

BESpeak

NOVEMBER 2013

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Notes from Shutdown City

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

Most of you know that while you see me at work in Baltimore, I live inside the Washington, D.C. beltway. As a result I felt the impact of the federal government shutdown in a number of very concrete ways. To begin with, my wife Maureen was furloughed. An analyst for the Library of Congress, she was sent home as “non-essential.”



In addition, my yoga studio was suddenly very crowded. Many public servants took advantage of the \$10 special for furloughed federal workers offered by Willow Street Yoga - a nice gesture, for sure, but my yoga peace-of-mind was disturbed by having mats so close that limbs collided through various flows and postures. My son, a rock-climbing instructor, has lost business due to the closure of local cliffs on federal land by the Potomac River. My sister-in-law, who works for a firm with government contracts, is facing potential cuts in salary and health insurance.

We are some of the luckier ones, however, fortunate enough to probably ride out the shutdown. Others, more dependent on weekly paychecks and government services are really feeling the pinch. Add to all this the near constant “blame game” broadcast by the media, each party pointing fingers while the world snickers at this “city upon a hill” blundering itself into oblivion, and, well, let’s just say, it wasn’t a great week.

To get some relief from all this, my wife Maureen and I went to see the *Capitol Steps*, a musical satire troupe that proudly puts the mock back into democracy. It came as a welcome relief from the travesty that was unfolding daily under the dome. Laughing at the parodies of our elected leaders felt like a dose of sweet, playful revenge.

A writer with the *Capital Steps*, Elaina Newport, was puzzled when hearing that “nonessential personnel” were sent home. She asks, “So why is Congress still here?” The Executive Branch was not spared, one cast member pointing out

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SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

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NOVEMBER 3

**“Animal Liberation
and Social Justice:
What’s the Connection?”**

Patrice Jones
Author and Activist

NOVEMBER 10

**“Freethinkers, Faithists,
and Atheists: Mapping
Non-Believers”**

Hugh Taft-Morales
Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

NOVEMBER 17

**“The Dawn of
Personalized Medicine”**

Dr. Ben Busby
*Professor and Chair, Department
of Bioinformatics, FAES*

NOVEMBER 24

“Stone Salad Fall Festival”

Hosted by
Karen Elliott & Hugh Taft-Morales

ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday
10:30 a.m. – Noon

Children of all ages are welcome.

*Separate childcare provided
for preschoolers between the
ages of one and four.*

BESpeak

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Our Sunday School Grows

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



More families and children are coming to the society to take advantage of our Sunday School. With them they bring a sense of energy and vitality that we want to sustain and grow. In September, we reached a peak of eleven students in the main classroom of our Sunday School. With the increase in older students, we formed a separate class for them in the library. For the little ones not yet ready for school, we provide childcare in the toddler room. October began with five toddlers in care, the largest number yet.

To meet the increasing need for childcare, the BES Board approved hiring a childcare worker for a trial period of 12 weeks that began in September. Our budget is tight. We could have tried to organize childcare as a cooperative run by the parents. However, the Board believes that providing childcare during our Sunday program is a responsibility shared by the whole society - not just a responsibility of the parents. Providing childcare as a basic service prepares us to grow further, and it allows more parents to participate in the platform address program.

A few weeks ago, Bobbi Hahn marveled at the number of children at BES that morning and asked me "Where did they all come from?" I couldn't give her a reason, but it wasn't magic. A lot of people have worked to bring about this success. Past President Rosemary Klein and Vice President Kathryn Sloboda revitalized our Sunday School about two years ago when they started the Religious Education Task Force and hired Linda Joy Burke to teach. Linda Joy infuses the classroom with art, music, empathy, and ethics, creating an environment for learning that attracts children and parents. Our PR Committee has increased our outreach to more neighborhood festivals and broadened our presence on social media. Kathryn placed advertisements in *Baltimore's Child* magazine and designed an attractive information sheet, which we have displayed at festivals. Gordon Stills showed us the history of our Sunday School by retrieving microfiche articles from *The Baltimore Afro-American* that report on our society offering the first racially integrated Sunday School in the city. These historical documents powerfully convey our ethical roots and frame the identity of our educational programs that began with the "Children's Sunday Assembly" in 1951.

The success of our programs for children relies on the work of our volunteers and staff. I thank Dr. Argentine Craig for volunteering to lead our ethical education programs. She will chair the BES Ethical Education Committee (formerly the Religious Education Committee) starting in January. Karen Helm recently stepped down as chair of the committee, and I'd like to thank her for her service. The members of the Ethical Education Committee deserve our appreciation: Kathryn, Dr. Susan Henley, Dr. Ben Busby, and our Leader Hugh. Ben will represent BES at the AEU Religious Education Weekend in November in order to help connect us with educators and resources from across the Ethical Movement. I'd like to thank the volunteers who have

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HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

All BES members are reminded that our beacon of humanism shines out to Baltimore, to Maryland, and around the country only thanks to the generosity of all of our members! Please contribute your fair share to our 2013–2014 Pledge Drive. Send your pledge commitments to *Baltimore Ethical Society, c/o Treasurer, 306 W. Franklin St., Ste. 102, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.*

Hydrofracking in Maryland

by Donald C. Helm, BES member

Large-scale plans for hydraulic fracturing and natural gas export in Maryland have recently been set in motion. From my vantage point as a scientist let me point to some clear dangers that result from hydrofracking. A physical process occurs that is overlooked by methane gas developers. This overlooked process is the upward migration of fractures from depth. A breakthrough in understanding the mechanisms that underlie this process came with the publication of an award winning paper entitled “*Hydraulic forces that play a role in generating fissures at depth*” by D.C. Helm, published in the Bulletin of the Association of Engineering Geologists. Over the decades, such mechanisms have been observed throughout the American southwest, Mexico, and overseas, such as beneath Xi’an, China (home city of the terra cotta warriors). They are especially applicable today to hydrofracking.

As a result, the frequently asked question “WILL overlying freshwater aquifers become contaminated?” shifts to “WHEN and WHERE will these aquifers FIRST become contaminated?” The follow-up question becomes “Does having about 30 years of an abundant supply of methane gas with its concomitant profits and revenues outweigh the eventual unavoidable

loss of the freshwater aquifers of Garrett and Allegany Counties, Maryland?”

It is important for the reader to picture these inevitable subsurface events. Hydrofracking is a decades-old technique for extracting methane gas from tight geological formations such as shale. In order for the trapped gas to be released to the land surface, highly pressurized water is introduced into a wellbore such that the target geological formation becomes fractured. When the water is subsequently depressurized to let the methane escape through the fractures into the borehole, solid particles, called “proppants,” which were introduced along with the water, remain behind to keep the fractures propped open. Otherwise, the fractures might close upon depressurization and undo the very purpose of the effort.

Rock at the two opposite ends of a horizontal hydrofracking line will move apart, reflecting the cumulative expansion of the intervening fractures. From the point of view of these opposite ends, it makes no difference whether the initial fracking water pressure continues to be maintained with no proppants or whether this pressure is reduced with the new proppants in place.

In order to hydrofrack in the first

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OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

Sunday, November 3, 9:30 a.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, November 10, 9:30 a.m.

Board Meeting

Sunday, November 10, 12:30 p.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, November 14, 5:45 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, November 17, 9:15 a.m.

Family Board and Card Games Party

Sunday, November 17, 3:00 p.m.

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Wednesday, November 20, 6:30 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, November 24, 12:30 p.m.

BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)

Sunday, November 24, 1:00 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	Nov. 3
G to L	Nov. 10
M to R	Nov. 17
S to Z	Nov. 24

DON'T FORGET TO CHANGE YOUR CLOCK!

Daylight Saving Time will be ending on Sunday, November 3, at 2:00 a.m. Remember to set your clocks back so you won't be too early for platform!

SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

NOVEMBER 3

“Animal Liberation and Social Justice: What’s the Connection?”

Pattrice Jones

Author and Activist

Ecofeminist author and activist Pattrice Jones will analyze the links between animal exploitation and social/environmental injustice. Speciesism is foundational to intra-species forms of oppression, such as racism and homophobia, providing ideological, psychological, and material support to injustice among people as well as to despoliation of the environment (which also hurts people). In explaining these connections, Jones will explain the concept of “intersectionality” as it is understood by feminist and antiracist scholars and activists, as well as the ecofeminist concept of the “logic of domination.” In closing, she will offer tips for building bridges across the animal, environmental, and social justice movements.

Pattrice Jones is an eco/anarcha-feminist writer, scholar, and activist who came to animal liberation through social justice work. Her activist history began in Baltimore in the 1970s and includes tenant organizing, anti-racist education, and direct action in a variety of flavors. She cofounded VINE Sanctuary, an LGBTQ-run organization which offers refuge to farmed animals while offering a progressive approach to animal liberation and associated agricultural reform. Her book, *Aftershock: Confronting Trauma in a Violent World* is a handbook for activists hoping to heal themselves as well as our violent and violated neighborhoods and ecosystems.

NOVEMBER 10

“Freethinkers, Faithists, and Atheists: Mapping Non-Believers”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

According to a 2012 Pew survey about religious affiliation, the fastest growing group in the U.S. is the one claiming **no religion** at all. As a result, a wide spectrum of organizations – from humanist to skeptic to atheist – are scrambling to attract some of these 33 million people. How do we make sense of the diversity of alternatives to traditional religion? What does Ethical Humanism offer that is unique and important? How can we help give direction to the many people now swimming in humanist seas?

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. His presence in Ethical Culture has been termed “invigorating.” 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.

NOVEMBER 17

“The Dawn of Personalized Medicine: Understanding Genomics, Epigenomics and Metagenomics for Individual and Public Health Advocacy”

Dr. Ben Busby

Professor and Chair,

Department of Bioinformatics, FAES

Francis Collins, the director of the NIH, has stated that personalized medicine is likely to dramatically alter healthcare in the next few years. In this talk, Dr. Busby would like to tell you why he agrees with Dr. Collins and how individuals’ data can improve public health.

Ben Busby is the Chair of the Bioinformatics and Computational Biology Department at the Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences (FAES), housed on the NIH campus, and a researcher in the field of evolutionary genomics. Ben is also a Baltimore Ethical Society Board member.

NOVEMBER 24

“Stone Salad Fall Festival”

Karen Elliott and Hugh Taft-Morales host our celebration of harvest and thanksgiving with stories, music, and poems! This Sunday we express gratitude for our harvest and the rich bounty that fills our life. Come ready to share what you are thankful for in your life! Those attending are encouraged to bring something ready to add to our tradition-based rendition of Stone Salad (lettuce, tomato, carrots, cucumbers, peppers, etc.), as well as non-perishable food items to add to the collection for *TurnAround*, a local center that helps women, children, and families who are victims of abuse.

Moral Philosophy!

Sundays 11/10 and 11/24, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Free and open to the public

Join Hugh Taft-Morales for the last two of four explorations of 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.

NOVEMBER 10

Doing What Feels Right – The pleasure principle

For our third class will explore an intuitive appealing and popular approach to the ethics – the belief that what matters is the *result* of our actions. Categorized as “consequentialism,” this broad array of approaches may differ about **what** result is a good result, but they agree that “character” and “principle” matter little if we do not approve of the *effects* of such character and principles. Dominating this perspective is utilitarianism, a philosophy promoting the greatest good for the greatest number. We will discuss Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mill’s pursuit of pleasure.

NOVEMBER 24

Caring and Doing – Relational Ethics and Pragmatism

Our final discussion will examine some alternative approaches to ethics, including systems that emphasize the importance of relationship over self-interest or sacrifice. What can we learn from classical Hegelian philosophy, more contemporary approaches to the “ethics of care,” and critiques by the likes of Carol Gilligan? Might beginning with “connection” instead of “autonomy” offer us better ethics? We will also explore what ethics is in a pragmatic light, and examine some of the perspective of William James, Jane Adams, and John Dewey. Concluding this way reminds us that the conversation continues.

FAMILY BOARD & CARD GAMES PARTY

Sunday, November 17, 3:00–6:45 p.m., at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic

Join members of the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup for a family board and card games party at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic in Howard County. Feel free to bring a game or play one of the many there. Please bring a snack or drink to share (or a small monetary contribution for the host instead). Come when you can, while the party lasts. Ms. Cedilnic is the lead organizer of the Maryland Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Address and directions will be provided when you RSVP. For questions, please call her at 301-642-1065. RSVP by joining the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/rSkPP>.



TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

We invite you to join us for a candlelight service on November 20th to help to honor and to remember the many lives from here in Maryland and from around the world that we have lost from our great human race due to hate crimes. These people were just living their lives when somebody came along and decided to use their hate towards Trans people and end their precious lives. As Humanists we are allies to the Transgender community and this year for the first time we will have our very own Hugh Taft-Morales taking part in this interfaith service and giving Humanists a voice at this event. It will take place November 20 at 6:30 p.m. at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore, 12 W. Franklin St., Baltimore, Maryland 21201. We hope to see you in the crowd as we light candles to remember all of these lives that we have lost and that we will find more drive to fight for the rights of Transgender people here in Maryland. This event is free but a collection will be taken for donations to the Transgender Response Team. For information e-mail Lucas McCahill at lmccahill45@gmail.com or see her after the Sunday’s talk.

Note to parents: there will be descriptions, during the reading of the names, of how these lives were taken which may not be appropriate for children.

IRONWEED

film

CLUB

Due to the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, the BES Ironweed Film Club will not meet in November and December. It will resume again on 4th Wednesdays starting January 22, 2014. Ask Emil about free membership in the film club (email volcheck@acm.org, or call 410/929-3399). Would you like to help select films? Please ask Emil.

BES EATERY SOCIAL (B.E.S.)

Sunday, Nov. 24, 1:00 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to go out together for lunch. We'll gather in the lobby at about 12:45 p.m. following post-platform snacks to decide what 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 now being held on a different Sunday each month to better provide members with the opportunity to attend this fun event. If you have any questions, please contact Adam Garst at synxr0nic@yahoo.com.

BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, November 14, 5:45–8:00 p.m.

Join us for this enjoyable outing at a great organization – learn more at mfeast.org. Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming (lialderson@gmail.com) and show up at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Ave., Baltimore, 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 participant.



Hydrofracking in Maryland

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place, the water pressure had to have been larger than the minimum *in situ* confining stress within the shale. Any such fracture within the shale will continue to expand in the local direction of minimum resistance. In order to accomplish this feat most easily and efficiently, the fracture is able to migrate upward, and does.

It is worth noting that if the upward migration of a zone of fractures or enhanced porosity intersects the plane of an active fault zone and then follows this plane of weakness preferentially, it may essentially “lubricate” the opposing faces along the fault and thereby trigger the next earthquake.

For Congress to exclude gas companies from EPA regulations is inexcusable. It simply means that Maryland must step up and shoulder the responsibility to establish and enforce reg-

ulations that safeguard the health of citizens, our environment, and our natural resources. We can no longer ignore contamination through subsurface processes, especially when such contamination is unavoidable. Upward density flow of methane will follow the upward migration of fractures and porosity enhancement into and through aquifers on its way to the overlying atmosphere.

As an international authority, I believe that producers of gas through hydrofracking should continue to be held financially accountable for all subsequent consequences of their hydrofracking on the health of residents, the well-being of their lives, and on the sanctity of our environment and natural resources, including freshwater aquifers, lakes, wetlands, and streams. Nor should the governor turn his back to science.

Dr. Helm has retired from a number of scientific research centers and institutions of higher learning. They are: The U.S. Geological Survey (15 years as Research Hydrologist in the USGS Water Resources Division), the University of California System (6 years as Group Leader of the Geohydrology and Environmental Studies Group, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory), the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (6 years as Head of the Geohydraulics Section of the Geomechanics Division of CSIRO-Australia's premier scientific research institution), University of Nevada, Reno (7 years as Professor of Geosciences and concurrently, Director of the Las Vegas Office of the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology—which serves as the state geological survey), and Morgan State University (13 years as Professor of Civil Engineering). Currently, he is a member of The U.S. Department of Energy's Samuel P. Massie Chairs of Excellence Program (Emeritus Professor in Environmental Disciplines). He is Fellow of the Geological Society of America and Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, Australia (College of Civil Engineers). He is the only American Honoree among the Shanghai Geological Survey's "Subsidence Advisors in Perpetuity" (Chinese Geological Survey). For more information, please refer to Who's Who in America.

Notes from Shutdown City

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that, “Joe Biden was really bummed that the White House tours were canceled; now he’ll *never* get into the West Wing.” One of my favorite skits had Paul Ryan leading a rendition of the Beach Boys classic “Fun, Fun, Fun” as Tea Party tune with the chorus “De-fund, Fund, Fund till Congress takes Obamacare away.”

Over the past week I have like many of you also found relief from the Daily Show, such as when Jon Stewart suggested that, “If Obama can negotiate with Iran, maybe he’s not the problem.” Then what is the problem? Is there a sincere battle going on over political philosophy? Have our public servants have lost their minds? Or is this a symptom of a disease running through our government?

I worried that it may be the latter on October 8th when I joined a campaign finance reform protest in front to the Supreme Court. Member Bernie Brown and I ran into one of BES’s newer members, Angad Singh who was with others from *Get Money Out - Maryland*. Like many in the crowd, they brought signs and props, including a ballot box overflowing with fake dollar bills and a sign reading, “Big Money Out, Voters In.”

As I listened to speeches in front of the court, my back turned to the Capitol, the irony was clear. Here we all were at the heart of a government that had just stopped funding itself, while inside the Court chambers a case was being heard that just might open the tap for private funding of campaigns by private business interests. Dollars for our democracy, no! Cash for campaigns, sure!

A key problem is that money makes

people lose their perspective. Greed is a powerful drug that can blind people to stewardship, duty, and civic pride. No longer is the trust of the public the most treasured asset of our democracy. It seems to be reduced to the bottom line. Then why is the federal government seemingly unable to stay up and running. If moneyed interests are in control, shouldn’t they demand that the trains keep running on time? Supposedly millions of dollars are being lost left and right due to the shutdown.

This is where the extreme Tea Party folks come in, I am afraid. Well, if you believe that government is the problem, and you *are* the government, then it is relatively easy to prove yourself correct: just BE the problem. Those who want to prove that the federal government is incompetent just have to get into the federal government and BE incompetent. Is that what has happened???

I hope we find our way out of this mess. Perhaps we need to focus on promoting more public participation in the process. Money pouring into politics doesn’t seem to have helped matters much, so maybe closer attention is needed. If a small group of extremists can bring our government to our knees, maybe we need more people invested in the process. Maybe local groups such as *Get Money Out - Maryland* can help us. There is such a thing as “people power,” if we are bold enough to wield it. As one sign read on the steps of the Supreme Court, “If the 99% vote, the 1% won’t matter.” And, if the 99% vote, maybe our government will stay open for the people’s business!

HAVE AN IDEA FOR A SUNDAY SPEAKER?

Tell the Program Committee! Ronit, Angad, Mary B., Hugh, or Emil. The Program Committee organizes our Sunday programs. Activities include inviting speakers, scheduling presiders, and finding volunteers to clean up after snacks. Want to help? Please ask any member of the committee about joining!

Our Sunday School

(continued from page 2)

assisted Linda Joy in the classroom or helped with childcare: Andy Brokaw, Susan, Kate LaClair, Janey Solwold, and Mav Vaughan. Our staff do the heavy lifting. I applaud Linda Joy for dealing with the challenges in classroom management and lesson planning that result from the variations in student attendance. Charlotte Sullivan recently started to provide childcare for us, and we appreciate her contribution. If you have not met Linda Joy or Charlotte, I’d encourage you to greet them and introduce yourself.

You can contribute to the success of our programs for children through volunteering or by increasing your annual pledge to help us meet our increased expenses. If you have experience teaching or working with young children, you could help as a classroom assistant for Linda Joy. If you have ideas for educational projects for the older students, you might help teach them in the library. Please speak to any member of the Ethical Education Committee to offer ideas or assistance.



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, November 17, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

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

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, November 24, 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, November 10, 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

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

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