



# The Ethical Humanist

## Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

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### Here's Something New

*Fred Hewett*

**B**oston Ethical Community is rolling out a new and important initiative. It's an initiative that's going to have an impact on the wider community, and it's going to change how we think about the organization.

To understand this new idea, first consider one of our core values — ethical action. Serving the community has been one of the Ethical Society's hallmarks throughout its history. Unfortunately, we've faltered in the past few years. As an organization, we've failed to deliver on the Society's commitment to act cohesively in service to the greater good. That's not to suggest that many individuals haven't given their time and money to important causes. They certainly have. But we've failed to take action as a community with energy and conviction.

The solution is to outsource our ethical action efforts. That means we'll make grants to

other organizations who share our values and can deliver services effectively. At its January meeting, the Board voted unanimously to make a grant in 2016, in an amount up to \$10,000. The process of setting up a grantmaking program and identifying our first grantee will take some time, but that's where we're headed.

By launching a grantmaking program, we are choosing to leverage our financial capital in service to our mission. Because we have the funds, we can support more activism than the membership could ever produce on its own. What's more, most of the causes we'd like to support require special skills that we lack. Enabling others to do that work makes sense.

This raises the question of how an organization with limited income can reasonably adopt a policy of giving away its assets. The Board realizes it isn't sustainable in the long term. We also realize that this is a unique point in the 60-year history of the organization. Our membership

is aging, attendance at Sunday meetings is down, and pledges have dropped off. Members are less able to take on projects. Our efforts at publicity and recruiting have not yielded the results we'd hoped for. But despite all that, our financial condition is sound. Using some of our money creatively to sponsor worthy projects in the community doesn't seem all that risky, given our darkened horizons.

The exciting part is that, in the process of empowering deserving non-profits to implement excellent projects, we'll generate ample goodwill towards our organization. If we act wisely, we can use that goodwill to grow. We'll be more engaged and more visible in the wider community. Members of the organizations with whom we're working will be curious to know more about us. And we'll be cultivating organizational expertise in philanthropy, which could serve us well in the future.

*Continued on page 4*



## The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

### Education: STEM and Testing

**W**hat is education?  
What is it for?

*Who* is it for?

These questions are rarely raised explicitly, but they deserve serious consideration.

Education is the acquisition of information, skills, and attitudes. As soon as we say what education is, other questions immediately arise: Which information? Which skills? Which attitudes? Who decides the answers to these questions? On what criteria are these answers based?

Schools are not the primary institutions of education in contemporary society; the media of mass communication are. But schools are important educational institutions. The push for schools to emphasize STEM implicitly assumes certain answers to the above questions.

The "E" in STEM doesn't stand for Ethics. STEM is science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. To emphasize STEM rather than, say, ethics, music, political economics, or history, is to assume that education is for the purpose of providing (at public expense)

to the future workforce (or that part of it most desired by future employers) information, skills, and attitudes that future employers will want them to have. This is often framed as for the benefit of the children, improving their ability to get better jobs. The implicit assumption is that it is the duty of the people to make themselves into the human resources needed by businesses, rather than, say, an alternative view, that it is the duty of businesses to provide goods and services



and meaningful work opportunities that the people need and want. Education is job training, not, for example, the development of responsible citizens of a democratic society.

How often in life after school have we encountered a situation requiring us to find the square root of a number? How often have we encountered a situation where

we are subjected to deception in commercial or political advertising? Which of these situations should education prepare us for? Which of these situations does education prepare us for?

The purpose of a test is to determine whether the person being tested has learned what was intended to be taught. The only legitimate function of a test, from the point of view of the student, is to determine what additional instruction that student needs. But testing is used for different purposes: to

classify students as faster or slower learners, to stigmatize the latter as failures, and, recently, to stigmatize teachers, principals, and schools where there are too many slower

learners. The effect of a high-stakes test is to drill into people's minds the idea that what's tested is important and what isn't tested isn't important. That leaves a lot out.

The question of how children ought to be educated is an ethical question. Our answers will depend on how we answer the questions raised at the beginning of this article.

## On Scalia's View on the Role of Religion

*Michael Bleiweiss*

*Editor's note:* In a recent speech, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia made the assertion that the US Constitution permits the government to favor religion over non-religion. The following is a response from BEC member Michael Bleiweiss.

In his eagerness to push his fundamentalist Christian ideology onto everyone, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia reveals that he is not much of a Constitutional scholar.

He shows either a severe lack of understanding of the Constitution or a cavalier disregard for its position on religion. Article VI explicitly states that there shall be no religious test for public office, the 1st Amendment clearly forbids an official national religion, and the 14th demands equal treatment under the law for everyone. The surest way to ensure that is to have no religion at all in any of our government institutions. Yet, he persists in trying to establish the Judeo-Christian God as our national patron.

Scalia excludes the 25% of our population who have either no religious affiliation or non-monotheistic faiths.

Finally, his belief in divine providence has a counterpart -- the Islamic terrorists have the same belief that God is on their side.

## The Presidential Race

*Andrea Perrault*

Last week, I had a chance to hear a rebroadcast interview with Robert Reich on Boston Public Radio addressing his newly published book, "Saving Capitalism for the Many, Not the Few". I had initially been impressed with his analysis of U.S. society's economic woes, and his discussion of its extreme income inequality and the implications of such among the population overall. Lately, I see that he is taking his argument further on the Huffington Post by integrating it into his thoughts about the 2016 presidential race. This is a welcome addition to the public discussion on economic inequality and how it is strangling our economy and the vast majority of the American population.

Reich begins his book by citing John Taylor in *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States (1814)*: "There are two modes of invading private property; the first, by which the poor plunder the rich....sudden and violent; the second, by which the rich plunder the poor, slow and legal." - an apt commentary on current economic reality in the U.S.

Reich dissects our economic situation and how it came to be by discussing the current reality in three overarching

categories: 1) the Free Market, 2) Work and Worth, and 3) Countervailing Power. Through his detailed thoughts on these areas, Reich identifies how the social contract that in prior generations built a more solid, grounded society, has been replaced by a gnawing lack of confidence in our economy, and an undermining lack of trust that it works for the good of all.

Reich reiterates his faith in an activist government that raises taxes on the wealthy, invests in education and other social services, and redistributes to the needy. While many believe in his priorities, he asserts that the increasing political power of the corporate and financial elite have influenced the rules by which our economy works.

Because political power can determine if this trend continues, the 2016 election for President of the United States is critical. Before you vote, consider reading Reich's book, and use it to inform your friends and colleagues on the best strategy to reclaim an economy that works "for the many, not the few".



**Fred Hewett**, *continued from page 1*

Grantmaking is not a panacea that solves all our problems, but it creates opportunities that wouldn't otherwise exist. The key will be executing effectively on those opportunities.

Over the next few months, there's a lot to be done. We'll start by laying out some guidelines that pin down the kinds of projects and organizations we want to sponsor. We'll probably need some legal advice. Before too long, we'll be receiving and evaluating proposals. And

before the end of 2016, we expect to be announcing the award of our first grant.

It's the start of something new for the Boston Ethical Community.

### Officers for 2015-2016

President	Brian King	(781) 581-6104
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Treasurer	Terry Goldzier	(617) 232-7704
Secretary	Andrea Perrault	(781) 593-5794

### Other Board Members

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Cathy Haskell, Fred Hewett, Martha Werman

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## Sunday Programs in February 2016

### February 7

**Heather Goldstone, Science Correspondent, WGBH/WCAI**



Heather Goldstone is the science editor at WCAI, the Cape and Islands NPR Station. She holds a Ph.D. in ocean science from M.I.T. and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, and spent a decade as an active researcher before

become a writer.

In her nine years with the Cape and Islands NPR Station, Goldstone has reported on Woods Hole's unique scientific community and key environmental issues on Cape Cod. Her reporting has appeared in venues ranging from NPR and PBS News Hour to The Cape Cod Times and Commercial Fishery News. Most recently, Goldstone hosted the blog [Climatide](#), an exploration of how climate change is impacting coastal life in the region.

### February 14

To be announced. Check the [website](#).

### February 21

To be announced. Check the [website](#).

### February 28

**Noah Beit-Aharon, Assistant Director of Activities, Maristhill Nursing & Rehabilitation Center**

*Combating Stigma in Nursing Home Care*

Noah will be discussing the destructive social stigmas that often isolate residents of nursing homes, and how to rethink our biases in a way that will make us and our loved ones happier and more fulfilled.



He also will talk about the important role activities play in nursing homes, assisted living, and other eldercare communities, from social and spiritual benefits to health benefits.

The way that our society views nursing homes — and especially the people in them — can be incredibly destructive to the well-being of those who have no choice but to be there, either for rehabilitation or for long-term care. The shame and stigma around requiring nursing home care contributes to feelings of loneliness and abandonment, and even raises the risk of abuse. In a country where a greater and greater share of the population is of retirement age or well past it, we need better, more ethical ways to think about nursing homes and their role in the community.

## Musicians for February

**February 7,** Katsuya Yuasa, Clarinet

**February 14,** Concordia Consort

**February 21,** Carolyn McCrone, flute; Marguerite Salajko, cello

**February 28,** David Salstein, piano; Jane Polack, flute.

~ Program Schedule for February 2016 ~	
<b>February 7</b>	Heather Goldstone, Science Correspondent, WGBH/WCAI <i>TBA</i>
<b>February 14</b>	To be announced. Please check <a href="http://www.bostonethical.org">www.bostonethical.org</a> .
<b>February 21</b>	To be announced. Please check <a href="http://www.bostonethical.org">www.bostonethical.org</a> .
<b>February 28</b>	Noah Beit-Aharon, Assistant Director of Activities, Maristhill Nursing & Rehabilitation Center <i>Combating Stigma in Nursing Home Care</i>
<b>Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge</b>	

<p><b>THE ETHICAL HUMANIST</b>                  Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community                  (617) 739-9050                  newsletter@bostonethical.org    www.bostonethical.org</p>	<p>Ethical Society of Boston                  Post Office Box 38-1934                  Cambridge, MA 02238                  Return Service Requested</p>
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