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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 9th at 1:00pm: The Latest “Word” on Neurodegenerative Diseases

Neurodegenerative diseases include Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS/Lou Gehrig’s Disease), among others. Together, these three diseases affect about 12% of the population. While there are attempts at treatment, there are no cures for these diseases. The effects of these afflictions are not only debilitating and demoralizing for those affected, but they can be devastating for the families as well.

Benjamin Wolozin, MD, PhD, is a pharmacologist and neurologist currently at Boston University School of Medicine, and an Elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He received his B.A. from Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT) and his M.D., Ph.D. from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He is currently a professor of Pharmacology, Neurology and the Program in Neuroscience at Boston University School of Medicine. He is also co-founder and Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) of Aquinnah Pharmaceuticals Inc., a biotechnology company developing novel therapeutics to treat Alzheimer’s Disease and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis.



Dr. Benjamin Wolozin

This program will take place online, via Zoom.. Current paid CDHS members will receive an invite to the meeting via e mail. ANY ONE WHO IS NOT A CURRENT PAID MEMBER of CDHS CAN ATTEND.

Send an e-mail request to: webmaster@humanistsociety.org , several days prior, or log onto our Meetup page: <https://www.meetup.com/Capital-District-Humanist-Society/> . Click on Join, then on Attend, and use the RSVP function and the link will be available to you.

If you like cars and/or James Bond, this should be a social for you. Our next social will be a trip to the Automobile Museum in Saratoga Springs on Saturday, featuring the official collection of original James Bond vehicles.

They are expecting us at 11:00AM for a self guided tour. Most people find an hour and a half sufficient to look around, so we will gather for lunch around 1:30 at a location not yet designated. Entrance fee to the museum is \$15 for seniors. By April 29th the weather should be spectacular!

Mark your calendar for APRIL 29th!!! RSVP to Dee Fuller by April 27th.

The Exhibit includes the following on-screen used vehicles, plus many more:

1964 Aston Martin DB5 • Used in *GoldenEye* (1995), *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), *Skyfall* (2012), *Spectre* (2015), and *No Time To Die* (2021)

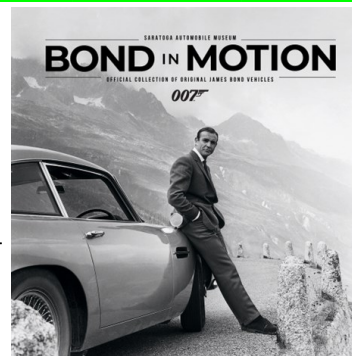
1977 Lotus Esprit “Wet Nellie” • Used in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977)

1999 BMW Z8 • Used in *The World is Not Enough* (1999)

2002 Aston Martin V12 Vanquish • Used in *Die Another Day* (2002)

2006 Aston Martin DBS • Used in *Casino Royale* (2006)

2015 Aston Martin DB10 • Used in *Spectre* (2015)



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CDHS is affiliated with:

The American Humanist Association (AHA)

Center for Inquiry (CSI)

Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

Review of our March Speaker's Presentation

Carol Quantock's talk was for the birds — or, rather, "For the Birder: Identification, Observation, and Protection." She's been a longtime active birder herself.

A "bird" is a warm-blooded egg-laying vertebrate distinguished by having a beak, feathers, and (usually) the ability to fly. There are many different varieties. Quantock explained that one can see them at bird preserves, or one's own backyard, especially if stocked with native plants or a bird feeder. She advocated buying only good bird seed, not the cheap stuff.

Quantock noted that bird activity varies during the day; she likes to go out really early. Dusk is another good time to see birds, especially owls. She deemed listening most important, because birds make distinctive sounds; and use of binoculars for a better view.

Most of the talk was about how to identify birds. Of course, the flying part is key, and birds are easily distinguished from other things that fly, like insects and airplanes. But many people like to identify the exact variety of bird. Timing is important, not just time of day, but time of year, since many birds vacation in distant places like Canada and Mexico (though "Moonbirds" do not travel to the Moon; bird wings only work in air).

Also, different habitats host different sorts of birds, giving one a clue for what to expect (though Quantock cautioned to "expect the unexpected"). For example, water birds might be expected on lakes; bluebirds like open woodlands; forests are good for thrushes, owls, and hawks — which, she noted, eat other birds, remarking, "That's fine, it's nature," shocking some listeners.

Another point was that to determine what you're seeing, size is important. Ostriches are bigger than sparrows; a downy woodpecker larger than a hairy woodpecker. But be mindful that a bird's apparent size may vary depending on distance from the viewer; and binoculars do make them look bigger.

Color is important too. Most birds have some. A goldfinch differs in that respect from a bluebird, as the names imply. Though there are way too many birds sporting yellow-and-black color schemes. Males tend to be more showy, while females try to be less conspicuous, to avoid predators and catcalls.

Then there's shape, and behavior. Quantock noted that robins mostly hop around on the ground, and are not seen clutching tree trunks like woodpeckers. She also pointed out that birds move rather than standing still, so that if you watch a bird for any length of time you will be able to see different aspects of it.

As to bird safety, a big threat is cats. Quantock recommended keeping cats indoors, making it harder for them to catch birds. But the biggest danger to birds is windows, which humans thoughtlessly incorporate into their dwellings. The problem is birds thinking they can fly through glass, which they cannot; resulting in fatal injury. Re-education efforts have failed. Quantock suggested instead various stratagems like keeping blinds partly closed.

Notwithstanding the preceding point about birds heedlessly smashing themselves against glass, it was asserted that "bird brained" is largely a misnomer, and that birds (even while their brains are in fact quite tiny) nevertheless somehow demonstrate a lot of intelligence. Very few birds voted for Trump.

Review by Frank Robinson

... and on Sunday, May, 7th at 1 PM

Why We Believe in God(s): A Concise Guide to the Science of Faith

This program will present a succinct, yet comprehensive study of how and why the human mind generates religious belief. Dr. Thomson methodically reviewed the components and causes of religious belief in the same way any scientist would investigate the movement of astronomical bodies, or the evolution of life over time—that is, as a purely natural phenomenon. Providing compelling evidence from psychology, the cognitive neurosciences, and related fields, he presents an easily understandable and exceptionally convincing case that god(s) were created by man—not vice versa, and thus confirms the primacy of reason and science over superstition and religion. The title of this talk is the same as the title of his book, from which the material is drawn, and was co-authored with Clare Aukofer, and has a forward by Richard Dawkins

J. Anderson Thomson, Jr., M.D. received his BA from Duke University. in 1970, and his MD from University of Virginia, School of Medicine in 1973. In 1978 he became a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Thomson maintained a private adult psychiatric practice for 41 years, and remains a staff psychiatrist at Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Virginia Student Health Services, seeing young adult patients. He is on the Clinical Faculty at the University of Virginia, School of Medicine.

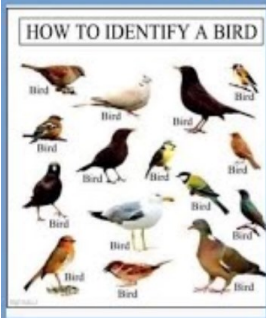
Dr. Thomson's current research interest is in the area of evolutionary psychology and using its principles to understand depression, suicide terrorism, and religious belief.



Dr. J. Anderson Thomson

Carol Quantock

For The Birds: Identification, Observation, and Protection



In case you weren't able to attend our March Meeting, here is a link to a recording of Carol Quantock's informative presentation "For The Birds: Identification, Observation, and Protection". This presentation provides many hints for the aspiring birder.

<https://youtu.be/Uuxq53cttcE>

From Frank Robinson:

Our next CDHS Book Club gabfest will be on Thursday, April 13, 1 to 3 PM. If weather looks good, we will meet in Ridgefield Park (I'll let you know); otherwise zoom:

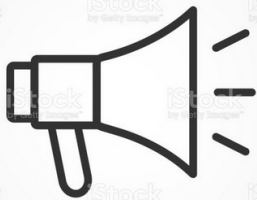
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82946552045?pwd=bkVsOUw0R2xGMEFKazkwcFBYbmZNdz09>

We are reading Adrienne Buller's *The Value of a Whale*, and are on Chapter 5, page 187. Hopefully we can finish the book in this next session.

Next book: *Coddling of the American Mind*, by Haidt & Lukianoff.

"Something has been going wrong on many college campuses in the last few years. Speakers are shouted down. Students and professors say they are walking on eggshells and are afraid to speak honestly. Rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide are rising. How did this happen?"

Interested? Contact Frank Robinson



Member News

Laird Scranton has recently been in the hospital with heart issues. He needed a valve replacement. Unfortunately, the procedure went horribly wrong, and he ended up in critical condition and on full life support. He is improving daily, though, and they're hopeful that he will recover fully. They just don't know how long that might take.

We wish him a full and speedy recovery. Please send good wishes their way. If you want to send a card, please send it to their home.



It is with deep sorrow that we announce the death of **Sylvia B. Chessin**, a long time very active member of the CDHS. She recently moved to Edgewater, Maryland, where she passed away on March 26, 2023, at the age of 94. Sylvia lived in this area for many years and had moved to a retirement community near her family a few months ago.

Sylvia was among the first members of CDHS, joining in the late 1980s. She offered her home as a meeting place in the early days. She was an artist and art teacher, and shared her talent with CDHS by creating illustrations to accompany the program announcements in the Humanist Monthly – before the days of Shutterstock and cut and paste. Until a few years ago, Sylvia was part of CDHS's Caring Network, sending cards and notes to our members. The family will be having a private Celebration of Life later in the year.

Have we got a job for you!

1. Judy McCann wishes to step down from her position as our Membership Coordinator. Interested? Please contact Judy or Don Porterfield—they'll let you know what the position entails.
2. Frank Wind (moi) would like to groom a partner or replacement to step up to serving as the CDHS Newsletter Editor. At least for the next few months, I will be facing some medical challenges, and if all goes well, some travel. In both cases, it may be difficult to create the Newsletter. It's not that difficult, and you will have a free rein to put it together as you see fit. It is composed using Microsoft Publisher, which is an easy and understandable program. Interested? - contact Frank Wind



After Utah lawmakers allowed book banning, one parent went after the Bible

The parent submitted a detailed request to get the holy book banned due to its inappropriate content

Republicans in several states have moved to ban books that they deem inappropriate for children because they cover racism, sex, and LGBTQ relationships in ways that make conservative parents very uncomfortable. The books themselves aren't graphic, much less pornographic, but the fear-mongering has been effective, especially in red states like Texas and Florida. Utah is no different. Last year, lawmakers passed a bill paving the way for the banning of school books that contain "pornographic or indecent" content. Those words, however, are not defined, allowing right-wing groups to declare just about anything they don't like as unfit for kids. But at least one parent decided to kick conservatives where it hurts: in their favorite holy book. According to reporter **Courtney Tanner** of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, a parent submitted a formal request last December to get the Bible banned from Davis High School in Kaysville. The newspaper received a copy of it via a public records request. While the submitter's name is redacted, the content of the request is glorious.

"Incest, onanism, bestiality, prostitution, genital mutilation, fellatio, dildos, rape, and even infanticide," the parent wrote in their request, listing topics they found concerning in the religious text. **"You'll no doubt find that the Bible, under Utah Code Ann. § 76-10-1227, has 'no serious values for minors' because it's pornographic by our new definition."**

"Get this PORN out of our schools," the parent wrote. **"If the books that have been banned so far are any indication for way lesser offenses, this should be a slam dunk."**

The parent in question didn't just say all this. Included in the demand was an 8-page list of specific verses that justified the request. The parent also included this bit of sarcasm when introducing the list:

"I thank the Utah Legislature and Utah Parents United for making this bad faith process so much easier and way more efficient. Now we can all ban books and you don't even need to read them or be accurate about it. Heck, you don't even need to see the book!" Was it trolling? Sure. But the request is superficially no different from the ones conservative parents are making, and the school district says it will review the request just as it does all the others they've received. (It's taking a while because there's a backlog.) The point of all this is obvious: Just because a book mentions sex (or any other potentially controversial topic)

doesn't mean it deserves to be banned from school shelves. Children should have the option of reading what they want—and easy access to books that other people (including adults!) may not want them to read. If conservatives are targeting young adult novels that talk about same-sex attraction, just to name one example, then there's no reason everyone else shouldn't target holy books which are far more offensive. That includes the Book of Mormon.

If the passages in those religious books were written as a young adult novel, you can bet Republicans would want to ban those, too.

To be clear, the purpose of calling for a ban on the Bible isn't to actually ban the Bible. It's to highlight the absurdity of banning books, period. The solution isn't to toss the Bible out of school for children who may want to read it; it's to make sure public school students have access to all kinds of literature.



House passes Parents Bill of Rights Act, giving parents control of children's education

The U.S. House of Representatives on Friday passed the Parents Bill of Rights Act, which would grant parents more control over their children's education.

If the U.S. Senate also passes the legislation and President Joe Biden signs it into law, it would permit parents to have access to a list of books and other reading materials in their kids' school libraries and would ensure that teachers provide parents with their class curricula. Other provisions in the bill include parental consent for students to change their gender pronouns or sex-based accommodations, such as bathrooms and locker rooms. The legislation also allows parents to review a school's budget and expenditures.

Denise Forte, president and CEO of The Education Trust, told theGrio that statutes like the Parents Bill of Rights Act "really aren't about the parents."

"They do nothing to invite parents to the table or really engage parents. Instead, what they've done is made Congress the National School Board, a teacher and a librarian all at once by really limiting the role of parents in their own child's education," she said. She continued, "I think the message being sent is that the current public education system doesn't matter. That students of color and what they want to learn and how they want to participate in school doesn't matter. What parents really want, doesn't matter." House Democrats have slammed their Republican colleagues for what they see as an educational power grab and attempt to further ban topics they don't like, including race, sexuality and gender identity.

On the House floor, while debating the Parents Bill of Rights Act, U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez delivered a rebuke of the legislation. The New York congresswoman said the bill was an attempt to "take some of the most heinous legislation that we are seeing passed on the state level to attack our trans and LGBT as well as people from marginalized communities right to exist in schools. Ocasio-Cortez held up several books that have already been banned in some districts as examples of the type of censorship she and other Democrats believe will result from federal legislation.

One of the books was "The Life of Rosa Parks". [In some currently edited books about Rosa Parks, they omit the reason as to why Parks was asked to move her seat, as not to distress white readers.]

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Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson



<<<<< (<https://edtrust.org/press-release/house-passes-parents-bill-of-rights-act-giving-parents-control-of-childrens-education/>)

Nebraska school revamps security after uninvited preacher evangelizes in cafeteria

Cringe-y influencer Ryan Foley began yelling about Jesus in a school lunchroom, exposing a security flaw in the Omaha school district.

Here's some free advice for Christians: If you ever get the opportunity to visit a public school, hijacking the lunchroom in order to win some converts is a *horrible* idea. (And not just because everyone is *rightfully jittery* these days about strangers doing *anything* disruptive during the school day.)

On Monday (03/27/23), 20-year-old **Ryan Foley** walked into Millard South High School in Omaha, Nebraska, ostensibly to pick up some transcripts. That's not an unusual request, so it's not surprising that the school allowed the former student into the building.

Before he left, though, he stopped by the cafeteria, where students were eating lunch, and yelled at them about Jesus. (In Nebraska. As if those kids haven't been inundated with that message all their lives.) Foley later bragged about it on TikTok, urging viewers to "be bold and courageous about the Word of God." I'll admit I laughed when he yelled about how, when he was a student at that high school, "I was what you call 'popular,'" truly living up to his last name. The key word there is "was." Based on their body language, the students in that lunchroom had no interest in being around him.

The only uplifting aspect of that video is how the students began laughing the moment Foley mentioned Jesus. He went from being some crazy adult to just being a run-of-the-mill crazy *Christian* adult.

by Hemant Mehta in Friendly atheist (friendlyatheist@substack.com)

The CDHS Executive Council voted to send the following memorandum of support to the New York State House and Senate. We thank Sue Parry for being the driving force for this action.



Capital District Humanist Society

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MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

New York Medical Aid in Dying Act (A.995/S.2445)

The Medical Aid in Dying Act (A.995/S.2445) would allow a terminally ill, mentally capable adult to request life-ending medication from a doctor that the person can self-administer at a time of his or her choosing, or never, should suffering become unbearable.

The mission of the Capital District Humanist Society is to provide 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, life-long education, democracy, social concern, and fellowship.

Our commitment to secular humanism and democracy leads us to value the right of all individuals to make the medical decisions that affect them, including decisions about end-of-life care. We believe that those decisions belong to the individual affected, not to other individuals or organizations.

We support the right of terminally ill individuals to have a full range of choices for dying in ways that provide them comfort. Medical aid in dying provides peace of mind to terminally ill patients. It allows a doctor to write a prescription for medication in response to a request from a terminally ill, mentally capable adult. The person can take the medication, so long as they can self-administer it, to achieve a peaceful death. The availability of this option, even for those who choose not to take the medication in the end, will improve the quality of end-of-life care for terminally ill New Yorkers.

Medical aid in dying is important and is needed because too many New Yorkers:

- suffer needlessly at the end of life;
- endure unrelenting pain at the end of life;
- turn to violent means at the end of life when medical aid could help them die peacefully; and
- feel they have little control over their own life (and death) when facing a terminal illness.

Expanding choice and care at the end of life provides New Yorkers autonomy. Studies have shown that patients who receive counseling about end-of-life choices score higher on quality of life and mood measures than patients who do not.

For the aforementioned reasons, the Capital District Humanist Society supports New York's Medical Aid in Dying Act and urges the legislature to act swiftly to pass it.

Dated March 28, 2023

Don Porterfield
Executive Director
Capital District Humanist Society

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Using quotes from the Bible, Oklahoma Republican Votes to Let Teachers Hit Kids With Disabilities

by Jon Jackson (3/14/23) in Newsweek.com (3/29/23)

Oklahoma lawmakers on Tuesday failed to pass a state House of Representatives bill that would prohibit corporal punishment against school students with disabilities. The bill was introduced by a Republican—State Representative John Talley—and some GOP members favored the measure. However, even more Republicans declined to support the bill, resulting in it not passing.

Nineteen states in the United States allow corporal punishment in schools, including Oklahoma. The state's department of education has a regulation that prohibits teachers from punishing children with disabilities, but Oklahoma does not have a state law in place against the practice. The final vote for the measure—House Bill 1028—garnered 45 votes of support, while 43 voted against it. Despite that slight edge in "yeas," 51 votes are needed to advance bills. All 43 votes against the bill were cast by Republicans.

Talley's legislation—House Bill 1028—would have barred the use of corporal punishment on any student with a disability. The bill defined corporal punishment as "the deliberate infliction of physical pain by hitting, paddling, spanking, slapping or any other physical force used as a means of discipline."

Earlier this year, about why he introduced the bill. "I'm passionate about kids. My whole life I've worked with kids," Talley said. "But my wife retired as a special ed teacher, district administrator and a principal of an alternative school. So she's seen a lot of students be misused, mistreated through her work with special needs students." His legislation did not seek to end corporal punishment for all school students, nor did it include provisions for how parents discipline their children at home.

"I just think a special needs student does not need to deal with that pain, because I think they would be wondering, why is this happening to me?" Talley told KOKH-TV. After the bill was rejected, The Recount media company shared several clips on Twitter from the Oklahoma House's debate over the measure. A video that garnered more than 150 comments and over 300 retweets was of State Representative Jim Olsen, a Republican, quoting the Bible as he rejected the bill.

"The rod and reproof give wisdom. But a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame," Olsen said, quoting from the Book of Proverbs. After House Bill 1028 failed to pass, Talley filed a notice to reconsider, which could allow the legislation to be brought back to the House.

The Recount

@therecount · Follow



Oklahoma lawmakers have rejected a bill that would have banned corporal punishment for kids with disabilities in schools.

Rep. Jim Olsen (R) cites Proverbs in rejecting the ban: "The rod and reproof give wisdom. But a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."



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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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