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OUR VIEW

Do us a favor: get a flu shot

Influenza is quickly spreading a deadly swath across the nation. Already, 21 children have died from its complications.

Older victims include a healthy 17-year-old girl from Minnesota who caught the disease and died a week later, cradled in her mother's arms. And a 14-year-old Iowa girl. The radio in her bedroom is still tuned in to the teenager's favorite station, Life 107.1. Her parents say it's too difficult to turn the music off.

Oregon is among only a handful of states that have not reported a high number of flu cases. But that is likely to change.

John Townes, Associate Professor of Medicine Division of Infectious Diseases at Oregon Health & Science University, says: "I don't think we've seen the worst of it yet."

This year's dominant strain of the influenza virus is H3N2, which is associated with more severe flu seasons. This year's H3N2 appears to be a mutation, which has heightened concerns among medical experts. That's because the current

flu vaccine is less effective against this year's virus.

A committee of influenza experts selects which strains to include in each year's vaccine. This is done

several months before the winter flu season begins to allow time for mass production of the vaccine. Because the flu virus is constantly changing, the vaccine may turn out to be an imperfect match.

Still, health officials are urging everyone to get vaccinated for the flu, even at this

late date. The vaccine can reduce severity of the disease and is still 50 percent effective against the new H3N2 strain, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. This is especially important to those who are most at risk: children, the elderly and people with medical conditions such as diabetes and asthma.

In getting a flu shot, you are not just protecting yourself. Your vaccine will reduce the chance of spreading this most contagious disease to your family, friends and co-workers.

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Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Start crafting rules for robocars

The (Eugene) Register-Guard

Two years ago, state Rep. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, introduced a bill in the Oregon Legislature calling for the Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Department to write rules for driverless cars. Oregon will need such rules, but it's just as well that Gelser's bill died.

It set an end-of-2014 deadline for the DMV. The agency's counterpart in California has been unable to meet the same deadline for rulemaking. Driverless cars may be ready for us before we're ready for them.

Google has been testing autonomous cars in California and Nevada, and has clocked about half a million miles in traffic with no accidents attributable to the vehicles themselves. Nissan, Volvo, Toyota and other car companies are also working on the concept of cars that drive themselves, using computers, cameras, sensors and GPS technology to avoid collisions and plot routes.

Anyone who has followed GPS instructions into a cul-de-sac has reason to be skeptical of such technology. So far Google's autonomous cars have had a backup system: A human driver ready to take control at the first sign of trouble. But as the technology develops further, human drivers may become not just superfluous but inferior: An estimated 90 percent of traffic accidents are caused by drivers' errors.

A robocar will never drive while drunk or take its eyes from the road while fumbling for a CD.

The California DMV, however, was unable to complete its rule-making task by the end of last year. It wasn't even able to answer the threshold question of whether driverless cars should be allowed on the roads without a human passenger who is prepared to take control.

As long as a human driver is required to remain on alert and has a full set of controls, the robocar will be not much more than a glorified form of cruise

control.

If cars really can drive themselves without a human minder ready to take over at any moment, further questions arise.

Would a driverless car need all the equipment and design elements that allow humans to drive safely, such as steering wheels, pedals, mirrors and windows? Who is liable in case of an accident — the car's maker or its owner?

Would driverless cars be allowed to operate without human passengers, delivering pizzas or prescriptions? If a driverless car carried passengers, would one of them have to be an adult?

Those were the types of questions that stumped the

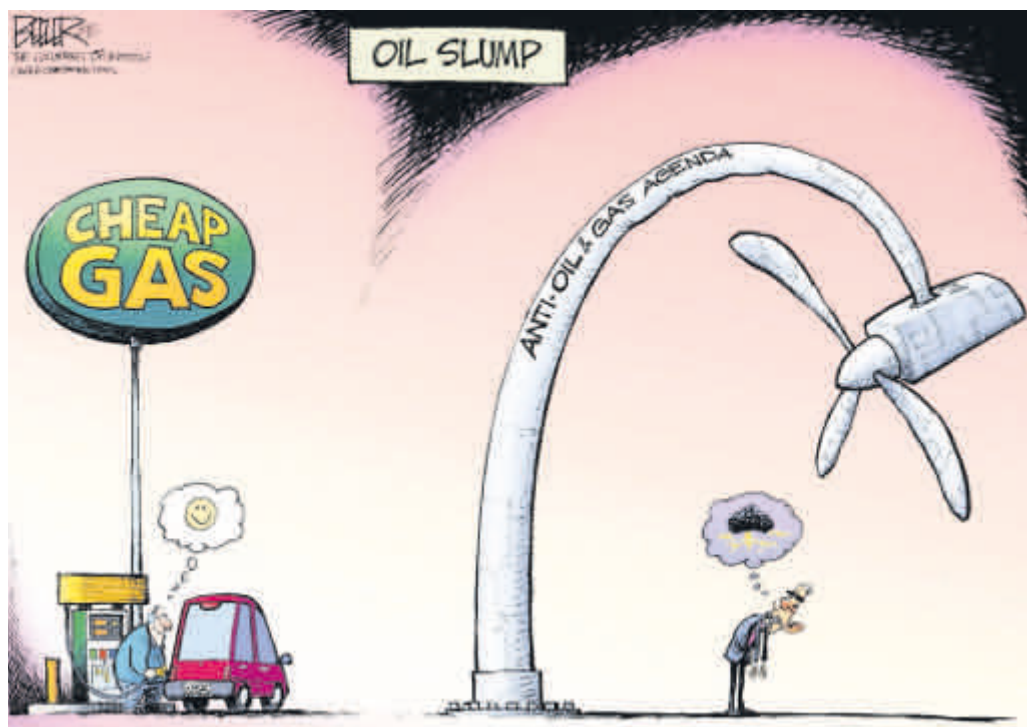
California DMV, and it's doubtful Oregon would have had greater success in answering them. But the issues need to be examined, because driverless cars are coming, perhaps initially as cars that include safety sensors and route planners so sophisticated that the human drivers have little to do. And driverless cars will be more than a matter of convenience: Gelser sees them as a means of providing liberating mobility to senior citizens and disabled people.

In a truly driverless car, the passengers, if any, could sleep, read or work.

Once driverless cars made up a substantial fraction of the fleet, their movements could be coordinated to improve the speed and efficiency of the transportation system. Ride-sharing would become more widespread. Drivers of all kinds would be automated out of their jobs. Just as putting Americans behind the wheel transformed American cities and workplaces in the 20th century, getting them out of the driver's seat may change the nature of life in the 21st.

That would have been too much for the Oregon DMV to chew on with a 2014 deadline. But the many questions and challenges presented by driverless cars will need to be faced.

Driverless cars may be ready for us before we're ready for them.



OTHER VIEWS

The problem with meaning

Not long ago, a friend sent me a speech that the great civic leader John Gardner gave to the Stanford Alumni Association 61 years after he graduated from that college. The speech is chock-full of practical wisdom. I especially liked this passage:

"The things you learn in maturity aren't simple things such as acquiring information and skills. You learn not to engage in self-destructive behavior. You learn not to burn up energy in anxiety. You discover how to manage your tensions. You learn that self-pity and resentment are among the most toxic of drugs. You find that the world loves talent but pays off on character.

"You come to understand that most people are neither for you nor against you; they are thinking about themselves. You learn that no matter how hard you try to please, some people in this world are not going to love you, a lesson that is at first troubling and then really quite relaxing."

Gardner goes on in this wise way. And then, at the end, he goes into a peroration about leading a meaningful life. "Meaning is something you build into your life. You build it out of your own past, out of your affections and loyalties, out of the experience of humankind as it is passed on to you. ... You are the only one who can put them together into that unique pattern that will be your life."

Gardner puts "meaning" at the apogee of human existence. His speech reminded me how often we've heard that word over the past decades. As my *Times* colleague April Lawson puts it, "meaning" has become the stand-in concept for everything the soul yearns for and seeks. It is one of the few phrases acceptable in modern parlance to describe a fundamentally spiritual need.

Yet what do we mean when we use the word meaning?

The first thing we mean is that life should be about more than material success. The person leading a meaningful life has found some way of serving others that leads to a feeling of significance.

Second, a meaningful life is more satisfying than a merely happy life. Happiness is about enjoying the present; meaning is about dedicating oneself to the future. Happiness is about receiving; meaningfulness is about giving. Happiness is about upbeat moods and nice experiences. People leading meaningful lives experience a deeper sense of satisfaction.

In this way, meaning is an uplifting state of consciousness. It's what you feel when you're serving things beyond self.

Yet it has to be said, as commonly used today, the word is flabby and vacuous, the product of a culture that has grown inarticulate about inner life.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Let me put it this way: If we look at the people in history who achieved great things — like Nelson Mandela or Albert Schweitzer or Abraham Lincoln — it wasn't because they wanted to bathe luxuriously in their own sense of meaningfulness. They had objective and eternally true standards of justice and injustice. They were indignant when those eternal standards were violated. They subscribed to moral systems — whether secular or religious — that recommended

specific ways of being, and had specific structures of what is right and wrong, and had specific disciplines about how you might get better over time.

Meaningfulness tries to replace structures, standards and disciplines with self-regarding emotion. The ultimate authority of meaningful is the warm tingling we get when we feel significant and meaningful. Meaningfulness tries to replace moral systems with the emotional corona that surrounds acts of charity.

It's a paltry substitute. Because meaningfulness is built solely on an emotion, it is contentless and irreducible. Because it is built solely on emotion, it's subjective and relativistic. You get meaning one way. I get meaning another way. Who is any of us to judge another's emotion?

Because it's based solely on sentiment, it is useless. There are no criteria to determine what kind of meaningfulness is higher.

There's no practical manual that would help guide each of us as we move from shallower forms of service to deeper ones. There is no hierarchy of values that would help us select, from among all the things we might do, that activity which is highest and best to do.

Because it's based solely on emotion, it's fleeting. When the sensations of meaningful go away then the cause that once aroused them gets dropped, too. Ennui floods in. Personal crisis follows. There's no reliable ground.

The philosophy of meaningfulness emerges in a culture in which there is no common moral vocabulary or framework. It emerges amid radical pluralism, when people don't want to judge each other. Meaningfulness emerges when the fundamental question is, do we feel good?

Real moral systems are based on a balance of intellectual rigor and aroused moral sentiments. Meaningfulness is pure and self-regarding feeling, the NutraSweet of the inner life.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, and is a commentator on "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer."

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LETTERS POLICY

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