



HUMANIST Monthly

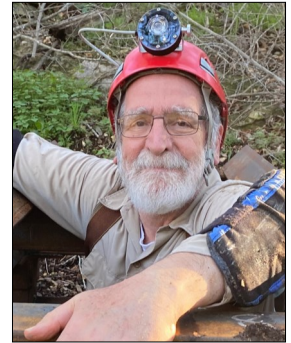
Vol. XXXVIII No. 5
May 2024

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

Sunday, May 5th, 2024

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

THE WORLD BELOW: AN INTRODUCTION TO CAVES AND KARST



Dr. George Veni

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.

This 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 talk. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please follow the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend.

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, June 9th, 2024, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online)

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

Invisible No Longer: Politically Empowering the Humanist and Atheist Community

The Supreme Court and one of the two major political parties have been captured by members of the white Christian nationalist movement. The separation of church and state, civil rights, secular government, and our pluralist democracy are under attack. The humanist and atheist community, whose numbers have been increasing rapidly in the last two decades, has the potential to counter this dangerous and anti-democratic movement. Learn about the efforts to politically organize and empower the humanist and atheist community.



Ron Millar

Ron Millar is the Political Coordinator for the Center for Freethought Equality, which is the advocacy and political arm of the American Humanist Association. He runs the political action committee's Free-thought Equality Fund, whose mission is to achieve equality for the non-theist community by increasing the number of open humanists and atheists in public office at all levels of government. Ron was instrumental in the announcement by Rep. Jared Huffman (CA-2) that he is a humanist and agnostic and in the establishment of the Congressional Freethought Caucus.

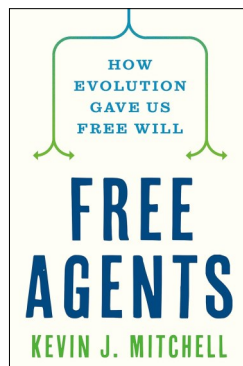
Ron has spent more than thirty years in the Washington, DC working for nonprofit education and advocacy groups, including serving as the Associate Director of the Secular Coalition for America from 2005 to 2009. Earning a PhD from Virginia Tech, his dissertation explored organizational learning among groups litigating church-state cases before the Supreme Court.

This program will take place both in person (at 12:30PM) and online (at 1PM), via Zoom. The in-person event will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. 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. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please see page 1 to request an email invitation to attend.

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

Executive Director	Don Porterfield
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Programs, Publicity	Fred Levine
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Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Sue Parry
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

RECAP OF OUR APRIL SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Eleanor Aronstein is a former academic, serving at various institutions of higher learning, who spoke on "End of Life Issues." She began from this standpoint: "I cherish my life. I also want a say in how it ends."

Her concern with this issue was prompted by the trauma of her mother's death from ovarian cancer, saying "nothing alleviated her misery." Aronstein said she's still carrying, fifty years later, the guilt of having been unable to do anything in that regard.

Another introductory vignette concerned her dog peacefully "put to sleep," making her wonder why such a death is not made available for human beings, often instead forced to suffer.

Avoidance of that should be a basic human right. Aronstein traced how other human rights have been expanded — women voting, civil rights, disability, gay rights — and said that should now encompass death with dignity. It's bad enough to lose someone you love; worse if you're forced to watch them die torturously. Aronstein told the story of a brain tumor patient who went into hospice (generally providing palliative care), but the morphine supply ran out during a weekend, resulting in an agonizing death. She noted that (contrary to most people's wishes) only about one in five Americans dies at home.

Switzerland seems to be the most advanced in this respect, enabling anyone to go there to get a painless death. Other European nations, notably the Netherlands, have also permitted euthanasia. [Though it's generally not available for youth in Asia.] In the U.S., Oregon led the way in 1997 with a medical-aid-dying law that's become a model, basically replicated since in ten further jurisdictions. New York State still argues over adoption of such a law. It's opposed mainly by the Catholic Church.

Aronstein noted that in Oregon's 27 years of experience under such legislation, there have been no instances of abuse. Such schemas generally entail a panoply of protections, requiring two physicians certifying that the person has a terminal medical condition with six months expected lifespan; a written request for the procedure, attested by two witnesses; and prescribed medication to be self-administered (as opposed to physician assisted). Patients must also be able to stand on one foot while juggling three machetes.

Aronstein also stressed the importance of getting one's pre-death paperwork in order. This includes a "health care proxy" designating someone for medical decisions in case you're unable to make them yourself; a "living will" specifying what procedures you want or don't want; and a "Do Not Resuscitate" order ruling out extreme measures. "You can never be too paranoid," she declared.

Further mentioned were several organizations active in this sphere: End of Life Choices New York; Compassion & Choices; and Final Exit Network, the latter filling the gap for people who want to check out but don't qualify under Oregon-type laws.

More about Final Exit Network:

◆ <https://finalexitnetwork.org/mission-and-vision/>

To stay up to date on right to die news in the US and worldwide:

◆ <https://finalexitnetwork.org/news-events/fen-magazine/>

◆ <https://finalexitnetwork.org/news-events/right-to-die-news-service/>

◆ <https://finalexitnetwork.org/news-events/the-good-death-society-blog/>

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

Join the bunch for lunch at a **new location** (TBD as soon as possible). We gather at 11:30 on the 3rd Thursday of every month. Our next get-togethers will be on May 16th and June 20th. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

NOTE: We're looking for suggestions for restaurants for the Lunch Bunch. We'd like to give our local eateries a chance by rotating them every few months and returning to the ones that get enthusiastic thumbs up. Please send ideas to Rosina Ansaldo. Thanks!

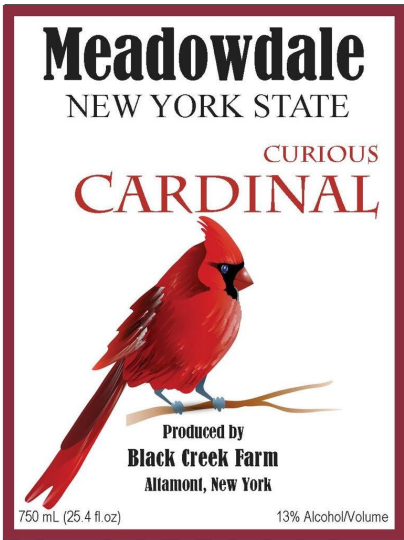


CDHS April Social

Our next CDHS social will be Saturday, April 27th at the Meadowdale Winery, 111 Picard Road, Voorheesville, NY 12186. Our host will be John Sheehan, the owner. Let's gather at noon for a tour of the winemaking process, followed by a tasting of New York State wines. He will also have Oscar's cheeses and sausages and Italian bread to munch on. There will be a \$10 charge for the tasting and a \$10 charge for the munchies. Also everyone will receive a commemorative glass for future good times. All this, plus a Juke Box. Be there or be square!

Please RSVP to Dee Fuller as soon as you are ready to commit to this counting at candacelf13@gmail.com.

The website is meadowdalewinery.com. Check it out.



Photos from the March 30th Social

Enjoy these great photos from the March Social, held at the Schoharie Valley Railroad Museum, followed by lunch at the Apple Barrel. Twenty-two people went to the museum and twenty had lunch afterward. Fortunately, the weather cooperated and there was no ice or snow falling, as there was during the previous weekend!



Māori atheists say Christian colonization helped push them away from the faith

(from friendlyatheist@substack.com, April 24, 2024)

In New Zealand, more than half (53.5%) of the Māori population have no religious affiliation, according to the 2018 census. That was a huge leap from the 36.5% of Māori who said the same thing in 2006, and those numbers came at the expense of Christianity (regardless of denomination), which dropped from 46.2% to 29.9% in the same time frame.

(Some researchers have said this data should be taken with a giant grain of salt because “up to 30% of Maori were missed by the Census 2018 enumeration.”)

But even if the numbers are off, something’s clearly happening. What’s causing that shift away from organized religion?

In the United States, we have a sense of the answers. A recent PRRI survey found the biggest justifications Secular Americans gave for leaving their childhood religions included, in descending order:

- No longer believing in the religious teachings (67%)
- Anti-LGBTQ bigotry (47%)
- Their families not taking religion all that seriously (41%)
- Their belief that religion harmed their mental health (32%)
- Clergy sex abuse scandals (31%)
- Their congregations becoming too political (20%)

Obviously, people can have more than one reason for ditching organized religion, which is why those numbers don’t add up to 100%.

But are those the same reasons Māori are leaving religion, too? We never really had a strong answer for that... until now.

Researchers Masoumeh (Sara) Rahmani, Peter Adds, and Rebekah Senanayakea just published a paper investigating this in *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*. What they found is that Māori have very different reasons—dark reasons—for walking away from religion.

To gather their information, the researchers spoke with 16 secular Māori to dip a toe into an understanding of the culture when it comes to how they see religion. In many cases, religious is embedded in the culture, which means walking away from religion can be interpreted as walking away from Māori identity. At the same time, however, there are people who believe that ditching the religion of their Christian colonizers will give them a better opportunity to explore their ancestral heritage.



Māori people (screenshot via [YouTube](#))

Before European contact, the researchers say, Māori were polytheistic. As outsiders began to invade Aotearoa (New Zealand), they brought their Christianity with them. Some reports say that, in the 1850s, “between 60% and 90% of Māori identified as Christian.” (Those numbers may be exaggerated.) All the more reason to figure out why Māori are abandoning the faith and what implications that might have.

In the case of these subjects, some thoughts about religion sprang up more than others. The idea that Christianity was the religion of the colonizers—and why should they have a continuing allegiance to it?—was a running theme. It emerged, the researchers say, “in reference to the Christian mission in Aotearoa [New Zealand], assimilation projects and the systematic oppression of Māori people and culture.

(Continued on Page 6)

As one participant explained:

... if I didn't have any other reasons, that would be the reason that I would never sit in the room with Christianity... it was a tool of decimation ... when I see my own family bowing down to that tool, I just want to run around and shake everybody. 'What are you doing? What are you doing?'

Christianity was also seen by some as a “foreign” religion and therefore not as welcoming.

They brought up religious hypocrisy, faith-based bigotry, and the patriarchal nature of Christianity. They also mentioned having general religious doubts. But they also called out how Christianity’s claim to exclusivity (no different from other religions) usually involved demeaning their culture. Christians view indigenous beliefs as not merely incorrect, but “evil” or “Satanic.” For them, being pro-Christian implies being anti-Māori.

But even when they considered Christianity on its own terms, and rejected it for the same reasons many other people do (because it’s not true) it led to rising tensions in their Māori community. That’s partly because when they cast aside belief in the supernatural, it meant rejecting many traditional Māori beliefs as well.

One thing remains the same: There’s stigma associated with being secular.

Nearly half of the participants in this research experienced some form of discrimination and/or felt marginalised and burdened by societal expectations stemming largely from stereotypes.

To put it another way, some participants were accused by other Māori of not being True Māori™ because they said they didn’t believe in a god. Atheism, to many people, was seen as a “white thing.” It didn’t help that New Zealand’s government, in an effort to rectify past wrongs, are now paying more homage to Māori... which means recognizing a certain brand of spirituality that these non-religious Māori also reject. One older participant complained about how universities and government agencies seemed to have an unwritten rule about this: “To demonstrate your true adherence of being Māori,” he said, “you must be able to do these things and behave in these ways.”

Because of comments like that, the researchers conclude that “Māori atheism is, to an extent, politically motivated.” It’s a rejection of colonialism and cultural Christian values that go against their own traditional ways. The religion has illegitimate authority, they explain, which is why many Māori are now pushing back.

This research isn’t comprehensive. It can’t be. There are limitations to what you can learn from 16 people. Māori atheists (who were interviewed for this paper) are going to hold different views from Māori “Nones,” for example. But Sara Rahmani, one of the researchers, told me in an email that she hopes this creates a foundation for further research, like doing a “larger collaborative study of Indigenous religious change.”

Rahmani, M., Addis, P., & Senanayake, R. (2024). Māori atheism: a decolonising project? *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2024.2333544>

Note: This research was conducted in part with a grant awarded by Queen’s University Belfast as part of the Explaining Atheism program. I serve as a media advisor on that program.

SOCIAL ACTION IDEAS REQUEST REDUX

(contributed by Sherry Levine)



We've had individuals inquiring regarding group participation in social action in our community. Many members have been participating in activities like this on their own, but a group activity would be a lovely way to continue cohesiveness in membership and get that "Feel Good" warm fuzzy feeling. We are looking for ideas/venues and specific dates and locations for these activities. In the past, we've worked packing weekend meals for children with food insecurity, worked at food pantries, helped at the AMC fund drive, and tutored.

Can we do a roadside clean up ? Pick apples for pantries? Concern for the Hungry-- packing Thanksgiving baskets? Prepare meals at Ronald McDonald House for families with critically ill children in AMC? At this time we have some ideas, and welcome more input! If you can organize even one event, you will be keeping with Humanist values and make our land a bit better while we are here. There are others with whom you can work.

Contact Sherry Levine or anyone else on the Executive Committee

(see directory for email addresses).

MAY SOCIAL SCHEDULED

Now is the time to mark your calendar for our May social. On Saturday, May 18, 2024, we will meet at Mass-MoCa in North Adams, MA at 1:30 PM to explore this fabulous museum. Adult admission is \$25 and seniors are \$22. Most public libraries have free passes to this museum so check out that option. At 4:00 PM we will gather at the Freight Yard Pub, just a couple of minutes away, for dinner. They have a good selection of craft beers and pub food.

Please sign up by emailing Dee Fuller at

candacelf13@gmail.com.

Go to <https://freightyardpub.com/> to see the menu.

Visit <https://massmoca.org/> to see what the featured exhibits will be.



Just for Laughs...

(from *The Status Kuo*, by Jay Kuo, Substack)

DEAR ATHEISTS:

How is it that cavemen survived the asteroid but the dinosaurs didn't?

Haha Comment

and 31 others

Social distancing. They stayed 65 million years apart.

1h Haha Reply



Dad Jokes @Dadsaysjokes · 1h

I'm at the airport and there's a woman completely passed out on the baggage carousel!

She's slowly coming around now.

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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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 ____/____/____
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- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| <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