

# Inquiring Minds: Ignoramus, Agnostics, & Science

#59 June 2020 “I know that I know nothing.” — Socrates *via* Plato Attn. Philosophers, [a new look at Socrates](#)

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## Using “Agnostic” and “Ignoramus” to accurately describe the scientific method

The dictionary defines an *ignoramus* as “a person who does not know much : an ignorant or stupid person.” In contemporary language to be called an ignoramus is an obvious insult. (1) However, originally it meant this: “The word comes right from the Latin **ignoramus**, literally ‘we do not know,’ which was a legal term in the 16th century that could be used during a trial when the prosecution presented insufficient evidence.” (2)

Likewise, the contemporary meaning of the word *agnostic* is defined mainly in religious terms as “a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.” This meaning deals largely with matters of faith or belief. (3)

However, the adjectival use of the word takes on a much broader meaning: “one who is unsure, skeptical, questioning, unbelieving” *in anything*, not just religious matters. So

**Belief in a higher power** was found in every segment of the religiously unaffiliated population. Overall, 70 percent of the nones said they **believe** in a spiritual force. Among **agnostics**, it was 62 percent. Even among atheists, nearly 1 in 5 (or 18 percent) said they **believe in a higher power.** (4a)

when [Rachael Maddow](#) of MNSBC says she is “agnostic on the matter,” it means she doesn’t know one way or the other at that point. (4)

## The Caution and Humility of True Science

Noah Harari (5) in his best seller, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, (6) first introduced me to this concept that scientists generally ascribe to the Latin word meaning “we do not know” (*ignoramus*), meaning they are open to new data which may force them to modify their original theory. We see this caution and humility with those trained in science and medicine especially when talking about this pandemic. Wise governors, mayors, legislators who believe in the scientific method are equally cautious in their speech and actions, but are also concerned with the economic and emotional needs of their constituents in various locals in which they govern. They realize that one size does not fit all, and that there are many forces to consider. They are open to change, and re-adjustment if needed.



## The Real Ignoramuses Will be Exposed Not by God but by Mother Nature.

The danger of blind belief in an ideology or a forceful personality will be exposed even as they try to attack the press, silence the CDC (7) and OSHA (8), and [weaken the Voice of America](#). Exposure is not enough. Voting them out of office and power is our only way of heeding the call of Mother Nature. Our choice.