



# The Utah Humanist

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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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## Chaplain's Corner

### Want to Feel Better? Do the Same Things Differently

After six years as a Chaplain, I am somewhat bemused to realize I am not a Chaplain. Not primarily at least. Probably why people's minds bend a bit when I explain that I am a Chaplain, and a humanist.

What I actually am, first and foremost, is a Wellness Integrator. I am passionate about well-being and fascinated by human nature. I also prioritize efficiency as one of my highest values, and there is little of anything more potent than religion.

We each have our feelings about religion, and wariness is understandable and valid. But whatever our feelings about religion may be, in a very real sense our bodies are religious.

Why am I writing about religion in a humanist newsletter? Because religion has coevolved with our human physiology, psychology, and sociology. Our bodies, brains, and cultures are all calibrated to religion. And that means that whatever we believe and feel about religion, the elements of religion contain shortcuts to well-being. I do not tell people to convert to religion. I tell people to convert religion to themselves. That is why my approach to religion is practical and subversive, powerfully effective, and appropriately humanistic.

I have begun doing wellness trainings for the staff members at the hospital where I work. One of the most ironic problems with wellness programs is that they end up making you more stressed! You are told you just need to eat better or sleep more or exercise or do meditation or yoga or go to therapy. All these habits can indeed be healthy, but most of us are busy and overwhelmed, so being told we need to do more just adds guilt to the already overwhelmed.

My approach is different. That's exactly it. Do the same things you already do, just with small changes that will make huge differences. Life is hard, but you have hidden resources that have already evolved into you. You can access the power of your brain and its sensitivity to ritual and meaning to more efficiently process stress and even trauma. The way we think

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# How to Talk to a Science Denier

## ~Book Review~

This book by Lee McIntire is subtitled, *Conversations with Flat Earthers, Climate Deniers, and Others Who Defy Reason.* by Lee McIntyre. The book with his recollections of a convention held as the Flat Earth International Conference (FEIC) in 2018. The recollections he shares are somewhat amusing and at the same time informative. While we may think this is a fringe group, they are more numerous than you might guess and quite serious about their beliefs. This look at Flat Earthers helps introduce us to the next covered concept, “What is Science Denial?” We learn to see that what people believe becomes part of who they are, it is part of their identity. This results it becoming an attack on them personally when you question or denigrate their beliefs.

In trying to understand what science denial is, he gives us five common factors researchers have identified.

1. Cherry-picking evidence
2. Belief in conspiracy theories
3. Reliance on fake experts (and the denigration of real experts)
4. Committing logical errors
5. Setting impossible expectations for what science can achieve

McIntire notes that, “virtually all conspiracy theorists are what I call ‘cafeteria skeptics.’ Although they profess to uphold the highest standard of reasoning, they do so inconsistently. Conspiracy theorists are famous for their double standard of evidence: they insist on an absurd standard of proof when it concerns something they do *not* want to believe, while accepting with scant to nonexistent evidence whatever they *do* want to believe.”

The middle of the book is a bit dense with comparisons and discussions of various research projects on the subject of science denial. But the last part of the book is a good discussion about the title’s question of “how to talk to a science denier?” In a way, it comes down to being willing, as hard as it is

sometimes, to keep a civil tongue, to be respectful and trying to find ways to impart new information to science deniers. We already intuitively know this, because making someone angry is not going to get them to listen to reason. You need to establish trust first.

I can say the book is well written and loaded with good information and advice on the subject. In fact the concepts were validated recently when I was T.V. surfing. I happened on the last part of an interview of Norman Lear. While he was discussing the character Archie Bunker, he stated how he got hundreds of letters saying, he’s just like my uncle or father or someone they know. He also stated that “Archie Bunker types are terrified of progress. To me that describes one of the main characteristics of the right-wing/Republicans/conservatives in this country. They are afraid of losing what is left of their white privileged status.

Something else I saw in the op. ed. section was someone’s use of an adage I have heard before but not recently, that is, “I’m ever hopeful but not all that optimistic.” This describes how I have felt about many things in recent years. I could put it before subjects like progress on climate change or preserving democracy from the threats by Republicans or convincing anti-vaxxers to get the shot. Just a thought.

—Bob Lane

### Further Discussion

This subject was addressed by the late and great Carl Sagan. *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* in particular distinguishes between real science and popular conspiracy theories Here are a couple of related links:

[Richard Layton Discussion Group](#)

[What is the Future of Science? By Wayne Wilson](#)



# Great Ideas From Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell is often considered the most eminent freethinker of the 20th century. He revolutionized contemporary philosophy and changed how we think about truth, logic, math, and metaphysics. Despite imprisonment and constant social pressure, he was also an outspoken civil rights advocate, agnostic, pacifist, and socialist.

Russell was born in 1872 to aristocratic British parents whose atheism and activism for women's suffrage, birth control, and other human rights issues were largely unwelcomed in "polite society." Before their deaths early in Bertrand's life, they asked the great John Stuart Mill to be his godfather and insisted that their son be raised as an agnostic. Bertrand Russell was, however, raised as a Presbyterian by his religious maternal grandparents. After a childhood riddled with depression, he found himself questioning his beliefs at age 15. By the time he was an adult, he was an outspoken Atheist and Agnostic. "There is no practical reason for believing what isn't true," he said, "either a thing is true, [and we should believe in it] or it isn't [and we shouldn't]..."

"Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind."

After graduating from Trinity College, Russell worked as a professor, mathematician, and logician. However, his unapologetic anti-war activism and support for socialism, atheism, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, etc. lost him several positions in academia and even resulted in his imprisonment on multiple occasions. In defense of his friend, Albert Einstein once wrote, "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds..."

In 1955, Russell and Einstein created a manifesto warning the world's leaders of the dangers of nuclear war. In it, they wrote, "remember your humanity, forget the rest."

Russell won the Nobel Prize in literature after writing several books on philosophy, science, logic, mathematics, freethought, life, and happiness, including his most famous work, *A History of Western Philosophy*.

If you want people to believe in your claim, then you'll need to do more than make assertions that are hard (or impossible) to disprove. It's your responsibility

to provide good reasons for why people should consider your claim in the first place. Russell illustrated this principle with the thought experiment known as Russell's Teapot. In summary: if I claimed that there was a teapot orbiting the sun between the earth and Mars, too small to be seen by any telescope, then the burden of proof is mine. It is not the responsibility of everyone else to search the vast reaches of space to refute my claim.

Russell questioned and criticized things like the USSR, the Vietnam War, the formation of the state of Israel, and other major issues. As a true skeptic, however, he didn't stop there.

It was his love of math, Russell once said, that saved him from suicide as a young child. Yet, despite what it means to him, he still exercised his skepticism and successfully found valid things to criticize in modern mathematics. Russell spent a decade writing the multivolume work *Principia Mathematica* with Alfred North Whitehead. In it, the authors tried to identify and correct all of the illogical or baseless assumptions in math, taking more than 360 pages (for example) to prove that  $1+1$  does indeed  $=2$ .

Russell didn't hesitate to point out the flaws, contradictions, and paradoxes found in science, logic, and philosophy. This is the essence of freethought! His approach was summarized in the first sentence in the first chapter of his book *The Problems of Philosophy*: "Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it?"

In one of his last interviews, Bertrand Russell offered advice for future generations in two parts, an intellectual and a moral part. His intellectual advice is that when we consider the truth of anything, we should only look at the facts. We must not get distracted by what we wish to be true. We also should not blindly accept what we think would benefit society if it were believed. We must look only at the facts.

Russell's moral advice is that love is wise and hatred is foolish. By using knowledge, kindness, and courage, we'll make the best world we can.

*Condensed from The Free Thought Forum,  
September 2021 Newsletter  
[FreeThoughtForm.org](http://FreeThoughtForm.org)*



# Chaplain's Corner

## What's Happened to Reason?

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about things literally changes the way our bodies respond. Our mindset is a matter of life and death. You just need to take a few minutes to plug into these resources.

Here are a few ways you can change your daily habits to increase your well-being, without adding much extra time or even effort. I will unpack some of the science in future columns, but for now, try these out and see how it feels. I am using work as an example, but you can use these practices throughout your day, wherever you are. For best results, talk to yourself, out loud.

When you wake: Take a moment to express gratitude. Tell yourself (or someone else, or your pet or plant) one thing you are grateful for.

As you go to work: Clear your mind and take big breaths. If you have time, you can place your hands on your stomach and chest and meditate for five minutes (when you are not driving!), but on days you do not do that, you can calm yourself while you go from one place to another.

When you get to work: State one of your highest values and remind yourself how your daily work connects to these values.

When you are at work: Be in your body by noticing what you are sensing. Take moments to actually feel what you are touching. For example when you wash your hands, note and feel the temperature of the water, the softness of the soap, and the texture of the towel.

At the end of work: Say one thing that is true, positive or negative doesn't matter. Just speak the truth about the day, either to yourself or someone you trust.

When you get home: Remind your body that you are home, perhaps by changing clothes. I change into cozy clothes immediately.

When you wash: Say out loud "I am washing off the day" (or whatever you need to process.) The combination of sensory input with this ritual will relieve stress incredibly efficiently.

At bedtime: Talk to yourself. Tell yourself something you are happy about or proud of. Journal if you can.

When you need to turn yourself off and on again, you can take a deep breath, hold it, and let it out slowly, at least five seconds each. Our breath is incredibly powerful, our main body process that is controlled both unconsciously and consciously.

You may feel stressed or overwhelmed in this moment, but your body has millions of years of wisdom you just need to plug into. Practice these rituals and you will not only feel less stress, but you will also feel happier and greater well-being in general.

—Jared Anderson

Reason and rationality are in the news. A rash of new books are out on the topic. And no wonder, with the impact of vaccine naysayers and election opponents and climate change deniers and so on. Why are we having this trouble; what are its causes?

As Walt Kelly, author of the Pogo cartoon, said: "We have met the enemy, and he is us." One of the causes is visceral response to emotional appeals. Another cause is, as Robert Cialdini says in *Influence: The Power of Persuasion*, reliance on cues about what other people think. In other words, "Social Proof," rather than scientific or factual proof.

Modern technology enables political and profit-motivated players to use new levers to take advantage of our unreasoning side for their own benefit. Purveyors of disinformation dispatch emotionally skewed falsehoods to get us to click and believe. It's been called the "algorithmic society", referring to the internet algorithms that push messages—true or misleading or even false—to people based on the likelihood of clicks and responses.

What does HFFC (Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County, Connecticut) have to with this? We came to the table early, standing for Compassion and Reason. Compassion is uppermost and is most effective when coupled with Reason. We seek to

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**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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# What's Happened to Reason?

educate and inform, examining topics carefully with a breadth of facts, analysis, and discussion facilitating various points of view. Our Books Etc. discussion group's choices are wide ranging, including Cialdini's work. The latest findings about the world are examined in our Science Readers group. How we are impacted is shared in our Social Hour. We bring experts on so many topics to our second Monday of the month general meetings. We believe that bringing relevant knowledge and dispassionate discussion in fascinating ways will advance Reason over confusion and unreality.

—Your Prez  
Cary Shaw  
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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 in person  
meetings are CANCELLED  
again until further notice  
Due to the Pandemic



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