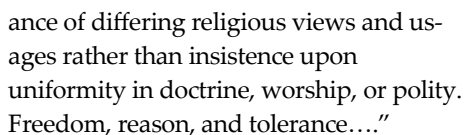




September 2021

Wisdom Story




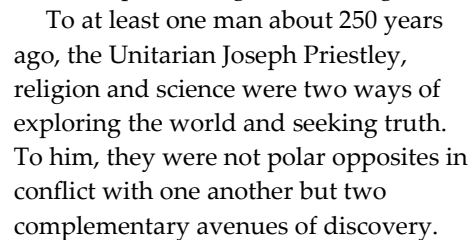
The Enlightenment, which was also known as the Age of Reason, saw the ascendance of reason as a source of religious knowledge. English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) made a distinction between knowledge and belief. The path to knowledge begins with our sense perception of the world. Based on this, we draw inferences and make deductions in order to expand our knowledge. By contrast, belief is based upon accepting something as true because we are told it is true by an authority. Sense perception and inferences or deductions do not play a role in blind faith. While Locke gave some credence to revelation as a source of truth, reason was far more important because, as he argued, revelation was subject to reason's confirmation. Immanuel Kant in his 1784 article, *What is the Enlightenment*, wrote *sapere aude*, meaning, "Have the courage to use your own rea-

Reason has been a valued part of our religious tradition since it began in the Reformation. Unitarian historian Earl Morse Wilbur wrote, while Unitarianism has often been understood “as a movement or a sect characterized primarily by certain beliefs about the being of God and the person of Christ,” it was not fundamentally a movement that was doctrinally driven since its adherents have varied widely in their opinion on a wide range of doctrines. Wilbur concluded that Unitarianism was characterized by three leading principles: “first, complete mental freedom in religion rather than bondage to creeds or confessions; second, the unrestricted use of reason in religion, rather than reliance upon external authority of past tradition; third, generous toler-

Reason, along with science, is under assault, a bizarre and tragic occurrence in the 21st century. This comes at a time when the earth is in greater peril than ever before from the devastation of climate change. Human avarice and the quest for power mock virtue, while the repair of the world is urgent and daunting. Pseudo-science, climate denial, alternative facts, fake news, and lies suggest that reason doesn't matter, yet it does. While reason is not infallible, it is an important guide and tool for repairing the world. This is not a momentary interlude but the work of generations. Reason, critical thinking, science, philosophy, technology, political will, and more are crucial to this endeavor.

Discovering Truth through Science and Religion

We often hear that science and religion are two things that just do not go together. One relies on facts which can be proven. The other relies on faith and intuition. However, science and religion have a lot in common. They both inspire wonder, questioning, and seeking truth.


 A portrait of William Paley, an English naturalist, philosopher, and theologian. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. He has dark, wavy hair and a serious expression. The background is a dark, mottled grey.

Joseph Priestley is best known as the scientist who “discovered” the presence of oxygen in 1774. He discovered that plants and trees generate oxygen, and he determined that living creatures need oxygen to breathe. Today we take this idea for granted, and maybe you have already learned it in school. But back in his day, trying to prove the existence of something you could not see, smell, hear, touch, or taste was difficult indeed.

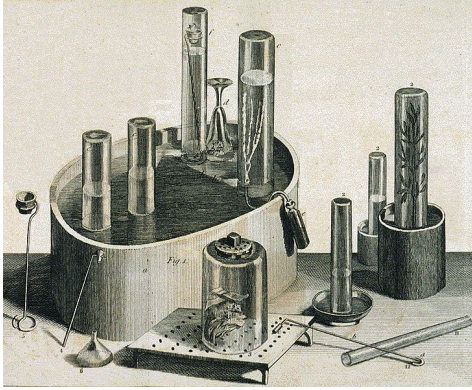
In those days, the Unitarian religion was already a home for people who believed we each can discover our own truth in matters of faith; people who believed that the use of reason was important in matters of science and religion. And Joseph Priestley was a Unitarian minister. He saw no contradiction

(Continued on page 2)

Repairing the World

Laboratory & Church

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**



between seeking truth through faith and intuition and seeking truth using the methods of science. During those years, while he was using science to explore air, gases, electricity, and other physical matters in our world, Joseph Priestley also wrote about religious matters. In one article, he proposed that the soul was a Divine substance, incomprehensible to human beings. He even taught the two subjects together at prestigious universities in England.

But a lot of people disagreed with his ideas—particularly his religious beliefs. In 1791, an angry mob destroyed his family's home; along with two places where Joseph Priestley sought truth: his laboratory and his church. The buildings burned to the ground, along with many important papers, books, and his notes on experiments.

Priestley and his wife had no choice but to flee England and seek refuge across the ocean in the newly established United States of America. You might think having lost everything and being forced to start over in a new country would make Priestley less interested in pursuing his freethinking ideas, but you would be wrong. Even as his family resettled, he continued his experiments in science and his explorations in faith. He discovered the poisonous gas, carbon monoxide, in 1799, and for this he is known as the father of modern chemistry. And, he continued to pursue his love of religion. The first Unitarian minister in the United States, he helped found the Unitarian Church in Philadelphia.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/loveconnects/session11/162312.shtml>

Integrity Restored

A Saving Church

Rev. Victoria Safford

Ours is a saving church, and by that, I mean that lives are saved within it. People say that. They use that old vocabulary. They say: "I never knew there was a place like this, where I could be accepted." They say: "I never knew there could be a congregation that believed as I do." They say: "I walked out of the church as soon as I was old enough, but until I came here, I had no idea how deeply I was longing for connection, to other people and also to the sacred." They say: "I was a spiritual shipwreck, and I'm still drifting, but at least, at last, I have a home."

For me, it was astonishing to discover this tradition: I was a young adult flailing around at large out there, and when I accidentally stumbled upon the works of William Ellery Channing one rainy afternoon, a door opened to me. Here was someone in print, someone who wrote in 1819, asking the unspeakable questions I'd been asking, doubting the "truths" that I'd been doubting, clearly defining the moral ideas, the theological ideas that I had harbored all along as crazy. Here was a religion welcoming science and reason, while honoring mystery and wonder. Here was a religion concerned more with deeds than creeds; a church that in its Sunday Schools, apparently, taught children to think and act and feel—to know their hearts—instead of to recite. I felt not as if my soul were saved, but as if myself were somehow integrated—my integrity restored, as mind and heart and soul were reunited, as if after a long, strange, unnatural parting of the ways.

Source: <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/14336.shtml>



Hear All Voices

Escape the Echo Chamber

C. Thi Nguyen

Something has gone wrong....
...It seems like different intellectual communities no longer share basic foundational beliefs.

...Maybe nobody cares about the truth anymore, as some have started to worry. Maybe political allegiance has replaced basic reasoning skills. Maybe we've all become trapped in echo chambers of our own making....

But there are two very different phenomena at play here, each of which subvert the flow of information in very distinct ways. Let's call them *echo chambers* and *epistemic bubbles*. Both are social structures that systematically exclude sources of information. Both exaggerate their members' confidence in their beliefs. ... An epistemic bubble is when you don't *hear* people from the other side. An echo chamber is what happens when you don't *trust* people from the other side.

...An "epistemic bubble" is an *informational network from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission*. ...When we take networks built for social reasons and start using them as our information feeds, we tend to miss out on contrary views and run into exaggerated degrees of agreement.



An "echo chamber" is a *social structure from which other relevant voices have been actively discredited*. Where an epistemic bubble merely omits contrary views, an echo chamber brings its members to actively distrust outsiders. ...A cult isolates its members by actively alienating them from any outside sources. Those outside are actively labelled as malignant and untrustworthy. A cult member's trust is narrowed, aimed with laser-like focus on certain insider voices.

In epistemic bubbles, other voices are not heard; in echo chambers, other voices are actively undermined.

Source: <https://aeon.co/essays/why-its-as-hard-to-escape-an-echo-chamber-as-it-is-to-flee-a-cult>

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "Children must be taught how to think, not what to think." Margaret Mead



Day 2: "You must never feel badly about making mistakes ... as long as you take the trouble to learn from them. For you often learn more by being wrong for the right reasons than you do by being right for the wrong reasons." Norton Juster

Day 3: "A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window." Gilles Deleuze

Day 4: "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use." Galileo Galilei

Day 5: "To argue with a man who has renounced the use and authority of reason, and whose philosophy consists in holding humanity in contempt, is like administering medicine to the dead, or endeavoring to convert an atheist by scripture." Thomas Paine

Day 6: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* 'Have courage to use your own reason!' — that is the motto of enlightenment." Immanuel Kant

Day 7: "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not." Blaise Pascal

Day 8: "Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense." Gautama Buddha

Day 9: "Those who will not reason, are bigots, those who cannot, are fools, and those who dare not, are slaves." George Gordon Byron

Day 10: "Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear." Thomas Jefferson

Day 11: "How quick come the reasons for approving what we like." Jane Austen

Day 12: "There's nothing more annoying than cold logic and reason when you've got a good fit going." James Patterson



Day 13: "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing." Albert Einstein

Day 14: "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." Immanuel Kant

Day 15: "In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual." Galileo Galilei

Day 16: "You cannot reason people out of a position that they did not reason themselves into." Ben Goldacre

Day 17: "I hope you weren't looking to me to be the voice of reason. I keep to a strict diet of ill-advised enthusiasm and heartfelt regret." Leigh Bardugo

Day 18: "It was my first clue that atheists are my brothers and sisters of a different faith. Like me, they go as far as the legs of reason will carry them — and then they leap." Yann Martel

Day 19: "One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests." Thomas Paine

Day 20: "Man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world." Albert Camus

Day 21: "Reason is not automatic. Those who deny it cannot be conquered by it." Ayn Rand

Day 22: "All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason." Immanuel Kant

Day 23: "It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into." Jonathan Swift

Day 24: "The human brain is a complex organ with the wonderful power of enabling man to find reasons for continuing to believe whatever it is that he wants to believe." Voltaire

Day 25: "Reason with yourself when you have lost your reason." Andrew Solomon

Day 26: "I mean, you could claim that *anything's* real if the only basis for believing in it is that nobody's *proved* it doesn't exist!" J.K. Rowling

Day 27: "If someone doesn't value evidence, what evidence are you going to provide to prove that they should value it? If someone doesn't value logic, what logical argument could you provide to show the importance of logic?" Sam Harris

Day 28: "Faith and Reason are like two wings of the human spirit by which it soars to the truth." Pope John Paul II

Day 29: "Human reason can excuse any evil; that is why it's so important that we don't rely on it." Veronica Roth

Day 30: "All human actions have one or more of these seven causes: chance, nature, compulsion, habit, reason, passion, and desire." Aristotle

Day 31: "Just because you're an atheist, that doesn't mean you wouldn't love for things to have reasons for why they are." Jonathan Safran Foer



Reason

Rev. Dr. William Murry

...Humanistic religious naturalism ... relies on the human ability to use our intelligence and our reasoning capacity to determine what is true and right. It relies on observation, reflection, critical thinking, and testing by experimentation, and it builds on what is learned in this way from generation to generation to expand knowledge and understanding. It holds that supernatural revelation is not reliable, nor are other direct, unmediated claims to truth. It does not claim absolute certainty, for it regards knowledge as dynamic and growing as humankind learns more about the world and human nature. Instead, it maintains that our knowledge involves degrees of probability.

Using the terms *Skeptics* and *True Believers*, Chet Raymo describes the two perspectives well: "Skeptics are children of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. They are always a little lost in the vastness of the cosmos, but they trust the ability of the human mind to make sense of the world. They accept the evolving nature of truth and are willing to live with a measure of uncertainty. Their world is colored in shades of grey.... Since they hold their truths tentatively, Skeptics are tolerant of cultural and religious diversity.

"True Believers are less confident that humans can sort things out for themselves. They look for help from outside—from God.... Their world is black and white. They seek simple and certain truths, provided by a source that is more reliable than the human mind.... They are repulsed by diversity, comforted by dogma, and respectful of authority."

The humanist's way of thinking ... tends to be skeptical about all claims to knowledge and truth that have not been verified by empiricism or critical intelligence. It is aware of the human tendency to believe what we want to believe or what gives us security or comfort or joy, whether it can be shown to be true. It

unlimited powers of self-deception. ... Humanism ... maintains that we should rely on empirical observation

and critical thinking in arriving at what we believe. But humanistic naturalists also know that what we believe to be true must be corroborated by the observations and critical thinking of others, or else it may prove to be merely our own viewpoint.

Traditionally, this mode of thought has been called reason. But in this age ... reason and critical thinking are out of favor. ...Human beings have used their intelligence and reasoning powers to confirm prejudices and to exploit their fellow human beings. It seems that we are not only rational animals but also rationalizing animals.

...Some of the criticisms of reason are based on a narrow understanding of what reason means, the view that reason refers to a coldly logical way of thinking. Rem Edwards suggests a larger understanding of reason: "Being reasonable involves more than thinking logically; it involves a comprehensiveness of vision and enlightenment, fairness and impartiality of judgment, and freedom from external and non-rational pressures." When humanistic religious naturalists refer to depending on reason, we should have this larger meaning in mind. This type of thinking has no place for dogmatism. The important thing is to be a reflective and reasonable person who does not accept beliefs as true simply because they are taught or because someone or some group believes them. On the other hand, no one can possibly verify everything, so we are all dependent on the results of the work of others. It then becomes important that we choose responsible experts or studies to depend on.

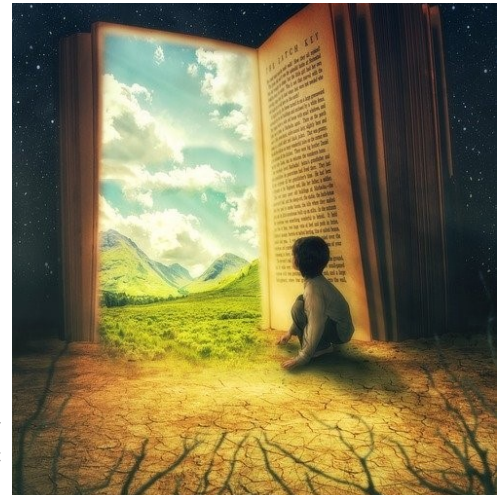
...The form of rationality that provides the most reliable knowledge about nature, including human nature, is the scientific-empirical method.

...John Dewey, in his book *How We Think*, suggests that the scientific method follows five basic steps. First, we identify the problem; then we analyze and clarify the nature of the problem through observation and reflection. In the third step,

we note possible solutions or working hypotheses. Step four involves reflecting on the various implications or consequences of each possible solution or hypothesis. And finally, we verify the solution adopted.

...To verify the outcome, we ask the pragmatic question, "Did it work?"

It is a mistake, however, to think that the scientific method always yields certainty; what it offers are degrees of probability. The limitations of being human make absolute certainty impossible in many cases. Our understanding of the world through the natu-



ral sciences changes somewhat as new discoveries are made and as new, more sophisticated equipment is developed for observing nature. Our understanding of human nature also changes through the discoveries of the human sciences.

Therefore, it is important to retain an open mind, but the fact that we are not privy to absolute truth does not mean that we have no reliable knowledge.

While the scientific-empirical method is the best method for discovering knowledge about the world, it is not enough in itself....

...A viable religion of the twenty-first century ...will recognize the importance of both reason and reverence. The human ability to think critically and constructively has made possible our many artistic achievements and medical and technological advances, but it is only reverence, understood as feelings of respect and awe, that can save us from the hubris that would destroy all the good we have accomplished.

Source: *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century* by William Murry

Questions & Answers

Michelle Richards

Dale McGowan estimates in his book, *Parenting Beyond Belief*, that children will ask approximately 427,050 questions between their second and fifth birthdays. That's an awful lot of questions! And not all of the answers are able to be articulated, let alone explained in a fashion that can be understood by the mind of a young child.

When it comes to Unitarian Universalist parenting, this can be a real challenge. After all, at the very heart of our religious tradition is the idea of questioning, seeking, wondering, exploring, and even changing our minds when new things become important. Children have a natural curiosity about the world and about life. One of the most frequently heard questions is "why?"



... While children in the elementary grades (kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade) remain concrete thinkers, they are more able to grapple with what is real and what is not. Children of this age are naturally curious about the really profound mysteries of life and are capable of being appreciative of the universal and enduring values that bring meaning to the world. Their curiosity can be revealed through lots of questions not only about what is real, and what is true, but also about what is fair.

They want to know not only "why" but also "how" about everything in their world. Children of this age want to keep track of everything, place things into categories, and classify all the newly acquired information. They may also insist upon proof or fact or be adamant about testing it out. At this point, children have a strong need to know not just what their parents think and believe, but why.

Source: <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/questions-answers>

Critical Thinking

Gwen Dewar

...Consider these recommendations made by Peter Facione and [others]....

Start early. Young children might not be ready for lessons in formal logic. But they can be taught to give reasons for their conclusions. And ...evaluate the reasons ...by others. ...

Avoid pushing dogma. When we tell kids to do things..., we should give reasons.

Encourage kids to ask questions. ...If a rationale doesn't make sense to a child, she should ...voice her objection or difficulty.

Ask kids to consider alternative explanations and solutions. It's nice to get the right answer. But many problems yield themselves to more than one solution. ...

Get kids to clarify meaning. Kids should practice putting things in their own words....

Talk about biases. Even grade school students can understand how emotions, motives—even our cravings—can influence our judgments.

Don't confine critical thinking to purely factual or academic matters. Encourage kids to reason about ethical, moral, and public policy issues.

Get kids to write. ...the process of writing helps students clarify their explanations and sharpen their arguments.

Source: <http://parentingscience.com/teaching-critical-thinking/>

Family Activity:

What Belongs? What Doesn't?

One way to help children develop critical thinking skills is to help children to create categories and classify items appropriately. You can do this by gathering together a lot of items in your home (e.g., tools, kitchen items, toys, office items, clothing, food, etc.), and then work with your children to group them into categories and even sub-categories. As your children learn the concept, invite them to gather things from around the home and have you sort them. The questions to ask again and again are: "What belongs? What doesn't?"

Earthy and Practical Reason

Rev. Dr. Jack Mendelsohn

...Second only to the free mind is our belief in reason and responsibility. Freedom requires responsibility, and responsibility requires reason. Humans must accept responsibility for their choices and their acts.

...A realistic study of human nature reveals a plethora of impulses and a rich diversity of motives within which the process of moral selection proceeds. We find some things are better and others are worse, by trial and error, by measurements of happiness and welfare, by comparison and reflection. For Unitarian Universalists, a chief resource is reason. With us, reason holds a place ordinarily accorded to revelation in other religions. Those who are likely to behave best exercise their reason most.

Thus I ...remain hopeful about the human estate. I find a basic capacity for goodness....

This does not mean that I am unmindful of the limitations of human reason, nor that I look upon it as an infallible guide. In the Unitarian Universalist way of life there are no infallible guides. But central to my faith and that of my liberal religious forbears, is the notion that reason is crucial to our functioning. How else shall we discuss our feelings of truth, beauty, and goodness? These matters do not, as some would say, defy discussion. Our religious community, our church, is grounded in just such community. E. Burdette Backus ...describe[d] our reasoning ability as an instrument that developed in the process of evolution, enabling us to satisfy our needs more adequately.

...Discover what commends itself to your reason as truth and then accept that as your authority. And by working at it faithfully, with one another's help, we can become better, wiser, and more loving human beings.

Source: *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age* by Jack Mendelsohn, 1964, Skinner House Books, Boston.

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction to Theme** son (or understanding)." As Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Dr. Paul Rasor writes, "...human reason became the final judge of all things, not only in science but also in the process of deciding philosophical and religious truth." Rasor does observe, however, that as reason trumped revelation in liberal theology, the faculty of reason then had to contend with the primacy placed on experience as emphasized by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834).

The essential nature of reason in our "way" of religion was asserted by the Rev. William Ellery Channing in his 1819 sermon, *Unitarian Christianity*, delivered in Baltimore at the ordination of Jared Sparks. There, Channing defended the importance of using reason in interpreting scripture. He wrote, "We are particularly accused of making an unwarrantable use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture. We are said to exalt reason above revelation, to prefer our own wisdom to God's." Channing continued, "We profess not to know a book, which demands a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible." As he explained, "...we [Unitarians] feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it [i.e., the Bible] perpetually, to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit, to seek in the nature of the subject, and the aim of the writer, his true meaning; and, in general, to make use of what is known, for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering new truths." Channing, in fact, was more traditional than the likes of Emerson and other Transcendentalists. As Channing said, "We honor revelation too highly to make it the antagonist of reason, or to believe that it calls us to renounce our highest powers." He was all too well aware that, "The worst errors, after all, ...[have] sprung up in that church, which proscribes reason, and demands from its members implicit faith." Channing concluded, "We honor religion too much to give its sacred name to a feverish, forced, fluctuating zeal..." devoid of reason.

The role of reason, generally, and science, specifically, in our religious tradition became more pronounced in response to Charles Darwin's publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1859. As the Rev. John White

impact of Darwinism on liberal religion, he said it initially "seemed the wreck of our high faith in human nature," yet "it has proved its grandest confirmation."

The Free Religious Association, founded in 1867 by radical Unitarians, consisted of the Intuitionist School, which was a continuation of the Transcendentalist heritage, and the Scientific School, which sought to have science and reason inform religious thinking. The Rev. Francis Ellingwood Abott, wrote, "Science is ...destined to be the world's true Messiah."

In 1887, the Unitarian Western Conference adopted *The Things Most Commonly Believed Today Among Us* "as a non-binding explanation of its theology." Among the items in the list was the following: "We hold reason and conscience to be final authorities in matters of religious belief."

The Humanist Manifesto, published in 1933, articulated the tenets of religious humanism, which would become increasingly important in our religious tradition. The fifth tenant concluded: "Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method."

It is notable that the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948, began as follows: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (Article 1)

This emphasis on reason continues. As our fifth source states: "Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit." In this, however, we are also wise not to make an idol of reason. It is an essential part of religious inquiry, yet reason has its limits.

Still, the need for reason has never been more important as social media and some media outlets are used to spread fake news, alternative facts, far-fetched conspiracy theories, and outright lies. The findings of science have no credibility for those who act on fantasies promoted by charlatans. Because of this, we must be activists in support of reason and science to combat growing idolatries of the mind and spirit.

Beyond Idolatry

Rev. Dr. Forrest Church

...Our fifth source: the humanist teachings that counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.

The inclusion of a warning against idolatries of the mind and spirit is not an afterthought, it is absolutely critical to the integrity of our faith, protecting even science and rationalism from becoming idols. Rationalism as an idol easily becomes rationalization. Science and technology without awe and humility about how they are used too easily become threats to both nature and humanity....

...When reason is reduced to rationality, it too can become an idol.

...The philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich once said that "the first word of religion must be spoken against religion." When spoken, it is almost always a word of warning against idolatries of the mind and spirit. This is not merely a negative, or critical, function for it liberates us to heed the guidance of reason and science with open, instead of dogmatically focused, eyes.

...With its subtle interplay between reason, science, and resistance to idolatry, the humanist tradition continues to change and grow. As long as we remain true to the humanist spirit, that growth will continue. We will respond to the forces of retrenchment by tapping the transformational power of new models of interdependence and community, which are unfolding in the writings of feminist and liberation theologians, and we will continue to encourage scientific exploration into the nature of our shared being.

Our religious challenge is greater than ever. We must employ our reason and the insights of science, mindful of the dangers of idolatry, to increase our understanding and cultivate the garden of the spirit in ways undreamed of before. We must not only nurture a deeper appreciation for the wonder and majesty of life, but renew our senses of responsibility for how the story we are telling will finally turn out.

Source: *A Chosen Faith* by Forrest Church & John Buehrens, Skinner House Books, Boston.

Too Many Bubbles

Reasons for Reason

Michael Lynch

...The ideal of civility requires ... common currency with those with whom we must discuss practical matters. More recent political philosophers ...have seen this ideal as a key component of a functioning liberal democracy. ... Democracies are, or should be, spaces of reasons.

So, one reason we should take the project of defending our epistemic principles [i.e., individuals' beliefs about knowledge and knowing] seriously is that the ideal of civility demands it. But there is also another, even deeper, reason. We need to justify our epistemic principles from a common point of view because we need shared epistemic principles in order to even have a common point of view. Without a common background of standards against which we measure what counts as a reliable source of information, or a reliable method of inquiry, and what doesn't, we won't be able to *agree on the facts*, let alone values. ...We live isolated

in our separate bubbles of information culled from sources that only reinforce our prejudices and never challenge our basic assumptions. No wonder that—as in the debates over evolution, or what to include in textbooks illustrate—we so often fail to reach agreement over the history and physical structure of the world itself. No wonder joint action grinds to a halt. When you can't agree on your principles of evidence and rationality, you can't agree on the facts. And if you can't agree on the facts, you can hardly agree on what to do in the face of the facts.

...We need to resist skepticism about reason: we need to be able to give reasons for why some standards or reasons—some epistemic principles—should be part of that currency and some not.

Source: <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/reasons-for-reason/>



Self-Interest vs. Truth

The Rationalist Delusion

Jonathan Haidt

...Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines delusion as "a false conception and persistent belief unconquerable by reason in something that has no existence in fact." ...The worship of reason is itself an illustration of one of the most long-lived delusions in Western history: the rationalist delusion. It's the idea that reasoning is our most noble attribute....

... Anyone who values truth should stop worshipping reason.

... I'm not saying we should all stop reasoning and go with our gut feelings. Gut feelings are sometimes better guides than reasoning for making consumer choices and interpersonal judgments, but they are often disastrous as a basis for public policy, science, and law. Rather, ...we must be wary of any individual's ability to reason.

...Each individual reasoner is really good at one thing: finding evidence to support the position he or she already holds, usually for intuitive reasons. We should not expect individuals to produce good, open-minded, truth-seeking reasoning, particularly when self-interest or reputational concerns are in play. But if you put individuals together in the right way, such that some individuals can use their reasoning powers to disconfirm the claims of others, and all individuals feel some common bond or shared fate that allows them to interact civilly, you can create a group that ends up producing good reasoning as an emergent property of the social system. This is why it's so important to have intellectual and ideological diversity within any group or institution whose goal is to find truth (such as an intelligence agency or a community of scientists) or to produce good public policy (such as a legislature or advisory board).

Source: *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* by Jonathan Haidt, Random House, Inc. 2012.



Come, let us reason together.

Reason and Arguing

The Reason We Reason

Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber

Our hypothesis is that the function of reasoning is argumentative. It is to devise and evaluate arguments intended to persuade.

Psychologists have shown that people have a very, very strong, robust confirmation bias. What this means is that when they have an idea, and they start to reason about that idea, they are going to mostly find arguments for their own idea. They're going to come up with reasons why they're right, they're going to come up with justifications for their decisions. They're not going to challenge themselves.

And the problem with the confirmation bias is that it leads people to make very bad decisions and to arrive at crazy beliefs. And it's weird, when you think of it, that humans should be endowed with a confirmation bias. If the goal of reasoning were to help us arrive at better beliefs and make better decisions, then there should be no bias. The confirmation bias should really not exist at all.

But if you take the point of view of the argumentative theory, having a confirmation bias makes complete sense. When you're trying to convince someone, you don't want to find arguments for the other side, you want to find arguments for your side. And that's what the confirmation bias helps you do.

...Confirmation bias is not a flaw of reasoning, it's actually a feature. It is something that is built into reasoning; not because reasoning is flawed or because people are stupid, but because actually people are very good at reasoning—but they're very good at reasoning for arguing. Not only does the argumentative theory explain the bias, it can also give us ideas about how to escape the bad consequences of the confirmation bias.

Source: <https://www.wired.com/2011/05/the-sad-reason-we-reason/>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Reason

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this journal & *Living the Questions* next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.” *Buddha*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story, p. 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “The first law of reason is that what exists, exists; what is, is, and that from this ...bedrock principle, all knowledge is built...that is the foundation from which life is embraced... thinking is a choice...wishes and whims are not facts, nor are they a means to discover them... reason is our only way of grasping reality—it’s our basic tool of survival. We are free to evade the effort of thinking—to reject reason—but we are not free to avoid the penalty of the abyss we refuse to see.... Reason is the very substance of truth itself. The glory that is life is wholly embraced through reason.” *Terry Goodkind*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What value do you place on reason? Why?
2. What appeals to you about a religion that uses reason as a tool in shaping beliefs and constructing theology?
3. How has reason been misused?
4. It is clear that reason is essential in the way that we approach religion, and that reason has its limits. How can we use reason responsibly?
5. How does reason influence one’s sense of certainty?
6. How can reason and intuition be partners in generating wisdom?
7. Can reason or science become an idol? Why or why not? If yes, what can be the consequences?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to those who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Not the Same

Science vs. Reason

Adam Wiggins

“Science” and “reason” are two words often spoken alongside each other—almost as if they were the same thing. Both are approaches to seeking truths about the world around us; they complement each other, but each is distinct.

Science is about the external world: measurement, controlled experiment, data collection, empiricism. It tests hypotheses against the hard reality of repeatable experiments with objectively measurable results. Those who practice it are called scientists or empiricists.

Reason, by contrast, is internally generated. It’s building mental models of the world, starting with your internal sense for what is right and pure, from which further truths can be deduced. Those who practice reason are called rationalists.

For most of history, reason was the only known or accepted way to arrive at truths about the world ...because tools for objectively and accurately measuring distance and time—the two most basic features of the physical world—did not exist up until around four hundred years ago.

Source: http://adam.herokuapp.com/past/2009/11/24/science_vs_reason/

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