



The Ethical Humanist

Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston

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Pot Talk Redux

Fred Hewett

In February of 2015, the Boston Ethical Community hosted a panel discussion featuring members of the Cannabis Society of Massachusetts. On March 19, the Cannabis Society returns to BEC to present a talk entitled *High Ground*.

Much has transpired since the 2015 session. Marijuana advocates were then primarily concerned with medical marijuana. The panel discussed difficulties that caregivers faced in growing and administering marijuana as therapy for a variety of medical conditions. At that time, no medical marijuana dispensaries in the state had yet gained approval to sell the product.

In June of 2015, a dispensary in Salem became the first to go into full service. Since then,

eight other outlets across the state have opened. Still, patients have reported difficulty finding doctors to prescribe the drug, and the costs are steep.

The far bigger change since 2015 is the state's legalization of recreational marijuana. In November of 2016, Massachusetts voters approved a referendum to legalize recreational pot by a margin of 54% to 46%. The referendum passed despite opposition from Governor Baker, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, Attorney General Maura Healey, and numerous other prominent figures in politics and law enforcement.

The law passed by the voters allows persons 21 or older to possess up to an ounce of pot in public and up to 10 ounces in the home. A person of legal age can grow six plants, with a maximum of 12 plants per household. (It is legal for a landlord to put the kibosh on the cultivation of pot by tenants.)

But the law we voted on may not be the law that we get. In January, State Senator Jason

Lewis filed a bill that would dial back some of the provisions in the original legislation. The proposed bill would limit the amount of pot a person could possess in the home to two ounces instead of 10, and lower the number of plants per household to just six.

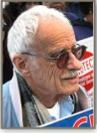
Furthermore, Lewis's bill would provide for the delay of the sale of edible and marijuana-infused products by two years.

And what is perhaps the most controversial provision in the proposed revision of the law is the empowerment of municipal officials to ban sales of marijuana in their community without the consent of voters.

The Lewis bill will not be uncontested. Senator Patricia Jehlen will be the chair of the Committee on Marijuana Policy, and she supported the ballot measure.

The discussion on March 19 should be lively and engaging. We are pleased to welcome the Cannabis Society once again.





The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Religion, Government, Ethics

Religions and governments are involved in ethics: they tell people, by commandments, laws, etc., what they want people to regard as the right thing to do.

Religion and government have always been entangled with each other. In ancient times there was no distinction between them. Over time, specialization occurred; the people who led the societies' religious rituals were not the same people as those who conducted its civil and military affairs. This separation didn't happen all at once. Even today in our own society, religious leaders are authorized by governments to conduct ceremonies that change the legal marital status of couples.

Where different people have authority, conflict can arise over who has authority over what. An example appears Sophocles's play *Antigone*, in which the central character has a conflict between the king's orders and what she regards as her religious duty. Another example is the Biblical "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." The obvious implication is that these are different.

In most countries, governments declare a particular religion to be the country's official religion. Britain is officially Protestant, Israel is officially Jewish, Iran is officially Islamic, etc. Wars were fought over which religion would be the country's official religion. The men who founded the United States were well aware of this and wanted none of it in their country. The United States was the first country with a constitution that prohibited an establishment of religion. But many people in our country, including some in high places, don't like this idea. They want their religion to be our nation's official religion.

The pregnancy/contraception/abortion issue is currently the most contentious ethical question involving religion and government in our country. Organized religion-based political forces are using government power to impose their ethical views on everyone. Lip service to liberty is general among us, but on this question, many powerful people come down on the side of government authority to impose their own religious views, and against individual liberty. "My body, my choice" was a sign often seen in the January 2017 women's marches.

Immigration is another hot issue. Competition for employment opportunity may be the underlying motivation for hostility toward immigrants and immigration, but the basis for this hostility is often framed in terms of religion. The Irish and Italians were targeted based on their Catholicism, and Jews were targeted based on their religion. Today the religious targets are Muslims.

Religious diversity in a society weakens the powers of religious authorities to impose their ethical views. They react against this weakening using whatever means are available to them, including their influence on government. To the extent that they are successful, people who are not their willing subjects are reduced to inferior status and suffer adverse consequences.

The peaceful coexistence of people with diverse religious views depends on the continued existence of freedom of religion and the separation of religious authority, which applies to the members of a religion, from government authority, which applies to everyone in a society.

Media Matters

Andrea Perrault

The story of how we, the public, get our news has never been more important. In 2008, Barack Obama broke new ground with his campaign's ability to communicate over social media. The campaign built a stunningly effective strategy to mobilize the youth vote. Yet, how quickly the bright light of that effort dimmed. In 2012, many younger people felt disillusioned because change had not come fast enough.

Obama was paralyzed by a mean and punishing Republican-led Congress. His inability to be a vocal enough champion of race issues frustrated many young people as well as some vocal and articulate academic leaders, like Cornell West. Then in 2016, the unlikeliest of candidates to many, Donald Trump, swept into ascendancy with his use of a new form of social media, the "Twitosphere". As his presidency unfolds, his contempt for mainstream media is evident. His Press Secretary, Sean Spicer, and his advisor Kellyanne Conway have stunned the public with their "alternative facts" and accusations of "fake news."

So, as many of us struggle to fathom the ability of such preposterous sources of information to dominate the media, we might look back to consider the sources of such change. I recall the days when

Al Gore championed the Internet as an essential tool that would bring information to our fingertips in seconds, making us instant purveyors of the world's knowledge to everyone's benefit. And the Internet is a valuable tool which many of us surely could not do without. Email allowed us to communicate so much more quickly; the U.S. postal service could not compete with such efficiency. Now email is going out of vogue and is replaced by Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and countless other media tools. Messages of 140 characters surely cannot convey any depth of knowledge — is this where the world is headed?

Hard news was formerly communicated by time-honored and venerated organs like The New York Times, The Economist, Time, Newsweek, and the leading news dailies in all major cities. As communication strategies changed drastically, these sources came under the gun. Advertisers vanished, mergers occurred, newspapers had to reduce their coverage, and many went out of business.

Television changed, too. Many more stations appeared through channels that proliferated as entertainment. News now was less available, as the public increasingly opted for sports, game shows and "reality" TV, including Mr. Trump — the "You're fired!" capitalist guru of "The Apprentice".

Radio changed as well. I recall the days of transistor radios when young people were plugged into rock and roll; but even then, news (brief though it was) usually was broadcast on the hour. At least they heard headlines. Today, young people are less likely to tune in traditional broadcast radio stations because they prefer to stream their music — without news interruptions — on personal devices like cell phones.

Even National Public Radio has changed: broadcasts are repeated, stories are heard on multiple programs, reporters aggressively cut off their interviews, and telethons are proliferating; I call it the Trump effect, although it was happening before Trump appeared on the scene. The listener is often left unsatisfied with the experience. One of my friends has switched to audiobooks.

Maybe I'm just cranky and old, and I need to be more hopeful that better days will come, and that media matters will not seem so dire. I still subscribe to "The Atlantic" and "The Nation", both 100-year-old magazines. They and a few others give me confidence that the power of the written word is not lost.



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The Boston Ethical Community relies on member pledges for financial support. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to BEC, please contact our treasurer, Terry Goldzier.

Write for 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.

Concert Announcement

BEC member Terry Goldzier is also a member of the Commonwealth Chorale and will be performing Mozart's Requiem with them on Sunday afternoon, March 12. Please see Terry for more information about this wonderful concert, details as follows:

Sunday, March 12th at 3:00pm
(Note: Clocks change that day!)

Church of the Holy Name
1689 Centre Street, West Roxbury

Tickets: \$30 general/\$25 student/senior.
Can be purchased at the door or online at:

<http://mozart12mar.brownpapertickets.com>

Sunday Programs in February 2017



March 5

Cheryl Crawford,
Executive Director,
MassVOTE

*Working for Voter
Engagement in
Massachusetts*

MassVOTE is a grassroots organization that works to increase voter participation and engagement in civic affairs, especially in traditionally low voter communities. In the presidential election of 2016, Mass VOTE organized voter registration, Get Out the Vote efforts, and voter tracking efforts in key MA communities. MassVOTE and Nonprofit VOTE collaborated to win a grant from the Boston Ethical Community. Cheryl will discuss the mission of the organization, the work they do (including upcoming municipal elections), and how BEC might contribute. She'll also reflect on the results of the 2016 election.

March 12

Community Discussion

The Attack on Humanism and the Resurgence of the Religious Right

What are the new threats to humanism under the guise of "religious liberty"?

March 19

The Cannabis Society of Massachusetts



The High Ground

Join the [Cannabis Society of Massachusetts](#) and the Boston Ethical Community to discuss the ethics of

cannabis legalization and its implications on racial justice, personal freedom, government oversight, and the ballot question process. We will focus on the current statute as written, changes proposed by the legislature, and the ethics of altering a ballot question passed by the citizenry without due process or public hearing.

March 26

Community Discussion

Resistance in the Age of Trump

A video and presentation on the rise of the Indivisible Movement and other ways in which we can effectively make an impact followed by an open discussion for sharing of ideas.

Musicians for March

March 5

Vivian Dolkart, *flute*; **Kenneth Dolkart,** *classical guitar*.

March 12

Suzy Giroux, *voice and guitar*

March 19

Margret Rowley, *flute*; **Brian Barone,** *classical guitar*.

March 26



Anastasia Seifetdinova, *piano*.

~ Program Schedule for March 2017 ~

March 5	Cheryl Crawford, Executive Director, MassVOTE <i>Working for Voter Engagement in Massachusetts</i>
March 12	Community Discussion <i>The Attack on Humanism and the Resurgence of the Religious Right</i>
March 19	The Cannabis Society of Massachusetts <i>The High Ground</i>
March 26	Community Discussion <i>Resistance in the Age of Trump</i>

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

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