The Freethought Society News
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Published by: The Freethought Society | http://www.FtSociety.org
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March/April 2023
Volume 15, Number 2

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: Ezine@FtSociety.org

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

Submit articles (5,000 word count max.) for review by the FS editorial board.

Please submit articles with a bio and photo, a suggested title, and relevant photos/clip art to:

Ezine@FtSociety.org

FS is an educational 501(c)3 organization

Donations and financial support are encouraged and appreciated. For donation information, please see the last page of this Ezine.

EIN Number: 23-2738574

Articles herein do not necessarily represent official positions of the Freethought Society.

President Biden Signs Bill to Honor Thomas Paine

The Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) is pleased to announce that on December 27, 2022, President Biden signed a congressional bill to endorse the creation of a monument dedicated to the life and work of Founding Father **Thomas Paine**.

Under the leadership of Congressman **Jamie Raskin** (D-Maryland) and Congresswoman **Victoria Spartz** (R-Indiana), House Bill 6720 (the congressional bill that endorses a Washington, D.C. monument to honor Thomas Paine) was included in the 2022 Omnibus Package. The package was passed by both the House and Senate in late December 2022.

TPMA will now begin working with the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) on advancing the project with a goal of unveiling the monument in 2026, which would coincide with the 250th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

NCMAC examines memorial proposals for conformance to the Commemorative Works Act, receives public comments, and makes recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior as well as to members and committees of Congress. TPMA looks forward to working with NCMAC members as sites are reviewed and a memorial design is developed. TPMA seeks to memorialize Thomas Paine in a way befitting his central role in the founding of the United States of America, as well as his worldwide call for liberty, justice, and equality.

Paine was one of the greatest political writers and philosophers during the revolutionary era and a patriot far ahead of his time. He served in the Continental Army, helped to establish the nation's oldest and most honored abolition society, designed and patented a distinctively unique design in single-span bridge technology, and advocated for old-age pensions, public education, and much more.

Margaret Downey, president of TPMA, said, "A friend to humanity and a foe to tyrants, Thomas Paine championed the rights of the 'common' people and believed emphatically in the dignity and rights of all human beings, which drove him to challenge the divine rights of kings, forever changing the course of history."

Robyn Blumner, TPMA vice-president, stated, "Memorializing Thomas Paine with a monument in Washington, D.C. should unite us as Americans. In the throes of the revolution Paine inspired us to conceive of ourselves as a 'nation,' and not just any nation but one built on the ideas of the Enlightenment, where the people govern themselves. Ultimately, we all became beneficiaries of that common inheritance."

Annie Laurie Gaylor, secretary of TPMA, said, "Were Thomas Paine alive today, he would surely be saying 'These are the times that try men's *and* women's souls.' Thomas Paine's pro-liberty, democratic vision is the antidote for our fractured nation."

TPMA board members were thrilled with the news. Following are their comments. Author, producer, and director **Ann Druyan** stated, "Our nation today, and the one we hope to become, would be unrecognizable to our Founding Fathers, with one spectacular exception — Thomas Paine. Through his love of reason, his bravery, and his thrilling prose, Thomas Paine was the genius who created the dream of America. May the future monument created in his honor be a token of our renewed commitment to fulfill it."

Actor, director, and secular advocate **John de Lancie** said, "The monument's legislative endorsement is a great achievement and by so many. And who will benefit the most? The hundreds of thousands over the years who will see the monument dedicated to Thomas Paine and be reminded of his greatness — for a moment, they will bask in the pride of being an American, and then, hopefully, go back to the daily struggle of keeping our country free for everyone."

Professor of history and chair of University of North Carolina at Charlotte Africana Studies **Christopher Cameron** stated, "Thomas Paine was one of the most significant Founding Fathers in a number of ways, especially in his early and consistent condemnation

of slavery. Shortly after publishing *Common Sense* in 1776, Paine authored an antislavery essay and remained active in the abolitionist movement for the next 30 years, supporting Pennsylvania's 1780 gradual abolition law, joining the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1787, and opposing the British slave trade in the 1790s. For this and so much more, he is worthy of a fitting monument in Washington, D.C."

Actor and writer **Ian Ruskin** said, "Thomas Paine came into my life when I wrote a one-man play about him, and what an eye-opening experience it has been. I discovered not only a man who sparked the American Revolution with *Common Sense* and changed the world with his pen, but who saw the potential for a country of true democracy, equality, and justice for all its people. His vision can inspire us all as we continue the journey he helped begin almost 250 years ago."

Image Credit:
National Portrait Gallery portrait of Thomas Paine by **Laurent Dabos**, circa 1792

Author, actor, and comedian **Julia Sweeney** stated, "Every American should know about Thomas Paine and his essential role in our nation's founding. I couldn't be happier that this monument endorsement has been passed and made law. And I couldn't be prouder to be part of the team who helped make this essential monument realized."

Actor, singer, writer, and teacher **Marnie Mosiman de Lancie** stated, "During the Christmas of 1776, as the Continental troops camped in misery at Valley Forge, Thomas Paine wrote 'These are the times that try men's souls. Let it be told to the future world, that in the depth of winter, the country, alarmed at a common danger, came forth to meet and to repulse it.' While we usher in the New Year, let us also rededicate ourselves to retaining our hard-won democracy."

Frances Chiu, author, editor, and educator said "I am overjoyed to hear of the decision to endorse a monument of Thomas Paine, arguably America's greatest visionary. More than any other contemporary, Paine grasped the importance of political and economic justice. He was not only among the first to propose American independence and a fully representative government in *Common Sense*, but also the first to lay the foundations of the modern welfare state including universal suffrage, assistance for the poor, and 'Social Security' in his book *Rights of Man*."

On January 29, 2023 TPMA hosted a Thomas Paine Birthdate and Proclamation Celebration event. Cosponsors were the Freethought Society, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Center For Inquiry, and the Secular Student Alliance. TPMA thanks **Kevin Bolling-Hey** for working as the Zoom webinar technician. The sponsors also thank **Christine Magallanes Jones** for her musical contributions and **Hyder Shah** for all his editing work on the final film.

Congressman Raskin shared updates on the Congressional front along with a heartfelt welcome. Congresswoman Spartz also delivered a welcome.

The keynote speaker was Professor Emeritus of History at the University of London **Greg Claeys**. His speech, "Thomas Paine's Collected Works: A New Edition," provided an update about efforts to uncover previously unattributed Paine writings.

During the event TPMA board members each read a Thomas Paine Day proclamation or resolution as an example of how one can be written to honor his life and work.

Thomas Paine Day is celebrated on June 8th every year. In Europe his date of death is used as an official time to reflect upon and honor his life accomplishments. Paine died on June 8, 1809.

The 2023 June 8th Thomas Paine Day will be enriched when more proclamations are written and approved by governors, mayors, and city councils.

Paine expert and President of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association **Gary Berton** participated in the question and answer portion of the event. The information he shared about Paine was entertaining and informative.

World-renowned Pennsylvania sculptor **Zenos Frudakis** answered questions about the Paine statue he has been working on for several years.

Celebratory music during the event included selections from a new musical, *The Crossing*. The play places Paine and his *American Crisis* writings front and center. *The Crossing* was written by **Jason Huza** and **John Allen Watts**. Three songs from the play were featured: "These Are The Days" is a song that opens and closes *The Crossing*; "On The Wheels of Time" is a duet sung by the characters Elizabeth and Abigail, and "Rights Intrinsic" showcases Thomas Paine's vision for a new world.

The recording of the January 29th webinar can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/Okf9uFVM0B8

When the Thomas Paine monument project and the formation of TPMA were announced in 2021 during an online fundraising event, **Todd Stiefel**, president and founder of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation tripled all donations received during that event. His generous pledge and triple match made the monument a reality. No government money will be used for the creation of the Thomas Paine monument. Stiefel was thrilled with the presidential approval of House Bill 6720 and said, "I'm so proud of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association team. This project seemed like a long shot just a year ago, but we have secured the legacy of the man whose words sustained the American Revolution."

The hard work to actually build and install a monument to honor the life and work of Paine has begun. Volunteers to help with research and fundraising are needed. Donations are also needed to fulfill all government monument requirements. To volunteer and/or donate, please note the following contact information:

Thomas Paine Memorial Association
P. O. Box 448
Madison, WI 53701-0448

Website: https://thomaspainememorial.org

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ThomasPaineMA/

Photos from the Thomas Paine Birthdate Proclamation Celebration

Congressman **Jamie Raskin** (D-MD 8th District) shared updates on the congressional front along with a heartfelt welcome and a brief description of why **Thomas Paine** should have a memorial in the Washington, D. C. area.

Congresswoman **Victoria Spartz** (R-IN 5th District) shared a few sentiments about Paine.

Pictured left is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of London **Greg Claeys**. His speech, "Thomas Paine's Collected Works: A New Edition," provided an update about efforts to uncover previously unattributed Paine writings.

Pictured right is **John Allen Watts**, the co-writer of the new musical *The Crossing*. See the link below to learn more:

www.thecrossingmusical.com

Pictured above left is president and CEO of the Center For Inquiry **Robyn Blumner** reading the 1996 Thomas Paine Day Bordentown, New Jersey proclamation. Blumner is also the vice-president of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association.

A 2014 City of Philadelphia Thomas Paine Day proclamation, signed by former Mayor **Michael A. Nutter**, was read by author and educator **Christopher Cameron**, pictured above middle.

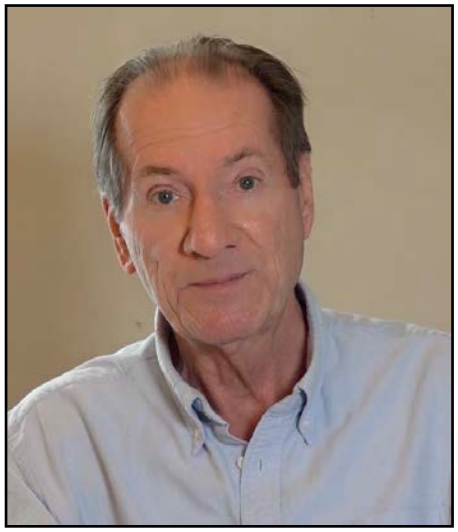
Pictured above right is author and educator **Frances Chiu.** She read the 1997 Thomas Paine Day Cherry Hill, New Jersey proclamation.

Pictured left is **Margaret Downey**, president of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA). She read a 1994 City of Philadelphia City Council Resolution.

Pictured right is **Ann Druyan**, a TPMA board member. She read a 2018 Pennsylvania House of Representatives Thomas Paine Day Resolution.

Pictured above left is **Annie Laurie Gaylor,** co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the secretary of TPMA. She read the 2009 Thomas Paine Day Urbana, Illinois proclamation.

Pictured above right are actors **John de Lancie** and his wife **Marnie Mosiman de Lancie**. They read proclamations from the cities of Lancaster and York, Pennsylvania, which were signed in 1996 to recognize June 8th as Thomas Paine Day.



Pictured above left is actor **Ian Ruskin**. He read a New Rochelle, New York Thomas Paine Day proclamation which was recently submitted to the office of the Mayor. Hopefully, the proclamation will be passed and presented on June 8, 2023.

Author, monologist, actor, and comedian **Julia Sweeney** is pictured above middle. She read a 1999 City of Philadelphia Thomas Paine Day proclamation signed by former Mayor **Edward G. Rendell**.

Freedom From Religion Foundation's Director of Governmental Affairs **Mark Dann** is pictured above right talking about the passage of House Bill 6720 and what was involved in securing legislative sponsorship.

More Photos from the Thomas Paine Birthdate Proclamation Celebration

Singing “These are the Days” from *The Crossing* are (left to right) **Neil Totton**, **Jonathan Mousset**, **Jim Schubin**, **Aiden Briggs**, and **Tess Primack**. The song opens and closes the musical production. To stay informed about the production of The Crossing, please visit: https://www.thecrossingmusical.com/

Performing “On the Wheels of Time” are **Katie Dixon** (as the character Abigail) and Primack (as the character Elizabeth).

Gavin Esham is pictured performing as Paine as he sings “Rights Intrinsic.”

Escham also appeared as Paine in the performance of the song “These are the Days.”

Pictured left is Pennsylvania sculptor extraordinaire, **Zenos Frudakis**. Presently, the statue he created of Paine is seven-feet-high. Depending on the area secured for the monument, the statue may change in height and other bronze items may be added, including a desk, chair, and quotations engraved in marble.

Gary Berton is pictured right. He is a Paine expert and former board member of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association. Berton was available during the event to answer questions pertaining to Paine’s life and legacy.

The 2022 Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform Conference Report

On Saturday, November 12, 2022, the Freethought Society and the American Humanist Association cosponsored an all-day conference to address the subject of prison reform. The subject matter was developed by the Southern California Secular Coalition (a committee of FS). Committee members are **Dave Rice**, **Judy Flattery**, **Rhett Kuseski**, and **Margaret Downey**. Technical assistance was provided by **Hyder Shah**. Music was provided by **Abraham Steven Mackey** (*We're All in This Together* and *Imagine*), **Shelley Segal** (*Saved*, *Gratitude*, and *Afterlife*), and **Dan Barker** (*Battle of Church & State*, *Friendly Neighborhood Atheist*, and *Just Say 'No' to Religion*).

The event was presented on Zoom and at two live event locations. Rice hosted a Santa Ana, California site at the Orange County Human Relations building and Flattery hosted the Goleta, California site at Live Oak Unitarian Congregation.

Speakers from Europe and audience members in attendance from all over the world made the event an international gathering.

The all-day conference examined the issue of how our society treats incarceration. Speakers included those with "lived experience." The goal of the conference was to better understand the causes, effects, and challenges of the current system established in the United States, and to review ways to reform it from a humanistic perspective. A wide range of expert speakers provided valuable and helpful insights as to how we can all become advocates for a better, more humane, and effective incarceration system.

Adam Conover, the creator and host of the TV series *Adam Ruins Everything*, kicked off the event with a welcome message in which he encouraged the audience to work for prison reform. Conover has examined several aspects of the criminal justice system. He is known and respected for contrasting common beliefs and misconceptions with actual data. Episodes noting prison reform include *Adam Ruins Cops*, *Adam Ruins A Murder*, *Adam Ruins Guns*, *Adam Ruins Prison*, *Adam Ruins Drugs*, and *Adam Ruins Forensic Science.*

Below are the names of the presenters, their professional designations, and their presentation titles. Recordings of the entire Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform conference is available at: bit.ly/LifeInPrison

Nadya Dutchin
Executive Director, American Humanist Association
"Humanism and Incarceration Reform"

Michael Golding
Chief Psychiatrist
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
"A Dangerous Culture of Incarceration:
Physical and Mental Health in Prison"

Jon Guy
Author of *Think Straight: An Owner's Manual for the Mind*
"The Prison Experience"

Jordan Hyatt
Associate Professor at Drexel University
Gina Clark
Superintendent of the Little Scandinavia Prison
(Hyatt spoke in conjunction with Clark)
"Can Scandinavian Principles of Humanity Work in American Prisons? Preliminary Lessons from Pennsylvania"

Paul Larsson
Professor of Criminology and
Founder of Law Enforcement Action Partnership
"Drugs and Punishment in an Exceptional Country"

Lawrence Larry
Prison Reform Advocate and former prisoner
"Inside Out"

Denise Gragg
Public Defender in Southern California
"Why Our Current Carceral System is Counter-Productive"

Fritzi Horstman
Founder of The Compassion Prison Project
"Adverse Childhood Experiences Behind Bars"

J. Anderson Thomson
Evolutionary Psychiatrist
"Free Will and the Crimes of the Criminal Justice System"

JoAnn Mermis
Freedom to Choose Volunteer
Benny Gutierrez
Founder of Ascending Scholars and Rebound Scholars
(Mermis spoke in conjunction with Gutierrez)
"Freedom to Choose Project: Change From the Inside"

Margaret Downey
Founder and President of The Freethought Society
"Throwing the Book at Them:
Shelving Nontheist Literature in Prison Libraries"

Shelley Winner-Dupre
Restorative Justice Advocate and former prisoner
"From Prison to Microsoft"

Mona Minton
General Manager of Social Services at Neighborhood House
Andrea Dauber-Griffin
Neighborhood House Association Sociologist
(Minton spoke in conjunction with Griffin)
"Reentry is a Journey:
Challenges and Chances When Leaving Incarceration"

Elizabeth Cavell
Associate Counsel, Freedom From Religion Foundation
"Imagine No Religion:
Towards a More Secular Criminal Justice System"

Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform Speakers

Nadya Dutchin, pictured above left, has more than 10 years of experience in the fields of community engagement, strategic partnership, youth program development, multi-method fundraising, and change management.

Michael Golding, pictured above middle, is the chief psychiatrist for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and is a member of the American Board of Psychiatry & Neurology Psychiatry.

Jon Guy, pictured above right, is a published author and science communicator who writes about critical thinking, science, and philosophy.

Gina Clark (far left photo) is Superintendent of the Little Scandinavia State Correctional Institution in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Jordon Hyatt (photo at left) is the director of the Center for Public Policy and an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology and Justice Studies at Drexel University.

Together, Clark and Hyatt addressed the question, “Can Scandinavian principles of humanity work in American Prisons?”

After their presentation, it was clear that applying Scandinavian principles within prison reforms will make for a better society.

Paul Larsson (pictured right) is the former head of the section for analysis and prevention in the Norwegian Police Directorate.

Larsson has been a professor at the Police University College in Oslo since 2007 and was a Guest Professor at Linnaeus University for three years (2010-2013).

Larsson is the author of several books in the field of economic crime, organized crime, and police studies. He is also the author of the article *From Medicine to Morals and Back Again? The Changing Perceptions of the ‘Drug Problem’ in Norway since 1965.*

Margaret Downey (pictured left) is the president of the Freethought Society (FS). FS's committee "Literature Placement for Prisoners" provides freethought, atheist, and humanist literature to prison libraries.

Shelley Winner-Dupre is pictured right. She struggled with addiction in her younger years. She was arrested for selling drugs and sentenced to four years in prison. Now free from addiction, and incar-ceraton, she is a Restorative Justice Advocate working to reduce crime and recidivism.

Mona Minton (pictured left) is an Advanced Certified Recovery Coach. She is the General Manager of Social Services at The Neighborhood House Association. Minton is dedicated to mental and physical health, wellness, and family advo-cacy. She specializes in services that target drug and alcohol dependency, domestic violence, sexual offenses, trauma, adolescence support, and mental health.

Pictured right is **Andrea Dauber-Griffin**. She works at The Neighborhood House Association where she oversees "Project In Reach" (a reentry initiative that serves incarcerated women and men living with mild to serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders) in San Diego County deten-tion facilities. Griffin is a member of San Diego Association of Governments, and is serving as a Commissioner on the Commission of Police Practices in San Diego, California.

Elizabeth Cavell (pictured right) is an Associate Counsel at Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), where she has worked to protect the separation of state and church since 2013. Before joining FFRF she was a Deputy Public Defender in Colorado.

Cavell is a 2009 graduate of Tulane Law School, where she worked in the Criminal Justice Clinic.

Cavell is one of four secular women on the podcasting team of "We Dissent." Each month they discuss developments affecting the separation of church and state in the United States Supreme Court, as well as in the lower Federal courts. We Dissent also highlights the advocacy work being done to help atheists and other nonreligious people outside of the courtroom. We Dissent is the only legal podcast for atheists and agnostics hosted completely by women lawyers. The podcast link is:

https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/we-dissent/id1620185995

Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform Speakers

Lawrence Larry (pictured left) was sentenced to 16-years-to-life in a California prison. He obtained his GED in prison and took advantage of many opportunities, including drug treatment and anger management. Larry highlighted his amazing journey at the Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform one-day conference.

Pictured right is **Denise M. Gragg**. She has been a Southern California public defender and trial attorney for over 30 years. She has represented both juveniles and adults charged with crimes ranging from misdemeanors to homicides. For the last 25 years she has specialized in capital defense and has taught courses on subjects ranging from forensics to psychiatry.

Pictured above left is **Fritzi Horstman**. She is the founder and Executive Director of The Compassion Prison Project, which is dedicated to bringing compassion, childhood trauma awareness, and creative inspiration to all men and women living and working in prisons. She is also a Grammy award winning producer for her work on HBO's *The Defiant Ones*.

J. Anderson Thomson (pictured above right) is a retired forensic psychiatrist with 42 years of experience in the criminal and civil legal systems. He is currently a Staff Psychiatrist at the University of Virginia Student Health Service. Thomson is the author of *Why We Believe In God(s)*.

JoAnn Mermis (pictured at far left) is an advocate for the Freedom to Choose Project. She has served the organization as a board member and volunteer.

Benny Gutierrez (pictured left) founded Ascending Scholars, a program at Butte College for formerly incarcerated students to provide a network of support in their pursuit of a degree. He is also the curator of Greenhouse Studio, a Chico, California community gallery that elevates the work of local artists, as well as those who are currently and formerly incarcerated.

Together, Mermis and Gutierrez presented the value of the Freedom to Choose Project. Gutierrez is just one of many success stories of the program.

Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform Volunteers

Pictured right is **Dave Rice.** He is the chair of the Freethought Society committee Southern California Secular Coalition. He served as the lead organizer of their 2022 all-day conference. Rice is also president of the United Nations Association-Orange County chapter of the United States of America's United Nations Association. He also serves on the boards of the The World Affairs Council and The League of Minority Voters.

Margaret Downey is pictured below left. She wrote the conference script, served as the timekeeper, processed the speaker payments, finalized the accounting, and wrote the conference report.

Judy Flattery is pictured right. She is president of Humanist Society of Santa Barbara and the editor of the group's newsletter.

Flattery researched potential speakers, communicated with them, collected their information, and was an onsite conference host.

Rhett Kuseski (pictured left) helped plan and implement the conference. He was the Zoom technician for the master internet feed and acted as a cohost.

Pictured right is **Hyder Shah**. He processed and prepared the break and lunch slideshows, expertly synchronizing them to music.

The Southern California Secular Coalition is grateful to the Freethought Society and the American Humanist Association for sponsoring the all-day hybrid Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform conference.

Use of the following facilities was greatly appreciated, allowing the hosting of a live audience in two California locations:

Orange County Human Relations
1801 East Edinger Avenue
Santa Ana, California 92705

Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Goleta
820 N Fairview Avenue
Goleta, California 93117

FS Signs Anti-Blasphemy Support Letter

In January 2023, the Alliance of Religions***** circulated a letter supporting a resolution addressing blasphemy, apostasy, and coercive conversion. House Bill 512 was introduced by Members of Congress Jamie Raskin (D-MD 8th District) and Mark Meadows (R-NC 11th District).

The United States House of Representatives passed House Resolution 512 by a vote of 386 – 3 on December 7, 2020.

House Resolution 512 is now making its way through the United States Senate. It calls on the President and Department of State to:

(1) make the repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws a priority in bilateral relationships between the United States and countries that have such laws;

(2) designate countries that enforce such laws as countries of particular concern for religious freedom; and

(3) oppose efforts by the United Nations to implement an "international anti-blasphemy norm" in addition to calling on all states that enforce blasphemy laws to amend or repeal them, and release all those imprisoned pursuant to them.

LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE RESOLUTION 512

Dear Congressman Raskin,

As leading advocates for religious freedom and human rights, we support the continued freedom of belief around the world following the Covid-19 pandemic. We encourage the protection and promotion of internationally recognized human rights regarding the freedom to choose and practice one's own belief, and condemn laws concerning penalties for blasphemy, the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence to a deity, or sacred objects, or toward something considered sacred or inviolable; apostasy, speech or actions that might "defame" or "insult" religious sentiments; and deprogramming, whereby individuals are systematically indoctrinated with conventional values through coercion, violence, or manipulation.

Blasphemy and apostasy laws, as well as deprogramming efforts, remain practiced in present times under the guidance or indifference of governments throughout the world.

Countries with laws against blasphemy, apostasy, or that tolerate deprogramming display a tendency to have severe governmental restrictions on religion, and to experience more social hostilities based on religion, than countries that do not have such laws and practices.

We are witnessing such issues persisting in many other areas of the world, including Turkey's suppression of religious freedoms and freedoms of speech, re-education camps in Xinjiang, China, as well as persecutions of the Falun Gong, South Korea's continued tolerance of coercive conversion practices under the guise of "family matters," kidnapping and forced marriages of girls in Pakistan, among others.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Human rights must be at the forefront of our thoughts as we respond to the evolving state of world affairs. These include the freedoms of association, expression, and freedom from invasion of privacy, and the freedom from practices such as coercive conversion, which infringes upon the right of the freedom of religion and belief. Coercive Conversion is the unjust, manipulative, and forceful pursuit to change someone's beliefs unwillingly, and often goes hand-in-hand with kidnapping, physical and verbal abuse, and restrictions on freedom of belief and speech.

In view of international discriminations and violations of human rights, we ask for a resolution reaffirming the condemnation of blasphemy and apostasy laws, and including language regarding coercive conversion practices.

*****Alliance of Religions (AOR) is a non-profit and non-governmental organization registered under the United Nations Department of Public Information. AOR works in interfaith arenas through scriptural dialogues and studies on a weekly basis, as well as actively engaging in advocacy for human religious rights through legislation. AOR aims to bring greater religious understanding and peace and transcends all borders of nation, race, religion, and ideology.

Pictured left is **Ali (Makan) Davari**, who is currently imprisoned in Iran. This 19 year old is charged with "waging war against God" after his arrest for defending women's rights in Iran.

The Iranian government began executing Iranian protesters who are demanding basic freedoms and human rights.

Two protesters have already been executed. Davari may be next. He is the only son of a single mother suffering from leukemia, Davari was arrested during the first week of the current uprising in Iran while returning home from a gym. This happened when he encountered and tried to protect a group of women who were being assaulted by the regimes' plainclothes forces.

Human Rights activists inside Iran are reporting that his first trial took place on December 24, 2022. The charge of "waging war against God" (Moharebeh) carries the death penalty. Similar to other cases where defendants were sentenced to death, Davari not only lacked access to independent lawyers but also, given the history of those cases, he was very likely tortured or mistreated by authorities to extract a false confession that would fit the regime's narrative.

Change.org is hoping to gather hundreds of thousands of signatures to bring the world's attention to this atrocity and potentially stop Davari's unjust detention and looming execution. Sign the petition at the link below to raise the voices of people unfairly facing a sentence of death:

https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-execution-of-makan-davari

Technology and Science

by Herb Silverman

Technology is our present and our future. Young people need to and, for the most part, are embracing it. Being tech-savvy is becoming a necessity for job seekers.

Schools must educate students for this reality so they can transition into the work world. And workers need to be able to master new technology, expect frequent updates/changes to software, and learn how to stay on top of those advances.

Technological improvements had usually come about by chance, trial and error, or inspiration. The modern scientific enterprise matured in the Enlightenment and concerned itself primarily with fundamental questions about the natural world. Research and development directed toward immediate technical application arose during the Industrial Revolution and became commonplace in the twentieth century.

Science deals with theories, principles, and laws, while technology deals with products, processes, and designs. Science has helped us gain considerable knowledge of the universe such that we can make accurate predictions on future outcomes. Technology simplifies our work by providing us with products that help us get better results in less time.

A downside to technology is that people can, and often do, filter out opposing points of view, leading to confirmation bias. Another problem is that folks often become obsessed with digital media and can't imagine a social life without it. Too many seem not only unwilling, but functionally unable to be, without media links to the world. Without digital ties, people can feel unconnected even to those who are close by. This sounds to me a lot like an addiction. The one thing I like when I see young folks walking with their heads down and thumbs busily tapping on phones is that they no longer feel the need to have a hand free to smoke tobacco. At least technology is not a lethal addiction like tobacco can be.

Most tech-savvy people understand that the technology they use was created through science, but they may not be interested in learning the underlying science. That's fine with me. Similarly, people feel safe flying on airplanes without knowing the science behind air travel. On the other hand, I think every educated person should have a rudimentary knowledge of science. I sometimes hear intellectuals, even within academe, matter-of-factly say, "I know nothing about science." To me, this is comparable to saying "I can't read or write."

Religious fundamentalists do not accept the parts of science that conflict with their so-called holy books, sometimes referring to science as "anti-religion." For many people, it's easier to ignore science and prepare for an afterlife, while being comfortably clueless about the workings in this life. But in searching for truths science does not try to debunk religious myths, though it often does as a consequence of scientific findings. Much of what we know about the age of the Earth, cosmology, archaeology, biology, and history conflicts with a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Just about all evolution deniers are theists. Even theists who accept evolution try to stick their god somewhere into the process, though biologists would never do that. These religious people are creationists because they believe their god created the universe and life on Earth, but evolution is a completely natural process with no supernatural entity needed. People, however, can acquire technological know-how without questioning supernatural dogma.

Religious people accept some science that improves their quality of life, like antibiotics, television, microwaves, and so forth. Often, they don't know there is basic science behind these conveniences. Antibiotics, for instance, is based on evolution.

If humanity had continued to apply religious belief without solid physical knowledge, how far would we have gotten? History books describe such a period as "The Dark Ages." Fortunately, religion is on the decline in societies that promote science.

The term "elites" arouses a negative feeling in many people, however the word elite is defined. Conservative leaders often attack the elite. Scientists are framed as part of that elite because they have knowledge and expertise that most people don't have. Science deniers often don't want to hear about climate change, vaccines, evolution, or the fossil record. They prefer to believe it's all a gigantic hoax.

I'm hopeful for the future. I think we need to train more people as science popularizers, and that scientists should become more adept at written and verbal communication for the general public. Some of the best science popularizers have been **Albert Einstein**, **Isaac Asimov**, **Richard Feynman**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Stephen Hawking**, **Stephen Jay Gould**, **Carl Sagan**, **Bill Nye**, and **Neil deGrasse Tyson**. Through their appealing personalities and convincing evidence, they have shown that it's possible to excite and educate the public about scientific concepts.

Though I'm a leftist, I sometimes hear from leftists with whom I disagree. Here's an example:

> *"The truth is unique to each of us since we decide individually what we consider to be truth. Every human being is unique and will see the world differently. We construct our own realities."*

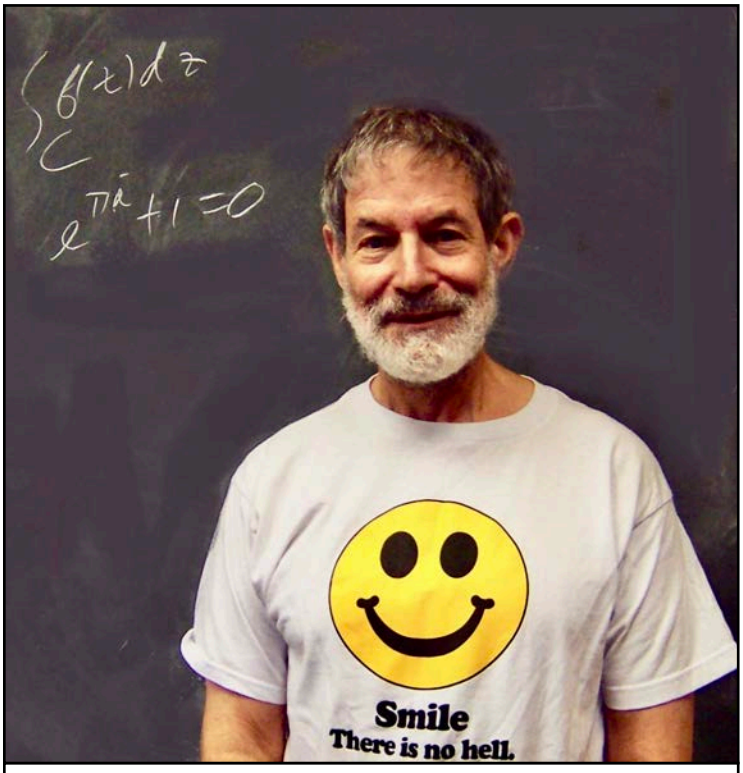
No, truth is different from an opinion, and deciding something is true does not make it so. People can say the Earth is flat, but I accept the scientific evidence that it is not. Here's another example of false reasoning:

> *"To be intellectually honest, you can't prove the non-existence of God any more than the existence. Therefore, there is a certain amount of 'faith' in both positions."*

I do not understand how someone can profess "faith" (belief without evidence) in things that are shown by science to be demonstrably false. We can't prove or disprove the existence of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, but I would not say there is a certain amount of "faith" taken in both positions. Under certain circumstances, I'm comfortable concluding that an absence of evidence is evidence of absence.

Some on the left with whom I disagree also support homeopathy, are anti-vaxxers, and anti-GMO. A few consider science and mathematics to be anti-feminist and representative of patriarchal oppression because science and mathematics are not subjective or open to interpretation and different ways of thinking. I've also heard complaints that science is not democratic. This is true! As **Anatole France** said, "If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing."

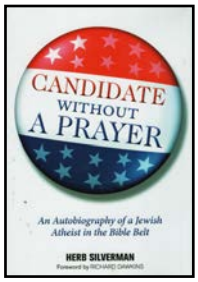
Call me undemocratic, but I think this is the bottom line: Opinions of the uninformed shouldn't count. You can feel free to disagree, but be prepared to show me the evidence.



Pictured above is **Herb Silverman**. He is a regular contributor to T*he Freethought Society News*. His past submissions can be found at the following Freethought Society website page:

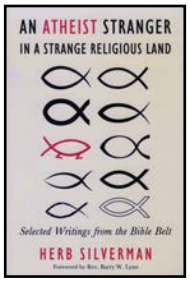
https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/

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



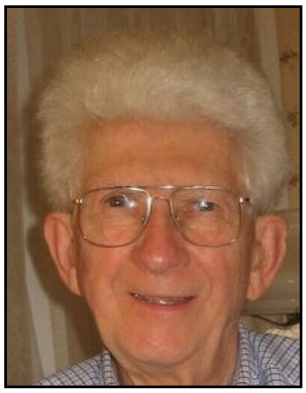
Silverman welcomes communication from readers. Contact him at the following email address:

silvermanh@cofc.edu



A Tribute to Alan B. Palmer

(excerpts from the *News Journal* obituary)



Alan B. Palmer was born in Syracuse, New York in 1934. He received his BA and a PhD from Syracuse University. He served in the United States Army as a Soldier-Scientist at the Army Chemical Center in Edgewater, Maryland.

In 1963 Palmer joined the DuPont Company. In his 28-year career with DuPont he held supervisory and management positions in research, technical service, manufacturing, sales, safety, health, and environmental concerns. Upon retirement Palmer consulted in the environmental field with DuPont.

In 1959 Palmer married **Yvonne Matoushek** of Poyntelle, Pennsylvania and they reached the 50-year anniversary mark in 2009. Unfortunately, she succumbed to multiple sclerosis that same year. He subsequently married **Linda Mahan** of West Chester, Pennsylvania in 2010. Mahan predeceased him in 2015.

Palmer enjoyed reading, birding, travel, and the performing arts — particularly symphonic music, opera and ballet. He was a subscriber to the Pennsylvania/Philadelphia Ballet for over 25 years. He was also an early supporter of the BalletX company and was proud of their accomplishments over the past 17 years.

In addition, he supported many nonprofit organizations in the fields of women's health and safety, inner city childhood development, and conservation. Palmer was an active secular humanist supporting the Center for Inquiry, Freedom from Religion Foundation, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Palmer was a Life Member of the Freethought Society (FS).

Margaret Downey a longtime friend to Palmer, said that some of her favorite memories of Palmer include his participation in the grand openings of Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Centers, his attendance at **Robert Green Ingersoll**-themed events, and his unwavering support of the FS *The Tree of Knowledge* display.

Sally Flynn, a board member of FS and friend to Palmer said, "Al and I first met as counter-protesters at the Planned Parenthood clinic in West Chester. He was very creative and helped design our 'I AM PRO CHOICE' signs." She also recalled that Palmer attended a large atheist rally in Washington, D.C. dressed as Uncle Sam. "The crowed loved it," she noted.

He loved playing bridge with his core group of friends but also promoted evenings at the ballet and orchestra, tailgating at the Hagley Fireworks, dining at his favorite restaurant San Nicola, and enjoying birds and nature.

Palmer died at his home in West Chester on October 5, 2022. He leaves behind no survivors but many very special friends who will miss his kindness, generosity, and unparalleled enthusiasm for life.

Palmer left his body to Humanity Gifts Registry for research or teaching use. He was an example to all of us as a life well lived in reason, kindness, and fairness. ◘

Humanism is the Best Future for Haiti

by Billy Almoza

August 14, 2021- December 14, 2022: It has been 16 months already since a magnitude 7.3 earthquake devastated the South Region of Haiti. People here wait for the aid promised by the central government — but it never arrives.

The people of Haiti have been living through extremely difficult times for generations, but this last decade marks the greatest disappointment. The country is plagued with corruption, theft, kidnapping, the rise of gangs, a high cost of living, environmental problems (the deforestation that is being done systematically across the country), and a rise in fuel prices.

After the earthquake of August 14, 2021, people throughout Haiti — especially in the Southern Region near the epicenter of the quake — have been left in the dark as the situation becomes more complicated. Thousands of families still live in makeshift tents located in inadequately supplied camps. Many people are starving, children are dying, young girls are engaging in sexual activity in return for meager dishes of food, and they are also exposed to daily sexual violence. The infant birth rate is increasing day by day, with teen pregnancy soaring.

These suffering people do not receive any visits from the government officials. They do, however, receive religious visits every week from missionaries who preach resignation to them.

Where are we going in this country where gangs rule? What future is there for a country with more than 100,000 churches that preach resignation, but no more than 50 benchmark vocational schools? What future can we cultivate when national production does not exist? Indeed, what future is there for Haiti?

The organization Mouvement de la Jeunesse pour la Liberte de Pensee en Haiti (MOJELIPH) has been watching the horrifying situation unfold and now we ask for our freethought partners to help us. MOJELIPH is a secular organization working to spread science, freethinking, and rationality in Haiti.

MOJELIPH is working to build a real future by bringing freethought to uplift the people. With reason, compassion, science-based solutions, and financial solidarity from our connections, Humanism could help create a path out of the darkness for Haiti.

Thanks to GO Humanity***** and our great friend **Margaret Downey** at the Freethought Society (FS)**,** we have received funding to help a few dozen hungry families by distributing food and hygiene kits to them in a dignified and respectful way.

Given the immediate seriousness of the situation in Haiti, MOJELIPH seeks to set up a community restaurant that could feed a few hundred of the most vulnerable families rather than only a few dozen. We need the continued support of partners such as GO Humanity, FS, and donors like you — humanists who wish to help with reason rather than religion, dignity rather than degradation.

Donations are being processed by GO Humanity and we thank Senior Strategist **Seráh Blain** and Downey for their help with the writing of this article. French is my primary language.

This article includes a link to GO Humanity's donation page setup specifically for MOJELIPH. Please consider donating:

https://gohumanity.world/team/mouvement-de-la-jeunesse-pour-la-liberte-de-la-pensee-en-haiti-mojeliph/

*****GO Humanity's mission is to end poverty and hunger; promote good health and well-being; and foster employment opportunities and economic growth in ways that exemplify humanist values.

GO Humanity is a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation. Its mission is to unite the humanist community in volunteer and charitable efforts, and to advocate for compassionate action throughout the world.

Donations may be doubled through some employers. To see if your employer offers a matching gift program and to find out how to participate, please visit the below link:

https://gohumanity.world/double-donation/

Pictured above is **Billy Almoza**. He was born in Haiti. Almoza studied communications at the University d'Etat in the Faculté Sciences Humaines. He founded Free Thinkers of Haiti in 2010, but the name of the group had to change in order to be registered with Haitian Ministry Social Affairs. The name Mouvement de la Jeunesse pour la Liberte de Pensee en Haiti (MOJELIPH) is French Creole in order to comply with registration rules. Almoza works with many other MOJELIPH volunteers.

Freethought Society Four-Month 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.ftsociety.org/freethought-society-code-of-conduct/**.

March

Freethought Society (FS) board members will be working to present "Pop-Up Events" for March, April, May, and June.

To be notified of special Zoom presentations, live or online meetings, and other pop-up events, please join the FS Meetup. The link to become a Meetup member is below:

https://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/

The current number of FS Meetup members is 2,159. Join now to help us reach and surpass our goal of 3,000 members! Please ask your like-minded friends to join as well.

April 6-9

The Freethought Society has no scheduled events for April, 2023. Instead we highly recommend attending the American Atheist (AA) National Convention taking place in Phoenix, Arizona.

AA is proud to present one of the most diverse and compelling lineups of speakers, activists, community leaders, academics, musicians, and artists that you'll see at any atheist event in America. As always, AA is committed to bringing brand new stories you've never heard to the stage, including international activists, poets, politicians, and much more. Not only that, you'll have the chance to reconnect with old friends, make new ones, and have an amazing time!

On Thursday night AA holds social events before the official start of the convention. The "Pub Quiz" event has become an annual tradition where you can meet fellow convention attendees, win prizes, and show just how smart you are! Later that night AA will hold a "Charity Game Night." AA will donate the proceeds to a local cause. In 2022, AA raised over $44,000 for a local abortion fund!

The convention officially kicks off on Friday morning featuring dynamic speakers, informative panels and hands-on workshops designed to kick your activism into high gear.

Friday evening attendees will enjoy the AA "Comedy Show" where you are sure to have a rollicking good time!

On Saturday the convention continues with more amazing speakers and breakout sessions. That night, AA will host an "Awards Dinner" where outstanding activists, organizers, advocates, and leaders will be recognize and celebrated.

During the Saturday VIP Reception convention attendees can meet speakers, presenters, board members, and AA staff at a special mixer featuring an open bar, appetizers, and great discussion opportunities.

Sunday the convention concludes with a "Two Hands Working Service Project" in which AA will be partnering with "The Outreach Program," a nonprofit organization that works to provide safe water, food, medical care, and education to those in need in the United States and abroad.

Attendees can also take advantage of a volunteer project of packing 50,000 meals for a Phoenix food bank.

Convention tickets are now on sale at:

https://convention.atheists.org/ticket-pricing

AA hotel blocks have sold out at every conference since 2011, so make sure to reserve your accommodations now. More hotel information can be found at:

https://convention.atheists.org/venue

May 5-7

The Freethought Society has no scheduled events for May, 2023. Instead we highly recommend attending the American Humanist Association's (AHA) 82nd Annual Conference taking place May 5-7, 2023. The "Crossroads and Collective Futures" conference takes place in Denver, Colorado.

Join AHA leaders, activists, and community members as we connect, learn, and build the future of humanism. The event will be held at the Renaissance Denver Central Park Hotel and will include an online component for virtual guests.

The conference schedule is still in the works, so stay informed by visiting: americanhumanist.org/conference

June 8

Save the date! A June 8, 2023 Thomas Paine Day event is being planned. It will take place in Philadelphia as well as in other parts of the country. Details about these events will be featured in the next issue of *The Freethought Society News*, Meetup, and other social media. Please let us know if you, or a group you belong to, plan to celebrate Thomas Paine Day on June 8, 2023:

margaret@ThomasPaineMemorial.org

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.

Name: _____Email: _____

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)