



HUMANIST Monthly

Vol. XXXIX No. 3
March 2025

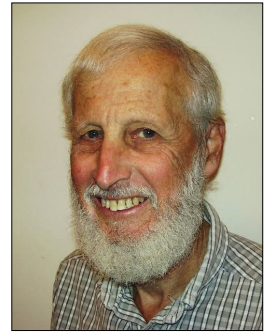
A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, March 9th, 2025

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

AI AND OUR FUTURE

Historian Yuval Noah Harari is a Big Thinker. His 2024 blockbuster book, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks From the Stone Age to AI*, concerns how Artificial Intelligence will shape our future. An AI “app” is a computer program trained on a vast amount of information (from the internet), learning to see patterns, for use in carrying out tasks. This is not thinking as we humans think of thinking; that's probably a long way off. Nevertheless, AI has huge impacts on many aspects of our lives, which Harari's book magisterially explores. A key problem is AI acting as an "alien" intelligence — working along lines we may not even understand. The book also importantly explores its implications for the future of democratic versus totalitarian systems.



Frank S. Robinson

Frank S. Robinson is a graduate of NYU Law School (1970), and served at the New York Public Service Commission as staff counsel and then administrative law judge (1977-97). He is the author of eight books including *Albany's O'Connell Machine* (1973), *Children of the Dragon* (a novel), *The Case for Rational Optimism* (2009), and *Love Poems*. Robinson is a professional coin dealer. He is married to the poet Thérèse Broderick and has a daughter, Elizabeth. Robinson was appointed to the U.S. Assay Commission by President Nixon in 1972.

The program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM) 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, but **please bring your own beverage**. 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 the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend.

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. 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 to the meeting.

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)

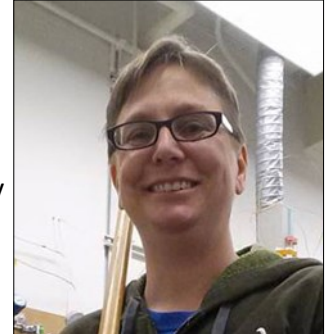
Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

On Sunday, April 13th, 2025, 12:30 PM (In Person)
and 1:00 PM (Online)

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:
**Reading the Rock Record:
Understanding Our Future**

It's difficult to understand how one or two degrees of global temperature rise can even be observed, much less have any impact on climate and ecosystems. It's especially difficult to accept as we struggle through another cold and snowy winter. The effects of global warming are hardly noticeable on the timescale of a person's life. However, on a geologic time scale, abrupt climate change and its catastrophic effects are readily discerned. We'll discuss how we use 19th, 20th, and 21st century techniques to tease information about climate and environment from rocks and how we can correlate this with events in the fossil record. We'll put special focus on an event called the Middle Eocene Climatic Optimum (MECO), a period of global warming that occurred around 40 million years ago and is recorded in rocks of western Utah.

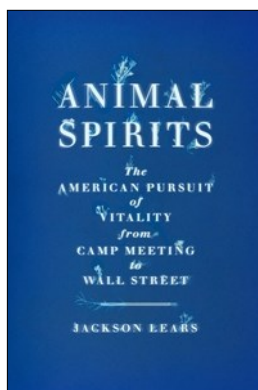


Penny Higgins

Penny Higgins is a consulting geochemist and paleontologist with her business, EPOCH Isotopes. Her specialty is using chemical studies of rocks and fossils to infer patterns of temperature, precipitation, vegetation, and dietary preferences. She applies her technical and instrumental knowledge as the Laboratory Operations Supervisor at Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, NY. Though she loves science, she loves her cats more and founded Mew-Mew House, a 501(c)3 retirement and hospice home for cats, which she runs out of her house.

This program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM) 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 *Animal Spirits: The American Pursuit of Vitality from Camp Meeting to Wall Street* by Jackson Lears. The group meets 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
Secretary	Vacant
Treasurer	Roland Tozer
Programs, Publicity	Fred Levine
Publications	Carol Quantock
Social Activities	Candace Fuller
Membership, Telephone	Judith Herbert
Meetup Coordinator	Fred Levine
Compliance	Vacant
Member at Large	Vacant

Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Sue Parry
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

Volunteers Needed to Fill Key EC Positions

CDHS' continuing existence is highly dependent on members stepping forward in various ways to ensure it remains a viable, thriving organization. All members are welcome to attend EC meetings to see how things work and whether you might be able help out. If you would like to make a positive difference for CDHS, reach out to a member of the EC about how to attend an EC meeting. You might be pleasantly surprised to find a good opportunity for you that may enhance the benefit you will get from our unique organization. Members with ideas, who are willing to help bring them to fruition, would be most welcome.

At present, there are three vacant positions on the EC: **Secretary, Compliance Officer, and Member-at-Large**. Two of these positions, Secretary and Compliance Officer, require work done on a monthly basis. None of the positions are difficult, but all are necessary for records and reporting purposes.

Please consider volunteering a bit of time each month to be an active part of a progressive secular organization in a safe environment with like-minded members of varied backgrounds.

If interested, send an email to Don Porterfield at CDHS.Albany@gmail.com to ask about the open positions on the Executive Council. Don will fill you in on the duties of each position and approximately how much time you can expect to spend per month on either one.

CDHS Sponsorship of Pride Center of the Capital Region's 2025 Parade

The CDHS Executive Council voted on February 12th to become a sponsor of the 2025 Capital PRIDE Parade & Festival. Mark your calendars for Sunday, June 8th if you would like to attend this annual event in downtown Albany!

You can read more about the Pride Center, the oldest, continuously operating LGBTQ+ community center in the country, on their website: <https://capitalpridecenter.org/>. In addition to public outreach and throwing one heck of an annual celebration the Pride Center provides counseling and other services for the LGBTQ+ community.

A group of CDHS members has been working to plan for our presence at the event held in and around Washington Park. If you can join us in walking in the PRIDE parade or working at our table to inform visitors about CDHS, our mission, and values, please contact Heather at hdrinkwater@outlook.com to let her know your interest and availability. We need your participation to make this a successful event for the Pride Center of the Capital Region and CDHS!

Last Call to Renew Your CDHS Membership

If you haven't yet renewed your CDHS membership, you will have probably received at least one reminder email in your inbox (check your "junk" or "spam" folders if not). If you took a new membership between 1 August and 31 December you will not be asked to renew until January 2026. Members will have 60 days from the date of the email notice to renew their memberships for 2025, allowing them to have voting privileges, access to our annual report, and receive email announcements and notifications of upcoming meetings and social events.

Please complete your renewal on our website at <https://www.humanistsociety.net/join-us/> by either:

✓ **Using the "Sign Up Online" option and making your online payment;** or

✓ **Using the "Download Printable Application" option:** print the application, fill it out, and mail it to CDHS, P. O. Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211 with your payment if you are unable to make an online payment.

Thank you for your continued support of CDHS. We value your participation and hope you choose to renew your membership.

RECAP OF OUR FEBRUARY SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Dr. Mark Reimers is a quantitative neuroscientist at Michigan State University. His topic was "The Social Psychology of Group Delusions."

He defined a "delusion" as a belief or impression firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument. This has usually been associated with disordered thinking — psychosis or mental illness.

Yet most people are deluded about some things, at some times. A good example is when one is "madly in love," a fairly common phenomenon. Reimers noted that the brain activity there has been found to resemble that in the brains of addicts.

But he also discussed what he called "everyday delusions." A basic one is self-importance. Most people believe they are above average (mathematically impossible). Such beliefs help us navigate through life. False memories are a part of it — we love to tell stories, and to embellish them, making ourselves more central, and our memories are actually continually rejiggered to comport with that.

Another topic was "dogmatic thinking," with the key factor being not the content of a belief, but how one believes it. Dr. Reimers referenced an impatient cognitive style — jumping to conclusions, unwilling to consider nuance. And such cognitive and personality traits govern the likelihood of adopting an ideology, like QAnon.

Key indicators there include bold, sweeping language; considering other people not just wrong, but bad; insulting them. There's a heavy use of abstract moral nouns like "necessity" and "freedom."

Important in all this is not so much the validity of the beliefs, but rather keeping in good stead with your group. This is especially true with religion — also helping us deal with what some might see as the meaninglessness of existence, countered by imagining there's a God who loves us.

The social element is particularly important given how many people feel anxiety about their social connections. Feeling isolation, resentment, humiliation, and economic stress, all amplified socially. And, Dr. Reimers noted, that such stress itself alters our cognition style.

He opined that this is increasingly salient in America, with hollowed out opportunity for working class people who can't think clearly about their life situation. There's a breakdown in shared societal consensus. And while modern society disperses us, social media creates the equivalent of the mob.

So — how can we combat all this? Dr. Reimers pointed to two persuasion techniques that have been developed, which seem to have some success in changing at least some minds. "Street epistemology" employs the Socratic Method, starting by asking people, for example, how confident they are in their beliefs. "Deep canvassing" begins by trying to connect with people as individuals, following up on concerns they express.

A recording of this presentation can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/jgklB4WUwlo>.

Join the bunch for lunch! We will gather at the Halfmoon Diner, 231 Grooms Road, Clifton Park, on March 13th at 12:00 Noon (please note different date and new time!). The date for the April Lunch Bunch get-together is April 17th. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

NOTE: If you know of a great local eatery, please don't be shy; recommend it! 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!

Action Item for Now!

The Senate will soon be voting on whether to confirm Linda McMahon as the next Secretary of Education. The American Humanist Association asks that you to contact your senators now to ensure they vote NO on her confirmation.

McMahon is a voucher cheerleader - discrimination's biggest fan, a privatization devotee, public schools' biggest adversary. "Fund education freedom, not government run systems," she stated in her Senate hearing last week.

Public education is in serious danger under a McMahon Department of Education.

The Department of Education's mission is to ensure access to equal educational opportunity for every individual, and a strong secular public education system is the foundation for how we achieve that mission.

However, in her testimony, McMahon proclaimed that under her reign, the Department "will protect the rights of parents to direct the moral education of their children." She wants to divert millions of American tax dollars to fund private religious schools. McMahon either doesn't understand the mission of the Department or plans to willfully ignore it. Either case makes her unfit to serve. Click on this link to contact your Senator: <https://americanhumanist.org/actionhq/?vsrc=%2fCampaigns%2f121892%2fRespond>.

Oregon Democrat's bill cracks down on Christian "health care cost sharing" ministries

Faith-based "health share" companies have left many families in medical debt. Rep. Bob Nosse wants more transparency in the system.

by Hemant Mehta on Substack • 24 February 2025

An Oregon lawmaker has introduced a bill designed to crack down on Christian "health care cost sharing" companies that have scammed upwards of 1.5 million people across the country. House Bill 2268, introduced by State Rep. Rob Nosse, would require such companies to disclose basic information about what services they provide (and don't provide), forbid them from claiming they're actual "health insurance" companies (because they're not), and force them to disclose how much money they've collected and paid out.

In short, the bill would provide customers with better information so they know what they're buying into, allowing them to hold Health Care Sharing Ministries (HCSMs) accountable if they fail to deliver on their promises.

Before diving into the specifics of this bill, it's important to understand what we're even talking about. In 2022, Christianity Today found that Sharity Ministries (formerly Trinity HealthShare), which filed for bankruptcy in 2021, left 10,000+ families with unpaid bills totaling over \$50 million. That's just one company. There are several others just like it.

What are Health Care Sharing Ministries?

While every company operates a little differently, HCSMs like Samaritan Ministries and Liberty HealthShare ask everyone in the system to pay a specific amount into the insurance pool every month... and if you ever need something covered, you make a request and the company will send a certain amount of money to you or your provider.

That's not really different from regular insurance, but these companies are not regulated, refuse to cover certain services, and can cut you off at anytime if you become too expensive to insure. Even worse: If you do something they deem "immoral," you may not get any money at all. (HCSMs generally do not cover contraception, extend care to your same-sex partner, and refuse to assist with abortion care.)

So everything is fine... until the moment you need them the most. Many participants don't realize that until it's too late. They also don't realize how badly they can get screwed over. California once sued an HCSM, claiming that it "routinely denied claims and spent just 16 cents of every dollar in premiums on health care expenses." By contrast, the Affordable Care Act requires (legitimate) health insurance companies to spend at least 80 cents of every dollar on expenses.

There have been numerous articles written over the years about customers who were denied help precisely when they expected to receive it. The end result is that Christian insurance companies are just like Christian movies and Christian theme parks: They claim to offer suitable alternatives for secular services... but they're so much worse than the real things.

What the Oregon bill would do

The new legislation proposed by Rep. Nosse would try to prevent the worst case scenarios from taking place by doing four things in particular:

1. Require HCSM sellers to register with the state. Anyone who offers or sells HCSMs would have to register with Oregon's Department of Consumer and Business Services.
2. Require HCSMs to be transparent about coverage. The companies would have to file an annual report saying how many enrollees they have, how much money those clients pay them, and how much money the company pays out as claims.
3. Forbid HCSMs from calling themselves "health insurance." That means no advertising or marketing suggesting they're legitimate insurance providers.
4. Require HCSMs to disclose which medical services they will not cover. That includes reproductive care, HIV/AIDS medication, and gender-affirming care.

None of that would stop HCSMs from existing. None of that would interfere with their faith. This is about consumer protection, not religious oppression. It's about transparency, not censorship.

The Center for Freethought Equality, the advocacy arm of the American Humanist Association, has praised the bill and is calling on Oregon lawmakers to pass it:

"The Center for Freethought Equality is proud to partner with Rep. Nosse to bring greater transparency to these questionable organizations masquerading as insurers. We stand ready to help Oregon pass this legislation to protect the well-being of its residents," said Fish Stark, Executive Director of the Center for Freethought Equality. "Oregon can send a clear message to these health care cost sharing organizations, who often hide behind the pretense of religion, that denying vulnerable people health care coverage and defrauding them when they need it the most is unacceptable."

Leave it to an organization representing non-religious Americans to promote legislation meant to keep Christians honest because those Christians can't do it themselves.

For now, the bill is in the hands of the House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care.

Now is the time to get involved and make sure our lawmakers protect our country's democratic principles and represent all of us—no matter how they or we identify religiously.



Oregon State Rep. Bob Nosse (screenshot via YouTube)

Mark Your Calendars — A Celebration of STEM Friday, May 9, 2025

Beverly Schwartz will be receiving a Congressional Commendation from the Congress of the United States presented by Congressman Paul Tonko of New York for the creation of the Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics program - STEM.

New York State Assemblyman Phillip Steck will also present a New York Assembly Citation to Beverly Schwartz for the creation and contributions to STEM and education as a whole.

This event will also celebrate all students, mentors, teachers, students, administrators, parents, and area businesses that participated in the first STEM program in the Capital District of New York. Current students and any other friends of STEM are all welcome! Please RSVP to: stem.Beverly.P.Schwartz@gmail.com.

Date: Friday, May 9, 2025

Time: 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Location: The Well, Legislative Office Building, 198 State Street, Albany, NY 12210

Underground parking is available under the Egg. Take the elevator up to the LOB building. Parking also available on State Street.

Light refreshments will be served.

For more information, go to <https://schwartzstemcommun.wixsite.com/schwartz-stem-histor>.

The 24 Hour Economic Blackout

WHEN:

Thursday February 27th from Midnight till Friday the 28th Midnight (a full 24 hours) 12:00 AM to 12:00 AM

WHAT NOT TO DO:

Do not make any purchases at large, big-box stores: shop small, local businesses for any essential items you may need

Do not shop online, or in-store

No Amazon, no Walmart, no Best Buy, nowhere!

Do not spend money on: Fast Food, Gas, Major Retailers

Do not use Credit or Debit Cards for non-essential spending

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Only buy essentials of absolutely necessary (Food, Medicine, Emergency Supplies)

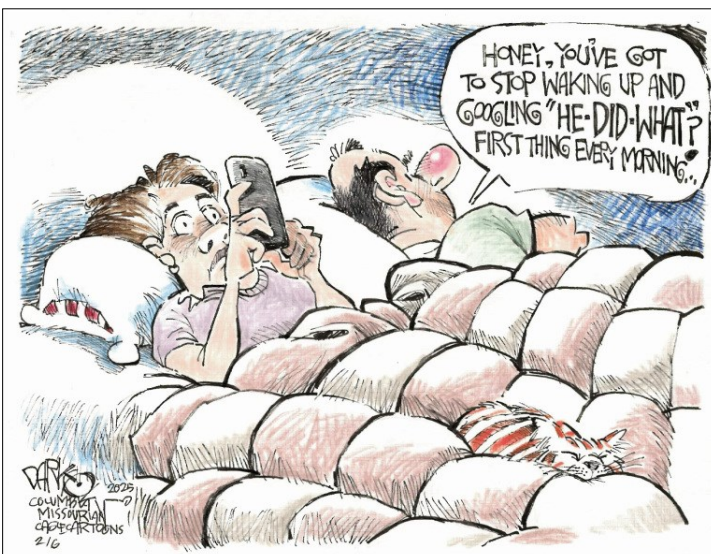
If you must spend, ONLY support small, local businesses.

SPREAD THE MESSAGE

Talk about it, post about it, and document your actions that day!

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Corporations and banks only care about their bottom line.
- If we disrupt the economy for just ONE day, it sends a powerful message.
- If they don't listen (they won't) we make the next blackout longer (we will)



Morning Doomscrolling by John Darkow, Columbia Missourian

*Celebrate Vernal Equinox!
Thursday Mar 20, 2025 — 5:01 AM*



March Social—Museum of Prints and Printmaking Schenectady's Best Kept Secret!

This relatively unknown museum, operated by the Print Club of Albany, holds more than 20,000 collector prints. In the 1990s, the Print Club of Albany established a charter for the Museum of Prints and Printmaking, with the ambition of housing and exhibiting its permanent collection in the Capital Region for visitors to learn, enjoy, and experience the art form. The collection covers the range of print making from the 16th century to the present. The museum is open the first and third Thursday of the month at 150 Barrett Street, Schenectady, NY 12305. We will meet there on **Thursday, March 20** at 4:00 PM (the Lunch Bunch is switching their get-together for **March 13 at the Halfmoon Diner**—see p. 4 for details).

Admission is free. Afterward, you have the option to dine at the 151 Bar and Restaurant at 151 Lafayette Street, Schenectady NY 12305. You may view their extensive menu online at <https://www.151barandrestaurant.com/>.



Please RSVP to Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com by Tuesday, March 18, 2025.

February Social Recap—Paths To Humanism

The Paths to Humanism social was held last Saturday, February 22nd, at the home of Frank Robinson and Thérèse Broderick. Fourteen people attended this annual event and shared food and beverages while three CDHS members recounted their personal journeys to becoming Humanists.

Sincere thanks go out to Frank and Thérèse for their hospitality, Dee Fuller for making the arrangements, and the three members who recalled stories from their lives that brought them to become Humanists: **Heather Drinkwater**, **Brad Fitzgerald**, and **Don Porterfield**.

"Liberty is meaningless where the right to utter one's thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist. That, of all rights, is the dread of tyrants. It is the right which they first of all strike down. They know its power. Thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, founded in injustice and wrong, are sure to tremble, if men are allowed to reason."

—Frederick Douglass

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 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
 PO Box 11209
 Loudonville, NY 12211-0209

FIRST CLASS

Address service requested

CDHS •• PO Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211-0209 •• (518) 533-2666

<https://www.humanistsociety.net>

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

MEMBER SUPPORT FORM

Name(s) _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City / State / ZIP Code _____

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 ____/____/____

- Individual Membership \$ 50 _____
- Family Membership \$ 80 _____
- Sustaining Member \$100 _____
- Patron \$150 _____
- Life Member one-time contribution of \$1000 or more _____
- Additional tax-deductible donation \$ _____

Please make checks payable to CDHS

Please send me additional information