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HUMANIST Monthly

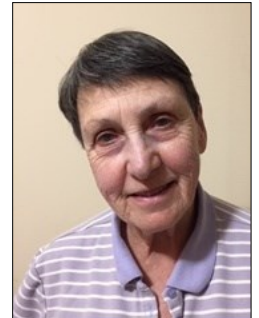
A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, April 14th, 2024

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

END OF LIFE ISSUES

Perhaps most people would prefer to avoid the topic of death, but it is an inevitable part of life. For some people, having control over death lessens anxiety. The Right to Die Movement dates back about 50 years. This talk will look at the organizations that are active and available today, the documents people should have prepared, and steps people can take so that their wishes are carried out.



Eleanor Aronstein

Eleanor Aronstein attained both BS and MS degrees in Education from Russell Sage College. She went on to attain a BA in History from Marist College, and then a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Educational Leadership from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Her career has included: Coordinator of Education at the Dutchess County Jail, Social Studies and Spanish teacher in the Hyde Park Central School District, Adjunct Professor in History at Marist College, and Supervisor of Student Teachers for SUNY New Paltz, Marist and College of St. Rose.

Eleanor's interest in The Right To Die stems from the very painful death of her mother in 1972 and her desire to help people avoid a similar end-of-life scenario. She became very active in Final Exit Network in 2013, giving presentations throughout the Hudson Valley and Upstate area, and considers the work to be a tribute to her mother.

This program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM), via Zoom. The event is free and open to the public. It will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, New York and via Zoom. Light refreshments will be available before the speaker's presentation. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please follow the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend. 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)

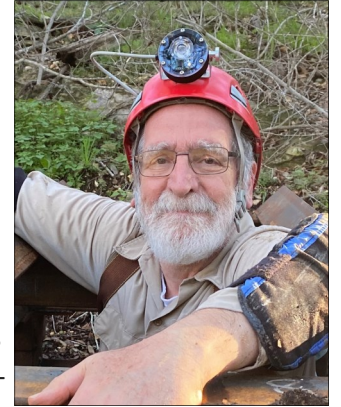
On Sunday, May 5th, 2024, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online)

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

The World Below: An Introduction to Caves and Karst

Have you ever heard of karst? It is a terrain that covers 20% of the earth's land surface. You have certainly heard of caves, which are the quintessential feature of karst areas. Caves and karst are generally unrecognized as vital resources. However, they sustain about 700 million people with drinking water, hold some of the richest archaeological and paleontological remains, contain many of the most biodiverse regions, and are even targets for settlement and the search for life on other planets. Everyone on Earth probably benefits from caves and karst. Learn how you are connected to the world below.

Dr. George Veni is an internationally recognized hydrogeologist specializing in caves and karst terrains. He is the owner and principal investigator of George Veni and Associates (GVA), conducting multidisciplinary environmental karst management research throughout the United States and in several other countries since 1987. In 2007, he took a hiatus from GVA to serve as the Executive Director of the National Cave and Karst Research Institute until he retired from the position in 2023 and returned to GVA. He has chaired 19 international and multidisciplinary karst conferences. From 2002-2022, he was a member of the governing board of the International Union of Speleology, serving as President for the final five years and organizer of its International Year of Caves and Karst in 2021-2022. He has been a doctoral committee advisor for geological, geographical, and biological dissertations at five universities in the US and Greece, taught karst geoscience courses as an adjunct professor for Western Kentucky University for 12 years, and taught karst science and management workshops internationally for NCKRI. Three cave-dwelling species have been named in his honor. He has published and presented over 290 papers, including six books, on hydrogeology, biology, and environmental management in karst terrains.

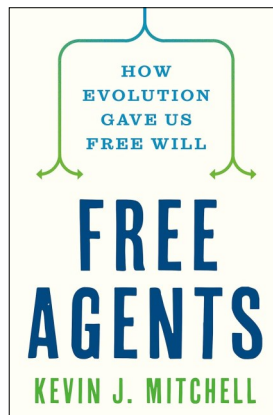


Dr. George Veni

This program begins at 1:00 PM, both in person and via Zoom. The in person event will be held at Pinnacle Living, 45 Forts Ferry Road, Latham, NY. It is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available starting at 12:30 PM before the speaker's presentation. Please bring your own beverage. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the on-line meeting via email.

CDHS Book Group is reading *Free Agents - How Evolution Gave Us Free Will* by Kevin J. Mitchell. They meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays.

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



CDHS Executive Council

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Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

RECAP OF OUR MARCH SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Paul Golin is Executive Director of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. His talk was titled "What is Humanistic Judaism?", which he divided into five basic points:

First, Jews are "remarkably secular." Golin noted there are about 7 million American Jews, about 2% of the population (less than most people think). He cited a Pew survey asking them, "Do you believe in the God of the Bible?" Only 26% said yes (compared to 56% of all Americans). Of the remaining Jews, half nevertheless believe in some sort of "higher power," leaving 22% apparently atheists. [I didn't follow that math — FSR.]

But the high secularism level among Jews doesn't surprise Golin, who said he can't see how, after the Holocaust, Jews can believe in a God who interferes in human affairs.

His second point was that Judaism is not just a religion. It's also a culture, and an ethnicity — actually, multiple ethnicities — Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and others. Golin noted another survey wherein, asked their religion, 30% of U.S. Jews did not answer "Jewish," again signifying rising secularism.

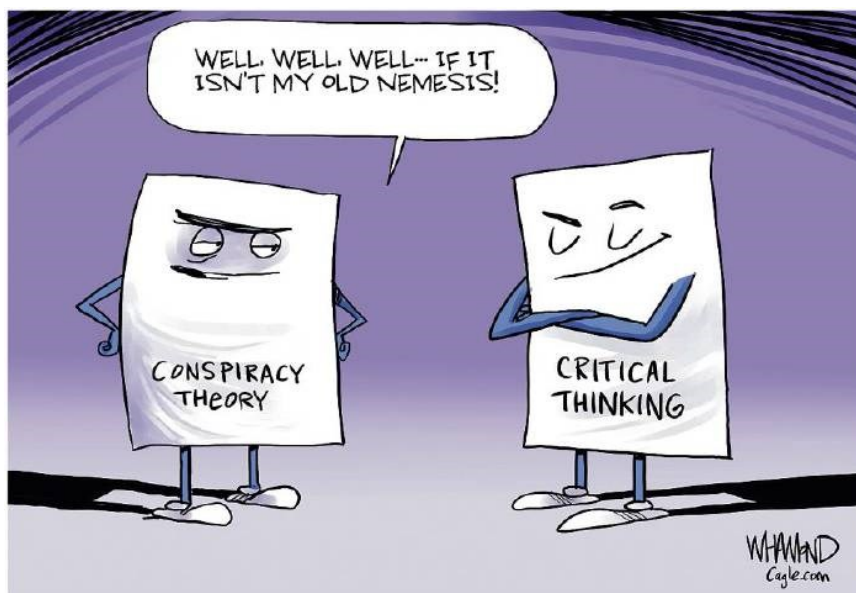
Third, he defined "humanistic Judaism" as a "meaningful Jewish community without God." He distinguished this from other versions of Judaism: orthodox, strictly following all the Biblical rules; reform, mostly ignoring them; and conservative, somewhere in-between. Humanistic Judaism is even less rule-and-ritual bound than the "reform" version. However:

Point four was that there's a benefit to ritual, even for secular people. All of us do things that equate to ritual, that impart meaning for us, such as birthday parties. Golin said a menorah connects him to his ancestors. He also recites "blessings" having nothing to do with God, sometimes just acknowledging gratefulness for things.

His fifth point was that meaning can come from any source and can provide value. Secularism need not mean giving up what has meaning for us — not throwing out the baby with the bath water.

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

Join the bunch for lunch at the Blue Ribbon Family Restaurant, 1801 State St., Schenectady, NY 12304. We gather at 11:30 on the 3rd Thursday of every month. Our next get-togethers will be on April 18th and May 16th. Please let [Rosina Ansaldo](#) know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.



by Dave Whamond, comics.com

The Philosophy of Ambiguity

(Quotes from various sources)

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE PHILOSOPHY OF AMBIGUITY, AS WELL AS THE IDIOSYNCRASIES OF ENGLISH, PLEASE ENJOY THE FOLLOWING:

1. DON'T SWEAT THE PETTY THINGS AND DON'T PET THE SWEATY THINGS.
2. ONE TEQUILA, TWO TEQUILA, THREE TEQUILA, FLOOR.
3. ATHEISM IS A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION.
4. IF MAN EVOLVED FROM MONKEYS AND APES, WHY DO WE STILL HAVE MONKEYS AND APES?
5. THE MAIN REASON THAT SANTA IS SO JOLLY IS BECAUSE HE KNOWS WHERE ALL THE BAD GIRLS LIVE.
6. I WENT TO A BOOKSTORE AND ASKED THE SALESWOMAN, "WHERE'S THE SELF-HELP SECTION?" SHE SAID IF SHE TOLD ME, IT WOULD DEFEAT THE PURPOSE.
7. WHAT IF THERE WERE NO HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS?
8. IF A DEAF CHILD SIGNS SWEAR WORDS, DOES HIS MOTHER WASH HIS HANDS WITH SOAP?
9. IF SOMEONE WITH MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES THREATENS TO KILL HIMSELF, IS IT CONSIDERED A HOSTAGE SITUATION?
10. IS THERE ANOTHER WORD FOR SYNONYM?
11. WHERE DO FOREST RANGERS GO TO "GET AWAY FROM IT ALL?"
12. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU SEE AN ENDANGERED ANIMAL EATING AN ENDANGERED PLANT?
13. IF A PARSLEY FARMER IS SUED, CAN THEY GARNISH HIS WAGES?
14. WOULD A FLY WITHOUT WINGS BE CALLED A WALK?
15. WHY DO THEY LOCK GAS STATION BATHROOMS? ARE THEY AFRAID SOMEONE WILL CLEAN THEM?
16. IF A TURTLE DOESN'T HAVE A SHELL, IS HE HOMELESS OR NAKED?
17. CAN VEGETARIANS EAT ANIMAL CRACKERS?
18. IF THE POLICE ARREST A MIME, DO THEY TELL HIM HE HAS THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT?
19. WHY DO THEY PUT BRAILLE ON THE DRIVE-THROUGH BANK MACHINES?
20. HOW DO THEY GET DEER TO CROSS THE ROAD ONLY AT THOSE YELLOW ROAD SIGNS?
21. WHAT WAS THE BEST THING BEFORE SLICED BREAD?
22. ONE NICE THING ABOUT EGOTISTS: THEY DON'T TALK ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE.
23. DOES THE LITTLE MERMAID WEAR AN ALGEBRA?
24. DO INFANTS ENJOY INFANCY AS MUCH AS ADULTS ENJOY ADULTERY?
25. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE A CIVIL WAR?
26. IF ONE SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMER DROWNS, DO THE REST DROWN TOO?
27. IF YOU ATE BOTH PASTA AND ANTIPASTO, WOULD YOU STILL BE HUNGRY?
28. IF YOU TRY TO FAIL, AND SUCCEED, WHICH HAVE YOU DONE?
29. WHOSE CRUEL IDEA WAS IT FOR THE WORD 'LISP' TO HAVE 'S' IN IT?
30. WHY ARE HEMORRHOIDS CALLED "HEMORRHOIDS" INSTEAD OF "ASSTEROIDS"?
31. WHY IS IT CALLED TOURIST SEASON IF WE CAN'T SHOOT AT THEM
32. WHY IS THERE AN EXPIRATION DATE ON SOUR CREAM?
33. IF YOU SPIN AN ORIENTAL PERSON IN A CIRCLE THREE TIMES, DO THEY BECOME DISORIENTED?
34. CAN AN ATHEIST GET INSURANCE AGAINST ACTS OF GOD?

Albrecht Dürer, a Humanist Messiah

He believed, and demonstrated, that individuals could ascend to divine realms of knowledge.

(by Ed Simon, from <https://hyperallergic.com/873317/albrecht-durer-a-humanist-messiah/>, February 25, 2024)

German painter Albrecht Dürer's arresting, haunting, and vaguely nefarious "Self-Portrait at Twenty Eight" (1500), accomplished at the last millennium's exact halfway point, now hangs at the Alte Pinakothek museum in München, Germany. There are any number of details that attract the viewer's attention, from the subject's piercing russet-eyed gaze to his ambiguous expression. But it's the immaculately rendered hands that are most human. In his self-portrait, Dürer stares uncannily forward in the same position as a medieval Christ, his cascading blond ringlets splayed down his shoulders. The first two digits of his right hand seem to play with the brown fur of his jacket, though they also spread open as if in the gesture of benediction. His fingers are long, tapered, elegant.

No painter — either before or after — has been quite as talented in the depiction of that notoriously difficult subject which is the anatomy of the hand as was Dürer. Consider his iconic 1508 blue-tinged sketch "Study of the Hands of an Apostle," stored at the Albertina museum in Vienna, Austria — intended merely to be a rough draft for the Heller Altarpiece in Frankfurt, it has become the most widely reproduced representation of prayer in the Western world, from religious posters to album covers to tattoos. Rendered in pen and ink, muscular, vein-crossed hands are pressed together above the merest indication of ruffled sleeves. When Dürer depicts hands, there is no clumsiness, no anatomical awkwardness — every knuckle, fingertip, and nail appears real, as if the hand itself could be grasped by your own.

Medieval and early modern folklore maintained that when the Devil came disguised in human form, he was unable to properly simulate hands and feet (not unlike modern generative AI's similar inability). The hand, therefore, came to symbolize the human. Appropriate, then, for Dürer, who wasn't just among the greatest German artists of the 16th century, but an indispensable theorist of humanism during the Northern Renaissance as well. The role that Dürer would perform would be as a portraitist of the most shocking verisimilitude, of the creative artist as a god. Within that self-portrait are self-created digits: hands that could hold, hands that could grasp, hands that could create.

Dürer's life straddles the two great Northern European movements of the 16th century: first, the Renaissance, which had then been recently imported to those colder climes; and second, the Reformation, which was then beginning to erupt among the dissatisfied principalities of Germany. This was a period that Patrick Wyman describes in *The Verge: Reformation, Renaissance, and Forty Years that Shook the World* as the single most important "critical juncture" in recent Western history. The Reformation, Wyman writes, was "an age of transition, a time of extraordinary shifts in European life and society with far-reaching implications for the future of the world." It was also a period that maps perfectly onto the career of Dürer.

Eight years before Columbus claimed to have reached India in 1492, Dürer perfectly rendered his own portrait in silverpoint at the age of 13 (also housed at the Albertina). A year after the Santa María sailed in warm Caribbean waters, the artist made another self-portrait — now in the Louvre — with that same uncanny, all-penetrating stare. In 1514, three years before Martin Luther's hammer hit the church door in Wittenberg, Dürer made his landmark engraving of the Vulgate translator, "St. Jerome in his Study" (1514), copies of which are held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Royal Collection Trust, London; Princeton University Art Museum, and more. And in 1526, a year after the Peasants' Rebellion was violently suppressed, Dürer painted "Tufts of Cowslips," a watercolor of cowslips with such startling realism that a viewer standing before it at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, can almost feel the plant's veins beneath their fingertips.

Arguably the first superstar artist of the Northern Renaissance, Dürer's paintings were featured in the Hapsburg galleries of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague or that of his patron Maximilian I in Frankfurt. But it was his woodprints and engravings, including the gothic "Knight, Death and the Devil" (1513); his comical picture of the Indian rhinoceros Ulysses (1515); and his occult masterwork "Melencolia I" (1514) with its alchemical symbols and crying angel — all of which were printed in his Nuremberg workshop and currently held at numerous museums around the world — that were sold to thousands of upwardly mobile burghers throughout Germany, establishing his reputation for genius.

And genius, as with Renaissance humanists on both sides of the Alps, was Dürer's great subject. Not genius in the prosaic sense which signals mere intellectual aptitude, talent, and skill, but in terms of the apotheosis of the human, of our individual ability to ascend into divine realms of knowledge. "I hold that the perfect of form and beauty is contained in the sum of all men," he writes in his 1528 *Four Books on Human Proportions*. "Nature holds the beautiful, for the artist who has the insight to extract it."



Albrecht Dürer, "Self-Portrait at 28" (1500), oil on lime, 26 2/5 x 19 1/5 inches; held by Alte Pinakothek, München, Germany (image via Wikimedia Commons)

(Continued on pg. 6)

But the connections between the coming Reformation and the Renaissance were complicated. Unlike Dürer's intellectual hero, Erasmus, who countenanced reform in the Church but ultimately rejected the Reformation itself, the artist was taken with Luther — initially. Drawn to Protestantism for the same reasons he was attracted to humanism, Dürer gushed over the nascent movement in valedictory terms. Perhaps he sensed in Luther's "priesthood of all believers," as he put it in his 1517 Theses, some of the same calls for spiritual freedom and dignity implied by the Renaissance. Indeed, he described Luther in a 1520 diary entry as a "Christian man who helped me overcome so many difficulties."

By 1525, however, the peasants of Germany had taken the calls about the priesthood of all believers to their logical conclusion, launching a massive rebellion for dignity and equality. This rebellion was violently quelled by the princes of the Holy Roman Empire at the cost of 100,000 lives—all at the urging of Luther. Dürer watched all of this wearily, writing in a 1530 letter that "I confessed that in the beginning I believed in Luther ... but as anyone can see, the situation has gotten worse."

If once the Reformation had seemed in step with humanism at its best, then by that point, it began to seem more like a Counter-Renaissance. The year the rebellion was finally pacified, Dürer designed a never-built monument to the massacred revolutionaries which was capped with a carving of a peasant, stabbed with a sword in the back.

There are figures during the period who indicate the possibility of there being a different sort of Reformation: the liberal writings of Erasmus, or the joyful Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre, for instance. Dürer is but one such refugee from this parallel universe where Renaissance and Reformation were fused as one. This would be a Reformation that's not ascetic, stern, and austere, but jovial and playful; a Reformation based not in hierarchy, but in the human; a rebellion on behalf of human accomplishment, dignity, and possibility. Where the priesthood of all believers implied an embrace of human flourishing and self-fashioning.

That alternate Reformation can be seen in the eyes of that self-portrait Dürer painted 17 years before the actual Reformation began. Notable is that exquisitely rendered hand, offering the viewer a benediction, for the painting telegraphs clearly that Dürer has rendered himself as Christ. The painter looks forward in the characteristic Salvator Mundi pose of the Messiah, the long ringlets of hair and his beard evoking the prototypical appearance of Jesus. The subject is somehow more than human. "One interpretation of his Christ-like self portrait," writes art critic Jonathon Jones in *The Guardian*, "is that it champions the artist as demiurge, possessing divine power to create worlds." That is certainly in keeping with Dürer's interests in Renaissance humanism and occultism. But in the Reformation, he perhaps prayed for something equally radical — not a priesthood of all believers, but a divinity of all believers.

"The rational soul in a certain manner possesses the excellence of infinity and eternity," wrote Marsilio Ficino, one of the most influential humanist philosophers of the Renaissance. If such an axiom were promulgated through the vocabulary of faith, there could be a recognition of a multitude of messiahs, of Christs, of gods, all ascending that angelic ladder towards heaven. There could be a rebirth of faith, a rebirth of the individual. The result was instead a miscarriage: a betrayal of the Reformation's promise by the very men who were supposed to have led it. As it is, Dürer as messiah stares out of the undifferentiated eternal darkness of his portrait from a place seemingly beyond history.

Referenced artworks are available for viewing at: <https://hyperallergic.com/873317/albrecht-durer-a-humanist-messiah/>

NON SEQUITUR Wiley Miller



More Food for Thought

"This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body..."

- Walt Whitman, in *Leaves of Grass*

March 30, 2024 Social: Schoharie Valley Railroad Museum

All aboard the Schoharie Valley Railroad museum on Saturday, March 30, 2024. We will meet at 11:30 at the Apple Barrel Cafe (<https://shopapplebarrel.com>) and proceed to the museum between 1 and 1:30. Their extensive menu is online. The tour will last about an hour.

Schoharie Valley Railroad Complex is a national historic district located in Schoharie County, New York. The district includes five contributing buildings and four contributing structures. The complex of buildings were built about 1875 by the Schoharie Valley Railroad. They include the passenger station, freight/locomotive house, office, old mill building, storage facility, and four coal silos. The four mile railroad was abandoned in 1942.

Tickets are free by emailing Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com by March 28th. The restaurant needs a final number by then as it will be a busy Easter weekend. Individual donations are gratefully accepted. Dress warmly, it could still be chilly. **Please indicate if you are signing up for both the lunch and the tour, or just one.**



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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.



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FIRST CLASS

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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 ____/____/____
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