

“Open to Wonder”

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In his book, *The Pale Blue Dot*, astronomer Carl Sagan wrote,

“How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, “This is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant?” Instead they say, “No, no, no! My god is a little god, and I want him to stay that way.” A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.”

I start with this quote because I think it captures two important ideas relevant for us today in this service on science.

Firstly, there’s the clear note of animosity between science and religion—a tension with a long, long history. Nearly four hundred years ago Galileo was convicted of suspicion of heresy by the Catholic church for suggesting the earth revolved around the sun. So also, Darwin’s ideas of evolution met with tremendous resistance for questioning doctrines of divine Creation. Indeed, arguments within religious traditions over the emerging impact of modern scientific development tore communities apart for centuries.

It would be nice to say that all of this conflict between science and religion, between “faith” and “reason” is all in the past. However, we know this is not true. Over the last few weeks we have seen this play out in the court cases over the availability of the drug mifepristone. Approved by the FDA twenty-three years ago through evidence-based trials, a Texas judge ruled on April 7 against the drug’s continued use. While Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk’s supporters deny that his conservative Christian faith impacted his ruling, he has a history as an anti-abortion activist affiliated with Christian organizations. Additionally, his ruling included [language referring to “unborn humans”](#) rather than conventional medical terms such as fetus or embryo. While the [Supreme Court ruling Friday](#) keeps mifepristone available for now, the legal debates will continue . . . as will the continued clash between some scientific claims and certain religious beliefs.

But not all religious communities have a problem with science. Certainly not Unitarian Universalists! Perhaps that’s because we qualify as an “unconventional” faith in Sagan’s terms when he writes, “A religion...that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as

revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.” We are indeed a religion of *wonder*—of asking questions, of leaving open the possibility of new ideas, of change, of evolution in the broadest sense. And yet I “wonder” how often we intentionally make space for *awe* in our lives? In our drive to learn and to understand, do we also simply pause to experience the *wow* of it all . . . of what we know, yes, but also of all we do not know, may never fully understand?

In exploring Humanism this month, we encounter a tradition that in embraces science as the source of knowledge. Notably, in the current [Humanist Manifesto III](#), the embrace of the scientific method is followed by this statement:

“We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.”

I appreciate this added statement as a recognition of all the knowledge that may not fit as neatly into scientific research papers. Although, I am continuously amazed by what *is* studied somewhere by science. Apropos of Kate’s “Small Acts of Kindness” emphasis this month, I smiled when I stumbled upon a [UCLA newsroom headline](#), “Small Acts of Kindness are Frequent and Universal, Study Finds.” Science, like the life and cosmos it studies, is endlessly creative and curious.

Religion and science may have a history of animosity as well as hotspots of continued tension. However, a religious understanding that embraces the ever-expanding wonder that scientific exploration brings is also possible. In this service today, may we embrace that possibility, that *reality*, as we listen to the reflections of two scientists.