, are these a part of your connection to Ethical Culture? Share with me how you try to nurture a “thoughtful love of life” by emailing me at leader@bmorethical.org.

BES RUNNING CLUB

October 6 and 20, 6:00 p.m.

Join us for a walk or run around the track at Lake Montebello, every other Sunday at 6:00 p.m. Meet at the parking lot below Lake Montebello Elementary. See Ben Busby for more information.

Keep fit or get in shape for the “Light the Night” benefit walk on Saturday, November 2, 5:30 p.m. at Camden Yards!



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, October 20, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

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

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, October 27, 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 Judy Katz or Emil Volcheck for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, October 13, 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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Visit bmorethical.org and look for us on Facebook, Twitter, and MeetUp.com @bmorethical

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