



# The Ethical Humanist

## Newsletter of the ETHICAL SOCIETY OF BOSTON

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

Volume 59, No. 5

March 2014

### **Building Community with and among Other Communities**

*Andrea Perrault, Board President*

As reported in recent columns, the Ethical Society of Boston is making changes. We've settled into new space at the Humanist Hub in Harvard Square. Fortunately, the response to the move back to Cambridge has been overwhelmingly positive. The location has lured more friends and former members back to our programs, and helped us to bring in new people for whom Belmont was too far or inconvenient. This change was several years in the making, and thanks to Humanist Chaplain Greg Epstein's constant plugging away at the goal of establishing a Humanist HUB in Cambridge, and our members' support of ESB joining the HUB, it has happened!

Also, the ESB Strategic Planning Process is on-going – we've dedicated several meetings to discussing the planning process with our consultant Mary Schaefer, we've surveyed members, and the Board will meet this month to identify a few clear objectives, setting the stage for us to move forward. As we consider future directions, we must focus on key priority areas to support the Society's growth in the context of working with other humanist groups. This may be more challenging than it seems. Our membership has diminished in recent years, and in order to recruit new members, we need to be sure that our mission is clear and attractive to potential members.

The word "community" has recurred throughout the ESB strategic planning process. This word seems to mean specific things to many ESB members. But does it have the same meaning for all? In years past, members were very connected to one another through the fact that they lived in the same area, and they had children who attended an ESB children's program. Over many years, ESB members engaged in social activities in the homes of members and friends. In the past few years, even these activities with long traditions in the group have been more difficult to plan. Some members have moved away, others have passed away, and even more are experiencing health issues that curtail their ability to be active.

Is this same vision of "community" that we can offer today as we embark on greater collaborations with other groups, especially with groups that represent different generations? Society has changed drastically over the last few decades – communication methods and styles have been revolutionized through technology. How do we frame our "community" in this new reality? Can we be more flexible? Are ESB's practices and activities set in stone, or can we demonstrate greater flexibility in order to encourage collaboration with other groups or people?

*Continue reading on page 7*



## The Way It Is (?)

*Marvin Miller*

### Revolution of Values

In his April 4, 1967 speech “Beyond Vietnam”, Martin Luther King Jr. called for a “revolution of values” against three “isms”: racism, materialism (acquisitiveness), and militarism. He said that our country needed such a revolution if we didn’t want to be endlessly protesting new wars here, there, and everywhere. Sadly, we did not heed his call. Over the past 47 years materialism and militarism have been as dominant as ever in our country. While overt racism based on skin color has been largely pushed underground by popular struggles, its effects are still apparent in many measures of human welfare, such as education and employment opportunities, imprisonment, and health. Imperialistic nationalism, a similar ideology based on where people live, characterizes our government’s foreign policy. Dr. King’s prediction about future wars has come true.

Every human action and institution embodies, explicitly or implicitly, its own hierarchy of values. When I do something, whether important or trivial, I am expressing the value that what I do is the most important thing that I can do at the time. The existence of every institution incorporates a value, and that is: the institution and its purposes are of prime importance.

The predominant institution in the economy of our country, and indeed in the rest of the world, is the business corporation. This is expressed by our architecture: the largest buildings in most of our cities are the financial centers. (Washington DC is an exception—the biggest building in that area is the Pentagon.) The central purpose of a corporation is profit, leading to its own growth and to growing economic inequality. Economic growth is deemed of prime importance by “both sides” in

politics. Of the countless statistics that characterize the economy, only one, the gross domestic product, is called “the economy”. Liberals argue that policies benefitting people, such as higher wages and unemployment insurance, are positive because they benefit “the economy”. People are the means; the economy is the end.

Our government’s foreign policy has been based on the doctrine that it has the right to determine, by force and violence if necessary, who shall govern other countries. It has done this in Iraq and Libya; it has tried to do this in Vietnam and Afghanistan; it has implicitly, by not calling them coups, supported military coups in Honduras and Egypt. Top U.S. officials tell the ruler of Syria that he must go, and we arm those who are fighting to oust him. Only irresistible public opposition has kept us from war there.

Changing the values that rule the dominant institutions of society, and thereby rule society itself, would require that the structure of those institutions be changed. Business organizations would be ruled democratically rather than plutocratically. The measure of their success would be how well they serve the people’s needs rather than how much purchasing power they acquire for themselves. Our country’s military establishment would be no larger than necessary to defend ourselves against other military powers.

The most powerful institutions in the world will strongly resist any such proposed changes. Such resistance could be overcome only by overwhelming popular demand. It’s not surprising that the revolution of values called for by Dr. King hasn’t happened yet. Will it happen in the future?

***Bach's Birthday***  
***March 21st, 1685***

Thousands take up music  
 one man wrought  
 on plangent pealing  
 pedaled pipe organ,  
 ten inspired fingers  
 played on one bright-singing harpsichord.

Bach's Baroque convention  
 precision of invention  
 music strong as sewing silk,  
 shuttles under and over our time

Trumpets, singing,  
 philharmonic choir,  
 French horn, flute  
 Bach is back.



*Elaine Mountleigh*

**Book Review: Alan Lightman's *The Accidental Universe***

*Fred Hewett*

Alan Lightman is one of those rare individuals who is as comfortable writing about quantum mechanics as he is writing about the drama of the ancient Greeks. Both a scientist and a novelist, the MIT professor recently released a collection of essays under the title "The Accidental Universe" (Pantheon Books).

Although he is a self-described atheist and humanist, Lightman tolerates the beliefs of those who posit an intelligence that transcends physical laws. He has respected colleagues who choose to believe that the physical laws governing the universe were set in place by a supreme intelligence outside the realm of science. He delineates a spectrum of belief from strong atheist, to agnostic, to deist, to the interventionist and personal god of the major religions. But, for Lightman, the elegance of scientific knowledge as it has emerged over the last 500 years is convincing evidence that physical laws apply equally throughout the cosmos. This guiding principle informs his reverence for the natural world, and so he leaves speculation about things outside of science to those who see a need for it.

In all the essays, Lightman contrasts the objective, abstract, and often inaccessible world of science with the subjective, messy world of human experience. He describes his experience sailing in the Aegean, feeling inconsequentially small and in awe of the vastness of the ocean, and yet being able to navigate reliably using mathematics and technology. Mind boggling descriptions of the cosmos are juxtaposed against meditations on our emotional and spiritual condition, and it is from the richness of these observations that the book draws its strength.

There is not a lot new here for the scientifically literate reader, but no reader need be daunted by Lightman's lucid expositions of current cosmology. Indeed, Lightman offers any reader a tour of a great mind, one that embraces the beauty of science and humanity alike.

## Ethical Action

*Pamela Dritt*

### **Oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. (TPP).**

#### *What is it?*

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a super secretive, multi-national trade agreement (similar to North American Free Trade Agreement--NAFTA) that threatens to extend restrictive Intellectual Property (IP) laws around the world and rewrite international rules on its enforcement. TPP is being negotiated between the United States, Japan, Mexico, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Chile, Singapore, Peru, Vietnam, New Zealand and Brunei, with input from 500 corporations, but not open to public input.

#### *Why is there a problem?*

Lack of transparency: The entire process has shut out multi-stakeholder participation and is shrouded in secrecy. We only know what a few of the 27 draft chapters of the TPP contain because anonymous sources sent copies of some chapters to Wikileaks, which has published them. President Obama is asking congress to "Fast Track" the TPP legislation, which would protect it from public and congressional study, response, and possible improvements.

Intellectual property (IP) chapter: Leaked draft texts of the agreement show that the IP chapter would have extensive negative ramifications for users' freedom of speech, right to privacy and due process, and hinder peoples' abilities to innovate. The TPP exports some of the most toxic versions of intellectual property and copyright law across the globe. It will add to the monopolistic power of multinational corporations, allowing them to protect their markets by restricting competition and innovation, and by enabling them to ride roughshod over national copyright, environmental, and consumer protection laws. "Free Trade" laws are neither free nor fair trade when they suppress competition and make insufficient allowances for externalities such as environmental, workplace, and consumer protections for the common good.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid announced last week that he was "against fast track" and Democrats like Senator Ron Wyden have likewise asserted that they are uncomfortable signing on to a bill that would put the TPP on a fast track. This is a major step in the right direction, but the fight against TPP closed-door trade negotiations isn't over.

#### *What can you do?*

You can help stop this global poison pill 'deal' by calling or writing Congress and President Obama: Vote 'No' on TPP! Vote 'No' on Fast Track! Easiest way may be to go to the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) website. They have a letter template you can modify or send as is, and they also give you the contact information for your senators and congress representatives. You can click through to send letters and/or phone calls. See the link below:

#### *More information:*

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF): <https://www.eff.org/issues/tpp>

Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Pacific\\_Partnership](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Pacific_Partnership)

or, Google "TPP" and read for yourself.

## **Oppose construction of the Keystone XL tarsands oil pipeline.**

### *What is it?*

Canadian tarsands produce some of the dirtiest, most expensive, most dangerous oil in the world. It is mined like coal, in giant strip-mines: the beautiful Canadian boreal forest are stripped off of the land, and giant machines use heat, steam, and chemicals to separate the tarry stuff from the sand and liquify it enough to transport. TransCanada, a company with a terrible track record of pipeline breaks, leaks, spills, and shoddy construction, wants to build another pipeline to bring Canadian tarsands oil to Gulf Coast refineries: the Keystone XL pipeline.

### *What's the problem? Don't you like "jobs" and "energy independence"?*

The oil market is global now; switching the sources of America's oil won't change the economic impact of our oil use at all, nor will it insure us against shortages and disasters. The only way to become truly energy independent is to switch from fossil fuels to renewables like solar and wind, which are truly local.

If the cost of the environmental destruction of mining it was included in the price of the oil, it would be too expensive to produce. If our tax subsidies to oil industry were eliminated, and TransCanada and the oil companies had to bear the full cost of pipeline construction and tarsands oil production, then it would be too expensive to produce, as well. We must stop wasting our tax money by subsidizing investing in obsolete fossil fuel infrastructure like oil pipelines and coal burning power plants. It's economically foolish even without the terrible environmental effects.

The State Department researchers just released their final report -- paid for by oil companies, and written by the same people who told us cigarettes were safe and not addictive. Their sham-science says that the Tar Sands would have a "negligible" impact on the climate. That's not true. Even their biased research admits that only 35 permanent jobs would be created by the pipeline. And despite running clear across the heartland of America, it will do nothing for "energy independence" because almost all the tar-sands fuel will be sold to other countries. Permitting the pipeline would merely enable others to burn dirty fuel, a horrible thing to help a neighbor, Canada, do. So now is the time to speak our truth: say no to Keystone XL.

### *What can you do?*

You can make a comment on the State Department's report, which is now open to "public comment". You can also contact Secretary of State John Kerry, asking him to recommend to President Obama that he deny the permit of the Keystone XL, and ask President Obama to deny the Keystone XL permit. You can write letters to the editor about the issue, and share information with your friends and family.

### *More information:*

Watch this excellent, informative, beautiful, short TED talk by photographer Garth Lenz: The True Cost of Oil: [http://www.ted.com/talks/garth\\_lenz\\_images\\_of\\_beauty\\_and\\_devastation.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/garth_lenz_images_of_beauty_and_devastation.html)

Read NASA Climate Scientist Dr. James Hansen's short 2012 NYTimes article: "Game Over for the Climate": <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/opinion/game-over-for-the-climate.html>

Read "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math" by Bill McKibben in Rolling Stone Magazine: <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>

## Sunday Lectures in March

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### March 2

**Barbara J. Dougan**, Massachusetts Project Director at Families Against Mandatory Minimums ([FAMM](#)).

*Drug Sentencing Laws: The Movement for Justice (and Sanity)*

Massachusetts requires mandatory prison sentences for most drug crimes. It doesn't matter if the person is an addict, played a minor role in the offense, or poses little risk to public safety – everybody goes to prison and often for a very long time. After 30 years of failed drug policies, Massachusetts is starting to make changes. But far more is needed. Learn about the latest developments – and how you can play a role.

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### March 9

**Gillian Mason**, Coordinator of Raise Up Massachusetts at [Jobs With Justice](#)

*RAISE UP Massachusetts*

The Campaign for raising the minimum wage has taken hold in Massachusetts with activists and low-wage workers collaborating to bring a more decent standard of living to those who are struggling to get by. A legislative campaign with a vote in November will bolster their efforts, or require new strategies to deliver on this promise.

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### March 16

**Rosalind Williams**, Dibner Professor of the History of Science and Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

*The Triumph of Human Empire*

Over the past century humankind has reached a decisive turning point in history, as human needs, desires, works and actions dominate the planet as never before. This domination excites visions of progress, but it also arouses anxieties that we may face a rolling apocalypse of intersecting crises. How do we understand and live in this new historical condition of human empire?

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### March 23

**To be announced**

*Please visit the website for updated details.*

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### March 30

**Andrea Barron**, Adjunct Professor of History, George Mason University

*Combatting Religious Fundamentalisms and Misogynous Cultural Traditions*

Female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called “honor crimes” sex trafficking, child marriage and radical anti-abortion policies are pervasive throughout the developing world. This presentation will focus on how religious fundamentalisms and misogynous cultural traditions influence these practices, and how women and their male allies are fighting to eliminate them.

## Building Community *(continued from Page 1)*

If so, how will we find common ground? Are our missions in sync, or do we need to discuss what we each hope to accomplish in this new setting where we are at least rubbing elbows, if not yet sharing activities? If we need to explore these questions, in what format can we do so? Our strategic planning is designed to focus on ESB, but as we move forward, we will need to build broader communication strategies. Change is difficult, but we must carefully consider future directions to expand our possibilities. Having the "Hub" in which to convene may be a sound solution, but we likely will need to change our thinking as well as our location to survive among the communities it will draw.

### Hospitality and Refreshment Schedule

Those who come to the Sunday platform meeting are asked to contribute some food item to the refreshment table, according to the first letter of their last name.

Week 1	Sunday, March 2	A - C
Week 2	Sunday, March 9	D - K
Week 3	Sunday, March 16	L - O
Week 4	Sunday, March 23	P - Z

### The Ethical Movement

The Society is affiliated with other Ethical societies through the American Ethical Union. Variants of the following statement are widely used in the Movement to describe its purpose:

*Ethical Culture is a humanistic religious and educational movement working to create a better world through ethical actions. We are dedicated to the ideal that the highest value is human worth and that our relationships to each other are of greatest ethical concern. Our commitment is to the worth and dignity of the individual and to treating each human being so as to bring out the best in him or her. Members join together in ethical societies to assist each other in developing ethical ideas and ideals...to celebrate life's joys and support each other through life's crises.*

## Information About the Society

### Officers for 2013/2014

President	Andrea Perrault	(781) 593-5794
Vice President	Ingrid Kisliuk	(617) 332-7109
Treasurer	Terry Goldzier	(617) 232-7704
Secretary	Margo Woods	(781) 646-6059

### Other Board Members

Donald Aharonian, Peter Ames,  
Cathy Haskell, Fred Hewett

Archivist	Brian King	(781) 581-6104
Caring Committee	Marline Miller	(617) 244-1471
Ethical Action	Margo Woods	(781) 646-6059
Membership		
Music	Ingrid Kisliuk Izabella Mazhbits	(617) 332-7109 (617) 731-1089
Newsletter	Fred Hewett Martha Werman	(617) 945-0396 (617) 497-7888
Officiant	Katrina Scott	(617) 965-3067
Open/Close Words	Betty Latner	(617) 277-7122
Program Comm.	Andrea Perrault	(781) 593-5794
Publicity	John Lampert	(617) 923-8550
Finance Committee		
Sunday Bulletin	Susan Caulfield	(617) 547-6085
Website	Fred Hewett	(617) 945-0396

### Groups Around the Society

Book Group	Mildred Siegel	(617) 731-4829
Movie Group	Marline Miller	(617) 244-1471
Walking Group	Doris Berger	(617) 277-1839
9:30 Forum	Carolyn Nalbandian	(617) 268-0814

E-mail [bostonethical@Verizon.net](mailto:bostonethical@Verizon.net) for all print and e-mail newsletter requests (subscriptions, changes and cancellations)

**Website: [www.bostonethical.org](http://www.bostonethical.org)**



<b>~ Program Schedule for March 2014 ~</b> <i>(Details on Page 6)</i>	
<b>March 2</b>	<b>Barbara Dougan</b> <i>Drug Sentencing Laws: The Movement for Justice (and Sanity)</i>
<b>March 9</b>	<b>Gillian Mason</b> <i>RAISE UP Massachusetts</i>
<b>March 16</b>	<b>Rosalind Williams</b> <i>The Triumph of Human Empire</i>
<b>March 23</b>	<b>To be announced</b> <i>Check the website for updates</i>
<b>March 30</b>	<b>Andrea Barron</b> <i>Combatting Religious Fundamentalisms and Misogynous Cultural Traditions</i>
<b>Sunday Meetings are held at 10:00, 30 JFK Street, Cambridge, MA</b>	

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