Dear Friends,

“I’ll start by challenging the title,” Tom Kochan said as he began his remarks for the J. Herbert Hollomon Memorial Symposium. The program, held on May 10, was titled Humans Need Not Apply? Reflections on Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work. In his scholarship and his work as a labor mediator, Dr. Kochan has seen workers, unions, and employers throw up their hands as if there is nothing they can do in response to the increasing automation of tasks. “Humans need not apply?” he asked. “No! Humans need to take charge” and ensure that machines are developed and introduced in a way that respects the wisdom and experience of workers.

During the symposium, Liz Reynolds noted that our subtitle, “the future of work,” implies a question: Will human labor as we know it disappear? The new MIT Initiative which Dr. Reynolds co-leads is intentionally called “the Work of the Future,” to signal that, however the economy changes, people will continue to have a meaningful role in it. Our third panelist, Andrew McAfee, co-author of Machine, Platform, Crowd: Harnessing Our Digital Future, similarly encouraged us to look for the ways that our future work can be safe, flexible, creative, and fulfilling.

At the end of the evening’s lively conversation, our moderator Lucas Stanczyk, a professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, invited one last question from the audience. A woman stood up and said, “The most important word in the title of tonight’s program is humans.” She asked the panel, “If we started from our humanity—what we believe philosophically and what we need personally—what kind of work would we create?”

For me, these exchanges about the symposium’s title represent the heart of what we do at Radius. In an institution that runs on problem sets with correct answers, we invite the kind of open inquiry where people don’t just answer the question, but challenge the premise behind it. We frame conversations about complex issues in ways that encourage people not to get overwhelmed, but to get engaged. We look for hope and new opportunities in every situation, and we foster reflection on the fundamental beliefs that shape our humanity.

This has been another great year for Radius, with an abundance of engaging courses, workshops, and speakers. Everything that we offer depends on you, our community of partners, supporters and friends. Thank you for believing in the future of our work.

With gratitude,

The Rev. Thea Keith-Lucas
RADIUS PROGRAMS 2017-2018

ARE WE THE ENEMY?
NOVEMBER 30, 2017

We invited Emile Bruneau (Annenberg School for Communications, University of Pennsylvania) to discuss the neuroscience of conflict and empathy in conjunction with the exhibition The Enemy at the MIT Museum. In this virtual reality installation by Karim Ben Khalifa, viewers experience face-to-face conversations with six combatants from opposing sides of conflicts in El Salvador, Israel/Palestine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Together with respondent Karen Ross (UMass Boston), Dr. Bruneau explained the benefits and limits of empathy, and offered alternate strategies for changing our mental responses to people we perceive as enemies.

HACK YOUR MIND

This year we added two excellent presentations to our ongoing series on the science and technology of mindfulness. On November 17, Susan Whitfield Gabrieli (McGovern Institute for Brain Research) explained how mindfulness meditation changes the structure and function of the brain, supports healthy development for children, and can suggest treatments for brain disorders such as schizophrenia. Zan Barry of MIT Community Wellness led a fun and substantive program on February 22 on the use of mindfulness techniques for better quality sleep.

REDUCING THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WAR
APRIL 7, 2018

Along with Mass Peace Action, the American Friends Service Committee and many other co-sponsors (please see our website for a complete list), we hosted the second annual comprehensive day-long program on nuclear proliferation. This year’s theme, Investing in Minds, Not Missiles highlighted the importance of campus activism, bringing student leaders from 15 campuses in New York, New Jersey, and New England, along with experienced scholars and activists, to share strategies for education, divestment, and challenges to the military focus of our federal budget. A special thanks to Jonathan King, Steering Committee member, for his tireless work organizing this important event.

HOLLOMON SYMPOSIUM ON THE FUTURE OF WORK
MAY 10, 2018

We are entrusted with the J. Herbert Hollomon Memorial Symposium, a series of forums on the pressing ethical issues of our times that honors Herb Hollomon’s distinguished career in science policy and his love of a good debate. This May we offered Humans Need Not Apply? Reflections on Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work, a substantive and lively program with Thomas Kochan (MIT Sloan), Andrew McAfee (MIT Initiative on the Digital Economy), Elisabeth B. Reynolds (MIT Industrial Performance Center) and moderator Lucas Stanczyk (Harvard University). Professor George Heaton (Worcester Polytechnic University), who worked with Herb Hollomon at the MIT Center for Policy Alternatives, offered a remembrance of his mentor and a hope that our discussion would be “haunted”—or at least inspired—by Dr. Hollomon’s spirit. We are grateful to the Hollomon Planning Committee: Sally Haslanger, Jay Keyser, Josué Lopez, Ken Oye, Dan Roos, John Tirman and, with very special thanks, Jake Jacoby.

YOUTH SUMMIT ON CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY
MAY 19, 2018

Our hosting of the 12th Annual Youth Summit with Boston Latin School YouthCAN was, once again, a joy. This long-standing partnership is a cornerstone of our spring semester and an exciting way to connect with the youth of Boston, Cambridge and the metropolitan area. Speakers included Elena Letona, Executive Director of Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts. Her delivery and message were perfectly honed to the young audience and her stories were full of hope and inspiration. To kick off the afternoon session, Doannie Tran, Assistant Superintendent of Boston Public Schools, gave spirited and lively encouragement to the young activists. Very special thanks to Cate Arnold, teacher advisor; and her incredible cohort of students for organizing this amazing event!
“In my classes, I don’t get to think about what the impact of my work is. My UROP is chemistry but I’m wondering what is happening with this research? I have no idea. This class has made me think a lot.”

“This class really opened my perspective and I did extra reading, actively going out and learning about things I don’t know about.”

“Make sure you’re having uncomfortable conversations.”

“I’ve been made so aware of my privilege.”

These are a few brief excerpts of students’ final presentations for our Spring ethics seminar. For the last class, students share their experiences and their perspectives on the issues we’ve discussed. It is always deeply moving to hear them speak about how they’ve been changed over the semester. Our guest speakers and discussion leaders covered community values and individual choice, the nature of forgiveness, and ethical responses to immigration, racism and climate change. We had a record number of students take the class: twenty-nine. We hope this turnout represents an increasing awareness of the importance of ethical reflection among our MIT undergraduates. Again, our deep thanks to Professor Sally Haslanger (MIT Philosophy) for sponsoring and teaching the class with Trish Weinmann.
Leon Trilling, a decades-long friend and supporter of The Technology and Culture Forum (Radius), died on April 20. Although retired as an active faculty member, Professor Trilling continued to teach at MIT and was dedicated to improving educational opportunities for young people, especially young people of color. We are honored to have had Professor Trilling in our circle and mourn his passing.