



The Ethical Humanist

Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

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Juliet Schor is Our 2016 Humanist of the Year

Fred Hewett

Boston Ethical Community is pleased to announce that **Juliet B. Schor** of Boston College is the 2016 Humanist of the Year. Schor will accept the award at our meeting on April 10, 2016.

Juliet Schor is a professor of Sociology at Boston College in Newton, MA. A graduate of Wesleyan University, Schor received her Ph.D. in economics from the University of Massachusetts. Prior to Boston College, Schor taught in the Department of Economics at Harvard University for 17 years.

In addition to her academic work, Schor has published extensively for general readers. Her 1992 book, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, was a national best-seller. This important volume examined the social currents underlying the increased working hours that Americans

experienced in the latter part of the 20th century.

Several other works that Schor has published since then have examined various aspects of American consumerism.



Her most recent book is *True Wealth*, which appeared in 2011. This book addresses two great challenges of our times. The first is our ecological crisis — climate destabilization and the running down of ecosystems around the world. The other is economic — the standard models of economic growth

are no longer sufficient to provide adequate employment as automation and globalization become more pervasive. *True Wealth* explores new visions of what a truly sustainable economy might look like.

Schor is currently on the advisory board of [The Center for the New American Dream](#), a program designed to improve well-being by inspiring and empowering all of us to shift the ways we consume.

Schor has received numerous awards for her work, including the Leontief Prize from the Global Development and Economics Institute at Tufts University in 2006 for expanding the frontiers of economic thought.

Since 1974, the BEC has awarded our [Humanist of the Year](#) award to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding service to society and have made contributions to the promotion and understanding of Humanism. We congratulate Juliet Schor and look forward to hosting her at BEC on April 10.



The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Charity

Religions tell people to be charitable. We all constantly get appeals from charities. The tax code offers a deduction for charitable contributions. What are we to think about charity?

Originally charity meant giving to the poor by people who are not poor. It therefore assumes that there are poor and non-poor people. This is true and always has been true, ever since prehistoric times when things became property. In a society characterized by scarcity, as most societies are and have been, it's necessarily true. But in a society characterized by abundance, which technological advance over the centuries has made possible, this assumption can be called into question. In our time and place, the existence of poverty is unnecessary, and therefore it is a moral blot on our society.

There was a time, in the 1960s, when our government recognized this, and the President declared a "war on poverty". Unfortunately, poverty won that war when the government undertook a shooting war in Vietnam,

relegating the "war on poverty" to the sidelines. Since then, eliminating poverty has not been an announced goal in political speech in this country.

Although it began as giving to the poor, charity has evolved over time. Often now it means giving to large wealthy institutions, such as churches, colleges, or hospitals. Such institutions often do good

“In our time and place, the existence of poverty is unnecessary, and therefore it is a moral blot on our society.”

work, but also often make self-aggrandizement a priority over their good work. The prices they charge for health care and education constitute barriers against fulfillment of their beneficent objectives.

In our society, in which relatively few people are super-rich, some of these super-rich people give large sums to charitable institutions. These institutions then come to depend on these donations

for their very existence. They are careful to avoid anything that might jeopardize the good will of their large donors. This gives the super-rich a major degree of control over these charitable institutions. It is known, for example, that the presence of carcinogenic chemicals and radiation in the environment is an important cause of cancer. But how much of the effort of anti-cancer institutions is directed toward removing such carcinogens from the environment, compared with their efforts to find cures or treatments for the cancers that do occur? Could this disparity have something to do with the fact that introducing the carcinogens into the environment is profitable and generates wealth for the actual or potential donors to the charitable institutions? How often do we see on PBS anything critical of the business or political practices of its large donors?

Relief of the effects of poverty or other forms of suffering is a valuable objective of charity. But another, perhaps more important objective is the elimination of their causes..

The Right Side of History

Peter Denison

Now that marriage equality has been sanctioned by the Supreme Court, we have read triumphalist calls that we are on the right side of history, with the implication that those on the other side should just desist and accept the inevitable. I have strong reservations about that statement. Long before it became fashionable, we at Ethical believed that our defense of the LGBTQ was just. Were we at that time on the wrong side of history? Should we have given up? No, when every referendum on the subject was going the other way, we still supported the ethical side.

Actually, through most of our lives, or at least mine, we have been used to being on the wrong side of history. During the civil rights revolution of the sixties I was thrilled by the outbreak of idealism. We were making progress. We were winning on voting rights, school integration, housing restrictions, etc. Then we encountered the backlash. Progress on civil rights began to slow as resistance became better organized. The opposition to voting rights has become far more sophisticated today, and can claim many victories. Laws that make it harder to vote, by

insisting on more formal identification, by reducing inner city voting sites and the days of permitted early voting, requiring voters to stand in line much longer in order to discourage them from voting, sending official sounding warnings against supposed voting fraud, have all made it harder for African Americans as well as other Americans to vote. Oh yes, they still have the legal right, but there is more bureaucracy to deal with. Then in some states convicted felons lose their right to vote for years if not for life. The fact that so many African Americans, mainly men, are incarcerated in prisons and so can't vote shows that history may not be moving our way; it may even be against us.

After World War II came to an end, the Allies, including our country, held trials of war crimes in Nuremberg. Some defendants were even executed. Others served long prison terms. American public opinion was overwhelmingly opposed to using torture. There was no doubt that various forms of torture, including waterboarding, were unacceptable. They were certainly considered to be torture. Then after the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001, the Bush administration not only held people as uncharged "enemy combatants", but sanctioned what it referred to as "enhanced interrogation." On National Public Radio, a so-called ombudsman ruled that

waterboarding shouldn't be called torture, as the use of that word was now controversial. The Obama administration that followed Bush's did end the practice, or at least said it did. Now the leading Republican contender for the for the presidential nomination stated proudly that he would use water boarding "and worse" with no compunction. Other candidates did show various shades of disagreement, but I didn't notice any strong moral shock after his statement (or was it actually a boast?). What was an undoubted crime when performed by Nazis now seems more or less reasonable behavior.

We should never claim to be on the right side of history. Sometimes history appears to be on our side, but often on the wrong side of ethics.

Most members of Ethical, I am sure, will stick with the ethical side.



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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.

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Sunday Programs in April 2016

April 3

Brian King, President, Boston Ethical Community

"Religions and Babies"



What is the relationship between religion and birth rates and what does it mean for the global population? BEC President, Brian King, will present a brief overview of the work of the Gapminder Foundation and its efforts to use statistics and data visualization to show trends in the health and wealth of countries around the world and to promote sustainable global development. A video and discussion of a TED talk by Hans Rosling, a physician, statistician, and Professor of International Health at Karolinska Institute in Sweden will follow.

April 10

Juliet Schor, Professor of Sociology, Boston College

Humanist of the Year



The renowned scholar and author has written extensively on a range of economic and cultural issues.

A leading voice on the dynamics of American consumerism, Schor has proposed new models of growth and sustainability.

April 17

David Rothauer, Filmmaker, Memory Productions

Article 9 Comes to America



Filmmaker David Rothauer presents a discussion about the most important peace document ever written. A document-in-action that has prevented war for Japan and her Asian neighbors for 69 years.

The world cries for peace. Religious leaders cry for it, politicians cry for it, reformed militarists cry for it, anti-war activists cry for it, progressive academics cry for it, anti-nuclear activists cry for it. When it arrived on the world stage in 1947, no one mentioned it. Most of the world knew nothing about it. Now that it is big news in Japan, only the Japanese take it seriously.

April 24

Book Discussion - "Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age" by Sherry Turkle, Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT.

As face-to-face conversation is supplanted by electronic communication what are we missing out on? We will have a short presentation of the book followed by a discussion. While encouraged, it is not necessary to read the book beforehand.

Musicians for April

April 3, Cherry Kim, Cello. Ai-ying Chiu, piano.

April 10, Lillian Sober Ain, flute

April 17, Nicholas Dinnerstein, cello.

April 24, Margaret Riley, flute; Melissa Lund, oud

~ Program Schedule for April 2016 ~

April 3	Brian King, President, Boston Ethical Community <i>"Religions and Babies"</i>
April 10	Juliet Schor, Professor of Sociology, Boston College <i>Humanist of the Year</i>
April 17	David Rothauser, Filmmaker, Memory Productions <i>Article 9 Comes to America</i>
April 24	Book Discussion <i>"Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age"</i>

Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge

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