

# BESpeak

JANUARY 2015

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## Our Ethical Rejection of Torture

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

As sad as it was to read experts of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA retention and interrogation practices, I am glad we had the integrity to release it. Terrorism is morally reprehensible. But so is torture and the indiscriminate use of violence. I admit that I am not an absolute pacifist; there are times I believe I would use violence to protect myself or my family. I hope I would do so only as a last resort and with a heavy heart.

For me, when human beings are killed or suffer from violence, it violates the inherent worth I hold so dearly. That's the point. As Ethical Culture Leader Joe Chuman described it, "The self-conscious aim of torture is to turn its victim into someone who is isolated, overwhelmed, terrorized, and humiliated." There is little that dehumanizes individuals more than torture, terror, and pain. It reduces us to our most base animalistic existence. The romanticized heroes of the movies that stand up to torture and the terror of war are rare in real life. Even the "toughest" of soldiers or spies are often reduced to sobbing, begging, and soiling themselves. Some of those waterboarded on my behalf were similarly dehumanized.

I want our nation to be better than this. I agree with Sen. McCain who said, "Our enemies act without conscience. We must not." That is why I applaud the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA retention and interrogation practices. I believe that it will help end our nation's use of such techniques. Some politicians, however, seizing this opportunity to seem "realistic" and tough, attacked the report as partisan. They dismissed it, missing the central ethical point behind release of the report.

The argument that I found most absurd was that since actionable intelligence came from the CIA's use of torture, it saved lives and thus was worth it. Sen. Saxby Chambliss said that, "enhanced interrogation techniques...provided intelligence information which helped the United States government and its allies to neutralize numerous terrorist threats." I would expect that the CIA, with its immense power over those in chains, would get some information that was useful. Just because bad



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### SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

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Director of Outreach,  
Big Brothers Big Sisters

#### JANUARY 11

##### "Ethical Policing"

Hugh Taft-Morales  
Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

#### JANUARY 18

##### "Empowering Students to be the Leaders of their Education"

O'Shai Robinson  
Facilitator, Baltimore Algebra Project

#### JANUARY 25

##### "Creating a More Welcoming and Caring Community at BES"

Elizabeth Collier  
AEU Mossler Fellow

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# BESpeak

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

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by @bmorethical.org. For general  
questions: ask@bmorethical.org.

**On the web at bmorethical.org**

# A Thoughtful Start

by Emil Volcheck, BES President



This year I'd like to start leading a more thoughtful life. In his book *The Thinking Life*, author P.M. Forni encourages us to cherish the act of thoughtful contemplation. He shares a metaphor from the poet George Witte, who wrote "There's something to be said for sitting still and letting things come clear, the way morning fog burns off the lake." The demands of employment and the distractions of smartphones, media, and Internet make it increasingly difficult for people to set aside any time to simply enjoy thinking. Forni encourages us all to "find the resolve to welcome deep thinking into our very active lives." He adds "Good thinking is the result of personal commitment and discipline."

Forni suggests many topics to think about, such as, your job, friends and relationships, living ethically, and your health and wellness. He encourages introspection and reflection on past experiences. Review difficult decisions that you have made recently, but "do not dwell on the past unless you can learn from it." He draws on Greek and Roman philosophers and mythology to provide Western historical context. He quotes the Stoic philosopher Epictetus on the importance of attention and recalls the message engraved on the Temple of Apollo: "Know Thyself." The practice of thinking helps to develop awareness, focus, and attention, which are general cognitive skills that support active listening, deeper relationships, and ultimately greater success in life.

Forni believes that making time to think deeply is the first challenge to developing a more thoughtful and attentive life. He suggests several approaches and tools. Schedule 15 minutes a day to think, what he calls the "daily rendezvous with your own brain." Keep a diary. Meditate. Think while commuting or waiting in line. Go for a walk during your lunch break. As you develop a practice of regular, intentional thinking, "you will learn to enjoy thinking the way a wood-carver enjoys carving, a swimmer enjoys swimming, or a singer enjoys singing."

Forni sums up his message: "Think if you wish to thrive... Ultimately, the good life is the thinking life." May we all find time in 2015 to lead more thoughtful and attentive lives.

## BES AMBASSADORS

The Public Relations Committee is looking for volunteers to help build relationships with other secular groups. If you'd like to attend meetings of the Towson Secular Student Alliance, Baltimore Atheists Meetup, or other groups, please contact PRC co-chairs Ken Brenneman and Paul Furth.



## MEMBERS – WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Please pledge to support our society in the 2015-2016 cycle. Look for a letter with a pledge card in your mailbox and plan for a pledge celebration dinner in February!

# News from the AEU

by Hank Gassner, AEU Board Member

The last week of October and the first half of November were marked by workshops and conferences, where participants from various societies met together to learn and to get perspectives from the points of view of other societies in the Ethical Movement.

On October 23-25, 28 participants from 11 societies met for a **Membership Growth and Development Workshop**. This program marks the renewal of an earlier program of annual workshops run by the AEU Membership Committee designed to strengthen lay leadership skills in society management. The first program of the new series concentrated on strengthening pledge campaigns, but also included a workshop on greeting visitors to your society. The program evaluation forms from people who attended the workshop were unanimously enthusiastic.

On November 7-9, about 40 people from 8 societies attended the **Ethical Education Conference**. (The participant numbers included children who attended a special ethical education program while their parents were attending workshops.). The Conference started with a presentation by Dale McGowan, author of "Parenting Beyond Belief" and "Raising Freethinkers", on why he had chosen to become AEU

Ethical Education Director and his vision for the future for growing ethical education programs. The program included workshops on starting an ethical education program from scratch, effective use of websites and social media in marketing ethical education programs, ethical action programs for children, adult ethical education programs, and a long-range proposal for developing an ethical education diploma program for teenagers.

On November 14-16, About 35 people from at least 6 societies attended the **Youth of Ethical Societies (YES) Conference**. The theme of this year's conference was *Ethics in Science and Medicine*. The conference broke into sharing circles to discuss various topics related to the theme. Time was also available for some sightseeing in New York and sampling ethnic cuisines. I am told that the teens and youth advisors left feeling that it was a great experience that energized them for further action back home and with enthusiasm for returning next year.

Organizing these conferences has made this an exciting and busy period for the AEU. Members of various societies have gotten together, shared ideas, made friends, and learned how much we can learn from each other as our societies work to achieve common goals.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Poetry Group

Sunday, January 4, 9:30 a.m.

### Colloquy: Humanist Spiritual Discussion Group

Wednesday, January 7, 7:00 p.m.

### Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, January 8, 5:45 p.m.

### Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, January 11, 9:30 a.m.

### Board Meeting

Sunday, January 11, 12:30 p.m.

### Fun with Philosophy: Skeptical Idealism

Sunday, January 11, 7:00 p.m.

### Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, January 18, 9:15 a.m.

### Family Board and Card Games Party

Sunday, January 18, 3:00 p.m.

### MLK Day Parade

Monday, January 19, 10:30 a.m.

### Dinner with Liz Collier

Saturday, January 24, 7:00 p.m.

### Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, January 25, 12:30 p.m.

### Sunday Assembly Baltimore

Sunday, January 25, 2:00 p.m.

### Family Game Night and Potluck Dinner

Saturday, January 31, 6:30 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	January 4
G to L	January 11
M to R	January 18
S to Z	January 25

**JANUARY 4**

**“Justice Begins with ‘Just Us’”**

**Leon J. Henry**

*Director of Outreach, Big Brothers Big Sisters*

The close bond between a mentor and mentee can be difficult to express in words. It is comprised of countless moments, large and small, all with the potential to be life changing (for the adult and the child). Each year, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Chesapeake works to provide at least 1,000 Maryland children with their own “moments” by matching them with a caring adult mentor. Mentoring not only helps youth reach their full potential, it also engages volunteers in the effort to create stronger, healthier, and more vibrant communities.

**Leon Henry** is a life-long resident of Baltimore City, and serves as the Director of Outreach for Big Brothers Big Sisters of The Greater Chesapeake, where he is responsible for finding mentors for the region’s most vulnerable youth.

He is the former Executive Director of the Maryland Regional Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (MRP-NFF) and former Director of the Maryland Children’s Action Network (MD CAN). Mr. Henry brings over 25 years direct service and management experience in issue affecting urban residents and low-income families. Leon has expertise in such diverse areas as juvenile justice, child advocacy, special education, early childhood education, community organizing and non-profit management. In 1998 he was appointed by Governor Glendening to the Citizen’s Review Board for Children and in 2001 was appointed to the Governor’s Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. He is a member of the Greater Baltimore Committee and serves on the Education and Workforce subcommittee.

Mr. Henry has written numerous articles and appeared on several public radio programs on issues ranging from child safety, urban poverty and family dynamics. He is a father, uncle and has been a mentor for nearly 30 years.

**JANUARY 11**

**“Ethical Policing”**

**Hugh Taft-Morales**

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

In 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr. cried out, “We can never be satisfied as long as

the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.” Today many Americans are speaking out against police actions involved in the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice. Communities of color have declared their mistrust and fear of men and women sworn to protect them. Leader Hugh Taft-Morales explores the questions: “What can Ethical Humanists do to help restore justice and rebuild trust? What can we do to demand ethical policing?”

**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.

**JANUARY 18**

**“Empowering Students to be the Leaders of their Education”**

**O’Shai Robinson**

*Facilitator, Baltimore Algebra Project*

The education system in this country is long overdue for a profound change. As laws, projects, and new innovations are implemented within schools; we often overlook the most important factor, the students. We will explore and discuss how the education system grooms students to be passive participants in their education, while wrestling with ideas of how to improve the learning experience.

**O’Shai Robinson** has worked with the Baltimore Algebra Project since 2006 in several capacities including tutor, President, and Board Member. He is also a graduate of the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and he will be receiving his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland Baltimore County in Business Technology Administration and a minor degree in Music. With his work with the Baltimore Algebra Project he has helped to improve the quality of education through tutoring and organizing of students. The organization has been instrumental in extending the time limit for public transportation for students and stopping construction for city’s Youth Jail. Now the organization is rallying around the Ten Year Plan, which would ultimately close over 20 schools



in the city while renovating others. Within the Clifton Park community, they are organizing people around the idea of “Black Control” over the future of the school.

**JANUARY 25**

## “Creating a More Welcoming and Caring Community at BES”

**Elizabeth Collier**

*American Ethical Union Mossler Fellow*

Following her platform in November 2013 on young adult engagement in Ethical Culture, Liz Collier returns to closely examine two characteristics young adults look for in humanist groups such as BES. How well we express our Ethical Culture identity to visitors, and how welcoming we are to those visitors' differences will largely determine how successful we are at gaining more young adult members. This interactive platform will give each person a chance to practice how they describe Ethical Culture and BES to their friends. It will also examine how everyone at BES can create a more welcoming and caring community towards each other and the rest of the world.

**Elizabeth Collier** was raised in Ethical Culture at the Ethical Society of Northern Westchester. She was a founding member of the Future of Ethical Societies, a group for young adults to stay connected to Ethical Culture. She attended Barnard College, where she studied music and flute performance. Elizabeth is currently a Fellow of the American Ethical Union, researching what will attract young adults and future generations to Ethical Culture. As part of her research this year, she is working directly with BES to experiment with young adult outreach. Elizabeth resides in New Jersey with her husband and baby.

### **DINNER WITH LIZ COLLIER**

**Saturday, January 24, 7:00 p.m., Location TBD**

Join us for dinner with Liz Collier, who will be speaking the next morning at BES. This is a great opportunity to welcome her and learn about her work as an AEU Mossler Fellow. Call Emil Volcheck at 443-791-9910 if you'd like to come.

### **COLLOQUY: HUMANIST SPIRITUAL DISCUSSION GROUP**

**Wednesday, January 7, 7:00 p.m.**

Join us in a free-form discussion group for an exploration of spirituality from the perspective of humanism. Whether you identify as atheist or agnostic or questioning, or accept the concept of spirituality or not, we welcome everyone who is interested in expressing their thoughts and ideas in a safe, nonjudgmental and welcoming gathering. Please join us on this experimental journey.

For additional information, contact Paul Furth at PD-QBlues@aol.com or Mary Beth Sodus at marybethsodus@gmail.com.

### **FAMILY GAME NIGHT AND POTLUCK DINNER**

**Monday, January 31, 6:30 p.m.**

Our next game Family Game Night and Potluck Dinner will be Saturday, January 31, at 6:30 pm at BES. Join us for a fun evening of food, drink, and games!

Sign up on this Google Doc to say what you're bringing: <http://goo.gl/ah96l3>. Speak to our Social Events Committee (Mav Vaughan, Thomas Higdon, Nathan Whitmore) if you have any questions or would like to come.

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## **BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST**

**Thursday, January 8,  
5:45–8:00 p.m.**

What do you get when you combine 17 cups of flour, 1 cup of cocoa powder, 4 pounds of butter, 6 cups each of white and brown sugar, 16 eggs, some baking soda, salt, and vanilla – and a lot of white and regular chocolate chips?

- a. 311 yummy cookies
- b. A lot of happy clients of Moveable Feast
- c. Fun!!



No, it's not a multiple choice test – those ingredients plus those of us in the photo and four others made all three answers come true. Come on out for baking night at Moveable Feast and find out how big mixers and convection ovens help all of the above add up to more than you'd expect! Contact Karen Elliott at [KarenSElliott@aol.com](mailto:KarenSElliott@aol.com) if you're interested in joining us. Learn more about Moveable Feast at [mfeast.org](http://mfeast.org).

## **SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?**

The Baltimore Ethical Society has a Leader and a team of officiants who are trained and licensed to conduct weddings, memorials, and other life passage ceremonies. We are pleased to make these ceremonies available not only to our members, but to all who have a desire or need for them.

For more information about our ceremonies or to make arrangements, please contact our Officiant Team Coordinator, Kathryn Sloboda, at [weddings@bmorethical.org](mailto:weddings@bmorethical.org).

## **SUNDAY ASSEMBLY BALTIMORE**

**Sunday, January 25, 2:00 p.m.**

Come to the next Sunday Assembly Baltimore!

What happens at a Sunday Assembly? A Sunday Assembly service consists of songs (pop songs mainly) sung by the congregation, a reading (usually a poet), an interesting talk (that fits into live better, help often or wonder more), a moment of reflection and an address, which sums up the day and hopefully gives a take home message. Afterwards we have tea and cake (well, in Britain anyway!) to encourage people to stay and mingle with one another. Visit us on Facebook at [fb.com/sundayassemblybaltimore](https://fb.com/sundayassemblybaltimore).

The Sunday Assembly is a global movement for wonder and good. It is an international not-for-profit that helps people start and run their own godless congregations. Our motto: Live Better, Help Often and Wonder More. Our mission: to help everyone find and fulfill their full potential. Read more at [sundayassembly.com](http://sundayassembly.com).

**S  
UN  
DAY  
ASSEMBLY**

## **FAMILY BOARD AND CARD GAMES PARTY WITH PARENTING BEYOND BELIEF**

**Sunday, January 18, 3:00-6:45 p.m., at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic**

Join members of the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup for a 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 provided when you RSVP.

For questions, please call Marjeta at 301-642-1065. Join the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/28VGXv>.

## REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY PARADE

Monday, January 19, 10:30 a.m.

Join BES and march in Baltimore's MLK Parade! We will meet at 10:30 a.m. at BES to make signs showing what Dr. King's legacy means to us. Then, at 11:30 we will head around the corner to the start (MLK Jr. Blvd & Eutaw), and march with other Baltimore organizations in Dr. King's memory. The parade will end at MLK Jr. Blvd & Eutaw St. around 2:00 p.m.. We will park a few vehicles near the end site to shuttle our marchers back to BES afterward. Let us know if you can offer your car for the shuttle. Go to <http://goo.gl/forms/xH2isB7Klg> (or email [bmorethical.action@gmail.com](mailto:bmorethical.action@gmail.com)) to sign up to march or help out. Wear warm clothes and walking shoes.

If you have physical concerns about being able to participate, email the address above and we will do our best to make sure you can take part. All are welcome!

## Our Ethical Rejection of Torture

(continued from page 1)

techniques get some information, it doesn't mean there are no better techniques.

Evidence indicates, however, that the CIA probably would have gotten more and better information without resorting to torture. Sen. McCain, a prisoner of war in Vietnam who suffered from torture, explained that "the abuse of prisoners will produce more bad than good intelligence." McCain continued, this "makes clear that acting without conscience isn't necessary — it isn't even helpful — in winning this strange and long war we're fighting. We should be grateful to have that truth affirmed."

This was the conclusion of the American Ethical Union when we passed a 2008 resolution opposing the use of torture. In it we called for the "absolute and total ban on the use of torture, whether by the military, law enforcement, intelligence services or

private actors." As an Ethical Humanist, the relationship between people gets as close to a sacrament as we get.

I will end this column with the following selection from the 2008 resolution:

*From the ethical standpoint, torture is the most extreme violation of human dignity because it totally annihilates the freedom and agency of its victims while totalizing the power of the perpetrators of torture. In addition, the relationship of the torturer to his or her victim adds a dimension to torture that is distinctively violative and horrific. For Ethical Culture, human relations are the matrix from which ethical experience is derived, through which it is exercised, and reinforced. Consequently, the perversion of human relations in the act of torture is of pressing moment to Ethical Culture and the values for which it stands.*

## FUN WITH PHILOSOPHY: SKEPTICAL IDEALISM

Sunday, January 11,  
7:00–9:00 p.m., at the  
Baltimore Free School at  
Red Emma's, 30 W. North  
Avenue, Baltimore

What is philosophical idealism?

From Plato to Bishop Berkeley to Felix Adler to Arthur Eddington, versions of idealism have advocated for the existence of substantial non-material reality.

Idealists have proposed such things as eternal and perfect "Forms," "ethical manifolds," and "mind-stuff." From a skeptical perspective, however, is there any room for non-material reality? BES Leader Hugh Taft-Morales tries to bring this esoteric topic down to earth.

Come have some fun with philosophy and check your ego at the door!

## BES film CLUB

The Film Club will resume in February, when we will screen "Pay 2 Play," a documentary on campaign finance reform.



**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**  
306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

**NEWSLETTER**  
Please do not delay!  
**TIME VALUE**

**ETHICAL ACTION MEETING**  
**Sunday, January 18, 9:15–10:15 a.m.**  
Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

**NEWCOMERS MEETING**  
**Sunday, January 25, 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 Janey Solwold for more information.

**MINDFULNESS**  
*meditation*  
**Sunday, January 11, 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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