



The Utah Humanist

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Humanists 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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President's Report

Empathy evolved over millions of years in animals and eventually humans as a form of parental care to provide the best care to the young to increase odds of survival. By providing feedback, babies encouraged mothers and tribes to care for them with their specific needs. These resulting emotions formed the basis for a shared language of need and nurturing that was replicated over time and solidified a stable system of caring.

By paying attention to these signs and understanding the needs behind them, cooperation happened. The tribes' successes depended upon not only the survival basics of shelter, food and defense, but also in gaining technologies and heuristic applications that advanced the tribes, allowing the offloading of responsibilities and energies that frees up efforts in a more economical manner to further the tribes' evolution. Numerous studies have shown that the regular use of empathy not only affects certain parts of the brain, but it in fact enlarges them, something that has been theorized to help humans to evolve to where we are now at the top of the food chain.

We as humans are currently a global tribe. Our communications are interwoven, and our economies connected like never before in the world's history. In order to understand and assist others in our tribe to grow together, we must imagine the welfare of the others according to our own human needs — and share them. Empathy is the only way to project our needs onto others at the same time we align ourselves to understand theirs. Simply put, we must become someone else to experience empathy (and ultimately success as a species.)

This year has been one of great changes, one that has stretched humanity to confront many of its deepest fears: pandemic, economic instability, the rise of authoritarianism, and the accelerating climate catastrophe. In each of these situations, people have not only revealed their fears but additionally their biases. This is made worse by national leaders who reject empathy and seek to inflame divisions among us. But it is empathy that will heal the divide and provide for the next

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I Get It...But

My last piece dealt with my personal issues with anxiety and I did some complaining about several things. Anyway, I was starting to think we as a nation were flattening the curve with this pandemic. I was also thinking about writing a couple of letters to the editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Titling one “I get it...but.” And calling another letter “I’m not that white guy.” But things changed almost the next day. The murder of George Floyd sent people into the streets with all the pent-up energy from being in isolation for weeks and people being fed up with all the injustice to blacks for literally centuries.

Then as the weeks went by, the rush to “get back to normal, to open up,” too soon was a big mistake, because now we have been experiencing spikes and surges in this virus that are worse than it was a few months ago. More cases, more deaths, and it is going to get worse, while the President thumbs his nose at face masks and demanding that schools open. Plus, it is going to screw up the holiday shopping season, which is something we should have been thinking about before rushing ahead.

So anyway, I decided to use the “I get it...but” theme to make a few points. I get it that people are sick of being cooped up for months and long for interaction with friends and relatives. I get it that they need to get back to work to make a living. As worried as I am about contracting this virus I too want to get out of the house and do things in a more normal way. But this disease is easily transmitted, and this country is showing that as big and powerful as we are as a nation, we are sadly incapable of doing the basic things needed to lower the infection rate. If early on we got serious about masks, distancing, testing, and tracing, we could have slowed the infection rate and saved what in the end will be likely

hundred of thousands of lives. I get it that people want their kids back in school and sports to resume, etc. But if we do not get the infection rate under control, none of that will happen.

As a high-risk individual, I have to say one of the most discouraging things I have seen reported in the media is that 57% of Republicans say that the number of lives lost so far is acceptable. How can that be? When I see reports like that, it makes me want to say, “why should I care if little Heber gets to play football or even gets back to school any time soon, or if anybody gets to go to a bar. I did not spend four of the best years of my life in the U.S. Air Force and work for over 40 years to be robbed of my retirement years. I still have things I want to get done.

That is enough about the virus for now. But it is hard to come up with anything positive to write about, especially with this idiot President making things worse and now amazingly trying to destroy the U.S. Postal Service because he cannot win in a fair election. If that is not enough, the west is on fire and Hurricane Laura is about to come onshore as a Category 4 storm.

I am hopeful that our chapter will be able to have meetings and events soon. The board will be working on doing some things virtually. Even a tech-tard like myself is getting better with online “stuff”. I have been happy to have V.A. medical appointments with their version of Zoom and a few Zoom discussions with friends.

In the past, Our chapter has, naturally, relied on getting together for just about everything. So, until we can meet again in person, we will have to be innovative, perhaps a zoom discussion group, or book review, etc. I think next month I will try to get back to writing about something “scientific.” Until then, stay safe.

—Bob Lane



Contact

~Book / Film Review~

Carl Sagan is one of my heroes, Of all of his books, only one of them is a novel: *Contact*, which was also made into a movie. It is not surprising that the book has a lot more detail than the movie, but the movie follows the book thematically and is also very enjoyable.

According to Wikipedia, “Carl Edward Sagan was an American astronomer, planetary scientist, cosmologist, astrophysicist, astrobiologist, author, and science communicator.” So, it is not surprising that *Contact* is about an astronomer, Eleanor “Ellie” Arroway. It is also not surprising that her SETI (Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence) team discovers a message from space that is deeply layered. The first level is a series of Prime Numbers which indicates that the sender is familiar with mathematics. Further analysis shows that there is also a video and audio component in the communication. Adolph Hitler is shown welcoming the world to the 1936 Summer Olympics in Germany. Finally, there are thousands of pages of a document that detail the building of a “Machine,” presumably, a transport vehicle.

The story, although largely predictable, is very well told. It involves debates among scientists, religious leaders, politicians, and countries. S.R. Hadden, who supports the project made his fortune with a product named, “AdNix” which attaches to televisions and listens for commercials. When it detects one it automatically mutes the speaker. The first reaction was that corporate America banned the product, but the courts allowed it to move forward. The follow-up was “PreachNix” which listens for telltale speech found in Evangelical broadcasts and automatically changes the channel when they are detected. Hadden is a major player in both the novel and the movie but the source of his fortune is not explained in the movie. Father Palmer Joss is a religious leader in the story. He and Ellie are physically attracted to each other and are each conflicted because their viewpoints are so diametrically opposed;

she doubts the existence of supreme beings and he cannot imagine life without God.

The Machine is built, Ellie visits the aliens and returns to earth; all very predictable. However, there are still a couple of chapters/ scenes left; and this is the good part! One of the “laws of science” known as Occam’s Razor takes Center Stage. It states that if there are multiple explanations of an observed physical process that the simplest one is the most likely the best explanation. For example, we all “stick” to the earth. It is possible that there are legions of microscopic fairies that hold us in place. However, that is much more complicated than the Theory of Gravity which is widely accepted as the reason we don’t float off to the sky.

The Machine takes Ellie to the stars via Wormholes, she is reunited with her long dead father who explained that there are indeed many ancient civilizations in the universe and that if Earth does not destroy itself there likely will be place at the Civilization Table for us in the future. When she returns home she finds that there was no evidence that she ever left. Cameras and in-person observers saw the Machine drop from a gantry into the ocean below. The recording devices she had with her showed nothing but static. She finds herself in an uncomfortable balancing act on the sharp edge of Occam’s Razor with few allies. Is this not like the religious argument for the existence of gods with no evidence? This is a challenging and intriguing story that I have enjoyed many times. If you have not read nor seen it, I heartily recommend giving it a try!

—Wayne Wilson





Climate Change

A Liberal Decalogue

Climate is word that many of us have become overstimulated with. We hear it all the time on the news, social media, conversation, it is everywhere. I am not talking about just global warming either. But the word is most often associated with that. So, what is climate exactly? And why is it so important to understand what it means in its various contexts? How do we unsensitize ourselves and get back on track so we can help with solutions instead of holding on for dear life?

Climate, by definition, means the description of a long-term pattern of weather in a particular area. It pertains to generally prevailing weather conditions of a region, such as temperature, air pressure, humidity, precipitation, sunshine, cloudiness, and winds and is gaged over a long period of time for consistency.

Climate has also been used as an oversimplification of these same patterns in social aspects and socio-economic verbiage. We talk heavily about items and refer to them as “climates” to infer the entirety of the topic. This causes a breakdown of the power of the word—Climate—and can confuse many when we start conversations and dialogue pertaining to climate change, climate crisis, and all things environmental pertaining to our earth and the issues at hand.

Understanding that we are saturated with words in our lives right now is a key piece to knowing how to dissect them for understanding. Climate change right now is unfolding massively before our eyes. It is truly the only “climate” worth addressing under that word. When addressing other topics, decide which words you feel speak to the topic on hand and be deliberate in your choices. It will require some thought. This will also cause time to pause and genuinely think about what to say, which stops runaway topics that are emotionally charged and usually end up out of control. 2020 has been a year of change, to say the least. Everything is in a state of movement, it feels. You have control more than you realize, and it always starts with your words.

Stay safe, stay strong, stay empowered and know that you are not alone, even in this time of quarantine and social distancing. Use your words to carry your voice out to all who need to hear you and to connect within this new normal for now.

—Melanie Curtis



1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worth-while to proceed by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your spouse or your children, endeavor to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than be latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful, even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness

—Bertrand Russell
Autobiography



Humanists 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!**

Disclaimer: 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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>> Put Your Name Here <<
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President's Report

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stage of our growth.

Let us seek to understand others when we don't agree, care for others who wear different labels, and lend our emotional support and assistance as needed to others despite the current environment. Let us further the collective cause of our species and care for others. Let us not to intentional harm. Let us stand up for truth. Not simply because we are human, but because we are Humanists!

—Jeff Curtis
 President, Humanists of Utah

Membership/Renewal Application

Name: _____

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- \$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
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 - 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.

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Now you can pay online with PayPal!

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.

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Upcoming Events

All Public Meetings are
CANCELLED until further notice



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