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HUMANIST Monthly

A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, November 12th, 2023

In Person at 12:30 PM and Online at 1:00 PM

How to Sustain Humanity, Advance our Civilization, and Succeed as a Species



Joseph Simonetta

Humanity must enter into a completely new understanding of the reality in which we exist. The window of opportunity to make the necessary and monumental shift in thinking is small compared to the large obstacles in our current belief systems — political, economic, social, and religious — that must be dissolved. Yet, this must happen if we and all the life forms that share this jewel of a planet are going to survive.

Joseph R. Simonetta earned a BS in Business Logistics from Penn State University, and then achieved an MS of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School where he studied ethics, global environmental problems, world religions, cosmology, and evolutionary biology. He also studied at Yale Divinity School. He also holds an MS in Architecture from the University of Colorado.

Born in Bethlehem, PA, to an immigrant blue-collar steelworker and his wife, he was raised in the shadows of the blast furnaces of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

He has since lived for significant amounts of time in California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Florida, Greece, New Zealand, and Ecuador.

He has been an Army officer, professional athlete, entrepreneur and businessman, architectural designer, real estate developer, home builder, environmental activist, author, speaker, senior editor of the World Business Academy, twice a nominee for the U.S. Congress, and once a nominee for the U.S. presidency (Democratic Party National Convention, New York City, 1992).

Intermittently, he wrote a mix of fiction and nonfiction books about humanity and the state of the world. He serves on the board of directors of The Secular Community.

At the 2023 U.S. National Senior Games held in Pittsburgh, PA in July 2023, he won the gold medal in the Sprint Triathlon in his age division, 80-84. For stories about this, Google "Joe Simonetta triathlon."

As a young man, disturbed at the extraordinary amount of unrelenting suffering in the world, he vowed to himself to do something to alleviate it.

This program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM), via Zoom, on Sunday, November 12, 2023. The speaker will be on Zoom. The in-person event will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. Light refreshments will be available at the meeting before the speaker's presentation. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the online meeting via email.

ANYONE WHO IS NOT A CURRENT PAID MEMBER of CDHS can attend. Send an email request to: CDHS.Albany@gmail.com. Please send the request several days prior, or you may log onto our Meetup page: <https://www.meetup.com/Capital-District-Humanist-Society/>, then click on JOIN, then click on ATTEND, and use the RSVP function, and the link will be available.

The Capital District Humanist Society provides a supportive community for exchanging ideas, heightening our knowledge of the world and ourselves, fostering moral and ethical growth, and promoting the principles of secular humanism. CDHS is a member organization for people with humanist values. Our values include commitment to free inquiry, rational thought, lifelong education, democracy, social concern, and fellowship.

Capital District Humanist Society, Inc.

Established 1986

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/CapitalDistrictHumanistSociety>



CDHS is affiliated with:

The American Humanist Association (AHA)

Center for Inquiry (CSI)

Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

On Sunday, December 10th, 2023, 1:00 PM ET
The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

America Needs Atheists Now More Than Ever

Kate Cohen is the author of *We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (and Maybe You Should Too)*. The book chronicles Kate's journey from Reform Jew to outspoken atheist, her decision to raise her children as atheists, and her attempts to create for her own family the benefits that religion provides for others. It also argues that nonbelievers should be more vocal and more honest, for both personal and political reasons.

Kate Cohen is a Washington Post columnist who writes about the intersection of culture, family, and politics. Her columns have led to interviews on NBC Nightly News, Freethought Radio, and the BBC World Service.



Kate Cohen

She is also the author of two previous books. *The Neppi-Modona Diaries: Reading Jewish Survival through My Italian Family* (UPNE) tells the story of a Jewish family who went into hiding to survive the Nazi invasion, and explores Kate's own perspective as a post-Holocaust, non-believing Jew at the end of the twentieth century. *A Walk Down the Aisle: Notes on a Modern Wedding* examines through personal essays the hard-to-resist but functionally outdated American wedding ritual. She and her husband live on a farm in Albany, New York.

This program will take place both in-person (at 12:30 pm) and online via Zoom (at 1 pm). The in-person event will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, New York; it is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available at the in-person meeting before the speaker's presentation. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the on-line meeting via email.

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Community Service Opportunity: The Great Give Back 2023

The Schenectady Public Library, 99 Clinton Street, Schenectady, will be collecting soap, body wash, shampoo, hair conditioner, toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant, feminine hygiene products, diapers (ALL SIZES), baby wipes, and baby shampoo for the 518 Free Store. Drop offs during regular library hours.

CDHS November News from the Executive Director

The election results are in! All the members who were running for positions on the Executive Council were elected. Thanks to all the CDHS members who voted and congratulations to the EC members who were elected to the EC. All the members of the EC volunteer their time to help keep CDHS operating. All the members of the EC appreciate your trust in them to help keeping the organization functioning. A listing of the current Executive Council members is to the right of this article.

I want to recognize the contributions and dedication to the Society and its mission of two members that are stepping down from their positions in the EC.

- Judith McCann has done an admirable job of keeping track of our membership, which includes updating the annual membership directory, for the past several years.
- Rosina Ansaldo has served as Secretary of the EC for several years and done a wonderful job of keeping a record of the discussions at the EC meetings.

As you can see in the listing to the right, we need to fill the role of Secretary in the EC. If you are interested in assuming the duties of Secretary, please contact Don Porterfield at cdhs.albany@gmail.com. The task is open to anyone that has been a member of CDHS for at least one year and will require a few hours of your time each month to participate in monthly EC meetings and prepare minutes of the meetings to document the EC's decisions.

In case you hadn't noticed, our website Humanistsociety.net has a new look. Please take a look at the refreshed website and provide any comments or suggestions via the contact page on the website or sending an email to cdhs.albany@gmail.com.

CDHS Executive Council

Executive Director	Don Porterfield
Secretary	Vacant
Treasurer	Roland Tozer
Programs, Publicity	Fred Levine
Publications	Frank H. Wind & Carol Quantock
Social Activities	Candace Fuller
Membership, Telephone	Judith Herbert
Meetup Coordinator	Fred Levine
Compliance	Kevin Smith
Member at Large	Sherry Levine

Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Sue Parry
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

RECAP OF OUR OCTOBER SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Abhijit Chanda is the founder of "Rationable," a YouTube channel. (The name does not refer to things subject to rationing, but rather rationality.) He joined us from India, speaking about "Alternative Health Practices and Pseudoscience."

A starting point was to query reasons for the popularity of "alternative" medicine as opposed to the conventional (real) sort. Chanda characterized the latter, in America, as not exactly user-friendly. People recoil from giant institutions like government, insurance companies, and big pharma. Mainstream doctors often seem cold and brusque, in contrast to "alternative" practitioners exuding warmth. Many people take modern medicine for granted, while venerating "traditional" treatments as better fitted to their beliefs, philosophies, and psychologies. As opposed to critical thinking.

But he suggested that critical thinking doesn't necessarily correlate with intelligence. In that regard, he cited Steve Jobs, certainly a very intelligent guy, who insisted on treating his cancer outside of mainstream medicine. This didn't work out well.

There's also the appeal of the word "natural," with the idea that it equates to "good." Wow, is that wrong: Chanda called it the "naturalistic fallacy." Humanity's whole history is a battle against nature; it can kill you. That's not to say we don't get some useful treatments from nature, like penicillin. But it requires science to separate what's good from what's bad.

Proponents of "alternative" treatments often do make scientific claims. But Chanda was pretty dismissive of that. It's typically window-dressing rather than real science, producing the conclusions the "researcher" wants to get. He cited the example of a Covid cure touted as 100% effective in trials. Well, to start with, 97% of people don't get Covid in the first place. (The purveyor eventually backed off the claim, instead saying his snake oil "boosts immunity", whatever that might actually mean.)

Yet numerous people insist that even stuff like homeopathy — which is literally no treatment at all — helps them. Of course that's the placebo effect, which is quite powerful. It throws a monkey wrench into any attempt at rational discussion.

Another word often thrown around is "energy." (Chanda displayed a website piling on the feel-good lingo, hawking "Holistic Calming Energy.") He said these folks actually don't know what they're talking about when it comes to "energy" (which is actually not some Jedi-like force, but prosaically defined as "the ability to do work"). Related here is the notion of a "life force" that somehow emanates within us ("vitalism"). That just ain't how things work.

Chanda focused particularly on "Ayurveda" practice, originating in India. The word loosely translates as "knowledge of life." Another of his targets was Reiki, which he said is not, contrary to common belief, some "ancient wisdom," but invented in the 1920s by one Mikao Usui, who died at 60, not exactly a great advertisement for Reiki's health benefits.

The basic problem with all this stuff is that it's grounded in ignorance of the true causes of disease and illness. Ayurveda is ancient — long predating germ theory! And typically it relies on the archaic concept that illness is caused by some sort of imbalance among bodily "humours." It was that kind of thinking that, for centuries, made bloodletting an all-purpose treatment for any malady (it killed George Washington). We now know it's complete bunk.

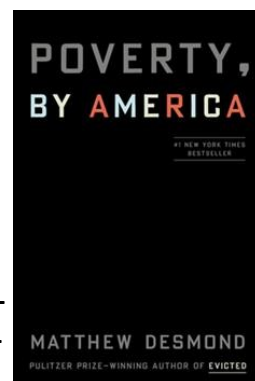
Chanda's final takeaway: Just let science do its thing. (What world is he living in?)

A recording of this talk can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/XLaf26A5ncA>

Join the bunch for lunch at the 76 Diner in Latham. We gather at 11:30 on the 3rd Thursday of every month. Our next get-togethers will be on November 16th and December 21st. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

CDHS Book Group is reading *Poverty, by America* by Matthew Desmond. They meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays.

Contact Frank Robinson if you want to join the spirited and informative discussion.



October 14, 2023 Social at Empire State Aerosciences Museum

We had an excellent turnout for the tour of the Empire State Aerosciences Museum on October 14. Our tour guide, Kevin Millington, showed us several historical military and civilian aircraft as well as a 32' model of the *Akagi*, a Japanese aircraft carrier used in the film "Tora, Tora, Tora". More highlights included an exhibit on women in aviation, the pioneers of space flight, and the General Electric engines used in aviation. We also climbed into a working Lockheed C130 Hercules and a Bell UH-1 (Huey) helicopter. After the tour, we had a delicious lunch at Perreca's.



Photos courtesy of Sue Parry

November 18, 2023 Social: Monet, The Immersive Experience

We have been very fortunate to be able to secure special pricing for our members, through the kindness/generosity of the general management, to attend the Monet Immersive Experience exhibition at the Schenectady Armory, 125 Washington Avenue, Schenectady. Prices are as follows: \$31/adult (includes \$1 fee for handling) for Venmo payments to Olga Porterfield, NOT to the venue; \$26/senior (includes \$1 fee for handling) for Venmo payments to Olga Porterfield, NOT to the venue. Free VR is included with all tickets. Plan to arrive by 2:45 PM; the event begins at 3:00 PM. There are no refunds for this event due to the rock bottom prices. However, the manager has decided to honor tickets at a later date if a member gets sick on the day of the event. In that case, please inform Dee Fuller of your change of plans and she will pick up your ticket for you at the event and give it to you the next time we meet. Please do not abuse this privilege because doing so would jeopardize our group's ability to obtain discounted tickets in the future.

All payments have to be collected by November 11th.

If you buy your ticket from the venue, you will not be eligible for this special discounted price.

Olga Porterfield will be accepting Venmo payments as well as checks for the event. Contact her at aglow95@yahoo.com for her Venmo account information or for her home address to mail a check. She will also accept checks in person if you see her before November 11th.

Optional dinner to follow at Cornell's Restaurant, 39 North Jay Street, Schenectady.

Contact Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com to confirm attendance or if you have any questions.

Refreshments Volunteers Needed for 2024

Due to Covid, for the past three years our Sunday speaker programs have been conducted via Zoom. Since September of this year, we have conducted hybrid meetings, offered both in person and via Zoom. As in the past, those who attend in person can enjoy light snacks and beverages, supplied by volunteers. Volunteers are already in place for the remainder of 2023, but are still needed for 2024. A list of meeting dates is below, in boldface type. Please note the following information:

- Venue: Pinnacle Living at Forts Ferry, 45 Forts Ferry Road, Latham, NY 12110 in the Library/Lounge.
- Bring a) food, or b) beverages, or c) both.
- Cost: CDHS will reimburse up to \$60 for food and up to \$20 for beverages, or you may make this a tax-deductible donation.
- Program times: socialize 12:30-1:00 pm; speaker 1:00-2:30 PM, including Q&A.
- Program dates: Second Sunday of each month.

Volunteers are needed for the following 2024 meeting dates: 1/14, 2/11, 3/10, 4/14, 5/12, 6/9, 7/14, 8/11.

To volunteer or get more information, please contact Sue Parry: sueparryharmony@gmail.com or 518-577-7329.

Preacher Who Lied About Military Service Plans to Open “Christian Military Academy”

from The Friendly Atheist, October 23, 2023, Hemant Mehta

Mark Burns, a résumé-padding, culture war-obsessed MAGA cultist and pastor who failed in his 2022 bid for Congress, says he’s going to open a Christian military academy.

During a conspiracy-driven ReAwaken America event last weekend, Burns praised his Lord and Savior Donald Trump—“We don’t care about those indictments! We don’t care about those arrests!”—before making a little announcement of his own: The “Burns Christian Military Academy” will open next year in order “to save our children from the evil public school system.”

The announcement lacked details, but **Right Wing Watch** points out that he elaborated on Facebook earlier this month:

Quote from Burns: “... Our mission is to provide an affordable, pro-American education with a strong emphasis on biblical teachings, and to create an environment where children can learn and grow without the need for discipline or court-ordered attendance. This school is not designed for children who have discipline issues. Our goal is to keep our rates extremely low at \$200 per month per student.

“Our school aims to instill good morals and a love for our country in our students while ensuring that they are not exposed to LGBTQ, CRT, or ‘woke’ teachings. We believe that our children are more than capable of making their own decisions and that they deserve a safe and nurturing environment to thrive in.

“We plan to have our students wear a military-inspired uniform, akin to those worn by cadets at WestPoint and VMI. We also encourage parents, grandparents, and mentors to participate by wearing the uniform, fostering a sense of community and support.

“Our curriculum will be based on the popular Abeka Curriculum, preparing our students for college, technical school, or business ownership. We are committed to providing a safe and bullying-free environment, and will notify parents immediately if any child reports being bullied.”

To be clear, there’s no actual connection to the U.S. military. The word just sounds important. Same with “Academy.” But this is nothing more than a private Christian school with costumes. Abeka, for those who aren’t familiar with it, is a popular home-schooling curriculum for parents who don’t want their kids to actually learn anything. And not exposing kids to the existence of LGBTQ people, ignoring the role of African Americans throughout our history (which is what conservatives mean when they denounce “CRT”), and dismissing challenging ideas under the guise of wokeness is basically an announcement that kids won’t learn the kind of material they may need to function outside their Christian bubble.

This isn’t a military academy. This is just another form of Christian Nationalist indoctrination. And it’s from a guy who said just last year that teachers who accept and educate students about LGBTQ people should be charged with treason, then executed.

It’s familiar rhetoric for anyone who’s followed Burns and his political trajectory over the years. In November of 2021, he called for the establishment of a theocracy, saying that anything “contrary to the word of God” needs to be removed from the country and made “illegal.” This is a man who offered up a biblical defense when Trump condemned African nations as “s**thole countries.”

Burns is a professional liar who wants to put his hand on the Bible while torching the Constitution.

And conservative Christians just embrace it. Even if Burns lost the GOP primary last year, he still gets invited on right-wing talk shows and still serves as a hype man at MAGA-friendly events.

If there’s any consolation here, it’s that Burns has a long history of lying. So for all we know, this school will never actually launch. At some point, he’ll probably ask for funding. Then he’ll say the school is unable to launch. Then he’ll blame liberals, somehow. Then he’ll pretend like this never happened.

For a preacher who falsely claimed he spent six years in the Army Reserve, this is just the latest example of Burns disrespecting the people who actually serve in uniform. (via **Right Wing Watch**)

Capital District Humanist Society, Inc. PO Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211-0209

(518) 533-2666 E-mail us at cdhs.albany@gmail.com

Visit us on the web at humanistsociety.net

The Capital District Humanist Society (CDHS) is an independent, non-profit (and non-prophet), non-partisan and strictly non-religious educational and social organization for those who share humanist values: commitment to education, rational and free inquiry, democracy, social concerns and fellowship. CDHS is affiliated with the four major humanist organizations - the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and the Humanists International (HI).

There are five types of CDHS member support: Individual, \$50/yr.; Family, \$80/yr.; Sustaining, \$100/yr.; Patron, \$150/yr.; and Lifetime Member, one contribution of \$1000 or more.

Members receive our publication, *The Humanist Monthly*, and vote by mail each September on the make-up of the governing Executive Council. Members are eligible for election to the Executive Council and may also serve as appointed officials. Members are welcome to attend Executive Council meetings.

The IRS recognizes CDHS as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Therefore, all donations, both cash and materials with established “fair market value”, qualify as charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

Donations are gratefully accepted to help speed our growth. CDHS is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization under the IRS Code. Financial disclosure information and our annual report are available upon request.

If you know of someone who may be interested in CDHS, please pass this newsletter along or give us the name; we will send a sample copy or two with no obligation.

We value your input. In the best humanist tradition, CDHS has no rigid picture of itself. We ask you to join us, not follow us. What activities and services would you like CDHS to provide its members? Send us your suggestions, questions, and comments.



CDHS

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FIRST CLASS

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<https://www.humanistsociety.net>

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MEMBER SUPPORT FORM

Name(s) _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City ++ State ++ Zip _____

Email _____ Fax _____

How did you hear about the Humanist Society? _____

All this information will be included in our Directory, which is distributed to members only, unless you request otherwise by checking and signing here: ☐ I do not want to be listed in the CDHS Member Directory _____

Levels of Member Support

Annual Payment **Date** ____/____/____

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership | \$ 50 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership | \$ 80 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member | \$100 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$150 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member | one-time contribution of \$1000 or more | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional tax-deductible donation | \$ _____ | _____ |

Please make checks payable to CDHS

☐ Please send me additional information