



The Freethought Society News

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

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for review by the
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Protesting Hobby Lobby and the Supreme Court Decision

by Margaret Downey

What does an activist do when United States Supreme Court Justices decide that a closely-held, for-profit corporation has the right to deny certain medical technologies to their insured employees due to its religious beliefs? The answer is, protest and protest loudly!

Protesting alone can't change the decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, but owners of corporations who are considering the decision a victory can be sent a message, loud and clear. The court of public opinion may convince owners, stockholders and employees that the decision is unfair. Refusing advanced medical treatments based on religious objections is devastating, and in this case to women in particular.

Hobby Lobby owners the Green family (David, Barbara, Mart and Steve) believe that certain types of birth control are too close to abortion methods. Therefore, Hobby Lobby will not cover, via their provided health care insurance, the use of an Intrauterine Device (IUD) or the "morning after" pill.

What is it about a "morning after" pill that so enrages religious fundamentalists? Plainly put, it is birth control that can be used to prevent pregnancy up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected sex. That's it. To some extreme religionists, the use of a pill after a possible meeting of a sperm and an egg is just like having an abortion.

An IUD prevents fertilization of the female egg by damaging or killing sperm. A Hormonal IUD damages or kills sperm and it stimulates the cervix to make inhospitable mucus for a fetus to grow. This type of IUD also affects the uterine lining (where a fertilized egg would implant and grow) by releasing certain chemicals. In this way, sperm can't get through to the uterus. An IUD also keeps the lining of the uterus from growing thick, which makes the lining an (almost) impossible place for a fertilized egg to implant and grow.

A copper IUD is toxic to sperm. Higher levels of copper cause the uterus and fallopian tubes to produce fluid that kills sperm. This fluid contains white blood cells, copper ions, enzymes and prostaglandins. Prostaglandins are a group of chemicals made by nearly all of the body's cell membranes. Different prostaglandins have varying effects on the body. Copper, white blood cells, enzymes and prostaglandins are found throughout the human body. Increasing levels of a fluid that is already found in the human body is simply a good way to provide birth control. Of course, no IUD is a 100% effective pregnancy prevention device.

If all this birth control information seems like too much information for you, the reader of this newsletter, imagine an employer discussing these details with insurance carriers and deciding that this or that type of medical ability does or does not fit within their view of proper health care – not because it is proven to be unsafe or too expensive. No. The reason for denying a woman certain birth control methods as described above are based purely on a religious belief that paints all sexually active women as potential abortionists – if they have the audacity to want to take control of their own bodies. With all the wonderful medical advancements concerning birth control, it is appalling to think that some women who happen to work for the wrong corporation will be denied scientific benefits which control fertility. This shortsightedness and care denial can leave an employee accidentally pregnant!

Unfortunately, on June 30, 2014, United States Supreme Court Justices issued a 5-4 decision in favor of Hobby Lobby's position. Hobby Lobby is now able to bypass the

contraceptive mandate – a regulation adopted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) – and deny female employees certain types of birth control. Without pushback, the ruling will very likely have long-standing and far-reaching consequences. Allowing corporations to claim religious exemptions from federal laws as if they are individuals is unreasonable and unacceptable – even though a majority of Supreme Court Justices approve.

Shortly after the ruling of *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) granted a temporary injunction in a case involving Wheaton College, a private Christian College. At question is the use of Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) Form 700. The EBSA form states that “on account of religious objections, the organization opposes providing coverage for some or all of any contraceptive services that would otherwise be required to be covered, [that] the organization operates as a non-profit entity, and [that] the organization holds itself out as a religious organization.” Filing such a form ends involvement in the ACA program.

The fear that religious fundamentalists have is that filling out the form is a “scheme” that would allow the government to offer female employees contraceptive services. The SCOTUS injunction for Wheaton College did not constitute a ruling on the merits of its religious objections, however. Interestingly, the court said, “Nothing in this interim order affects the ability of the applicant’s employees and students to obtain, without cost, the full range of FDA approved contraceptives.”

The words “full range of FDA approved contraceptives” is a reminder that the Federal Drug Administration found that the birth control methods Hobby Lobby owners found so

objectionable are approved methods of *birth control* – not an actual abortion procedure!

The *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* decision is a clear imposition of religious beliefs affecting others. While the decision is limited to the contraceptive mandate, consequences extend much further. What happens when the owners of corporations are opposed to blood transfusions, medical treatment, stem cell therapies, and psychiatric care? Will certified “prayer consultants” replace real medical treatments? Potentially outrageous scenarios boggle the mind.

What are the lessons we need to learn from all of this? Be careful when seeking employment. Asking a job applicant “What are your religious leanings” was once considered inappropriate. One wonders if a job applicant must now ask the same question of an employer. More and more people in the workforce must object to imposed religious biases. Businesses owned by religious fundamentalists, such as Hobby Lobby, that impose restrictions based on their faith must continue to be boycotted by workers and customers.

There was a time when unwanted pregnancies were ended with cruel and barbaric procedures. Some women were forced to take matters into their own hands and resorted to using coat hangers and any other sharp object that they could find to induce an abortion. Many women died as they desperately attempted to take control over their situation.

Contraceptive history is filled with horror stories of secret visits to so-called abortion “doctors” who maimed and cut away at female organs with little compassion or skill. We must protest against those who try to prevent women from having access to birth control. We must demand freedom of choice and the right to use scientific advances, no matter how far backward religious-based corporations and United States Supreme Court Justices want us to travel.



The Hobby Lobby protest cartoon on the left was created by talented artist **Celestia Ward**. She lives and works in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Ward is a longtime Freethought Society supporter. She is also a regular contributor to *The Freethought News* with her interesting articles and provocative cartoons.

Ward is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University. She and her artist spouse **Robert Sundin, III** own and operate [Two Head Studios](#). Together they offer a combined 40-plus years of professional experience.

Photos of the 2014 California Hobby Lobby Protest



Beautiful Southern California weather helped draw many volunteers to the Hobby Lobby protest on July 29, 2014 in Laguna Niguel. The protest effort included participants from Planned Parenthood, Riverside Atheists and Freethinkers, Americans United for Separation of Church and State – Orange County, Backyard Skeptics, and the Freethought Alliance. Pictured above right and below left is Freethought Society (FS) founder and president **Margaret Downey**. She represented FS and voiced concerns about imposition of religion with a film crew from Chinese Central Television after being invited to conduct a live interview.



There Are No Hermit Crabs in Heaven

by Staks Rosch
(pictured below with son Orion)

I'm not much of a pet person, but I agreed to have a family hermit crab named Sunny. Our hermit crab recently died and my five-year-old was sad about the loss. Being raised rationally – without the belief in supernaturalism – my son did not inquire about the fate of Sunny's eternal soul or anything like that.

In contrast, many religious parents preach to their children that humans have souls and that animals do not. I would imagine that children of these parents would be immensely concerned with the eternal fate of their recently deceased pets, especially if that pet was a cat or dog instead of a hermit crab. If their pets don't have souls, then they couldn't possibly live on in Heaven with all the other souls. They would just be gone. Interestingly enough, religious believers don't generally lose too much sleep over the reality that their soulless pets are just gone. If, however, they think deeply about this, such a fate is problematic.

Contrary to the teachings of the Abrahamic religions, humans don't have souls. There is no "divine spark" separating man from beast. We have to realize right from the start that we are all animals; we are merely a different kind of beast. The most significant difference between a human and a hermit crab is the fact that we have the ability to realize this fact. We are the kind of animal that has developed the ability to think and reflect upon the world and ourselves. This gives us a huge advantage that has enabled us to alter our environment to suit our needs and to work together to create complex tools, but also powerful weapons.

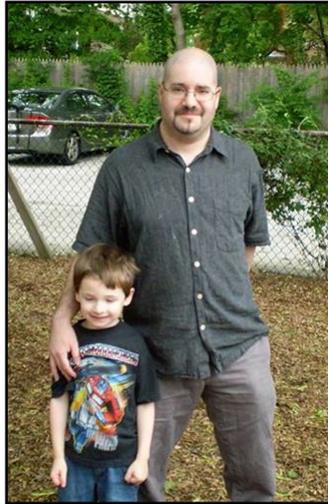
Whether we are human animals, a hermit crab, or a cat or dog, we are soulless. And when we die, we are dead. There are no eternal punishments or rewards. Life is what we make it to be, and the only real punishments and rewards are right here in this life.

Like all creatures, we have a drive for self-preservation. We are part of the food chain, and our intellectual ability has put us at the top of it.

Because of our intellectual abilities, humans are in a position of power over other animals. As a side effect of those intellectual abilities, we reflect on that power. That power does not come from a god, but from our ability to think in complex terms.

In the immortal words of Uncle Ben Parker from the Spiderman comics, "With great power comes great responsibility."

This is why the issue of whether pets have souls is really important. Religious believers often assign special rights to human beings based on their belief that human beings have



souls. In their mind, animals don't have souls, and therefore don't have rights. The realization that human beings don't have souls *either* often makes religious believers uncomfortable because they perceive this to mean that we don't have rights, and, therefore, "anything is permissible." They fail to realize that rights shouldn't be predicated on whether or not something has a soul.

Morality comes from our sense of compassion and empathy; animals have rights to the extent that we can empathize with them and feel compassion for them. Animals that show more human-like traits are afforded more human-like rights while those species that greatly differ from us like insects are just pests.

Like my son, I also miss Sunny. Our pet gave us a lot of joy, but there was no need to make up a heavenly after-life story. The pleasure of remembering fun times with Sunny is all we need for comfort.

FS Member Honors Pet With Donation

Recently, the Freethought Society (FS) received a \$1,000 donation from a longtime supporter, **Edward J. Baker**. He enclosed the following letter:

Dear Freethought Society,

The enclosed donation is being sent to honor the life of my pet Teddy. He died the other day. I will miss him very much. All of my dogs (Sam, Jingles, Buster, Teddy and Boomer) have provided me with the fondest memories of my life.

Many people have judged me, stolen from me, lied to me, and hurt me. My pets, on the other hand, just seek love. Give them love and they love you back tenfold.

My pets give my life purpose. If there ever was a thing like a God, then I was theirs. I enjoy caring for my pets – feeding, washing, and petting them. I never came home to an angry, mean or complaining dog. They just adored me, as I did them. It breaks my heart when they die.

Freethought Society supporters, some of whom I am proud to call friends, know that there is no heaven for humans or pets.

In this crazy world of uncertainty, I'm very happy to have shared my time with terrific pets as well as many trusted atheist associates and friends. I hope my donation helps to keep the Freethought Society active and productive.

Editor's Note:

Regular meetings and events provide opportunities for supporters to meet, socialize and share ideas. Many nontheists have developed longstanding friendships through FS. Talking about life's difficulties in a rational way has been very comforting to many. FS is a non-profit 501(c)3 educational organization. All donations are fully tax deductible.



United Nations Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief 2014 Report

The Freethought Society (FS) is a member of the United Nations (UN) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) for the Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief. On June 16, 2013, **Daniel Hoffman** represented FS at an open forum that took place at the United Nations building in New York City.

Michael De Dora was elected the new president of the organization, replacing **Bani Dugal** from the Bahá'í International Community. Dugal is now the Vice President. **Oren Drori**, of B'nai B'rith International is the Treasurer.

De Dora is the Director of Public Policy for the Center For Inquiry's (CFI) Office of Public Policy. The mission of CFI, according to their website is "...to foster a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values."

De Dora's election as the President of the United Nations NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief is a testimony to his ability to build relationships of trust and mutual respect with people of faith – with the objective of finding common ground and achieving a common good.

There are many important issues before the Committee, and for it to be effective the member organizations need to contribute individually, and as a group, to the cause of non-discrimination on the basis of religious belief and lack thereof. The Committee, and the UN, have a vision of how this can be accomplished. This vision was put into writing and voted upon by the General Assembly in 1981 when it approved, with a 55 to 36 vote, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. In 1993, the UN reaffirmed its commitment to those principles in a 128 to 48 vote of the General Assembly.

On June 8, 2014, FS capped off the 73rd annual conference of the American Humanist Association (AHA) with a very successful 20th anniversary of "Thomas Paine Day." Many FS members and board members were in attendance. The theme of the AHA conference was clear: nontheists cannot gain fair treatment in America, and the rest of the world, unless we form alliances with believers. While history may not be on our side, AHA and FS continue with outreach efforts. If nontheists want to help alleviate the real suffering caused by the imposition of particular religious beliefs on other people, we must form alliances. It's that simple. There are, in fact, many religious people who are interested in finding common cause with the secular nontheist community.

Believers who are members of minority religions often advocate for religious pluralism. There is a vigorous debate both within and between many religious groups about state, government, and corporate sponsored religion. Many theists and nontheists alike support the consensus expressed through the AHA conference, which happens to be precisely what the UN has been saying for quite some time now. FS works closely with CFI and AHA to achieve that goal.



Pictured above is **Dan Hoffman** who is standing in front of the United Nations building in New York City.

At the June 16th forum, Dugal highlighted the upcoming anniversary of the 1981 General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Interestingly, Article 1 of that Document is a revision of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights got its start at the first session of the General Assembly in 1946. Eleanor Roosevelt was the American representative on its drafting Committee. The Declaration was approved in 1948 with some nations abstaining, but without any "no" votes. Few documents ever written can compare to its hope and its optimism, its breadth and its brevity, or its clear and precise affirmation of humanistic principles.

Article 2 of the Declaration states:

"Everyone 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."

The revision of Article 18 becomes the first section of Article 1 of the 1981 Declaration, and is something FS very strongly supports. It states:

1. No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, Institution, group of persons, or person on grounds of religion or other beliefs.
2. For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression "intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

The 33rd anniversary of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief is November 25, 2014. The NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief will celebrate this anniversary and encourages NGO members to do so as well.

In the meantime, Hoffman will be representing FS at another NGO meeting scheduled for October 23, 2014 when **Heiner Bielefeldt**, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, will deliver his report to the General Assembly. FS thanks Hoffman for his representation.



– A Secular Celebration –

Sunday November 2, 2014
12–3

SeeScan

3855 Ruffin Rd

San Diego, CA

\$4/person or \$10/family

Food, drinks, and children's activities!

Join us for a great secular holiday! Enjoy a day full of fun festivities and cultural tradition as we honor the lives of loved ones. Feel free to participate by bringing a framed photo of a deceased person you will be honoring.

Cohosted by the Humanist Fellowship of San Diego and
Margaret Downey of the Freethought Society

Margaret@FtSociety.org

Please RSVP by October 26 at meetup.com/humanistfellowship
Or contact Victoria de la Torre at victoriahumanist@gmail.com

The Freethought Society's 2014 Three-Month Activities Calendar

September 29

The Freethought Society (FS) is pleased to host **Larry Robin**, the former president of Robin's Bookstore, the oldest independent book store in Philadelphia until its closure in December 2012. His presentation, "Scott Nearing: The Making of a Radical," will take place on **Monday, September 29** at the **Ludington Library (5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)**. The event starts at **7:00 PM** and is **free and open to the public**.



Robin is cofounder of Moonstone Incorporated and director of the Moonstone Arts Center. He created and directed The Celebration of Black Writing for 18 years, The Paul Robeson Festival for 8 years, Poetry Ink for 18 years, and various other Moonstone programs. He currently produces poetry programs.

While very few people have heard of **Scott Nearing**, Robin considers his legacy an important topic for all freethinkers. Nearing died on August 24, 1983, at the age of 100 years plus 18 days. During his lifetime, he was arrested for sedition for writing a pamphlet against the draft for the First World War in 1917, and was the first person thrown out of the American Communist Party in 1919. Attend this lecture to learn more about Nearing, the author of hundreds of books and articles on economics and politics.

October 6

FS is proud to present **Jason Torpy**, President of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF).

MAAF is a national non-profit that is developing a strong online community for nontheists in the military.

This free and open-to-the-public speech takes place on **Monday, October 6, 2014** at **7:00 PM** at the **Ludington Library (5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)**.



Torpy's speech, entitled "The Pathway to Equal Rights for Atheists in Foxholes," will highlight historical precedents and current events related to religious privilege in the military, the humanist community, and the role of the chaplaincy in fostering change. Topics will include humanist alternatives to church at the military academies and at Air Force basic training, humanist religious preference, and the Navy's humanist chaplain candidate.

October 7

Every year since 2010, FS representatives and other interested people have testified in front of the Chester County Commissioners about the importance of restoring the inclusion of *The Tree of Knowledge* in the Chester County Winter holiday display. The **Tuesday, October 7, 2014** Chester County Commissioners' Sunshine Meeting includes a public comment session where community members are invited to air grievances, ask questions, and make requests.

The Sunshine Meeting will take place at **10:00 AM**. The location of the meeting is **313 West Market Street (6th Floor), West Chester, Pennsylvania**.

Please plan to speak for one to five minutes. After stating your name and where you reside, it would be helpful for you to cover the following:

- * *The Tree of Knowledge* is important to me because (highlight your best reason/reasons)
- * I will visit West Chester to see *The Tree of Knowledge*. I will likely bring family and/or friends to shop and eat in West Chester as we celebrate the season, etc.
- * Make a personal appeal if possible.
- * Thank them for listening/considering, etc.

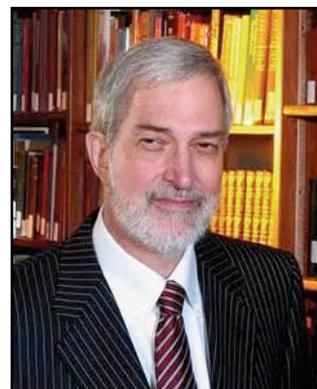
If possible, please have at least six copies of your statement (one for each of the three Commissioners, one for FS, and several for reporters). Remember that you do not need to be eloquent or forceful. Your unique voice is needed. Already scheduled to speak are **Jason Torpy** (representing nontheists in the military), **Hugh Taft Morales** (Ethical Humanist Culture Leader), **Jennifer Taylor** (representing Black Atheists of Philadelphia), and **Margaret Downey** (FS President). If you would like assistance in creating your statement, contact FS. If possible, please send statements to FS in advance of the meeting at: Newsletter@FtSociety.org. Your attendance is vital.

December 8

FS joins with the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia (EHSP) to host the president and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, **Ron Lindsay**.

Lindsay is the author of, *The Necessity of Secularism: Why God Can't Tell Us What To Do*.

The **Monday, December 8, 2014** Lindsay speech "The Necessity of Secularism" will take place at **7:00 PM** at the EHSP Building (**1906 Rittenhouse Square Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103**). Watch for more details about this event in upcoming newsletter announcements.



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

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

Yes! I want to:

- become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):
 \$30 Individual Supporter **\$35** Family Supporter **\$20** Student **\$1,000** Supporter for a Lifetime
- become a "Freethought Star" by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): **\$5** **\$10** **\$15** **\$20** **\$25** **\$30** **\$35** **\$40** **\$45** \$_____ (other per month)
- earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): _____

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

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

Name: _____

Email: _____

Use this same form to bid on the use of the FS St. Croix Cottage.

FS's cottage in St. Croix is available for use the 11th week of each year. In 2015, the week offered will be March 14-21 (Saturday-Saturday). The yearly maintenance fee for the beachside cottage at Chenay Bay Beach Resort is \$950.

The lowest bid FS can accept must meet that cost.

The bid is for a one-week stay in cottage number 6 and does not include travel, rental car or food expenses. If you are interested in placing a bid for the use of this property, please return this form to the address below:

Freethought Society
St. Croix Cottage
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366-0242

Email a bid to:

<http://bit.ly/17p4FfK>

For additional information see:

<http://bit.ly/1dYwjVN>

