The Freethought Society News
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Published by: The Freethought Society | http://www.FtSociety.org
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January/February 2016
Volume 8, Number 1

The Freethought Society News ezine is published by The Freethought Society (FS) for the nontheist community.

Free subscriptions are available for supporters, donors and like-minded individuals upon request.

Contact FS at: newsletter@FtSociety.org

Articles on topics of interest to freethinkers are welcomed and will be considered for publication.

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Tax ID Number: 23-2738574

Chester County Commissioners Reject Nontheist Winter Holiday Symbol, Again!

by Margaret Downey

Every year since 2007, the Freethought Society (FS) has advocated the use of a *Tree of Knowledge* as a winter holiday symbol for the nontheist community on the lawn of the Chester County Courthouse in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Prior to 2010, the area was known as a "free speech zone," but passage of a Chester County Commissioners' resolution (Resolution Number 58-10) removed public accommodation rights. The Resolution gave Chester County Commissioners full and exclusive use of the lawn during the winter holiday season. They place displays of their choice on the grounds from Thanksgiving until shortly after New Year's Day. The Commissioners contend that their chosen winter holiday-themed items follow permissible descriptions found in the 1984 United States Supreme Court case *Lynch v. Donnelly*. In 1984, the secular/nontheist community did not have a symbol of any type.

The Tree of Knowledge was created as a result of a ten-year search for a winter holiday symbol that could convey a message that would make nontheists proud. *The Tree of Knowledge* expresses the importance of education, and the necessary study of science, philosophy, history, ethics, critical thinking, lives led by nontheist heroes and much more. The use of laminated book cover ornaments conveys that literature about those subjects are available and recommended reading. *The Tree of Knowledge* is adorned with book covers including some that some religious leaders do not want people to know about, let alone read.

On November 10, 2015, I made another attempt to request that Resolution 58-10 be rescinded. I was joined by **Jason Torpy**, president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), and **Jason Heap** Executive Director of the United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR). During the public commentary at that Chester County Commissioners' "Sunshine Meeting," we took turns trying to convince Commissioners **Kathy Cozzone**, **Terence Farrell**, and **Michelle Kichline** that *The Tree of Knowledge* would be the ideal way to include the nontheist community. A week later, Farrell sent the following email:

At our Sunshine meeting last week (November 10th), you asked that the board reconsider/ rescind Resolution 58-10 regarding holiday displays. At our Commissioners' meeting on November 12th, I asked if anyone wanted to offer such a motion to reconsider/rescind Resolution 58-10. There was no such motion, and thus Resolution 58-10 remains in force. You can see video of our Commissioners' meeting on the County's website, Chesco.org.

Terence Farrell
Chairman

A video of the November 10, 2015 Sunshine Meeting that includes my testimony and those of Heap and Torpy can be seen at: http://goo.gl/wXc1D2

Needless to say, we were all disappointed that the Commissioners continue to refuse the inclusion of the nontheist winter holiday symbol, *The Tree of Knowledge*, but we will not be deterred. Legal consultations and further discussions are ongoing towards the goal of finding a way for nontheists to be treated as equal citizens in Chester County.

Please earmark a donation to this important winter holiday effort as soon as possible. *Tree of Knowledge* funding is needed in order for FS to pursue legal actions. □

The Integrity and Humility of Science

by Hugh Taft Morales

The following article is the speech that was delivered in honor of the 10-year anniversary of *Tammy Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*, a court case humanists celebrate as a victory for science education. The case defends the theory of evolution and reminds us that we are, after all, animals. It is a great example of both the integrity and humility of science.

The anniversary event was sponsored by the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, the Freethought Society, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State on Sunday, December 6, 2015. Special guests were **Eric Rothschild** and **Hedya Aryani**, of Pepper Hamilton LLP; Attorney **Steve Harvey**; and **Lauri Lebo**, a journalist who covered this story from the start. She also wrote a book about the case, *The Devil in Dover*.

The sobering fact is that only 35 percent of adults in this country agree that "evolution is a scientific theory well supported by evidence."

More, 45 percent, believe that God created humans as they are now 10,000 years ago! People all over this supposedly-educated country dismiss evolution as "just a theory."

Creationists treat this science based word "theory" as if it was "something you dreamt up after being drunk all night." I picked up that phrase from humanist activist **Isaac Asimov**.

Far from some inebriated fantasy, science offers us the only acceptable path to discover the facts of life. Science need not claim dominion over all of life — it need not fully explain love, morality, or human imagination. But science must rule over the facts we share in our multicultural world, facts free of religious, ethical or cultural bias. We must constantly defend science.

Science is attacked in large part because it threatened the dominant religious paradigm: the "two-world paradigm." This worldview assumes that there are two radically different and distinct realities: a reality of material stuff and a reality of non-material stuff, some people call that stuff souls, heaven, and god.

Many try to keep these two worlds separate and emphasize the gap between the divine and the mundane, spirit and matter, heaven and earth. This division, in one form or another, dominated philosophy for 2,000 years. The book of Matthew recommends that we "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Scientist **Stephen Jay Gould** urged us to see science and religion as representing independent areas of inquiry, two "non-overlapping magisteria." They emphasize different data: science deals with facts and religions deals with values. In his 1999 book *Rock of Ages*, Gould proclaims this "blessedly simple and entirely conventional resolution to...the supposed conflict between science and religion."

The two worlds clash often, however. Some use religion to ignore evidence, claim the existence of miracles, and defend the effectiveness of prayer. Some use science to mock religion.

These days, Georgetown University theologian **John Haught**, an expert witness in the Kitzmiller/Dover trial, takes up Gould's campaign to establish a truce. For Haught, science and religion are simply different layers of explanation. Science can explain religion on a scientific level — such as its role in society and it's support of the cohesion and reproductive capacity of cultures.

Haught also appreciates religion in non-scientific terms — as a human response to experiences that are not, strictly speaking, observable.

For example, he claims that religion grows out of our experience of "the infinite" – of seeing the universe as "infinite being, infinite truth, infinite goodness, infinite love."

Haught sees room for religious concepts, such as "soul" or "spirit," because they are outside of science. Science need not confirm nor deny "the mystery of being, the goodness that pervades everything, the unity, the coherence, the meaning, the truth, the beauty...what philosophers and theologians traditionally call the transcendentals."

I am skeptical of the term "transcendentals." I am not sure what my father, a subatomic particle physicist, would have said about "transcendentals" or about this supposed truce between science and religion. He was dedicated to the scientific method and rejected supernatural explanations.

But he also often spoke about his work in non-science terms. For him, particle physics was poetry and there was beauty in the microscopic world of bubble chambers and in the galaxies above. Like **Lauri Lebo**'s father, who pointed to the night sky and taught her "to dream of infinity," my dad found inspiration in nature. Unlike Lebo's father, my dad rejected theological implications.

My father was more like **Carl Sagan**, who found in science not god but simple wonder and joy. Inevitably these experiences affected his sense of meaning, of morality, and of mystery — a mystery that remained even as he accumulated more and more facts.

I like a metaphor to describe mystery offered by science writer **Chet Raymo**. He said, in so many words, "Imagine that all the facts we gather are like an island in a dark, vast sea of ignorance. No matter how large our island of facts grows, there will still be much more we don't know. The shore of this island, where the beach of what we know meets the waves of ignorance, is mystery. As the island of knowledge grows, so too does the shore. The more we know, the more we experience mystery."

Of course, there are many ways to speak about "mystery." Those of more materialistic leanings see mystery as simply an absence of knowledge. Those more spiritually-minded can experience mystery as an active force, perhaps even of supernatural quality.

As a materialist, I reject supernaturalism. I think there is one world. I embrace the consistency and verifiability of the scientific method. While I hesitate to say that the scientific method is "universal" (since the term "universal" is such an abstraction), I do say that science is as close to universal as we're going to get.

Nothing so transcends cultural differences as does science. Pried loose from politics and power, science encourages international cooperation. Scientists of many backgrounds and languages can agree on science. Even religious leaders, such as the **Dalai Lama**, and Catholic Popes (since the 1950s) find common ground in science.

It's too bad that the theory of evolution, which so fully demolished previous paradigms, didn't create more common ground when it became popularized over 100 years ago. When geologists uncovered the fact that the earth was much older than previously accepted, evolution through random mutation began to make sense. There was no more need for an "intelligent designer."

This was not easy for followers of a designer God. As the Bergen [New Jersey] Ethical Society Leader **Joe Chuman** explains, "...Darwinism robs human beings of a providential God who cares for them, and assures that they have a place in the universe, and that their life has meaning. This reality is a tough pill for human beings to swallow. It is a harsh blow to the human ego..."

For many fundamentalists, evolution robbed them of beauty and awe. They saw Darwinism, and science in general, as corrosive of aesthetics and mystery. They share **Edgar Allen Poe**'s reaction. He writes, "Science!...Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart?"

Social Darwinism, which perverted the theory of evolution in order to justify greed and brutality, also turned many against science. Embracing **Herbert Spencer**'s phrase, "the survival of the fittest," advocates of Social Darwinism argued that competition is good because it fuels growth. It took a remarkably ruthless position concerning those who suffered due to the economic "law of the jungle." Disempowered laborers were abused and killed for the "greater good." This context affected the most classic battle between science and religion 90 years before the Kitzmiller/ Dover trial: the Scopes Monkey trial.

I don't have time to explore the Butler Act that outlawed the teaching of evolution challenged by **John T. Scopes**. I do, however, want to share Chuman's explanation that **William Jennings Bryan**, who took the side of religion, was not the bumbling fool some make him out to be. He was a populist who saw a world in which modernity and greed crushed farmers, laborers, women and children.

In some ways, Bryan a century ago and creationists today share the similar protest. In Chuman's words, "It is a protest against elitism, against know-it-allism, against the pretensions of intellectualism and its perceived condescension. It is an expression, in the truest sense, of a culture war, which uses religion as a weapon to fight that war." Chuman points out that all the new, and very important books defending atheism and freethought "did not go over well in the American heartland where they were perceived as the latest expression of intellectual arrogance."

In some ways, Ethical Humanism's founder **Felix Adler** appreciated Bryan. They both feared that modern capitalism destroyed beauty and abused the marginalized. Like Bryan, Adler defended the powerless against Social Darwinism by proclaiming "...every human being, in virtue of his equality as a moral being, is invested…with certain inalienable rights."

Adler speaks more like his Rabbi father than like a scientist. He claims there exists a moral law that "comes out of the infinite depths and heights...That [t]here is a voice that speaks in us out of the ultimate reality of things. It is not subject to us; but we are subject to it, and to it we must bend our pride."

Adler did not allow his idealism to blind him. He knew that science, while challenging us, demands a shared social project based on observation and facts. It requires an enlightened and engaged mind. As he wrote, "the characteristic mark of new truths such as those published by **Isaac Newton**, **Galileo Galilei**, and **Charles Darwin**, is the awakening effect which they have upon other thinkers. The test of their value is to be found, not so much in the problems which they solve, as in the new problems which they raise; not so much in the knowledge which they convey, as in the outlook which they open upon new lines of inquiry. Thinking is a social act."

Ten years ago in York County, Pennsylvania those afraid of change refused to support thinking as a social act. Instead, their fear of difference led them to choose blind faith over the bracing challenge of science. What can we, as Ethical Humanists, learn from this historic case?

I turn briefly to the case of *Tammy Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District*. Back in 1987, in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the Supreme Court ruled that creation science can't be taught in science class. Unfortunately, the embers of religious zealotry were not fully extinguished. The controversy reignited when a self-appointed theistic watchdog in York County burned, in the school parking lot, a student mural portraying *The Descent of Man*.

After that incident, the county school board put creationism back in the classroom in the form of "intelligent design." Biology teachers were ordered to present intelligent design as an "alternative to evolution," and to reference the now infamous creationist textbook *Of Pandas and People*.

Led by **Bill Buckingham**, creationist activists attacked the standard textbook for being "laced with Darwinism!" They said it was "inexcusable to have a book that says man descended from apes with nothing to counterbalance it."

On October 18, 2004, the school board voted 6-3 to add the following to the curriculum: "Students will be made

aware of the gaps/problems in Darwin's theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, intelligent design." Three school board members who voted against it resigned in protest.

The School board pronounced that as of January 2005 teachers had to read the following to all 9th grade biology students:

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin's theory of evolution…Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it is still being tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence...Intelligent design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view...As is true with any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind.

It wasn't enough to tell students to "keep an open mind" about pseudo-science. The school board also instructed administrators to silence criticism of their policy. Administrators decreed that "there will be no other discussion of the issue and your teachers will not answer questions on the issue!"

This occurred at the same time that leading intelligent design proponents admitted that, "there are no peer reviewed articles by anyone advocating for intelligent design supported by pertinent experiments or calculations..."

Michael Behe, a science witness for the creationists, lowered the bar of science when he defined "scientific theory" as simply "a proposed explanation which focuses or points to physical, observable data and logical inferences" — a definition so loose that Behe admitted that it would allow astrology to be called a "scientific theory!"

The school board denied that intelligent design was "religion in disguise" despite being represented in court by the Thomas More Law Center, a conservative Christian law center named after the patron saint of lawyers that uses litigation to promote "the religious freedom of Christians and time-honored family values." Its stated purpose is"...to be the sword and shield for people of faith."

Eleven parents, infuriated by having religion in science classes, turned to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the law firm of Pepper Hamilton to be the sword and shield of the scientific method. Ironically, the creationist activists insisting that "there be no discussion of the issue" accused the ACLU of "Orwellian" tactics in defending science. They called the plaintiffs' suit "a flagrant assault on free speech."

Pepper Hamilton's **Eric Rothschild** began his case by throwing out creationist claims that this whole issue was no big deal. As Rothschild correctly pointed out, there is no such thing as a "little" constitutional violation. He argued that intelligent design was simply not science and had no place in biology class.

The first witness for the plaintiffs, Brown University biology Professor **Ken Miller**, effectively explained that "Intelligent design is not a testable theory and as such is not generally accepted by the scientific community," and could not be falsified, proving it to be outside the realm of science.

"Intelligent design," Miller continued, "falsely undermines the scientific status of evolutionary theory and gives students a false understanding of what theory actually means."

Miller got personal, saying that as a person of faith he would be furious if creationists forced his two daughters "to choose between God and science."

You really need to read Lebo's book to hear the rest of this very interesting story. The bottom line is that, thankfully, this challenge to science was defeated.

On December 20, 2005, **Judge John E. Jones III**, a Republican appointed by **George W. Bush**, ruled that putting intelligent design in the classroom or forcing teachers to disparage evolution was unconstitutional. He went further, concluding that intelligent design and creationism are not science. The *Of Pandas and People* textbook was thrown out of the science classroom.

Although I feel flushed with victory by this story of science over superstition, I must mention the humility of science.

I don't believe that "truth" exists in some non-material realm. I believe that truth is a human creation. Human beings are simply animals. We are at our best when we are rational animals, as **Descartes** described us, but we are animals nonetheless. Our rational nature is constrained by emotions and desires that inspire and trouble us, that promote virtue and feed selfishness, that induce pride and shame. So when touting the benefits of science, let's humbly admit that science is the product of flawed creatures.

We defenders of science have not always displayed such humility. Humble faith in science can give way to an arrogant assuredness. Science has been promoted as a cure for all social and personal ills. This attitude can become "scientism." Personally, I accept scientism when it's defined modestly as the view that the characteristic inductive methods of the natural sciences are the only source of genuine factual knowledge. Facts are determined through the scientific process.

I admit that there is more to life than facts. That's why I reject more expansive forms of scientism — I don't believe that science is the only path to understanding the human experience. As philosopher **Tom Sorell** explains, this form of scientism puts "too high a value on natural science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture." Scientism then becomes dogmatic reduction of human wisdom to what we can measure.

While some of you may disagree, I think there are valuable aesthetic, emotional, and psychologically powerful experiences that can't really be measured. I don't call these facts. But they are meaningful experiences that science can't dismiss or control.

These experiences are aspects of life outside the scope of science. **Friedrich Hayek** in T*he Counter-Revolution of Science*, 1952 edition, explained that it is impossible to eliminate the "human factor." For science to do so is intellectual imperialism. **Sara Maitland**, a British feminist, called scientism a "myth as pernicious as any sort of fundamentalism." I won't go quite that far, but extreme scientism doesn't work for me.

The humility of science includes seeing scientists as human beings, often, like the rest of the species, tragically flawed. Professor **Anthony Esolen** of Providence College in Rhode Island puts it this way: "Scientists are human, just as we are...Scientists gave us an innocent **Albert Einstein**, a

compromised **J. Robert Oppenheimer**, and a monstrous **Josef Mengele**. Scientists have brought us great good and, yes, some great evil. Scientists, like every other group of people in the last misbegotten century, wore robes streaked with blood. Scientists infected unsuspecting women in Central America with syphilis. Scientists experimented upon black men at Tuskegee. Scientists ignored the dangers of thalidomide." In other words, scientists are human.

Esolen continues: "A physicist can tell me how a winged object can stay in the air. But he cannot, insofar as he is a physicist alone or even a biologist alone...tell me about the beauty or the nobility of the buzzard...There are, in short, things that the natural sciences cannot do..."

Miller admitted during the Kitzmiller/Dover trial that science doesn't consider issues of meaning and purpose in the universe. He explained, "If I could solve the question of the meaning of my life by doing an experiment in the laboratory, I assure you, I would rush off and do it right now. But these are questions that lie outside the purview of science. It doesn't say they're not important, it doesn't say that any answer to these is necessarily wrong, but it does say that science cannot address it. It's a reflection of the limitation of science."

We must admit this obvious truth while maintaining the integrity of scientific facts. We can't allow others to replace science with superstition or substitute intelligent design for evolution. Observation and reason, the tools of the scientific mind, must guide our research and public policy. They must continue to be the backbone of science classes all across our country.

We owe that to the next generation. We must send our children to science classes that teach science, not dogma. With all humility, let's continue to defend the integrity of science. □

Pictured above are (left to right) **Hugh Taft-Morales** (leader at the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia), **Janice Rael** (president of the Delaware Valley Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State)**, Lauri Lebo** (author of *The Devil in Dover*), **Eric Rothschild** (partner at Pepper Hamilton, LLC)**, Steve Harvey** (attorney at Steve Harvey Law), **Hedya Aryani** (associate at Pepper Hamilton, LLC), and **Margaret Downey** (founder and president of the Freethought Society).

Taft-Morales, Rael and Downey were the co-sponsors and co-hosts of the December 6, 2015 event to celebrate the 10-Year Anniversary of the *Tammy Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District* decision. The event included a morning speech by Taft-Morales, a piano concert, the decorating of the 2015 Philadelphia *Tree of Knowledge*, a luncheon, an afternoon program and a Happy Hour celebration party.

Lebo, Rothschild, Harvey and Aryani delivered presentations about their involvement in the case. The speakers shared interesting facts about the case and each had humorous stories to convey. Everyone in attendance learned a great deal about the nonsense of trying to give "Intelligent Design" equal footing in the science classroom.

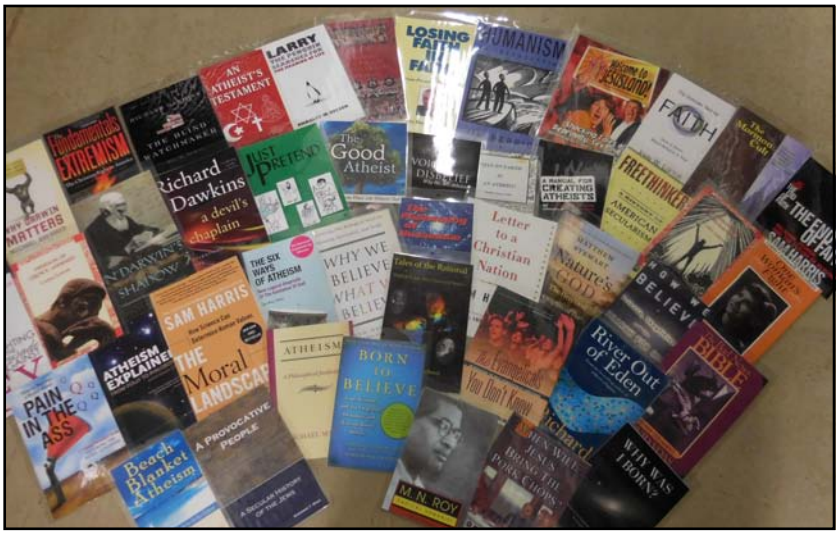
Photos of the 2015 Philadelphia Tree of Knowledge *Event*

Pictured left is the 2015 *Tree of Knowledge* which was placed in the foyer of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia building.

Pictured above (left to right) are **Margaret Downey** (creator of *The Tree of Knowledge* and President of the Freethought Society), **Dan Hoffman**, **David McDevitt**, **Manny Hoffman** and **Hugh Taft-Morales** (EHSP Leader). Taft-Morales performed his song "If I Had a Book" for guests and most people sang along since it was a familiar tune based on the famous **Pete Seeger** song "If I Had a Hammer"

Pictured right are three children, whose parents are members of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, standing next to a miniature Tree of Knowledge. The children hand-made the book cover ornaments. They decorated their *Tree of Knowledge* on stage during the morning program. Left to right are **Eliot Raynor**, **Manny Hoffman** and **Ben Raynor**.

Pictured below are some of the many ornaments available for purchase through the Freethought Society (FS). For additional sales information, contact FS at: (610) 793-2737.



Photos of the 10-Year Anniversary of the Kitzmiller/Dover Decision

Pictured in the photo at right are **Tracy Lockwood** and **Dennis Horvitz**. Lockwood is a member of the Freethought Society board of directors. At the event, she provided the technical help needed.

Horvitz traveled to Philadelphia from New York City to attend the day long event.

Pictured below is **Rollin Wilber** as he performs at the Sunday, December 6, 2015 Ethical Humanists Society of Philadelphia platform.

A little monkey business is pictured below.

Pictured above is Freethought Society board member **Dan Hoffman**, who worked as the bartender during the Happy Hour celebration.

Susan Corbett is pictured left standing behind the Happy Hour food service table. Corbett missed a few speakers on the program in the auditorium in order to setup the beautiful food presentation in the upstairs social hall.

A Public Nontheist Veterans Day Celebration

by Margaret Downey

In May of this year, I started planning a 2015 Veterans Day event to take place in my hometown of West Chester, Pennsylvania. My first challenge was to reserve a spot at the Chester County Old Historic Courthouse Free Speech Zone. Over the years, I have observed many groups using the area facing the main street that runs through the Borough of West Chester (High Street between Market and Gay Streets) and knew that there must be a way to arrange for use of the area.

I learned that the Borough does not have a formal application process and that my request for use was going to be processed through **Rebecca Brain**, the Communications Coordinator for the Chester County Commissioners' Office. Knowing how unwelcoming the Commissioners' Office is to the Freethought Society's (FS) requests, year-after-year, to place our winter holiday symbol on the same grounds, we expected trouble. My "use request" took two months to get approved. I became a bit of a pest, but I was pleased to finally get permission for use approved in late July.

The Chester County Old Historic Courthouse has a lovely raised porch that overlooks a flat piazza that is perfectly suited to host an outdoor event. On the day of the event, white wooden folding chairs were delivered by a rental company, an "Ask an Atheist" booth was setup, and a table with complimentary literature was placed below a large banner that stated "Don't Believe in God? You are not alone." The banner was useful in blocking a large Ten Commandments plaque which has been on the building since 1920.

Some of you may recall that FS attempted to have the plaque removed in 2001. Although we won the first round in Federal Court, the plaque was allowed to remain after an Appeals Court determined that the plaque had "historical significance." The fact that no formal complaints had been received for the first 80 years allowed the Appeals Court to say that history could trump the constitutional tenet of separation of religion and government.

That ruling caused me to write my new motto: "Never hesitate to litigate!" Being a plaintiff is not easy, but standing up to stop both small and large violations is imperative to maintain separation between government and religion. More information about the case can be found at:

http://www2.ca3.uscourts.gov/opinarch/021765.pdf

Hiding the Ten Commandment plaque from view pleased many in attendance, and **Sally Flynn**, who was the lead plaintiff in the above described lawsuit especially appreciated not having to look at the offensive plaque during the event. I introduced her as a special guest at the Veterans Day ceremony.

The most noticed sign, however, was the one we placed on the "Ask an Atheist" booth. The words "Yes, there are atheists in foxholes" enraged some passersby and we heard a lot of shout outs, some of which were profane and some just sarcastic and rude.

The banners, booth, tables and speakers did bring curious people to the area and we were pleased to interact with some

very nice religious citizens. We made new contacts and connections that would have never known about us without us hosting this free and open-to-the-public event.

The Veterans Day celebration would not have been possible without the help of volunteers. FS thanks the following people for their help:

Susan Corbett
Glen Loev
Tom Melchiorre
Tom Schottmiller

We also thank speakers **Jason Torpy** (pictured above left) and **Jason Heap** (pictured above right) for not only helping with the set-up and tear-down process but for delivering fantastic presentations. My opening remarks are printed below:

The United States is not the only country that celebrates veterans on the anniversary of the Armistice of World War I. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month there was silence across the battlefields of Europe. Four years of unbelievable destruction came to an end in 1918.

Canada celebrates Remembrance Day on November 11. Great Britain commemorates November 11th with two minutes of silence and celebrates the Armistice on the second Sunday of November every year.

Today, we gather to honor those who have rendered the highest service any American can offer — fighting for our freedom. Surveys have revealed that there are many nontheist veterans, but surveys of this type are a new phenomenon. I contend that since the beginning of wars, nontheists have fought alongside theists. Yes, next to religious veterans we nontheists have stood sentry over this nation's security.

Hosting a "Yes, there are atheists in foxholes" at this historic courthouse is fitting because we gather in the shadow of a statue known as "Old Glory."

The sculpture is a representation of a brave warrior. We look at the sculpture and do not concern ourselves with the question, “Are we looking at a religious person or a nontheist person?” It is an irrelevant question because we are viewing a depiction of bravery and patriotism. And the statue of “Old Glory” symbolizes that this day belongs to all who have protected the land and country that we love.

We appreciate the Minutemen who won our independence and our warriors who turned back aggression in the Middle East. We honor our patriots who fell in battle and those who stood ready to do so. We honor and thank those Veterans who were wounded and those who treated their wounds.

Today we think about those in the military who returned from their military service to friends and families, and far too many who could not return.

We are joined together to show our appreciation for a debt we can never fully repay to our courageous veterans.

We honor our veterans on this day because it marks the end of the First World War. Every American who ever put on this nation’s uniform in war or in peace assumes risks and makes sacrifices on our common behalf.

Each of the 1.6 million men and women now serving in our military today bears our common burden as well as our united appreciation. One of the greatest honors we can pay to our veterans is to act with the sufficient wisdom and action to preserve the freedoms they won through their service and great sacrifice.

To honor those who served in Europe and Korea and Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, in scores of posts at home and abroad, let us resolve that we will not stray from the responsibilities necessary to uphold our constitutional freedoms.

To the nontheist community, the First Amendment is paramount. Freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of religion are worth fighting for and these rights shall not be abridged.

We also honor our veterans today by noting the outstanding service being rendered around the world at this moment by the most talented and the best prepared group of men and women who have ever worn our nation’s uniform.

Every year, our humble words on Veterans Day can never do justice to the sacrifices made by our veterans: by those who returned and those who did not; by those who live among us today and those who live only in our memories.

We know we can never repay the debt, but still we try because their sacrifices will be in our hearts every day. ☐

Pictured left is the banner that was used to hide the Ten Commandments plaque which has been affixed to the facade of the Chester County “Old Historic” Courthouse since 1920. The text on the plaque is a Protestant version of the Ten Commandments and specifically leaves out words that the Jewish community holds sacred: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.” (Exodus 20:2) Yet, the Appeals Judges ruled that the plaque was of “secular” and “historic” value.

Below is a photo of the Freethought Society’s “Ask an atheist” booth and some attendees at the Veterans Day event.

Photos of the 2015 Veterans Day Celebration

Jason Heap is pictured in the upper left photo delivering his 2015 Veterans Day speech at the "Old Historic" Courthouse in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Heap is an Oxford-educated man who recently sought to be the Navy's first humanist chaplain. He is currently suing the Pentagon, claiming unconstitutional discrimination. Heap is certified as a humanist celebrant by the Humanist Society, which joined in the suit and is challenging both the U.S. Navy and the Department of Defense for not recognizing the group as an endorser of chaplain candidates.

While Heap could not discuss the details of his case, he was able to convey the issues involved. Humanists make up 3.6 percent of the United States military, according to a survey by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. Many humanists are atheists, but some say that the term "atheist" is not sufficient to express their belief, or lack of it. Humanists generally emphasize their confidence in human potential.

Heap is also the coordinator of the United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR) and he spoke about the goals and mission of the organization during his speech. Unity and cooperation between local and national secular groups continues to flourish thanks to the work done by UnitedCoR. See: www.UnitedCoR.org

Jason Torpy is pictured in the lower left photo delivering his 2015 Veterans Day speech about the purpose, mission, vision and goals of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), which is a much needed organization for the benefit of the secular community. MAAF assists United States military members by responding to illegal and insensitive religious proselytizing on military bases. It is an independent 501(c)(3) organization building community for humanists and other nontheists in the military. MAAF also educates both the military and civilian community about atheism and humanism in the military with over 70 worldwide points of contact, lay leaders, and local groups from Kyrgyzstan to Japan and throughout the United States and its Chaplain Outreach program to educate 5,000 military chaplains on how to support atheists and humanists in the military. See: www.MilitaryAtheists.org

Pictured right are **Steve Rade** and **Margaret Downey**. Rade is a Life Member of the Freethought Society. He has earned that distinction with his generous financial support over the years.

Rade is also the founder of the United Coalition of Reason which is based on a business plan written by Downey in 2008. Rade enjoyed the event and was very proud to be a supporter of all the participants.

The Freethought Society's 2016 Four-Month Activities Calendar

January 13

It is our pleasure and honor to host **Stephen Eric Bronner** on Wednesday, **January 13, 2016** as he presents his interesting topic, "The New Bigot."

Bronner will address a new and more important form of bigotry targeting groups that have always been victims, but with a different type of language. Unless the tactics of the new bigot are understood, it becomes even more difficult to oppose this type of prejudice.

The presentation will take place at the **Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr**, **Pennsylvania 19010** at **7:00 PM**.

Bronner is a professor in the department of Political Science at Rutgers University. He is currently Board of Governors Professor of Political Science, a member of the Executive Committee of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, as well as on the Graduate Faculties of Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University. He is also Director of Global Relations, Executive Committee of the UNESCO Chair for Genocide Prevention Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights.

February 18

The Freethought Society is very pleased to host **Scott Rhoades** on **February 18**, **2016** as he presents "Put Kids First."

When it comes to health and safety, we should always put kids first. Unfortunately, in many states, non-medical vaccine exemptions place children in the United States at great risk for many deadly, contagious diseases. The evidence is clear: vaccines save lives. Worrisome laws should put safety before personal beliefs, but children in religious families are at risk.

The **7:00 PM** presentation will take place at the **Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr**, **Pennsylvania 19010**.

Rhoades is the co-director of the Secular Coalition for Pennsylvania. He is also co-founder of the Annual Pennsylvania State Atheist Humanist Conference. In addition, Rhoades is the Founder and President of the Lancaster Freethought Society in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Scott is a Humanist Celebrant and owns and operates New Traditions: Secular Celebrations and Humanist Ceremonies.

March 31

Are you planning to attend the 2016 Reason Rally being held on June 4, 2016 in Washington, D.C.? Do you seek more information and help in planning your trip? If so, please attend the **Thursday**, **March 31, 2016** meeting to get answers to all your questions.

Please join us at the **Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr**, **Pennsylvania 19010** at **7:00 PM**.

Bring your questions and ideas, whether you plan to spend the entire weekend in the Washington, D.C. area or are just attending the Reason Rally one day event. We will be discussing food, volunteers needed to represent the Freethought Society, activities, and addressing all concerns. We will also connect to **Lyz Liddell**, the Executive Director of the 2016 Reason Rally via Skype. She will take questions from the audience and give us an update on who will be speaking and performing. She will also provide an overview of all the related Reason Rally activities being planned before, during and after the event.

Please note the Reason Rally bus flyer in this newsletter and visit the Reason Rally 2016 website at: ReasonRally.org.

April 14

On **Thursday**, **April 14**, **2016**, the Freethought Society will host **Barbara Mancini** at the **Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr**, **Pennsylvania 19010**.

The presentation entitled, "Who gets to decide how you will die?" starts at **7:00 PM**.

In 2013 Mancini was arrested and prosecuted in Pennsylvania on the charge of aiding the attempted suicide of her dying 93-year-old father after handing him his prescribed morphine four days before his death.

A hospice nurse and police overrode his written advanced directives, and he was then hospitalized and treated in defiance of his end-of-life wishes. Her prosecution lasted a year, during which time it garnered national attention, and it was roundly criticized throughout the media.

A judge dismissed the case due to "a lack of competent evidence."

Mancini's case was featured on National Public Radio and TV's *60 Minutes*. She has traveled the country speaking about her experiences and has become a vocal advocate for end-of-life choice. Mancini will discuss her case, the broader issues involved, and the impact they have on the end of our lives.

Another Fantastic Secular Day of the Dead Event!

by Margaret Downey

When a new secular event proves to be a success, of course it must be repeated! So that is what we did on Sunday, November 1, 2015 in San Diego, California. Sure enough, the second annual Secular Day of the Dead event was once again a huge success.

Victoria de la Torre and I created The Secular Day of the Dead concept during a brainstorming mentor/protege weekend in 2013. We hope to see the event become a national outreach effort to appeal to secular Hispanics who want to continue traditions and rituals that embrace cultural connections. Secularizing the Day of the Dead proves that religious traditions and rituals can indeed be godless, family friendly and fun.

We are happy to help individuals and/or organizations that would like to host an event in any given area. For additional organizing information, see:

http://www.secular-celebrations.com/secular-day-of-the-dead

We have made it very easy to host a Secular Day of the Dead. At the Secular Celebrations link, event planning resources such as these can be found:

Introduction Script
Talking Points and Sound Bites
Party Agenda
Words to a Sing-Along
Event Direction Signs
Piñata Entry Forms
Press Release Samples
Sample Poster
Menu Suggestions
Ideas for Activities

Please enjoy the photo spread below and on the following page for an overview of the activities of the day. Watch for details in this newsletter about a 2016 event. ☐

Entertainer extraordinaire **Buck Bowen** is pictured left performing one of his original songs for the audience. Bowen performed two times and rocked the house with songs such as “The Afterlife Party’ and “iCan iWill.” Learn more about Bowen at: www.buckbowen.com

The Secular Day of the Dead co-hosts and co-sponsors are pictured below, left to right, **Victoria de la Torre** (representing San Diego Secular Latinos), **Steven Soden** (representing Sunday Assembly San Diego) and **Margaret Downey** (representing the Freethought Society) .

Photos of the 2015 Secular Day of the Dead Event

A fun time was had by all who tried to break open the candy-filled piñata.

Cultural costuming is encouraged at the Secular Day of the Dead event. Pictured above left **Christine Jones** is dressed as her favorite Latina artist, **Frida Kahlo**, and **Margaret Downey** is dressed in a traditional Dia de los Muertos outfit.

The “Honoring Table” is pictured above right. The photos on the table represent the lives being honored that day.

Even the adults at the event got into the coloring activities. The colorful Sugar Skull masks were created and worn by those who did not get their faces painted. Plastic Sugar Skull rings were used to decorate the cupcakes.

THERE'S

ROOM FOR YOU ON THE REASON BUS

THE

REASON RALLY

JUNE 4, 2016
WASHINGTON, D.C.

JOIN US FOR THE LARGEST GATHERING OF THE SECULAR MOVEMENT IN WORLD HISTORY.

BUY YOUR BUS TICKETS NOW AND RIDE CAREFREE TO DC

PRIVATE, COMFORTABLE TRANSPORTATION ★ SAME DAY ROUND TRIP ★ SAVE ON GAS, TOLLS, & PARKING

The Freethought Society needs "Bus Captains" to help before and during the bus trip. Please volunteer as soon as possible by calling Margaret Downey at: (610) 793-2737

Tickets can be purchased at http://rallybus.net/reason-rally

Help sponsor the

Freethought Society

at the 2016 REASON RALLY in Washington, D.C.

Five Great Reasons to Help the Freethought Society Participate in the Reason Rally 2016:

The Freethought Society represents Freethinkers nationwide, offering a comfortable "philosophical home" for many nontheists searching for a like-minded community.

Attending Reason Rally 2016 will help the Freethought Society reach out to the wider public.

The Freethought Society offers secular celebrations, shares ideas and information with other local and national groups, and provides a much needed service to the nontheist community. Reason Rally 2016 is a great opportunity for the Freethought Society to collaborate with many other secular organizations.

The expected attendance at Reason Rally 2016 is 60,000, so it's the perfect venue to find new supporters, educate the public, and represent nontheism.

The Freethought Society added over 2,000 new supporters at Reason Rally 2012. With your help, imagine how many more supporters can be recruited at this historic event.

DONATE HERE:
www.ftsociety.org/donate

Earmarked donations in the form of checks can be mailed to the below address.

THE REASON RALLY
JUNE 04 2016
UNITED | SECULAR | AMERICANS

The Freethought Society

P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366 • 610.793.2737 • info@FtSociety.org

Advocating Separation of Religion and Government, Freedom of Expression, and Nontheist Rights

The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month.The newsletter is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in many locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. FS activities and services depend on the financial contributions of supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (www.FtSociety.org/donate/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please donate generously.

Yes! I want to:

( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):
$30 Individual Supporter **$35** Family Supporter **$20** Student **$1,000** Supporter for a Lifetime

( ) become a "Freethought Star" by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): **$5 $10 $15 $20 $25 $30 $35 $40 $45** $_____(other per month)

( ) earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): _____

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____Cell: _____

( ) Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will email a complimentary newsletter to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS newsletter.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society

Supporters of the Freethought Society (FS) often want to do more than just donate. Listed below are various committees organized by FS. The committees were designed to fulfill the mission, goals and vision of FS. We seek to be of assistance to nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas. Please see the FS website or contact FS to volunteer at: volunteers@FtSociety.org.

Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee
(nontheism explained in classroom settings)
Anti-Discrimination Support Network
(assist Openly Secular gathering reports)
Community Outreach
(locate tabling opportunities)
Diversity Outreach Committee
(brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities)
Free Speech Zone Committee
(research and implement displays in public venues)
Jump Into the Jean Pool
(collection of jeans for the homeless)
Helping Hands
(provides helpers to seniors and in emergency situations)
Meetup Committee
(social events and improving online communications)
Media Outreach Committee
(press coordination and writing press releases)
Membership Committee
(watching for and connecting with possible supporters)
Monthly Meeting Coordinators
(schedule and manage speakers and venues)
Secular Celebrations
(develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations)
Sole Searching
(collection of athletic shoes for donating to the homeless)
Speakers Bureau
(provide FS a CV, photo and list of subjects to participate)
Special Events
(coordinate interesting and unique nontheist events)
Thomas Paine Memorial Committee
(assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events)
***Tree of Knowledge*/Winter Display Committee**
(make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the winter symbol concept nationwide)