

# BESpeak

FEBRUARY 2012

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## Starry Night, Science Bright!

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

I'm glad that we've turned the corner on winter – days are getting longer and the light is coming back. But in the middle of a cold dark night last week, I was inspired and awed once again by the winter sky. I walked outside at about midnight and looked up. Through the thin, crisp air, the Milky Way shimmered and twinkled intensely. Once again I felt a moment of humanist reverence for the wonder of nature, and felt very alone.

I felt alone despite the fact that we are all traveling together in a journey through the amazing universe. Somewhere two thirds of the way out from the center of our spiral galaxy is a 4 billion year old rock. A rather ordinary star of hydrogen and helium located 93 million miles away serves as the center round which this travels at 66,000 miles per hour circling endlessly. I ran back in to the warmth of my living room.

This experience corresponded well with last month's installment of *The Day the Universe Changed*, one of my favorite video sets that I'm sharing this year with the Baltimore Ethical Society. For those who have attended our viewings and discussions, you know that the irreverent and witty narrator James Burke tells the story of humanity's winding path from ignorance towards wisdom, superstition towards reason.

Last month the path took us through the starry heavens. In the installment, *The Infinitely Reasonable: Science Revises the Heavens*, Burke describes a medieval world blindly attached to Aristotle's cosmology. This paradigm dominated for well over a thousand years. The church embraced it and used force and terror to banish all alternative perspectives.

Aristotle postulated that the earth was at the center of the universe, around which were a series of crystal spheres. Those spheres close in were filled with corruptible, earthly matter. Far from earth, the spheres contained heavenly objects such as planets and stars that never changed – created permanent and perfect by God. Everything that happened in the universe did so because God placed within every object an "essence" that determined its behavior.



(continued on page 7)

CELEBRATING

# 60

YEARS

JOIN US AS  
WE CELEBRATE!  
April 21-22, 2012

**SUNDAY PLATFORMS**

10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

**FEBRUARY 5**

**"The Morality of Capitalism &  
Free International Trade"**

James Case, PhD  
Writer and Consultant

**FEBRUARY 12**

**"Foundations of Evolution"**

Mike Reid  
President, Washington Area  
Secular Humanists

**FEBRUARY 19**

**"Maryland's Nonprofits –  
Transforming Lives"**

Tracey Durant, EdD  
Director, Professional Development,  
Maryland Nonprofits

**FEBRUARY 26**

**"Imagining the Ethical  
Manifold: The Science  
Fiction of Spider Robinson"**

Perry Beider  
Board President,  
Washington Ethical Society

# BESpeak

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**Fritz Williams** *Leader Emeritus*

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[www.bmorethical.org](http://www.bmorethical.org)

# b Congratulated

by Rosemary Klein, BES President

The December 28, 2011 issue of the ubiquitous *b*, the once-a-week freebie Tribune news offering, published an enlightening article in which David Zurawik identified ten local media stories from the passing year and plumbed them for their deeper meaning. His take on two local media personalities in particular resonated in regard to the values often posited within Ethical Culture.

Zurawik marveled at the “power and imagination” of Ron Smith, host since 1984 of a WBAL talk show, who in October 2011 announced that he’d received a diagnosis of stage four pancreatic cancer to his on-air audience and then remained on-air for more than a month openly sharing his situation before dying in mid-December.

Zurawik paid homage not only to Smith’s outgoing courage but also to the “one-market, one-station career” that Smith had been able to retain and shape for more than a quarter of a century at 1090 AM Baltimore. Zurawik conjectured that sadly that type of “career...is probably a thing of the past.” And if that is the case, he predicted it “will make for media that are less personal and accountable.”

October 2011 also brought the troubling news that Baltimore-based radio voice Lisa Simeone had been fired from the freelance job she held for fifteen years with Sandprint Media Center Inc., whose documentary series SOUNDPRINT is the oldest of that type on public radio. According to online sources, Simeone had over the years produced three documentaries and had penned and voiced program intros for the series.

Even at this point, teasing what’s factual and what’s not regarding the Simeone firing (on the “ethical” grounds that “partisan involvement” undertaken by an employee is out of bounds) is, however, hugely difficult to ferret from the blizzard of information that swirls chaotically about the Internet. A 10/20/11 *Huff Post* blog cites Simeone as saying that she has been one of an October 2011 Movement steering committee of approximately 50 persons. Go to the [october2011.org](http://october2011.org) website, however, and Simeone is one of 15 people (along with Maria Allwine, past co-chair of the Maryland Green Party, and Margaret Flowers, M.D., ardent advocate for single payer health care) identified as “the people who are helping to organize the October 2011 Movement.”

Simeone’s current bio on [october2011.org](http://october2011.org) is cloaked in clever banality remarkably lacking in the specificity attached to the other organizers. She is identified simply as living in Baltimore and being “a proud loudmouthed feminist and rabble-rouser [whose] husband wonders whether her love of natty dressing might interfere with her participation in the revolution.” (Reflect that many might construe the words “loudmouthed feminist and rabble-rouser” and “the revolution” grounds for severance no matter whom they were attached to.)

While the Simeone firing begs for a more in-depth explication than it appears thus far to have received anywhere, it is important that Zurawik calls attention to it

*(continued on page 7)*



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 4:00–5:30 P.M.

# *The Day the Universe Changed*

*A philosophically fun video and discussion series!*

Come view and discuss a video series by James Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed*. Burke explores with wit and wisdom links between knowledge and reality through stories about the history of western civilization.

Join Ethical Culture Leader Hugh Taft-Morales for the sixth installment on Monday, Feb. 12: *Credit Where It's Due: The Factory & Marketplace Revolution*. Free and open to the public.



## ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, February 26, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

Open to all members. Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society! Today's meeting will include a discussion about what makes Ethical Action so rewarding for YOU!!

## BES WELCOMES KATIE LACLAIRE



BES Membership Committee chair John Reuter presents new member Katie LaClaire with her "official" name tag.

## ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday  
10:30 a.m. – Noon

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Poetry Group

Sunday, Feb. 5, 9:30 a.m.

### Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, Feb. 9, 5:45 p.m.

### Moveable Treats

Sunday, Feb. 12

### Board Meeting

Sunday, Feb. 12, 12:30 p.m.

## Video and Discussion Series

Sunday, Feb. 12, 4:00 p.m.

## Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, Feb. 19, 9:30 a.m.

## BES Ironweed Film Club

Wednesday, Feb. 22, 7:30 p.m.

## Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, Feb. 26, 9:15 a.m.

## Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, Feb. 26, 12:30 p.m.

## Great Thinkers

## Discussion Series

Sunday, Feb. 26, 12:30 p.m.

## SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

Last names starting with:

A to F	Feb. 5
G to L	Feb. 12
M to R	Feb. 19
S to Z	Feb. 26

## STAY INFORMED

Receive emails about upcoming events by registering on our MeetUp site at [meetup.com/bmorethical](http://meetup.com/bmorethical).

**FEBRUARY 5**

## “The Morality of Capitalism & Free International Trade”

James Case, PhD  
*Writer and Consultant*

Louis Galambos, professor in the John Hopkins University history department, has said of James Case's *Competition: The Birth of a New Science* that its “implications for economic thought are stunning.” Today's platform, based on that book, will explore capitalism and free international trade in light of moral arguments that go beyond the ordinary marketing of both as strategies advantageous to any and all developed nations.

Trained as a mathematician, **James Case**, now a writer/consultant in Baltimore, has worked in a variety of industries, as well as in government, minor league baseball, and higher education. In addition to *Competition* (Hill & Wang, 2008), Case has published *Why Can't Obama Fix the Economy? What Has to Happen First?* (2011) and *Economics and the Competitive Process* (New York University Press, 1979). A number of his articles have also been published by the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics.

**FEBRUARY 12**

## “Foundations of Evolution”

Mike Reid

*President, Washington Area Secular Humanists*

As have all accomplished scientists, Charles Darwin built on the work of his predecessors. In this talk with accompanying slide presentation, Mike Reid will discuss the amazing ideas of Erasmus Darwin (Charles' grandfather who speculated on organisms originating from primitive ancestors), James Hutton (the 18th-century geologist who discovered the antiquity of the Earth and speculated on natural selection), Sir Charles Lyell (the geologist who inspired Darwin and later became his close friend), Alfred Russel Wallace (the naturalist who independently discovered organic evolution and natural selection), and others who while less well-known also made essential contributions. He will argue that Charles Darwin was the greatest of the evolutionists, but not the first or only one. He will also make the case that precursory scientific discover-

ies had to have been made and that society had to have reached a certain level of social, political, economic, and technological development before evolutionary theory could be formulated. This event is also sponsored by the Baltimore Secular Humanists and the Baltimore Coalition of Reason.

**Mike Reid** is the president of the Washington Area Secular Humanists (WASH), the parent organization of the Baltimore Secular Humanists. He holds degrees in geology and computer systems. He formerly taught geology and astronomy at a community college in California and works in the aerospace field and the space program. He has a long-standing interest in the history of science and in the 19th century.

**FEBRUARY 19**

## “Maryland's Nonprofits – Transforming Lives”

Tracey Durant, EdD

*Director, Professional Development, Maryland Nonprofits*

It would be difficult to imagine what life in Maryland would be like without nonprofits. Their work impacts, transforms, and shapes our communities and our lives. The ways in which Maryland Nonprofits strengthens, educates, and engages nonprofit organizations and the value of you as an individual to this important work will form the heart of this presentation.

**Tracey Durant**—prior to her current Maryland Nonprofits' position—was the founding executive director of the 100 Black Men of Maryland College Access Program (100 CAP), whose mission was to help low-income, first-generation, underserved students navigate the college access process. She has also served in the Baltimore County community college system as a learning assistance coordinator. She has received two outstanding research awards, one from Morgan State University for improving classroom practice (2005) and one from the Developmental Education Association of Maryland (DEAM) for developmental education (2006). Her professional service activities include being a board member for DEAM (as its immediate past president) and for the Woodbourne Center. In addition to her doctoral degree in higher education administration from Morgan State University, she holds a bachelor's from Sojourner-Douglass College and a master's from Coppin State University.

**FEBRUARY 26**

## “Imagining the Ethical Manifold: The Science Fiction of Spider Robinson”

Perry Beider

*Board President, Washington Ethical Society*

Ethical Culture founder Felix Adler coined the term “Ethical Manifold” to refer to the ideal state of society in which each person is uniquely himself or herself and all contribute their unique gifts to the good of the whole. A worthy goal for us to strive for! But given how far society today is from that ideal – and in the face of so many contrary influences and trends – it can be hard for us to keep up our enthusiasm for the effort, particularly if we don’t have a clear mental picture of the desired result. Perry Beider will argue that Spider Robinson, winner of a Robert A. Heinlein Award for Lifetime Excellence in Literature 2008, is unofficially the Official Science Fiction Writer of Ethical Culture. He will illustrate his points by offering passages from Robinson’s stories that present hopeful and inspiring science-fictional metaphors that speak to the Ethical Manifold.

Perry Beider has been a member of the Washington Ethical Society (WES) for 20 years and currently serves as president of its Board of Trustees. Holder of a Stanford PhD in engineering-economic systems (translation available on request), he works as a policy analyst and manager at the Congressional Budget Office. He sometimes says that science fiction was his first religion. He is married to Alida DeCoster, a Unitarian Universalist minister, and they have an 11-year-old son, Louis, who reluctantly attends WES’s Sunday school.

### **DARWINIAN THEORY**

by Rosemary Klein

To ascertain why Darwin turned  
from revolution to utter evolution  
one need not look far.

In childhood his speech took  
on a slight stammer that gave  
him fits pronouncing “r.”

# Pledges Are Up!

## *Mid-Year Financial Report*

While December 31 is the end of the calendar year, we are only midway through our fiscal year which runs from July 1 to June 30.

Thank you to everyone who has made a pledge this year. BES appreciates the generosity of those members who have already pledged during this fiscal year. We have pledges from 75% of our members and collectively their pledges increased about 16% above last year!

Treasurer Stephen Meskin also reports that expenses are roughly on budget while income is a little harder to judge since 91% of our budgeted income consists of voluntary contributions from members.

This is terrific progress, but the society is still working to meet its goals. The Board urges all members who have not yet pledged to please contact the treasurer and even if you are not a member, we welcome and greatly appreciate your tax deductible contributions. BES will be the better for it.

## **bmorethical t-shirts**

**GET YOURS  
TODAY!**

Available in black,  
blue, and white

**ONLY \$15**

### **REASON RALLY**

**March 24, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Join Baltimore CoR at the Reason Rally – the largest gathering of humanists in history! On the National Mall in Washington, D.C., March 24, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. See Hugh or Emil about travel arrangements. Learn more at ReasonRally.org.

IRONWEED

# film

CLUB

Wednesday, February 22,  
7:30 p.m.

Join us this month at the BES Ironweed Film Club when we screen the 2011 Earthdance Short Attention Span Environmental Film Festival.

This volume features seven, stunning, hand-picked short films from the Earthdance Films Library, with subject matter ranging from living in harmony with nature to sustainable architecture, tackling issues that we are all dealing with as our planet evolves. Titles include *The Ecological Footprint: Accounting for a Small Planet*, *Nom Tew – Man of the Soil*, and *Suryamani the Environmental Activist*. View the film trailers at [www.ironweed-films.com/product-p/0911.htm](http://www.ironweed-films.com/product-p/0911.htm).

Screenings are open to members of BES and the BES Ironweed Film Club. Ask Emil about free membership in the film club ([volcheck@acm.org](mailto:volcheck@acm.org), or 410/929-3399). Donations are requested for refreshments. The Club meets monthly on the 4th Wednesday.

Join the Film Club Meetup to let us know you will be there at <http://meetup.ps/6Dg98>.

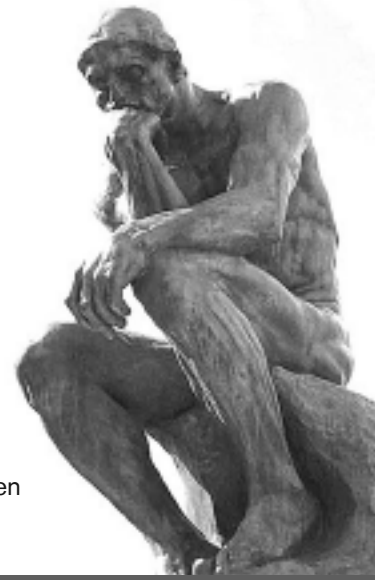
## Great Thinkers Discussion Series

Sunday, February 26, 12:30 p.m.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Emerson, Adler, and Transcendence*

Join Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society, for the second installment of a series of stimulating conversations about some of the most important American thinkers connected to humanism and freethought. Free and open to the public.



### UPCOMING DATES AND TOPICS:

Sunday, March 25, 12:30 p.m. – W. E. B. Du Bois

*Du Bois, Inclusion, and Power*

Date to be determined – Jane Addams

*Ethical Relationships and Jane Addams*

### BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, February 9, 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 Lisa Alderson know you are coming ([lialderson@gmail.com](mailto:lialderson@gmail.com)) and show up at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Ave. Baltimore, MD, at 5:45 p.m. Park on the street in front of building. 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 BES participant.

MINDFULNESS

# meditation

Sunday, February 19, 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 mindfulness comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to some words from Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.

## SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?

The Baltimore Ethical Society has a Leader and a team of officiants who are trained and licensed to conduct weddings, same sex commitments, memorials, and other life passage ceremonies. For more information about our ceremonies or to make arrangements, please contact our Officiant Team Coordinator, Kathryn Sloboda, at [weddings@bmoreethical.org](mailto:weddings@bmoreethical.org).

## Starry Night, Science Bright!

*(continued from page 1)*

When new instruments and the facts they allowed us to record began poking holes in this world view, the church initially accepted most of the changes. The new information did, after all, allow the church to create a more accurate calendar, which improved the churches' secular power, including the ability to get the masses all onto the same schedule regarding holy days and rituals.

When troublemakers like Galileo insisted that the church accept all of the new truths as fast as they were spilling out of the labs and observatories of Europe, however, the church cracked down. In rulings passed down from the Council of Trent, books were prohibited, priests were tested, wayward bishops were pun-

ished, and Jesuit enforcers brought on the Inquisition. All of this due to scandalous assertions such as that the earth went round the sun and the moon had mountains.

We all know how the story goes. Eventually the work of Galileo, Brahe, Kepler, Descartes, and Newton turned our view of the universe inside out. The church relented and the Enlightenment project moved forward. Our world today is filled with assumptions so different from those of the medieval mind that it's hard to believe that when we look up at the night sky we're seeing the same thing. We are, however, and we know that because it is all held together by the story of science that is still being written. Happy Darwin Day, by the way!

## *b* Congratulated

*(continued from page 2)*

as a simple but profound "reminder that ethics, free speech and protest are not abstractions or stuff for the history books only. Some people are putting their jobs and careers on the line today for what they believe."

The best takeaway from Zurawik's article, however, was the point he made in his opening sentence about the general worthlessness of lists such as he's

putting forth "unless there are larger points to be made about each of the items." That he then stepped out on to what appears to be an increasingly wobbly limb to make those "larger points" whetted my appetite for the debates and contradictions that contribute to the universalities – beginning with those locally bred – of ethics content. *b* congratulated David Zurawik for having done so.

## Computer to Donate?

**YOU CAN HELP  
THE SUNDAY  
SCHOOL!**

Are you ready to upgrade to a new desktop computer and looking for a good home for your current machine? Are you putting off buying that new laptop you really want because the one you have works okay?

Please consider donating your computer to the Sunday School!

Our Sunday School teacher Linda Joy Burke is using web videos in the curriculum and has plans for the students to do video projects and blogs. The refurbished laptops we have are slow and unreliable, and they often choke on streaming videos. Linda Joy could do more if she had a computer with at least 1 GB RAM and a 14-inch screen. If you think you can help, please speak to Kathryn or Emil.



# BESpeak

**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**

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

**NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!

**TIME VALUE**



## BES's 60th

### ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

April 21-22, 2012 – Stay tuned for more details!

#### **NEWCOMERS MEETING**

**Sunday, February 26, 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 John Reuter or Hugh Taft-Morales for more information.

#### **SUPPORT MOVEABLE FEAST AND MOVEABLE TREATS**

**Baked Goods – Sunday, February 12**

**Other Items – Every Sunday**

Support Moveable Feast in its work to feed people with AIDS, blood cancer, or breast cancer and their families. Guidelines for donations are posted at the Society. For more information about Moveable Feast and their many additional programs, visit them on the web at [www.mfeast.org](http://www.mfeast.org).



# **bmorethical**

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