



[Black Humanists and Non-Believers of Sacramento](#) discussed Humanism and Social Justice at AOF's June 25 meeting. Thank you BHNBS!

✧ ✧ This month's Main AOF Event ✧ ✧

➤ Talking About UFOs

Sunday, July 30, 2023, 2 pm – 4 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

In the smoky interstice between science and pseudoscience, Ufology squats and broods. It is pretty harmless to wonder about odd lights in the sky, but like some obsessions it can chase you down a conspiracy-theory rabbit hole: how the government hides crashed alien spaceships, weird theories about how the UFOs fly, just who is in them and why do they *probe*. Individual Ufologists can be passionate because they've had some UFO-related experience themselves, or claim to. Some, too many, are oddly fixated, like someone who has spent too many minutes clinically dead at the bottom of a frozen lake. So skeptics struggle to talk about UFOs without people getting angry and defensive.

Can we ever have a productive discussion on this topic? Our speaker **Mick West** has been studying and explaining UFOs for a decade, and has many interactions with a wide spectrum of the UFO community. He will share some of his experiences, and advise us on how to proceed.

A Q&A will follow Mick's presentation.

[Mick West](#) is a British-American science writer, skeptical investigator, and retired video game programmer. He is the creator of the websites [Contrail Science](#) and [Metabunk](#), and he investigates and debunks pseudoscientific claims and conspiracy theories such as chemtrails and UFOs. He lives right in Sacramento. No, we can't say where.

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

Park free in the lot. It's an in-person event. OK to bring snacks & beverages - even to share. Food adds to the fun.



✧ ✧ Other Upcoming AOF Events ✧ ✧

➤ Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday, July 11, 2023, 7 pm – 8 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

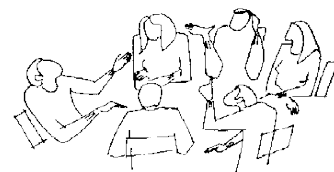
It's an AOF planning meeting, mainly for AOF directors & officers but open to all. These happen as required, and are a lot more fun than they sound.

Join us, meet the Board, and keep an eye on the shenanigans. We love visitors. We often have snacks. And maybe you'll have some good ideas, hm?

Note, this Board meeting will be an actual in-person meeting, so be sure your vaccinations are current, or wear a mask, or just don't cough on us.

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

Bring your ideas for AOF, your strategies, your event and activity suggestions -- best of all, your volunteerism! Helping hands are the bomb. (A good kind of bomb.)



✧ ✧ Upcoming Local Non-AOF Events ✧ ✧

Here's where it gets confusing. Sacramento is host to other freethought groups, and AOF advertises their events as a courtesy. Please consider some of these. We're all friends.

➤ Blasphemy Breakfasts (and Brunch)

Saturday, July 8, 2023, 10am – 11:30am (Folsom)

Sunday, July 9, 2023, 9:30am – 11:30am (Sacramento)

Sunday, July 16, 2023, 9:30am – 11am (Rocklin)

July 8 location: Mel's Diner, 13399 Folsom Blvd, Folsom, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/ri6JvaBoSZVHTdnU6>.

July 9 location: Mel's Diner, 3000 J Street, Sacramento, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/toijMkseMWmTanVP7>.

July 16 location: Mel's Diner, 6708 Lonetree Blvd, Rocklin, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/ZUY2gg72KkmkC4bU6>.

Like to hang out with like-minded people? Want to meet freethinkers in smaller groups? Or do you just get the morning munchies? Join us for our "Blasphemy Breakfast." We really don't blaspheme all that much, but who knows what dark mutterings will emerge? A great place to speak your mind, and a good starter if you are new to meetups.

Details for July 8, see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/zgwfdyfckblb/>.

Details for July 9, see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/294544869/>.

Details for July 16, see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/pwnnssyfckbvbl/>.



➤ Sacramento Skeptics in the Pub

Saturday, July 8, 2023, 6pm – 9pm

A social meetup for the skeptical minds, a community of people, friends, and families that champion the methods of science and critical thinking. Visitors and new skeptics most welcome!

For details see <https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/294421361/>.

Location: Duke's Pints & Plates, 510 La Sierra Dr, Sacramento; map at <https://goo.gl/maps/aNzV4j33cnizW9j77>.

➤ Sunday Assembly

Sunday, July 9, 2023, 11am - 1pm (doors open 10:30am)

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

Sunday Assembly is a secular celebration with music, readings, food and speakers, plus entertainment for children. For the potluck lunch, bring your favorite dish to share, and be hungry. Main presenters this month is author Lisa Wilkes.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/snnjbtvfckbmb/>.

➤ Avoiding Cognitive Bias – an RfR online presentation (RfR = Recovery from Religion)

Monday, July 10, 2023, 5pm - 7pm

Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/186729414>.

How do you know if your thinking and decision-making are biased? Skeptic Richard Gilliver will discuss cognitive biases, how to avoid it in thinking, and how to be sure we are not unwittingly making errors when our brains take mental shortcuts.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/294604432/>.

➤ Free Movie Nights

Friday, July 14, 7pm – 9pm (at Reason Center)

Wednesday, July 19, 7pm – 9pm (via Streaming Teleparty)

Join us for Free Movie Nights! The Reason Center movie on July 14 will be *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain*. (An English cartographer must tell a Welsh village that their mountain is only a hill, so the offended community sets out to change that.) The movie for July 19 is yet undecided, but you can watch it at home on your PC, in your jammies.

Note, Reason Center is in the rear of the building. No fee to attend, but "RC" does appreciate donations. Bring your own snacks & drinks. For the Streaming Teleparty, sign up on the website (see Details link below), and you'll get an email with the video link just before showtime. As you watch, you can exchange comments with the rest of us online!



Location for July 14: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

Details for July 14: See <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/rjstlftyckbsb/> or call Reason Center at 916-426-2464.

Details for July 19: See <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/ftknftyckbzb/>.

You can suggest your own favorite flick for next time, how cool is that?

➤ **Recovery from Religion (RfR) Virtual Support meetings**

Saturday, July 15, 7pm – 9pm

Location: Via online video, attendance link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>.

Providing ongoing and personal support to individuals letting go of religious beliefs. Please be sensitive and tolerant, and cut others some slack, because we all need slack. "RfR" is here to help.

➤ **Ancient Christian Study Group**

Sunday, Jul 16, 2023, 12 noon – whenever

Location: Shine Cafe, 1400 E Street, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/8YJG9B7PbAwNjxjh6>.

The history of ancient Christianity is endlessly fascinating. Don Fox and Steve Thoreson will trace the early history, the religions of Rome, Gnosticism, Mystery cults, persecutions, biographies of major Christians, Bible writings and other such topics. Previous biblical knowledge not required to participate.

Details: See <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/ndfzqyfckbvb/>.

➤ **Game Night at Reason Center**

Friday, Jul 21, 2023, 6pm – 9pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

A fun evening of games and good food at "RC". Reason Center has some games but you are welcome to bring your own. Bring food too, It's a pot luck. No gambling please! No blood sports either, we keep losing people.

Details: See <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/ggslytyckbccc/>.



➤ **Black Humanists & Non-Believers Book Club**

Saturday, July 22, 2023, 3:30pm – 5:00pm

An online book discussion open to all. Book topic to be announced. RSVP to attend, and the location will be revealed.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/whnfftyckbdc/>.

➤ **Coffee and Community**

Sunday, July 23, 2023, 10:30am – 12 noon (online meeting)

Location: Videoconference; to attend, click

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88317332021?pwd=OVI6M3IRQm52L0hQUmhwd0pucENEQT09>.

Meet for open-topic conversation, bring your own coffee. Get to know new folk or visit with some old friends! Hosted by Nancy Sneed and Mynga Futrell, such friendly people!



➤ **Porch Talk**

Wednesday, July 26, 7pm – 8:30pm

A social gathering on the virtual front porch. Join online (via your personal computer) for a chat on topics of the day. Your suggestions for discussion topics are welcome. Hosted by Nancy Sneed.

Videoconference link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88417809715?pwd=UGx1Q3hpU25iWkwrZjZaTWZMEMxZz09>.

➤ **Librarian for a Day**

Saturday, July 29, 9am – Noon

Wouldn't it be cool to be a librarian? Take charge of all those books? Here is your chance! Reason Center has an extensive library recently moved to the new location. Books are on the shelves in their respective sections, but not in the correct alphabetical order. Our librarian has them all catalogued in our computer, but needs to sort them. RC will greatly appreciate your help! (You are allowed to shush people.)

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

Details: See <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/294384696/>.

➤ **Humanity Breakfast**

Sunday, July 30, 2023, 9:30am – 11:30am

"We are a fun, friendly, and non-intimidating group of like-minded people, so come join us!" Location to be announced. See <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/294603234/> to vote on where. (RSVP required).

➤ **Saturday Morning Hike**

Saturday, Aug 5, 2023, 9:30am – 11:30am

Sacramento has gorgeous hiking places, ranging from riverside nature to rugged hills. Join us for hiking on a Saturday each month, to meet new people, observe nature, and leave only footprints. Sites to be determined.

For details: <https://www.meetup.com/reasoncenterevents/events/jfkcqsyfclbhb/>.

➤ More Events - Event Calendars

There's more! Much more. And plans keep changing, so don't trust the static list above. To keep track of all those other events, bookmark & follow these links:

- Sacramento Freethinkers, Atheists and Nonbelievers, <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/calendar/>
- The Reason Center calendar, <https://www.meetup.com/ReasonCenterEvents/events/calendar/>
- Black Humanists of Sacramento events, <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/calendar/>
- Recovery from Religion Sacramento, <https://www.meetup.com/RfR-Sacramento-CA/events/calendar/>
- Sacramento Skeptics events, <https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/calendar/>
- Compassionate Humanists of Roseville, <https://www.meetup.com/compassionate-humanists/events/calendar/>
- Sunday Assembly Sacramento events, <https://www.meetup.com/sunday-assembly-sacramento/events/calendar/>
- Central Valley Alliance of Atheists & Skeptics, <https://www.meetup.com/fresno-cvaas/events/calendar/>

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: to support a social and intellectual community for freethinkers, contribute to society through education and community service, advance the civic understanding and acceptance of freethinkers, 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 join or donate, visit ReasonCenter.org.

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 ✧ ✧

➤ Indivisible Day

Tuesday, July 4, 2023

In the state of Minnesota, former Governor Jess Ventura did something remarkable: he declared Independence Day to be **Indivisible Day**, a day in recognition of the separation of Church and State, and the vital role it has played in keeping our nation free and whole. For more information, see https://seculareasons.org/july/indivisible_day.html.



➤ World Population Day

Tuesday, July 11, 2023

The Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme established **World Population Day** in 1989, seeking to raise awareness of global population issues. The inspiration for this annual event was public interest in Five Billion Day, July 11, 1987, when the world's population reached approximately five billion people.

Visit the **World Population Clock** at <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>.



If you missed the 2023 Thomas Paine Day online celebration, enjoy it now at this link: <https://youtu.be/hHUIy2-L-JA>.

Also available is a written article highlighting the event, including Amber Quitno's keynote presentation. Read the article at: <https://tinyurl.com/2psvbbzc>.

*Holy Sh*t Dept*

Did Jesus Poop?

A serious theological debate, involving would-be popes, saints, and historians since the dawn of Christianity

By [Candida Moss](#), from *The Daily Beast*

What Jesus said and did when he was alive is, quite clearly, a subject of great interest to Christians today. And the New Testament tells us a great deal about some of the details of Jesus' life: he was circumcised, he was rude to his parents, he walked around (sometimes on water), he rode donkeys, he cried, he got angry, and he shared meals with his followers. The Bible says absolutely nothing about Jesus' sex life (although Dan Brown has hypothesized quite enough about that already), but it's equally silent on the question of digestion. Everybody poops, but did Jesus?

If you're thinking, "Yes, he was a human being, But oh my G-o-d why are you bringing this up? Talking about Jesus' bowel movements is like discussing my parent's sex life," then that's understandable. But if it seems like we at The Daily Beast have jumped the shark this week, then you'll be interested to know that this was a centuries-long debate among the Church Fathers, for whom digestion was often a much more important question than sex.

In the second century a popular Christian teacher named Valentinus wrote in a letter to a man called Agathopous that Jesus "was continent, enduring all things. (The risen) Jesus digested divinity: he ate and drank in a special way without excreting his solids. He had such a great capacity for continence that the nourishment within him was not corrupted, for he did not experience corruption." In other words Jesus was special and never defecated although, as scholar Christoph Marksches has written, Valentinus was talking about Jesus after his resurrection so we are already in "special" territory.

At the time Valentinus was a priest and a teacher in Rome. At one point he even came close to being elected the bishop of Rome (you know, the role of the pope). Later, at the insistence of those who disagreed with him, he would be removed from his position and, later still, condemned as a heretic. For many, though, as Dr. Stephen Young of Appalachian State University told The Daily Beast, he was "a popular Christian teacher who offered one among several competing 'deeper' understandings of Jesus and God... [a bit] like contemporary Christian teachers who aren't so much pastors of specific churches but ... who attract the interest of Christians from all sorts of different Evangelical churches or denominations." It's not really fair to dismiss him out of hand as a heretic.

Still, you're thinking, Valentinus turned out to be a heretic, so maybe his opinion doesn't count? Perhaps, but there were other "orthodox" Christians who agreed with Valentinus on this point. Ismo Dunderberg, a professor at the University of Helsinki and author of *Beyond Gnosticism*, pointed out that the orthodox Christian philosopher and teacher Clement of Alexandria (now a saint, if that matters to you), agreed: "The one point that Clement agreed with Valentinus on was that Jesus didn't do number two." Clement also wrote that Jesus being divine didn't have to eat but he did so to avoid giving the impression that he wasn't human.

Why is everyone talking about this? Well there's a lot at stake here. Much of early Christian theological debate is taken up with the issue of how Jesus is both a god and a human being. Early on there were some early Christians who thought that Jesus only "seemed" to have a human body but in reality was a god. You can see why Christians who held this position thought Jesus never went to the bathroom. This position, which is known as Docetism, would come to be rejected as heresy, but those who wanted to argue that Jesus was truly human have to explain how the combination of humanity and divinity works. While they are doing that they are also trying to avoid the idea that the divinity in Jesus is somehow defiled by or corrupted by all the disgusting aspects of human bodies. Excrement, in particular, was just the kind of disgusting thing that people wanted to avoid.

As late as the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., a period when pretty much all Christians agree that Jesus had a real human body, Christians are still debating the poop question. Epiphanius, a late fourth century monk and bishop who spent a great deal of his time denouncing heretics, denies that Jesus ever eliminated solid waste (Panarion 77). Kelley Spoerl, a professor at St. Anselm College and the author of several important articles on this subject, told me that what's interesting is the context in which Epiphanius does this. During this section of the Panarion he was fighting with a group of Christians known as Apollinarians. Apollinarians believed that Jesus did not have a rational human soul and Epiphanius (and all modern Christians) strongly rejected this idea. Where Epiphanius was willing to agree with the Apollinarians was on the question of bathroom visits. As Spoerl told me: "Epiphanius agrees with those Apollinarians who think Jesus did not excrete solid waste even though he disagrees with their other theories about Jesus's lack of a rational human soul or the claim that Jesus's body/flesh is somehow different from ours." So once again you have theologians who disagree on other points of this issue 'reaching across the aisle' on the question of digestion.

What's uniting these conversations about Jesus' digestion, Spoerl told me "is a clear desire to affirm the historical, physical reality of Jesus's body—but, in Epiphanius's case, to avoid the perceived defilement that the body brings"

In order to make his case Epiphanius appeals to another well-known case in which people may not have excreted, namely, the Moses-led Israelites who wandered in the wilderness eating manna supplied by God. Rabbinic interpretations of what happened in the wilderness maintained that as the Israelites were eating "the bread of angels" (manna) they didn't excrete it because it was "bread

that is absorbed in the limbs" (Sifré to Numbers 88). Though Epiphanius doesn't mention them, there were ancient Greeks who were also rumoured never to have gone to the bathroom. Dunderberg mentioned that two philosophers discussed in the ancient compilation *Lives of the Philosophers* never excreted solid waste either.

In part this conversation reflects a cultural abhorrence of excrement. It's not so pleasant. Early Christian descriptions of hell describe people buried up to their necks in piles of the stuff. You can see why people don't want to associate it with an incarnate deity.

Simultaneously, there are some serious medical underpinnings to the debate. Ancient medical thought about how digestion works seems to have been driving a lot of this conversation. Claire Bubb, a medical historian at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at NYU, told me that most ancient theories of digestion relied on the concept of heat and the individual capacity to produce it. "Aristotle, in whose theories heat plays a critical role in general, leans particularly hard into this correlation. Heat for him is unambiguously what turns ingested food into nourishment suitable for the body. Further, he believes that the degree of heat is variable in different individuals, but that some are closer to perfect than others."

Because digestion is so individual, Bubb said, "It would not be hard for someone working within the Aristotelian tradition to take this claim to the next level and argue that a person with the most perfect degree of heat would be capable of most perfectly digesting his foods." For anyone who subscribed to this thought system the claim that Jesus never digested food wasn't a denial of his humanity; it was an endorsement of his perfect body.

At the same time, not everyone agreed. Some people, Bubb said, thought that digestion was about crushing and grinding, not heat. The Roman era doctor Galen argued that "the quantity of waste products [depends on] the nature of foods consumed." For Galen "radishes... are barely food at all and most of their substance is simply not suitable for assimilation, with the result that almost as much as is consumed must be excreted. Even a perfectly constructed body could not avoid this." So you can see why other Christians would have disagreed with Valentinus and Epiphanius about the issue of excrement.

Of course modern theories of digestion are more Galenic than Aristotelian. If you want to say that Jesus was truly human, you have to admit that he used the bathroom. For the pragmatically minded there's the issue of nutrition: Jesus lived on a high-fibre ancient Mediterranean diet; we have to imagine that life-long constipation was the least of his problems.

Today there's really no 'official' position on Jesus' bathroom habits. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, following the statements of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, that Jesus is "truly man and truly God" and is "like us in all things but sin." As excretion is a normal part of being human, Jesus would have passed solid waste just like everyone else. ■

"I grew up and for a time worked in a small college town where my father taught physics, and encountered many scientists with huge egos and occasionally preposterous views about matters outside their areas of expertise. Yet when confronted with theoretical or experimental results that conflicted with their assumptions they would always humbly submit to what was true. Science is a spiritual pursuit in the sense that we wrestle with a reality much larger and more immutable than ourselves. Fools often point to the errors that scientists have made, preferring the fragile certainties of religion, perhaps. The greater virtue of science and its practitioners is the readiness to admit mistakes and learn from them, an insatiable appetite for discovery, and a willingness to swallow one's pride and rewire one's brain in order to absorb an ever evolving body of knowledge, in order to be part of this truly grand and noble project." [Anders Pytte, "In Praise of Science," *NYT letter*]



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: Prolific Pamella Rivers
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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 pages (two):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1525411971087089/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Atheists-and-Other-Freethinkers-AOF-104763721971742>

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. Be respectful, and you 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>.

Your modest editor is Fran Evanisko. Which is why his name is way down here.