

# BESpeak

FEBRUARY 2015

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## Imagination and My Ethical Culture

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

Sometimes it's hard to see the water you're swimming in. Having worked as an Ethical Culture Leader for almost five years, I swim in humanist seas enriched by many springs. For me the most consistent and powerful spring is the legacy of Felix Adler. For this reason, over the course of the spring I will speak on Adler more often - in my platforms and my columns. That begins here.



Adler left us with a fundamental ethical challenge, one that inspires me every day. He saw a broken world full of suffering and despair where individuals were treated as if they had no worth. He saw growing numbers of people abandoning theistic faiths and belief in the supernatural. These two factors posed a fundamental question: Where could the growing ranks of godless men and women gather to find inspiration honor the worth of all and to build a better world? From 1876 on he could answer, the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Our life is enriched by Adler's vision and hard work.

There are other good sources for humanist inspiration, of course: the birth of democracy in Greece; the beauty and human dignity in renaissance art; the courage of enlightenment scientists risking persecution to speak the truth; defenders of democracy demanding rights for all; and the decency of those who choose compassionate deed over dogmatic creed. From Doctors without Borders facing West African ebola and Haitian cholera, to protestors out on the streets today honoring the lives and dignity of BOTH young black men and officers in blue, hope floods into my life without having to imagine the existence of a better world in heaven above.

I can, however, imagine a better world in my mind, here and now. Imagination is a wonderful tool - a gift biology gave to the human race. I can imagine Felix Adler's yearning for "something more" than the broken world around him - a yearning so strong that it led him to postulate something he called an "ethical manifold," a cumbersome term mired in an antiquated metaphysical idealism. But I interpret Adler's "ethical manifold" more as a metaphor representing a system of interrelations between people where they are at their ethical best. Imagine, Adler challenged us,

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

*(details on pages 4-5)*

#### FEBRUARY 1

### "For Holocaust Remembrance Day: Lessons from Lithuania"

Ellen Cassedy  
*Author*

#### FEBRUARY 8

### "A Segregated Baltimore: Reflections of 1950-1960"

James M. Griffin  
*Physical Therapist & Civil Rights Activist*

#### FEBRUARY 15

### "The Global Culture of Violence: What Is The Path to Peace and Justice?" *(video)*

Christopher Hedges  
*Journalist & Minister*

#### FEBRUARY 22

### "The Tao of Ethical Culture"

Hugh Taft-Morales  
*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

### ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday  
10:30 a.m. - Noon

*Children of all ages are welcomed.*

### TODDLER CARE

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

# BESpeak

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## Issue 446

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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**

# Ethical Action: The Road Ahead

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



Ethical action begins with each of us. Our individual ethical commitments express our values, our character, and our desire to make the world a better place according to our interests and passion. When we come together as a society, we speak with a louder voice than we can as scattered individuals. We encourage each other to go beyond our individual commitments to act ethically together. Joining an ethical society stimulates our own personal engagement because we are implicitly inviting other members to encourage us to act.

Our society has the opportunity to speak out together on significant issues of public policy. The Maryland Legislature will consider a “Death With Dignity” law that allows physicians to end the suffering of terminally ill patients. Hydraulic fracturing poses hazards to the environment. The Just Kids Partnership is introducing two bills: one to end the practice of automatically charging youth as adults, and a second to ensure that when youth are charged as adults that they will be held safely and securely in juvenile detention centers – not adult jails. We can advocate for better nutrition for children in schools and day care centers by joining the Sugar Free Kids coalition. In Baltimore City, we can oppose the corporatization of public water by working with AFSCME and Corporate Accountability International.

As a society, we also engage in direct action to help those in need. We worked at the Real Food Farm to help them end “food deserts” in our city. We’ve baked sweets at Moveable Feast to help those wasting away from serious illness. We’ve contributed to TurnAround with our canned food drive and Mitten Tree.

If we want to support any of these actions as a society, we need energy and leadership from the Ethical Action Committee. We have displayed more focused engagement in the last few years than in the decade before. BES has participated in campaigns and submitted testimony on Marriage Equality, gender identity protection (Trans Equality), gun safety, and abolishing the death penalty. We played a small part in the success of these issues. We can do more. We need to persist in pursuing the issues important to us, even ones that appear intractable, like Climate Change, or creating opportunity for all youth in our city.

Kate LaClair will be concluding her service as chair of the Ethical Action Committee (EAC) at the end of May. We’re looking to fill the position as quickly as possible. She is willing to stay on the committee for another year to help with the transition to new leadership. To help the EAC move forward, I ask that every member commit to participating in an ethical action of the society. I challenge us to meet the following goal: **In the year 2015, at least half of all members will participate in an ethical action of the society.**

We reached this level of participation in 2012 on the campaign for marriage equality. At that time, I counted at least 40 members who participated in some way. The

*(continued on page 7)*

# EAC Seeking a New Chair

by Kate LaClair, Ethical Action Committee Chair

Many of our members know that what brought me to Baltimore five years ago was the beginning of a PhD. After many years of work, I am pleased to be in the process of bringing that endeavor to a close! I am also looking toward the next step in my life, which will be bittersweet since it is taking me away from Baltimore and this community that means so much to me. Therefore, I've decided to step down as Ethical Action Committee (EAC) Chair at the end of May.

The EAC is one of BES' bridges to the rest of the Baltimore Community, and the way in which we collectively express our commitment to honoring worth, growing relationship, and building justice outside of our walls. When we do our fall food and warm clothing drive for the domestic violence center TurnAround, we bring some compassion and care to those who are suffering the absence of these

from someone close to them. When we volunteer at an urban farm, we grow food for our neighbors and push back the shadows of food insecurity and starvation in our city. When we march together in the Martin Luther King parade, we honor the legacy of others who share our ideals and strengthen our relationships through common commitment.

When I agreed to chair the EAC three years ago I had no special skills or training. I didn't have a particular plan about what areas we should pursue or what projects we should begin. What I did have was a strong desire to add to the full expression of BES' ideals in the world, and to facilitate the energy and creativity of others who share that passion.

If you want to learn more about the position, or know someone you think would be a good fit, get in touch with me (katherine.laclair@gmail.com or 201-978-3191).

## CELEBRATE DARWIN DAY WITH THE BALTIMORE COALITION OF REASON

Thursday, February 12, 7:30 p.m. (potluck dinner at 6:30 p.m.)

Join us for a lecture by Prof. Jason Rosenhouse titled "Among the Creationists." Rosenhouse will speak about some of his experiences socializing with creationists, talk about some of the different schools of thought within creationism, and also discuss why they feel so threatened by evolution.

This event is free and open to the public. Sign up to bring a dish for the potluck here: <http://ur1.ca/jgz88>. If you can't bring a dish, you can sign up to contribute towards pizza on that form. Free childcare will be provided (donations accepted). Please RSVP to [bmorecor@gmail.com](mailto:bmorecor@gmail.com) or call 410-929-3399 by Monday, Feb. 9, if you will be bringing children.

Visit the Baltimore Coalition of Reason at <http://BaltimoreCoR.org>.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Poetry Group

Sunday, February 1, 9:30 a.m.

### Colloquy: Humanist Spiritual Discussion Group

Wednesday, February 4, 7:00 p.m.

### Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, February 8, 9:30 a.m.

### Board Meeting

Sunday, February 8, 12:45 p.m.

### Exploring Bioethics

Sunday, February 8, 4:00 p.m.

### Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, February 12, 5:45 p.m.

### Darwin Day Lecture and Potluck

Thursday, February 12, 7:00 p.m.

### Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, February 15, 9:15 a.m.

### Family Board and Card Games Party

Sunday, February 15, 3:00 p.m.

### Tour of Frederick Douglass Mansion

Saturday, February 21, 1:30 p.m.

### Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, February 22, 12:30 p.m.

### Sunday Assembly Baltimore

Sunday, February 22, 2:00 p.m.

### BES Film Club

Wednesday, February 25, 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	February 1
G to L	February 8
M to R	February 15
S to Z	February 22

FEBRUARY 1

“For Holocaust Remembrance Day:  
Lessons from Lithuania”

Ellen Cassedy  
*Author*

Ellen Cassedy set off into the Jewish heartland of Lithuania to connect with her Jewish forebears. But what had begun as a personal quest expanded into a larger exploration. Probing the terrain of memory and moral dilemmas, Cassedy offers a close-up view of how an Eastern European nation is encountering the complex history of the Holocaust, World War II, and the Soviet era that followed. She conveys a cautious message of hope, with implications far beyond Lithuania.

**Ellen Cassedy**, the author of *We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust*, is a former speechwriter in the Clinton Administration and columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News. Her articles, essays, and Yiddish translations have appeared in numerous publications. Her roots in Ethical Culture go back three generations. She lives in Takoma Park. Visit her website at [www.ellencassedy.com](http://www.ellencassedy.com).

FEBRUARY 8

“A Segregated Baltimore:  
Reflections of 1950–1960”

James M. Griffin  
*Physical Therapist and Civil Rights Activist*

When the Supreme Court struck down school segregation in 1954, James Griffin was wrapping up his military service prior to enrolling at Johnson C. Smith University (Charlotte, N.C.) and before continuing on to Boston’s Sargeant College for his degree in physical therapy, thereby becoming the first African-American licensed to practice in the state of Maryland. More importantly, however, he was becoming a major activist in the civil rights struggle here in Baltimore, particularly in the area of public accommodations, public education and in community organization. His efforts as an appointee to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (1968-1974) and as chairman of Baltimore CORE (Congress of Racial Equality, 1963-69) led to major changes in the city. Other appointments included Board member of Baltimore City Model City Agency and a gubernatorial appointment as Equal Opportunity Specialist for the State of Maryland. He led demonstrations against injustice and racial segregation. He

will share his recollections of this momentous period in the history of Baltimore.

**James Griffin** is a licensed physical therapist. He operated four offices (Griffin Associates, P.A.) in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area, and was a chartered and active member of CHARM, which provided employment and training to young African Americans looking to become therapists. An outstanding high school and college track star, he enjoys making presentations to groups on healthy eating habits and the importance of exercising. Got a tennis racket? He will meet you on the court. Visit his home: he’ll serve you his specialty – freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juice. He is a member of Bethel AME Church, a life member of the NAACP, is president of the Fairmount Neighborhood Association and serves on the Board of Directors of Sojourner Douglass College. He and his wife Cardrienne P. Griffin have been married fifty-six years. They are the proud parents of four adult children, eight grandchildren and a 1-month old great-grandchild.

FEBRUARY 15

“The Global Culture of  
Violence: What Is The Path to  
Peace and Justice?” *(video)*

Christopher Hedges  
*Journalist and Minister*

Christopher Hedges addressed the Brooklyn Ethical Society in September 2014 on the “psychosis of permanent war” and how we can change our culture to cultivate peace and justice. Discussion will follow this video presentation.

**Christopher Hedges** is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist specializing in international warfare, religion and politics. Hedges is also known as the best-selling author of several books including *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (2002) – a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction – *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (2009), *Death of the Liberal Class* (2010) and his most recent *New York Times* best seller, written with the cartoonist Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (2012). Hedges is currently a columnist for the progressive news and commentary website Truthdig, a senior fellow at The Nation Institute in New York City, and a contributing author for OpEdNews. He spent nearly two de-

cedes as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has reported from more than fifty countries, and has worked for the Christian Science Monitor, NPR, the Dallas Morning News, and the New York Times, where he was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years (1990–2005). In 2002, Hedges was part of a group of eight reporters at the New York Times awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the paper's coverage of global terrorism. He also received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2002. He has taught at Columbia University, New York University, Princeton University and the University of Toronto. He currently teaches prisoners at a maximum-security prison in New Jersey. He writes a weekly column on Mondays for Truthdig and authored what the New York Times described as "a call to arms" for the first issue of the Occupied Wall Street Journal, a newspaper associated with the Occupy Wall Street protests in Zuccotti Park, New York City. He is a political activist and describes himself as a socialist.

## FEbruary 22

### "The Tao of Ethical Culture"

Hugh Taft-Morales

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

Both Ethical Culture and the broader tradition of Humanism in general use reason to liberate us from superstition so we can build a better world. Sometimes, however, we can get sucked into overly intellectualized debates about how many atoms fit on the head of a pin. This is why, the Taoist sage Laozi reminds us to think less and simply "be." What would the founder of Ethical Culture, Felix Adler, think of such wisdom? In trying to answer this question, Hugh Taft-Morales relies on Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* in an attempt to keep things simple.

**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.

## TOUR OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS MANSION

Saturday, February 21, 1:30 p.m.

The Frederick Douglass Humanist Society (FDHS) is organizing a tour of Frederick Douglass' residential mansion "Cedar Hill" in Washington D.C. in honor of the internationally renowned slavery abolitionist and human rights leader. Contact Khandra Sears (tanique@gmail.com) or Aaron Bishop (abishop2@verizon.net) to RSVP.

## EXPLORING BIOETHICS

Sunday, February 8, 4:00–5:30 p.m.

*(Location TBD – Baltimore Free School or BES)*

Hugh Taft-Morales offers a wide ranging, discussion evening touching on moral dilemmas confronting doctors, scientists, policy makers, and citizens. Some of the areas to explore include human and animal subjects in medical research, physician participation in capital punishment, caring for patients in persistent vegetative states, organ donation and harvesting, and medical and military use of nuclear technology. He hopes this discussion will generate topics of interest to be addressed in three classes later this spring.

## FAMILY BOARD AND CARD GAMES PARTY

Sunday, February 15, 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 her at 301-642-1065. Join the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/2cx1FH>.

**BES**  
**film**  
**CLUB**

**Wednesday, February 25,  
7:30 p.m.**

*(potluck dinner at 6:30 p.m.)*

Take Back Our Democracy with GMOM! The documentary **PAY 2 PLAY** follows filmmaker John Ennis' quest to find a way out from under the "Pay 2 Play" System, where Politicians reward their donors with even larger sums from the public treasury. Along the way, he journeys through high drama on the Ohio campaign trail, uncovers the secret history of the game Monopoly, and explores the underworld of L.A. street art on a humorous odyssey that reveals how much of a difference one person can make. See the trailer at <http://pay2play.tv>.

This event is open to the public. To cover the cost of screening rights, we request a contribution of \$1-\$20 (*sliding scale, pay what you can, dollars or Bnotes*). Sign up to bring a dish for the potluck (or to contribute towards pizza) at: <http://ur1.ca/jgz00>. Free childcare will be provided (donations accepted). Please RSVP by Sunday, Feb. 22, if you will be bringing children. Visit GMOM at <http://getmoneyoutmd.org>.

**BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST**

**Thursday, February 12, 5:45-8:00 p.m.**

Join BES members and others for this enjoyable outing at a great organization – check out their website at [www.mfeast.org](http://www.mfeast.org).

Let Karen Elliott know you are coming ([KarenSElliott@aol.com](mailto:KarenSElliott@aol.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 Karen know if you'd like to carpool, and she'll try to match you up with another BES participant.

**SUNDAY ASSEMBLY BALTIMORE**

**Sunday, February 22, 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](http://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**

**COLLOQUY: HUMANIST SPIRITUAL  
DISCUSSION GROUP**

**Wednesday, February 4, 7:00 p.m.**

Join us for a lively exploration of spirituality through the lens of humanism. Whether you are a skeptic or accept the concept of spirituality, there is ample room for discussion. Everyone is welcome to participate who is interested in expressing their thoughts and ideas in a safe, nonjudgmental and welcoming gathering. Please note that this will be our final event. We thank all of those who have participated.

For additional information, contact Paul Furth at [PDQBlues@aol.com](mailto:PDQBlues@aol.com) or Mary Beth Sodus at [marybethsodus@gmail.com](mailto:marybethsodus@gmail.com).

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING GROUP 2.0

Leader Hugh Taft-Morales is receiving applications for a second Relationship Building Discussion Group beginning in March. The purpose remains the same: to help members learn about communication styles and personality differences so as to improve their own relationships and the web of relationships at BES. Contact leader@bmorethical.org if you are interested – the group will take place if we get five or more registrations.

## Imagination and My Ethical Culture

(continued from page 1)

an “infinite system of interdependence in which men [and women] as ethical units have their place.” (EPL 125) Imagine a world where we all help each other bring out our ethical best.

There are times when Adler sounds as if this manifold is “out there,” an external objective reality like Plato’s forms or the gods of theists. But in *my* Ethical Culture, any such inspirational concept is primarily a human construction. More importantly, it’s a human choice.

At times, Adler understood this existential truth even though he couldn’t shake the use of some religious vocabulary, such as term “divine.” As quoted by his son-in-law and biographer Horace Friess, “I affirm that there verily is a divine life, a best beyond the best I can think or imagine, in which all that is best in me and best in those who are dear to me, is contained and continues.” (EPL as quoted in Friess, p. 231)

My Ethical Culture is rooted in Adler’s affirmation. As a product of free will, such an affirmation needs no “discovery” of some pre-existing objective truth. It is our joy and challenge to create. In *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* Adler explains, “I do not find worth in others, I attribute it to them – I create the ethical manifold. I need an idea of

the whole in order to act...” (p. 121)

The wholeness and unity I discover only in my imagination is a powerful part of my commitment to Ethical Culture. When I find others who choose to imagine this too, then the hard work begins. Then we have to figure out how to act in concrete ways to make this fractured world more whole? The devil – which I spell with no “d” – is surely in the details. But I handle the details better when inspired by my humanist faith.

Some people don’t like the term “faith,” perhaps because to them it implies irrationality or perhaps it is simply too tarred with the brush of unpleasant religious upbringings. Fair enough. But as a secular child of the sixties who saw before me a broken world, I – like Adler – yearned for something that would inspire me to live better. I’m glad I found an Ethical Culture that has evolved to include the existential side of Adler while letting go of idealist metaphysics. If that’s too much philosophical jargon to end on, then I will conclude with John Lennon’s over-quoted yet appropriate ode to imagination: “You may say I’m a dreamer. But I’m not the only one. I hope some day you’ll join us. And the world will live as one.”

## EA: The Road Ahead

(continued from page 2)

EAC will track our progress toward this goal throughout the year. Here are some ways you can help based on the amount of time you have available: *One hour:* Make ten phone calls to members to get support for adopting a position on public policy or to approve a public action.

*One morning or evening (3 hours):* join us for one event, like a service project at Real Food Farm or Baking Night at Moveable Feast.

*One hour per month:*

- Attend EAC meetings and help the committee decide on positions to recommend to the society, or;
- Track legislative events on one issue that you are interested in and report to the committee by email.

*Three hours per month:*

- Attend one EAC meeting per month (one hour), and spend another two on committee projects, like researching issues and formulating positions; or
- Serve as EAC Secretary: attend one meeting (one hour), prepare and distribute minutes, track actions (one hour), and compose the monthly Ethical Action newsletter in Mailchimp (one hour). (No research duties in this position.)

*Five to ten hours per month:*

- Serve as Chair or Co-Chair of the EAC: lead meetings, coordinate activities, and report to the BES Executive Board.

Please help at whatever level of time commitment you can afford. If you know someone who you would like to see as EAC Chair, please nominate them. I look forward to seeing us reach the level of 50 percent participation before the end of the year!



**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**

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

**NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!

**TIME VALUE**

**ETHICAL ACTION MEETING**

**Sunday, February 15, 9:15–10:15 a.m.**

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

**NEWCOMERS MEETING**

**Sunday, February 22, 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, February 8, 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](http://bmorethical.org) and look for us on Facebook, Twitter, and MeetUp.com @bmorethical

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