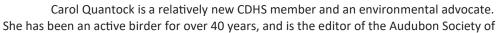


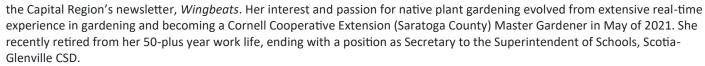
Vol. XXXVI No.5 May 2022 A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society

Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

On Sunday, May 15th, 2022, 1 PM
The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:
Native Plant Gardening 101

Native plant gardening and gardening for pollinators and wildlife are trendy topics that have become especially popular during the pandemic. However, the "trendiness" is far less important than the environmental gains and personal satisfaction experienced by learning and getting into the soil. Emphasis will be placed on the importance of the relationships between plants, insects, birds, and other wildlife when planting native plants, no matter the size of the garden bed.





Ms. Quantock has a BA degree in geography and urban/regional planning from SUNY Albany, and a Graduate Management Certificate from Cornell University NYS School of Industrial and Labor Relations. She is currently enrolled in a bird biology course (Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology) as well as other bird-related mini-courses. She is also an accomplished sewist and has a large doll collection.

This program will take place online, via Zoom. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the meeting via email.



Please join us for a Cinco de Mayo celebration at Pancho's Restaurant, exit 8 Clifton Park, noon Saturday, May 14th.



Contact Dee Portzer by May 12th to be included on the reservation. 518-663-1622 or 518-328-6261, or candacelf12@gmail.com.

Dee will be putting together a short hike in that area after the lunch if anyone is interested. Place to be determined. When you make your reservation, please also indicate if you will be hiking (weather permitting).

We hope to see many of you there.

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)

Recap of our April Speaker's Presentation: Ben Wang— "Climate Change & Extinction Rebellion"

On Sunday, April 10, the speaker for the monthly CDHS members' meeting was fellow CDHS member Ben Wang. Ben is also a member of the group Extinction Rebellion (a.k.a. XR) His presentation focused on the quickening pace of worldwide climate change, its damaging effects on all life on our frail planet, and what XR is doing to combat these climate changes.

XR's aim is to use rational, scientific, ethical, and non-violent means to raise people's awareness of the dire condition of our atmosphere and planet. Ben presented informative slides to demonstrate how greenhouse gases, especially CO₂, are causing dramatic increases in atmospheric temperatures. Higher temperatures can lead to droughts, flooding, uncontrollable wildfires, raised sea levels, and super-storms.



Ben pointed out that often people who tell the truth are shunned or attacked by others. A goal of XR is to make doubters understand that science is not just a set of facts but a method to learn the facts and be able to question popular, commercial notions and short-sighted opinions.

The disruptive effects of climate warming could cause sea levels to raise 2 feet by 2050 and this could bring about the dislocation of about 13 million Americans. A social upheaval like this could lead to the rise of radical authoritarian politic groups.

To combat these harmful atmospheric changes XR is advocating the elimination of carbon-based fuels by 2030. XR believes we are rapidly driving towards a cliff and that our current political establishment and corporate leaders are not telling us the truth about the condition of our climate.

Extinction Rebellion believes their message that the world does not offer unlimited resources and that there is no utility in exploring other planets as potential sites for human colonization when earth's resources are depleted must be heard around the world. Their truth is that we have to make changes that will lessen modern society's impact on our planet as fast as possible.

More information about Extinction Rebellion can be found online at: https://rebellion.global

Recap by Kevin Smíth

LOOKING AHEAD.....On Sunday, June 12th, 2022, 1 PM

Judy J. Johnson: Wither Democracy

This presentation will address the psychology of authoritarianism which, according to Freedom House, currently threatens western democracies.

Philosopher Charles Taylor claimed that, "Understanding the 'other' will pose the 21st century's greatest social challenge." Given the sewage that floods social media and the Internet with outrageous conspiracy theories, racism, and attacks on democracy, science, and the media, Taylor's challenge seems daunting. Will the worrisome lure of authoritarianism further polarize and divide people into warring camps that scar the face of America's democracy?

Judy J. Johnson is Prof. Emerita, Psychology Department, Mount Royal Univ., Calgary, Alber-

ta. Her postgraduate theses and her postdoctoral fellowship at the Ellis Institute in NYC explored the biological, social, and psychological forces that insidiously shape dogmatism's unique profile. She currently focuses on authoritarianism, a trait that shares many overlapping features and causal influences with dogmatism.

Following her experience as a clinician and supervisor of therapy, Johnson taught psychology to university students, inmates in two penitentiaries, women on the Sarcee Reserve, and Palestinian students in Gaza, Israel, during the intifada.

Her nonfiction book, What's So Wrong With Being Absolutely Right: The Dangerous Nature of Dogmatic Belief, (Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York), and her novel, Thief of Reason, (Iguana Books, Toronto), focus on the psychological nature of dogmatism. Her website is at: www.dogmatism.ca



We're looking for the raised hands of volunteers to take on some of the duties that have kept the CDHS afloat over the years. Several of the members of our Executive Committee are looking forward to stepping down from their positions or requesting assistance in fulfilling their duties. Judy McCann was asked to be relieved of her duties as the Membership Chair. Frank Wind, the editor of our Newsletter, needs to have an assistant and back-up Editor to step in when his travels interfere with his ability to compose the Newsletter and take it to press. Several other officers of the EC, who have served CDHS for many years are considering stepping down, but those positions will need to be filled. Please contact a member of the Executive Committee for more information and indicate your interest in answering the call. Thank you!



2

"The necessity of secularist small dissent"

an interesting read from https://onlysky.media/jhmckenna

Secularists often say nothing when they should really speak Sometimes taciturnity is merely manners, perhaps thought of as good manners. There is no need to mar a dinner party with a sharp and disagreeable remark, right? No need to set the table on a roar with a cutting witticism offered at a guest's or a host's expense, but how many opportunities are lost for the secularist to offer small dissent? A small dissent would be a polite, short, and apt rejoinder to some overt religious bias.

We're not talking about a diatribe here. This is not the occasion for a loud, piercing scream. The tone and timbre are to be serene, delivered where possible with a smile. It's not an argument.

Overview:

Secularists should not remain silent when religious people offer opinions but should rejoin with small, pleasant disagreement.

Polite, short, apt, and therefore educative in this way: small dissent lets everyone within hearing know that not everyone agrees with what was said, and not everyone is a fellow traveler with the speaker.

Here's an example: Suppose a well-spoken, learned and lively Catholic priest attends a dinner party and slips up at one point and speaks disparagingly of the 'superstitions' of Hinduism. All the secularists at the dinner party will see in the priest's remark an obvious case of the crow chiding blackness, of the pot calling the kettle black.

Mannerly secularists might bite the tips of their tongues, taste blood at this moment, and say nothing. But what is really called for is small dissent. Otherwise, the priest and the other guests will think the whole table is in agreement. Otherwise, the secularist's perspective is silenced.

Remember the criteria for small dissent: polite, short, apt (and therefore educative).

What is to be said in rejoinder to this priest? Perhaps something along these lines, delivered with a smile:

"Geography determines local superstitions. People at one spot on the globe easily espy other people's superstitions at another spot on the globe while local custom blinds people from seeing the superstitions of their own spot on the globe. One man's religion is another man's superstition. A Hindu might think transubstantiation is a tad superstitious."

The point is to say *something*. Don't let these moments pass. Disagree with peoples' odd opinions, even if your disagreement is modest and mildly put. Never let the necessity of dissent pass you by.

Further examples:

At an office gathering people speak of a recent airline crash and someone notes, "The sole survivor had his prayers answered," and small dissent responds, "How about the prayers of a hundred dead passengers?"

A hairdresser says, "Everyone needs religion," and small dissent says, "There are a billion people who apparently don't."

At a family gathering uncle Olaf says, "Without religion society would collapse into chaos," and small dissent returns, "It's funny that some of the most irreligious societies on the planet are among the most civil and safe and stable (like Scandanavia), while some of the most religious societies are the most un-civil and un-safe and un-stable (like Honduras)."

At school, a coach says, "The golden rule of Jesus is the height of morality," and small dissent replies, "Actually, Confucius taught the golden rule 500 years before Jesus: Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."

A colleague says, "My ancient holy book predicted certain features of 20th-century science," and small dissent quickly adds, "Where does your holy book predict 25th-century science? Point out those passages to me."

A faith healer you meet through a mutual acquaintance says, "The hall was filled with discarded crutches last night at the faith healing," and small dissent rejoins, "Discarded prosthetic limbs might be more to the point." And so on.

Silence is not always golden. A secularist's voice with a soft and pithy response can offer a sudden remedy to the careless public sharing of uninformed and biased religious opinions.



J. H. MCKENNA

J. H. McKenna Ph.D. has taught the history of religious ideas since 1999 at the University of California, where he has won teaching awards. He has published in academic journals and also in popular venues.

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Florida Officials' Claims That Critical Race Theory Is Lurking In Math Texts Don't Add Up

By Rob Boston (au.org) 04/19/22

Officials in Florida have banned dozens of math books because they supposedly contain "critical race theory" (CRT).

You read that right. Math books are accused of somehow discussing racial issues in ways that far-right Republicans and their Christian nationalist allies don't like.

For those of us who have been monitoring Christian nationalism for years, the current attack on public school textbooks and material in public libraries is disturbingly familiar.

It works like this: Take something that actually exists, but is not well known or understood by the American people, distort it beyond all recognition and construct an elaborate conspiracy theory that accuses a nefarious cabal of sinister "elites" of using the thing to infiltrate all our public institutions for some wicked ends. That then becomes an excuse to undermine those institutions or block forms of instruction that the far right opposes.

CRT, which includes the rather uncontroversial notion that entrenched forms of racism have historically been a problem in America and remain so today, is sometimes used as an analytical tool in colleges, graduate schools and law schools. It's not routinely taught in secondary schools.

What is taught (or should be) in secondary schools is that our country has not always lived up to its promise of "liberty and justice for all" and that Native Americans, Black Americans, women, Asian Americans, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, nonbelievers, LGBTQ residents and others have been subjected to oppression, bigotry and denial of basic rights. Any fair reading of history makes this clear. But to Christian nationalists, who cling to a vision of the U.S. as "God's favorite nation," any discussion of our country's flaws – no matter how glaring they may be – is tantamount to teaching kids to hate America.

In the 1950s, far-right extremists tarred anyone with even remotely progressive views as communists. In the 1980s, Religious Right groups attacked books for teaching "secular humanism" or "witchcraft." Like CRT, these things exist, but they were hardly being pushed in public schools, libraries and government institutions.

There's a troubling echo in these new attacks on CRT. It has become the far right's new bogeyman. And because religious and political extremists need it to scare their base of voters, they will conjure it up wherever necessary – even finding it in the pages of books designed to teach long division.

Researchers Say the Supreme Court is Now More "Pro-Religion" Than Even Before

By Hemant Mehta

That's the conclusion of a new paper to be published in the *Supreme Court Review* by professors Lee Epstein and Eric A. Posner. They found that the current court, under Chief Justice John Roberts, has issued more "pro-religion" rulings – often against church/state separation or in favor of bending the rules for people of faith – than his predecessors. The Roberts Court has ruled on the side of religion 81.3% of the time, compared to 45.5% under Earl Warren.

A small-but-important note: While the "pro-religion" and anti-religion" terms make it easier for the researchers to discuss their findings, let's be clear about this: rulings that support church/state separation are good for people of faith, too. So are rulings that ask everyone to play by the same rules. The church/state separation cases argued by civil rights groups are not actually "anti-religion" in any meaningful way, and this terminology only fuels the Persecution Complex of the Religious Right.

It's not just the rulings that are problematic. The justices themselves have become tools of the Religious Right. The researchers found that, of all the justices who have ruled on religion cases, the five most "pro-religion" judges are the five Republican appointed justices who sit on the court right now (Amy Coney Barrett hasn't had time to rule on these kinds of cases yet.) All five are more "pro-religion" than even the late Antonin Scalia, though that's also a function of the kinds of cases they are now hearing under a Court that has shifted hard to the right. (All seven of those justices, by the way, are Catholic, although Neil Gorsuch was raised in the faith and now belongs to an Episcopalian denomination.) All of this is a major break from the past, as Adam Liptak writes in the New York Times: Early studies covering 1996 to 2005 and 2006 to 2015 found that judges' partisan affiliations, as reflected by political parties of the presidents who appointed them, were not significantly tied to their votes in free exercise cases.

Zalman Rothschild, a fellow at the Stanford Constitutional Law Center, updated that data in a second study, to be published in *The Cornell Law Review*. He found that things had changed.

"The political politicization of religious freedom has infiltrated every level of the federal judiciary, Mr. Rothchild wrote. None of this should come as a surprise. As the Religious Right has lost its cultural power, and as the nation has become less religious as a whole, the've managed to gain even more significance through the Supreme Court. It's a long-term strategy for conservatives that is finally paying off-- and the rest of us are paying a price for it. The Court has repeatedly said that discrimination against LGBTQ people and spreading a deadly virus via in-person gatherings are perfectly acceptable if you just say it's a requirement of their religion. Faith-based beliefs that *harm others* are now given special privileges. Unless Democrats expand the court, nominate judges who support church/state separation or can galvanize voters to support politicians specifically by using the Court as leverage, this will only get worse. A victory for our side is a victory for everyone. A victory for the Christian Right is a victory only for them-- and often at the expense of everyone else. (see chart on the bottom of page .5)



Sentinel Theist power grab dangerous for everyone

(04/23/2022) This time of year is a time when those of us who are religiously unaffiliated (i.e. atheist, agnostic, secular humanist, etc.) don't garner a lot of attention with the plethora of religious holidays and observances like Easter, Passover, and Ramadan (just to mention the Abrahamic list), and that's OK. We can observe spring traditions that aren't steeped in theology or spirituality but still have cultural significance and/or personal meaning. What we as the secular and nontheist communities must not do is ignore primary elections like the one coming up in West Virginia on May 10.

To quote American Atheists President Nick Fish, "There are more than 500,000 elected positions in the United States. One-tenth of one percent of those are in Washington, D.C. Those who've spent the past decades focusing primarily on what's happening in Congress or the presidency have ceded the fight in our communities to people who quite literally want to install a Christian government, relegating us to second-class citizenship and entrenching their advantage even as their numbers continue to decline."

Local and statewide elections have been the focus of a large cohort of Christian nationalist groups and organizations for decades with an agenda centered around the dismantling of the wall of separation between church and state, and culture war. This is something the secular and nontheist community ignores at its peril.

There are episodes of extremism motivated by the forces of Christian nationalism like the events of Jan. 6, 2021, that are difficult to ignore, but the more power that those forces soak up in elections, the more likely it is that events like that insurrectionist coup attempt on Capitol Hill will only have been a prelude to the death of U.S. democracy and the dismantling of our secular constitutional democratic republic. The Freedom From Religion Foundation, in partnership with the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, released a report recently that chronicled the Christian nationalist influences of the Jan. 6 events and it is alarming, to say the least. If that is what they do when they lose a major election and see their influence wane, what are they capable of in electoral victory?

It is incredibly important that the secular and nontheist community remain informed and active. One way to do that is by referencing the American Atheists State of the Secular States Report. The State of the Secular States Report "provides the most comprehensive review ever of statewide laws and policies affecting church-state separation and religious equality in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico," according to the latest edition of the American Atheist Magazine.

Another way for the community to stay active, informed, and involved is through a new multimedia platform called OnlySky. OnlySky, a name derived from the classic John Lennon hit song Imagine, "serves 84 million religiously unaffiliated Americans through storytelling, commentary, and analysis from a secular perspective," as Dale McGowan, chief content officer for OnlySky, told American Atheist Magazine. McGowan continued, "We take the existence of one natural world and one mortal life as a starting point, then ask: How did we get here? How should we live? Where are we headed?"

While keeping a local focus is critical, as I've already stated, we must at the same time hold a global perspective. American Atheists is an affiliate of the global organization Humanists International. Humanists International is "the sole democratic, representative body of the humanist movement internationally, with humanist and other secular associations (including American Atheists) in 70 countries," as referenced again in American Atheist Magazine. You can find out more about Humanist International by visiting https://humanists.international.

We're living in a time when women are actively losing their rights to self-determination, bodily autonomy, and personal sovereignty in reproductive healthcare and family planning to an extent unparalleled in modern history; in a time when trans persons are actively being deprived of a legal right to even exist; a time when the catch-all term "critical race theory" is being used to denigrate anything morally panicked parents and activists find threatening to a white-washed status quo. The secular and nontheist community can and must lead the way to an age of scientific, empathic, equitable, and just renewal. Together, we must do better.

Eric Engle is assistant state director for American Atheists in Parkersburg.

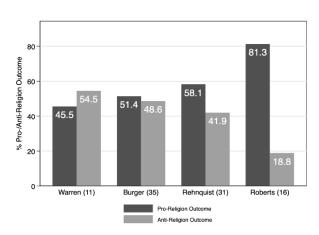


Figure 2. Outcomes in religion cases, by CJ era, 1953-2019 terms.



Billboard heading south on I-787 in Albany.

World Central Kitchen partners recovering after attacks in Kharkiv







In the past, we have been encouraging our membership to support Humanitarian causes including Grassroots Givers, Habitat for Humanity, food banks and Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood. Locally, Grassroots Givers has been our go-to for donations, especially families get established in new quarters. In our last issue, we asked you to add The World Central Kitchen to the list. To date, the WCK has managed to prepare 12 million meals for families in the Ukraine.

From the Editor: We urge you to continue to support these organizations, but emphasize aid and support to the victims of the Russian decimation in the Ukraine. Dee and I have been talking with friends in France who are housing a Ukranian family fleeing their country, trying to relocate in Ireland. We have asked Marc and Nicole to make a donation on our behalf to help them resettle. We encourage you to find ways to also help those in the same dire straits, if nothing else, please make donations to the World Central Kitchen.

Help Grassroot Givers Help Refugees CDHS members may recall that prior to COVID, when our monthly programs were held live and in person, we had a jar in the room where members could donate to Cook the Books, our facetiously named way to support Grassroot Givers' work. Proceeds from the jar were used to buy new microwaves and children's books. We recently heard from our friends at Grassroot Givers. They have stayed very busy during the pandemic, continuing to provide books to students in all the schools in the Albany School District, stocking little free libraries with



books and non-perishable food, and providing clothing to residents in need. As some of you may know, Albany is welcoming approximately 100 refugee families, primarily from Afghanistan. Grassroot Givers is working with refugee families through several agencies to provide basic home essentials. Most of the apartments the families are moving into do not have microwaves, one of the main things CDHS used to donate. So, this is a reminder that Grassroot Givers continues to do wonderful work and they could use your donations, and especially at this time, new microwaves. To learn more about Grassroot Givers, visit their website at *grassrootgivers.org*.

Student Who Sat During Pledge of Allegiance Wins \$90K Harassment Lawsuit

A former Texas high school student has won a \$90,000 settlement after she claimed a teacher had harassed her for sitting during the pledge of allegiance.

Civil rights group American Atheists announced on March 29 that they had successfully reached a settlement with 12th-grade sociology teacher Benjie Arnold at Klein Oak High School.

According to the Texas Education Code, during the one-minute pledge, each student may "reflect, pray, meditate or engage in another other silent activity that is not likely to interfere with or distract another student."

Despite the law, American Atheists said Arnold "singled her [the student] out" and "retaliated against her for sitting out the pledge." It added that Arnold also went on an extended tirade, offering to pay students to move to Europe if they didn't like living in America. According to ABC13, the suit was filed in 2017 and claimed the former student had been harassed by teachers and administrators over her refusal to recite the pledge due to her objection to the words "under God."

Controversy Aboard Domestic Flight, As Religious Group Holds Impromptu Concert

by Matthew Distefano (patheos.com 04/21/22)



Worshipping Jesus 30,000
Feet In The Air!

Somewhere at 30,000 feet above sea level, USA – A TikTok video, showing an in-flight impromptu concert of sorts, has gone viral. Some groups are praising the group of worshippers for their bravado, while others are speaking out against them, saying it's a form of entitlement and privilege. We caught up with James Thompson, the guitarist from the video, who had this to say: "We just felt the spirit that day, and wanted to show everyone on the flight what they are missing out on. We know we have the truth, so why wouldn't we want to share that with the world? This is just the first of many to come. In no time, you'll be

hearing more about the salvation that comes from our God." NOTE: If you google this situation, you can read the stream of comments from those on the plane, those

from both sides of the "Christian" aisle.

Congratulations to Younus Samadzada on his just published study of the history of religions.

CDHS Executive Council

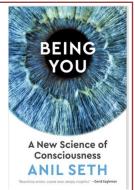
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Room Arrangements Frank Robinson

BOOK CLUB

The CDHS
Book Club has
been reading and
discussion of *BE-ING THERE: A*New Science of
Consciousness by
Anil Seth.



"Anil Seth's quest to understand the biological basis of conscious experience is one of the most exciting contributions to twenty-first-century science."

Interested? Contact Frank Robinson.



The History of the Rise and Fall of the World's Religions and their Evolution

Younus Samadzada Author

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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 six types of CDHS member support: Individual, \$50/yr; Family, \$80/yr; Student \$25/yr; Sustaining, \$100/yr; Patron, \$150/yr; 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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