

# The Ethical Humanist

Newsletter of the  
**Boston Ethical Community**  
Ethical Society of Boston  
MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

Volume 60, No. 10

Summer 2015

## Capping Off a Season on Climate Change and the Environment

*Fred Hewett*

**O**ur speaker on June 7, 2015 will be Susan Solomon, who is Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Science at MIT. Her topic is "On the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change".



A highly regarded climate scientist, Professor Solomon will reflect on the ethical problems related to cumulative carbon emissions.

If you've been attending meetings in the 2014-2015 season, you're aware that there has been a conscious effort to explore the issue of climate change in some depth.

Starting back in October, Ben Hellerstein of *Environment*

*Massachusetts* gave us a progress report on the advances of solar energy around the state, and on the grassroots efforts to build the solar movement.

In November, we had Professor Sue Stafford of MIT, who is an activist with the *Mothers Out Front*. Professor Stafford's talk built a strong case for why we are morally obligated to combat climate change.

Also in November, Fred Gordon spoke on climate-friendly architecture in Boston.

In January, Professor Kerry Emanuel of MIT gave a brilliant overview of the state of climate science.

Our Humanist of the Year, Zygmunt Plater, spoke in April on his 30-year career in pursuit of environmental justice.

In May, students from Divest Harvard gave an excellent presentation of the movement at Harvard to divest the University's holdings in fossil fuels.

All together, these programs have raised our awareness and increased our knowledge of this crucial issue. Our thanks to all the speakers who participated in this series.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

## An Extended Summer Hiatus

*Brian King*

Unfortunately, we are losing our space again. The Humanist Hub has received funding to expand their programming for children and families and they need the space we have been using on Sunday mornings. They have also recently announced that they will be developing a curriculum for nonreligious and interfaith families with the Center for Earth Ethics, so we wish them well.

This happens to come at a turning point for the Boston Ethical Community. The board is recommending to the membership that we take this time to re-evaluate our programming and activities. Once we have decided how we want to move ahead, we will then make arrangements for new space.

What this means is that this may be the last newsletter for a few months, that we won't be coming back to 30 JFK Street, and that most likely we will not be starting up again this year with our regular September dates. However, please do watch for the return of our newsletter with announcements of our new schedule and, as always, go to [bostonethical.org](http://bostonethical.org) for the latest and most up-to-date information.



## The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

### Freedom and Power

**F**reedom, or liberty, is the central ethical value in American public life. It's in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, in famous speeches like the Gettysburg address and FDR's Four Freedoms speech, on our monuments such as the Liberty Bell and the Statue of Liberty, on our coins, on military actions such as Operation Iraqi Freedom (not Liberty, which would generate an embarrassing acronym), in the slogans of civil rights activists, in the names of groups on the left and right like the American Civil Liberties Union and FreedomWorks, and in the (mis)characterization of our economy as "free enterprise".

Freedom is always freedom for someone to do, or or not do, something. You're not free to do something if you must do it. For example, freedom of religion must include freedom to not be religious. When people on opposing sides of an issue use the term "freedom" they mean freedom for different people to do different things.

In human relations, power is the ability to get other people to do what one wants them to do. I have identified eight kinds of power (If you know of others, I'd appreciate it if you would let me know.) Five of

these--violence, political power, economic power, manipulative ideological power, and social disapproval, are antagonistic. The other three--love, respect, and moral example, are benign.

Violence is of many kinds--schoolyard bullying, domestic abuse, sexual sadism, crime, police, prison guard, and mob violence, and warfare. The purpose of violence is murder and/or terrorism. Violence is the underlying basis for other kinds of antagonistic power.

Political power is the ability to make laws that others must obey even if they don't want to. Laws must be enforced, and the heart of enforcement is force

Economic power is the consequence of political power. It is law that gives people control of their property and of their money, which originates from government. The primary use of economic power, for those who have more than they need for the current and future maintenance of their and their families' lives, is to obtain more of it.

Manipulative ideological power is carried on through preaching, propaganda, and advertising. It surrounds us every moment of our waking lives. It tells us what to think,

feel, do, and especially want. It's most effective when it's invisible. For example, women bleach and straighten their hair. Why? They have been led to believe that straight blond hair is beautiful, and hair that isn't straight or blond isn't. The means by which this manipulation occurs are the infotainment media.

Social disapproval is power because we are social beings. It was illustrated in "The Scarlet Letter". Excommunication and shunning are examples.

These antagonistic kinds of power are interrelated and interconnected. People obtain political power through warfare. Others buy it through corruption. Propaganda leads the public to support military budgets.

On the benign side of power, love is powerful. It's why adults take care of babies. We're genetically programmed to love babies. If we weren't, our species would have become extinct long ago.

We stand in line at checkout counters and yield to pedestrians and at red lights out of respect for others as well as for the laws.

*Continued on Page 4*

## Our Shameful History

Peter Denison

President George W. Bush was both disappointed and puzzled. Why didn't the Iraqi people express more gratitude? He had overthrown the vicious dictator Saddam Hussein, had him executed, and established democracy, and all they expressed was anger and hatred. True, our country had killed thousands of Iraqis, bombed their country so severely that electricity, water supplies, other utilities, were seriously crippled and did not return to full capacity for several years. Then in the chaos that followed we killed more thousands. After all his good intentions!

Our former president did not know the true history of our foreign policies for the last century and more. He is not the only one. More than 99% of Americans, at least those who are Caucasian, have no idea of our shameful history. They should read the book by Steven Kinzer, *OVERTHROWN: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. 2006. Kinzer details how Americans hijacked Hawaii from the indigenous people there and persuaded President McKinley to accept it as a territory. In the Spanish-American War we "liberated" Cuba and then imposed a president friendly to our business interests, did

the same to Puerto Rico, and spent four years conquering the Philippines, killing 200,000 in the process. Theodore Roosevelt induced an independence movement in Panama to take it away from Colombia so that we could build the Panama Canal. When in 1909 President Zelaya of Nicaragua tried to be independent of our country, William Howard Taft forced him out of office and into exile. Subsequent Nicaraguan presidents kowtowed to American business, oppressed their own people, and were regarded by us as democratic, i.e., subservient to American corporations.

More recently President Eisenhower in 1953 overthrew the democratically elected Mossadegh in Iran, beginning a harsh dictatorship by the Shah ending in the Islamic revolution of 1979. Then in 1954 he did the same to President Arbenz of Guatemala, suspected of being pro-Communist because he tried to control United Fruit. Then followed several decades of dictatorship and civil war, not really settled even now. Our interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine seemed to be that all Latin American countries should be subservient to the United States. Then on September 11, 1973 President Nixon used the CIA to overthrow and kill Salvador Allende, the

socialist president of Chile, followed by General Pinochet's bloody dictatorship. The Chileans remember an earlier and really more bloody 9/11!

Kinzer's book gives details of these regime changes, and a few others not mentioned above. The book is well written and seems to be well documented. The various chapters often turned to be page turners, the reader often wishing that our country's project will fail, only to be disappointed. He does not deal with the question as to why all these presidents (and of course their associates and advisors) behaved in such an imperialist manner. As many of these presidents showed greatness in other areas, as in the domestic policies of both Roosevelts, our policies do not seem the work of evil people. Perhaps Karl Marx's concept of historical materialism offers some explanation.

Anyway our nation's behavior is unlikely to change until more Americans have a true understanding of our history. The people of these foreign countries have a better understanding of our history than our white majority. Very likely there is a better understanding in our minority groups. We have a long way to go. American history needs a lot of revision before Americans will understand why so many hate us. It is not because they hate democracy; it is because we have perverted it.

## Marvin Miller (continued from page 2)

When people take an action on behalf of what they regard as morally right, like the marches and sit-ins of the civil rights movement, they set an example followed by others, which can lead to the kind of social change they want.

Often the power of some limits the freedom of others. Employers use economic power to keep workers from freely associating in unions. Segregation laws limit where people can go. Minority religions and political groups are sometimes suppressed.

Understanding freedom and power is necessary in order to use them for the benefit of human welfare.

## Sunday Lectures in June

June 7

**Susan Solomon, Professor of Climate Science, MIT**

*On the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change*



This talk reviews key aspects of climate change that are linked to values as well as science. Dr. Solomon has made major contributions to understanding the irreversible nature of climate change due to carbon dioxide and the importance of cumulative historic emissions. She will discuss both the science and her view of some of the ethical issues surrounding climate change.

June 14

**Program to be announced**

## Musicians for June

**June 7th:** David Salstein, piano;  
Jane Pollack, flute

**The poor are no longer with us**

*No one's poor any longer. Listen to politicians. They mourn the middle class which is shrinking as we watch in the mirror. The poor have been*

*discarded already into the oblivion pail of not to be spoken words. They are as lepers were treated once, to be shipped off to fortified islands*

*of the mind to rot quietly. If poverty is a disease, quarantine its victims. If it's a social problem imprison them behind high walls.*

*Maybe it's genetic; how often they catch easily preventable diseases. Feed them fast garbage and they'll die before their care can cost you,*

*of heart attacks, stroke. Provide cheap guns and they'll kill each other well out of your sight. Ghettos are such dangerous places.*

*Give them schools that teach them how stupid they are. But always pretend they don't exist because they don't buy enough,*

*spend enough, give you bribes or contributions. No ad target their feeble credit. They are not real people like corporations.*

From Made in Detroit, Marge Piercy, 2015

## *Finding the Words*

*Dahlia, larkspur; earlier  
forsythia, dazzling, golden, hides  
peeping purple hyacinth, cream narcissus.*

*Soil, crumbly, cool, sifts through our fingers.*

*Peony, petunia, clematis climbing.  
Trellises of language: sweet alyssum, paper whites.*

*Arnold Arboretum, long walks along a century of cultivars.  
Beauty luxuriant, scents unveiled.  
Spring's brief moment of all delights, lilacs.*

**Elaine Montleigh**

### **On Corporate Rule**

*Michael Bleiweiss*

*Editor's Note: Michael has contributed this in reference to issues discussed by Zygmunt Plater.*

There is an exhibit at Lawrence General Hospital on avoiding cancer-causing chemicals and endocrine disruptors. Good luck with that! Our consumer products and food are loaded with them. Shampoo, soap, and body washes are full of chemicals called cocamides and sodium laurel sulfate -- all suspected carcinogens. Cleaning products are made with chemicals that can kill you outright. Plastic containers are made with endocrine disrupting phthalates and biphenyls to make them flexible.

Going on to food, meat has hormones and antibiotics. Prepared foods are made with chemicals most people cannot pronounce. If you want to go

lower on the food chain toward "healthier" foods, produce is covered with pesticides and genetically modified in ways we don't yet know the effects of. Indeed, there are some 6,000 artificial chemicals used in food and consumer products, only a handful of which have ever been tested for safety.

How can this be? These chemicals give products properties the producers think consumers want and lower their cost of production. In America's loose regulatory environment (contrary to what some politicians assert), chemicals are presumed safe until proven otherwise. Manufacturers have no incentive to test them and government agencies do not have the resources to do so, exacerbated by deliberately tight budgets designed to prevent them from "over-regulating." We should be practicing the "precautionary

principle" that a chemical must be proven safe before it can be deployed into the environment.

However, the corporations making these products are constantly lobbying, bribing (oops, making campaign contributions to), and extorting (with the threat of funding an opponent) elected officials to make sure that this does not happen. As a consequence, money gets its way with the government over citizens' interests.

The only way to even begin to fix this is to get corporate money out of our government and elections. Thanks to 130 years of Supreme Court decisions thwarting any attempts to do this, it can only be accomplished by amending the Constitution to unequivocally state that corporations are not real people and do not have an inherent right to spend money on politics or politicians.

~ Program Schedule for June 2015 ~  
 (Details on Page 4)

<p align="center"><b>June 7</b></p>	<p align="center">Susan Solomon, Professor of Climate Science, MIT  <i>On the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change</i></p>
<p align="center"><b>June 14</b></p>	<p align="center">Program to be announced  <i>Check the website – <a href="http://bostonethical.org">bostonethical.org</a></i></p>
<p align="center"><b>Sunday Meetings are held at 10:00 AM at 30 JFK St in Cambridge</b></p>	

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