



Vol. XXXIX No. 2
February 2025

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, February 9th, 2025

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

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GROUP DELUSIONS



Mark Reimers

How do people become entangled in conspiracy theories and other shared delusions? This question has long been the province of novelists, but recently psychologists and social scientists have applied the tools of their disciplines to shed light on this vexing question.

This talk will survey their findings so far about the psychological and social factors that lead people to embrace dogmatic delusions, and to double down on them in the face of contrary evidence. We will discuss the personality characteristics and life history that incline people to rigid beliefs. We'll consider the everyday personal delusions that most of us hold. We'll discuss the social process of converting and committing to a shared delusion. Finally we'll briefly consider the psychology of reasoning and what conditions make people more amenable to changing their minds.

Dr. Mark Reimers is a quantitative neuroscientist, researching how dynamic brain activity gives rise to thoughts and feelings. Dr. Reimers has worked at the US National Institutes of Health, the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, the Virginia Institute for Psychiatric and Behavioral Genetics and at Michigan State University. His broader aim is to ground our understanding of feeling and thought in brain dynamics and biology.

Dr. Reimers was the leader of the Richmond Humanists in Virginia for five years, and the leader of the UU Forum in Lansing, MI for six years; he speaks frequently at humanist and science outreach events in Michigan and online. He is trying to weave together brain science with humanist aspirations.

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 page 1 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, 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)

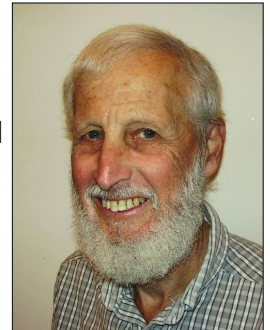
The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

*On Sunday, March 9th, 2025, 12:30 PM (In Person)
and 1:00 PM (Online)*

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

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.

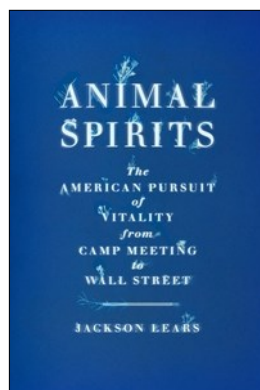


Frank S. Robinson

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.

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	Sherry Levine

Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Sue Parry
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

RECAP OF OUR JANUARY SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Dr. Yotam Ophir is an Associate Professor of Communications at the State University, Buffalo. His talk was titled, "Misinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Extremism in an Age of Political Mega-Identities." Based on his studying thousands of years of misinformation, and his forthcoming book, *Misinformation and Society*, it's a pretty bleak assessment.

He started off discussing the epidemic, noting inequality of impacts, surprise, horror, anxiety, distrust of experts and officials, widespread conspiracy theories, quack solutions, scapegoating, and violence. Of course he was not talking about Covid, but the 1854 cholera outbreak. With Covid, in contrast to earlier times when diseases' causes were not understood, information was widely available and spread fast. Yet in America, it was politicized like no disease before.

Giving Ophir his Lesson #1 — Nothing is new, but nothing is the same.

We're living in what's been called the "Post-Truth" era, blamed on Trump and social media. Yet before that we did have JFK assassination conspiracy theories, the 1980s-'90s "Satanic Panic" (resembling QAnon), and even further back, literal witch hunts. Today's "Great Replacement Theory" also had antecedents. But what differs now is ubiquity of tools to create visual misinformation, and our intimate relationship with our devices.

His Lesson #2 was that we did not evolve to be seekers of accurate information. Yet we've had a longtime preoccupation with assessing reality, going back at least to Plato's cave allegory. What evolution did endow us with is pattern recognition. Seeing what might be a tiger in the bushes, running away fast preserved your genes to reproduce, while if you deliberated, you'd be eaten. But such quick judgments often disserve us.

Ophir discussed some examples, displaying a chart showing a seemingly strong correlation between Maine's divorce rate and margarine consumption. But a key point is that correlation does not mean causation, a principle most people don't instinctively apply. And feelings tend to trump facts; if people feel crime is rising [they always do — FSR] facts won't sway them. Meantime, another thing evolution gave us was prioritizing tribal solidarity over facts. We feel it's more important to be in good with our social groups, which was vital for group survival.

His Lesson #3 was that misinformation is growing more political. The group think operates especially strongly here, with many people's principal sense of identity being their politics. And, further, the misinformation problem is asymmetrical — much bigger on the right. Ophir cited Chris Mooney's book, *The Republican War on Science*, battling the scientific consensus about climate change, even about evolution. We saw this too regarding Covid, with Trump voting areas having higher infection rates (due to science rejectionism). And it's not just science, but misinformation and fake news more generally, which the right is more prone to seek, see, and spread.

The other side is not somehow magically protected. However, on the right, leadership and elites actively working to push falsehoods is a much bigger phenomenon. And they do so with increasing impunity.

So Lesson #4: The price for spreading misinformation is in sharp decline. In fact, it's rewarded, not punished. Marjorie Taylor Greene's political clout keeps growing. And of course Trump goes from triumph to triumph the more he lies. Indeed, Ophir asserted his voters trust him more than their own families! [Says something about the character of those families — FSR.]

Lying, Ophir suggested, is actually a conscious strategy, quoting Trump's sometime consigliere Steve Bannon's "Flood the zone with excrement" (using a more graphic word which wouldn't make it into a CDHS newsletter). And the media can't turn away, because the public eats it up.

In the Q&A there was reference to "the marketplace of ideas." A free marketplace, Ophir amended. Not what we have, when Facebook for example decides what you'll see — based on trying to maximize "engagement" (and thus ad revenue).

Finally, Lesson #5: There's no silver bullet solution. Ophir rounded up the usual obvious remedies, but said they really don't seem to work; can even backfire, making people even more wedded to false beliefs. Instead we need big systemic changes — bolster democratic institutions; curb money in politics; restore the authority of party leaderships; rebuild journalism with perhaps public media; advance media literacy education. [And make pigs fly — FSR.]

But he ended by quoting Leonard Cohen: "There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

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



Credit: Pat Bagley; caglecartoons.com
The Salt Lake Tribune

Join the bunch for lunch! We will gather at Jimmy's Egg, 1800 Western Ave., Albany, NY 12203 on February 20th at 12:00 Noon (please note new time!). The date for the March Lunch Bunch get-together is March 20th. 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!

Executive Council Needs Your Help!

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 two vacant positions on the EC: **Secretary** and **Compliance Officer**. Both these positions require work done on a monthly basis. Neither position is difficult, but both 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.

Reminder: CDHS 2025 Membership Renewals Due

It's time to renew your CDHS membership. Unless you are a lifetime member or became a new CDHS member between 1 August and 31 December 2024, you should have received a renewal notice in your email in mid-January. 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.

Inspirational Quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."

"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle."

New Year, New Secular Representation in Congress

by *TheHumanist.com* Staff • 16 January 2025

The American Humanist Association (AHA) and Center for Freethought Equality (CFE) staff met with new and returning Members of Congress on the very first day of the 119th Congress session to begin establishing important relationships and putting a face to the powerful secular constituency. Although Congress continues to be more religious than the country as a whole—CQ Roll Call survey reported that 95 percent of Senate and House members identify with a religious faith, while a Pew Research Center survey found 70 percent of Americans affiliate with a religious faith—there is a growing cohort of nonreligious members.

For Democrats, incoming Arizona Representative Yassamin Ansari identified as “agnostic,” incoming Washington Representative Emily Randall identified as “none” (she will also be the first openly queer Latina in Congress), and California Representative Jared Huffman continues to identify as a “humanist.” Ohio’s Dave Taylor is the one Republican who did not specify a religious affiliation. CQ Roll Call stated that, “another 21 Democrats did not specify a religious affiliation.”

Hemant Mehta recognized CFE Political Manager Ron Millar for encouraging Ansari to mark her public identifier as agnostic when they talked at an event hosted by the Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC. “Ansari also won her primary by 39 votes (following a recount). She’s a reminder of why voting matters and how those votes can help change the conversation when it comes to diversity and representation at the highest levels of government.”

Mehta also wrote in his article, “Secular organizations still matter!” Ron Millar, political and PAC manager of the Center for Freethought Equality expands on that statement, “We are making advances in Congress and in state legislatures because we are doing the work to increase our community’s visibility, which makes elected officials and candidates more comfortable to identify with the humanist and freethought community. This turns into a positive feedback loop because as more elected officials publicly identify with us, the lingering bias against our community diminishes, which in turn allows more members of our community to also confidently be public as a humanist, agnostic, atheist, or nonreligious. Our efforts are making it possible for members of our community to be their authentic selves across the country.”

The CFE does extensive outreach to candidates and elected officials to indicate that there is a humanist and atheist community to support them, demonstrate that being their authentic selves will not end their careers, and encourage members of our community to run for office. Our elected officials will work against the efforts of White Christian Nationalism to build a future for a safer, saner, stronger, and more secular America. More than a quarter of our country’s population identifies as religiously unaffiliated, and are making our values known at the ballot box and running for—and winning—seats in public office.

A full list of the Center for Freethought Equality PAC’s 2024 endorsements and their election results can be found [here](#). A list of current and former humanist and atheist federal, state, and local elected officials can be found [here](#). You can become a member of CFE for free [here](#). And you can always participate in [AHA Action Alerts here](#).

At his opening day reception, Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin (co-founder and co-chair of the Congressional Freethought Caucus) quoted a letter by Thomas Jefferson in reference to the current situation in Washington: “A little patience, and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people, recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles.” That same day, Speaker Mike Johnson, the top Christian Nationalist on Capitol Hill, offered “a prayer for the nation” on the House floor that he incorrectly claimed Jefferson had written and said every day. Thankfully, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation recovered the truth and debunked this falsehood.

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.

AHA Offers New Ways to Connect with Humanism

by TheHumanist.com Staff • 23 January 2025

Humanism empowers us to create our own meaningful lives. It's our shared humanity and sense of responsibility—not dependence on scripture, an afterlife, or deities—that encourages us to make the most of the time we have together and honor everyone's worth and dignity. The American Humanist Association makes humanism accessible to all with our Ten Commitments, online studies, in-person and online events, publications, and communications (i.e., email, social media, media outreach, etc.). We also help humanists connect with each other with local groups, ceremonies performed by humanist celebrants, and humanist chaplains serving various institutions (i.e., universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.). Now AHA has launched three new programs to ensure we all have “something to belong to, something to believe in, and something to fight for.”

Our Dose of Humanism text messaging program delivers humanist inspiration right to your phone so you can start your day empowered to live your values. Each text provides an opportunity for self-reflection and personal development, incorporating wisdom from an array of historical and present-day figures and a prompt to act on your humanism. Sign up [here](#) to get your dose.

Our Humanist Discord Community establishes an online hub for humanists to share their journeys to humanism, learn from thought-provoking discourse, and connect in regional networking channels so online friends can develop into in-person connections. Here you can discuss everything from philosophy to pets, science to social justice, and religious family to recreational sports. We have channels open for you to give and receive guidance on political action, starting and growing local communities, caring for children and aging parents, entertainment and travel recommendations, and much more. Discord is one of the best platforms for community engagement and becoming more popular as people seek alternatives to the traditional social media corporations. The AHA Discord is free and available to all AHA members so [become a member](#) today to get your special invitation link. Current AHA members can use their access link to jump in and enjoy all the channels now.

Within the AHA Discord is our Humanist Parenting Discord, a public online space open to anyone involved in raising kids who are good without a god. AHA, and partner Camp Quest, regularly engage with parents, grandparents, teachers, and community leaders eager to help children mature into caring and ethical adults. After surveying folks on the topics that matter most to them, we developed channels where parents and caregivers can learn from and support one another and get their questions answered by a range of humanist parenting experts. If you've ever wondered how to raise your children without religion or handle those questioning your decision to do so, you're not alone. Come share, vent, and inspire each other. [Click this invitation link](#) to join and connect with other humanist caregivers.

Our country feels torn apart and full of uncertainties, so these programs are crucial to help us come together and stay engaged. “We're going to be doing plenty of resisting and fighting for our rights,” said AHA Executive Director Fish Stark. “AHA is making it easier to live a humanist life and find like-minded people because we believe that adopting humanism makes people feel purposeful, meaningful, and connected—and we need a lot of that right now.”



Action Item Note!

Don Porterfield received this request from the American Humanist Association (AHA) asking that humanists contact their representatives in Congress and ask them to join the Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC). It is very easy, free, and only takes two minutes. All they need is this link, and a little nudge from you: <https://www.votervoice.net/Humanist/Campaigns/120109/Respond>

Now more than ever, it is incredibly important for members of Congress to be informed about church/state separation issues and threats to secular democracy. The CFC serves as the separation of church and state watchdog in Congress, and is open to all members of Congress, regardless of religion and political party.

“Gathering of the Clans” - January Social Recap

The annual party of the Capital District Non-believers (CDHS, Capital Region Atheists and Agnostics and the Freethinkers Community) met last Saturday at the Union Buffet in Schenectady. The food was plentiful, delicious and representative of different cultures. About 40 people were in attendance. Below are a few photos of the meeting. Sincere thanks go to Dee Fuller for making all the arrangements for this yearly event.



February Social—Paths To Humanism

Paths to Humanism is an annual social usually held in February. This year is no exception. So mark your calendar for Saturday, February 22nd from 2:00—4:00 PM.

Three new members will be sharing their journeys. There will be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss what's been presented during the program.

Frank and Thérèse Robinson will be welcoming us into their home in Albany. Everyone is asked to bring a small snack to share and your own beverage. It is a carry-in/carry-out location.

The Robinson's address will be sent out to those who RSVP they are attending.

Please RSVP to Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com by February 19, 2025.

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.



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How did you hear about the Humanist Society? _____

All this information will be included in our Directory, which is distributed to members only, unless you request otherwise by checking and signing here: [] I do not want to be listed in the CDHS Member Directory _____

Levels of Member Support	Annual Payment	Date ____/____/____
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- | | | |
|--|---|-------|
| [] Individual Membership | \$ 50 | _____ |
| [] Family Membership | \$ 80 | _____ |
| [] Sustaining Member | \$100 | _____ |
| [] Patron | \$150 | _____ |
| [] Life Member | one-time contribution of \$1000 or more | _____ |
| [] Additional tax-deductible donation | \$ _____ | _____ |

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