

✧ ✧ **Upcoming AOF Events** ✧ ✧

Cheers for AOF members & friends who joined us for the April 26 online presentation on the [History of Quackery](#) by quack-watcher & skeptic Chris Holland – AOF's first successful online meeting! If you missed it, the sad news is that we did not record his marvelous talk, so it is not available for retrospective viewing. But please enjoy supplementary material at <https://chrisholland.ch/dr-quackensteins-museum-of-oddities/>. And maybe (we hope!) Chris Holland will be back some day.

➤ **Free Movie Nights ...**

AOF has suspended in-person movies showings due to the CONVID-19 lockdown (and anyway, Reason Center Theatre is closed). The program committee is working on methods for Online movie showings. See May 15 event below.

➤ **Board of Directors Meeting**

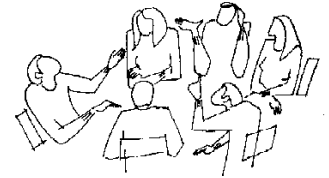
Tuesday, May 12, 2020, 7pm-9pm

A planning meeting, tentative, very tentative, since Reason Center is temporarily closed. AOF may cancel it, hold it online, or meet elsewhere. Watch [this link](#) of our website, or contact AOF for details.

Location: TBD (to be determined).

Contact: See the AOF Contact page (<http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>).

Bring your ideas for AOF, your strategies, your suggestions for events and activities -- most of all, your volunteerism.



➤ **Free Movie Night**

Friday, May 15, 2020, 7pm-10pm

As you know, Reason Center (RC) and AOF like to treat you to two Free Movies each month. But due to COVID-19, Reason Center is closed. The program committee hopes to show the next movie as an online event, using the "Netflix Watch Party" application. This requires a Netflix account and the Google Chrome browser. If you don't have either, we apologize, and ask you to be patient until RC opens its doors. If you have them, here's what to do:

1. In advance of Movie Night, open your Chrome web browser and install the Netflix Party Extension. Get it at "www.netflixparty.com" (free).
2. Just before show time, fire up the Chrome browser again and visit:
https://www.aofonline.org/calendar-of-events/icalrepeat_detail/2020/05/15/2274/-/free-movie-night.html.
The page should display the link for accessing the movie. Click the link.
3. The Movie Party page will open. Log into Netflix. At the top right (of the browser window) you should see a small gray circle with the letters **NP** in darker gray. It's hard to see, so look very closely. You may need to click on the "NP".
4. The Netflix movie should begin. As it plays we can chat on the side of the screen and make silly, snarky comments.



This is a learning process for all of us. Be patient please. If you have questions, see Contact info below.

Free Movie Nights are especially for Reason Center members, but non-members are welcome. How can you become a Reason Center member? Sign up at <http://reasoncenter.com/donate/>. Membership is a measly \$5 a month, is tax deductible if you itemize, and the perks (like this one) just keep coming.

Location: Online via Netflix (www.netflix.com), see instructions above.

Contact: Email "programs (at) aofonline (dot) org", or see <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

➤ **Dave Warnock: Dying Out Loud**

Sunday, May 31, 2020, 2pm-4pm

This exceptional speaker, previously scheduled for April, has generously agreed to speak to AOF in May.

Who is Dave Warnock? For almost 40 years a conservative Evangelical pastor at the Foursquare Church, he began to look into the claims of Evangelical Christianity. Looked a bit too deeply perhaps. He learned his lifelong faith had failed him.

First he called himself an agnostic. Later it was "atheist," and now does what he can to de-stigmatize this explosive word (it just means "non-theist," he says). He seeks to show that atheists can be good people, exhibiting the same morals and values as people of faith.

The exit from Christianity was due to the tenets of his life-long faith no longer aligning with his core values: 1) acceptance of all people and 2) the idea that life is to be lived for the moments that are contained within this one life we know we have, rather than viewing this life as a temporary life until we enter eternity. Turning from his faith came at a huge personal cost: the loss of most of his friends, the end of his 37-year marriage, and a broken relationship with two of his three children, which has also deprived him of being part of his six grandchildren's lives.

Then on February 26, 2019, he received the devastating diagnosis of ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's disease). A series of doctor visits, a blood test, MRI, more doctor visits, and finally an EMG at one of the most prestigious hospitals in the country led to the cold and final diagnosis, along with instructions to put his clothes back on and where to find the exit from the neurologist's office. No follow-up plan ... no counselor referral ... just go home and die in 3-5 years.

Suddenly this precious and brief life became infinitely more precious and incredibly brief. Instead of succumbing to the depression, anger and hopelessness of the debilitating, fatal disease, Dave immediately decided to begin "Dying Out Loud," to live life to the fullest and travel as much of the world as his body will allow. He wants to see places he's never been, spend time with people he knows and loves, experience the joy of meeting new people, and cherish the beautiful moments life offers. This life-change is now the Dying Out Loud Tour: Dave is traveling to speak at venues all over the world, doing interviews on podcasts and YouTube shows, and basically spreading his message everywhere he can.

Let's welcome him. Let's hear him. A special event of the AOF Speaker Series.

Location: Videoconference via Zoom (<https://zoom.us>). AOF will publish the Zoom Meeting ID later.

Before the event: Go to <https://zoom.us/download>; download & install the Zoom videoconference tool.

Contact: Email "programs (at) aofonline.org", "daveoutloud (at) gmail.com" or "warnockpa (at) gmail.com".

Totally free. But you must signup with Zoom.us and get the Zoom Videoconference application. (A bother, we know, but worth it.)



Dying Out Loud

with
Dave Warnock

LIFE AFTER GOD >

✧ ✧ Other Upcoming Events ✧ ✧

➤ Quarantine Trivia Night Online

Friday, May 8, 2020, 7pm – 9pm

Join freethought friends on Zoom, the free online videoconference tool, for a Quarantine Trivia Night – Bar Style, which means grab a drink (juice or soda is OK) and play along. Have paper and pen handy to write down your answers – expect 60-80 questions. Form a team (before the game using phone, email, texting or google docs) or play as an individual. In honor of the Quarantine the first place prize is two reason center colored fabric face masks!



Location: Videoconference via Zoom (<https://zoom.us>). For the Zoom Meeting ID, see <https://www.meetup.com/ReasonCenterEvents/events/270344968/> just before the event starts.

Before it begins: Go to <https://zoom.us/download>; download & install the Zoom videoconference tool.

Details: See <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/270363527/>.

➤ Blasphemy Breakfast

Sunday, May 17, 2020, 9:30am – 11am

Join friends for a "Blasphemy Breakfast" at Mel's Diner in Rocklin. Like everything else these days, it is tentative. "A few of us still order takeout from Mel's so we can tip our regular wait staff and say thanks to them for holding the front line. If we are still under Shelter At Home orders from Gov. Newsom we'll just do that again in May. We will be back together at some point to laugh and share as we've done for six years. ... We miss you! Stay soapy, JS." Also, "This is a great group of people to answer any atheist questions you might have, help you learn more about all the freethinking goings-on in the region, or help you any way we can. It's always a breath of fresh air to have brunch with like-minded friends. And we'll surely be friends once we've met you." Recommended: the malts, omelets, biscuits 'n' gravy, and grilled cheese.

Location: Mel's Diner, 6708 Lonetree Boulevard, Rocklin. Map: <https://goo.gl/maps/tFRtMCuqWXejWJSA>.

Details: <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/270158453/>.

Message Judy Saint, the event organizer, with any questions. That's right, "Saint." Stop giggling.

➤ Coalition of Reason – Sacramento Area Events

Look, we have only so much room. Other freethought events are happening in the area all the time. If you want to know more, see <https://unitedcor.org/event-calendar-2/>. It will crush your cabin fever.

You can help. Here's how.

Support Reason Center

Since Reason Center opened in July 2014, it has hosted hundreds of events and accrued twelve partner organizations. Its mission is to support a social and intellectual community for local freethinkers, contribute to society through education and community service, advance the civic understanding and acceptance of freethought, and uphold the separation of religion and government. All good work.

But to continue, "RC" relies on support from members and donors. Please stand up for Reason Center, because it stands up for you. To set up a monthly or one-time donation, visit ReasonCenter.org.

Support AOF

You can support AOF *without spending a dime*. How? When you purchase goods at Amazon.com, simply use this link: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0325762>. Bookmark it now! Prices & service will be the same, but AOF will receive a small kickback for whatever you purchase. Sweet!

Suggest a Meeting

Know a compelling speaker, have a great meeting idea? Tell the AOF Program Committee! Go to <http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>, click "Program Committee" in the drop-down line, and enter your thoughtful suggestion. (Reasonable honorariums paid to speakers.)

Volunteer?

We suggest it meekly. See <http://www.aofonline.org/learn/committees.html> for opportunities.

✧ ✧ Secular Holidays ✧ ✧

➤ National day of Reason

Thursday, May 7, 2020

First endorsed in 2003 and honored by U.S. secularists, The [National Day of Reason](http://www.nationaldayofreason.org/) (NDoR) occurs on the first Thursday of May. NDoR is a response and counterbalance to the National Day of Prayer, designated by the US Congress since 1952. On this day all humanist Americans can join hands to celebrate rationality — a concept all can or should support. The goal: to raise public awareness of the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the sphere of private worship. For details, and to learn about events in your area, see <http://www.nationaldayofreason.org/>.

Other organizations such as the [Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia](http://www.ethicalhumanistsociety.org/) have designated this the **Rational Day of Care**, a day to donate home-cooked meals to the Aid for Friends project, or perform other acts of humanistic charity.

On January 23, 1808, in a letter to the Reverend Samuel Miller, our Founding Father Thomas Jefferson had these words:

"Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the time for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and right can never be safer than in their hands, where the Constitution has deposited it. ...civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States and *no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents*." [Emphasis added]

The National Day of Reason is a *movable* secular holiday. It can be any time from May 1 to May 7.



➤ Towel Day

Monday, May 25, 2020

[Towel Day](http://www.towelday.org/) is the annual celebration of the life and writings of Douglas Adams (1952-2001), humorist, humanist, conservationist, science fiction writer and social critic. On that day, fans around the universe proudly carry a towel in his honor. Why a towel? Don't panic, go to the website to see - or better yet, read [The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](http://www.hitchhikersguide.com/). It's a great book!



➤ Opposite Day

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

Some say the proper date is May 26, some say April 30, some say March 27th – can you ever be sure? When someone says "Today is **Opposite Day**," he might be lying! Opposite Day is a day to say the reverse of what you mean, with a wink, with a nod; a day when "no" means "yes" and "shut up" means "keep talking;" a day to be nice to your boss, teacher or enemy, and a complete jerk to your best friend; a day to turn words on their head; a day to tie knots in logic. Celebrate with care. It might get you in trouble!

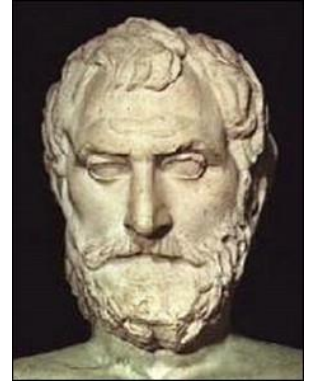
etizooqo

➤ Birthday of Science

Thursday, May 28, 2020

The **Birthday of Science** marks the day Thales of Miletus (in 585 BCE) correctly predicted a solar eclipse. A better choice might be the discovery of fire or the wheel, but we don't know exactly when that happened or who did it. We *do* know about Thales. His prediction was significant because the idea of cause and effect (causality) applies to all science. Given any phenomenon, with the exception of purely random quantum events, in principle we can trace its cause or causes, and the cause of those causes, back through time -- until all cause-tracks merge at the "Big Bang," beyond which, presumably, no tracks remain. The seeds of our life and future were sewn then. The [Large Hadron Collider](#) is an effort to re-create those first moments.

Science desires a beginning that applies to the big picture, and a sense of order and predictability. That is where causality leads us.



Not yet an AOF member? Please join us!

Atheists and Other Freethinkers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association, FEIN 68-0325762, incorporated in 1993. Meetings are free and open to the public. AOF also hosts civic service projects, dinners, movies and parties! See what awaits you at www.aofonline.org.

AOF President & Editor: Fantastic Fran Evanisko
Vice-president: Marvelous Mynga Futrell
Secretary: Rapid Ruth Rezos
Treasurer & Registrar: Kinetic Ken Nahigian
Webmistress: Palpable Pat Kelley
Facebook page: Kaeleigh Pontif
Directors at large:
Roger Zabkie, Pamella Rivera, Linda Ostrofsky (Jetta),
Kaeleigh Pontif, Ben Tuason
... And the rest of the motley team.

How to Contact AOF:

- Call 916-304-3796 (voicemail)
 - Or write to PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182
- Or visit <http://www.aofonline.org/contact> to e-message us

How to Join AOF:

Visit <http://www.aofonline.org/join>, or come to a meeting. We have forms.

AOF's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Atheists-and-Other-Freethinkers/533365556831322>

AOF is affiliated with the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies (ASHS), Atheist Alliance of America (AAA), American Atheists (AA), American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Sacramento Coalition of Reason (SCoR).

AOF Mission Statement:

"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."

What is a Freethinker? One striving to form opinions of life, religion, politics and philosophy on the grounds of reason and experience, rather than tradition, authority or custom. He or she need not be an atheist, though in a religious society most atheists do tend to be freethinkers.

AOF supports a benign separation of Church and State as the best means to protect the liberty and intellectual commerce of citizens. "... to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries" (James Madison, 1803).

Our vision: to be a venue where secular and unchurched citizens can socialize, dialog, develop friendships and enjoy shared company. AOF does not discriminate on such grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, physical debility or (*cough*) religion. We welcome the fair-minded of all political persuasions and preferences. Any who will treat others with respect and dignity may join.

Donations to AOF are tax deductible, and the newsletter is free by email. Please share with sympathetic friends.

Letters, submissions? We love them! See: <http://www.aofonline.org/read/submission-guide.html>.

The Theologian's Theologian

(Cribbed from ShipOfFools.com, with hat-tips)

There is little scope to overstate the extreme cleverness of Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1275). "Very clever," for example, would be a lame way to say it.

His books are quite incomprehensible to most mortals. Fortunately there are many books written to explain Thomas's books. Unfortunately, anyone who understands Thomas immediately becomes incomprehensible as well, so they don't get us far.

Not a likely passenger on the ship of fools, you might think. He's considered one of the greatest thinkers in history, by people who think about thinking. His influence on Christian ideas has been immeasurable. And he invented the limerick – although it must be said that his own efforts weren't terribly funny.

He was entirely obsessed with deep and clever thinking. Ecclesiastical dignitaries and fellow brain-boxes would travel across the world to compare notes or tap his thoughts, only to find they couldn't get a word out of him because he was too engrossed in mulling things over.

His greatest work of all was the *Summary of Theology*, a big title for the biggest book you've ever seen (and if you've seen it you'll probably have seen some other pretty big books as well). In this he ties

up all those little nagging questions about who is God, what is everything else, the meaning of life, and whether the Risen Christ had phlegm.

By St Nicholas's Day 1273, he was 49 and had been writing the book for eight years with no end in sight. That day, he sat in his cell and wrote the words: "The parts of penitence, because they are actions, have these last two relationships of power and order in time, but no order of position..."

He laid down his quill and went out to Mass. When he came back, he looked even more distracted and overawed than normal. The monks asked him if he was all right, and he murmured, "I've met God."

(Historians think it was possibly a *petit mal* stroke, caused by overwork. And it's true, Aquinas was not exactly the epitome of physical fitness. The word Lardo arises. But who knows?)

Thomas continued in the state for a worryingly long time. In the end they suggested he go back to his cell and get on with that book they were eagerly awaiting the next volume of.

"Oh no," he said. "I've met God. That's all straw."

Sure enough, he didn't write another word of theology for the rest of his life. Admittedly that wasn't especially long, because he died in a freak donkey-riding accident the following year.

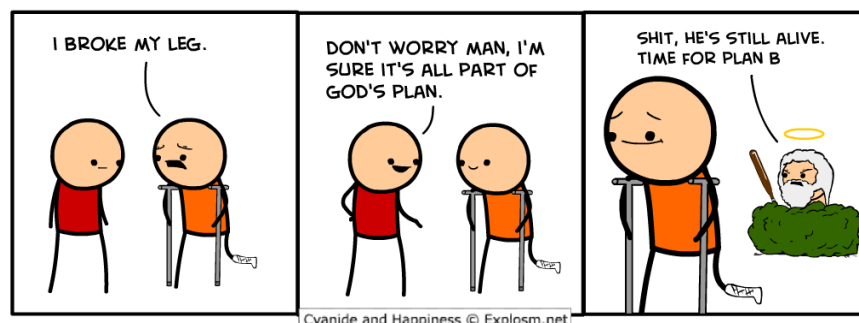
'Freethought Matters' TV Show

A weekly half-hour TV talk show from the Freedom From Religion Foundation

"Freethought Matters," a weekly TV show from the [Freedom From Religion Foundation](http://FreedomFromReligionFoundation.org) (FFRF), has returned to national television as of April and is now airing across the country, covering more than 22 percent of the U.S. TV market. "As an antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing," says FFRF, "the half-hour talk show will air Sunday mornings in 12 cities."



In Sacramento, enjoy Freethought Matters on **KQCA-MY** (Ch. 58), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.



Christian Apologist Puffs Up His Testimony

Josh McDowell's Testimony just keeps getting better

By Edward T. Babinski, reprinted from new.exchristian.net ([link](#)), condensed for space

A film came out in 2012 portraying Josh McDowell as having traveled the world in search of evidence to refute Christianity. Unable to do so, he reluctantly converted. The film was titled [Undaunted](#).

McDowell converted in 1959, so let's start by comparing his earliest written testimonies of his conversion with the expanded multi-part series he composed 39 years later, and again 48 years later.

In the first edition of his book, [Evidence That Demands a Verdict](#) (ETDV), McDowell's testimony was titled, "I've Got a Satisfied Mind." In the [second edition](#) he rewrote and lengthened it, and called it, "He Changed My Life."

Based on those two early versions, and based on the date McDowell himself supplies for his conversion, he converted when he was a mere sophomore at an unimpressive community college and he converted in a matter of months. Nor was he studying religion or philosophy, but courses in preparation for law school. He says that in college he met a girl at that college with a beautiful smile and he wanted that happiness. He adds, "My new friends challenged me intellectually to examine the claims that Jesus Christ is God's Son." But when did McDowell find the time and mental composure to rise to that "intellectual challenge"? His conversion took place, by his own admission, "Dec. 19, 1959," at the end of the first semester of his college sophomore year. He did not spend years studying the evidence. Just months.

Worse: he admits that he was easily distracted and/or had great difficulty concentrating prior to converting: "I hated to be alone... [was] frustrated... empty... If my girl loved me, I was on cloud nine; if she broke up with me, I was really down... I had a bad temper... and still have the scars from almost killing a man during my first year in the university... had a lot of hatred... hated my father [a wife-beating alcoholic]... had a lot of restlessness in my mind, and I always had to be somewhere, or with someone. I just couldn't be alone with my own thoughts. My mind seemed like a maze... I always had to be occupied. ... I'd walk across campus and my mind was like a whirlwind with conflicts bouncing off the walls. I'd sit down and try to study or cogitate and I couldn't." (ETDV, 1st & 2nd eds.) How could Josh thread an intellectual needle if he was in such an unstable frame of mind?

Then ... 39 years after converting (in 1999) his testimony changed to a more intellectual sounding one in which he writes for the first time the following:

"I left the university and traveled throughout the United States and Europe to gather evidence to prove that Christianity is a sham. One day while I was sitting in a library in London, England, I sensed a voice within me saying, 'Josh, you don't have a leg to stand on.' I immediately suppressed it. But just about every day after that I heard the same inner voice. The more I researched, the more I heard this voice. I returned to the United States and to the university, but I couldn't sleep at night."

"University?" He was taking legal prep at Kellogg Community College, and converted only a few months after meeting a happy Christian girl there. He was one heck of a traveler to go "throughout the United States and Europe" in a few months.

Things grow even less believable when Josh puffs up his story again, this time 48 years after converting. In the newest retelling, published in 20 parts on his website in 2008, he embellished his tale further by adding travels not just to the U.S. and Europe but to "the Middle East," and notes the exact time within a half hour when he heard "the voice in the library":

"The whole reason for writing my first book ... was to write a book to make an intellectual joke of Christianity – to refute those students and professors I had encountered in the university. I thought that would be easy. I left the university. I traveled throughout the United States, England, and the Middle East. I gathered evidence to write the book. I was sitting in a library in London, England ... late on a Friday afternoon around 6:00 or 6:30, and something happened It was like a voice spoke to me. Now I don't normally hear voices, but it was like a voice spoke to me. It said, 'Josh, you don't have a leg to stand on.' I immediately suppressed it. [But] almost every single day after that, I heard the voice." ([source](#))

Josh portrays himself as a highly focused, well-traveled intellectual researcher prior to converting, having traveled, "throughout the United States, England," and now, "the Middle East." But that was absent from his testimonies from 1981-1992 ([link](#)). Judging by the way Josh's testimony has changed, I'd say he is living proof of how people change along with their memories. Memory experts also point out that each time we access a memory it undergoes changes.

Josh did spend time gathering together the most fundamentalist apologetic rejoinders he could stuff together between two covers, but did that *after* he converted. He spent 13 years going to libraries working on his earliest apologetic works. And I'm sure his ministry has taken him to places throughout the U.S. Europe, even the Middle East. But there is no evidence he did so *before he converted* while still a sophomore studying law in a community college and all in a matter of months. And whatever "research" Josh did after converting, he left a lot of it to others, as acknowledged in ETDV.

In fact in Josh's book, *Reasons Skeptics should Consider Christianity*, Glenn Morton (an undergrad at the time) ghost wrote the young-earth creationist arguments featured in that volume, not Josh. Mr. Morton later gave up young-earth creationism. But Josh, unlike Morton, seems to have never developed the brains or inclination to do so but still believed decades later and perhaps today in a young-earth, a literal Adam and Eve, dinosaurs existing besides humans, and probably a literal garden with magical fruit, Flood geology, a literal confusion of tongues at a literal Tower of Babel, and an inerrant Bible that he imagines he has harmonized beyond any difficulty. Just read his website today. Meanwhile the undergrad, Glenn Morton, came to defend the evidence for common ancestry.