



AOF News & Views – Newsletter for July 2016

Upcoming Events

➤ Board of Directors Meeting

Monday, July 11, 7 pm

An AOF planning meeting for AOF Directors & officers, but open to all interested friends and members. Come peek in the kitchen to see how the sausage is made. Eew, hate sausage? Then bring your own fresher ideas, your better plans and strategies for AOF. We love ideas!



Location: Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento. Map: <https://goo.gl/iVQL8z>.

➤ Philosophers' Table: Atheism in the Media

Sunday, July 31, noon – 1:00 pm

The last few "Philosophers' Table" discussions were slamdunk winners, so AOF hopes to keep this going for a while. The topic this time: Perception of atheism in the public eye.

How do they see us? When mainstream media mentions atheism, is the context favourable, or non? Has the perception changed over time? What about the old image of the foul-mouthed, sour, bitter, village atheist—is that you? What can we do anything to improve our reputation in the eyes of the general population of the U.S.? (Do we need do anything?)



Come take your stand, state your views. The general rule at Philosophers' Table talks: respect each other's opinions and feelings, help others be heard, and try not to burn down the barn. Please.

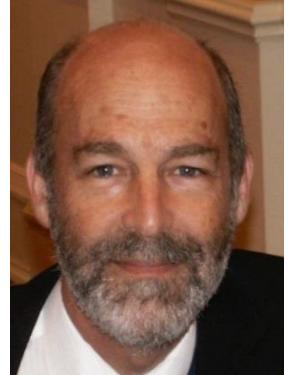
Location: Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento. Map: <https://goo.gl/iVQL8z>.

➤ Mitchell Diamond: Darwin's Apple

Sunday, July 31, 1:00pm – 3:00pm

(aka: *The Evolutionary Biology of Religion*)

Religion is a phenomenon. A deep, pervasive phenomenon that sticks to history like hot chewing gum to your sneakers. For over 50,000 years, in one form or another—longer than agriculture, longer than written language—humans have practiced it. Yet despite modern scientific and philosophical delving, its source and its purpose are a mystery. Deep at the root and wellspring of things, something is going on. Something pervasive. Something universal. *But what?*



Academicians can't even agree if it is an accidental by product (epiphenomenon) or an evolved adaptation. Theories exist. But to date, all approaches to the evolutionary and biological source of religion fail to show how it is adaptive, how it could increase individual fitness. And at the day's end, a comprehensive cognitive theory of religion remains lacking.

Speaker Mitchell Diamond comes to AOF to dissect prevailing explanations for religion's origin, put the pieces under a microscope, and tell us why they lack legs.

A bit about this gentleman. Mitchell Diamond got his B.A. in Biology from UC Santa Cruz and has maintained a keen interest in the biology of human behaviour since. Seeing how religious behaviours are universal and persistent in all human societies, and yet existing explanations are absent or deficient, he decided to dig into the origins of religion. What he found was that virtually all popular theories focused on beliefs in gods and the supernatural "not particularly amenable to scientific analysis," rather than religious *behaviours*, which are more appropriate for scientific study. By examining human actions rather than belief, Diamond shucked the prevailing dogma and developed a new hypothesis of the religion's origin.

He is the author of [*Darwin's Apple: The Evolutionary Biology of Religion*](#).

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➤ Ryan T. Cragun: What you Don't Know (but Should!)

Sunday, August 14, 2:30pm – 4:30pm

(aka: *How to Defeat Religion in 10 Easy Steps*)

What *should* you know about religion? Besides not drinking the Kool-Aid, that is. OK, so nonbelievers (on average) know more about faith than do believers (on average). That's old news. Heretics, outcasts & apostates are often driven to dig up the dirt. But none know it all. And what you think you know, and don't, might turn your blood to ice.

Ice is nice, especially in August! So Ryan T. Cragun, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Tampa, Florida, is here to bring us an irreverent, engaging, and illuminating introduction to the sociological study of religion for non-experts. Using U.S. and international data, and clear and simple analyses, Ryan will answer all who have ever asked if religion really helps or hurts society, or wondered what the future holds for faith.

It's another event of the AOF Speaker Series (we say it with pride). Where will it happen? Where can you hear this exceptional speaker? [Reason Center](#), of course! RC is a priceless regional resource for nonbelievers. So priceless that, for this event only, we suggest a price. That's a voluntary donation of \$2 per person. Dare we call it a love offering? But it might be a warm day, so please help RC keep the AC running.

Location: Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento. Map: <https://goo.gl/iVQL8z>.



➤ Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup

Sacramento-area freethinkers have "adopted" a stretch of Highway 99, from Elkhorn Boulevard to Elverta Road, and for over twenty years have kept it clean of litter and debris. It is one of our more successful civic efforts, and shows that we can also serve the community.

If you agree, please join us! Enjoy a quiet walk in the wild, wet morning. Commune with nature. Do a deed for the environment. The refuse you collect would otherwise be swept by rain into tributaries and the ocean, degrading habitat, and bringing slow death to many creatures.

Activity captain Don will cheerfully provide all safety equipment, including comfortable, natty hard-hats and gloves, stylish safety vests, collection bags, and handy trash pickers. The cleanup takes a scant two hours. Dress for the season—a bit of sunblock might be wise. And you might want to bring a backpack or fanny-pack to carry 3 or 4 trash bags.

Saturday, August 20, 9:00am – 11:00am



Location: Travel north from Sacramento on I-5, past Sleep Train Arena. Take the "Highway 99 - Yuba City, Marysville" exit. Exit at Elkhorn Boulevard less than a mile north. Turn left, cross the overpass. Meet in the park-&-ride lot on your left. **For more info or carpooling, contact:** Don, 916- 447-2169.

Truth is not a Rock – by Fran Evanisko

I first read Jean Paul Sartre's *Portrait of an Anti-Semite* about 50 years ago. Recently, I came across a paragraph that I had highlighted at that time. It is the most lucid description of the difference between authentic rational, and ideological thinking I have encountered. This was written in 1945 and is certainly pertinent today.

"The rational man seeks the truth gropingly, he knows that his reasoning is only probable, that other considerations will arise to make it doubtful; he never knows too well where he's going, he is 'open,' he may even appear hesitant. But there are people who are attracted to the durability of stone. They want to be massive and impenetrable; they do not want to change: where would change lead them? This is an original fear of oneself and a fear of truth. And what frightens them is not the content of truth which they do not even suspect, but the very form of the true—that thing of indefinite approximation. It is as if their very existence were perpetually in suspension. They want to exist all at once and right away. They do not want acquired opinions, they want them to be innate; since they are afraid of reasoning, they want to adopt a mode of life in which reasoning and research play but a subordinate role, in which one never seeks but that which one has already found, in which one never becomes other than what one already was. Only passion can produce this. Nothing but a strong emotional bias can give instant certitude, it alone can hold reasoning within limits, it alone can remain impervious to experience and last an entire lifetime." — *Portrait of an Anti-Semite*, Jean Paul Sartre, 1946

If truth is a rock, then it's a very slippery one.

[E]thical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

~ Albert Einstein

Cleo Fellers Kocol (Jan 12, 1927 - July 5, 2016)

Quietly, amid loved ones, and in the home shared for twenty years with late husband Hank, Cleo went away. Her long life story ended Tuesday morning at 6 a.m., ironically a day after the death-day of her hero, Thomas Jefferson.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, sharing a birthday with her other hero Jack London, humanist and feminist activist Cleo Fellers worked for the Department of the Navy during World War II and then as a medical secretary, doctor's assistant and assistant hospital administrator. She married Hank Kocol at age 43. Her activism ignited when she and Hank lived in New Jersey in the 1970s. She served on the national board of the American Humanist Association and chaired its feminist caucus for many years (in 1988 the AHA named her a Humanist Heroine). The Kocols moved to Washington State in 1979 and participated in a weekly Sunday picket at the Mormon Temple in Bellevue to protest the church's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. She and 20 others were arrested in 1980 for chaining themselves to the temple gates to hinder Mormon President Spencer Kimball from entering—the first of her three civil disobedience arrests. Migrating to California, Cleo and Hank became charter members of Atheists and Other Freethinkers, began a highway cleanup project and were active in Humanists of Greater Sacramento Area. Cleo wrote and published, but a major cusp of her life was when she attended a poetry conference, and "felt the top of her head explode."



Cleo's creative oeuvre is too large to list, but included three, hour-long women's history shows, presented throughout the U.S., spotlighting Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Sanger and other feminists, as well as a one-woman drama about the women in the life of Thomas Jefferson. The U.S. Navy commissioned her to write and perform a play about "Amazing" Grace Hopper, a computer pioneer and one of the first women Navy commodores, who later rose to the rank of rear admiral. Cleo's memoir *The Last Aloha*, published in 2015, details her humanism, feminism, and amazing life with Hank.

A star has gone dark, time has collapsed to a singularity, Cleo is gone. We will miss her.

Tributes

Activist, feminist, editor, humanist, author, poet, playwright, actress and so much more---Cleo did and achieved so many heights in her 80+ years. The word "can't" was not in her dictionary or a part of her vocabulary. If you want a glimpse into the life of Cleo Kocol you must pick up a copy of *The Last Aloha* available through Amazon. She was quite an extraordinary woman.

For me, personally, having the opportunity to get to know Cleo and have her be a part of my life, if only a short time, was a profound gift that I'll treasure the remainder of my life. That's the amazing impact she made on me. I smile whenever I recall a woman of small stature standing in front of about 80 family and close friends at my wedding. My soon-to-be wife and I towered over her in height, but it was Cleo who stood as a giant in projecting to the audience with robust enthusiasm. She was so proud to have been asked and to serve as officiate at a same-sex wedding---a first for Cleo, both as officiate and as an attendee at a gay wedding. Judy and I wanted a strong, female, no-nonsense feminist to pronounce us at our wedding and the name Cleo burst forth from our lips simultaneously. Cleo was so touched and honored that we wanted her. Can you imagine, Cleo was the one feeling honored? She was ever so humble and modest in the midst of such an accomplished life lived to its fullest, which is why she is and was loved so much.

In my last conversation with Cleo a little over a week ago, she told me what an honor it was to have gotten to know me these past few years and what a privilege knowing me had been for her. I looked her in the eyes and said, "No, it's the other way around dear friend, it's the other way around." You will be missed dearest Cleo---Aloha.

~ Kathy Johnson

Cleo amazed me. Her work amazed me. My experience of her writings was akin to being a ten-year-old at a new school, shy, awed, unsure, a bit intimidated by the kaleidoscopic language, standing on the periphery – until an image comes up to grab me and knock me down winded like the playground bully. Her poetry hooked you and pulled you. Her observation of human nature was provocative, challenging, often sexy, and rich with hilarity. Literary talent aside, Cleo was alive to the core and an activist and humanist in all her fibers. She rubbed elbows with heroes—Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan, Phillip Appleman, Kurt Vonnegut, Dan Barker—and casual conversation with her was like a walking tour through a galaxy of lights. I wondered, why did she and Hank chose to live in *this* backwater? It should be New York, London! But this small Ohio girl, who stood toe-to-toe against the Mormon empire and gleefully endured arrest for her values, loved this little Sacramento-area coven of humanists and freethinkers, lived here, fostered us, and shared her talents. Now her personal adventure has ended. What remains with us is inspiration and memories. We must try to deserve them.

~ Ken Nahigian

The Blues Man

Cleo Fellers Kocol

tosses a riff saying
life is a slipshod serenade pinching
pride, bruising the undertones.

Her velvety voice hums a reality
he doesn't coax from his sax. Clinging
to resistance, he improvises.

She slows for the melody, punching
lead lines. Negating bitter and mouthing
sweet, she tosses vibrato at him.

Bluesy contralto. No room for
anything but gut-grabbing emotion.
A throb of longing duels with
music crying his head.



When you donate blood...

Please consider donating blood at the BloodSource, and if you do, use AOF BloodSource ID# **4857**.

Numerous BloodSource Donation Centers exist -- find them listed at: <http://www.bloodsource.org/Locations>.

AOF gets no perks when members donate, but it saves lives and is good for public relations. And what can be more humanistic than donating blood?

AOF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association, FEIN 68-0325762. General Meetings are free and open to the public. AOF also hosts civic service projects, dinners, movie outings, parties! To see what awaits you, visit the website, www.aofonline.org; or contact AOF at our 24/7 voice-mail: 916-447-3589; or write to PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. Semaphore ... probably not.

AOF Acting President: Kristi Craven. Vice-president: Mynga Futrell. Editor: Fran Evanisko. And all the rest of us, their minions.

The purpose of Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF) is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

Not yet a member of Atheists and Other Freethinkers? Then join us.

Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

E-mail is required for newsletter delivery.

Questions, concerns? Call AOF, 916-304-3796.

Your Membership Level (annual, please circle):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Basic Dues : \$ _____

Additional Donation : \$ _____

Total enclosed : \$ _____

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to groups similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association, EIN 68-0325762. Dues & Donations are tax-deductable as permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter for free on request (email only).