



The Ethical Humanist

Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

Volume 62, No. 5

February 2017

Products of the Information Age

Andrea Perrault

As we learned this fall, perhaps the most important factor in national elections is still the economy. In the 1950's and 1960's, manufacturing was the glue of the capitalist system, producing the products that seduced Americans by making life more comfortable: cars, televisions, stereos, home furnishings, appliances, clothes, etc.

We were living the life that our forebears dreamed of. Other countries envied our goods, and everyone wanted to live like Americans. But the manufacturing age dwindled because, to the barons of industry, the labor in the U.S. to make these goods was no longer valued; it was much cheaper to make things in other countries. As manufacturing died in this country, so did American cities and towns where jobs disappeared. Extreme poverty hit places like Detroit,

Cleveland, St. Louis, and Indianapolis.

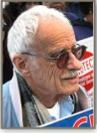
But the information/technology age emerged to keep America productive; San Francisco and its Silicon Valley; Seattle, Washington; Massachusetts and its 128 belt; and the North Carolina Research Triangle Park were the places where the economy was growing. The highly educated were cut out for these areas; jobs and wealth were almost synonymous. These areas flourished, while the regions that earlier had provided jobs and community for our country languished, only to be saved by the service sector. Banking, insurance, retail, civil service and health care picked up the slack. But the pay was not so good, and benefits were almost nonexistent. Indeed, long-term employment disappeared as instability beset many industries. Walmart stores and prisons flourished — not the stuff that makes for thriving communities and social coherence. The banking crisis made our economy really hit the skids — bankruptcies and

foreclosures devastated cities and towns all over the country. Poverty and blight reigned in many areas. How could this nightmare be turned around?

Never fear. Donald Trump arrived, and he hit the magic number. Promise the people a return to the past. Turn back immigrants in their tracks, and send back those who'd settled here illegally (even if they'd lived here for thirty years and contributed to their communities). Women can return to earlier days when men ruled the roost, and so many other "interest groups" (like the disabled, blacks, Muslims, and GLBTQ folks) could just quiet down. The Donald owned the Information Age.

The Information/Technology Age depends on communication, and our technological devices allow us to communicate with anyone, anywhere in the world. But we've hit a wall.

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The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

A More Humane Society

The American Ethical Union's statement of purpose says that the supreme aim of human life is to create a more humane society. This idea is in accord with the recognition that humans are social beings and that every act of a living organism has the purpose of making life better for that organism and its species.

What would a more humane society be like?

In a more humane society, there would be increased acceptance of the principle that everyone, equally, is worthy of respect, regardless of the individual or group differences that make each of us the unique individuals we are, such as age, appearance, sex, language, ways of thinking, place of origin, descent or residence. No one would be exalted as superior or despised as inferior.

Politically, no one old enough to be able to form a political opinion would be denied the right to vote, for any reason or excuse, and no one would have more or less political power than anyone else. All elections would be deemed public functions and financed purely publicly, with no private contributions (alias bribes) permitted.

Currently the relationship between employer and worker in most jobs, where there is no union, isn't significantly different from master and slave or lord and serf. The supreme sin for a worker is insubordination, failure to accept subordinate status and obey the orders of one's "superior", regardless of whether those orders are just and reasonable. In a more humane society, the concepts of equality and democracy would be extended to the economic realm of activity. Workplaces would be democratic nonprofits, as Ethical Societies are. The

American society is unlikely to become more humane in the near future.

members of Ethical Societies do the work necessary for the functioning of these societies because we believe in the necessity of doing it, not because we get paid for doing it. People's motives for all work would be similar to their current motives for volunteer work, recycling, or hobbies: the desire that the work be done, rather than fear of poverty.

In a more humane society, supervisory and managerial workers would be chosen democratically, to the greatest extent feasible, by those

whose work they supervise and manage. The Declaration of Independence says that the just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. This principle, which supposedly applies to the government of a whole country, would also apply to workplaces within a country.

In a more humane society, the economic necessities would be distributed as universal human rights rather than as market commodities. No one would be denied adequate food, housing, clothing, healthcare, education, or any other necessity of a decent life, for lack of purchasing power. The incomes of supervisory and managerial workers would be limited to a low single digit multiple of those of the lowest paid workers. Purchasing power is political power. Economic inequality is political inequality. Limiting income differences would limit the extent to which upper and lower classes would exist.

American society is unlikely to become more humane in the near future. Just the opposite. Through the upcoming dark days, it will be valuable to keep in mind the potential for a more humane society.

Medicare Threatened

Peter Denison

When Donald Trump won the election last November, I was certainly appalled and upset. But my primary worry concerned my children and grandchildren. Now I realize that I and all senior citizens including members of the Boston Ethical Community who are on Medicare are threatened as well. House Speaker Paul Ryan wants to convert Medicare into a voucher system. Apparently, we would be issued vouchers adding up to a certain figure which we would use to pay our doctors' bills. Maybe this sounds OK, but it's not. Medicare sends me and everyone else on Medicare a quarterly report on what they have spent on our treatments. The report shows how effective Medicare has been in providing the medical treatments which we need. These are figures from a recent statement:

For a regular office visit, the charge was \$565. Medicare only approved \$208.15. Then Medicare paid 80% of the bill, leaving \$41.63 for me or my backup insurance to pay. If Speaker Ryan gets his way, I would be paying the full \$565. With bills like that, how long would my vouchers last? It's even worse when it comes to tests like an MRI, X-rays, and so forth. Recently I wore a heart monitor for 24 hours. The bill? \$2065. But Medicare

approved only \$235.96, and my 20% share was cut down to \$63.08.

Medicare has strong bargaining power and can reduce bills to a rate which is fair. I can't do that. No one else on Medicare can do that kind of bargaining either. As we get older, we need more and more medical treatments and supervision. With a voucher system, I would be forced to refuse tests like heart monitors, MRIs, colonoscopies, etc. I would save my limited voucher funds and die a few years earlier than I otherwise would.

We members of our community are more aware of what is going on than the majority of senior citizens. We should contact our Senators and Representatives and mobilize all our friends and neighbors to do the same. This is literally a matter of life or death.

Editor's note: In some versions of the Republican plan, vouchers are for the purchase of insurance coverage, not for direct payment of health costs to providers.

Ethics and Climate

Fred Hewett

Determining the best policy to fight climate change is inherently an ethical challenge. Deciding what course of action we as a society should take requires us to implicitly make value

judgments. It forces us to consider whether we value the present over the future, economic growth over ecological integrity, and the human species over all others.

The question of present-day considerations versus concerns for future generations arises because the decisions we make today about limiting greenhouse gas emissions have a long term impact. Each day we continue to dump carbon into the atmosphere results in more warming in the second half of the century.

People who are ideologically committed to the idea of economic growth -- above all else -- say action against climate change hurts economic growth. It's debatable whether that's entirely true, but we must ask ourselves if failing to grow the economy is worse than the effects it could have on the environment. We all depend on fossil fuels, but besides causing destructive global warming, their extraction and refining do tremendous environmental damage. How much we should sacrifice our material well-being and our economic robustness in order to protect the Earth is an ethical question that we answer implicitly, not only when governments make energy policy, but also when individuals make consumer choices.

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Andrea Perrault, *continued from page 1*

This election cycle proved that the most powerful, yet devastating, kind of information is misinformation. We now live in a world of lies and “fake news.” The Misinformation Age produces products that will hurt, if not end, civil discourse. The media, information’s guardian, is a creature of its own folly. It reports on itself and on the 140-character tweets of Donald Trump. The legacy of 2016 may be the death of substantive reporting and a genuine understanding of current events and history. With these kinds of products, I think we may not be in store for a very sanguine 2017. For whom does the bell toll? It seems it tolls for all of us.

Fred Hewett, *continued from page 3*

And finally, can we act as if the human species is more important than all others? As humanists, we place a high value on the right of men and women to seek the best possible life for all. But an ethic that promotes humanity while ignoring other species is shallow and selfish. Our efforts to prevent devastation from climate change must take into account that we are the ones who have created the problem, and that it is unethical to place that burden on other species.

Contribute to The Ethical Humanist

The Ethical Humanist welcomes contributions from readers. If you have 400-500 word article, book review, commentary, or essay that you’d like to share with our membership, please contact Fred Hewett.

Sunday Programs in February 2017

February 5



Mary Tittman, Director of Outreach, Mass Budget and Policy Center

A Progressive Income Tax for the Highest Earners in Massachusetts

The 2018 ballot in Massachusetts will ask voters to levy a tax on annual incomes over \$1 million, with the revenue earmarked for education and transportation. This talk will delve into the social and political questions around the so-called “millionaire’s tax.”

February 12

Alexandra Piñeros Shields, Executive Director, Essex County Community Organization



BEC was proud to award a grant to the Essex County Community Organization last year to aid in their ongoing efforts to foster community relations on the North Shore.

From their website: “ECCO is a diverse network of congregations and organizations across the North Shore building relationships and power to put human dignity at the center of public life. We work together across race, class, and faith lines to ensure that all people on the North Shore can thrive, grow, and dream.”

February 19

Community Programming

Video and discussion on a topic to be announced later.

February 26

Community Programming

To be determined - check the website later.

Musicians for February

February 5



Jane Pollack, flute

David Salstein, piano

February 12

Peter Zay, cello

Anastasia Zay, violin

February 26

Concordia Consort, recorders

~ Program Schedule for February 2017 ~	
February 5	Mary Tittman, Director of Outreach, Mass Budget and Policy Center <i>A Progressive Income Tax for the Highest Earners in Massachusetts</i>
February 12	Dr. Alexandra Piñeros Shields, Executive Director, Essex County Community Organization
February 19	Community Programming <i>Video and discussion on a topic to be announced later</i>
February 26	Community Programming <i>To be determined - check the website later</i>
Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge	

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