



# The Utah Humanist

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HumanistsofUtah.org

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**H**umanists of Utah is a Chapter of the American Humanist Association. We are a nonprofit corporation organized to advocate and promote ethical, rational, and democratic humanism among our membership and the larger community.



**Humanism** is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,  
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Humanist Association

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## Life Can Be Wonderful

It must have been twenty years ago when my daughter Sarah and I were talking one evening and she said “Dad, when I look up at the mountains or the night sky I feel so small. Insignificant. Like nothing.” She was only about 12 years old at the time, and her angst wasn’t surprising. Many of us have such feelings when we face the immensity of space and the stars, the vast face of a mountain, or the rolling expanse of the sea. If we compare our physical size against such immensity we are indeed seemingly insignificant, less than ants staring down an elephant. But that feeling of smallness is the product of only one, very limited point of view, and given what we now know about ourselves and our place in the cosmos it is not very relevant.

Even two decades ago, I had enough insight to reply to Sarah, “You are the most complex system in nature.” I then attempted to convey that as part of the web of life on Earth, and a very beautiful member of one of the most complex species in that network, she was far more intriguing, rare, and wonderful than any star or mountain. The stars are just big globs of gas collapsing and fusing under their own weight; mountains mere piles of stone pushed up by tectonic forces. They are indeed magnificent and awesome, but lacking a nervous system they are unable to think, play the violin as Sarah does, invent, write, speculate, measure, create music, poetry or mathematics. The stars cannot look at each other and wonder or, large as they are, even feel insignificant or grand. What would it be like to be a star or a mountain? Not much different than being a stone or being dead. No awareness or thoughts, no emotions, no sensations.

We humans can observe, reason about what we see, and explain our insights to each other. And that ability to see, measure, reason, and communicate reveals ever more about us and this universe with each passing year, reveals more and more about how marvelous we are, how rare and improbable, and how wonderful. The intricate, interwoven patterns of life on Earth are the facets of a jewel in the cosmos. And only the human pattern, the most complex of these aggregates of atoms, these systems of chemically communicating cells, can puzzle out the rules, laws, and history that made us and the universe what we are. No star

(Continued on page 4)

### Inside This Issue

HoU YouTube Channel.....	2
Soapbox / Original Gods Were Women!.....	3
Humanist Celebrant .....	5



 Humanists of Utah

## Understanding our Legal System through Ethics and Compassion



The Honorable  
**RICHARD MAZRICK**  
Third District Judge

OCTOBER  
10

THURSDAY  
7:30

ELLIOTT HALL  
569 S. 1300 E.  
Salt Lake City

## YouTube Channel

Humanists of Utah now has our very own YouTube channel!

We will be posting all of our future speaker's presentations (not counting technical difficulties or the speaker's privacy choice). Our most recent posting is Jared Anderson's Humanism 101. It is an hour long but well worth your perusal, especially if you were unable to attend the September meeting. More to follow!

Where to find it?

There is a link on the [HoU web page](#) under **Media**->Videos (thanks Lisa Miller!) or search YouTube for the "Humanists of Utah" channel.

Don't forget to subscribe; this will make it easier to find in the future!

—Brian Trick

## Support the AHA

**Humanists of Utah** urges you to support the American Humanist Association.

The AHA is dedicated to preserving individual rights and promoting nationally the philosophy of humanism.

Membership brings you the *Humanist* magazine and *Free Mind* newsletter six times a year.

Annual membership is only \$45.00 (**\$35 Introductory Rate**) and can be paid with plastic. Phone (800) 743-6646 or write to:

**American Humanist Association**  
1821 Jefferson Place, NW  
Washington DC 20036

Or visit online:

<https://americanhumanist.org/>

## Nonprofit

Humanists of Utah is a nonprofit organization supported in large part by dues paying members. Our other major source of funds comes from generous gifts, mostly from the same dues payers who give a little more. In February 2003, chapter member Marion Craig died and left HoU a bequest of \$20,000.

**The Florien Wineriter Trust recently donated \$1000.00 to our chapter!** When you create your personal will please consider leaving a gift to Humanists of Utah.



I missed Jared Anderson's presentation of *Humanism 101* last month. Fortunately, we now record speaker presentations and make them available via our website, so I watched it. Jared did a great job and expressed some ideas that I had not thought of. First, he talked about a Geek Culture where organized religions are inherently humanistic because they were created by and for humans. Yes, they get a little confused sometimes about what is and is not important but basically organized religions are about humanism! One of the first things I thought about was watching the 1988 PBS six-episode series, *The Power of Myth*, where Bill Moyers interviewed the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell. One of the main takeaways from this series is that every known culture, past and present, has a Creation Myth and that these myths have many common features. I'm not sure if the "original" myth is known. It is, however, understood that they all grew from a basic framework. There is almost always a Deity (creator), and the stories often involve a tree with special fruit and a serpent. The Creation Myth in the Bible is actually more than one story; in Genesis I God creates humans "in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

In the earliest known cultures this God was a woman. You've seen the Fertility Goddesses, round statues of a pregnant woman. Female's had the power to create children and were worshiped as Gods. The phrasing in Genesis I identifies humans as women, or men, or hermaphrodites and findings from dwellings of these ancients show evidence of these beliefs.

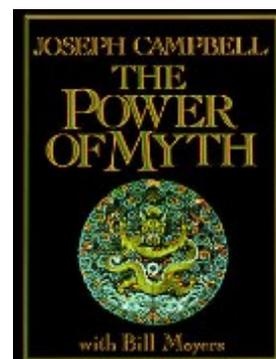
But in Genesis II, which is much younger version of creation story than Genesis I, "man" is created individually. Then God

planted a garden and created all the beasts, the birds, etc. *Finally*, God got around to creating "woman." According to Joseph Campbell this myth arises from stories when historical humans replaced "hunter/gatherer" tribal organization with farming Communities. The new organizational structure led to men replacing women in important community leadership roles.

Jason also discussed humanism's goal to, "Maximize Wellbeing." An old and oft-used subject in humanist discussions is to describe humanism in less than 30 seconds Also called an elevator response. I have been fiddling with this for 20 years or so. Our website banner reads, "Joyful Living, Rational Thinking, Responsible Behavior." I think clarifying edits to something like, "Live Joyfully by practicing Rational Thinking and Behaving Responsibly" is in order. Still a little awkward but I think it is moving in the right direction. Any Word Smiths out there want to take a crack at design? What about Maximize Wellbeing? Please email your thoughts to me with the subject of Soapbox (see page 5) and maybe we can get a discussion going.

—Wayne Wilson

*The Power of Myth* series is available on both Amazon Prime (charge for each episode) and on Netflix.





# Life Can Be Wonderful

(Continued from page 1)

can do that; no mountain can attempt to decipher the riddle of its own existence.

What is the point of all this? Ross Douthat, a conservative columnist for the New York Times, in his memorial to Christopher Hitchens wrote that “rigorous atheism casts a wasting shadow over every human hope and endeavor” (NY Times December 17, 2011). This remark has stuck in my craw these last 12 months and is very far from the truth, betraying an almost laughable ignorance. It is typical of the remarks made by the conservative religious community about secular humanism and atheism. Such remarks are made with no data to back them up, just flat statements of dogma without justification.

Indeed, it is very easy to make the opposite case, as Hitchens did in his book *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, that religion casts a wasting pall over existence. It isn't atheists who denigrate all humanity as miserable sinners, terrorizing children with threats of eternal hellfire and endless torment. And it isn't atheists who claim that this life is only a painful proving ground for the next, warning that lest we spend our lives groveling in preparation for meeting a vengeful and capricious maker he may visit us with tsunamis and massacres of children. If those aren't part of an enervating cloud darkening existence, I don't know what is.

A view of existence based on evidence and reason rather than divine magic demonstrates that we are marvelous and precious creatures in our own right, far more astonishing and rare than anything depicted in creation myths or fantasies given in any antiquated text. The story of us is far more fascinating than any ancient fable. The evidence, after all, shows no trace of an all powerful creator, but tells a 14-billion-year-long tale of chaotic explosions, collapsing stars, expanding space, warping space-time, black holes and cosmic jets, serendipitously spawning a tiny island of order that eventually produced us, unique in all this universe. The atheist sees that life is rare and precious,

something to be cherished and celebrated, not wasted ranting in hatred against our fellows over doctrinal differences or sexual orientation, or groveling before an imaginary deity.

To understand how rare and precious we are, we need only understand what the evidence demonstrates, that we came about through biological evolution from simpler forms of life. That evolution is driven through random mutation and non-random selection by the environment when the mutations occur. That randomness provides a set of choices for survival, and that randomness makes us unique in this cosmos. If evolution is happening on other worlds, the random mutations ensure that non-random selection has a completely different set of survival choices on each world. Life on no two worlds will be alike, and the complex creatures that might result on each planet will be quite different. The species of Earth are therefore unique. We are the only humans in this cosmos, and we may be the only highly intelligent species in it. We are certainly almost infinitely rare.

Sure, our individual lives are limited and sometimes brief, but that brevity doesn't make them any less wonderful or marvelous. Certainly, many of us suffer horribly in our short lives, but that doesn't diminish or make them less precious. Knowledge of the ephemeral nature of life, our mutual suffering and predicament, our astonishing origin, and the potential in each and every human brain must cultivate compassion and a positive humanism.

This year we celebrated my granddaughter's first birthday with my daughter and her husband. At the party I marveled as I watched them, tall, beautiful, intelligent, and compassionate holding their own perfect little girl. My complete lack of religious belief cast no shadow over the love and awe that I felt at that moment. On the contrary, that lack of belief gave me a clear understanding of how lucky I am and how wonderful life can be.

—Steve Hanka

Reprinted from our January 2013 newsletter



# Humanist Celebrant

**H**umanists of Utah meetings are open to the public and free of any admission charge. A discussion and light refreshments follow the speaker's presentation. Come join us and **bring a friend!**

**D**isclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Humanists of Utah nor the American Humanist Association. Reprinting of articles is permitted for humanist groups promoting the interests of humanism if attribution is properly stated.



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**Jared Anderson** (MA, BCC) is endorsed by the AHA Humanist Society as a Chaplain, Celebrant, and Lay Leader. He provides rituals across the life span for birth, coming of age, and divorce, as well as weddings and funerals. He specializes in designing personalized ceremonies that integrate ideas from art, history and popular culture. Contact him at [jared@humanistsofutah.org](mailto:jared@humanistsofutah.org)

## Membership/Renewal Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- \$50 Regular Annual Membership and subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
  - \$90 Regular 2-year Membership and subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
  - \$35 Regular Annual Membership with email delivery of the *Utah Humanist*
  - \$65 Regular 2-year Membership with email delivery of the *Utah Humanist*
  - \$20 *Student* Annual Membership and subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
  - \$20 Annual subscription to the *Utah Humanist* (I do not want to be listed as a member of **Humanists of Utah**)
  - Please send a *FREE* trial Subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
  - \$ \_\_\_\_\_ additional contribution to help promote public awareness of humanism
- ⇒ All contributions in excess of the \$20 subscription fee tax deductible.  
 ⇒ *Members* have the right to vote in Chapter elections and participate in Chapter decisions.  
 ⇒ Dues provide for information packets, honoraria to speakers, expenses of newsletter publication, trial subscriptions, copies to libraries, and newsletter exchange with other chapters.

**Humanists of Utah**  
**P.O. Box 1043**  
**West Jordan, UT 84084**

### Newsletter Contributors

Steve Hanka  
 Brian Trick  
 Wayne Wilson

>> **Put Your Name Here** <<  
 >> **Write an Article!** <<

## Notes:

- ◆ *General Meetings* are for all members and the general public. There are no admission charges.
- ◆ *Discussion Group* meetings are open to everyone. A different book or topic is covered every month.
- ◆ *Board Meetings* are planning and business sessions. They are open to all members.
- ◆ Eliot Hall is in the First Unitarian Church located at 569 South 1300 East in Salt Lake City.
- ◆ RE 201 is upstairs in the East Educational Building at the First Unitarian Church.

## Charitable Giving While You Shop

### Amazon.com

Sign up for Amazon Smile and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to HoU:

- Log into amazon.com and open your personal account settings.
- Select “Your Amazon Smile.”
- Search for “Humanists of Utah.”  
This will find “American Humanist Association” in West Jordan because we use the AHA as our umbrella for sales tax exemption.
- Click the “Select” button.

If you have a bookmark for Amazon please modify it to go to smile.amazon.com—you always want to use the “smile” option.

### Smith’s Grocery Stores

Humanists of Utah is enrolled in Smith’s Inspiring Donations program. If you have a Smith’s Fresh Value card, you can register it to benefit Humanists of Utah. Simply visit [www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire](http://www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire), create an account, associate it with your Fresh Values card number, and then enter NPO Number: KQ330 within your “account summary.” All future purchases will now benefit HoU.

# Upcoming Events

Meeting	Topic	Date	Time	Place
General Meeting	<b>Understanding Our Legal System</b> <i>Richard Mazrick, 3rd District Judge</i>	Oct 10	7:30 <sup>T</sup>	Eliot Hall
Board Meeting	Chapter Business	Oct 17	7:30	TBA
General Meeting	<b>What Can HoU Do About Climate Change?</b> Bob Lane	Nov 14	7:30 <sup>T</sup>	Eliot Hall
Board Meeting	Chapter Business	Nov 21	7:30	TBA

## Humanists of Utah

*A Chapter of the American Humanist Association*

P.O. Box 1043

West Jordan, UT 84084