



HAGP News

*Promoting Principles and Ideals of Humanism
based on Ethics, Rationalism and Human concerns.*

Volume 5, Number 2

Spring 2010

Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia P.O. Box 161 Willow Grove PA 19090-0161
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NCC's "So Help Me God" Exhibit Gives False Message to Children

Margaret Downey of the Freethought Society (www.FTsociety.org) recently brought an issue of local concern to the PhillyCoR (Greater Philadelphia Coalition of Reason) leaders, who are now in the process of deciding what action, if any, to take as an organization.

In March of this year, HAGP Board member Elaine Oxman recently brought the same issue to our group's attention. Her 2003 letter to the Constitution Center explains the issue clearly:

Board of Directors
National Constitution Center
P.O. Box 8500-54493
Philadelphia, PA 19178-4493

Dear Board of Directors,

This is my second donation to the Constitution Center. In response to my first gift, I received a ticket to attend the Center at its opening on July 4, 2003. I was delighted with the exhibitions and with the chance to sign a copy of the Constitution, a document that I appreciate and honor. There was one presentation, however, that deeply disturbed me. In it, schoolchildren who chose to take the Presidential oath of office were told to repeat "so help me God" as if there were a religious requirement for the Presidency. Children should be informed that they have a choice: the phrase is not in the Constitution and may be omitted, without penalty, by the incoming President. I still recall, after more than fifty years, how thrilled I was in eleventh grade to learn that the Constitution specifically forbids a religious test for any office or public trust.

Sincerely yours,
Elaine B. Oxman, Ph.D.

(cont'd on page 4)

HAGP Spring Events

MOVIE NIGHTS

Every first Saturday, 7 PM
Giant Superstore, 2nd floor Community Room
315 York Rd.
Willow Grove, PA

Films and documentaries concerning the issues of Humanistic interest, followed by spirited discussion.

April 3 Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story*

May 1 *Temple Grandin*, an HBO-produced biopic of Grandin, a woman with autism who has become a top researcher in humane livestock handling

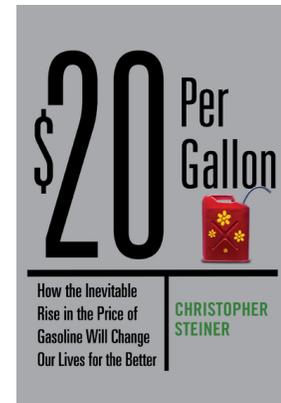
June 5 Film TBA

SECULAR BOOK CLUB

Third Saturdays, 7 PM
Barnes and Noble
102 Park Ave.
Willow Grove, PA

April 17 *\$20 Per Gallon: How the Inevitable Rise in the Price of Gasoline Will Change Our Lives for the Better* by Christopher Steiner (288 pages).

May 15 and June 19: TBA



CASUAL LUNCHEON

Second Saturday of each month (14/10, 5/8, 6/12), Noon
The Olive Garden
2328 W. Moreland Rd.
Willow Grove, PA

For many years, HAGP has sponsored a purely social gathering at the Olive Garden in Willow Grove. This is an excellent way to meet members, engage in some stimulating conversation with like-minded thinkers,

Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.

Edmund Burke

HAGP Spring Events (cont'd)

PROGRAM MEETINGS

Last Sundays, 1:30 PM (Saturday in June, and no meetings in July or August)
Upper Moreland Library
109 Park Avenue
Willow Grove, PA

April 25 *Ancient History: Why Ancient Sources about the Past are Unreliable* with author and blogger **Tom Verenna**.

Did Alexander the Great really march on Jerusalem as Josephus claims? Did the Jews leave Egypt of their own volition or were they, as many great Greek and Roman historians claimed, expelled by the Egyptians due to a disease they are said to have carried? Does the Bible's *The Acts of the Apostles* really portray the origins of the Christian church? Are ancient source texts, which claim to be historiographical, honestly useful towards developing a historical model of the past? These questions and more will be raised during this engaging lecture by Thomas Verenna which seeks to challenge commonly-held presuppositions about ancient literature and the genre of historiography.



Thomas Verenna, author of the book Of Men and Muses: Essays on History, Literature, and Religion (2009), is an amateur historian who has been researching the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods for six years and the ancient Near East for four years. He is co-editing two book projects on Christian origins and the historical Jesus and writing a monograph on the mythical Jesus. Thomas is currently working on an undergraduate degree with a focus in Classics.



May 30: Maggie Ardiente from the American Humanist Association

June 26 (Saturday): Richard Fallstich from Lehigh



The Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking (PhACT) hosts monthly lectures at the Community College of Philadelphia. For information see www.phact.org.

Recent Events



In January, Ellen Johnson, former president of American Atheists, spoke on the topic *Let's Play Hardball*, promoting the Godless Americans Political Action Committee (GAMPAC) which endorses political candidates who support church/state separation.

In February, Rob Boston, senior policy analyst at Americans United for Separation of Church and State (<http://www.au.org>), updated us on AU's current projects. Rob Boston and other AU members regularly address the latest church/state topics on AU's blog, *The Wall of Separation*, at <http://blog.au.org>.



NCC (cont'd from cover)

Elaine has sent this letter repeatedly over the last few years and never received a response. She has since added this proposed solution to the problem to the bottom of her letters:

N.B.: This problem is very easy to resolve. After the child says, "...preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States," a recorded voice says, "You have now completed the requirements for becoming President. If you wish to add "So help me God," press the gray button. At this point the child hears the Chief Justice say, "So help me God." –E.B.O.

HAGP will be taking action as an organization on this issue. We encourage our members to visit the National Constitution Center to view the exhibit in question and to write letters to the National Constitution Center and local newspapers in support of Elaine Oxman's objection and suggestion for resolution of the problem.

**GET
WELL
SOON!**



Longtime member and treasurer of HAGP Warren Goss is resting comfortably after suffering a mini stroke in mid-March. HAGP members and friends send well wishes of a speedy recovery to him and his wife Shirley.

One Nation, Under the Constitution

In March HAGP 2010 speaker series of national leaders in the secular movement concluded with Sean Faircloth, executive director of the Secular Coalition of America. Faircloth gave a rousing talk and then discussion about the state of church-state separation in America and the importance of his organization's mission. He also emphasized the importance of grassroots support and encouraged HAGP members and friends to **sign up for action alerts at www.secular.org**. Faircloth will give his talk again on Sunday, April 25th, 11am at the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia.





Ethical
Humanist
Society
of
Philadelphia

Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

1906 South Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

215-735-3456

www.phillyethics.org

Sunday Platform meetings are held at 11 a.m. September through May. Ethical Society Platforms are free and open to the public. A coffee hour follows for discussion and conversation. *Ethics for Children* classes start each Sunday morning at 10:45AM; child care provided for children to seven years. Free parking is available with a permit you can get inside the Society's office.

Enjoy casual company and conversation with other atheists. Meetups are held the third Thursday of each month at the Midtown II Restaurant, 122 S. 11th St., Philadelphia. For more information, join at <http://atheists.meetup.com/215/>.



JOIN HAGP TODAY

(If you don't want to join the AHA, but want to be affiliated with HAGP, become a Friend of HAGP! Friends can't vote in elections or run for the Board, but receive all other benefits of HAGP membership.)

- NEW MEMBERSHIP
- RENEWAL

Membership Types:

- Individual, \$25.00
- Family, \$35.00
- Student/Limited Means, \$15.00
- Sustaining member, \$50.00
- Patron, \$100.00
- Sponsor, \$150.00
- Lifetime, \$250.00
- Benefactor, \$500.00
- Building Fund, \$1000.00
- Friend of HAGP (\$15 for individuals, \$25 for families)

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Spouse/Partner _____

Mail your check (payable to HAGP) to

Humanist Association Of Greater Philadelphia
P.O. Box 161
Willow Grove, PA 19090-0161

Humanist Celebrant Available

Martha Knox, Certified Humanist Celebrant, would like to remind you that she is available for all your life passage ceremonies, including weddings and commitment ceremonies, baby namings, coming-of-age celebrations, funerals or memorial services, and even divorce celebrations. Discounts are available for HAGP members.

Email celebrant@hagp.org or call 330-242-4714.



Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia

The Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia (FSGP) advocates reason, rationalism, freethought and humanism. To this end, FSGP provides forums in which freethinkers can gather for informational and educational meetings, and for fun events and social networking with like-minded individuals. Visit <http://www.fsgp.org> to learn more.

Socrates Cafe

Facilitated by Sam Frederick

**Wissahickon Valley Public Library
650 West Skippack Pike, Blue Bell, PA
Mondays, 7pm (except holidays)**

Socrates Café is a worldwide movement that fosters independent, informal community discussion groups under the overarching topic: “What is the good way to live life?” The local discussions approach the big topic by discussing more specific subjects like “Integrity,” “If no one is perfect, what is perfection?” and the like. Participants contribute questions and observations based on their own experience. Participants learn new perspectives from each other and then make up their own minds. An extraordinary group culture of reason, honesty, compassion and trust can and has developed among strangers.

HAGP fully supports the spirit in which these discussions are conducted and encourages all curious and open minds to attend! To learn more about the Socrates Cafe movement, visit <http://www.philosopher.org>



**Freethought Society
of Greater Philadelphia**