A Four-Month Combined Issue To Bring Readers Up To Date
by Margaret Downey

Members of the Freethought Society’s (FS) editorial team had a very busy four months, causing us to produce this combined publication. Work, family and other obligations prevented a concentrated effort to stay on our usual publication schedule. We hope the articles you find in this issue will not only bring you up to date, but will also exemplify the fantastic FS activities that took place over the last four months. We are sure you will be impressed by the many ways FS continues to serve the nontheist community.

On August 18 and 19, 2018, I was pleased to help the Center for Inquiry (CFI) celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum’s reopening to the public.

I presented my one-woman play, The Love Story of Eva Amelia Parker and Robert Green Ingersoll, on the afternoon of August 18. The 40-minute presentation highlighted how Eva and Robert met, courted, married, parented two children, worked together and inspired each other. The theatrical presentation was performed on a stage created with the help of Jeff Ingersoll and Sandy Parker Ingersoll. They brought antique furniture, an oriental rug, and other Victorian parlor accessories from their bed and breakfast business located in the Finger Lakes area of New York. The stage was set perfectly.

The presentation was made possible with help from Glen Loev and Marjorie Goldman. Loev was a writing consultant and a pre-performance director. Goldman was my acting coach and also helped with stage directing.

Tom Flynn (Executive Director of CFI) and Tim Binga (Historian and Librarian at CFI) fact-checked the script and provided me with little-known information as well as rare visuals.

I also thank Christina Jones for assisting Goldman with the cue cards used during the performance. While I tried to memorize the entire play, time worked against completing such a feat. The presentation included a PowerPoint slide show, so exact wording was needed. Steve Lowe worked the slides for us.

The lovely compliments I received made all the work worthwhile. Flynn wrote, “Your portrayal of Eva was magnificent, and lost almost nothing due to the maddening microphone problems.” Yes, there were microphone difficulties, but I was able to project enough for all the attendees to hear the love story.

I hope to present this short play in another venue soon. We are working on a partnership with the Philadelphia Ethical Society and CFI to host an Ingersoll event which could include the play and an essay contest. Please watch for more details in upcoming ezines/newsletters.

It was also my pleasure to host one of the two bus tours that CFI organized on Sunday, August 19. Our bus had 36 participants, who enjoyed riding the spacious, comfortable and immaculate coach hired by CFI. We traveled along the Freethought Trail, with stops at The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum (Dresden), The Matilda Joslyn Gage Center (Fayetteville), The Gerrit Smith estate (Peterboro), and the National Abolition Hall of Fame (Peterboro). We also enjoyed a champagne brunch at the Dresden Hotel Restaurant.

Some bus activities included a Sing-a-Long, a Pun/Joke-a-Thon, toasts to Robert Green Ingersoll and the viewing of the fantastic series American Freethought. Subjects covered were the founding of the United States, the Abolition Movement, Women’s Suffrage, the Freethought press and the rise of Roman Catholicism. American Freethought is a four part series available through the following link:

https://secularhumanism.org/product/american-freethought-dvd-bluray/
Photos from the 25th Anniversary of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum

During the play, Downey (as Eva Ingersoll) presented a birthday gift to Tom Flynn. An Ingersoll facsimile whiskey label above was used to replicate what the product may have looked like when it was produced in 1876.

Pictured left in two photos is Margaret Downey portraying Eva Amelia Parker Ingersoll during her August 18, 2018 one-woman show, presented in Syracuse, New York.

Downey and Marjorie Goldman are pictured right during the Saturday night conference dinner.

Throughout the evening, Downey stayed in character as Eva Amelia Parker Ingersoll. Propped up against the wall, behind the ladies, is an original 1876 broadside poster that was donated by Saul Dunn from Meriden, Connecticut. The poster will be prominently displayed at the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum beginning in 2019.

Bestselling author and scholar Susan Jacoby delivered the Saturday evening keynote address. Her speech, “Reason Embattled in a Culture of Lies: Why Robert Ingersoll Wouldn’t Recognize Trump’s America,” was topical and enlightening — as well as frightening.

Jacoby is pictured left with Downey and Flynn.

Flynn was the lead organizer of the 25th Anniversary of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum event with a team of Center For Inquiry employees. Every little detail was masterfully managed and planned. Attendees had a wonderful time and were happy for the opportunity to meet, socialize and exchange ideas.

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There are too many people in the above photo to identify them all. The photo includes most of the people who rode the Freethought Trail Coach with host Margaret Downey (seated in the front row, second from the left). The group enjoyed visiting the museum, which houses displays related to the life and times of Robert Green Ingersoll.

Over the years, Downey has donated items to the museum, including a Victorian photograph of Ingersoll, an original political cartoon featuring Ingersoll, and a modern plate using a famous Ingersoll quotation. This year, she donated a collection of stereoscope cards with the name T.W. Ingersoll listed as the photographer. Research is being done to find a possible family connection.

Sculptor Zenos Frudakis is pictured above left, standing with Downey next to the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum marker. In 2015, Frudakis became involved in the refurbishing project of the Ingersoll statue located in Glen Oak Park (Peoria, Illinois). He has been exceptionally generous in volunteering his time and talents.

Pictured above right are Sandra Turner and Tom Flynn listening to professional pianist Christina Jones play the “Ingersolia March.” Jones and Downey are working to find an Ingersoll speech, prose or essay that will coordinate with the rhythm of the music. The National Music Company in Chicago, Illinois published the composition by George Schleiffarth in 1883.
2018 marks the eighth year I have attended DragonCon at the invitation of Skeptrack. 2018 speakers, performers and panelists also included Nick Eftimiades, Jamy Ian Swiss, Curt Anderson, Bob Nygard, Gleb Tsipursky, Teddi Fishman, Derek Ellington, Agnes Vishnevkin, David Mass, Bob Blaskiewicz, Eve Siebert, CW Brown, Herb Silverman, Mark Gura, Leannah Lord, Scott Sigler, John de Lancie, Michael Stackpole, Ian Harris, Jane Crow, Angela F. Mattke, Susan Gerbic, Dr. Charles E. Gannon, Terry Robinson, Mika McKinnon, Charlie Kaufman, Roxanne A. Henkle, Brian Brushwood, Mandisa Lateefah Thomas, Brian Dunning, Arturo Garcia, Steven Novella, Jay Novella, Bob Novella, Evan Bernstein, Cara Santa Maria, Loren Collins, Pete Ludovice, Abby Hafer, and Daniel Reynoso.

It’s been very rewarding to be involved in organizing the Skeptic parade entry. There is no other place in the world where our messages can reach millions. The costumes in our contingent convey the importance of critical-thinking skills, education, the application of reason, science, and much more.

The DragonCon parade draws over 90,000 onlookers who line the 1.5 miles route in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The parade also airs live on the CW network and is rebroadcast several times throughout the day. The CW has millions of viewers and the network staff covers the parade with many cameras, overhead filming and professional commentary.

Each year, I request a space for a Skeptic “Star Car” in the parade, but many times, our invited star is not able to make it to the event. James “The Amazing” Randi has been our star twice. This year we were able to host actor John de Lancie — not only as the rider in the Skeptic parade entry star car, but also as a panel participant at the Skeptrack.

The attendees were very impressed with de Lancie’s participation and found him to be a great representative of skepticism. After the parade he wrote that the experience was very enjoyable and great fun.

Please enjoy the photos included in this article and consider attending the 2019 DragonCon event. It is held every Labor Day Weekend. We welcome parade walkers in both the “Skeptics in History” and “Punny Costumes” sections. Conference registration information can be found here: [http://www.dragoncon.org](http://www.dragoncon.org)
More DragonCon 2018 Skeptic Photos

Pictured in the above three photos are the “Skeptic Heroes” banner carriers. There would not be a Skeptic presence in the parade without the banner carriers. They are our heroes! The folks who volunteered this year are pictured in the first photo on the left. They are (left to right) Keiran Brown, Abby Hafer, Bill Creasy, and Merald Clark.

Most important to the success of the Skeptrack is the audio/visual crew. Pictured in the left photo back row are (left to right) John Olthoff, Mark Ditsler, Jason Benford and David Price.

Seated in the front row (left to right) are Elizabeth Gordon, Shara Smith, Bryant O’Hara, and Ed Neubaum.

Crew members wore “tin foil” hats poking fun at the belief that sheets of aluminum can protect the brain from threats such as electromagnetic fields, mind control, and mind reading.

In the above left photo, Margaret Downey dressed as a “Cheerful Skeptic” on Friday to motivate people to participate in the Saturday Skeptic parade entry. Her “Think” megaphone is often put to good use around the Con.

Above right, artist Emily Byrne is pictured holding a mini-caricature. She used her artistic talents to raise funds for parade expenses (signs, costumes, snacks, etc.). Downey is holding the parade donation jar. Donations can be earmarked for this event through the Freethought Society. Donations are tax deductible. Donate online at: https://www.ftssociety.org/donate/.
The Secular Day of the Dead concept was developed by Victory de la Torre and me in 2013. We held our very first Secular Day of the Dead in San Diego, California on November 2, 2014. Since it was a Sunday, we made the event family friendly and used an outdoor facility. It was a huge success! We held the event again in 2015 at the same location, and again, to rave reviews.

A “How to Host a Secular Day of the Dead” toolkit was developed based on the two San Diego events, but we realized that we were missing opportunities to celebrate the tradition during the week. Consequently, we approached three groups in Los Angeles to help us develop a celebration that could take place in the evening during a weekday. We were thrilled to find Sunday Assembly Los Angeles (SALA), Atheists United (AU), and the Center For Inquiry-West (CFI-West) willing to join forces with The Freethought Society to cohost a Secular Day of the Dead dinner and ceremony.

A team was developed and duties divided. After visiting several possible locations, a lovely downtown Los Angeles restaurant was chosen for the event. We contracted for a minimum of 40 diners to ensure live entertainment as well as the ability to use the stage and sound equipment for our celebration. The final number of attendees was 65.

The La Fonda Restaurant did not disappoint. They arranged for an all-female mariachi band, Mariachi Las Catrinas, to provide us with a beautiful show that included dancers and singers.

After the pre-arranged meal was served and the show was over, the cohosts welcomed guests, lit candles, and started the ceremony. The Secular Saint Candles lit that night included Charles Darwin, Carl Sagan, Albert Einstein, Frida Kahlo, Sigmund Freud, and Christopher Hitchens.

Christina Jones from AU provided some particularly interesting history in her welcome. She said, “Welcome to this wonderful celebration of life that has its origins in a 3,000-year-old, ever-evolving Aztec tradition. Our secular community has embraced this beautiful cultural tradition that allows us to celebrate the lives of our loved ones who have died. We hope that many of you will join us later this evening to honor the memory of someone you loved. This celebration is meaningful to me, personally, because my family heritage connects me to this indigenous tradition. Traditionally, theists believe that the spirit of the dead will come back to Earth, and for one day, the Day of the Dead, they will be together with the living. I have moved on from this superstition and magical thinking that once held a strong place in my childhood.”

Representing CFI-West, Jim Underdown said, “The Center For Inquiry welcomes you and we hope to see many of you again when we open our doors at our new location just around the corner at Temple and Rampart Streets. We non-theists know that this is our one and only life to live. More and more people are abandoning their religious upbringing, but still want to celebrate the beauty of their culture. This is why a secular version of the Day of the Dead was created.”

Amy Boyle, who was representing SALA, welcomed people to the event saying, “Current statistics and social surveys reveal that 46% of the population in the United States consider themselves ‘non religiously affiliated,’ atheist or agnostic. Most of those 46% enjoy community and social gatherings as a way to build strong group ties. So, we think that this Secular Day of the Dead will appeal to those new non-affiliated citizens. As Jim said, our Secular Day of the Dead event is actually a celebration of life and we have incorporated Hispanic rituals and traditions that have no religious or supernatural connections. Secularism welcomes everyone — with or without faith — and tonight is a way to join together in our common humanity as we share life legacies, tell stories about our dead loved ones, and enjoy each other’s company. Because we do not believe in an afterlife, it is important to stress the fact that when we die, all that will be left is our legacy. Through our legacies, we will live on. At this Secular Day of the Dead we come together as a community to celebrate life — not death.”

My welcome partly included, “The Secular Day of the Dead is a perfect way to remember dead loved ones in a way that does not require prayer, church, or any other religious dogma. On this day we do not dwell on the sadness of a person’s death, but instead we focus on the happiness we shared with them. The stories you share will give us the opportunity to reflect on just how precious and significant life really is.”

Shelley Segal opened the honoring portion of the program by singing a song dedicated to Hitchens. She also sang a song she wrote about her grandmother. Her tributes were touching and lovely.

Julia Sweeney attended and spoke about her father and his legacy as a trial attorney. Sweeney was influenced greatly by her father and she honored his legacy in a beautiful way.

Ian Harris also spoke about his father. Through a few stories Harris described how his father had a major influence in his comedy, his political mind, his questioning nature and above all, his leading example of empathy.

Steve Hill honored a family member whose tragic death changed his personal goals in life. Hill’s nephew was murdered in Detroit, Michigan earlier in the year. Hill is determined to question the acceptence of crime in the city and fight back with the use of reason and critical thinking skills.

I spoke about my father and how he and I used DNA science to confirm that we were related. I also talked about the importance of developing understanding and acceptance through the application of knowledge. Understanding can ease difficult family dynamics. While relationships can be complicated, knowledge and science can actually help us heal. When we heal, precious memories can be made, people can experience love, and families can be made whole again.

There was an open-mic opportunity and many people in attendance honored their dead loved ones. Each speaker enjoyed reflecting on their loved one’s legacy.

The entire event was covered by National Public Radio’s affiliate KPCC (Pasadena, California). You can read or listen to the report at:

Pictured in the above left photo are (left to right) Margaret Downey, Christina Jones, and Amy Boyle. They are on stage singing “Imagine,” in honor of the life and work of John Lennon.

Jim Underdown (cohost and cosponsor) and Karen Briner (volunteer) are pictured in the above right photo.

Julia Sweeney is pictured above left. She announced that she has developed two new monologues, which will be produced in Los Angeles in early 2019. Sweeney provided a short description of the show topics and talked about her father’s influence. Watch for more show details in future Freethought Society ezines.

In the above center photo, Bobbie Kirkhart is dressed in a typical Day of the Dead outfit that includes a half face mask. Half face masks were offered for sale during the event as was a Saint Christopher Hitchens Secular Saint Candle created by Margaret Downey and Emily Byrne.

Pictured above is Shelley Segal. Her elegant performance brought tears to the eyes of attendees.
BSA’s Religious Recruitment/Anti-Noneist Signs: Activist Report
With submissions by Margaret Downey, Sally Flynn and Thomas Schottmiller

Each year during the month of September, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) conduct a membership drive targeting elementary school children. They use their past reputation as a non-profit service organization to get into a public school setting. However, in the year 2000, BSA declared itself a “private” organization which gave them the right to decline ANY application they found harmful to their mission. Please see the following United States Supreme Court case for details: Boy Scouts of America v. Dale (530 U.S. 640).

While the above mentioned case was specifically about a gay man being denied BSA affiliation, BSA was on record as having also determined that nontheists were not welcome either. My own Pennsylvania Human Relations Department discrimination complaint against BSA was dismissed due to BSA having declared itself “private.” See: Margaret Downey-Schottmiller v. Chester County Council of the Boy Scouts of America (Docket No. P-3986).

As a private organization, one would think that BSA would be held to a different standard in their dealings with government entities such as schools, the military and Congress, but BSA has too many friends in high places for them to suffer the consequences of having become a private organization. BSA continues to this day to receive special favors and treatment not granted to other private organizations. Millions of taxpayer dollars are used to support BSA activities including their Jamboree, building needs, and fundraising efforts. BSA still retains its Congressional Charter, allowing it to receive special government privileges — all while excluding some members of society due to biased membership rules.

In 2015, BSA dropped its anti-gay membership rules. Then in January 2017, it dropped its anti-trans members rules. Just recently (October 2017), BSA announced that it would start accepting female applicants. While these are steps forward to stop certain discrimination, BSA continues to determine that nontheists are unworthy and unacceptable to be members of the world’s largest youth group.

Many nontheist activists work hard to educate the public about this unfair and immoral treatment of nontheist citizens at the hands of BSA. When recruitment signs are placed on school grounds, activists must speak up and demand that the signs be removed. When a school is supporting the BSA recruitment drive they are, in essence, in agreement that nontheist children WILL BE discriminated against and that bigotry is supported by the school district. Once this is pointed out to a conscientious and concerned school superintendent, however, the signs are usually quickly removed from school property. This is what happened recently at the Pocopson Elementary School, located in Pocopson, Pennsylvania.

The day I noticed eight BSA recruitment signs on the lawn of the Pocopson Elementary School (very close to the outdoor school sign), I contacted the school superintendent.

It was not my first complaint. I’ve complained for many years about this entanglement. The school is easy for me to monitor, as it is located directly across from the Pocopson Post Office, where the Freethought Society (FS) has a postal box.

School Superintendent Dr. John Sanville has always been considerate and understanding. He treats all concerns with respect and I hold him in high regard. Only one day after my alert about the sign placements, Dr. Sanville wrote:

Dear Ms. Downey:

Thanks again for your input. I looked into the matter of the signs that gave you concern. I found that the District had acted properly. The signs were removed — without regard to their content — as they violated District policy applicable to all signs. Accordingly, it is not necessary for me to comment as to your thoughts about the Boy Scouts. However, as I shared with you previously, I can assure you that the District will continue to adhere to the standards set by the federal and state Constitutions, statutes, regulations, and court cases.

Kind Regards,
Dr. John Sanville

While the BSA recruitment signs were taken off the school grounds they were then placed on the other side of the street, which is the property of Ace Hardware. Sally Flynn (an FS board member and resident of Pocopson) decided to inquire as to whether or not the owner of Ace Hardware had been asked about the placement of the signs and if he approved of them and the message they conveyed. Flynn went into the store and spoke to the owner’s daughter. They had a nice chat about BSA not allowing nontheists to participate and Flynn was assured that her concerns would be conveyed.

Flynn was hopeful because a few years ago she visited a nearby veterinarian’s office who had allowed BSA signs to be placed on his property. When she told the veterinarian all the details about BSA bias membership rules, the signs were immediately taken down. The signs have never appeared on the veterinarians property since then. Unfortunately, BSA signs continued to be displayed on the Ace Hardware property, weeks after Flynn’s visit.

Learning about the way Ace Hardware was ignoring Flynn’s visit, Thomas Schottmiller (an FS Life Member and
promote BSA entangles Ace Hardware into a hurtful policy of the exclusion of the nontheist community.

I write to provide additional information concerning the discriminatory membership policies. In order to keep out people that BSA considers “undesirable,” they declared themselves a “private” organization. Please see the following article:


Within ten years of the Dale case, however, BSA started accepting applications from gays, transgender children and girls. Their progressive approach and nondiscrimination stopped there. To this day, they will not consider membership applications from nontheists. We nontheists are more than willing to substitute the word “God” in the Boy Scout Oath with the word “Good,” making it very easy for our participation. There would be no disruption and as you know, a Scout is honest and truthful. The word “Good” exemplifies the tenets of BSA without problems. Below is what is found on the BSA application:

Excerpt from the BSA Declaration of Religious Principle

The BSA maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God and, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and the organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life. Only persons willing to subscribe to this Declaration of Religious Principle and to the Bylaws of the Boy Scouts of America shall be entitled to certificates of membership.

Don’t let the word “nonsectarian” throw you. That only means BSA is not pushing a particular religion. Please go to the following link to see which religions are considered “acceptable:”

https://www.scouting.org/awards/religious-awards

You will not see a nontheist emblem, nor will you see a secular category such as Secular Judaism. Here is where you will find the complete list of acceptable religions:

https://www.scouting.org/awards/religious-awards/chart

I ask that you not let BSA continue using your property to promote the exclusion of the nontheist community.

It is unfortunate that the use of your business property to promote BSA entangles Ace Hardware into a hurtful policy of bigotry and aids in the promotion of unproven prejudices against nontheists. I ask that you help us obtain equality and protect our children from being bullied and discriminated against by not giving BSA easy access to sign placement. Perhaps when the voice of acceptance is heard loud and clear, BSA will be open and fair to all applicants without prejudice.

A Pew study from 2014 showed that 23 percent of Americans described themselves as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.”

Further, a Pew survey from October 2017 showed that 56 percent of Americans are of the opinion that you don’t need to believe in a god to be moral.

Sincerely,

Thomas C. Schottmiller

After several weeks passed, Schottmiller followed up and discovered that Mr. Drennen had referred his letter to the Scout Executive of the BSA Chester County Council. Mr. Drennen apparently wanted a better explanation of the BSA membership rules. The following was received a week later:

Thomas,

I have hesitated to respond as I know there is nothing I can say that you will find acceptable. As a values-based organization with the aims of developing character, personal fitness and citizenship, our programs are open to all youth (within the appropriate ages for each program) who aspire to live up to all of the values expressed, and pledged to, in the Scout Oath and Law. A number of children and/or their families decide not to participate in Scouting because one, or more, of these values conflict with their personal beliefs.

Like a great many youth organizations, we wish we had universal appeal. However, in a great country that celebrates diversity, most organizations find they appeal only to a segment of the youth population. As one of the largest youth serving organizations in the country, we celebrate diversity and are among the most inclusive in our policies.

Scouting has benefited from a great many people who share our set of values and we remain steadfastly respectful of those who do not.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Rogers, Jr.
Scout Executive, Chester County Council, BSA

Schottmiller made sure to respond, sending the following to both Rogers and Drennen:

Dear Mr. Drennen and Mr. Rogers,

Thank you for your email of Oct 23. I am sorry you felt hesitant to respond. Only through conversation can we share ideas as to how to serve the best interests of our young citizens. The tragic events of Pittsburgh reminded me that we have much work to do in our country to insure that all citizens are respected for who they are. If we are to make progress, adults like you and I must learn to work together so we can better serve all of our young people. What they learn
in their youth will be the foundation of who they will be as adults.

That is why I continue to be concerned that The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) continues to discriminate against nontheist children and families. Recent polls show that number as approximately 25% of our population. Your statement that some children and families choose not to participate is incorrect. They are excluded. What kind of signal does it send that BSA exclude such a large portion of our youth?

If we are to build a more inclusive country, we must strive to create a youth organization that accepts all. Actually, that would be easy to do. A Scout oath that states a Scout had a duty to do GOOD, would certainly create an inclusive and welcoming environment. I know you are a private organization. Thus there is no law forcing you to make a change. But, I hope you would agree that it’s time for BSA to do the right thing and serve all of our youth in this great country.

Mr. Drennen owns a very successful hardware store that we are fortunate to have in our neighborhood. As you enter the parking lot you can’t help but notice the warm, welcoming environment. Can you imagine if an employee met you at the door asking your religious beliefs before you could come in. Sounds absurd, right? When you posted signs on his property inviting young people to join BSA, a parent would reasonably assume their child would be welcome, regardless of their beliefs, just as they assume Mr. Drennen welcomes all customers to his store. And I might add that one always feels welcome at Ace Hardware!

The values you state in your email of developing character, personal fitness and citizenship are universal values that are all important for the development of our young people. My hope is that our next generation will be better able to learn that we can be different in some aspects of our lives and beliefs, but still be GOOD citizens that work together to build a better tomorrow. We have an opportunity of achieving that goal if we work together in a youth organization to understand some of our differences, but build on the fact that we share so many of the same values. A Boy Scout oath allowing a youth to say a scout’s duty is to do GOOD would allow all of our young citizens to be served by BSA.

I would welcome an opportunity to work with you to create that environment.

As of the publication date of this FS Ezine, there has been no further communication between the parties. Schottmiller, Flynn and I reported this entire incident in order to inspire readers to be prepared to take action next September when BSA kicks off their 2019 recruitment drive. Concerned nontheists and others who know that discrimination is immoral and dangerous must speak up when recruitment signs are displayed — whether on school grounds or on private property. Please plan to help us educate people that there is great harm in separating youths for philosophical reasons. BSA must change in order to reflect as well as promote a united, diverse and productive society.

The Schwartz Event

On Wednesday, September 26, 2018, Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) leader Hugh Taft-Morales interviewed David N. Schwartz about his book, The Last Man Who Knew Everything. The event was co-sponsored by The Freethought Society (FS) and PES. Glen Loev (FS Vice-President) represented FS that night as a welcome speaker. In the photo at right, Schwartz is seated. Taft-Morales (left) and Loev (right), are standing.

Schwartz’s book is about the fascinating life and incredible work of Enrico Fermi, who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1938.

Schwartz holds a PhD in political science from MIT and is the author of two previous books. He has worked at the State Department Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs and at Goldman Sachs in a variety of roles in both London and New York. The 1988 Nobel Prize in Physics was awarded jointly to Schwartz’s father Melvin Schwartz, Jack Steinberger and Leon M. Lederman “for the neutrino beam method and the demonstration of the doublet structure of the leptons through the discovery of the muon neutrino.”

Taft-Morales and Schwartz shared growing up as children of two atomic physicists with personal connections to Fermi’s work, the former being a PhD advisee of Fermi, and the latter sharing a Nobel Prize in physics built, in part, on Fermi’s legacy. Schwartz and Taft-Morales both remembered their fathers having a deep reverence for physics research, perhaps exhibiting the effects of what Fermi called “physics as soma,” something that produced a zombie-like state in its practitioners!

The evening focused, of course, on Fermi, a man who, while not the best of fathers, served his students and our nation unfailingly. He was a great teacher who respected, encouraged, and mentored his students. He used simple metaphors to convey complex concepts. What set Fermi apart from other physicists was his unique expertise in both theoretical and experimental physics. This is why people used to say that Fermi “knew everything.”

The evening ended with discussion of how Fermi was, in the end, literally and figuratively, “down to Earth.” While allowing priests, rabbis, and pastors to offer him blessings on his death bed, Fermi never did convert to religion after a starkly secular life. He was simply being kind to the clergy: “It pleased them and it did not harm me,” he was quoted as saying.

Schwartz’s closing statement was, “Fermi...accepted with rare equanimity the fact that he would no longer exist, an acceptance in keeping with his generally realistic, perhaps pessimistic, view of life. For Fermi, science completely replaced the function of religion and he died much as he had lived — without any obvious need for metaphysical or religious speculation on what happens after death.”
How Freethinkers Can Save the Truth
by Dr. Gleb Tsipursky

We as freethinkers are especially sensitive to baseless claims, as unfortunately most people in our society hold on to a faith that has no basis in the physical experience of our senses. Moreover, we have cried out a multitude of times about the powerful role of religion in our public sphere. Consider when the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled in 1970 that “It is quite obvious that the national motto and the slogan on coinage and currency ‘In God We Trust’ has nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of religion.” If that is obvious to the court, I question the reading comprehension of the Justices. However, the Supreme Court, by declining to hear an appeal, upheld this case, a giveaway of justice and truth to the power of organized religion.

Now the rest of society is waking up to the problem of falsehoods in public discourse. Indeed, we are living in a low point for truth in public speech, when “fake news” and “alternative facts” appear to be winning out against real news and actual facts. The problem is especially prevalent among people who already hold beliefs not based in reality, such as strong religious beliefs, conspiracy theories, and science denialism. Sadly, many officials — especially in the current presidential administration — reinforce such irrational perspectives, although fortunately a number of brave members of the Republican party are standing up to support truthfulness.

Given all of these developments, it might seem ludicrous to many that truth can win in our public discourse. However, research suggests that we can address political deception through a number of effective strategies, which are brought together in the Pro-Truth Pledge, at ProTruthPledge.org. This new project combines behavioral science and crowd-sourcing to reverse the tide of lies and promote truth in politics and other areas of our public sphere. Numerous well-known, reason-oriented public figures took the pledge, including Freethought Society founder and president Margaret Downey. She added her name alongside many others and offered to publish this article to help promote the cause.

The luminaries who have already taken the pledge, and encouraged other public figures and private citizens to take it, did so because they saw it as having the potential to help truth win our public discourse. Several reason-oriented organizations have also committed to the pledge. A list of those group sponsors is available at ProTruthPledge.org.

Before getting to the details of the pledge and how it works, let’s examine the evidence for fake news and alternative facts winning, first focusing on private citizens sharing fake news. BuzzFeed News published an analysis on November 16, 2016, focused on deceptive news articles on Facebook in the final few months of the U.S. presidential campaign. Its report focused on comparing Facebook shares, comments, engagements, and reactions on the top 20 highest performing fake news stories from not very reputable sources and the top 20 credible news articles. The latter came from 19 major right-leaning, centrist, and left-leaning websites, such as The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, New York Daily News, The New York Times, Fox News, New York Post, CNN, USA Today, and others.

In the six months between February and July 2016, the top 20 fake stories received a hair-raising 6 million engagements. We can be thankful that the credible news stories received more engagements, around 21 million, outperforming fake news by over 3 to 1. The situation grew much worse closer to election day. In the last three months, from August through early November, the top 20 deceptive news stories received 8,711,000 engagements, while the top 20 true stories had only 7,367,000. It’s hard to tell whether the hoax websites stepped up their game in producing articles better designed to appeal to Facebook users or whether the hyper-partisan mood of the last few months bred a greater willingness to share misleading news stories, but the outcome remains: fake news won in this instance.

Of course, private citizens are not the only ones responsible for the glut of deception in our public discourse. Many of our politicians, including unfortunately our most powerful politicians, put out “alternative facts” that they present as true. For instance, on November 27, 2016, Donald Trump tweeted: “I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally.” He added in a subsequent tweet that day: “Serious voter fraud in Virginia, New Hampshire and California so why isn’t the media reporting on this? Serious bias — big problem!”

After being challenged to come up with evidence to support these claims, the Trump team failed to do so. Numerous media venues, such as CNN, The New York Times, Politifact, and Slate, blew the whistle on Trump’s deception. Following his usual form, Trump simply denied that he lied, and continued to repeat his false claims, aggressively attacking anyone calling him out on his deception. He is doing so despite the fact that his lawyers, when filing a court case in Trump’s name opposing the recount efforts of former Green Party presidential nominee Jill Stein, stated that “All available evidence suggests that the 2016 general election was not tainted by fraud or mistake.”

Fortunately, some prominent Republicans also called out Trump on this lie. For instance, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan stated on January 25, 2017, that he has “seen no evidence” of mass voter fraud. In turn, Senator Lindsey Graham said on January 24, 2017, “I am begging the president, share with us the information you have about this or please stop saying it.”

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky is the co-founder of the Pro-Truth Pledge and author of the national bestseller on how we can figure out what is true, convince others to believe the truth, and change our society to be more truthful, The Truth-Seeker’s Handbook: A Science-Based Guide.
Another example is given by Trump's deceptive statement, in the first presidential debate with Hillary Clinton, that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) “is the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere, but certainly ever signed in this country.” Trump falsely claimed that NAFTA cost Americans millions of manufacturing jobs, saying that “go to new England, Ohio, Pennsylvania, you go anywhere you want, Secretary Clinton, and you will see devastation where manufacturing is down 30, 40, sometimes 50 percent.”

Since that statement was made, his claims have been roundly disproved by prominent economists — people who have thoroughly studied NAFTA and know far more about its impact than Trump or any other politician for that matter. According to Alan Deardorff, an economist at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan, “It’s just nonsense to say NAFTA is responsible for the decline of manufacturing jobs in the U.S.”

The Congressional Research Service, a nonpartisan research arm of Congress, found in its research report that “NAFTA did not cause the huge job losses feared by the critics or the large economic gains predicted by supporters,” and that instead the “net overall effect of NAFTA on the U.S. economy appears to have been relatively modest,” with overall a small and positive impact. Despite being condemned by mainstream newspapers, fact-checkers, economists, and nonpartisan researchers for lying about NAFTA, Trump stubbornly repeated his claims while attacking, with little appeal to fact, the media and experts who disputed his false claims.

The available evidence shows that Trump’s bald-faced lies convinced a large portion of the population. A mid-December 2016 Qualtrics poll showed that over half of Republican voters believed that Trump won not only the electoral college vote but also the popular vote. Mitigating this very bad news, results showed that a college education helps guard against falling victim to the illusory truth effect: while 60 percent of Republicans without any college education believed that Trump won the popular vote, only 37 percent of Republicans with a college degree believed that lie.

Trump’s deceptive statements on NAFTA, among other lies about economic issues, also had a big effect on public beliefs. For instance, according to a poll by Public Policy Polling published on December 9, 2016, 67 percent of Trump voters wrongly believed that unemployment had increased during Barack Obama’s presidency. In reality, when Obama took office in January 2009, unemployment was at 8 percent and rising due to the crisis in the financial system in 2007-2008. By the time of the December 2016 poll, unemployment had dropped below 5 percent, a huge reduction from 2009. Similarly, while the stock market gained 11.8 percent during the Obama presidency, only 41 percent of those who voted for Trump were aware that the stock market went up. According to 39 percent of those who voted for Trump, the stock market had fallen during those years.

Deception proved such a successful strategy for political causes and individual candidates in the United Kingdom and United States elections in 2016 that Oxford Dictionary chose as its 2016 word of the year “post-truth,” meaning “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Now, this choice does not mean that politicians did not lie before, Democrats as well as Republicans. For example, remember Bill Clinton’s famous statement in January 1998: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.” How about Obama’s statement: “If you like your health care plan, you can keep it,” which was rated as “Lie of the Year” by PolitiFact for 2013. Nonetheless, when called out by the media, experts, and investigations, they have backtracked on their deceptions. On November 7, 2013, Obama apologized for his deceptive statements about people being able to keep their plan.

In August 1998, Clinton stated that “I know that my public comments and my silence about this matter gave a false impression. I misled people, including even my wife.” So in the end, lying did not prove a successful strategy for either. Trump, however, doubles down on lies when called out, and attacks anyone who criticizes him for lying — and succeeds. This difference is why Oxford Dictionary made its choice, and helps clarify why so many believe we live in a post-truth society.

Tilting the scale toward truth requires a two-pronged approach, one targeting both private citizens and public figures, using methods informed by research about what is most likely to lead to truth-oriented behavior. In addressing private citizens, we need to consider both what causes people to believe in lies and what causes them to share misinformation. Regarding the former, studies suggest that all new information that goes against our current beliefs causes us emotional discomfort. Our minds naturally tend to reject such information, instead looking for and interpreting information in a way that provides us with comfort by conforming to our existing beliefs. Scholars term this thinking error the “confirmation bias,” as described by Raymond Nickerson in a 1998 article in the Review of General Psychology. Research on the confirmation bias in regard to political beliefs by Charles Taber and Milton Lodge published in 2006 in American Journal of Political Science shows that people tend to accept uncritically political information that favors their current beliefs, while expressing skepticism toward data that goes against their beliefs, providing an interesting mechanism by which confirmation bias works in politics.

Scott Lilienfeld, Rachel Ammirati, and Kristin Landfield’s 2009 piece in Perspectives on Psychological Science describes effective strategies in fighting the confirmation bias. These involve education about avoiding this and other similar fallacious thinking patterns, as well as encouraging delayed internalization of information pending fact-checking, and considering alternative perspectives. Such behaviors are taught in education in critical thinking, sadly all too lacking in our school systems, many of which focus on teaching to the test.

College education makes people less likely to fall for the confirmation bias, as we may observe from the difference between college-educated Republicans who believed Trump won the popular vote and those without college education.

We also have clear research on what makes people more likely to share misinformation. In a 2010 article published by Psychological Science, Francesca Gino, Michael
Norton, and Dan Ariely showed that if people perceived others behaving dishonestly, they were also more likely to behave dishonestly themselves; in turn, if they behaved dishonestly, they perceived others as more likely to behave dishonestly, perpetuating a spiral of deception. Nina Mazar and Dan Ariely’s 2006 piece in the Journal of Public Policy & Marketing illustrated that people are more likely to lie if they believe it benefits their in-group.

Now consider how the research above applies to sharing fake news. If people see a false news article shared on their Facebook feed that appeals to their personal political perspective, and lack education in avoiding the confirmation bias and similar problematic mental patterns, they are likely to believe it. They will also be more likely to share it, because it benefits their political in-group. Even if they have some skepticism about the piece they might well share it, because they see others sharing it, and thus see others around them engaging in dishonest behavior, which they emulate.

Fortunately, we also have research on what causes people to avoid dishonest behavior from some of the same researchers. Two articles by Mazar, On Amir, and Ariely in 2008 in the Journal of Marketing Research show some intriguing findings: reminders about ethical behavior made people less likely to lie; getting people to sign an honor code or other commitment contracts to honesty before engaging in tasks involving temptation to lie increased honesty; making standards for truthful behavior clear decreased deception. An article by Heather Mann et al. in PloS in 2014 demonstrates that our likelihood of lying is strongly impacted by our social network, making it especially important to address social norms around deception.

While we do not have comparable research on how to address deception by public figures, we do have findings on how to incentivize public figures to engage in pro-social behaviors, such as avoiding pollution. Pollution of our air and water devastates the physical environment in a similar way to how pollution of truth devastates our public discourse through undermining trust. While we all gain from clean air and water, individual polluters gain more — at least in the short and medium term — from polluting our environment. Similarly, individual public figures, as outlined above, gain more from polluting our public discourse with deception.

The environmental movement has pursued a series of successful strategies to push public figures to engage in pro-social behaviors, such as avoiding pollution. Pollution of our air and water devastates the physical environment in a similar way to how pollution of truth devastates our public discourse through undermining trust. While we all gain from clean air and water, individual polluters gain more — at least in the short and medium term — from polluting our environment. Similarly, individual public figures, as outlined above, gain more from polluting our public discourse with deception.

The pledge’s Frequently Asked Questions clarifies that the pledge only applies to knowable information about the public sphere. It does not address private speech, or spiritual speech, or personal experience: only public discourse. Thus, the pledge defines misinformation as anything that goes against verifiable facts. That may mean directly lying about the situation at hand, for instance when a politician denies making a statement she actually made. It can mean lying by omission, as when a scholar publishes a study with a successful experiment, while hiding that he conducted 50 of the same experiments that failed until by random chance one finally worked, a phenomenon known as publication bias.

In some cases, misinformation is obvious, so that anyone can see it. In other cases it is less so. For those cases, the pledge calls on signees to rely on credible fact-checking websites. We consider credible any fact-checking organizations that have passed the standards of the Pynter International Fact-Checking Network.

In some cases, fact-checking websites have not evaluated certain claims but the claim will be opposed by scientific research. Since science is the best of all methods we as human beings have found to determine the reality about the physical world, the pledge considers a clear scientific consensus that signees can use to determine the truth. For the purpose of the pledge, this consensus may come in the form of position statements by prestigious scientific organizations, or the result of meta-analysis studies (evaluations of a series of other prominent studies) that come to a clear determination. Since science gets ahead in part through individual scientists with expertise in a certain domain challenging the scientific consensus in that domain, those who are scientists do not have

12 truth-oriented behaviors as seen highlighted in the below blue box:

- Verify: fact-check information to confirm it is true before accepting and sharing it
- Balance: share the whole truth, even if some aspects do not support my opinion
- Cite: share my sources so that others can verify my information
- Clarify: distinguish between my opinion and the facts
- Acknowledge: acknowledge when others share true information, even when we disagree otherwise
- Reevaluate: reevaluate if my information is challenged, retract it if I cannot verify it
- Defend: defend others when they come under attack for sharing true information, even when we disagree otherwise
- Align: align my opinions and my actions with true information
- Fix: ask people to retract information that reliable sources have disproved even if they are my allies
- Educate: compassionately inform those around me to stop using unreliable sources even if these sources support my opinion
- Defer: recognize the opinions of experts as more likely to be accurate when the facts are disputed
- Celebrate: celebrate those who retract incorrect statements and update their beliefs toward the truth

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to abide by the scientific consensus in areas where they have expertise.

As part of signing the pledge, people also have the opportunity to sign up for the pledge newsletter and action alerts, follow it on social media, to ask all of their elected representatives to take the pledge, to be listed in a public database of pledge-takers, to join an online or in-person community of other pledge-takers, and to sign up to be a pledge advocate. The latter consists of any of the following:

1) Promoting the pledge to other private citizens;
2) Advocating for public figures to take the pledge;
3) Monitoring and evaluating whether the public figures stick to their commitment. Furthermore, whenever they share a news article, signees are encouraged to add a sentence stating that they took the pledge and verify that they fact-checked the article. Pledge-takers are asked to share publicly with their networks about taking the pledge, asking others to hold them accountable. Signees may also add a badge to their online media presence and a logo on the back of their business cards indicating they took the pledge.

The pledge and these additional elements contain many components designed to counteract the tendencies that cause us to lie. For instance, the first behavior, of fact-checking before accepting information as true, is key for addressing confirmation bias. Many elements of the pledge, such as the second behavior of avoiding lying by omission and the fourth behavior of clarifying between opinions and facts, aim to address the need to create clear standards for truthful behavior. Signing the pledge itself serves a similar function to an honor code. Reminders of taking the pledge include signing up to email updates, following it on social media, putting a badge on one’s online presence or a logo on the back of one’s business cards, and serving as a pledge advocate, all of which promote truth-telling. Joining online and in-person communities of pledge-takers, as well as promoting the pledge to one’s existing social network, help tilt one’s social network to one oriented toward the truth.

Public figures — politicians, journalists, media figures, CEOs, academics, ministers, speakers, and others — get additional benefits, in line with the research. They have the opportunity to share a paragraph about why they took the pledge and provide links to their online presence. The paragraph is then sent around in the pledge newsletter and posted on social media as a way of providing a reputational reward for committing to truth-oriented behavior. Public figures also get their public information listed in a database on the pledge website and can post a badge on their own website about their commitment to the pledge, providing clear information about which public figures are committed to truthful behavior.

These rewards for public figures will grow more substantial as the pledge gets more popular and known, creating a virtuous cycle. The more private citizens and public figures sign the pledge and the more credibility it gets, the more incentives other public figures will have to sign it. While these early adopters will be most committed to honesty, later adopters will be more likely to do so out of a desire to gain a reputation as honest, and thus will be more likely to cheat. To address this problem, the pledge crowdsources the fight against lies.

One of the volunteer roles for the pledge is holding public figures accountable. If a volunteer suspects that a public figure made a false statement, the volunteer would approach the person privately and ask for clarification. The matter can be resolved by the public figure issuing a retraction — everyone makes mistakes — or the volunteer realizing that the public figure’s statement is not false. If the matter is not resolved, the volunteer would then submit the case to a mediating committee of vetted and trained volunteers. They would investigate the matter and give the public figure an opportunity to issue a retraction or explain why the statement is not false. If the public figure refuses to do so, the mediating committee then assumes that the public figure lied, meaning the person made a deliberately false statement, and rules the person in contempt of the pledge. This ruling triggers a substantial reputational punishment. The mediating committee issues a media advisory to all relevant media venues that the public figure is in contempt of the pledge and puts that information on the pledge website. The committee also sends an action alert to all pledge-takers who are constituents to that public figure, asking them to tweet, post, text, call, write, meet with, and lobby the public figure to retract his/her words. A public figure who intends to lie is much better off not taking the pledge at all.

Will the pledge work to tilt the scale toward truth? In order to tell, we’ll need to evaluate whether people are taking the pledge, and also whether the pledge changes their behavior. Rolled out in December 2016, the pledge has a host of signees. Pledge volunteers find it easy to get private citizens to sign up by attending political and community events and presenting the pledge as an opportunity to fight lies in public discourse. A number of public figures have also signed up after being individually approached by Pro-Truth Pledge volunteers.

The pledge is also gaining sign-ups of public figures outside of the reason-oriented movement. For example, Ethan Bearman, rated as #57 top radio talk show host by Talkers magazine and frequent guest commentator on CNN and Fox, signed the pledge. Bearman is progressive and religious, but another talk show host who signed the pledge, John Wells, is conservative and religious. Another signee is Pat Lynch, the CEO of WomenRadio, a radio network of female broadcasters.

Clergymen have signed the pledge, such as Pierre Whalon, an Episcopal bishop. To be clear, religious people can take the pledge as the pledge applies to verifiable statements about the public sphere, rather than religious or value-based language. Thus, the pledge has the potential to bring together all sorts of people who are oriented toward the truth above all in the public sphere, in the same way that Reverend Barry Lynn served as the Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State for 25 years.

Over 600 politicians across the political spectrum — Republicans, Democrats, and minor parties — have taken the pledge. The pledge is explicitly nonpartisan. The pledge is effective in changing behaviors. One research study at Ohio State University, published in an article in the peer-reviewed journal Behavior and Social Issues, demonstrated the
effectiveness of the pledge in changing the behavior of pledge-takers to be more truthful with a large statistical significance when sharing on Facebook.

Researchers examined the first 10 news-relevant posts one month after they took the pledge and graded the quality of the information shared, including the links, to determine how closely their posts matched the behaviors of the pledge. They then looked at the first 10 news-relevant posts 11 months before they took the pledge and rated those. The study found large, statistically significant improvement in pledge-takers’ adherence to the 12 behaviors, such as fewer posts containing misinformation and including more sources. Another research study, published in an article in the peer-reviewed Journal of Social and Political Psychology, came to similar conclusions using a different methodology, providing further support for the effectiveness of the pledge.

Personal stories show the same behavioral change. A retired United States intelligence officer, who prefers to remain anonymous, took the pledge. He described how, soon after taking it, he saw an article “that played right to [his] particular political biases” and his “first inclination was to share it as quickly and widely as possible. But then [he] remembered the pledge [he’d] signed and put the brakes on.” The story turned out to be false, and “that experience has led [him] to be much more vigilant in assessing, and sharing, stories that appeal to [his] political sensibilities.”

Lorenzo Neal, a conservative Christian pastor who took the pledge, described how he “took the Pro-Truth Pledge because I expect our political leaders at every level of government to speak truth and not deliberately spread misinformation to the people they have been elected to serve. Having taken the pledge myself, I put forth the effort to continually gather information validating stories and headlines before sharing them on my social media outlets.”

Michael Smith, a candidate for Congress, took the pledge, and later posted on his Facebook wall a screenshot of an alleged tweet by Trump criticizing minority and disabled children. After being called out on it, he went and searched Trump’s feed. He could not find the original tweet, and while Trump may have deleted that tweet, the candidate edited his own Facebook post to say that “Due to a Truth Pledge I have taken, I have to say, I have not been able to verify this post.” He indicated that he would be more careful with future postings.

The evidence so far shows that the pledge has much potential. Whether it will succeed depends on how many people go to the website on ProTruthPledge.org and sign it, thus providing incentives for public figures to sign it, and spread the word, lobby public figures to sign it, and monitor those who do. The early results look promising. Emerging out of the freethought movement, the Pro-Truth Pledge has the potential to enable freethinkers like all who are reading this article to save the truth in our country by signing the pledge located at ProTruthPledge.org.

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**The 2018 Tree of Knowledge Special Event**

**December 2**

On Sunday, December 2, 2018, please join us at the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES), located at **1906 South Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**. The program will begin at **11:00 AM**. After a platform speech by PES Leader Hugh Taft-Morales, we will decorate the **Tree of Knowledge**. The tree will be on display throughout the month of December and the lobby is open-to-the-public during office hours.

This year, in partnership with the Freethought Society’s (FS) Helping Hands Committee, PES is accepting donations of gently worn sports shoes and gently-worn jeans to be delivered to Safe Harbor of Chester County. Safe Harbor is an independent, nonprofit organization providing food, shelter, clothing and much more to homeless men and women in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Safe Harbor is located very close to Camp Linden, which is a PES effort to provide a summer refuge for inner-city children.

The actual names for the FS Helping Hands collection drives are “Sole Searching” for shoes and “Jump Into the Jean Pool” for blue jeans. Large, festive boxes will be in the lobby next to the **Tree of Knowledge** until 2:00 PM on December 2.

FS president and founder Margaret Downey will deliver the boxes to Safe Harbor on Monday, December 3. Tax-deductible donation letters are available upon request.

The title of the Taft-Morales 11:00 AM speech is “Do You Listen to Your Conscience?” As children we often experience an inner voice — messages from our psyche reminding us to act ethically toward others. Most of our lives we try to have a clean conscience. Politicians talk of “voting their conscience.” What is this thing we call conscience? Although it is clearly aroused when we witness injustice, can we nurture it so that it more consistently and smoothly guides our behavior? Can conscience be as effective at nurturing goodness as it is in identifying evil? In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, “When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”

Taft-Morales does not have all the answers, but his speech will cause you to think about these important questions.

At approximately 12:45 PM, there will be a 45-minute discussion about the presentation in an upstairs classroom.

Downey will be offering to create ornaments for those who bring two color copies of the front of their favorite books.

The 2018 Tree of Knowledge is a Special Event by the Freethought Society and the Philadelphia Ethical Society.

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Available in paperback and Ebook at your favorite bookstore or online. Please shop at: smile.amazon.com

Using this link to order, automatically increases the Freethought Society’s AmazonSmile donations.

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The 2018 Tree of Knowledge is a Special Event by the Freethought Society and the Philadelphia Ethical Society.
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 publication 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 locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tristate area of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey as well as Southern California. 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 to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). 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: _______________________________________________________________________________________

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Email Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________________________Cell: _____________________________________________

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

FS will send a complimentary ezine (or hard copy upon request) to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS publication.

Name: _____________________________________________________________________________Email: ___________________________________________________________________

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

**Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society**

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

**Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee**
(nonthemism explained in classroom settings)

**Anti-Discrimination Support Network**
(assist Secular Coalition for America gathering reports)

**Community Outreach**
(locate tabling opportunities)

**Diversity Outreach Committee**
(brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities)

**Free Speech Zone Committee**
(research and implement displays in public venues)

**Helping Hands**
(provides helpers to seniors and in emergency situations)

**Jump into the Jean Pool**
(collection of jeans for the homeless)

**Meetup Committee**
(social events and improving online communications)

**Monthly Meeting Coordinators**
(schedule and manage speakers and venues)

**Secular Celebrations**
(develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations)

**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 donation to the homeless)

**Thomas Paine Memorial Committee**
(assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events)

**Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee**
(make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the winter symbol concept nationwide)**