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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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My Journey to Humanism

One of our most popular historical features has been members sharing their own **Personal Roads to Humanism**. You may find it interesting to compare and contrast with your own personal experiences you encountered on your own Journey. Two such Journeys follow. You are encouraged to first, check out the 22 Stories on our website: <https://humanistsofutah.org/features/journeys-to-humanism/> and then compose your narrative and submit it for publication on the website and potentially on a future edition of this newsletter.



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Richard Layton

August 1994

Perhaps I am a bit naive; I have never thought that there should be anything like a male point of view of Humanism, as possibly something distinct from feminist Humanist views. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines feminism as "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes." I have been supportive of this theory for many years now and consider myself to be a feminist.

Humanist Manifesto II says, "The principal of moral equality must be furthered through elimination of all discrimination based upon race, religion, sex, age, or national origin. This means equality of opportunity and recognition of talent and merit." As a Humanist who agrees with this statement, I feel that being a Humanist means being a feminist. The viewpoint I am presenting here tonight is simply that of one Humanist who happens to be a male.

I am citing some quotations from great writers in which the word *man* or *men* is used in the old sense, as referring to human beings, that is to both men and women. If I had the right to modify these quotations, I would add the words *and woman* or *and women* after the words *man* and *men* in order to emphasize that no sexist connotation was intended.

And now to the main point I want to make tonight.

Every person can choose either of two ways of viewing the world into which he or she is born. In the first, the way of the true adventurer, she has an active and profound interest in seeking truth through using her reason and looking critically at the evidence in an atmosphere of free inquiry. In the second, he merely accepts as true the mythology of his culture or subculture and conforms to its expectations of him. The vast majority of people who have this choice pick the second option, the easier, more effortless one, in which one merely surrenders her right to think for herself to certain "authorities" who are considered the arbiters of correct behavior and belief by virtue of being spokesmen for god, the gods, or other

heroes of the culture or subculture.

Robert Ingersoll states succinctly, "The man who does not do his own thinking is a slave, and is a traitor to himself and to his fellowmen."

Joseph Campbell describes the search for truth by the true adventurer in the analogy of the thirteenth-century legend in which King Arthur's knights of the Round Table set forth from his castle, each on his own steed, in quest of the Holy Grail:

"And now each one went the way upon which he had decided, and they set out into the forest at one point and another, there where they saw it to be thickest so that each would experience the unknown pathless forest in his own heroic way."

He goes on to say:

"Today the walls and towers of the culture-world that then were in the building are dissolving; and whereas heroes then could set forth of their own will from the known to the unknown, we today willy-nilly, must enter the forest...and, like it or not, the pathless way is the only way now before us.

"But of course, on the other hand, for those who can still contrive to live within the fold of a traditional mythology of some kind, protection is still afforded against the dangers of an individual life; and for many the possibility of adhering in this way to established formulas is a birthright they rightly cherish, since it will contribute meaning and nobility to their unadventured lives, from birth to marriage and its duties and, with the gradual failure of powers, a peaceful passage of the last gate. For, as the psalmist sings, 'Steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord' (Psalm 32:10); and to those for whom such protection seems a prospect worthy of all sacrifice, an orthodox mythology will afford both the patterns and the sentiments of a lifetime of good repute.

"However, by those to whom such living would be not life, but anticipated death, the circumvallating mountains that to others appear

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Anna Hoagland

August 1994

I am certain I am a humanist for the same reason Hindus are Hindus, Catholics are Catholics, Lutherans are Lutherans. I was born to humanists and raised humanist. My father was a Unitarian minister for thirty-nine years, and Editor of the *Religious Humanist* from 1972 to 1977. My mother was second generation Unitarian, and her influence on my belief system is strong and deep.

When we are little we believe everyone thinks as we do and believes as we do. My childhood beliefs did not include god, Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, heaven or hell. When Christmas came, I thought everyone was pretending there was a Santa Claus. Easter was a time to celebrate spring and take flowers to church, not to celebrate the rising of the dead.

But, along with an excellent religious education through the Unitarian church, and two best friends, Marilyn O'Sullivan, red-headed Irish Catholic, and Laura Weiss, dark-haired Jew, I soon learned that other people really did believe in: God or gods; reincarnation; heaven; hell; angels; sin, immaculate conception, and yes, even Santa. Wasn't life wondrous enough without all this paraphernalia?

Although I was open to discussions, it soon became apparent to me that many religious beliefs were stranger than fiction. Marilyn told me animals did not go to heaven. Animal lover that I am, I knew at the ripe age of 7 that there was surely no heaven if animals couldn't attend. Marilyn went to a bazaar at my church, and she was in terrible trouble with her priest. She had to confess to that awful sin of entering a place where others believed differently than she. Laura couldn't eat pork! And, how could the strange stories in the Old and New Testament be true? People carrying around rock tablets, wandering lost for 40 years, living hundreds of years, rising from the dead. It was too much!

My favorite childhood story was, and still is, "The Churkendoose. It was about a creature, part chicken, turkey, duck and goose. Every barnyard bird was afraid of him because he was

different. I began to feel like the Churkendoose, quite different than the majority of people around me. And, no matter how loudly I might sing the Churkendoose song, different was not allowed.

Does the green grass ask the sky so blue,
I'm green why aren't you green too.
A rose smells sweet cause it's a flower,
An onion smells strong, a pickle is sour.
They're different yet they get along,
And no one seems to think it wrong.
Chicken, turkey, duck or goose,
Can't there be a churkendoose?

Quite often the answer is "no." Different is too scary.

In high school, in the early '60's, I lost, what I thought were friends, when I was the only one in a social studies class to respond "More Alike" to the question: "Are the Russians more like us or more different?" Friends told me to go live in Russia. The logic must have been: We must all be alike to get along; we don't get along with the Russians; therefore, they must be different; and different is bad.

For a year and one half I went to a Lutheran College in Minnesota. My boy friend told me I was the sweetest girl he had ever met, but he knew I was going to hell because I did not believe what he did. I checked out the church and was told men were better than women and we were all sinners. Hogwash. I finished my studies at the University of Wisconsin, where, because of the diversity, and encouragement of thinking just for thinkings' sake, I felt alive, safe, sane.

(How difficult it is to have minority beliefs. I couldn't imagine being a black humanist!) Yet with each obstacle I faced, I found my humanist beliefs becoming stronger. In order to rent an apartment in a small town in Kansas, I had to convince my landlord that I had a conscience even though I did not believe in God. I got the apartment.

When we moved to Salt Lake, my son was constantly asked, "Are you Mormon?", "Are you

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Richard Layton

Anna Hoagland

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to be of stone are recognized as of the mist of dream, and precisely between their God and Devil, heaven and hell, white and black, the man of heart walks through. Out beyond those walls, in the uncharted forest night, where the terrible wind of God blows directly on the questing undefended soul, tangled ways may lead to madness. They may also lead, however, as one of the greatest poets of the Middle Ages tells, to 'all those things that go to make heaven and earth.'"

Campbell alludes to the dispiriting effect of orthodox belief in another statement:

"Coerced to the social pattern, the individual can only harden to some figure of living death; and if any considerable number of the members of civilization are in this predicament, a point of no return will have been passed."

Two and-a-half years ago I told an assembled group of people that, if I were to return to belief in the traditional mythology I used to espouse, I would feel like a "walking zombie." I would feel less alive in being untrue to my real self and having given up my precious individuality, my right to think for myself and to seek truth with an untrammelled mind. It was interesting to note the similarity between the phraseology I used in that statement and that used by Campbell in the above quotations, which I first encountered a couple of months ago. I used the term "walking zombie," and he uses the terms "anticipated death" and "living death" to describe how an adventurer would feel about returning to an orthodox mythology.

I do sometimes, however, feel some frustration in the limitations of my own intellectual capacity; I would like to soar even higher than I realistically can in feeling the elation of discovery about the mysteries of the Universe that I would have if I had the larger capacity for understanding that geniuses like Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, or William Shakespeare had. But Friedrich Nietzsche says we more limited human beings can also be useful:

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Republican?" He told me that after a while it was easier to lie than to face constant rejection. We moved into a new neighborhood. The lady across the street came over to welcome us. "Are you Mormon?" "No." "Well, that's all right." We went to a block party, "Let us pray before we eat." A mother does not know when to register her child for kindergarten because the information was distributed at the ward house. A Native American friend says he has no prejudices but requires that his children marry Mormons, have the ceremony in the Temple, and that they love each other because they will be together for eternity. The Boy Scouts have Mormon troops and non-Mormon troops. The message is always: different is bad. Different will be punished.

Well, I remain a humanist, despite all the obstacles, because nothing else makes much sense to me. Humans have brains. If we use our brains, we create religions, philosophies, art, languages, sciences. Humans, in my eyes, are no better than trees, animals, fish. We are different, just as the Churkendoose is different. I value differences. I treasure my life as a humanist.

"That the Great Man should be able to appear and dwell among you again, again, and again, that is the sense of all your efforts here on earth. That there should ever and again be men among you able to elevate you to your heights: that is the prize for which you strive. For it is only through the occasional coming to light of such human beings that your own existence can be justified....And if you are not yourself a great exception, well then be a small one at least! and so you will foster on earth that holy fire from which genius may arise."

Fellow Humanist Adventurers, isn't it nice to feel truly alive?



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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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. We invested this money in an endowment fund. The interest is still helping to pay for banquets, special events, etc. When you create your personal will please consider leaving a gift to Humanists of Utah.

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Humanists of Utah

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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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All Public Meetings are
CANCELLED until further notice
Due to the Pandemic



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