



The Ethical Humanist

Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston
MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

Volume 61, No. 1

September-October 2015

What's New in our 60th Anniversary Season

Brian King

This year we have a lot of changes to announce. The first is certainly our new space and meeting time (or is it our *old* space and meeting time?). We are moving back to the Longy School of Music at **33 Garden Street** in Cambridge, and back to our old starting time of **10:30 AM** every Sunday morning. We first moved to the Longy School twenty years ago and met there for many years before we started our nomadic quest for new meeting space. We are all hoping for some stability now, and plan on staying put this time.

The 10:30 starting time means we are moving everything half an hour later, so the early-bird current events discussion group will start at 9:30.

Perhaps more important are the changes we are making to our programming. We are considering this an experimental year and we will make changes throughout the year based upon feedback and results we get early on.

We are starting the year with alternative programs every

other week. One week we will have our usual outside speaker presenting their talk followed by a question and answer with the speaker. On alternate weeks we will experiment with different formats, all of which are



intended to involve more discussion among ourselves and to build our sense of community.

As the year goes on, we'll try more things and see what works for us and what doesn't. The one thing that will not change however is that we will have something every week at the same time and place. For those of you who are on autopilot Sunday mornings, that means you can just get yourself there and be ready for anything.

On September 27 we will kick off our alternative programming with a discussion of what it means to be a community and how to build community. Everyone can share their ideas for the types of programming that will help us accomplish that.

Lastly, the board has decided that during our experimental

60th anniversary season we will not be soliciting financial contributions from our members and friends. While the Treasurer will continue to accept checks, we suggest that you make your contributions to more needy organizations and of course remember to bring in refreshments to share on your assigned weeks, or whichever weeks work for you.

Ture Turnbull, Executive Director of Mass-Care to Speak on September 20

Single-payer health care is an issue that has engaged members of our community for a long time. Here in Massachusetts, the organization known as Mass-Care (masscare.org) has made the realization of single-payer health care their sole mission.

We are very pleased to announce that Mass-Care's distinguished Executive Director, Ture Turnbull, will be the season's opening speaker on September 20. Please join us for an important and informative talk and discussion.



The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Ethical

For a community with "Ethical" in its name, we don't spend much time talking about what we mean by "ethical".

Ethics is about good and bad, right and wrong, what we ought and ought not to do.

There's no such thing as absolute, universal good. Good is always good for someone or something. What's good for the owl is bad for the mouse.

The concept of good is relevant only for living organisms. It makes no sense with respect to inanimate objects.

Living organisms are future-oriented. We can distinguish living from non-living entities by observing that living organisms act, via internally generated processes, in the interest of their survival and that of their species. Changes in non-living entities result from purposeless natural forces.

From a human viewpoint, good is what's good for humans. So, according to Plato, Socrates thought that good is what preserves and bad is what destroys. For people, "preserves" and "destroys" mean preserves or

destroys people. He didn't think that good related to pleasure and pain, but we know that pleasure is associated with what's beneficial, like a drink of water when we're thirsty, and pain is associated with injury and illness.

Of course we know that some things can be both good and bad. Too much of a good thing can be bad, as, for example, food or medicine.

The dictionary tells us that "ought" is related to "owe" and "own". It's a social word. We begin learning about what we ought and ought not to do from those around us, beginning at birth. We learn that what we ought to do is what we expect will please those who are important to us. Later in life we may develop more complex and abstract ideas about how to decide what we ought to do.

As the American Ethical Union's statement of principles tells us, ethics begins with choice. "Ought" is meaningless unless there are possible alternatives.

Religions are large, complex sets of ideas, institutions, and practices. All religions tell us what we ought to do. Some of these directives are generally applicable to all societies.

Examples are the Three Commandments: don't commit murder, theft or perjury. Others are specific to a particular religion: don't worship idols or eat during daylight during Ramadan. From a humanistic perspective, the universally applicable commandments are beneficial to individuals and to humanity generally. The ones specific to a particular religion benefit that religion as an institution, but may or may not benefit its adherents, let alone humanity as a whole.

All religions originated in particular places among small groups of people. Some of them have expanded to claim universal validity. These have come into conflict with one another and with smaller groups, leading to war and other harmful practices. Religion-based ideas about what one ought to do have often led to harmful effects, such as crusades, jihads, "Troubles", etc.

Over time many, though not enough, of us have learned that our welfare and that of our descendants depend on that of everyone else, and of the environment that sustains us all. The future of the world depends on people being, in the humanistic sense, ethical.

Letter in Support of Compassionate Aid in Dying

Following a vote by the Board, the letter below is submitted on behalf of the Boston Ethical Community in support of legislation for assisted dying in Massachusetts.

October 28, 2015

The Honorable Representative Kate Hogan
Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
MA State House, Room 130
Beacon Hill, MA 02118

Dear Representative Hogan:

The Board of Trustees of the Boston Ethical Community wishes to convey to you and to the members of the Joint Committee on Health Care that we enthusiastically support House Bill 1991. We urge you and your colleagues on the Committee to support this bill that seeks to endow Massachusetts' residents with an option to address end of life issues with compassion and choice.

The Boston Ethical Community (BEC) is a humanistic and educational movement inspired by the ideal that the ultimate aim of human life is working to create a more humane society. BEC has been active in Massachusetts for over 60 years, as part of the Ethical Culture movement that began in the 1870s. BEC may align with social issues it deems critical to the betterment of society and to the individuals of that society. We support the issue of ensuring death with dignity as determined by the conscious decision-making of those facing imminent terminal illness. We believe that the HB 1991 does so, and includes important safeguards to ensure that an individual with an imminent terminal condition has the sole ability to determine such action for him or herself.

This spring, many of our members have signed statements of support for HB 1991 to submit to their representatives in the MA House and Senate. We will attend the hearing at the State House on October 27th; we know that supporters of this bill will offer compelling testimony, as they did in 2013. We urge you to listen to their facts and personal stories, and honor their commitment with your support.

The examples of Oregon and Washington in making such an option available are important to consider and we encourage you to investigate those experiences. The brave struggle of Brittany Maynard faced a devastating illness and who, with her family, made this choice to ensure her peaceful end, is also compelling. We believe that the tide is turning, and as baby boomers age, assist their parents with medical needs in old age, and face their own aging, they will advocate for and demand a kinder, more compassionate end-of-life. This bill must be brought to the wider population in Massachusetts for discussion and debate. The time is NOW!

We urge you to report HB 1991 favorably out of committee to ensure that the important public dialogue on this issue can continue. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brian King, President
Boston Ethical Community (on behalf of the BEC Board of Trustees)

Report on the 2015 AEU Assembly

Michael Bleiweiss

This past June I attended the annual Assembly of our parent organization, the American Ethical Union (AEU), held this year in Stamford, CT. As usual, it was four very intense days of workshops, meetings, speeches, and networking. This is a report on the major actions taken there and some items that we might find useful here in Boston.

The core reason for the Assemblies is the business meeting, where we vote on ethical action resolutions, elect board members, and pass the budget for the coming year. We passed resolutions renewing our call for the elimination of nuclear weapons, lifting the expired deadline for ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment, and calling for criminal justice reform.

As always, there were also many workshops on organizational development, ethical action, and Ethical Culture philosophy and practice. This year's focus was on sustainability – of both the environment and Ethical Culture.

I attended the following workshops:

Attracting Young Adults to Ethical Culture Societies:

This focused on providing Platform topics and activities geared to toward younger people such as volunteer opportunities and (role-playing) games nights.

Promoting Ethical and Spiritual Growth in Small Groups:

The Leader Emeritus of the Long Island Society, Arthur Dobrin, discussed his two main initiatives: Colloquy, and the Ethics Project – a series of short videos presenting ethical dilemmas for discussion.

Stir it Up! Grassroots Organizing for Change:

This was presented by Juanita Lewis of Community Voices Heard (New York City) about their program to build relationships with and between people in (disadvantaged) communities to prevent oppression by the powers that be.

Environmental / Climate Justice – What Is It, Who Needs It, and How Can I Help:

Pat Almonrode of 350NYC gave a history of the climate movement, international agreements, and their failures.

Other workshops that I was not able to attend were:

- Caring Economics
- Stop Planting Trees (and Build a Real Sustainable Community)

- The Ethical and Financial Imperatives for Fossil Fuel Divestment
- Neighbors Link – Educate, Empower, and Employ
- Consumer and Environmental Well-Being: a Surprising Compatibility
- Worker Cooperatives – Past, Present, and Future
- Theater of the Oppressed – New York City
- Growing and Sustaining Ethical Education for Children
- Appreciative Inquiry: an Ethical Practice of Collaborative Change
- Ethical Aging
- Tips from the Trenches

The day before the Assembly attendees visited Neighborhood Link in Stamford. They provide programs to assist low income immigrants to integrate into American society. This includes: English lessons, computer training, homework assistance, drivers license training, and job training.

Friday evening, the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester hosted a performance by the singer Honor Finnegan. She performed an eclectic mix of folk, romantic, and satirical songs.

The Sunday platform was given by Anne Klaeyson

(Leader of the New York Society) and James Croft (Leader intern at St. Louis). Anne reviewed the origins of Ethical Culture from Felix Adler and our subsequent evolutions, such as women becoming Leaders. James made a call to return to our activist roots and related the St. Louis Society's participation in the Ferguson, MO "Black Lives Matter" protests.

The National Ethical Service (NES) is the AEU's non-governmental organization (NGO) at the United Nations. They work for human rights around the world. This year, their keynote speaker was Susan Alzner from the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN NGLS) who spoke about her work to secure woman and youth speakers for the UN World Climate Summit.

This year's keynote address was given by Ami Dar, the founder of Idealist.org, a job posting web site for non-profits. He spoke about how to address the problem of bringing good people together who want positive change, but don't necessarily know the best way to do so.

The Elliott-Black Award is given to a person who has devoted his/her life to advancing humanist values, often at personal risk. This year's award was given to Sandra Steingraber for her work in preventing fracking in New York state and the

storage of toxic oil under the pristine Seneca Lake.

Book Review: Stephen Jenkinson's *Die Wise*

Martha Werman

I first heard of Stephen Jenkinson after I had decided to "help people die", as part of my continuing education as an energy healer. I had read the work of Stephen Levine on the subject, and also taken a course in Dying Consciously to this effect but aside from the original work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross I was ignorant of the growing possibilities to be of service in this field. This was a year ago.

In the meantime, the movement for greater consciousness of death and dying has grown considerably, and with it the publication of Jenkinson's newest book, *Die Wise*.

Jenkinson's qualifications in serving as program director for Palliative and Hospice care at a major Canadian hospital (for 20 years) were several: Master in Theology from Harvard, Master in Social Work from University of Toronto, Assistant professor at a medical school. In his recently published book "Die Wise" he entertains the reader with stories of how the medical and hospital staffs he worked with would persist in denial regarding telling the dying the truth about their condition. In *Die Wise* he raises significant questions

about the commonly held view of the "death trade" by the very people employed in the medical and social professions.

Here is a quote from the jacket cover of *Die Wise*:

"Dying well, Jenkinson writes, is a right and responsibility of everyone. It is not a lifestyle opinion. It is a moral, political and spiritual obligation each person owes their ancestors and their heirs. *Die Wise* dreams such a dream, and plots such an uprising. How we die, how we care for dying people, and how we carry our dead: this work makes our capacity for a village-mindedness, or breaks it."

In his lecture, and in his book, from which he would at times read, Jenkinson creates interesting images with his words. After sitting through his 2 hour lecture, I felt I had taken a lesson in hearing what people are REALLY saying. One of his repeated exclamations was "Are there any adults here?" (rhetorical meaning; adults are reasonable and can face situations with clarity.)

We can catch him at Lexington Community Education on December 7th.

He is also teaching at Rowe Center December 4-6. The Canadian Film Board made an excellent film about his work entitled "*Griefwalker*" (see Amazon prime video).

Sunday Programs in September and October 2015

September 20



Ture Turnbull, Executive Director, Mass-Care

Single-Payer Health Care

Ture Turnbull has a distinguished record of public and non-profit service. Prior to becoming the Executive Director of Mass-Care, he was Commissioner at Massachusetts Commission on GLBT. In addition, he has served as Jamaica Plain Liaison for Boston City Councilor Matt O'Malley, and as Legislative Director for Representative Denise Garlick.

Mr. Turnbull will bring us up to date on what is happening with single-payer health care in Massachusetts, and offer ideas on how we can help to advance the cause.

September 27

Brian King, President, Boston Ethical Community

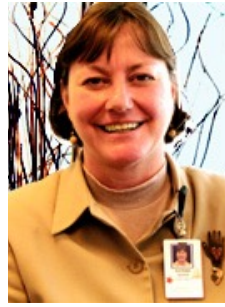
On Building Our Community



BEC President Brian King will lead a discussion on why we are experimenting with new formats on Sunday mornings, what we are trying to accomplish, and your ideas for what you would like to see. Earlier this year we changed our name to the Boston Ethical

Community, so let's talk about what it means to be a community, and how we we can make it happen.

October 4



Katrina Scott, MDiv, BCC-HPCC, Massachusetts General Hospital

Katrina Scott is an Ethical Culture officiant and an Oncology Chaplain at Massachusetts General Hospital. She will offer a presentation and lead a discussion about the current state of end-of-life care, and touch on many of the issues that terminal patients are facing today.

October 11

Semi-annual Members' Meeting

Members are urged to attend this important meeting to discuss the status of our community and make plans for the coming year. The meeting begins at 10:30 AM.

October 18

Compassion and Choices

Our speaker (name unavailable at this writing) will talk about a bill currently in the Massachusetts legislature that would make assisted dying legal in our state.

October 25

Boston Book Festival

BBF

This year, the annual Boston Book Festival's chosen short story for the "One City One Story" initiative is Jennifer De Leon's "*Home Movie*". (You can download a free copy of the story at <http://www.bostonbookfest.org/attend/1c1s>. Copies will also be available at meetings on the weeks prior to the 25th. Read the story ahead of time, and we will gather for a discussion.

Information About the Society

Officers for 2014-2015

President	Brian King	(781) 581-6104
Vice President	Michael Bleiweiss	(978) 689-2874
Treasurer	Terry Goldzier	(617) 232-7704
Secretary	Andrea Perrault	(781) 593-5794

Other Board Members

Donald Aharonian, Peter Ames,
Cathy Haskell, Fred Hewett, Martha Werman

Archivist	Brian King	(781) 581-6104
Caring Committee	Marline Miller	(617) 244-1471
Ethical Action	Michael Bleiweiss	(978) 689-2874
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
Program Comm.	Andrea Perrault	(781) 593-5794
Publicity	John Lampert	(617) 923-8550
Finance Committee		
Sunday Bulletin		
Website	Fred Hewett	(617) 945-0396

The Ethical Movement

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.

Hospitality and Refreshment Schedule

Sunday attendees are asked to contribute some food item to the refreshment table, according to the first letter of their last name.

Week 3	Sunday, September 20	L - R
Week 4	Sunday, September 27	S - Z
Week 1	Sunday, October 4	A - F
Week 2	Sunday, October 11	G - K
Week 3	Sunday, October 18	L - R
Week 4	Sunday, October 25	S - Z

E-mail newsletter@bostonethical.org for all print and e-mail newsletter requests (subscriptions, changes and cancellations)

Website: bostonethical.org

Facebook: [facebook.com/bostonethical](https://www.facebook.com/bostonethical)

Twitter: twitter.com/bostonethical

~ Program Schedule for September-October 2015 ~	
Sept 20	Ture Turnbull, Executive Director, Mass-Care <i>Single-payer health care</i>
Sept 27	Brian King, President, Boston Ethical Community <i>On Building Our Community</i>
October 4	Katrina Scott, Oncology Chaplain, Massachusetts General Hospital
October 11	Semi-Annual Members' Meeting
October 18	Compassion and Choices <i>On pending legislation to enable assisted dying</i>
October 25	Boston Book Festival – One City One Story <i>Jennifer De Leon's short story "Home Movie"</i>
Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge	

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