

## HUMANLIGHT CELEBRATION FEATURES NOTED HUMANIST DR. PAUL KURTZ

Red Bank Humanists celebrate a holiday in December that's called HumanLight. Although Humanism is a philosophy, not a religion, Humanists have been observing HumanLight nationally during the holiday season since 2001. This year the speaker for the Red Bank HumanLight celebration will be noted Humanist, Dr. Paul Kurtz, founder of Council For Secular Humanism, Center For Inquiry, and Prometheus Books, a leading publisher in popular science, philosophy, and critical thinking.

This year's HumanLight event will take place on Saturday, December 18, 2010 at the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House at 1475 West Front St. in Lincroft, NJ 07738. The festivities will begin at 3:00 p.m. with a reception for Dr. Kurtz, offering holiday refreshments and hors d'oeuvres, followed by Dr. Kurtz's talk, "HumanLight: A New Tradition" at 4:00 p.m. A Q&A session with Dr. Kurtz will follow, after which homemade holiday desserts and coffee will be served. The suggested donation at the door is \$10 per person.

Humanism seeks to understand the universe through science and critical thinking and represents an overall objective of developing a more humane society. A short video, "Home For The Holidays," available on our homepage and YouTube, shares the history of the HumanLight and its three themes: reason, compassion and hope.

New Jersey Humanist Network ( [www.njhn.org](http://www.njhn.org) ) is supporting the Red Bank event and is also offering a family-oriented HumanLight banquet the week before in Somerset, NJ.



Dr. Kurtz, born in 1925 in Newark, NJ, is best known for his prominent role in the United States skeptical community. He has been called "the father of secular humanism." He is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, having previously also taught at Vassar, Trinity, and Union colleges, and the New



School for Social Research. Kurtz has published over 800 articles or reviews and has authored and edited over 50 books. Many of his books have been translated into over 60 languages world-wide. The asteroid (6629) Kurtz was named in his honor.

Red Bank Humanists is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization presenting various forums and discussions about the philosophy of humanism. It is a chapter of the American Humanist Association in Washington, DC ( [www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org) ), and a member of the New Jersey Coalition of Reason ( [www.njcor.org](http://www.njcor.org) ). Monthly Forums are held on the second Sunday of the month at the Red Bank Charter School (58 Oakland St.), with other events offered throughout the year, such as Humanist Salons featuring classic philosophical discussions, and a regular social event called, "Drinking Post-Theologically." More information about Humanism and RBH events is available at [www.redbankhumanists.org](http://www.redbankhumanists.org).



## ERIS: ONE WEIRD LITTLE DWARF PLANET

**From Boingboing.net - Maggie Koerth-Baker  
at 8:38 AM Friday, Nov 12, 2010**

Earlier this week, we learned that the dwarf planet Eris is probably smaller, in diameter, than Pluto, but is simultaneously 27% more massive. That's pretty nifty. But it's also pretty strange. The going theory, prior to this, was that Pluto and Eris were basically twins—similar size, similar composition. Imagine you had a pair of identical twin children, and one was 100 pounds heavier than the other.

Both Pluto and Eris are Kuiper belt objects, masses of rock and ice that coagulated together on the outskirts of our solar system. The ice-to-rock ratio—and, with it, mass—varies a lot from one Kuiper belt object

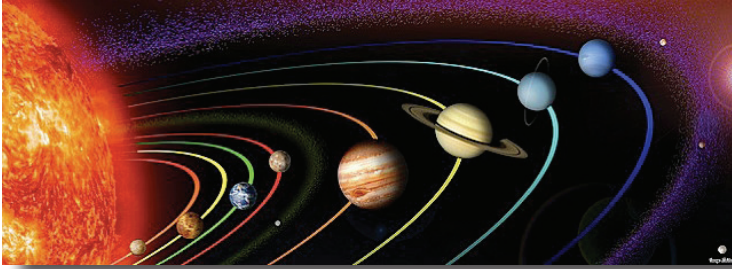
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to another, says astronomer Mike Brown. But, it was previously assumed that, by the time smaller objects had coalesced into something as large as Pluto or Eris, their composition would be about the same as any other Kuiper object in the same size category. Instead, this new data suggests that Eris contains a lot more rock, or Pluto contains a lot more ice, or a little bit of both. And it throws our entire understanding of Kuiper belt objects out of whack.



No answer is immediately obvious, but it is immediately obvious that one or more of the assumptions of the standard scenario are going to have to be discarded. Earlier this summer I had constructed a new hypothesis that did an adequate (though, frustratingly not great) job of explaining some of the crazy variability in the Kuiper belt as being due to a random series of giant collisions which knocked the ice off of some objects, leaving just the rocky cores. I gave a couple of talks on the hypothesis, and even wrote the first draft of a scientific paper describing the details. But I fear now that the draft is going to have to go to the recycle bin. Even in my hypothesis once things grow to a certain size they should be more or less the same. Eris and Pluto are just too big to be different.

So what happened instead? Did they form in different places? In different solar systems? Did Eris spend time close to the sun? None of these hypotheses is immediately appealing, but somewhere in there there must be a kernel of what really happened. Pluto and Eris and all of the rest of the dwarf planets must have a widely divergent set of histories of formation or evolution or interaction or all of the above.



*“We still cling stubbornly to the idea of an animating soul, a spiritual ghost in the biological machine.”*

**– THE ECONOMIST (NOVEMBER 30, 2010)**

## SAM HARRIS INSPIRED BY FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE?

When I stumbled upon the Nietzsche quote below, I immediately thought of the new Sam Harris book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*.

*“All sciences are now under the obligation to prepare the ground for the future task of the philosopher, which is to solve the problem of value, to determine the true hierarchy of values.” - Friedrich Nietzsche*

Sam Harris is clearly taking up the challenge in his book with, “My claim is that there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, just as there are right and wrong answers to questions of physics, and such answers may one day fall within reach of the maturing sciences of mind.”

Although some scientists scoff at Harris’ goal, you’ll notice he says “answers may one day fall within reach” of science. His knowledge of neuroscience may be the key to prove his hypotheses. We’re pleased Harris has taken Nietzsche’s challenge to begin “the task.”



## TOPIC



***Friendship:  
Gender and Lifespan Perspectives***  
**by Janice C. Stapley, Ph.D.**

**Chair, Dept. of Psychology  
Monmouth University**

- ▶ What is friendship?
- ▶ Does the definition differ by gender? By age?
- ▶ What about cross-sex friendships?
- ▶ Who benefits from “friends with benefits”?
- ▶ How do friends make us resilient?

*“Promise me you’ll always remember: You’re braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”*

*- Christopher Robin to Pooh - A.A. Milne*



Cultivating rational inquiry, ethical values, and human development.

**Monthly Forum  
Sunday, January 9, 2011  
10:30 a.m.  
Red Bank Charter School  
58 Oakland St.**

**Red Bank, NJ 07701**

**[www.redbankhumanists.org](http://www.redbankhumanists.org)**

# Drinking Post-Theologically

A mixer. . .for skeptics, freethinkers, agnostics, atheists, non-religious, Humanists, or those who are simply post-theological.



Join the conversation on:  
Thursday, January 27, 2011  
8:00 pm to 10:00 pm

New location suggestions needed - email:  
info@redbankhumanists.org

Organized by



An Ethical Secular Worldview  
www.redbankhumanists.org

## AUGUSTUS ARNONE TO PLAY AT HUMANLIGHT

Augustus Arnone (Will Steelman's piano teacher at Monmouth Conservatory) will play selections of light classical piano pieces for the HumanLight receptions on December 18th.



Mr. Arnone holds degrees from the Boston Conservatory, the University of Michigan, and completed his doctoral studies at Cornell University where he studied historical performance practice with Malcolm Bilson. During that time, he presented recitals using period instruments spanning the entire history of the piano, from eighteenth-century five-octave pianos to mid-nineteenth-

century precursors to the modern piano. In addition, he was active as a musicologist, focusing research on the music of Brahms and the performing culture of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. This led to the publication of two articles as well as lecture-presentations at a number of universities, and, in 2003, at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society.

Humanism rejects religion. It attributes nothing to the so called "supernatural." In this there is an awakened liberty that releases us from the shackles and servitude mentality of old superstitions so that we may realize our full potential.



- Stephen Hawking

## RBH BOOK CLUB

We will meet on January 6 to discuss *Walking Israel, a Personal Search for the Soul of Israel* by Martin Fletcher

From Booklist: "Acclaimed for his fearless broadcast journalism, Fletcher here visits not the tense battle line dividing Jew from Arab in Israel's eastern sector but rather the peaceful western coastline, a surprisingly complex region where fascinating human stories unfold outside of the media limelight. Peopled by a colorful array of characters, these stories define the cultural landscape the author traverses in journeying by foot from Lebanon to Gaza.... To be sure, Fletcher encounters reminders of that strife. But he also encounters heartening evidence that open-minded individuals—Jewish and Arab—can surmount the walls of prejudice and hate. A much-needed corrective to media stereotypes."

Our February book will be *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese. It's a long book and we will meet a week later than usual to have time to read it.

### RED BANK HUMANISTS

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