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OUR VIEW

Put Roundup risk in context

A World Health Organization finding that glyphosate “probably” causes cancer shouldn’t be dismissed out of hand, but requires some context.

The World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer last month issued a paper classifying glyphosate herbicide, sold under the trade name Roundup by Monsanto Co., as “probably carcinogenic to humans.”

The finding made headlines because genetically modified “Roundup Ready” corn, soybeans and other crops are staples of U.S. agriculture. Critics have used the report to call into question the safety of GMOs generally and of glyphosate-resistant crops specifically.

It’s disturbing any time commonly used products are found to have a link to cancer. While IARC’s finding shouldn’t be dismissed out of hand, it must be taken in context.

The finding is the opposite of what the Environmental Protection Agency and other regulatory and research agencies have concluded.

The European Union’s Glyphosate Task Force said evaluations done over the past 40 years consistently confirmed glyphosate “poses no unacceptable risk to humans, animals or the environment.” One of the largest epidemiology studies involved approximately 57,000 U.S. farmers who apply herbicides, the task force said in a prepared statement.

The task force said there are “serious deficiencies in terms of methodological approach” in IARC’s findings and that the

classification should be withdrawn.

In reaching its findings, IARC does not conduct original research. It evaluates available literature.

The German Federal Institute of Risk Assessment, which in 2014 declared glyphosate non-carcinogenic, called the IARC classification a “surprise” and contrary to studies done by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and even a prior study by WHO.

The finding is the opposite of what the EPA and other regulatory agencies have concluded.

IARC’s finding is not conclusive.

IARC classifies substances on a scale of 1 to 4. Substances in Group 1 are classified “carcinogenic to humans” because there’s enough

evidence to conclude that they cause cancer. Group 1 includes birth control pills, alcoholic beverages, mineral oils and the sun.

Glyphosate is classified in Group 2(a), which means “there is limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans and sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals.”

The report said “limited evidence” means a positive association has been observed, but other explanations have not been ruled out.”

While glyphosate and other chemicals warrant continuing study, nothing in the IARC’s report suggests it shouldn’t continue to be used responsibly.

And what of the implications for biotechnology? It’s a conventional herbicide, not genetic engineering, that’s at issue. The technology still presents the best opportunity to provide farmers with increased yields to feed an increasing population.

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.

YOUR VIEWS

BMCC has worked to get max value out of bond

For more than half a century Blue Mountain Community College has educated thousands of students, many of whom live and work in Umatilla and Morrow counties. Family businesses have been established, job training has expanded opportunities and lives have been enriched with specific coursework. Theater, music, the Arts and Culture Festival and numerous other activities have brought depth to rural life.

Beginning in 2014 President Cam Preus, board members and staff held 12 “active listening” sessions throughout both counties. They heard the constructive criticism and the priorities of our citizens. The bond proposal reflects this wealth of community input. The highest priorities were workforce development, safety, protection and updating of existing infrastructure and equipment. Partnerships have been established in Hermiston utilizing existing OSU facilities for precision agriculture and critical workforce training at the Port of Morrow in Boardman. BMCC is collaborating with the Energy Trust of Oregon and could see an annual savings of around \$100,000 in utility costs with upgrades to heating, cooling and electrical systems.

State and lottery funds will provide \$4 million as a match to further leverage the bond. The college shaved \$5 million from the original bond and reduced the cost to 25 cents per thousand assessed property value. The median home value in Umatilla County is \$145,000 for an estimated bond cost of \$36.25 per year.

Over 50 years ago the citizens of Umatilla and Morrow counties made a wise decision to establish Blue Mountain Community College. Please join us in

the continuing support of this worthwhile investment in the education, training and well-being of both counties.

**Paul and Mary Davis
Pendleton**

BMCC bond passage crucial to the region

Backers of ballot measures always talk about the urgency of their cause, but Blue Mountain Community College’s bond measure is truly crucial to the economy of northeast Oregon.

On the May 19 ballot is a bond measure to fund \$25 million in new job training and education facilities, new instructional equipment and infrastructural equipment to include electrical, energy management, utility lines and data center technology

This measure is reduced from one that went down to defeat some months back. That rejection has resulted in an improved package that has been distilled to items that are just must-haves for the community college which operates from Pendleton, Hermiston, Boardman, Milton-Freewater and Baker City.

People took a key step 51 years ago in forming the district. But the degree of responsibility is much higher this election. The reason: Blue Mountain needs to keep its facilities current with technology and job and business needs.

We need to turn to our community college for training and education as tuition soars at universities, as technology changes the job market, and workers need to retool. Fortunately, Blue Mountain and other two year colleges have lower costs and lower fees than the universities. These community colleges need funding, but they are a bargain.

**Mike and Pam Forrester
Pendleton**

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

OTHER VIEWS

A moral bucket list



**DAVID
BROOKS**
Comment

About once a month I run across a person who radiates an inner light. These people can be in any walk of life. They seem deeply good. They listen well. They make you feel funny and valued. You often catch them looking after other people and as they do so their laugh is musical and their manner is infused with gratitude. They are not thinking about what wonderful work they are doing. They are not thinking about themselves.

When I meet such a person it brightens my whole day. But I confess I often have a sadder thought: It occurs to me that I’ve achieved a decent level of career success, but I have not achieved that. I have not achieved that generosity of spirit, or that depth of character.

A few years ago I realized that I wanted to be a bit more like those people. I realized that if I wanted to do that I was going to have to work harder to save my own soul. I was going to have to have the sort of moral adventures that produce that kind of goodness. I was going to have to be better at balancing my life.

It occurred to me that there were two sets of virtues, the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral — whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful. Were you capable of love?

We all know that the eulogy virtues are more important than the résumé ones. But our culture and our educational systems spend more time teaching the skills and strategies you need for career success than the qualities you need to radiate that sort of inner light. Many of us are clearer on how to build a career than on how to build character.

But if you live for external achievement, years pass and the deepest parts of you go unexplored and unstructured. You lack a moral vocabulary. It is easy to slip into a self-satisfied moral mediocrity. You grade yourself on a forgiving curve. You figure as long as you are not obviously hurting anybody and people seem to like you, you must be OK. But you live with an unconscious boredom, separated from the deepest meaning of life and the highest moral joys. Gradually, a humiliating gap opens between your actual self and your desired self, between you and those incandescent souls you sometimes meet.

So a few years ago I set out to discover how those deeply good people got that way. I didn’t know if I could follow their road to character (I’m a pundit, more or less paid to appear smarter and better than I really am). But I at least wanted to know what the road looked like.

I came to the conclusion that wonderful people are made, not born — that the people I admired had achieved an unfakeable inner virtue, built slowly from specific moral and spiritual accomplishments.

If we wanted to be gimmicky, we could say these accomplishments amounted to a moral bucket list, the experiences one should have on the way toward the richest possible inner life. Here, quickly, are some of them:

The Humility Shift

We live in the culture of the Big Me. The meritocracy wants you to promote yourself. Social media wants you to broadcast a highlight reel of your life. Your parents and teachers were always telling you how wonderful you were.

But all the people I’ve ever deeply admired are profoundly honest about their own weaknesses. They have identified their core sin, whether it is selfishness, the desperate need for approval, cowardice, hardheartedness or whatever. They have traced how that core sin leads to the behavior that makes them feel ashamed. They achieved a profound humility.

Self-Defeat

External success is achieved through competition with others. But character is built during the confrontation with your own weakness. Dwight Eisenhower, for example, realized early on that his core sin was his temper. He developed a moderate, cheerful exterior because he knew he needed to project optimism and confidence to lead. He did silly things to tame his anger. He took the names of the people he hated, wrote them down on slips of paper and tore them up and threw them in the garbage. Over a lifetime, he made himself strong in his weakest places.

The Dependency Leap

Many people give the book “Oh, the Places You’ll Go!” as a graduation gift. This book suggests that life is an autonomous journey. We master certain skills and experience adventures and certain challenges on our way to individual success. This individualist worldview suggests that character is this little iron figure of willpower inside. But people on the road to character understand that no person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own. Individual will, reason and compassion are not strong enough to consistently defeat selfishness, pride and self-deception. We all need redemptive assistance from outside.

People on this road see life as a process of commitment making. Character is defined by how deeply rooted you are. Have you developed deep connections that hold you up in times of challenge and push you toward the good? In the realm of the intellect, a person of character has achieved a settled philosophy about fundamental things. In the realm of emotion, she is embedded in a web of unconditional loves.

Energizing Love

Dorothy Day led a disorganized life when she was young: drinking, carousing, a suicide attempt or two, following her desires, unable to find direction. But the birth of her daughter changed her. She wrote of that birth, “If I had written the greatest book, composed the greatest symphony, painted the most beautiful painting or carved the most exquisite figure I could not have felt the more exalted creator than I did when they placed my child in my arms.”

That kind of love decenters the self. It reminds you that your true riches are in another. Most of all, this love electrifies. It puts you in a state of need and makes it delightful to serve what you love. Day’s love for her daughter spilled outward and upward. As she wrote, “No human creature could receive or contain so vast a flood of love and joy as I often felt after the birth of my child. With this came the need to worship, to adore.”

She made unshakable commitments in all directions. She became a Catholic, started a radical newspaper, opened settlement houses for the poor and lived among the poor, embracing shared poverty as a way to build community, to not only do good, but be good. This gift of love overcame, sometimes, the natural self-centeredness all of us feel.

The Call Within the Call

We all go into professions for many reasons: money, status, security. But some people have experiences that turn a career into a calling. These experiences quiet the self. All that matters is living up to the standard of excellence inherent in their craft.

Frances Perkins was a young woman who was an activist for progressive causes at the start of the 20th century. She was polite and a bit genteel. But one day she stumbled across the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire, and watched dozens of garment workers hurl themselves to their deaths rather than be burned alive. That experience shamed her moral sense and purified her ambition. It was her call within a call.

After that, she turned herself into an instrument for the cause of workers’ rights. She was willing to work with anybody, compromise with anybody, push through hesitation. She even changed her appearance so she could become a more effective instrument for the movement. She became the first woman in a U.S. Cabinet, under Franklin D. Roosevelt, and emerged as one of the great civic figures of the 20th century.

The Conscience Leap

In most lives there’s a moment when people strip away all the branding and status symbols, all the prestige that goes with having gone to a certain school or been born into a certain family. They leap out beyond the utilitarian logic and crash through the barriers of their fears.

The novelist George Eliot (her real name was Mary Ann Evans) was a mess as a young woman, emotionally needy, falling for every man she met and being rejected. Finally, in her mid-30s she met a guy named George Lewes. Lewes was estranged from his wife, but legally he was married. If Eliot went with Lewes she would be labeled an adulteress by society. She’d lose her friends, be cut off by her family. It took her a week to decide, but she went with Lewes. “Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically. Women who are satisfied with such ties do not act as I have done,” she wrote.

She chose well. Her character stabilized. Her capacity for empathetic understanding expanded. She lived in a state of steady, devoted love with Lewes, the kind of second love that comes after a person is older, scarred a bit and enmeshed in responsibilities. He served her and helped her become one of the greatest novelists of any age. Together they turned neediness into constancy.

Commencement speakers are always telling young people to follow their passions. Be true to yourself. This is a vision of life that begins with self and ends with self. But people on the road to inner light do not find their vocations by asking, what do I want from life? They ask, what is life asking of me? How can I match my intrinsic talent with one of the world’s deep needs?

Their lives often follow a pattern of defeat, recognition, redemption. They have moments of pain and suffering. But they turn those moments into occasions of self-understanding — by keeping a journal or making art. As Paul Tillich put it, suffering introduces you to yourself and reminds you that you are not the person you thought you were.

The people on this road see the moments of suffering as pieces of a larger narrative. They are not really living for happiness, as it is conventionally defined. They see life as a moral drama and feel fulfilled only when they struggle on behalf of some ideal.

This is a philosophy for stumblers. The stumbler scuffs through life, a little off balance. But the stumbler faces her imperfect nature with unvarnished honesty, with the opposite of squeamishness. Recognizing her limitations, the stumbler at least has a serious foe to overcome and transcend. The stumbler has an outstretched arm, ready to receive and offer assistance. Her friends are there for deep conversation, comfort and advice.

External ambitions are never satisfied because there’s always something more to achieve. But the stumblers occasionally experience moments of joy. There’s joy in freely chosen obedience to organizations, ideas and people. There’s joy in mutual stumbling. There’s an aesthetic joy we feel when we see morally good action, when we run across someone who is quiet and humble and good, when we see that however old we are, there’s lots to do ahead.

The stumbler doesn’t build her life by being better than others, but by being better than she used to be. Unexpectedly, there are transcendent moments of deep tranquility. For most of their lives their inner and outer ambitions are strong and in balance. But eventually, at moments of rare joy, career ambitions pause, the ego rests, the stumbler looks out at a picnic or dinner or a valley and is overwhelmed by a feeling of limitless gratitude, and an acceptance of the fact that life has treated her much better than she deserves. Those are the people we want to be.

David Brooks, New York Times columnist.