AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California September 2004

Sunday, September 12

John Stuart Mill's Secular Religion

The speaker at the September meeting is **Lou Matz**, who is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of General Education at the University of the Pacific in Stockton. The focus of his talk is John Stuart Mill's 1874 essay defending the possibility and desirability of a purely secular religion, titled "Utility of Religion".

In Mill's essay, he favors a "Religion of Humanity." He rebuts those who believe that even if traditional supernatural religions such as Christianity are no longer intellectually sustainable, they still are useful and so should not be abandoned to secular beliefs. Mill investigates the alleged usefulness of religion to society and the individual, and while he concedes that religion, as a matter of historical fact, has been the source of moral teaching and that many of the fundamental teachings of

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Special Points of Interest

- Freethought Day 2004 Details (page 1 and insert)
- Vision for AOF (page 2)
- A Summertime Gathering of Secular Students (page 3)
- Newdow Film at the Crest (page 5)
- Back Before There Was a Local Freethought Day (page 6)
- AOF community service projects (page 7)

Exciting "Freethought Day" Ahead!

We are taking a big step forward in 2004!

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Board Meeting Summary

Please note that Sacramento's *third* annual event is coming on **Sunday**, **October 10**. Mark your calendars. Plan to attend, and bring along your family and friends to the celebration in Waterfront Park-Old Sacramento.

We fully expect that the 2004 Freethought Day celebration of reason, freethought, and church-state separation will be our best ever because, this year, we are taking one *giant* step forward, making the event more clearly a cooperative endeavor on behalf of the Freethought community.

The Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area, which was among several of our supporting co-sponsors at last year's event, has this time teamed with AOF to be-

come event co-producer, sharing half the risk and half the benefits. We are delighted that HAGSA has joined with us to help "grow" this event in the Sacramento area. Due to the efforts of both organiza-

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It is rumored that Thomas Paine himself may attend Sacramento's Freethought Day this year, despite being shy of media attention (he prefers to communicate via pamphlets).



The AAI Connection AAI to Hold 2005 Convention in Southern California

The purpose of the organization,

AOF, is to promote the civic

understanding and acceptance of

atheism in our community.

The Atheist Alliance, of which AOF is a member society, will hold next year's convention in Los Angeles. It will be hosted by the 400-member Atheists United. This will put the 2005 spring gathering (it takes place Easter weekend) in the close proximity to Sacramento (the closest location since AOF itself hosted the 2000 "Freethought Across the Millenia" event).

The Crowne Plaza Hotel, near LAX airport, has been selected as the site for the meeting, and the availability of notables and "s ights to see" in the area promises to make this event memorable.

Wouldn't it be fun to have a large contingent of AOFers go down together to LA? More details to follow.

The AOF Line

Building AOF's Future By Kevin Schultz

Dear AOF members:

Many thanks to all who participated in AOF's August Summer Sizzler event. Oratory variety and creativity was outstanding. Food selection, as well, was both diverse and delicious. For members who missed Sharon Fratepietro and Herb Silverman's conclusive answer to the question, "Is There Sex After Death?," the text of their talk has been graciously made available to members of AOF. If you would like a copy, please contact a member of the AOF board, and a copy will be made available to you at the next AOF general meeting (or via email).

Before considering matters of more consequence to AOF than sex and death, I would like to encourage everyone to mark their calendars for October 10. The

2004 Freethought Day Committee, led by Beverly Church and Mynga Futrell, has organized a singularly outstanding line-up of speakers and entertainment. Please see the information within this month's newsletter for exact details. You won't want to miss this fall's most festive event! If you have any questions or comments about this year's event, please

contact a member of the AOF board at your earliest convenience.

Now, on to matters of long-term consequence. As President, I am responsibile for helping define a vision for our organizational future. As we move past our tenth anniversary, I feel we must set our sites on future growth. What will AOF look like at our fifteenth and twentieth anniversaries? I consider this a fundamentally challenging question -- not just for myself and the board, but every member of AOF.

A recently published grassroots manual by the American Humanist

Association (AHA) provides recommendations for steps AOF can take. These future steps will help increase our odds for becoming a stronger voice for atheism in our community.

Over the next several months, I will be sharing information in this column which I feel is of relevance to our organization's future, and how it relates to you as a member.

Sections of the manual focus on organizational issues such as,

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AOF Board

President: Kevin Schultz
Vice President: Kay Dickey
Secretary: Dave Flanders
Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Tina Burgess Beverly Church Mynga Futrell Don Knutson Betty Simonsma

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell, Editor Kay Dickey, Asst. Ed. (Submissions), Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

Visibility and Impact:

Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz, Jerry Sloan, (more members welcome!)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

Connections (ad hoc):

Don Shirley (Caring), Ken Nahigian, Tina Burgess (Youth) Betty Simonsma Kevin Schultz (E-mail)

Freethought Day 2004:

Beverly Church (Chair), Mynga Futrell (Program), Jerry Sloan (Event Day), Ken Nahigian (Publicity), Kay Dickey (\$)

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI), Hank Kocol (CSH), Betty Simonsma (AA), Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Pat Kelley Meetings: Dave Flanders, Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Betty Simonsma

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail 447-3589 if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

aofboard@rthoughtsrfree.org

Bright Beginnings

Summer Fun with Freethought

Bright Beginnings is a bimonthly column reporting on the secular student movement published by the Secular Student Alliance. It is syndicated in more than 20 freethought newsletters. Bright Beginnings is written by Amanda K. Metskas, a second-year graduate student in Political Science at the Ohio State University. She is a member of Students for Freethought at OSU and the SSA. Contact her at amanda@secularstudents.org.

For many college students summer is a time to go home, catch up with old friends, and frantically earn money for the next school year. Many secular students took some time away from these priorities this August 5th through 7th to make the trek to Washington D.C. to work on building a stronger secular community on their college campuses.

The Secular Student Alliance annual conference set out to educate, inspire, network, and enlist these students and the many non-student freethinkers who attended. Those who made the journey found themselves connected to a broader national community. Jenny Werness of the Campus Atheists and Secular Humanists (CASH) at the University of Minnesota said, "The thing that I really valued about this conference was the opportunity to meet and talk with so many intelligent, rational people from across the country."

The first day of the conference was an activist training session focusing on nuts and bolts problems and solutions students face when trying to start and run a secular student group. Brian Underwood, a past president of Students For Freethought (SFF) at the Ohio State University, unveiled a set of web tools he created for the Secular Student Alliance called the "Turnkey" that can help groups create a website; track their membership, finances, and events; and keep records of meetings "at the turn of a key." This tool is aimed at helping groups deal with one of their biggest challenges – maintaining continuity when leaders graduate. With detailed records new leaders do not have to reinvent the wheel when past leaders graduate. The Turnkey also allows groups to share information with one another such as event ideas, publicity materials, and meeting presentations.

Putting student groups in touch with one another and with the broader national Freethought community is a central mission of the Secular Student Alliance. A Friday afternoon session put student group leaders together in discussion groups with leaders of the national Freethought movement such as Fred Ed-

words, editor of *The Humanist* magazine for the American Humanist Association. This session allowed students such as Andrew Carmichael, an incoming freshman at the University of Central Florida in Orlando who is working to start a Freethought group at his university, to get advice from leaders of more established student groups as well as from people with years of experience in Freethought. These sessions proved valuable for the national leaders as well, giving them hope that the Freethought movement would be in good hands in the future. Bobbie Kirkhart, President of Atheist Alliance International, said. "I was very impressed with the young people at this conference. They demonstrate the intelligence, dedication and attitude necessary to lead the Freethought community to its rightful place of influence in the 21st century."

The main conference sessions featured a star-studded cast of presenters including Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Mel Lipman, President of the American Humanist Association; Massimo Pigliucci, Professor of Evolutionary Biology at SUNY Stony Brook; Ellen Johnson, President of American

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Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization,. It is a member society of the Atheist Alliance International. AOF maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Please Attend and Support Freethought Day 2004!

Help to spread the word!

Make use of the 1/2-page flyers that are enclosed with this newsletter

One flyer for you...

... another for a Friend

(or to duplicate for posting)

(Continued from page 1)

tions, we are bringing in from Alabama a featured speaker (Eagle Scout, Darrell Lambert). We will have noted atheist, Mike Newdow, to sing and play guitar. Also coming is a two-person drama team from the Bay area, which will perform a short skit based on a noted (and notorious) freethinker who is one of two women to who will be added this year to our expanding "GALLERY OF FREE AND

INDEPENDENT THINKERS" to be displayed again at Freethought Day.

The pictorial gallery currently consists of nine notables (Tom Paine, James Madison, Robert Green Ingersoll, Frances Wright, and Clarence Darrow are among them). This year we are adding two more women freethinkers. The posters will be on display at Freethought Day 2004, and the printed gallery program will provide succinct descriptions of the varied accomplishments of these remarkable people. If you have yet not seen the gallery, then be sure to come peruse it. AOF hopes to add a few persons each year, as our funds permit, and it intends to make the display a regular part of Freethought Day to help educate the community that freethinkers are a part of our heritage, and of the fabric of our society.

Last year's event was staged pretty much by AOFer-volunteers, using CDs for music and some reruns of prepared mini-speeches from prior AOF meetings. This year is much more ambitious! We will have **live music**, a magician, local poets, displays, and some activities for children (e.g., mystery boxes and ladybugs), local poets and more. This year's theme is *Dare to Think for Yourself!*

We are part of this community and we need to *show it!* Please come lend your support. Help us to put our footprint on the City. We will be pleased to accept any and all donations to help us make this an event that people and media will begin to notice.

See the inserted flyer for some of the features of the upcoming event.

Don't miss it!

Origins of Sacramento's Freethought Day

Our local event has its roots in a 3-year effort (1999-2001) to do atheist/ humanist outreach at California State University. The effort proved rather fruitless in the long run. Still, it did lead to the idea of AOF sponsoring an October "freethought celebration" accompanied by a formal "freethought proclamation" to be read and distributed. Mynga Futrell offers a little history for the record books on p. 6.

We've been really busy planning for Oct. 10...

The committee has put in just hours and hours of hard work (Okay, we confess it hasn't been all work.— We've had fun, too.)



Kevin Schultz relaxes while waiting for a meeting to begin.

...and we could use a little bit of help. Can you assist on the day of the event?

We need a few people to "mind tables" that day, to assist committee members with small tasks, to help clean up the grounds, etc..

To volunteer, phone 447-3589 (24 hr.) and leave your phone number for a call-back.



Beverly Church phones to get some answers during the last Freethought Day meeting. In the foreground is the "spread" she laid out to help us with our thinking!

Photos by Mynga Futrell

Fortunately for the committee, Chair Bev Church, has kept us well supplied with munchies. Since she moved just recently, we had our August meeting in her new house. (See photos.) Actually, we met in her spacious kitchen and were able to munch throughout!

Summer Fun

(Continued from page 3)

Atheists; among many others. Many of their talks focused on political issues facing secular Americans, and how students could get involved to help foster more rational U.S. government policies. Audio from all of these presentations will soon be posted at www.secularstudents.org.

The conference closed on Saturday night with an awards banquet honoring Michael Newdow with the "Backbone Award" for his suit challenging "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. The awards banquet also honored four SSA affiliate groups for their efforts in the past year. James Madison University Freethinkers (their website), the University of Kansas Society of Open-Minded Atheists and Agnostics (newspaper article featuring their efforts and publicizing campus Freethought), Students for Freethought at the Ohio State University (best service project raising over \$1000 at the Central Ohio AIDS-Walk), and The Michigan State University Freethinker Alliance (best SSA affiliate for 2003-2004 for persuading their city council in East Lansing, Michigan to honor "Church-State Separation Week"). Brian Underwood was awarded for his work as a dedicated SSA volunteer (creating the "Turnkey" system). Robert Nekervis, outgoing Campus Organizer for the SSA, received an award for amazing efforts working for the SSA over the past year.

Conference participants returned home on Sunday mobilized and inspired to continue the hard work. Cam Desautels of University of Texas—Dallas summed it up well, "It was an amazing experience. Never before have I felt the presence of so many intelligent minds. There's an incredible energy from being in the same room with so many people who are actually thinking."

For more information about the SSA's 2004 conference go to www.secularstudents.org.

Building AOF's Future

(Continued from page 2)

"Running effective meetings,"
"Planning and Budget," "Issue Advocacy," Building Community,"
"Educational Development,"
"Fundraising," "The Internet,"
"Newsletter and Promotional Materials," "Media Relations," and
"Public Events."

Members interested in obtaining their own copy of the 2004 AHA Grassroots Manual may do so by contacting a member of the AOF board. The manual provides a wealth of information on organizational structure, activism, and experience. AOF will provide the manuals to members on a "costbasis." That is, we will provide you a copy for the cost of producing the copy (should not be much!).

As always, if anyone has any questions or comments regarding AOF, please do not hesitate to submit them to any member of the board of directors. As a transparent organization, we are directly accountable to you as an AOF member, and we encourage active participation by our membership.

Freethought [Fun? or Blues?] at the Movies

A long awaited documentary film, *Pledge of Allegiance Blues*, centering on atheist **Michael Newdow**, finally hit town. The single showing was part of the Sacramento Film and Music Festival, that ran Aug. 12-15. A number of AOFers trekked downtown to the Crest Theatre for the film's "world premiere." Producer-director, **Lisa Seidenberg**, was on hand for the event, along with Dr. Newdow and **Dave Kong**, California State Director of American Atheists. Dave's battle to remove a large cross from park property is not well known, but it was featured in a segment of the film, as was "the Roy Moore situation," and an interview with Alan Dershowitz.



After: Jerry Sloan gives a listener his own "film critique."

Before the movie: Director Lisa Seidenberg poses with some of the people who showed up to see her film. Familiar faces include (left to right), David Henderson, Merle Simonsma, Don Knutson, Betty Simonsma, Lydia Sheridan, Jerry Sloan, Kevin Schultz, Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey, Lisa, (?,?), and Bev Church. —photo by Paul Geisert





AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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City		_ Zip	
E-mail address (print legibly!)			
Check your preference:			
Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12) Low-income Member (\$10) Single Membership (\$20)	, , ,	☐ Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.	
Single Membership (\$20) Please check your preference. We can deliver your m.pdf file to your e-mail address above. □ E-m	nonthly newsletter via an attached	• 1	

Freethinkers Cooperate for Public Outreach

Might "Meager Beginnings" Lead Toward "Something Big"? By Mynga Futrell

The idea of recounting in AOF News & Views some of the history behind our local Freethought Day was stimulated by HAGSA's deciding to partner with AOF for this year's event. Below is the first of a three-part recollection. Coming next month: is Part 2: HEADING TO THE COURTHOUSE

Part 1: HEADING TO CAMPUS

The idea behind it was to perhaps engender some student interest in our local freethought organizations, AOF and HAGSA. That's why, under AOF's name, I set about in the summer of 1999 to organize a campus outreach effort at Sac State that would involve people from *both* of the organizations.

AOF was a nonprofit association at the time, but it didn't yet have 501c3 status. Thus, was a bit difficult to jump through the CSUS hoops. Still, I did eventually make arrangements with the administration.

By September I had signed up the volunteers to go to campus to "table" *during October*. Little did I know then that the chosen time frame of our outreach effort would soon be

labeled, "Freethought Week". That happened because, when gathering up brochures and planning the materials for our table, I ran across a *Freethought Day Proclamation* that had been printed previously by the Freedom from Religion Foundation of Madison. WI.

Recognizing that its commemoration date, Oct. 12, 1692, coincided with our planned tabling, and thinking that might be a nifty way to interest more students, I duplicated copies of the proclamation wording for distribution during our outreach. I also made a rotation chart and drew up guidelines for the volunteers from the two different organizations.

Actually, that year we had planned for 3 days on campus, but I soon began touting the "week" of our tabling as "Freethought Week."

We seated ourselves under a new banner that I had produced. [AOF already had its own banner, but I really wanted the tabling event to involve people from *both* organizations and knew that the HAGSA folks wouldn't go for sitting

behind the "atheist" label .Thus, I chose wording I thought might work well to catch the thinking student.] Our banner: said, "Try Reality: The Invisible and the Nonexistent Look Very Much Alike."

Once on campus, tabling teams proceeded to pass out the assembled freethought and organization literature to students who stopped by. FFRF's Freethought Day Proclamation flyer intrigued several, and so the next year I made sidewalk signs declaring "This is Freethought Week! Ask about it!" That brought more students to the table to inquire.

Enticing sustained student interest or participation in our local groups proved a "tough sell" and, as it turned out, the idea of our perhaps forming and sponsoring a campus group went nowhere, even after three years.

Still, I did find that members of these two organizations *can* work together and *enjoy themselves* while they are at it. I hope the pattern continues and grows. How else can we who are so marginalized in our community ever have any influence in or on it?

AOF Board Meetings At a Glimpse—July 18 / August 15

<u>Minutes</u> - The minutes of June 20, 2004 were approved./ The minutes of July 18 were approved.

<u>Treasury Report</u>:- The board approved the June 2004 treasury report / The board approved the July 2004 report.

<u>Davis Dinners</u> - The dinner for the needy is August 17.

<u>Programs</u> – The July program was reviewed. Upcoming programs were discussed. The August meeting will be a Summer Sizzler, with speeches and a potluck. / The September program was discused.

<u>Liaison Reports</u> – Liaisons with various freethought organizations gave reports./ No time for liaison reports.

Bylaws – Any bylaw changes need to be done by February.

<u>Website</u> - Kevin and Jerry will work on updating the AOF web site.

Kevin will be out of town, starting July 19. Vice president Kay Dickey will handle any emergencies until Kevin arrives back in Sacramento August 7th.

/ Treasury Actions Motion to pay Newdow for additional services approved. Motion to transfer excess in amicus brieffund to general fund, approved. Two motions to re-label funds internally were approved.

The next meeting is Sept. 19 at Jerry Sloan's house.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the *N&V* submissions editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

frethnkr@ mindspring.com or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material submitted online in a PC-compatible word processing format such as Word, Wordpad, or Notepad. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF 's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

Our "Emergency" Highway Cleanup By Don Knutson

For the first time in the 8-year history of AOF's Adopt-A-Highway program, several Board Members called for an Emergency Cleanup to address the serious accumulation of trash and debris at the two-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. this summer.

Veteran participants Mynga Futrell, Don Knutson, Al Ludtke, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz and Pete Studelska along with newcomers Bev Church and Mark Craig answered the call early Saturday morning, August 28.

Considerable progress was made in the two hours we worked but much remains out there and it continues to tarnish our two AOF signs with the blue ribbons attached and suggests that atheists are scofflaws. So please consider joining us as we finish the task on Saturday, September 18 as AOF once again participates in the statewide "California Coastal Cleanup Day". We will gather at 8 a. m. at the Park & Ride on Elkhorn west of 99 and once again we will allow our signs to reflect our dedication to clean highways.

Davis Dinner Report

Seven of the "AOF crowd" stepped forward to help with the August 17 Davis Community Meal. They were Kevin Schultz, Ken Nahigian, Paul Geisert, Ruth Rezas, Sheri McDonald, Stan Whiteside, and Mynga Futrell, who coordinated the team and is very grateful to Ruth and Sheri for responding to late requests when conflicts arose for a couple of the people who had signed up previously.

Fifty-eight persons, including five children, were in need of a meal that sweltering day. All were served a colorful and nutritious meal as the band played on. Raheel, Kathryn, and Zoe, students at UCD, complemented the AOF team for the setup, serve, and cleanup. AOF's mop crew displayed its skills with flair.

SF Mime Troupe Presents

Great fun in the park and you don't have to go to San Francisco! Take an entertainment break! Bring friends and snacks (and spare change to donate to the troupe since the performance is free). The mime group will present *Showdown At Crawford Gulch* (Get it?—the title) in Sac'to on Sunday, Sep 12, at 4:30 pm. Bandshell, Southside Park, (6th & T Sts). AOFers depart mtg. at 4 if they choose to go..

Mill's "Secular Religion"

(Continued from page 1)

Jesus are noble, he argues that there are serious problems with grounding morality in religion. Moreover, Mill defends the idea that a purely secular religion would actually serve humanity and all sentient creation better than supernatural religions.

In this talk, Matz will explain Mill's reasoning and assess its merits as well as explain how Mill softened his purely secular view at the end of his life.

Lou Matz is supremely qualified to address the topic, and this presentation promises to be very enlightening!. Matz has previously taught at UC San Diego, the University of Redlands, Xavier University. His teaching and research interests are in the history of philosophy, ethics, and the philosophy of religion.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!



We're on the Web!
www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm

Calendar of Events

AOF General Program Meeting (open to public) Sunday, Sept. 12, 2:30 PM

Freethought Day Planning Committee Thursday, Sept. 9, 7 PM

AOF Board Meeting (open to members) Sunday, Sept. 19, 9:30 AM

Atheist MeetUp (location TBA, phone for Tina at 447-3589) Sept. 21, 7 PM
Brights MeetUp (location TBA, phone for Paul at 447-3589) Sept. 27, 7 PM

Freethought Day 2004 Sunday, Oct. 10, 11AM - 4 PM

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of every month, from 2:30 - 5 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour Recorder, call 447-3589.

