The Online 2023 Thomas Paine Day

Thomas Paine died on June 8, 1809 in Greenwich Village, New York. He left a stellar legacy that includes many accomplishments, examples of personal ethics, love for humanity, and a high moral living standard. Paine is known as a “Founding Father” because Common Sense is touted as the document that galvanized the Revolutionary War and his The American Crisis papers inspired colonists to fight to the end.

Common Sense, a 47-page pamphlet published in 1776 (five months before the Continental Congress unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence), urged Americans to declare independence and replace the monarchy with a republic. Common Sense was immediately successful with 120,000 copies sold in just three months, and nearly one million over the next three years. Paine donated all the proceeds from Common Sense to finance the Revolutionary War effort.

Few people know that Paine, in 1805, delivered a message to the Pennsylvania Board of Health entitled “Of the Cause of the Yellow Fever; and the Means of Preventing It In Places Not Yet Infected With It.” The presentation is credited for the reconstruction of Philadelphia’s Dock Street, eliminating standing water, sewage, and trash — avoiding a major health crisis in Philadelphia.

Paine believed that only a democratic form of government can guarantee the natural rights of man. His book, Rights of Man, inspired revolutionary thinking across the globe.

Unlike other Founding Fathers, Paine never owned or hired enslaved people. He was a vocal abolitionist. In 1775, he became a Founding Member of The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes (the first American abolition society).

In 1777, Thomas Paine was sent by Congress to meet with Iroquois Six Nations chiefs in Easton, Pennsylvania, which resulted in a peace accord. For the rest of his life, Thomas Paine called Native Americans “brothers.”

A majority of Paine’s writings promoted social justice for women, public education, progressive tax law, old-age pensions, religious freedom, and international cooperation (the concept that led to the formation of the United Nations).

The Social Security Administration posted the full text of Paine’s Agrarian Justice on its website acknowledging Thomas Paine’s pamphlet is the “philosophical herald” of the Social Security program. See: https://www.ssa.gov/history/tpaine3.html For all of the these reasons and more it is fitting to declare every June 8th as “Thomas Paine Day” — a day to reflect on his work and life. The 2023 Thomas Paine Day event took place via Zoom. The event was hosted by Margaret Downey (president of the Freethought Society and president of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association) and Judy Flattery (president of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara). The hosts were assisted by Dave Flattery, who acted as the Zoom Technician, and Dave Rice, who controlled the chat and monitored the audience participation. One hundred and thirty people attended this year’s event.

Cosponsors were the Center for Inquiry, represented by Robyn Blumner; the Freedom from Religion Foundation, represented by Annie Laurie Gaylor; the Freethought Society, and the Thomas Paine Memorial Association, which were represented by Downey.

Congressman Jamie Raskin kicked off the event with a passionate welcome and talked about how honored he was to now be the Chair of the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee.

The theme of the event was an examination of Paine’s Deistic lifestance. Many Founders of the United States of America were Deists. Deism is an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that accepted the existence of a creator on the basis of reason, but rejected belief in a supernatural deity who interacted with humankind.

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Paine’s book, *The Age of Reason*, was written to explain Deism. In that book he states “One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests” and “A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right.”

There is much to learn about Deism and how it relates to the modern world. The June 8th keynote speaker, Amber Quitno, delivered a very informative presentation explaining the Deistic lifestance. Quitno is a spokesperson for the World Union of Deists (WUD). To learn more about WUD, please visit their website at: https://www.deism.com/

During the event, a 2023 Thomas Paine Day, Borough of West Chester, Pennsylvania proclamation was read by Downey. The proclamation was signed by Mayor Lillian L. DeBaptiste. Below is the text of the proclamation:

**Whereas:**
Thomas Paine, a founding father and leader of the American Revolution, peer of George Washington, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, was one of the most brilliant political philosophers of his time; and

**Whereas:**
He published a pamphlet entitled Common Sense, setting forth his argument in favor of American independence; and

**Whereas:**
The writings of Thomas Paine acknowledge that freedom depends on people who form opinions based on reason independently of tradition, authority or established belief; and

**Whereas:**
He advocated justice for women, public education, progressive tax law, religious freedom, and preservation of world peace, through arbitration of international disputes; and

**Whereas:**
Thomas Paine was among the earliest writers publicly to denounce slavery, and was the first to call for reparations; and

**Whereas:**
Thomas Paine is noted as calling for an end to slavery, and the establishment of human rights around the world as evidenced by his thought-provoking works *African Slavery in America, The Age of Reason*, and *Justice for Women*; and

**Whereas:**
His life and work have inspired many generations of democratic thinkers in many lands.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED
Lillian L. DeBaptiste
Mayor of the Borough of West Chester
does hereby proclaim June 8, 2023, as Thomas Paine Day
and encourages the citizens of West Chester to learn more about this great historical figure.

Joining the event were guests from England. Thetford Mayor Stuart Wright and Gez Chetal, the owner of the Thomas Paine Hotel in Thetford, talked about a new Thomas Paine-themed exhibition. The hotel is also a museum hosting the “Walk in the Footsteps of Thomas Paine” exhibition. Wright and Chetal invited audience members to visit the area and wished everyone a “Happy Thomas Paine Day.”

Paul Fitzgerald from Manchester, England is a cartoonist and illustrator. He is the author of *Paine: A Fantastical Visual Biography*. Fitzgerald shared several pages of his book that had relevance to the subject of Deism. His presentation was enjoyed by all.

Sculptor Zenos Frudakis joined the Zoom social hour from his studio in Glenside, Pennsylvania. He displayed the 7-foot-high clay model of Thomas Paine and talked about the process of designing, sculpting, and completing statues.

TPMA board member Daniel Brin also attended and spoke briefly during the social hour.

The recording of the event is available at the following link:

https://youtu.be/hHUIy2-L-JA

Pictured left is Congressman Jamie Raskin. He sent a recorded welcome which was shown at the opening of the June 8, 2023 Thomas Paine Day event.

Congressman Raskin had his head covered in a bandana as a result of hair loss from the chemotherapy he received after being diagnosed with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma in December 2022. “They promised me that my eyelashes and my eyebrows and my hair will come back one day soon,” Raskin said.

On his website, the 60-year-old fourth-term Congressman said that after receiving “a preliminary diagnosis of being ‘in remission’ with a 90% prognosis of no relapse, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and love.”

Congressman Raskin is the Chair of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association and looks forward to helping establish a Thomas Paine monument in Washington D.C. or its environs.
Photos from the June 8th Thomas Paine Day Zoom Event

Pictured above left is cartoonist, illustrator, and author Paul Fitzgerald. He is a resident of Manchester, England. He shared pages from his book PAINE: A Fantastical Visual Biography. To reach Fitzgerald email him at: paine.org.uk

Pictured above right are Stuart Wright (the Mayor of Thetford, England), and Gez Chetal the owner of the Thomas Paine Hotel and Museum. The hotel is the actual home where Thomas Paine was born. To make reservations or to learn more about the hotel, email to: enquiries@thethomaspainehotel.co.uk

Pictured left is Annie Laurie Gaylor welcoming people to the 2023 Thomas Paine Day event on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Pictured right is Robyn Blumner delivering a welcome on behalf of the Center for Inquiry.

Pictured above left is Margaret Downey, president of the Freethought Society and the Thomas Paine Memorial Association. Downey was the event coordinator, script writer, and a cohost of the June 8th Thomas Paine Day celebration of his life.

Pictured above right is Judy Flattery. She cohosted the event with Downey. Flattery is the president of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara (HSSB). To learn more about HSSB, please visit: https://www.sbhumanists.org
It is an honor and privilege to be here tonight from my home office to celebrate Thomas Paine Day! I want to thank the Freethought Society, Center for Inquiry, the Thomas Paine Memorial Association, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation for hosting this event to celebrate my hero, Thomas Paine!

I also want to take a minute to express a humble thank you to Congressman Jaimie Raskin for the welcome message introducing me, and Bob Johnson of the World Union of Deists for his dedication to the promotion of Deism and Reason.

I’m excited for this opportunity to speak tonight about Paine’s intellectual philosophy of life — Deism. Paine was a proud and outspoken Deist who took incredible chances with his freedom and safety in order to spread the principles of Deism, independence and liberty. Many Americans, and people around the world, are familiar with Paine’s pamphlet Common Sense because it was the catalyst which ignited the American Revolution. They may also know about his American Crisis papers that salvaged the Revolution when our brave soldiers were weary, tired, hungry, bruised and battered. But my absolute favorite book by Paine (and in general) is The Age of Reason.

Within the pages of The Age of Reason, Paine wrote:

“The Creation speaks a universal language, independently of human speech or human language, multiplied and various as they may be. It is an ever existing original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this Word of God reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.”

This First Principal and “Existing Original” forms the Deistic view of God and Nature — or “Nature’s God.”

It was Paine’s Deistic philosophy of life that empowered him with reason, logic, and the critical thinking skills to describe Deism so eloquently. He was able to see that the inalienable rights all human beings are born into by default through the Laws of Nature, occur without a Caste or Class system.

Most Americans have been led to believe that our Nation was founded on Christian Principles, which is baffling because our Declaration of Independence specifically refers to “Nature’s God,” not Yahweh, Allah, or Jesus. It, in fact, states:

“To assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them.”

The Phrase “Nature’s God” is Deistic, not Christian. Many of our key Founding Fathers were Deists, aside from Paine, they include Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and George Washington.

When people hear that many Founding Fathers were Deists, they always ask “What’s a Deist?”

When I’m asked if I’m a Christian, I answer, “No. I’m a Deist” Inevitably, that is usually always followed with “Huh? A Deist? What’s that?”

For those who have read briefly about Deism, they often think we believe in a “clockmaker God” who created the world and then stepped away to let it run itself. That is really a simplistic and distorted view of what Deists really believe. We view life, and nature, as proof of and part of the First Principal or “God.” We believe nature is always interacting with us and doesn’t suspend Physical Laws in order to appease the whims of human beings who wish for this or that. I personally don’t even use the term “God” anymore because the term is immediately associated with Yahweh or Jesus when that is not at all what I mean to convey.

When we trace the roots of Deism, we find people such as the British religious philosopher Lord Edward Herbert (the 1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury KB) from Cherbury, England, who wrote De Religion Gentilium in 1645. This work examines Christianity and caused quite a stir by making, among many other anti-dogmatic irreligious observations, such heretical claims as there being no such thing as original sin; that not all Christian revelations are true divine revelations; and the authority of the Church does not deserve our faith.

Though Herbert brings claims to divine revelations and inspiration into question, he does not reject all such claims, nor does he reject the idea of revelations and “revealed” religion as Deism does. However, this type of independent thinking in religious matters, though not directly establishing Deism, laid the groundwork for Deism.

Other Deists in this time period were Anthony Collins, John Toland, and Matthew Tindal. Tindal’s writing, Christianity As Old As The Creation, was more in tune with Paine’s The Age of Reason and Ethan Allen’s Reason: The Only Oracle of Man, since the restraints of treating Christianity and the Bible in a completely objective manner were gone.

By the time of the 18th century, Deism was firmly established among the intellectuals of Europe and North America. Such outstanding philosophers as Descartes and Voltaire used Deistic ideas as a battering ram against what they perceived as the unreasonable claims to divine revelations and teachings of the Bible and Christianity.

In America, Deists such as Paine and Allen worked hard to bring Deism to the people. Deists such as Jefferson and Washington did much to promote Deistic principles behind
reason centers will be dogma and ritual free and will be.

Deism is not a religion, but a philosophy of life. We do not worship a God. We love nature and strive to be kind and moral people. We believe that natural laws are proof of a first principal, but reject the idea there is a vengeful god in the sky somewhere who demands worship and suffering in order to please him or her. We reject the idea of “original sin” and “magical thinking.” We embrace the latest scientific theories.

We also do not use the term “faith” in the context of a God. We see the term as emotional manipulation tactics used by priests and clergy. We encourage our children, friends, and family to question everything and use their own natural birthright of reason instead of religion.

We have much in common with humanists, atheists, and pantheists. Deists have little to nothing in common with “revealed religions.” We also do not use the same beliefs as gnostics or the New Age spirituality movement. We have no affiliation at all with Scientology, science of mind, power of attraction, Jewish mysticism, and other New Age pseudo-science spirituality movements. We do not believe in prophets, so-called miracles, psychics, or astrology. We believe in astronomy, physics, biology, chemistry, and all natural laws. As Paine put it in The Age of Reason:

“In every point of view in which those things called miracles can be placed and considered, the reality of them is improbable and their existence unnecessary. They would not, as before observed, answer any useful purpose, even if they were true; for it is more difficult to obtain belief to a miracle, than to a principle evidently moral without any miracle. Moral principle speaks universally for itself. Miracle could be but a thing of the moment and seen but by a few; after this it requires a transfer of faith from God to man to believe a miracle upon man’s report.

“As mystery and miracle took charge of the past and the present, prophecy took charge of the future and rounded the tenses of faith. It was not sufficient to know what had been done, but what would be done. The supposed prophet was the supposed historian of times to come; and if he happened, in shooting with a long bow of a thousand years, to strike within a thousand miles of a mark, the ingenuity of posterity could make it point-blank; and if he happened to be directly wrong, it was only to suppose that God had repented himself and changed his mind. What a fool do fabulous systems make of man!”

As Deism continues to grow, we hope to see Deist reason centers being established around the world. The end goal is to have as many Deist reason centers as are needed to educate people about Deism and to serve the needs of people. Deist reason centers will be dogma and ritual free and will be staffed by knowledgeable Deists who can answer any questions people may have about Deism. They will have libraries containing books, periodicals, and other media about Deism as well as about science, math, and history. This is the vision, goal, and one mission of the World Union of Deism.

Visit our website to learn more about the World Union of Deism. I’m sure you will be pleasantly surprised. Here is the link: www.deism.com

About the Author:

Amber Quitno is a proud, freethinking Deist and secular activist who is passionate about defending the wall between religion and government. She lives in Sycamore, Illinois with her spouse and children. Quitno is a representative of the World Union of Deists, a member of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, and a new supporter of the Freethought Society.

As a Deist, Quitno sees proof of a “principal cause” within nature consistent with the laws of physics, but firmly rejects “revealed religion,” supernatural mythology, and superstitions. She believes we gain a deeper understanding of this principal cause through the advancement of science, using the scientific method, logic, reason, and critical thinking skills.

Quitno has a Bachelor’s in technical communications with an emphasis on the biomedical industries. She also has a master’s in regulatory affairs for the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical device industries. During her studies, Quitno took classes in philosophy and world religions as her electives. These classes sparked a deep desire to learn everything she could about theology and philosophy. She has read every book she could find about religion, philosophy, humanism, atheism, and American history. Quitno’s favorite book is The Age of Reason by Thomas Paine which mirrors her own thoughts regarding “revealed religion,” superstitions, and supernatural mythical deities.

Quitno is also an elected County Board Member of DeKalb County, Illinois, where she serves on the Law and Justice Committee and on the Health and Human Services Committee.

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White Christian Nationalists frequently say “they” are coming after your children. But who are “they,” and how are they doing it?

“They” are often liberal teachers and media who supposedly are turning students away from Christianity and toward Marxism, or “they” are gays recruiting children to become gay or trans. “They” also favor illegal immigration, taking away your legal guns, and trying to convince pregnant women to obtain abortions. In addition, “they” are purportedly talking young people into voting for Democrats.

Obsessing over such issues suggests that these religious conservatives are unwilling to allow their own children to grow up and think for themselves. Imagined conspiracies about liberals trying to “indoctrinate” kids are usually based on liberals trying to educate kids and offering them support for who they are. Liberals are interested in engaging with students and teaching them critical thinking, not in trying to mold them into unthinking automatons.

White Christian Nationalists worry about liberal indoctrination because they, themselves, are guilty of religious indoctrination, often trying to recruit other people’s children and frightening their own children about the dangers of exploring thoughts outside of the ones approved by their inflexible ideologies. Some of these parents and family members refuse to acknowledge that their children are gay and claim that gender dysphoria is a liberal hoax.

White Christian Nationalists usually support creationism and call evolution a myth. But evolutionary theory is not an ideology or a belief system: it is part of science, where asking questions and accepting evidence are essential. Creationists are correct that science doesn’t have all the answers about the universe, but scientists continue to look for evidence to answer important questions. Creationism is not science, though creationists would like it to be taught in science classes. Creationism is faith-based, not science-based.

White Christian Nationalists are anything but “Christian” when it comes to support for social justice. They appear unconcerned also about child abuse within various churches. Instead, they seem to worship Donald Trump, who many believe was sent by God to make our country great again. They think America was great at a supposed time when White Christian privilege was considered the norm and diversity was discouraged.

The religious right accuses those who disagree with them of being “woke,” without knowing how to define it. Here’s the dictionary definition:

“Woke means being alert to systemic injustices and prejudices, especially those involving the treatment of ethnic, racial, or sexual minorities.”
part of a tribe that identifies with a political group and a narrow culture. They alienate many reasonable Christians who feel embarrassed by the 30 percent of MAGA Trump enthusiasts who say they support both God and Donald Trump. The Republican Party is starting to sound more like a religion than a political party, while evangelical Christians are sounding more like a political party than a religion.

Most of our country disagrees with their calling the United States a “Christian Nation.” The United States Constitution does not contain the words Christian, Jesus, or God. Our framers were careful and thoughtful writers. Had they wanted a Christian nation it seems highly unlikely that they would have forgotten to include their Christian intentions in the supreme law of the land.

In 1797, the Treaty of Tripoli was ratified unanimously by the United States Senate, and this trade treaty stated in part:

“The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

I wonder what part of “not” White Christian Nationalists don’t understand.

The framers of the United States wisely established the first government in history to separate religion and government. They formed a secular nation whose authority rests with “We the People,” — the first three words of the United States Constitution, and not with “Thou the Deity.” The founders created a constitution in which the government acknowledged no gods, the better to ensure freedom of conscience. We the people are free to worship one, many, or no gods. As Thomas Jefferson said, “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

There are many reasons that people today have become less religious, but I think White Christian Nationalism is an important reason. Because of their stance on issues such as abortion, birth control, misogyny, anti-Semitism, LGBTQ, immigration, gun control, book banning, school prayer, and climate change, White Christian Nationalists have alienated younger people and have lost their support. I don’t consider White Christian Nationalists partners in any sense, but it seems they are unintentionally helping to create more secularists.

So, once in a while, I’m tempted to say “Thank God” for White Christian Nationalists. With a smile, of course.

**About the Author:**

Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to The Freethought Society News. His past submissions can be found at the following Freethought Society website page:

https://www.ftosociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/

Silverman is the author of two highly recommended books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*. Both books are available online and bookstores.

Silverman welcomes communication from readers. He is available for speaking engagements. Contact him at the following email address:

silvermanh@cofc.edu

To learn more about White Christian Nationalism, the Freethought Society highly recommends two books written by **Andrew L. Seidel**. He is an author and constitutional attorney who has defended the First Amendment for more than a decade — both in and out of court.

Seidel dedicated his career to challenging religious privilege and battling Christian Nationalism. He speaks and writes extensively about religious freedom, and has been profiled by BBC News, Buzzfeed, *International Business Times*, and more.

Is a fight against equality and for privilege a fight for religious supremacy? In the book *American Crusade*, Seidel dives into the debate on religious liberty, the modern attempt to weaponize religious freedom, and the Supreme Court’s role in that “crusade.” He also takes a look at some of the key Supreme Court cases of the last thirty years.

Was America founded as a Christian Nation? No, and *The Founding Myth* ends this debate for good.

With more than 1,000 5-star reviews on Amazon, the critically acclaimed *The Founding Myth* marshals the best arguments against the historical disinformation of Christian Nationalism and backs those arguments up with a feast of well-cited historical facts. America will never be a Christian Nation because the moment it becomes a Christian nation, it will cease to be America.

The Christian Nationalist identity is incredibly weak and vulnerable because it is based on historical distortions and lies. But we need more than facts to fight back, we need better arguments. *The Founding Myth* gives you new, better arguments. It’s not simply a refutation of the idea that we are a Christian nation. It goes deeper and gives you the tools to help destroy this un-American political ideology.

Pictured right is Seidel. He serves as vice president of Strategic Communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He can be reached at:

seidel@au.org
I don’t place much emphasis on identifying the “causes” of taking a certain path in life. I’ve often struggled for an answer when asked “what made you decide to become a psychologist?” I usually find myself offering some contrived response:

It’s inspiring. It’s a way of combining multiple interests. I love having a career centered on public service, etc., etc.

While all those responses are true, “settling in” and finding a good “fit” with a way of living, like a career, is something that happens over time, through multiple experiences and decision points. That has been the case in my settling into life as a non-theist. There have been no epiphanies on my journey.

The first time I realized that the word “church” represents something more than a building came around the age of four. While running errands with my mother, I spied a church other than the Catholic one we attended. I think I was taken by its red doors — they held such allure! I asked my mother if we could start going to that church instead. She fumbled for a response. With no irritation she said, “No, it’s not our church.”

When I asked why it wasn’t our church, she answered, with amusement, “It’s not the one we go to.”

It was then that I realized different groups of people go to different churches. That was my first experience with religious distinction.

Religion is cited by many as an important source of comfort during difficult times. While I respect — and when younger, perhaps envied that comfort claim — I always puzzled over how abstract religious concepts (particularly those that are endemic to Catholicism) could come close to the immediate support and love of friends and family. Frankly, the potential for religion and a god providing “support” and “stability” did not square with my personal experience.

How many times, for example, during my Catholic school years did I hear the exhortation to cope with pain and disappointment by “offering it up to the holy souls in purgatory,” all the while knowing that I’d get much more comfort from talking to friends, going for a walk, or escaping into music or literature?

After nearly 30 years of work as a mental health treatment provider, I have seen countless examples of people helping one another thrive without making reference to a god or a particular religion. I have witnessed individuals successfully grapple with the most challenging existential questions — those related to personal responsibility, what a “good life” should look like, commitment, and sexuality — without consulting dogma. At the same time, religious responses to these questions have often felt detached and abstract, at best, and cruel, at worst.

The discrepancy between the comfort and love arising from individuals supporting one another in the “here and now versus the wooden, contrived, abstract, and sometimes bizarre notions from religion about how to cope with life’s challenges was perhaps the first evidence that, for me, religion was lacking and did not have all the answers. At the very least it was not the only answer.

That discrepancy helped further another line of thinking within me:

Is the notion of god an essential aspect of a happy life? Might it be superfluous?

The very willingness to even begin asking such questions started the “loosening” of my belief in a god.

As I moved through adolescence into early adulthood, my critique of religion became more pointed: perhaps religion and the idea of a god is not only superfluous but also harmful? Such questions came to the fore in the context of various activities in my Catholic church and high school.

In preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation at the age of 14, I participated in a day-long retreat. What I recall most vividly is the constant reference to the dangers inherent in sexuality. Eternal damnation always loomed as the ultimate price of giving in to sexual temptation. The facilitators of the retreat hastened to add that even thinking about sex was an instance of such. I concluded that my peers and I were likely doomed.

In retrospect, that retreat was an opportunity lost, a missed chance to help adolescents develop a mature, caring, responsible attitude towards sexuality. Mostly, I recall experiencing horror at the way it was handled and consider that instance to be the beginning of my revulsion towards and rejection of religion.

We were told that “souls are falling into hell like autumn leaves” due to sexual impurity. On another occasion, it was suggested that nuclear war is a fitting punishment for a sexually impure society. What monstrous things to say to children, particularly in reference to so elemental an aspect of our selves. I’m grateful for the sense of revulsion I experienced as it prompted further inquiry on my part.

Around the time I was starting to experience a growing sense of revulsion towards religion, I happened to come across the American Atheist Forum television program on our local access cable channel; it was hosted by Madalyn Murray O’Hair, Jon Murray, and Gerald Tholen. Watching the program was affirming in many ways. For one, it greatly reduced my sense of isolation. I was also bolstered by the confidence the hosts demonstrated. Evincing no diffidence whatsoever, this gang sure could throw some punches back at the evangelical Christianity which was ascendant in the society of the United States at the time and had a strong foothold in government, particularly the Reagan White House. The program suggested I did not have to be a helpless witness to all of that — I could be confident in my views and argue right back. I was especially impressed with the force and
In our country’s (and, more importantly, the world’s) future, there is no America.” We, too, are citizens with a stake in the Bible, there is no America.” We, too, are citizens with a stake. Such as theists have an obligation to counter audacious statements.” This left me feeling hopeful that I might find with them a supportive, inquisitive community. I attended Quaker meetings for about a year. I met thoughtful and insightful individuals, none of whom did anything but make me feel welcome. Over time, however, I decided that the friendly, congenial atmosphere of the meeting was necessary but not sufficient: being part of a meeting with roots in Christianity evoked a refocus on my rejection of religion. While I appreciate the Quakers’ warm welcome and respect their focus on questions rather than answers, I decided I might feel more “at home” among friendly, congenial individuals who are more explicitly nontheistic.

Over the past several years, as the pandemic and middle age have brought life’s finitude front and center, I have found myself wanting to come “out of the closet” and more explicitly express my nontheism. Visibility is important: nontheists have an obligation to counter audacious statements such as Josh Hawley’s recent insistence that “without the Bible, there is no America.” We, too, are citizens with a stake in our country’s (and, more importantly, the world’s) future.

To conclude, I want to share are few insights I’ve gained from Humberto Maturana, a Chilean biologist and philosopher. His ideas have impacted my work as a psychologist as well as my overall view of life, including the role of religion and the concept of god in our civilization. Language is at the center of Maturana’s thinking. He points out that this world only exists in language, without which we have no contours to our individual and shared lives. We create our world(s) through the stories we tell each other and ourselves and the distinctions we make through language. We have created god and religion, along with countless other cultural features.

Maturana also emphasizes that humans are loving creatures, noting that we become ill when deprived of love and connection. The foundation for our existence as loving beings includes, among other things, the neotenic path taken in the evolution of our species: our relationships, even as adults, are characterized (at their best) as ones involving total trust and reflecting the parent-child relationship.

Finally, Maturana points out that as animals who engage in reflection on various aspects of our existence, we have used language to invent systems — including political, religious, and economic ones — that help us justify our actions. He notes that these systems have often alienated us from our nature as loving beings, and that we have begun to live through them rather than through our basic loving nature.

Maturana’s ideas leave me feeling optimistic. He reminds us that we can take a step back from our lives and reflect on the superfluity of the idea of god, and through conversation, invent more loving ways of living together as a civilization.

About the Author: Frank J. Angelini is a psychologist whose work focuses on substance use and misuse. He received his PhD from the University of Pittsburgh and is a member of the Constructivist Psychology Network. He lives in the Main Line suburbs of Philadelphia with his wife and daughter. He is an avid photographer and an “apprentice” printmaker. In his free time he enjoys music, taking long walks with his daughter, and watching sunsets with his family.

Please Promote the Congressional Freethought Caucus

After the summer break, a newly elected Congress will resume. Please take a few minutes to encourage your Congressperson to join the Congressional Freethought Caucus by scheduling a visit, making a phone call, or writing to them.

Founded in April 2018 and co-chaired by Congressman Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-MD), the Congressional Freethought Caucus is working to protect the secular character of our government and advance evidence-based public policy. Members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus identify as humanist, nonreligious, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian. The Caucus has four objectives:

1. Promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values.
2. Protect the secular character of our government by adhering to strict Constitutional principle of the separation of church and state.
3. Oppose discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious, and nonreligious persons and to champion the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide.
4. Provide a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.

If your Congressperson’s interests align with any of these issues, please contact them (phone, letter, or email) to encourage them to join this growing group of lawmakers who can increase the visibility and influence of humanists and nontheists in Congress! If your Congressperson is already a member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, please send them a note of appreciation instead. See the Congressional Freethought Caucus website for a list of members. The link is:

https://huffman.house.gov/freethought-caucus/members
Almost everyone drinks and/or appreciates great coffee and tea — every day! Now there’s an easy way for readers of The Freethought Society News to raise funds for The Freethought Society (FS)!

Giving Bean is a specialty coffee roaster and artisan tea shipping directly to homes everywhere. Please see the Giving Bean website at: https://www.givingbean.com/store/home.php?partner=ade9b

FS will receive 25% on most items and there are subscription options that raise funds automatically through repeat orders. It's all a simple and delicious way for people to help support FS, but we need your help to spread the word! Here’s how you can help with every sip:

1. Email your friends, family, associates. There is a template at the below that you can copy and paste, or write your own and make sure to include the link.

2. Post on Facebook or other Social Media. It’s SUPER EASY! Click on the link above and use the Facebook share button or post public and send. Copy the message below or write your own appeal. You can also select particular friends to message and send the a message and link.

“Hey there, do you want to support The Freethought Society (FS) with your next coffee or tea purchase? FS is dedicated to maintaining the Jeffersonian Wall of separation of religion and government, freedom of expression, and ending negative stereotyping of the nontheist community. Every little bean and tea leaf will help keep FS active and productive. Giving Bean is a specialty coffee roaster and artisan tea-blender. They are willing to give a substantial donation to FS with every purchase made through the the following website link: www.givingbean.com/store/home.php?partner=ade9b Thanks so much and please click the link now. Treat yourself to fine coffee and tea at reasonable prices while helping out FS.”

3.) You can also post the above message on Facebook or to Instagram but personal messages do work better. Why not do both? When purchasing from Giving Bean, supporters will be asked to enter the name of the person they are attributing their order to, which is you, so make your message memorable.

Partnering with Giving Bean is a cool new way to raise funds! Just order from the website and treat yourself to artfully crafted coffee and tea shipped right to your home or office. Let's raise some funds! Here’s the website link again:

www.givingbean.com/store/home.php?partner=ade9b

Missing Frank Trotta

Frank (Francis) Trotta, age 91, of Havertford, Pennsylvania, formerly of Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, died on April 1, 2023 at his residence at The Quadrangle Independent Senior Living facility.

Born in New York City, New York, he had lived in Lansdowne for 51 years prior to moving to Havertford.

Trotta was a graduate of City College of New York, receiving a Masters in Education and Temple University receiving a Doctorate in Psychology. He had worked for the Veterans Administration in Philadelphia for over 22 years. He also worked for the Social Security Administration in Philadelphia. He retired in 2009.

Trotta was an Army Veteran who served from 1952 to 1954. He was a longtime member of the Veterans for Peace group His interests included the Theatre in Philadelphia, Lansdowne Symphony Orchestra, and taking Temple Osher Lifelong Learning Institute courses.

Trotta was predeceased by his wife Joan (nee Oppermann) Trotta. He is survived by his two children, Diane Trotta of Aldan, Pennsylvania and Jack (Heather) Trotta of Ocala, Florida.

When reporting his death to the Freethought Society (FS), Trotta’s daughter said that her father didn’t specifically tell her about the organization nor did he promote other causes in which he was involved. “My Mom was well aware of his causes and she would mention them to me when dad was out and going to this or that meeting. Mom died 10 years ago this September,” Diane said.

Diane also said that there were many causes her father believed in and she saw a few publications he subscribed to when she would visit him at the Quadrangle.

When asked about her childhood Diane said, “My brother Jack and I were reared in a non-religious home where we were encouraged to think for ourselves on religious and secular matters. My father wanted us to seek more information if we had questions regarding ‘god’ or various religious beliefs. He stressed that we should not believe or go along with society norms because that didn’t make you a moral person. We were brought up in a loving home, knowing we had the support and encouragement of our family on whatever we decided to do in life.”

Diane joined FS and has already attended one online event (Thomas Paine Day 2023). “We look forward to getting to know Diane, said Margaret Downey, president of FS.

“Diane’s father was friendly, kind, generous, and supportive,” Downey continued. “He will be missed very much.”
Freethought Society Activities Calendar

To receive notices about Zoom events, become a member of The Freethought Society Meetup group. Join at: https://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/. Each listing will have a unique Zoom link listed in the description of the event. FS meetings will include security features and will be recorded for replay on social media. Those who join the meeting consent to be recorded and agree to abide by the FS Anti-Harassment and Code of Conduct Policy found at the FS webpage: https://www.ftso.org/freethought-society-code-of-conduct/.

August 12
On Saturday, August 12, 2023 the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the museum’s opening under the auspices of the Center For Inquiry (CFI). The address of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is:

Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum
61 Main Street
Dresden, NY 14441

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is the only museum in the United States dedicated to Freethought. It is also the place to find the largest collection of artifacts related to life of Robert Green Ingersoll, who is best known as “The Great Agnostic.” Ingersoll orations were collected and published, many of which are on display in the Museum.

Ingersoll’s life story is filled with examples of his high moral standards, sense of humor, knowledge of religious beliefs, and his determination to promote equal rights.

The first opening of the Museum took place in the 1920s. The second opening took place in the 1950s. Each time the museum closed, related collections were dispersed. Under CFI’s leadership, the Museum recovered items, repaired the house, and added many collectible items related to the time period and the life of Ingersoll.

The Museum is located on the west shore of Seneca Lake in the heart of New York’s Finger Lakes area. The beautiful location and surrounding areas are the perfect place to vacation. There are many very nice hotels in the area. Below are the names and phone numbers of the hotels that we can highly recommend:

Dresden Hotel
Phone: (315) 299-2310

Belhurst Castle and Winery
Phone: (315) 781-0201

Best Western Plus Vineyard Inn & Suites
Phone: (315) 536-8473

If you plan a trip to participate in the CFI Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum anniversary event, please view more information about this historic location at the following website: https://freethought-trail.org/.

The celebration will start at 11:00 AM with free museum tours featuring new and expanded displays. A complementary sit-down lunch will be provided and a new gazebo will be dedicated to long-time museum director and editor of Free Inquiry magazine Tom Flynn.

Freethought Society President Margaret Downey will unveil a surprise gift to the museum, which will also be dedicated to the memory of Flynn.

The keynote speaker is Seth Andrews. He is an award-winning podcaster and author. Andrews frequently quotes Ingersoll, and his career as “The Thinking Atheist” has been as exemplary as Ingersoll’s legacy.

To reserve a seat and a lunch, please contact Jeff Ingersoll at: jingersoll@me.com

Seating at the museum may be limited. Please RSVP as soon as possible.

August 19
3D event plans are listed below and all are welcome to participate at any of the times listed.

On Saturday, August 19, 2023, please join a group of like-minded individuals, and many Freethought Society (FS) board members, as we celebrate the 73rd birthday of Margaret Downey, the founder of FS.

3D stands for “Drinks, Dinner, and Dessert.” West Chester, Pennsylvania is the perfect location for this type of event. All locations for drinks, dinner, and dessert are located within walking distance of each other.

This is a “Dutch Treat” event. Please plan to ask the server for a separate bill at each location or bring cash to pay for your own portion. A reservation is needed for the dinner location only. RSVP at: infor@FTSociety.org and through the FS Meetup page (see link above).

We start at Barnaby’s (15 South High Street) for drinks (5:00 PM EST in the upstairs Lounge), then Mercato (33 West Market Street) for dinner (6:30 PM EST in the basement Wine Cellar). We end at Gemelli’s (12 West Market Street) for dessert (9:00 PM EST).

The Bicentennial Garage is located at 20 South High Street. From that garage, Barnaby’s can be seen directly across the street. Mercato is around the left corner from the garage entrance/exit, and so is Gemelli’s.

Drinks at Barnaby’s (see menu at the below link): https://www.barnabyswestchester.com?

Dinner at Mercato (see menu at the below link): https://mercato-wc.com/

Dessert at Gemelli’s (artisan ice cream and sorbet): http://www.gemelligelato.com

October 1–7
The Freethought Society is looking for volunteers who will help place a Tree of Knowledge at the Chester County Free Speech Zone (Old Courthouse, 2 North High Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380) during Banned Book Week. The Tree will be decorated with laminated color copies of the covers of banned books. There is much work to do. Contact FS for details about the project at: info@FtSociety.org

Donations are also being sought for this project. Costs include the purchase and delivery of a tree (will be donated after Banned Book Week), signage, and the creation of ornaments. If a total of $1,000 is not raised, the project will be abandoned. Please earmark a donation at this link: https://www.ftso.org/donate/
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates for separation of religion and government. We assist nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas.

FS publishes The Freethought Society News every other month. The publication is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in locations across the United States via Zoom or in-person when possible. FS activities and services depend on financial contributions from supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (www.FtSociety.org/donate/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Donations can be earmarked for use in a committee (see list below), project, and/or an event. Non-earmarked donations will be applied to a general fund which finances office related expenses. Please donate generously.

Yes! I would like to:
( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to The Freethought Society):
   $30 Individual Supporter   $40 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  $50  $55  $_____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 send a complimentary ezine to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS publication. FS will never share or sell a subscribers contact information.

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City, State and Zip: _________________________________________________________________________________________
Email Address: ____________________________________________________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________________________Cell: ___________________________________________________

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Mail this form to: Freethought Society, P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366 or scan and email this form to: Ezine@FtSociety.org

Volunteer Opportunities Through The Freethought Society
Supporters of FS often want to do more than just make a financial contribution. Listed below are committees designed to fulfill the mission, goals, and vision of FS. Volunteers are needed in all committees listed. Please contact FS to volunteer at:

volunteers@FtSociety.org

Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee
   (nontheism explained in classroom settings)
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)
Helping Hands
   (provides helpers to seniors in emergency situations)
Jump into the Jean Pool
   (collection of jeans for donations)
Literature Placement for Prisoners
   (providing literature to prison libraries)
Meetup Committee
   (planning events)

Monthly Meeting Coordinators
   (schedule, manage speakers and venues)
Secular Celebrations
   (develop new nontheist celebrations)
Southern California Secular Coalition
   (connect, share, and grow together)
Speakers Bureau
   (provide FS a resume, photo, and speech subjects/titles)
Special Events
   (coordinate unique events of interest to nontheists)
Sole Searching
   (collection of athletic shoes for donations)
Thomas Paine Memorial Committee
   (work on themed events)
Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee
   (promote and support the concept nationwide)