



# 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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## President's Message

I have been hearing the word “woke” in general conversations lately, a lot! Both in passing, in deliberate focus (both positive and negative,) and in social media. I mean it has been around for many years, but it seems that recently it has been more focused in my world enough to notice and cause me to pause to look. It is another word that is being evolved and given meaning that is causing emotions in folks that will drive their beliefs, thoughts and eventually actions. Enough so, that I figured it was time to say something. It is a word that many understand as “to be awoken,” but the context has deep communal roots in culture and is now being used as a weapon for those who truly do not understand nor want to. Here is a bit of info:

### WHAT DOES WOKE MEAN?

Woke means being conscious of racial discrimination in society and other forms of oppression and injustice. In mainstream use, woke can also more generally describe someone or something as being “with it.”

### WHERE DOES WOKE COME FROM?

Figurative woke—being

socially and politically awake, or aware—starts in emerging in Black English at least by the 1940s. A 1943 article in *The Atlantic* quoted a black United Mine Workers official from 1940 playing with woke in a metaphor for social justice: “Waking up is a damn sight better than going to sleep, but we’ll stay woke up longer.”

By the 1960s, woke could more generally mean “well-informed” in Black English, but it still strongly aligned with political awareness, especially in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950–60s and appearing in the phrase stay woke. The term was notable enough to prompt a 1962 *New York Times* article commenting on black slang, titled “If You’re Woke You Dig It.” *Melaninful*, a 1972 play about the black nationalist Marcus Garvey, *Garvey Lives!* by Barry Beckham, notably used woke for awareness of racial injustice in the Black community: “I been sleeping all my life. And now that Mr. Garvey done woke me up, I’m gon stay woke. And I’m gon help him wake up other black folk.”

Singer and activist Erykah

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# Chaplain's Corner

## How Small is an Absolute God?

One of the more frustrating ironies around religious belief is that the bigger your god is, the smaller your mind often is. I'm not just trying to be snarky. Granted, it very much depends on the nature of your big god.

I guess it isn't so much the size of your god as how you think of your god. Hinduism has a complex history when it comes to the nature of god, as does the Israelite religion of the Bible that became Judaism. But neither have the intolerance of Christianity.

Christianity was the first truly exclusivist religion, the first religion to say, "Our God being right makes all of your gods false, and the absolute only way to be right with god is our right and only way". Zoroastrianism, which heavily influenced Judaism, did teach that there was only one God and that all other gods were demons, but Zoroastrianism also encourages respect and discourages conversion. In this way, Zoroastrianism is like Judaism, which teaches, "Sure, we worship the one God and so do you, in your way. We are just chosen in a particular way so we live in a particular way."

Back to Hinduism, Indian religions teach that there is one transcendent reality and that everything we believe here on earth is an illusion. So, they don't so much teach that they are right as much as that no one is right. Hinduism explicitly embraces multiple paths to God, or Brahman, who represents the totality of all things. Can't get bigger than that. Hinduism also has the idea of "Indra's Net," one of my favorite religious concepts, the interconnectedness of all things. We are God. We are all God.

I am double endorsed Humanist and Unity. One of my favorite things about Unity is that it teaches there is no god outside of us. God is principle, and we are all particular expressions of God. I know that many of you are put off by god language, and I respect that. For me, I believe that God talk and spirituality and

religion are all just aspects of human behavior and human culture, nothing special that needs to be treated differently.

All this brings me back to the absolute small god of Christian exclusivity. On April 1st I had the dubious honor of participating with Dr. Deen Chatterjee, an esteemed academic and debater, on the topic "Is God Necessary for Ethics?" Spoiler: it was not a debate, just a Church event masquerading as a debate. There were many faith claims, but little good faith discussion on their side.

There are many ways to be a good Christian. There are many ways to be a good debater. This event was neither of these. Dr. Chatterjee and I debated Dr. James White and Pastor Jeff Durbin, who are apologists for presuppositionalist biblical literalism.

I am obsessively constructive. This is why I love doing interfaith Chaplaincy as a Humanist. I don't like to attack the worldviews of others. But presuppositionalist biblical literalism is quite literally untenable. Rather, it is impossible to have both biblical literalism claims and intellectual integrity. To their credit, I'm dumbstruck at the clarity of the framing "presuppositionalism." This worldview literally says that they already know they are right, so they don't need to explain or defend why they are right. And that's exactly how this pseudo-debate played out. This debate currently has over 120,000 views on YouTube. You can look it up on the channel "Apology Studios".

White and Durbin made fun of me for describing myself as "Devout Agnostic," but I embrace and celebrate the expansiveness of mind, integrity of spirit, and hopefully warmth of heart that comes with this openness. As I explained to this mostly closed audience, when I embrace that I am not the expert on others, that each person is forever mystery, I can meet them and respect them where they are and learn from them how to best engage with them.

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# WOKE

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Badu is credited with helping to revive woke in her 2008 song “Master Teacher,” whose chorus dreams of a better, uplifted world: “What if it were no niggas / Only master teachers? I stay woke (dreams dreams).”

After Trayvon Martin, a young unarmed black man, was shot dead in February 2012, many in the black community issued calls to stay woke to the discrimination and injustice black people face in the US, particularly in the form of police brutality. Especially under the hashtag “#staywoke” on social media, woke took off in 2014 with the Black Lives Matter movement, ignited by the tragic shooting of two other young, unarmed black men by police officers. Among activists, woke and stay woke were cries not just to be aware of racial injustice, but to organize and mobilize to do something about it.

Woke was quickly appropriated by mainstream white culture in the mid-2010s, to the criticism of many black observers. In many instances, woke did spread in keeping with its activist spirit, referring to awareness of other forms of injustice, such as sexism, anti-gay sentiment, and white privilege.

In other cases, though, the force of woke was diluted, the subject of humorous memes or just casually used as a label for anyone who is “with the times,” not necessarily engaged in the fight for justice and equality. This dilution especially occurred on woke Twitter, with major brands appearing to capitalize on social justice to appeal to millennials. Now, stay woke is pretty abundant in mainstream media... everyone from Childish Gambino to Netflix is cashing in on the phrase’s popularity, spreading its 100% important and influential meaning too.

## WHO USES WOKE?

Woke sometimes takes a superlative form, *wokest*, emphasizing the extent of someone’s wokeness, or the state of being woke. As a

result of its mainstream appropriation, woke toggles between several uses. It is still used for awareness of and activism against forms of oppression and injustice. It is also used for being conscious of “true reality” more generally, of not accepting conventional wisdom. Artificial intelligence, for instance, is often described as woke when it becomes self-aware. Woke is also sometimes just used to characterize someone as “hip” or “open-minded” as well as the source of plenty of cute puns.

Finally, in Black English, woke can also still mean just being literally “awake,” harkening back to its roots. This is not meant to be a formal definition of woke like most terms we define on Dictionary.com, but is rather an informal word summary that hopefully touches upon the key aspects of the meaning and usage of woke that will help our users expand their word mastery.

My hope is that we, as humanists, wake up. Many of us are on the path and are working diligently toward waking up, stay awake and helping others along our way to make a difference. The biggest thing is to remember, being awake is not a destination...it is a journey. A beautiful, hard, messy, interesting journey with lessons learned and earned to last a lifetime.

During this time of snowy spring, with its promise of growth and renewal, reflect on your journey. Is there something that you feel drawn to waking up to? Something you would like to learn more about? If so, lean in and have fun learning.

Know that we see you. We are here for you. We are happy that you are part of this wonderful adventure of life. We look forward to seeing you soon.

*Kindest regards  
Melanie White-Curtis  
President, HoU*



**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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# Chaplain's Corner

## How Small is an Absolute God?

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When humans believe they are agents of an Absolute God, the irony is that they behave in ways that are small and limiting. When we embrace how small and limited we humans are, we gain access to all that life has to offer.

When people ask me, "If there is no God, if there is no afterlife, what is the point of this life?" I answer, "All of it."

—Chaplain Jared Anderson

**No in person meetings scheduled in  
 May**

**Watch your email and/or our website  
 for June event notifications**

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

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