



Fall 2014

Community Section



*The Missouri River Dinosaur; or, How North Dakota is  
Faring*

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The pallid sturgeon is, perhaps, the least sexy fish in existence. Prehistoric, armored, and occupying the muddy recesses of slow flowing rivers, it is one of nature's leftovers from the dinosaur era. Large at maturity, the pallid sturgeon grows between 30 and 60 inches, and can weigh upwards of 85 pounds. Consistency is the modus operandi of this fish, which has remained relatively unchanged over the last 70 million years. The pallid sturgeon is muted, having a gray coloration--like hair later in life. The sturgeon, which can live to be 100 years old, grows white. The tail is heterocercal, resembling a shark's tail, and its body is wrapped in thick cartilage plates. In my youth, while fishing the muddy Missouri River, if we hauled a sturgeon to the surface, we cut the line immediately to release it back to the bottom world, where it would resume sucking and slurping minnows. I often named these armored tanks General Patton or General Sherman.

Lately, the pallid sturgeon has occupied an unusually large presence in my thinking. I have seen these magnificent creatures only a handful of times, and usually only their shovel-like snout as it rears out of the water before I release it. You see, the pallid sturgeon is endangered. Before the Missouri River was dammed in the mid part of the 20th century, the pallid sturgeon preferred its warmer waters, which now have cooled. Now numbers have been severely reduced and it is often wondered if we

will ever know the moment of passing of this species from existence.

The cultural memory of the pallid sturgeon must be incredible. The Cretaceous Period from which it originated was a time when much of the Midwest was a shallow sea and insects multiplied in diversity with the oldest known ants and aphids arriving on earth. The Tyrannosaurus rex, and six-foot long Velociraptors roamed the land, as well as the mighty Triceratops. Large, toothy sea monsters followed the currents, as well as sharp-billed predatory water birds. This is the world that created the rough-hulled pallid sturgeon.

Two populations of pallid sturgeon swim in the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers of Montana, which join forces in North Dakota, and these sturgeon are estimated to be extinct by 2018, four years from now. Who will see the last pallid sturgeon? What will it feel like to hold a taut fishing line, slicing the blue-white monofilament and then sending the last pallid sturgeon to what surely must be its watery grave?

Is it an issue of beauty, of wanting things to look pretty? Will our world look better if we are sans pallid sturgeon? I never knew the dodo bird and largely will never have seen many of the 150-200 species that the UN Environment Programme reports go extinct every 24 hours. And yet the world of my mind and the world I live in feel diminished because of the loss of

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this biodiversity. Who will give the eulogy for the pallid sturgeon?

Recently, an oil well near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers was overtaken due to flooding. The ice-jammed Missouri River flooded, and an oil well owned by Zavanna LLC, a Denver-based company, spewed 1,400 gallons of oil into the Missouri. This is the habitat of the pallid sturgeon and, currently, the oil looks like a bathtub ring lining the banks of the river.

In the Bakken, oil spills, brine spills, and chemical spills do not happen only because of flooding. Mismanagement, intentional disposal in drainage ditches and fields, as well as unexpected pipeline malfunctions contribute to the over 7, 200 oil spills that have occurred in western North Dakota in the last seven years.

On March 20th, a pipeline near Alexander, North Dakota, burst, sending 34,000 gallons of sweet Bakken crude across fields and ditches. The cleanup required over 225 trucks to haul away the oil-coated soil, which the North Dakota Quality Director Dennis Fewless says is largely cleaned up.

Thirty-four thousand gallons is a lot of liquid; it's about 1.5 times the size of the pool you grew up with in your childhood--the one that's four feet deep at one end, gently sloping to eight feet at the other, and is twenty-one feet long. The spill near Alexander remained largely unreported, never making the headlines of any national paper.

Another spill, the nation's largest, never received coverage in the New York Times or major publications either. Over 20,600 barrels -- or more than 865,000 gallons, the size of seven football fields--of oil oozed onto Steve Jensen's farm. Jensen discovered the

leak on September 29. The state took more than 11 days to tell the public about the oil spill, and Governor Jack Dalrymple was supposedly notified on October 9, one day before the public.

Pipelines do not guarantee safe travel of oil, but neither do trains. Last July, a train carrying Bakken oil derailed in Quebec, killing 47 people, and leaked an estimated 1.5 million gallons of oil.

On December 30th the town of Casselton, North Dakota, which boasts producing five North Dakota governors (including Dalrymple), roughly 30 miles west of Fargo experienced shock waves one mile east of town. Another train carrying Bakken oil had derailed and numerous cars exploded, sending a plume of jet-black smoke and fire into the air. What would have happened if the train would have derailed in Casselton, a town of 2,400 people? What would have happened if it derailed in Fargo?

Oil that leaves by rail must be certified that it's safe for transport. That means someone in North Dakota certified that the oil tankers traveling to Quebec and through Casselton were ready and safe for transportation. The DOT -- 111 tankers, the same tankers involved in the Casselton mishap, are not effective in preventing impact damage, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

While demand for oil increased, pressuring oil companies to drill deeper and search more widely for oil, the squeeze has mostly been felt by communities affected by the Bakken oil boom. In November of 2013, I traveled over 4,500 miles to 13 communities affected by the Bakken oil boom, teaching creative writing and bearing witness to the widespread changes happening in the area. I am originally

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from western North Dakota, the region of the state known for producing coal.

The changes I've noticed in infrastructure and community life are staggering. The first words my hotel concierge in Dickinson, the first town where I was teaching, were, "There are no good people here." George had come over from Russia to work in the oil fields to save money to pay for dental school. In Williston, North Dakota, I ate supper with Jim and Ida, two native Kansans, who lost everything--their savings, retirement, and part of their parents' retirement--in the last economic recession. Jim was a state archaeologist and Ida worked in the school system. Struggling to provide for their 8-year-old daughter, Ida was able to get a job in the Williston public school system; Jim works in a local lumberyard. The three pay \$1,200 a month, plus utilities, to live in a 28-foot motorhome in the middle of a "mancamp." Jim often spends the night at his friend's apartment so his family can have enough room in their trailer.

Twelve hundred dollars is a bargain in Williston. During my time in the region I would see weekly specials for hotels--which are multiplying as fast as rabbits--at the bargain rate of \$700. That's \$2,800 a month. If you'd like to rent a house you can expect to pay \$4,000-\$6,000 a month: that's \$72,000 in rent a year. Perhaps you'd like a cozy apartment. The most expensive place to rent an apartment in the country is not San Francisco or even New York City. It's Williston, North Dakota, where a 700 square foot apartment will cost you \$2,000 a month. That's pretty fracking nuts.

Dotted across the prairie of western North Dakota, among the whipping wheat, grazing cattle, and native prairie grasses are 10,100 oil

wells pumping and pulling shale oil to the surface. Flames flick and flash across the Bakken due to the flaring of natural gas. In October of 2013 the oil industry was flaring 29-30 percent of the natural gas and now, as the most recent report from the Director of the Department of Mineral Resources, Lynn Helms, reports, we are flaring 36 percent natural gas. The irony in the report is this:

U.S. natural gas storage is now 39 percent below the five-year average indicating increasing prices in the foreseeable future. North Dakota shallow gas exploration may be economic at future gas prices.

Why are we wasting what might in the future become--actually, already is--a viable energy source?

The land that is used for fracking in North Dakota is not only private land, but also public land. North Dakota holds some 1.1 million acres of the 3.8 million acres of national grasslands, nearly one-third of the country's total amount of public grassland. But not many people view wild grassland as one of the gems of the prairie; in fact, most people view the prairie as a wide open expanse of wasteland. Traveling to Crookston, Minnesota, via train this year, one woman said, as we were passing through Whitefish, Montana, near the border of Glacier National Park, "Hurry and sit in the observation car, the rest of the trip is boring." Boring is how North Dakota is labeled. It takes time and patience to understand the prairie. As the writer and activist Terry Tempest Williams says, "The degree of our awareness is the degree of our aliveness. What is invisible to me is what I have not yet learned how to see. The invisible becomes visible through our attention, through stillness, through silence. And

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patience.” Are we being patient if the state of North Dakota has allowed oil exploration to happen on 95 percent of the national grasslands, protecting only 5 percent, or 50,000 acres, of it from oil development?

Fracking is a process that has increased our potential for oil extraction. Before, when we needed to hit the metaphorical nail on the head, we had to drill right above a pocket of oil. No more. We now can drill to the depth of 9,800 feet (where most of the Bakken shale oil resides) and drill horizontally nearly two miles, plunging and pressuring our way to new reservoirs of sweet, black crude. Fracking involves an initial blasting process of around two million gallons of freshwater, with 1-2 percent of the water’s composition made up of chemicals, being shot into the earth’s crust, boring to the shale bed. After this process is complete, pipe is plunged down the hole with a magical widget that allows oil developers to then send pipe horizontally into the shale bed. New reserves of freshwater must be used in the fracking process to help keep the pipeline clear of salt buildup due to the saliency of the water upon extraction. Like an artery that has too much plaque, fracking requires new medication of fresh water to stay healthy. Each well in the Bakken formation requires 2.2 million gallons of freshwater to begin pulling oil and, if the reports are correct that the boom could last 30-40 years, each well’s amount would increase to 6.6-8.8 million gallons of freshwater over the lifetime of each well.



Earth is warming and changing, this is common knowledge. Over the past 25 years the earth has warmed 1 degree Celsius, effectively winnowing

glaciers and the polar ice caps. According to the UN Environment Programme, “Earth is in the midst of a mass extinction of life. Scientists estimate that 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird and mammal become extinct every 24 hours. This is nearly 1,000 times the ‘natural’ or ‘background’ rate and, say many biologists, is greater than anything the world has experienced since the vanishing of the dinosaurs nearly 65 million years ago.”

In 2013 Whole Foods demonstrated how dependent we are upon one single species--the honey bee. At its University Heights location in Rhode Island, Whole Foods had to eliminate 237 of their 453 products--53 percent of what it sells. It makes sense, from the assertion that roughly 150-200 of the 8.7 million species become extinct every 24 hours, that we may very well face our own demise very soon.

Bill McKibben’s recent book, *Oil and Honey*, paints a similarly complex picture by focusing solely on plant life. For every degree Celsius that the earth warms, plants must migrate 40 miles farther north. The average tree takes 10 years to move 1 mile farther north. For each degree Celsius the earth warms, it will take plant life 400 years to acclimate to a new climate. With the prospect of the earth warming 2-3 degrees Celsius this century, it means that we will need 800-1,200 years of time for plants to adequately adapt.

Lately, I have been thinking about the idea of comfort in 21st century American society. From the moment we are born to the moment we die we expect to be comfortable, and we will do anything, including warming, weirding, and altering the bio, chemical, and physical make-up of the planet to make it so. It took a lot of oil for me to travel;

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it takes a lot of oil to get my clothes to the department store where I shop, as well as the produce I eat, and on and on. But we know oil does one thing and it does one thing really well: It warms the planet.

In America we might replace the word comfort with a new word, one the historian James J. Farrell calls comfearth. Comfearth is the amount of comfort that's consistent with sustainability, it takes into consideration the needs of the planet--the planet we live and desperately depend upon. Comfearth suggests that we might need to change the nature of our conversations to get more in line with the needs of nature; it suggests that we might need to put on another sweater in winter to stay warm and sweat more in the summer. Comfearth is how humans have largely lived on the planet, but 250 years ago with the Industrial Revolution, much of that changed. Now it seems that we have 500-year floods every other year; increased toxicity in the oceans; and new, blazing pink sunsets in western North Dakota due to flaring of methane and other gases.

Comfearth would mean we might rely more on the life-giving energy of the sun, rather than the dead energy of fossil fuels; it would mean we might live more seasonally, realizing that citrus should not be available year-round; and it would mean we might need to put greater demands upon ourselves rather than the earth as a whole. It might mean we contemplate the goodness of the pallid sturgeon in our thinking about the Good Life.

In his book, *Letters to a Young Evangelical*, Tony Campolo documents his thinking of losing the humpback whale:

I, personally, am sensitized to the Franciscan perspective on animals each year when my wife and I go whale watching off the shores of Provincetown, Massachusetts. The naturalist on the boat with us talks about the decimation of whales and how they are on the verge of extinction. It is then that I remember that the psalmist declared that whales were created to sing hymns of praise to God. Whales sing! At least, humpback whales do. What's more, they create new songs every year.

Pallid sturgeon do not sing or delight in making new songs like the humpback whale. But they do cruise at a gentle 5 miles per hour, serving as a type of river janitor, cleaning and consuming small fish and vegetation on the river bottom, gently rising and falling between 2 and 50 feet of water. In the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services report, "The Pallid Sturgeon, a Missouri River 'Dinosaur,'" the species was labeled "one of the ugliest fish in North America"--yet there is something miraculous in holding a creature that links me to a time when the earth was still taking shape. It is humbling. It is awe-inspiring. It helps reveal to me the long view in the history of the earth. It is my hope that North Dakota might do the same.

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*and Stories about Fracking in America, with Ice Cube Press. His work has appeared in Orion Magazine, Earth First! Journal, The Huffington Post, and the EcoTheo Review, among other venues.*



## *Policymakers and Insurance Companies Choose Discrimination on Behavioral Health*

**Susan Rae Helgeland**

Former Executive Director

Mental Health America of North Dakota (MHAND)

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I recently retired as Executive Director of Mental Health America of ND (MHAND). MHAND is a non-profit organization whose mission is about advocacy, education and increased access to care. My advocacy efforts and fight against discrimination continues.

In 1964, 50 years ago, I visited the ND State Hospital (NDSH) in Jamestown. I was a senior at UND and the trip was mandated for those who majored in social work.

I had no idea what to expect and, at 22 years old, I knew very little about mental illness or, as we call it now, behavioral health (mental illness and substance use). What I observed at NDSH shook me to the core. I was traumatized and it motivated my next 50 years of advocacy for people with behavioral health disorders.

At NDSH men and women were segregated with vacant looks on their faces. Haldol and Thorazine were the drugs of choice. There were bathtubs fitted with wooden covers and a "carve out" for the patient's head to accommodate ice bath shock treatments. Electric shock therapy and other "treatment" modes were available for our viewing. Bars were on the windows and locked doors were everywhere.

My reaction to the field trip was that through no fault of their own, these folks became ill and were "locked up" indefinitely.

Since 1964 things have changed. In most cases, patients can now participate in recovery.

I hoped and expected that insurance reimbursements also would have changed to meet the increased knowledge base in the delivery of behavioral health services. I hoped and expected that society had changed their judgment relative to the idea that individuals "choose" to experience behavioral health issues. Do we choose chronic illnesses such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis or heart disease? I hoped and expected that policy makers would make good decisions about expanding access to behavioral health services when the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was recently implemented in ND.

After 50 years, I feel it must be time to "catch up" and treat the brain as we do other organs of our body. For example, when diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease, ulcerative colitis and the like, several medical support services such as nutrition and exercise consults are accessible to the patient and reimbursed by insurance providers. Not true with behavioral health.

As an advocate for increased access to behavioral health services, I looked forward to the implementation the ACA with the hope we could enroll more individuals in cost effective health insurance plans to increase access to behavioral health services. I was shocked to learn that because of the Benchmark of Essential Health Benefits plan that ND submitted to the Federal Exchange, ND citizens experienced a *decrease* in access to behavioral health services. Kurt Snyder, Executive

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Director of Heartview Foundation, Bismarck, stated in a June 9th *Forum* article that “These people cycle in and out of high-cost care. It’s a major problem. Residential (treatment) is an essential piece. Without residential care, we can’t effectively treat our citizens.” In the same article, Greg LaFrancois, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Prairie St. John’s in Fargo said, “The reduced support for residential addiction services will compound problems the state’s mental health providers already struggle with because services have not kept up with demand.” He continues, “Over time, it’s going to limit or eliminate those services from being offered. New providers will not enter this market. Access is difficult now.” Behavioral health is the only chronic condition that, as a matter of public policy, we wait until stage four to treat, and then many times treatment is delivered through incarceration.

Renee Schulte, CEO of Schulte Consulting, LLC, IA was awarded a contract from the ND Legislative Interim Human Services Committee to conduct a statewide needs assessment on the delivery of behavioral health services for adults and youth. She stated in her final report to the ND Legislative Interim Human Services Committee on *Behavioral Health Planning*, July 22, 2014 that:

An area requiring attention is the use of insurance including federal Medicaid, Medicare and private third party funding to address gaps in the behavioral health system in ND. Two specific issues include lack of funding for various services and lack of coverage for licensed professionals to provide services.

Schulte went on to say that:

The Century Code is inconsistent with the current Essential Health Benefits (EHB) package selected. ND Century Code 26.1- 3608 authorizes 60 day minimum for inpatient treatment; 120 days minimum for partial hospitalization and 20 outpatient visits for substance abuse treatment. ND Century Code 26.1-36-09 authorizes a minimum of 45 days for inpatient, a minimum of 120 days for partial hospitalization, minimum of 120 days for residential treatment for youth 21 years and under, and 30 hours of outpatient treatment. The current EHB package allows insurance providers to decrease services to the level of services recommended in the Sanford plan selected.

The Insurance Commissioner, Adam Hamm, submitted the EHB plan for ND’s participation in the ACA. The plan submitted was similar to the existing Sanford insurance plan for coverage. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of ND (BCBSND) existing plan provided the opportunity for increased behavioral health services and was consistent with the ND Century Code. It was not selected. As Renee Schulte said:

The EHB plan submitted by ND to the Federal Exchange Marketplace for the ACA allows a decrease in services, especially residential substance abuse treatment in Medicaid in order to cover more total lives. There are multiple complaints to the Attorney General and pending lawsuits regarding changes made in the state based on the chosen EHB plan for Medicaid. In addition to the reductions in Medicaid, BCBSND has also

reduced coverage to reach the plan that the Insurance Commissioner submitted for ND.

Upon the final ruling, a change in ND code to reflect this decision may be necessary. The ACA has expanded mental health coverage through the use of Medicaid, Health Care Exchanges, and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA). Medicaid Alternative Benefit Packages (ABPs) must comply with the MHPAEA. If surgical/physical treatments are covered, the behavioral health services are covered to the same extent. This federal law is also inconsistent with the Century Code section 26.1-36-08 and 26.1-36-09.

Schulte recommends the following strategies to the ND State Legislature under the Insurance Coverage Changes Needed:

1. Increase funding options for services for youth and adults; and
2. Increase behavioral health professional coverage in Medicaid and private insurance.

Patrick Springer of the *Forum* wrote in an article on July 26, 2014:

ND Attorney General (AG) Wayne Stenehjem issued an opinion concluding that some plans offered by two major health insurers likely fail to comply with federal law by excluding coverage for residential treatment of adults with substance abuse.

He went on to say, “The opinion applied to the Sanford Health Plan and the Blue Cross Blue Shield of ND insurance plans sold on the health insurance marketplace established under the ACA.”

In the same article, ND insurance commissioner Adam Hamm stated that, “My team and I are still in the process of reviewing the AG opinion.” Similarly, a spokeswoman for the ND Department of Human Services, which administers Medicaid, said “Officials are reviewing the opinion.” In addition, “BCBSND has been collaborating with state insurance officials and others to gain a better understanding of the situation to ensure that plans it offers comply with both state and federal law,” spokeswoman Andrea Dineen said in a statement to the *Forum’s* Patrick Springer. Ruth Krystopolski, President of the Sanford Health Plan, stated that she also is working to ensure that its plan complies with the law in their coverage of residential treatment for substance abuse in light of Stenehjem’s opinion.

Senator Tim Mathern (D), Fargo stated, “To me it does clarify that there was an arbitrary reduction of benefits that was contrary to federal and state law so these benefits must be reinstated.” Mathern went on to say in the *Forum* article of July 26, 2014, “I think that insurance companies will be forced to change their policies, more people will get treatment, and that is a positive.”

As an advocate I need to ask these questions of the ND policy makers:

1. Why submit an EHB plan for implementation of the ACA that reduces and, in some cases eliminates services, when it was inconsistent with the current mandates for behavioral health services in the ND Century Code?
2. Because of the ACA, did services get lowered or eliminated related to heart disease, diabetes and the like?

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3. Why, after 50 years, am I still confronted with the prevailing status of discrimination against access to behavioral health issues when compared to access of services to other chronic medical illness?
4. Why would ND policy makers make decisions that would cause more emergency room visits and an even larger percentage of our prisons filling up with inmates exhibiting behavioral health issues, both ultimately paid for by ND citizens?

In a *Forum* article written by Mike Nowatzki on July 22, 2014,

Representative Chuck Damschen, (R) Hampden, chairman of the 17 member Interim Human Services Committee, was quoted, “We look forward to trying to implement as much as we possibly can – at least as much as we can agree on.” Representative Damschen is referring to the recommendations in the Schulte Report.

It is my hope that the injustice and discrimination of the change in insurance coverage for some behavioral health issues will be corrected and brought back to be consistent with the ND Century Code. Not only is it the right thing to do, it will save dollars and more importantly, it will save lives.

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## What – IS – the Value of Higher Education?

**Dean L. Bresciani**

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It seems like everyone from the national and local media up to the President of our country is talking about the value of attending college, or at least what that value should be. Interestingly, in those current conversations, economic return on investment (“ROI”) has become the almost singular measure of higher education’s value. That becomes even more provocative if contrasted against an observation that the inherent rather material value of higher education has historically be the lens through which it was assessed.

Along lines of the current conversation, though, fields with the highest paying jobs on graduation are gauged “better” while those less so are dismissed as worse, or worse yet -- wasteful. I’ll grant you that’s one way of looking at things, but it’s a perspective missing a bigger point which ultimately has material economic implications as well.

Preparation for a first job out of college and career are important. I’ll make no argument contrary to that position. But job placement has never been the *central* value of education in the U.S. or for that matter most any place around the world and particularly the European antecedents from which American higher education was born. And unlike in the past, sources from the Wall Street Journal to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that the average American will now change jobs somewhere between seven to eleven

times. In light of that, it would be a short-sighted goal to focus solely on initial job placement if not even lifetime career.

Stepping back a bit from the current conversation, it is worth remembering that American higher education started with nine colonial colleges founded from 1636-1769. They were intended to, in simple terms, educate the “whole person” and prepare them for public service and leadership rather than vocational pursuits. In fact, preparation for careers was an outgrowth rather than goal of American higher education, and only became a pertinent aspect through the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act.

While that original basis of American higher education may sound unproductive by contemporary measures which focus on material economic value, there was a two-fold logic behind the original intent of a baccalaureate degree. Yes, I said *baccalaureate degree*, not major. In spite of today’s popular focus on majors, to this day undergraduates earn a baccalaureate; a major is just one narrowly focused part of that an undergraduate education.

As a sidebar worth noting, some experts anticipate that ‘majors’ will soon become an artifact of education in the twentieth century. That’s because most jobs in the future don’t yet exist, so there is no way to create majors to suit them. Given that, many anticipate a curricular return to broad educational preparation

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so that graduates have the tools to learn and accommodate emerging educational demands as new fields of study and work emerge. That notion of “learning how to learn” is not new; it’s been the liberal arts underpinning of American higher education from the start.

As I mentioned earlier, the logic behind a liberal arts definition of higher education is two-fold. First, it provides an individual with skills ranging from analytical, critical thinking and improved written and oral communication, through a foundation in quantitatively-based fields such as math and science. That value and structure isn’t limited to four year undergraduate degrees. Even vocation two year associate degrees require 25% of their curriculum to include “general education.”

And employer studies tell us that while businesses certainly look for graduates with the applied knowledge provided through students’ majors, they sort and make hiring decisions by those who best articulate the broader skills highlighted above. The resounding message from employers is that graduates, at both the undergraduate and even post-baccalaureate levels, need even more of those broad skills and preparation than they current bring to the workplace.

My arguments to this point have been based on history and philosophical orientation, but they are also supported by quantitative economic analysis. The rewards of higher education for college graduates are what economists call the “internal rate of return.” That return or ROI can be mathematically calculated. Doing so objectively demonstrates that, on average, an individual’s investment -- particularly if in *public* higher education-- offers ROI well in excess of

common financial investment alternatives.

The societal benefits of an educated citizenry, referred to as the external rate of return, are similarly substantial. That well known benefit is the reason Americans have throughout our history so consistently supported the proliferation of and consistently increasing access to public higher education. There may be no better example of that than North Dakota where in an economically modest state, of until recently less than 700,000 people, we support eleven post-secondary institutions.

At the same time, we all recognize that a higher education degree has always been and continues to be a substantial personal investment. But in comparison to other states, North Dakotan’s support of public higher education has kept the cost to our students and families relatively low through a consistent level of public subsidy. The result has been that an exceptionally high number of our young people are college educated; the Lumina Foundation ranks North Dakota fourth in the nation.

As reported in respected nation publications such as the *Economist* through local media and university based studies, our students subsequently enjoy some of the highest ROI of any colleges and universities in the nation. In the illustrative case of North Dakota State University (NDSU), an externally reported 9.5% ROI in national media (pegged at over 14% in other studies) exceeds public research university peers in most of the country. When considered in combination with the \$7 of state-wide economic impact that NDSU returns for every \$1 of state support it receives, it’s hard to argue that public

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higher education in North Dakota isn't an exceptional investment for both our students and our state.

In summation, I would argue that the trend of defining higher education even in our two-year vocational degree programs as simply "job training" seems questionable. A broad liberal arts education has been the intent and value of public higher education since its inception. It is also the well-recognized basis of our country's broad provision of both public and private higher education alternatives, and our resulting national economic success. That differential success, when contrasted with other

countries lacking our educational opportunities, seems to suggest that our model works and works well. As highlighted above, it yields measurable and substantial benefits for graduates. But it similarly benefits the communities where they live by measures ranging from increased economic productivity and an enhanced tax base, to reduced needs for public services, assistance programs and health care needs, and a more civil and law abiding citizenry. That rolls up to state and national economies that continue to be over time some of the strongest in the world.

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## *What is Wrong with the World?*

**Howard A. Dahl**

*President and CEO of Amity Technology*

When I was growing up in a town of 200 people in North Dakota, I never dreamed that I would be the first westerner on the Beijing army farm in Northeast China near the Russian border, or that I would have meetings with Central Committee members of the communist party in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia, or that I would spend two hours in the home of the leading Muslim cleric in the Caucasus mountains near the border between Chechnya and Dagestan, or that I would spend an evening in Yalta at the dacha of Mrs. Lenin, which after her death was given to Beria, the notorious head of the KGB.

My world was very small in Gwinner, North Dakota as my greatest cross cultural experience happened to be the German Lutherans in our midst. We were Scandinavian Lutherans, and we knew that they were different. Little did I realize at that time what doors I would later walk through and what interesting windows I would peer through.

In this article, I intend to simply give you my reflections on economic vitality as seen through the lens of an imperfectly practicing Christian.

One cannot help being on the defensive today when one is an American, white, male capitalist who also happens to be an evangelical Christian. Indeed, it's not a stretch for one with such an identity to feel a real kinship with Mr. K. from Franz Kafka's, *The Trial*. He felt a profound sense of guilt, standing accused before the world

without even knowing what the charges were. All he knew was that he was guilty.

Another piece of literature that resonates with me is *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, the alias for Charles Dodgson, a gifted Oxford logician and mathematician. The Red Queen is presiding over the courtroom demanding a verdict at the outset of the trial. The rabbit as defense attorney replied "we have not had any evidence yet," to which the Red Queen replied "verdict first, evidence later." The concept of prejudice is well illustrated here.

I am going to attempt to persuade you to take a fresh look at economic systems and ask you to do so without prejudice. I may not persuade you of this, but I am going to suggest that awards should be given to the most profitable businesses. This may have the ring of blasphemy for some of you, but please bear with me. I am well aware that Paul Tillich said that the only economic system a Christian can embrace is socialism. I have a sense as to why he said it, but I believe he could not be more wrong in his assertion.

A few years ago, on one of my frequent trips to Russia, I read G. K. Chesterton's *What is Wrong With the World*. It has some amazing thoughts about economic systems in that it includes a strong critique of both socialism and what he called industrial capitalism. Chesterton sets forth a strong case for the importance of

property rights, and in a time before most people see the deficiencies of socialism, he roundly critiques it as an economic system. He fought in vain for years to try to sell the British public on distributionism, a close cousin to the 1970's book by E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*. Both authors made the case for small firms, small farms, and many of them.

Reading the Schumacher book captivated my imagination and launched me in a direction that has had an influence on me ever since. Shortly after reading it, I decided to move to Fargo and try to develop a small tractor for the Third World. Central to that move was trying to live a life that had no sacred/secular dichotomy. I desired that my faith might be central in all that I did. The business model changed, and even though my pathway has been very imperfect, the ideal of living out my faith through my business has remained a passion.

I hope to answer the question Chesterton posed in *What is Wrong With the World*, but instead of doing it through some lofty prescriptions, I am going to attempt to do it through some simple descriptions and observations of one person's journey. I do hope to answer this question for you. If I do nothing else, I hope I will help you ponder in a fresh way how one might think about both the tension and the adventure of being a Christian in business. I do intend to make a number of affirmations I hope you will find thoughtful, if not persuasive.

***Affirmation 1: Some of the most well-meaning people bring about some terrible consequences, largely as a result of a faulty understanding of economic principles.***

These "unintended consequences" often happen when we look at particular problems and make general policy. In many instances a particular problem's solution is an overreaching general principle that has unintended consequences. I expect I am one of the few business people who has read Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation and all his early writings, including his surprising final gymnasium paper on "The Importance of Abiding in Christ," a commentary on John 15:1-11. Marx was a brilliant student of logic and, if censorship laws had not been so strict in Germany at the time, would likely have had a routine career as a professor of logic. But he was prevented from becoming a teacher and turned to journalism. And then when the paper he was writing for shut down, he began some deep reflections on economics. It was while writing about the squalid conditions of vine dressers and wood cutters that he learned first-hand of some of the great inequalities that existed in the capitalist system.

Marx thought capitalism had served a great purpose by destroying feudal society, allowing many people to move from a position of subservience to become artisans and merchants. To put it plainly, Marx applauded the emergence of a middle class and wanted it to be much larger. But Marx's prescription for the "evil capitalists" was to abolish capitalism, as opposed to endorsing widespread ownership in the form of profit sharing or employee stock ownership.

When I team taught a course in Business Ethics at Concordia College many years ago with Shannon Jung, I pondered Paul Tillich's assertion that "the only economic system a Christian can support in good conscience is

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socialism.” All the egalitarian impulses we have within us argue for some sort of socialistic system. Even wealthy businessmen cheer for Robin Hood against the rulers of Nottingham. The Archbishop of Canterbury in 1935 implied that “the Kingdom of God had come to earth in Joseph Stalin,” and this at the height of Stalin’s murderous reign. For decades the grip of socialism held sway over the intellectual leaders in many countries and to a lesser extent still does.

I would submit to you that it is not a coincidence that in a few short years there was a stark contrast between East and West Germany, China and Taiwan, and North and South Korea. One can argue all day about the misapplication of a socialistic theory, but the empirical data shouts loudly to the unbiased observer to look closely at the differences.

I have had the privilege of making more than 75 trips into Eastern Europe since 1974 and have spent well over two years of my life there. Many of my convictions are colored by this experience, and certainly that is a truism for all of us. If all I saw was inequality and never met any responsible, compassionate capitalists, I would likely form conclusions not unlike those of Karl Marx.

But today, apart from more than a few professors and journalists and a handful of others, the empirical evidence has persuaded most people that socialism, however well intentioned, has been a miserable failure. The African leader, Julius Nyerere, who was considered the model socialist leader a generation ago, introduced policies that turned out to be a disaster for Tanzania. Today Tanzania has leaders in place who are bringing about some of the most

encouraging economic progress ever seen in Africa. A number of African countries are seeing true economic progress as they understand the potential of market capitalism, accomplished by transparency.

Today many would still argue that the only hope for alleviating poverty is the redistribution of wealth. There is a measure of truth in this, but only a measure. I just spent some time with Greg Page, a North Dakota native, who is chairman of the board of Cargill. Cargill is one of the only western companies that remains in Zimbabwe, and maintains a deep commitment to its many employees there. Greg made the statement that well-meaning NGO’s are destroying the livelihood of many small businesses by coming to local farmers and giving them seed or fertilizer or something else, and destroying the business of the local seed or fertilizer dealer. Well-meaning people, who do not have an understanding of economic principles, can do harm while intending to do good. That leads me to my next point.

***Affirmation 2: The best way to help someone is a good job and not a handout.***

We have all heard the adage if you give a person a fish you feed her for a day, if you teach a person to fish, you feed her for a lifetime. There is another part of this statement that is often unspoken, but increasingly understood. When the food or aid is given to a corrupt government, much of the aid never reaches the intended beneficiaries.

A few years ago I flew on a plane with a young Kenyan man who grew up with an illiterate mother in rural Kenya. Through a series of circumstances, he

was sent to a boarding school at the age of nine where he got a great education, and then was sent to the United States for an undergraduate education and a master's degree. He has seen his mother only a few times since the age of nine and not for eight years. He is now an auditor for a big accounting firm and was traveling to Fargo to audit Microsoft.

We had such a nice visit on the plane that I asked him if we could have lunch on a subsequent visit of his to Fargo which we did. We talked for an hour about economic development in Kenya. He told me he had little hope for his country because of the governmental corruption. He explained that his tribe was the 6th largest in Kenya, and any tribal leaders who came to power simply enriched themselves and a few friends, and he was not hopeful about that system changing. He then said that he loved the transparency that existed in our system, the rule of law and the opportunity that someone from Kenya can truly have a significant career path at a firm like PricewaterhouseCoopers. He wistfully said that someday he would like to go back and make a difference in his country, but felt that until the corruption was dealt with, there would be not much that could be done.

Ann and I were in Washington, DC a few years back for the National Prayer Breakfast, and had the privilege of hearing Bono give the main address with a plea for Americans to embrace Africa and do something meaningful about AIDS and economic reform. The next evening we had dinner with a remarkable businessman from Milwaukee, who sets the gold standard for Christian authenticity. Milt Kuyers has built a factory in the inner city of Milwaukee to train disadvantaged young

people skills to make them successful. He has a factory in the poorest part of rural Mississippi for the same purpose. In Kenya, he works with a group of American Christians mentoring young Kenyan entrepreneurs. Milt learned that few Kenyan farmers were making a good living from their coffee production. He partnered with a few of these small farmers by starting a business to distribute the coffee beans in the United States, sharing the distribution profits with the farmers and giving them a stable market for their production. While in Kenya, Milt and his friends serve as advisors and teachers for many young Kenyans on how to run a business. In addition, they make loans above the micro level to companies that have a need and a good business plan. The decision as to who gets the loan is made jointly between the Kenyans, who are required to provide 50% of the money in the pool. The program has been very successful, with no defaults on the loans.

Tom Friedman, the chief foreign correspondent for the New York Times, has written much about the global economy both in his column and his books *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* and *The World is Flat*. Friedman develops the thesis that meaningful job creation requires capital and capital will flow to where there is transparency and the rule of law. It will also flow to places with favorable tax policy. As much as some people bemoan globalization, it is a reality that is not going to be stopped.

The changes have been going on for some time. Alexis de Toqueville wrote in the 1830's about how small the globe had become, "The Middle Ages were a time when each province, city, and family could maintain some individuality, but that the modern trend

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was toward homogeneity as the nations advance toward unity. Our means of intellectual intercourse unite the remotest parts of the earth; and men cannot remain strangers to each other, or be ignorant of what is taking place in any corner of the globe.” What would he have thought of the internet?

The reality today is that for many in India, China, Russia, Vietnam and many other countries, meaningful job creation is taking place, wages are increasing, and there is an emerging middle class. It is not a stretch to say that more people have come out of poverty in the last ten years than in any decade in human history. To the extent that these countries have economic transparency and the rule of law, to that extent capital will flow to them.

I heard a most poignant conversation between William Buckley and George McGovern some years ago on Buckley’s television show, “The Firing Line.” Buckley said, “George, your mission in life has been to redistribute capital. That presupposes there is capital to redistribute. After you have redistributed all the capital, what is your plan for capital creation?” McGovern later bought an Inn in Vermont and, after it failed, he wrote some poignant thoughts about the hindrances of regulations and tax policy for business owners.

I would strongly suggest that there will not be meaningful job creation in any part of the globe without the initial investment of capital and the requisite expectation that the capital can be employed in a viable manner. This is absolutely imperative for development of the poorest nations. There is one way that capital formation takes place and that is through profitability. The primary sources of capital formation are

agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. Most poor nations have land pleading to be farmed efficiently in the context of a system that incorporates transparency and the rule of law. Nowhere is this truer than in Africa.

Contrary to the general notion that high profits are a bad thing and almost immoral, I would suggest to you that we should be applauding the companies with the highest profits...now what the firm does with the profits is another matter which we will get to, but briefly, the companies that have the highest profits pay the highest salaries, have the most stable work force, and are able to endow chairs at universities, allowing certain professors the time to critique capitalism. Furthermore, 50% of all U.S. stocks are owned by employee pension funds and 401k plans. The growth of these funds requires healthy profits, and yet there is this lingering sentiment that high profits are somehow immoral.

I have had the wonderful opportunity to sit on the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and travel to Washington twice a year as chair of the bank’s audit committee. I can tell you that the one overarching theme that is discussed every month is the high unemployment numbers. There is a consensus that we have no realistic chance of seeing these numbers come down without significant GDP growth. My business is like many other businesses. Investments in new products and new factories are made when one is optimistic about the future. But in times of great uncertainty, it is prudent to be cautious. It is true that many companies are sitting on a great deal of cash at present, most wanting to deploy the cash at a return greater than 1 or 2%.

Until there is clarity on tax policy and the deficit, much of this capital will remain undeployed. One of our board members in Minneapolis is CEO of a Fortune 500 company. He has a choice of building a new factory in Holland where the corporate tax rate is 20% or in White Bear Lake, Minnesota where the federal tax rate is 39% plus the Minnesota tax rate. As a leader responsible for the well-being of all his shareholders and employees, what should he do?

From what I have said thus far, one might think that I am simply giving a rubber stamp of support for unbridled capitalism. In a general sense that is perhaps true. However, for a Christian, seeking to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus, it gets rather complex.

***Affirmation 3: There is one principle that should be the guiding light for every decision made by a Christian in the business world, and that is “In everything, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, for this sums up all the law and the prophets.”***

To me, the last part of this teaching on the Golden Rule is most profound...this sums up all the law and the prophets. Is it possible this sums up all that a Christian needs to know to be faithful in the business world?



So what is wrong with the world? The last thing I will say to you is my answer to Chesterton’s question. But I will try and tackle the application of the Golden Rule into the business world. This is very difficult to put into practice. There are a number of Biblical principles that strongly inform my decision making in my business. To me it means:

1. **Being a very good listener...**swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. I have not truly heard someone, until I can state their position in words that they say accurately states their position. We like to demonize those with whom we disagree but accurately stating the position of another brings great understanding.
2. **Believing in absolutes without being absolutistic.**
3. **Being righteous, without being self-righteous.** The world seldom dislikes righteousness in Christians (although sometimes it does), but rather it dislikes self-righteousness as much as Jesus does.
4. **Being as shrewd as a serpent** while simultaneously as *innocent as a dove*.
5. **Sharing generously out of profits** first with employees and then to worthy causes. “Those who are rich in this world need to share abundantly.” But in this matter there is great tension. One of the early church fathers, Basil of Cappadocia, said one of the most important matters in sharing resources with the poor is making sure that it was a genuine need and did not take away initiative or dignity from the recipient. He said few matters were more difficult to discern.
6. **Not being presumptuous ever in decision making.** “Come now you who say today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such a city and make a profit, instead you ought to say if the Lord wills.”
7. **Being a good steward over time, talent, treasure, and influence.** “To whom much has been given, much will be required.”
8. **Being truly humble and seeing all people as sacred and as more**

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**important than one's self.** "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." No one will write a best seller on humility and how I achieved it! Likewise, C. S. Lewis in *Screwtape Letters* nailed how tricky humility is.

9. **Knowing myself properly is what really keeps me humble.** And that is what is wrong with the world. As long as I am alive, I will be envious, I will lust, I will be greedy, I will be angry, I will be slothful, I will be gluttonous, and central to all of this, I will be proud. There is not a person alive, including people like our favorite Christian leaders, who would not be embarrassed by having a tape recording of every thought from any day of life played in consecutive order before the world.

I am what is wrong with the world. I am fallen, and no matter how righteous I might act, I have this brokenness that is very real.

For proud, successful business people, humility does not come naturally. The more press clippings and awards and money one accumulates, the further one can get from the Kingdom. The Bible talks far more about money than about salvation, and that is why any of us in business should be haunted by the statement "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

So to try to properly answer Chesterton's question, "What is Wrong With the World," it is definitely not capitalism, for I truly believe capital formation is one of the greatest blessings to any people anywhere, but rather the problem is me, the capitalist, absent

God's grace and mercy being central to my daily life.

The number one song of the 20th Century was "I Can't Get No Satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones; "...but I try and I try and I try." Never in human history have so many had so much, and yet contentment eludes most people. Chesterton said there are two methods of reaching contentment. One is to acquire more, the other is to desire less. St. Basil the Great said, "No vice more pernicious than envy is implanted in the souls of men. This passion is first and foremost a personal detriment to the one guilty of it and does not harm others in the least. Now envy is pain caused by our neighbor's prosperity. The worst feature of this malady, however, is that its victim cannot reveal it to anyone."

I would submit to you, that one of the primary explanations for class warfare and the disparaging rhetoric often heard about obscene profits is a lack of contentment, fueled by envy. To me the antidote for this is written by the Apostle Paul when he said "I have learned the great secret of being content in plenty and in want." He calls it a secret. My mother grew up in a home without indoor plumbing during the Great Depression and she made it quite clear what a happy childhood she had. My wife and I had the privilege of hearing Mother Theresa speak at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington almost 20 years ago. She said something very poignant: "When I look in the eyes of the children in the slums of Calcutta, I see joy. I don't see the same joy when I look in the eyes of American children. Too many of your children look for their happiness in things."

So what is wrong with the world:  
I am!

## **Howard A. Dahl**

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*Among Mr. Dahl's other accomplishments are being named Kazakhstan Honorary Consul in 2012, the Fargo-Moorhead Small Businessman of the Year, and the North Dakota Agricultural Person of the Year. In addition, Amity Technology was the first North Dakota company to be the SBA Region VII Exporter of the Year.*



## *Beyond the Scope of Reason: How Does Technology Change Us?*

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Nothing could be further from the truth. We wouldn't do that. That's just beyond the scope of reason.

*--CIA director John Brennan, March 11, 2014, denying claims that his agency had searched computers of U.S. Senators serving on a CIA oversight committee.<sup>1</sup>*

It is a truism — a true truism — that we “live in a technological age.” A seemingly endless stream of innovation has taken us from packet mail hauled by horse or carriage to digital packets transferred at the speed of light. Along the way we've received previously unimagined capabilities that few of us could now imagine giving up. Examining closer our present situation, though, and considering patterns of life altered by technology, habits of thought, ways of knowing, ways of relating, ways of conceiving ourselves, ways of conceiving our connections with others, it is proper to ask not only “what have we gained,” but “what have we lost?” How has our technology changed us? Has it perhaps shifted the ground upon which previously stable ethical norms were built? This essay was born from meditation on those questions, particularly as they apply to the realm of communication technology.

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Rogers, “Brennan Calls CIA Hacking Charges ‘Beyond The Scope of Reason’” *Time*, URL (accessed August 31, 2014): <http://time.com/20200/brennan-calls-cia-hacking-charges-beyond-the-scope-of-reason/>

Director Brennan's confident rebuttal of allegations that his agency had unlawfully violated the integrity of communications belonging to the U.S. senators gave way by midsummer to an admission that the allegations were indeed correct. In mid-July Brennan retracted his earlier statement.<sup>2</sup> His admission called to mind another event, one indelibly imprinted on the minds of baby boomers, one that also hinged on communication technology. The summer of 2014 marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Watergate hearings and President Richard Nixon's resignation in disgrace from the nation's highest office.

The slowly unfolding Watergate drama began during the 1972 presidential campaign, when burglars were caught attempting to plant listening devices, or “bugs” in telephones at the national offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel in Washington. The goal was to access information that would improve the Nixon campaign's chances. The bugs to be installed were primitive by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards. They might be compared to clever spy gadgets devices one might see in a museum of Cold War artifacts. Four decades ago they were

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<sup>2</sup> Shane Harris, Elias Groll, “‘Nothing Could Be Further From the Truth,’” *Foreign Policy* July 31, 2014, URL (accessed 8-31-14): [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/31/brennan\\_cia\\_interrogation\\_inspectorgeneral\\_integrity](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/31/brennan_cia_interrogation_inspectorgeneral_integrity)

cutting edge technology. President Nixon's fortunes hinged also on another cutting edge communications technology, one he embraced deliberately in hopes of defending his administration against future critics. Believing that an accurate record of his conversations with his aides and advisors would stand as historical evidence of his thoughtfulness and integrity, he had a voice-activated tape recording system installed in the Oval Office. This was a misjudgment. As the drama unraveled, the tapes proved the opposite, revealing specific legal infractions as well as behavior patterns that discredited him in the public eye. Nixon's apparent confidence that technology would serve him well turned out to be wrong. It destroyed his presidency.

One might well assume Nixon's dark nature justly turned the gods against him—that his attempts to use technology to his advantage were fated to result in his just destruction. There is cause for regarding this view as naïve. Fast-forward 40 years: electronic listening devices physically planted inside telephone receivers are, as millennials might say of bell-bottomed jeans, “SO seventies. . . .” Moreover, they are unnecessary in the 2010s. When a government entity seeks to intercept phone conversations—for example, to monitor the communications of a German prime minister — such clumsy techniques are entirely unnecessary. When a federal agency (or certain private corporations) wishes to scan and store the communications data of millions of American citizens, no physical break-in is required. Such operations can be performed with virtual silence and invisibility. And, according

to apparently reliable witnesses, they often are.<sup>3</sup>

Attention-grabbing news headlines, whether in 1974 or 2014, do alert us to the potential mischief our technology enables. Yet such shocking stories —if indeed they are still shocking — are not the stuff of our daily interaction with technology. It is likely that the most profound human impacts accompanying technological change fly, as it were, “below the radar.” They go largely unnoticed and unremarked. Furthermore, we are so heavily saturated with technologies, and their effects are so deeply embedded in our thoughts and habits, that it is difficult to know where to begin. It is no small matter even to adequately define the word technology. Yet we must begin somewhere.

It is worthwhile to note that the freighted term “technology” has application to virtually the entire span of human history. It did not begin with digital networks and devices. In his epic technological tale *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Arthur C. Clarke invited readers to consider the linkage of the technology of the first bone weapons to the technology of spaceships, though the two were separated by eons. Human history is awash in technology. Our present preoccupation with touch screens

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<sup>3</sup> Revelations of the sort revealed by intelligence operative Edward Snowden, who famously in disembarked with vast troves of data on US domestic and foreign surveillance operations, are reminders of the dramatic challenges advanced networked digital technology presents to received understandings about the proper limits of government and corporate power over human interaction. The account of *Guardian* reporter Glenn Greenwald, a Snowden, supporter, presents a sobering picture, regardless of one's views on the propriety of Snowden's controversial actions. Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State* (Macmillan Books, 2014).

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and globally networked pocket devices should not diminish our appreciation, for example, for the revolutionary impact of paper and mass printing, both by historical standards relative newcomers to the western world. By virtue of housing books, a library would even today be the home of an impressive technology, even if it did not possess a single computer. The failure to recognize paper books as profound technology may be, indeed, a trademark shortcoming of the mentality fostered by the recent digital age. Once adopted, technologies blend so fully into the scenery of ordinary life that they tend to become invisible.<sup>4</sup> But books *are* technology. Indeed, writing itself can be properly regarded as a form of technology. All communication technologies have implications for the nature of interaction between human beings. And they possess—at least potentially—powers that can shape human nature. Certain communities and certain individuals have developed a keen sensitivity to this power. Their perspective is worth considering.

Of all examples of the critical approach to technology, the Amish communities of North America present perhaps the most fascinating case. This most un-cosmopolitan subculture, distinguished by strict avoidance of various technologies ubiquitous in mainstream culture, evoke curiosity and often a sense of puzzled amazement. Ken Burns' 2012 film *The Amish*, broadcast as part of the American

Experience history series, was so overwhelmingly popular that PBS soon produced a sequel.<sup>5</sup> The drama of the Amish is supplied by their unusual lifestyle and worldview, and that lifestyle and worldview is different in large part because of the unusual response of Amish communities to certain technological advances.

Sociologist Ronald Kraybill, recognized widely as the dean of Amish studies, interprets the Amish strictures on technology in terms of impact on community and relationships. Most of the prohibitions found in the *ordnung*, the unwritten codes that govern life in Amish communities, date to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kraybill relates a humorous story about the Amish response to one technology:

In about 1920, Ike Zook used his noisy tractor to plow. His neighbor Deacon Jonas Beiler, irked by the clanging noise, thought it was ridiculous to use such a thing in the field. So according to oral tradition, deacon Beiler tied his horses to a post, walked across the road, and told Zook: "Now you have to get rid of this stupid thing. I'm offended by it." Deacon Beiler was not only the deacon in Zook's congregation, but he was also the brother of stern bishop Ben Beiler. Zook was soon "called on the carpet" and asked to make a confession in church. But Zook liked his tractor, so he left the Amish and joined the Peachey church, whose members were using tractors in the field without any qualms.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> My understanding of this process has been enhanced by the weekly NPR program "99% Invisible" hosted by Roman Mars, which explores the origins and course of dozens of inventions and techniques that are so woven into the landscape of daily experience that they remain unnoticed. URL (accessed 8-31-14): <http://99percentinvisible.org>

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<sup>5</sup> *The American Experience*, "The Amish" (2012), URL (accessed August 31, 2014): <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/amish/>

<sup>6</sup> Donald Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 172.

This humorous story aside, Amish elders had practical reasons for banning tractors. Tractors would disrupt established patterns of farm work, patterns felt to be important for maintaining the integrity of Amish life. They would increase the size of farms, which would alter Amish neighborhoods. Likewise, using buggies instead of automobiles would tend to keep Amish neighbors closer together, more accountable, more tightly knit. The Old Order Amish seem intuitively to have understood that those technologies were more than neutral tools to be adopted for mere utilitarian purposes. They would change the community, and its cherished ways of communing.

Just as fascinating is the Amish approach to the telephone. In the first decade of the century, many Amish purchased telephones, and strung lines along fence posts to connect neighboring homes. In 1908, the bishops decided to stop it. “Amish leaders are not entirely sure why the bishops banned the phone,” writes Kraybill, “except that they made gossip too easy, were too handy, and too worldly.” But the sociological explanation makes sense:

A phone decontextualizes conversation by extracting it from a shred social context filled with social codes. Although close friends can discuss intimate matters on a phone, such conversations lack the rich nuances of body language, facial expression, and eye-to-eye contact. . . . One must imagine the other person in a different context removed from the immediate setting.<sup>7</sup>

For the outside world, phones might be entirely appropriate. For the Amish, they

were fundamentally problematic. “Although quicker and handier,” Kraybill observes, “the phone threatened to erode the core of Amish culture: face-to-face conversations.”<sup>8</sup>

As a professor at a small denominational college, I had for many years the privilege of teaching an array of history and social science courses in small, intimate settings rich in “face-to-face conversations.” For my sociology survey course, Amish communities served excellently as examples of certain basic sociological principles. Their selective adoption of technology in support of a unique lifestyle never failed to stimulate lively, and generally sympathetic interest from my students. I’d just been teaching a section on the Amish when I was invited to serve on a planning committee for a national conference of college and university educators from sister schools. The conference theme was “Common challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Several technology-sessions were planned. The emphasis seemed, however, more on how to implement certain technologies than on encouraging critical examination of their purposes and consequences. I thought a somewhat philosophical approach would be valuable. I urged a presentation on technology that would go beyond “ooing” and “ahing” at the latest trends and inventions, and would

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<sup>8</sup> Kraybill, 146. In a recent interview regarding the most recent PBS program on the Amish, Kraybill notes that digital technology is “a big stressor and point of debate in all Amish communities. The biggest issues are cell phones and the Internet.” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, “The Amish: Shunned’ on PBS, A Rare Look At Those Leaving the Church,” January 31, 2014, URL (accessed August 31, 2014): [http://www.cleveland.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2014/01/the\\_amish\\_shunned\\_on\\_pbs\\_a\\_rar.html](http://www.cleveland.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2014/01/the_amish_shunned_on_pbs_a_rar.html)

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<sup>7</sup> Kraybill, 145.

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instead consider some of the “burdens” that inevitably accompany the “blessings” brought by technology. And so, as often happens with such suggestions, I was asked to be the presenter.

My talk, titled “Technology Burdens and Blessings” first addressed the intensity and speed of change brought by the internet. Then as background, I discussed the utopianism of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century visionary Francis Bacon, who enunciated, perhaps as well as anyone ever has, the unlimited resources nature would yield to humanity through sustained investigation of the proper empirical sort. I demonstrated that concern and controversy over new technologies has a long history. And I discussed the Amish as an extreme case of reaction to technology, but one from whom we might take some insight. As teachers comprised most of the audience, I stressed the ways technology affects our communications. I emphasized the commonly recited statistic that 80 percent (or some similar proportion) of communication is nonverbal. Audience members responded with nods of affirmation to that meme. They apparently believed the statistic, or at least accepted that bare words only convey a small portion of the meaning that can be exchanged by persons when they are face to face. And then, I suggested that these observations might have unhappy implications for the apparent headlong rush into distance education that was then taking place. The faces seemed stiffer, the nods became fewer.

Aside from several attendees that stayed behind to chat afterward, the overall response to the presentation seemed cool. Several colleagues agreed

that so far, distance education programs in some disciplines had not fully overcome certain problems associated with cheating and academic rigor. One serious-minded attendee, while agreeing with much of what I’d said, suggested that my presentation had given an unduly “dark” view of technology.

This “dark” view was not, however, shared by other presenters at the same conference. At one session, a professor from Texas, enthusiastic about his experiences teaching online, declared with confidence “anything you can do in the regular classroom you can do online.” “Anything,” that is, he added modestly, “except for putting your hand on the shoulder of a student.” A member of a business school faculty in southern California spoke in strong categorical terms. He described the current generation of college students as “digital natives” immersed from childhood in a world of screens and icons and mice and keyboards. Teaching this generation without using advanced technology would be, he said, like trying to instruct someone in a tongue other than its original one. He spoke of classrooms that lacked digital technology (like networked video projectors, document cameras, and smart boards) as “barren” and “backward” in an age where virtually the first language of the young is defined by computer technology. The tone was evangelistic. Much of his fifty-minute presentation was given over to specific devices and applications, and how to work around glitches. The problems and shortcomings, he assured, were temporary. They would be quickly overcome with the inexorable advances of hardware and software. The danger to educators and schools, he warned, is failing to tap this vast and wondrous potential of current and developing

technologies, and being left behind the fast moving wave of innovation. But, he added, there is no excuse for being left behind, because the technology itself facilitates the education needed to thrive in the digital environment. Limits are artificial and self-imposed. “You can now,” he enthused, “complete a Ph.D. from anywhere in the world with just your iPhone.”

Except for individual conversations I joined, there seemed to be little pushback to these and other such proclamations. Enchantment apparently reigned. No one asked, for example, why the claim of earning a Ph.D with an iPhone was not simple nonsense. No one asked why, if one could do with online education anything that could be done in the classroom, our denomination had paid to transport from across the nation, then feed, house and entertain nearly 200 faculty members in a conference setting? I hesitated to publicly question these colleagues, as their experience with educational technology seemed greater than my own. And I had already had my forum. Yet I could not help recalling the words of another colleague (a former mentor), whom I also liked and respected, and whose experience as an educator also far exceeded my own. She suffered no such enchantment. Her memorable words on the topic were “distance education seems to me a lot of distance and not much education.”

As I considered the rhetoric about virtual classrooms and iPhone-based learning, some analogies seemed to emerge. One was a memory from my grade school in the 1970s, when books and records and handouts about space exploration seemed to proliferate in our classrooms. We were told that “Tang” was one of the great spinoffs of the Apollo space program. And we were

given some in our classroom. We liked it. Our *Weekly Reader* told us that space-age technology would transform food as well as beverages. Soon one could have the equivalent of a Thanksgiving meal with turkey and trimmings by simply swallowing a few compressed nutrition pills. Our article did say that most people would likely favor the real meal over the compressed food pills. The marvel was that you *could* just take the pills and get the meal’s full nutritive value.

Another analogy, one much less sanguine, also emerged in my mind. It was based on an account of the long (pre-1954) legal campaign by NAACP attorneys to erode and overturn the infamous 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that had licensed racial segregation in public facilities. NAACP lawyers, including Thurgood Marshall and his mentor Charles H. Houston, were propelled by a deep awareness that segregation was unreasonable. Their challenge was to illustrate that unreasonableness before the nation’s highest court. One of their most important plaintiffs was Heman Marion Sweatt, an ambitious African-American student seeking admission to the law school at the University of Texas. Sweatt was first refused admission, based on the firm policy that black students should not mingle with white students. Yielding to pressures from several directions, however, the University leased four rooms in a small building next to the state capital, opening what they termed a “separate but equal” law school for blacks. This “basement school” never actually operated. Yet like a similar move by the University of Oklahoma, it served well to illustrate the nonsensical nature of the claim that one could achieve a full quality higher education, preparing one to function in a complex

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public profession, with such extraordinarily limited interaction with others preparing for that same field. Preparation for arguing before a court requires practice in intense, sustained dialogue and debate. One student or a handful of students pursuing this goal would be handicapped regardless of any racial considerations. Thurgood Marshall's arguments to this effect won a unanimous Supreme Court ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950). The University of Texas was forced to integrate its law school. The logic of the ruling led quickly to the overturning of the *Plessy* decision in the 1954 *Brown* case.<sup>9</sup>

The image of juxtaposing segregation with communication technology will doubtless strike some as strange and perhaps wrongheaded. Yet for me, the claim that one could complete a Ph.D. with just an iPhone strongly evoked that image. I pictured a small, lonely cell, separated from real engagement with teachers and fellow students, the content of learning narrowed to pixels and sounds. It depressed me. Was my reaction justified? The reality, it might be argued, is exactly the reverse: by opening access to massive troves of information—by putting the world's greatest teachers at the fingertips of anyone with a connected device—advanced digital technology promotes *more*, not less, integration. It serves to break down

walls, to flatten barriers, to overcome exclusion, to diminish isolation, to magnify opportunities.

There is undeniable truth in such a response. And yet it seems only a partial truth. A fuller truth is that human beings are complex social creatures, who require more than “virtual” interaction with other humans. To be meaningful, it seems to me that education must be personal. There are consequences to conforming our habits of communication to any prevailing technology, especially those as potent as the ones that now envelope us. The full human connection, the face-to-face connection so valued by the Amish, is in danger of being devalued by some of the more extreme claims made on behalf of digital technology. Perhaps, in some theoretical sense, it might be possible to “complete a Ph.D.” with just your iPhone, and it might be possible to have a “Thanksgiving meal” by ingesting a few nutrition pills. But these alternatives would, in my judgment, fall short of certain basic human qualities. They would even fall short of the utilitarian goals envisioned by those who make such claims for them.

This essay began with an illustration warning about invasions of private space—violating accepted norms of ownership and confidentiality. Collapsing, as it were, our zone of privacy. I believe, though, that perhaps the greater danger to guard against with our advanced technology is that it can put distance between people. M.I.T. professor Sherry Turkle's observations in her book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* are appropriate. A longtime scholar of the social impacts of technology, Turkle poses the question “does virtual intimacy degrade our

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<sup>9</sup> The strategic role of the *Sweatt* case in the pre-1954 civil rights movement is documented in Gary M. Lavergne, *Before Brown: Heman Sweatt, Thurgood Marshall, and the Long Road to Justice* (University of Texas Press, 2010). A PBS docudrama entitled *Simple Justice* (1993) dramatized this encounter with a classroom which resembled nothing so much as a mop closet. URL (accessed August 31, 2014): <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/SimpleJustice>

experience of the other kind and, indeed, of all encounters, of any kind?" After decades of research, including interviews with individuals from all walks, Turkle's answer could be described as a nuanced confirmation of the Amish concern over the subtle but real impacts of new technologies upon relationships. "Our networked life," she suggests, "allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We'd rather text than talk."<sup>10</sup>

So are Eli Pariser's observations regarding the "filter bubble" effect which points us directly to the information and the viewpoints that correspond to our pre-existing inclinations as charted by Google and other data conglomerates that track our internet habits and return search results based on the resulting individualized profiles. The result, Pariser argues, is a dramatic reinforcement of ideological and partisan isolation. Internet users with strong ideological proclivities have their biases echoed back and reinforced, and learn to regard those with different views as either immoral or hopelessly ignorant. "More and more," writes Pariser, "your computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click."<sup>11</sup> My own sampling of the sorts of sustained invective hurled back and forth in the comments sections of typical online news and opinion pieces suggests that Pariser's concerns are justified. Without non-virtual, face-to-face communication, discussion of vital issues can easily degenerate into

dehumanizing vitriol, raising and widening the barriers that already separate us. In comparison, the tribalism of the Amish seems relatively benign.

Both the boundary breaking and boundary reinforcing aspects of current technology ought to be the subject of sustained thought. To naively assume that technology is a tool and nothing more, is tantamount to assuming that our patterns of thought and our norms of conduct, both personal and interpersonal, are fixed and established separately from the material objects and the material processes that surround us. I believe this is incorrect. These technologies do in fact change us—individually and corporately—in ways that are profound even if they are hard to quantify, and hard to place in a clear rational context. The changes are real even if they often fall outside our scope of vision. Secretary Brennan's response to the query about CIA violation of senate computers—that such a violation would be "beyond the scope of reason"—seems to betray this narrowness of vision, if not a misjudgment of the nature of reason itself. It is a consequential deficiency, and one that deserves notice.

Is the solution to become Amish? I don't believe so. We should, though, appreciate certain of the insights that have—applied within their unique context—made their lives so different from those of mainstream Americans. Chief among these insights is that technology is more than merely a tool. It alters us—and our relationships—in ways we cannot afford to ignore.

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<sup>10</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books, 2011), 12, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* (Penguin, 2011), introduction.

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