

BESpeak

SEPTEMBER 2017

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Timothy Snyder's Lessons About Tyranny

by Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Leader

This summer I read a short book that made me wonder, "How worried should we be? How worried should we be about the potential for the growth of tyranny in the United States, the land of the free and home of the brave?" According to Yale historian Timothy Snyder, we should be more worried than we are.



In his pocket size book entitled *On Tyranny*, Snyder offers us twenty concise lessons drawn from the 20th century. His area of expertise, Eastern and Central European history, led him to study autocratic bullies very successful at killing the democratic spirit and ruling by fiat. For many, the parallels to current political realities in the U.S. are too strong to ignore. Before being accused of hyperbole and hysteria, I want to offer six general lessons I drew from Snyder's list.

The first lesson is that **the path of history is not fixed**. In 25 years of teaching I had to constantly remind students that it was not inevitable that the north won the civil war and the allies won WWII. Despite cultural narratives reinforcing belief that good always triumphing over evil - from Superman through Harry Potter - there are no guarantees. The path history takes is determined by many factors, including luck and the dogged determination of individuals. To help ensure that good will triumphs, we must act to support the good in our world.

The second lesson is that **we shouldn't assume that "our institutions" will survive** assault unless we act to keep them strong. Remember that the Nazis used the press and democracy to destroy the press and democracy. Our institutions will only survive if we contribute to good causes and defend professional organizations that have their own noble and idealistic codes of ethics.

The third lesson is that **humans are malleable** - we are easily controlled especially when pressured by authority figures. Snyder references the infamous 1961 experiments by Stanley Milgram, another Yale professor, in which supposedly average people were capable of horrific acts of cruelty when encouraged by seem-

(continued on page 7)

SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

SEPTEMBER 3

"AEU Assembly Report"

Argentine Craig, Karen Elliott, Kirk Mullen, and Emil Volcheck

SEPTEMBER 10

"Humans, Nature, and the Eclipse of the Sun"

Hugh Taft-Morales
Ethical Leader

SEPTEMBER 17

"Finding A Better Balance: Diversity in the Arts"

Nate VashtiBlue Couser
Artist

SEPTEMBER 24

"Addiction, Relapse, and Recovery"

Thomas Higdon
BES President

ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Every Sunday
beginning September 10
10:30 a.m. - Noon

Individualized programs for preschool children and school aged students.

TODDLER CARE

Separate supervision provided for children up to age two.

BESpeak

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

Issue 471

Editor: Kathryn Merrill

Proofreading & Circulation: Judy Katz

Deadline: 10th of the prior month

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

OFFICERS & EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

President..... Thomas Higdon
Vice President..... Charles Shafer
Secretary..... Kathryn Merrill
Treasurer..... Richard Heffern
Fred Compton Karen Elliott
Paul Furth Catherine Gayhardt
Max Romano Alan Shapiro
Tevis Tsai

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Building Alan Shapiro
Caring Jeanne Sears
Ethical Action..... Charles Shafer
Ethical Education Argentine Craig
Financial Karen Elliott
Membership..... Wayne Laufert
 and Janey Solwold
Program..... Paul Furth
Public Relations..... Thomas Higdon

ACTIVITY CONTACTS

Film Series..... Joe Adams
Meditation Karen Elliott
Poetry..... Kirk Mullen
Social Events Mav Vaughan

ETHICAL CULTURE/ HUMANIST OFFICIANTS

Karen Elliott, Paul Furth,
Kirk Mullen, Hugh Taft-Morales
Coordinator: Kathryn Merrill

Contacts by e-mail: use President,
VicePresident (one word), Treasurer,
Secretary, or Admin followed by
@bmorethical.org. For general
questions: ask@bmorethical.org.

On the web at bmorethical.org

From Goals to Action

by *Thomas Higdon, BES President*

September marks the start of our regular program year. There is food and fellowship at the Labor Day weekend picnic, formal platforms return, and Sunday school resumes. It's an exciting time. This year, there are even more reasons to be enthusiastic. As you may know, this summer the Board set out a set of goals for the upcoming year. While all members will receive an email in the coming weeks with these goals, here are a few highlights. The Society will work to ...

- Balance our budget;
- Grow our membership;
- Offer outstanding programs; and
- Find a new home for the Society.

While these goals are ambitious, I know that we can realize this bold vision for the future if we work together. We will need each member to contribute their time and talent. With that in mind, what will your contribution be? Before you answer, I encourage you to ask yourself a few questions.

First, what does the Society mean to you? What place does the Society hold in your life? For me, the Society is a place to learn, grow, and organize for action. However, at it's core, the Society offers me a sense of community, of belonging.

Second, ask yourself how much time are you willing to contribute to keep the Society in your life? Perhaps it's a few hours a year or month. For others, it may be a few hours a week. Still others, such as our Society's officers, it may require setting aside time each day. This time commitment will be different for everyone.

Finally, ask yourself what do you enjoy doing? Some people love public speaking, others enjoy working with children, while still others take pleasure in cleaning (yes, such folks like me do exist).



BES member Kathryn Merrill receives the Anna Garlin Spencer Award from the AEU for her service to BES. The Anna Garlin Spencer Volunteer Award recognizes a lay member of an AEU-affiliated ethical congregation in good standing for his or her significant volunteer contributions to the success of that ethical congregation and, therefore, the success of the AEU, or volunteer contributions on behalf of the AEU itself.



Looking Forward & Cultivating Ethics with Tots & Pre-Teens

"I (We) believe our children are our future; teach them well and let them lead the way..."

Each Sunday, the children meet with learning facilitators/teachers in their classes; while their parents attend the Platform sessions - both engaged in learning aligned with core values for humanistic living, drawn from a diversity of current sources and wonderful multicultural resources.

For the children, these core values lessons include "Ethics is my belief":

- believing every person is important and unique
- believing every person deserves to be treated fairly and kindly
- learning from everyone
- being part of the earth: cherishing it and all life upon it
- learning from the world by using my senses, mind and feelings
- being a member of the world community, which depends on the cooperation of all people for peace and justice
- learning from the past to build for the future
- being free to question
- being free to choose what I believe
- accepting responsibility for my choices and actions
- identifying my values
- striving to live my values

Presenting the lessons from 10:30

to Noon, are BES teachers/facilitators of learning and wonder:

- Jill Gordon (pre-K, ages 3-5);
- Monica Cooper (pre-teen, ages 6-12);
- Elizabeth Milstead (pre-teen Spanish Culture and Language teacher).

The September Theme is "FRIENDSHIP"

The VALUES are: I am a member of the world community which depends on the cooperation of all people for peace and justice. Every person is important and unique.

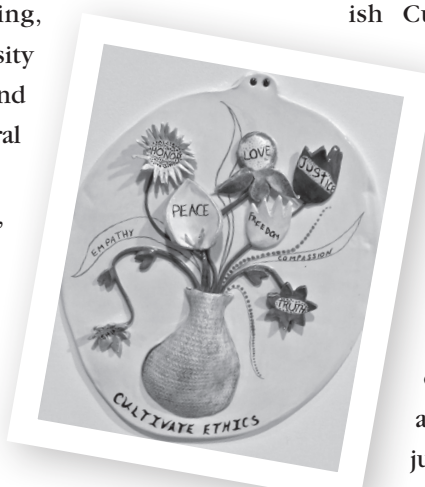
Every person deserves to be treated fairly and kindly.

In supportive and guiding roles are the BES Ethical Education Committee (EEC): Argentine Craig (Chairperson), Patricia Denholm, Brian Dorsey, Kim Knox, Maya Kosok, Matthew Milstead, Max Romano, Monique Stins and Tevis Tsai. Ex-officio: Thomas Higdon (BES Board President); Hugh Taft-Morales (BES Leader)

Sessions begin on Sunday, September 9th.

Free Registration is now open for September 2017 - May 2018.

Please download and complete the Registration form at bmorethical.org/programs-activities/sunday-school/ and return to: ascraig@comcast.net by Saturday, September 2nd.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

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

Labor Day Weekend Picnic

Sunday, September 3, 12:00 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

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

Second Sunday Family Meet-Up

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

Board Meeting

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

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, September 17, 12:30 p.m.

Program Committee Meeting

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

Newcomers Meeting

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

CHECK OUT OUR MEETUP GROUP

It is the easiest way to RSVP to an event, get directions, or arrange car pools. Together we can create meaningful events, make friends and learn, teach, and share ethical culture.

www.meetup.com/bmorethical

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	September 3
G to L	September 10
M to R	September 17
S to Z	September 24



SEPTEMBER 3

“AEU Assembly Report”

Argentine Craig, Karen Elliott,
Kirk Mullen, and Emil Volcheck

BES members Argentine Craig, Karen Elliott, Kirk Mullen, and Emil Volcheck will report on the 102nd Assembly of the American Ethical Union that took place June 8-11 in Baltimore. The theme of the conference was “Communities Confronting Systemic Racism.” This conference energized 130 participants from across the Ethical Culture Movement who experienced powerful talks, engaging workshops, and a moving platform address by Hugh Taft-Morales. On Sunday, the Assembly adopted a sweeping resolution on systemic racism that called for a study of reparations. The 2018 Assembly will be in Albuquerque. Come join us for the last Summer Sunday talk of 2017, and prepare to be impressed!

SEPTEMBER 10

“Humans, Nature, and the Eclipse of the Sun”

Hugh Taft-Morales
Ethical Leader

In the past solar eclipses have generated fear and been seen as evil omens. Thanks to science, humanists know that an eclipse results from the ceaseless ticking of our celestial clockwork. But while we no longer cower in fear when darkness descends at noon, we may fail to appreciate the humbling lessons of an eclipse. How can we better appreciate the beauty and awe nature offers? How can we learn from our environment how to act less like masters of nature and more like stewards of earth?

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.

SEPTEMBER 17

“Finding A Better Balance: Diversity in the Arts”

Nate VashtiBlue Couser
Artist

Discussion Points:

- Defining Diversity.
- The Dividing Starts With The Education System.
- Creating Resources That Seek To Bridge Our Community Instead Of Dividing It.
- Spotlight What Is Working And Strengthen What Isn't.
- Eliminating The Road Blocks Artists Of Color Face As They Create.
- Power Struggle /Defining What Is Good Art.

Nate VashtiBlue Couser was raised in Baltimore City. He was educated in both the Baltimore City and Private school system. He went to Coppin State University and majored in Urban Arts and Production, with a concentration in Acting. Nate has worked in various sections of the arts. He is an Actor, Director, Radio Personality, Jewelry Designer, Teaching Artist and Curator. His mission is to build a stronger and more diverse arts community in Baltimore City. Ten years ago, Nate created ‘The Artist Exchange’ as a networking tool for his fellow Urban Arts majors at Coppin State Univ. Over the years, as he has grown as an artist, the group has also grown to over 4000 active members from all over the world. The mission of The Artist Exchange, like Nate’s personal mission, is to create opportunities and platforms for artists of all cultures and backgrounds. This group focus is to build sustainable life long careers for artists.

“THE PAST SPEAKS TO US IN A THOUSAND VOICES, WARNING AND COMFORTING, ANIMATING AND STIRRING TO ACTION.

– FELIX ADLER

SEPTEMBER 24

“Addiction, Relapse, and Recovery”

Thomas Higdon
BES President

Substance use disorder (SUDs), more colloquially known as addiction, impacts the lives of millions of people. Alcohol alone claims the lives of over 88,000 people in the United States each year, making alcohol the fourth leading preventable cause of death in our country. Yet SUDs need not be a death sentence. September is National Recovery Month – a time to discuss the benefits of prevention, treatment, and recovery for substance use disorders. Thomas will give a general introduction to SUDs and then discuss his personal experience with addiction, relapse, and recovery.

Thomas Higdon is the President of the Baltimore Ethical Society and a survivor of substance use disorder.

UPCOMING AEU EVENTS

AEU SKILLS SUMMIT 2017

Saturday, October 14, 9:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
with additional Friday & Sunday activities
at the Philadelphia Ethical Society

Share skills, best practices, ideas, and questions about improving your Society's Communications, Ethical Education, and Membership. Learn about what the AEU offers Societies and develop a supportive network of members. More details and registration available soon at aeu.org.

YES TEENS IN NY NOV 2017

Thursday, November 9, 7:00 p.m. at New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West 64th Street, New York, NY 10023. Friday-Sunday at Frost Valley: 2000 Frost Valley Rd, Claryville, NY 12725

The Youth of Ethical Societies (YES) will connect teens from throughout the Ethical Culture Movement for another full weekend of discussion, play, brainstorming, performance, campfires, and bonding. More details and registration available soon at aeu.org.

CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE SOCIETY ON SUNDAY MORNINGS?

INTERESTED IN A PAST PLATFORM THAT YOU MISSED?

Watch them on our Vimeo page! Simply go to vimeo.com/user4409178 to see video recordings of many of our platforms from the last several years.

LABOR DAY WEEKEND SUNDAY PICNIC

Sunday, September 3, 12:00 p.m.
at the home of Dianne and Stuart Hirsch

Join us for food, fun, and fellowship following the Sunday program which will end early at 11:30 a.m. Members Dianne and Stuart Hirsch have agreed to open their home to us again and so we will gather for our annual picnic from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The picnic is potluck so please bring a dish to contribute. Directions will be handed out and/or provided on request.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Treasurer has mislaid his mind reading program. So until further notice, please make sure to identify any cash pledge payments put in the basket on Sunday mornings. We apologize for any inconvenience.

The Finance Committee

bmorethical t-shirts

bmorethical
THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

**GET YOURS
TODAY!**

Available in black, green, purple,
and white (*while supplies last*).

ONLY \$15

RACIAL JUSTICE AND TRANSFORMATION

Here is an excerpt of Hugh Taft-Morales' Platform address from the AEU Assembly. Read the full transcript at aeu.org/2017/07/racial-justice-and-transformation/.

Good morning. In Ethical Culture—that's this—there are a lot of ways to grow. We take care of each other through life's ups and downs. But at this time in history we are called on to confront systemic racism. This is not easy. Just ask our friends of color in this room who've been doing it all their lives. For those of you, this is for you—thanks for being my teachers.

Another teacher, Michael Eric Dyson, used to say in church, "If the sermon ain't making you a little bit uncomfortable, it ain't effective." In his book *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*, Dyson explains, "...if it doesn't cost you anything, you're not really engaging in change; you're engaging in convenience. You're engaged in the overflow."

At our best Ethical Culture can do better than that. We are all at different points on this journey, but we have this much in common—we all have much more work to do, as individuals, as Ethical Societies, and as a nation. And I suggest that those of us who identify as white, as I do, have the most work to do.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING

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

Join the Program Committee and help choose speakers for our Sunday morning meetings! Visitors are also welcome to provide thoughts and speaker suggestions, or to just listen. The Program Committee meets monthly on fourth Sundays.

ETHICAL HUMANISTS VISIT WITH TURN AROUND TUESDAY AT PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT PRIOR TO AEU ASSEMBLY



BES members Stephen Meskin and Kathleen Wilsbach, and Leader Hugh Taft-Morales, joined Ethical Humanists from around the country at Macedonia Baptist Church 718 W. Lafayette St. for a meeting of Turn Around Tuesday. This BUILD project works with unemployed and underemployed Baltimoreans to secure steady, good paying employment. Ethical Humanists and TAT staff and participants enjoyed connecting and learning about the challenges present in so many urban centers. Other Ethical Culturists included Michale Bleiweiss (Boston), Lujira Cooper (Brooklyn), Pat Spencer (Long Island), Sharon Stanley (Long Island), and Favio Apollon (FES).

SECOND SUNDAY FAMILY MEET-UPS!

Join other families with young children immediately following platform on the second Sunday of each month to have fun, build community, and let off steam. The activities will be selected with 2-6 year olds in mind, but all are welcome! If you have questions, email Maya at may-agk@gmail.com or Beth at emluginbill@gmail.com.



Timothy Snyder's Lessons About Tyranny

(continued from page 1)

ingly authoritatively people. When the “unthinkable happens,” such as catastrophic events or terrorism, people are even more open to manipulation by tyrants. We must avoid being hapless victims of “terror management.”

A fourth lesson is that we should **be careful with language**. We should not repeat phrases tossed out by politicians or the media simply to inflame or control, something Hannah Arendt warned about in her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Don't throw around “fake news” just because the president has. Don't accept mantras about “terrorism” and “extremism.” And for goodness sake, we must defend the concept of truth. Snyder warns that entering the time of “post-truth” means we've the “pre-fascist” era.

The fifth lesson seems almost obvious: **beware of concentrations of power**. The novelty of Snyder's approach is that he points out how power concentrates in many ways. Power concentrates in an oligarchy of incumbents from both parties kept in power, not by free voters, but by moneyed interests. Power concentrates in privatized security forces both overseas and at home. Power concentrates in gatekeepers who threaten to change the Internet from open to closed. To avoid tyranny we must let freedom ring in the U.S.

A final lesson from Snyder I'll em-

phasize is that we should **be wary of polarization and dehumanization of “the other.”** This is something people all along the political spectrum are guilty of, myself included. We must do better. Instead of interacting in the world through social media, we should practice corporeal politics by getting out into public sphere. Build relationships with people you don't know. Make eye contact and small talk. This is, Snyder tells us, how the Solidarity labor movement in Poland was able to topple a tyrant. It's also the heart of what some call our “religion of relationships” – Ethical Humanism

I will end my first column of the 2017-2018 program year by pointing to a lesson not from the 20th century, but a lesson that seems timeless: “inequality breeds tyranny.” Since the United States is now led by a businessman more dedicated to “the art of the deal” than the art of democracy, we must condemn glorification of economic greed. Given the historically unprecedented economic inequality of our nation Snyder's lessons are more important than ever. Ethical Humanists, inheriting a legacy of demands for more just distribution of resources, should redouble our efforts. Only if we help society rise above greed, fear, and the dehumanization of others will Snyder's Twenty Lessons save us from ourselves. The choice is ours.

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. For more information about our ceremonies or to make arrangements, please contact weddings@bmorethical.org.

HUGH TO SPEAK AT THE IMPACT HUB

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

BES Leader Hugh Taft-Morales will be speaking about *The Fragility of Goodness* as part of Baltimore's Impact Hub's Lunch and Learn series. At noon, on Thursday, September 7, join Hugh at 10 East North Avenue in Baltimore for a discussion of how hard it is to be good. Striving to be moral in an unpredictable world can be rewarding but also risky. What is goodness? How do we nurture it in ourselves? Why does the quest for a good life make us vulnerable to being hurt and broken? Come discuss these questions and hear why he thinks an ethical life is worth the risk.

2017 ASSEMBLY KEYNOTES

The American Ethical Union celebrated its 102nd Assembly “Bmorethical2017: Communities Confronting Systemic Racism” in Baltimore in June.

Keynote speakers were Congressman Jamie Raskin and Adam Jackson, CEO of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle.

If you were unable to attend the keynote program, there are videos of the speakers available at aeu.org/2017/08/2017-assembly-keynote-program/.



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, September 17, 12:30 p.m.

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

NEWCOMERS MEETING

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

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the last Sunday Platform of every month, and find out more about Ethical Culture and our Society – its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and are recommended for anyone who's curious about membership. Please attend at least one Platform before going to a Newcomers Meeting. Contact Wayne Laufert or Janey Solwold for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, September 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

Welcome to BESpeak, the newsletter of the Baltimore Ethical Society. Donations from readers like you help us keep it in production. Send checks payable to Baltimore Ethical Society to: BESpeak, 306 W. Franklin St., Ste. 102, Baltimore, MD 21201. If you would like to subscribe to the online version of this newsletter, sign up at bmorethical.org. Thank you.