

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

May 2006

Sunday, May 14

## Why a Naturalistic Worldview?

### Special Points of Interest

- Brand New Camp for Our Free-thinking Youngsters (See Insert)
- AAI in Kansas City - Convention Report (page 2)
- CCA Recognition Presentation (pages 4 and 5)
- Details of AA-California Award (page 6)
- Sin and Sex and End Times Thinking (page 7)

**It's the first Camp Quest in the West! You can help CQW get off to a great start this summer. Find out how by reading the insert. Thank you!!**

The May general meeting features a return visit to AOF by **Richard Carrier**, who lives in the Bay Area and doing doctoral work at Columbia University. His topic: **"Why Naturalism? The Value of a Sound Naturalist Worldview."**

For this topic, Richard will draw from and summarize his recent book, *Sense and Goodness without God: A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism*. He will be explaining what "metaphysical naturalism" is, why it makes more sense than religion, and how it solves some important questions about ourselves, our world, and our future. This presentation will include the nature and importance of philosophy in general, and what naturalist philosophy entails specifically, especially regarding the nature of morality, of the universe, and of the human mind. There will also be some discussion of what beauty is, and whether the purpose of government is to enforce a democratically-elected morality.

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### Recognition Is Received for Community Service and Leadership

## AOF Garners Another Award!



There has been some great news from our affiliate organizations across the last couple of months! First off, the AOF board received notice from Dave Kong, who is the State Director of American Atheists, that our group was receiving

from AA California a "Special Events Leadership" award. On the heels of the announcement came a lovely ice-blue crystalline engraved item signifying same (details, page 6). Then, just this month at its annual convention, Atheist Alliance International presented to AOF its "Community Service Award" - the first ever. AAI plans the CSA award to be given annually and carry a value of \$500 (pages 2 and 4 have details). All in all, quite uplifting for all who work so hard for this group. You know who you are!

## AOF and Julia Sweeney Honored at AAI Convention

### AOF Line By Don Knutson

AOF was awarded the first annual Atheist Alliance International (AAI) *Community Cooperation Award* (which carries a \$500 prize) at the first-ever joint national convention of the AAI and the Secular Student Alliance (SSA) in Kansas City during the religious weekend of Passover/Easter.

AOF, being a member society of AAI, was recognized for its positive voice for atheism in our local community. We were represented at the convention (and upon receipt of the award) by inveterate convention goers Bev Church, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell and yours truly.

We were all stunned and pleased at receiving the award but credit must primarily go to Mynga, who packaged the application which ultimately bested submissions of six other candidate freethought organizations across the country that had survived the basic screening of the nine-entry field.

As usual, very interesting speakers and workshops highlighted the annual convention but this year was unusual and memorable in that a tornado preceded by heavy hail interrupted the awards proceedings Saturday night, shortly after we had received ours. It entailed a required evacuation to the bowels (lower basement) of the hotel.

Shortly after we reconvened in the ballroom, **Julia Sweeney** of "Pat, the Androgynous One," of Saturday Night Live fame in the early '90s, accepted the *Richard Dawkins Award* for outstanding contributions to atheism.

**Hemant Mehta**, a 23-year-old Chicago graduate student, showed us how easy it is for an atheist to make national headlines when he spoke of how he auctioned on e-bay his hours (\$10/hour) of attending services in an old church near where he lived. Ultimately, he made \$504 which he donated to the SSA. Numerous national publications like the Wall Street Journal suggested he had "sold his soul"!

**Dr. Paul Mirecki**, a professor at yours truly's *alma mater*, the University of Kansas, who has a PhD from Harvard Divinity School and was chairman of KU's Religious Studies Department, had a harrowing story to recount after attempting to offer a class called "Intelligent Design, Resurrection and Other Religious Mythologies" at the university last year. He was first denounced as "disgraceful" by the KU chancellor (one reason I don't contribute to my *alma mater*!), was forced to resign his chairmanship, and then was physically assaulted on a lonely Kansas highway, from which he still hasn't psychologically recovered.

And **Lori Lipman Brown**, the first registered lobbyist for atheist-humanist causes and Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for

America, spoke of her days as a Nevada state senator representing southern Las Vegas and how her career as a politician was cut short by an unscrupulous religious right candidate.

**The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.**

### AOF Board (2005-6)

**President:** Don Knutson

**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell

**Secretary:** Kevin Schultz

**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

**Directors at large:**

Carla Corbett, Beverly Church

Dave Flanders, Vincent Wales

### AOF Committees

**Newsletter:** Mynga Futrell (Editor)

Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

**Freethought Day, Oct. 8, 2006:**

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

**Darwin Day, Feb. 11, 2007:**

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell, Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

**Ad Hoc Committees:**

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach (Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Kevin Schultz); AOF Finances Evaluation (Carla Corbett, Beverly Church, Ken Nahigian)

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

### AOF's Voluntariat

**Affiliation Liaisons:**

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)

Hank Kocol (CSH)

Kevin Schultz (AA)

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

**Community Service Projects:**

Don Knutson

**Internet Website:** Kevin Schultz

**Meetings:** Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma, Carla Corbett

**Membership Database:**

Ken Nahigian

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 at **447-3589** if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

**aofboard@aofonline.org**

**May's Movie Night:** As of press time, Beverly Church had not yet decided on the film to be shown, but viewing will be at her home on **Friday, May 12, at 7 PM.** Her address is **24 Adkinson Ct.** (North Natomas), and the phone number is **359-5423.** *Bring along your favorite microwave popcorn and beverage to enjoy the show. Kevin Schultz will host the event.*



## Meeting Recap

# The Mysterians

By Dave Flanders

AOF's April speaker was philosopher Matt McCormick. Matt began his talk about rationalism—that ability of to sticking to your hypothesis and letting the facts decide. It's is an unnatural act, and you have to brace yourself to perform it.

Shamans have a different agenda; they're trying to heal and advise people in real time, and can gratefully hide behind mystery when the unexpected happens. The postulation of invisible, undetectable effects that (unlike atoms and germs) are systematically immune to confirmation or disconfirmation is so common in religions that such effects are sometimes taken as definitive. No religion lacks them, and anything that lacks them is not really a religion.

Many religious theists resent investigation of their truth claims and are content to rely on sophistry and obscurantism to keep their religion in a shroud of mystery.



Matt McCormick at April AOF Meeting

Matt compared belief in God to belief in Santa Claus. Over time some students have realized that the probability of Santa Claus existing has no better probability than that of God's existence. Both are based on wishful thinking, but that does not make them necessarily true. The world gets ahead by losing its illusions, and not fostering them. That is the path to all human progress.

Sometimes the mysterians may say that their God is outside of space and time—their God is beyond our finite minds. The problem with that argument is that our "soul" (a pre-scientific word for the mind) can only function within the constraints of space and time.

Matt said a good road to travel is independent thought. H. L. Mencken said:

"Independent thought, to a good many men, is quite impossible, and to the overwhelming majority of men, extremely painful." An anonymous

writer wrote: "Philosophy is questions that may never be answered. Religion is answers that may never be questioned." But, Matt said his job is to ask questions—the right questions, and in the right order to ask them in.

One of the surprising discoveries of modern psychology is how easy it is to be ignorant of your own ignorance. Matt said that when it comes to his students: sugar attracts bees better than water. He said "I plant seeds." It is those seeds of doubt that help students in his class attain a higher level of rationality.

### AOF Board Meeting Minutes Summary

April 17, 2006

Home of Beverly Church

March minutes approved by consensus. March treasury report approved by consensus. AOF is soon to receive \$500 from AAI via 2006 Community Cooperation Award. Board agreed by consensus to fund the purchase of 250 business cards from iprint.com, per Kevin's second draft design. Board discussed creation of multiple positions to facilitate interim newsletter production during Mynga's 6-month sabbatical. **Next BOD meeting:** Monday May 22, 2006, 6:30 PM, at Bev's again.

## Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of the 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** ("a positive voice for atheism").

AOF is also affiliated with the American Humanist Association, American Atheists, and the Council for Secular Humanism.

### 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.

## AAI Presents First Community Service Award CSA Awards Presentation

By Herb Silverman

The purpose of the new Atheist Alliance *Community Cooperation Award* is to encourage groups to interact in a positive way with their local communities. This not only makes the general public aware of our numbers but also gets our message out and changes common misconceptions about us.

This annual award of \$500 is given to a Freethought organization that demonstrates a positive image, ethical behavior, and cooperation with its larger community.



Community Cooperation Award Plaque

We had a number of well-qualified entries. The winning organization stood out because it had no outstanding members. Let me explain.

As a math professor, about two or three students per class earn A's, and I consider such students outstanding. On rare occasions, I have had such a good class that many students earn A's and I have difficulty distinguishing who is truly outstanding.

That seems to be the case with members in this year's winning organization, although some of its members are known to be outstanding in their work outside of their local community, nationally and internationally.

The organization that impressed us the most had accomplished, among other things, the following:

- Cooperated with Arthiksamata in India to donate \$845 for tsunami relief.
- Provided volunteers to a community meals program 4 times throughout 2005.
- For the tenth consecutive year, maintained their two-mile stretch of

*adopted highway for which they were noted in the local press as "citizens of the community."*

- Conducted a silent auction raising \$400 for a local emergency shelter for children.
- Organized a Freethought Day with cooperation from the mayor's office, the public library, voter registration and more.
- Co-produced a Darwin Birthday Educational Gala along with 2 universities, 1 college, and 4 other community organizations.
- Provided 15 volunteers for the local public TV station fund drive.
- Earned 27 credits at the local blood bank for donations of blood and plasma.

All of this was accomplished by the 93 members of this year's winner, Atheists and Other Freethinkers of Sacramento, CA.

**Mynga Futrell and Kay Dickey** (back row center) are the two AOFers in this picture. It was taken after a superb meal at an Indian restaurant near their Kansas City hotel.

The other AAI convention attendees pictured here are (clockwise from upper right corner):  
**Joe**, Atlanta  
**Mike**, San Diego,  
**Margaret**, Philadelphia  
**Stuart**, Los Angeles  
**Carol**, Wisconsin,  
**Ric**, Pennsylvania  
**Richard**, Wisconsin,  
is in the center  
Photo by the waiter!



### A Naturalistic Worldview

(Continued from page 1)

Richard will be selling and signing copies of his book after the talk. The sale price will be \$20.

Richard Carrier is a historian and philosopher. Besides authoring *Sense and Goodness without God*, he has been contributing author for *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave*."

Richard has discussed and debated his views before audiences across the country, and on national television, and he has written numerous articles in various print publications, and on the Secular Web, where he has been one of the most-read authors for many years, averaging ten thousand readers a month.

He is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on Roman science at Columbia University.

For Richard Carrier's online writings and links to his bio and homepage, see: [www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard\\_carrier](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier).

One of the best aspects of attending an annual convention is the fantastic camaraderie. It is great fun meeting people from other AAI groups. See below ↓

## Many Hands Make Light Work at Davis Community Meals

By Carla Corbett

An impressive number of AOFers turned out on April 18 to help feed the hungry at last month's Davis Community Meals (DCM) event.

With six of us pitching in – **Carla Corbett, Richard Kowaleski, Ken Nahigian, Tom Nicoletti, Liz Purcell, and Kevin Schultz** – the set up and serving was effortless, and yes, fun! The efficiency afforded by great member participation allowed us time to do a little socializing amongst ourselves and with the community members who came to enjoy a hot, home-cooked meal.

An initiative of St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Davis Community Meals is a non-denominational, non-profit volunteer organization that has been providing low-income individuals food, shelter and other services in a community setting since

1990. Unlike some church-centered community services, DCM offers a truly "free" meal with no strings attached – clients don't get a sermon served up with their supper.

Over 50 organized groups support the Davis Community Meal effort through volunteer service, and AOF is one of them. Once each quarter we supply a team to perform some combination of setup, serving, and cleanup.

Volunteers are invited to partake of the offerings, and our crew didn't have to be asked twice. The AOF team chowed down on our choice of turkey, ham, pasta, veggies, fruit salad, rolls and a variety of scrumptious desserts. Fresh flower arrangements on each table and entertainment by musical volunteers on the piano and fiddle always make it more than just a meal.

Though the good feeling we get from volunteering is thanks enough, our group received special kudos from Bill, the evening's Volunteer Leader. According to Kevin Schultz, Bill "had nothing but praise for how well our group of volunteers performed with setup. He said we had all done his job for him," and that he would "pass on the praise." Kevin also reports that Bill commented that he enjoys working with our group and feels lucky when he happens to be working on those occasions when AOF is providing volunteers.

If you haven't yet had the opportunity to support both AOF and the greater Sacramento community by helping at Davis Community Meals, not to worry! You can be part of next quarter's team by contacting [info@aofonline.org](mailto:info@aofonline.org) or calling (916) 447-3589.



**Mynga Futrell** (above, left) literally dances with delight at getting the news from **Herb Silverman**, who gave the presentation talk on behalf of AAI. AAI president **Bobbie Kirkhart** (center) looks on.

**Don Knutson**, AOF president, shows the award to the audience. Happy AOFers attending the Kansas City convention were (left to right, **Bev Church, Kay Dickey, and Mynga** (still ecstatic). CCA Committee Chair, **Carol Smith**, looks on.

## AOFers Thrilled to Receive Atheist Alliance International's "Community Cooperation Award"



# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (print legibly!) \_\_\_\_\_

## Check your preference:

\_\_\_ Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)    \_\_\_ Family Membership (\$30)

\_\_\_ Low-income Member (\$10)    \_\_\_ Patron (\$50)

\_\_\_ Single Membership (\$20)    \_\_\_ Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_ )

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

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer.     E-mail     Postal mail

## Comments Received Regarding the Special Events Leadership Award

### AA-California and American Atheists

#### Dave Kong and Lance Wilhelm

Dear Mynga and Atheists and Other Freethinkers of Sacramento:

I apologize for the delay in sending this to you, but enclosed is the Special Events Leadership 2005 award for your participation and leadership in the Freethought Day celebration on October 9th of last year.

The tardiness of my delivery, of course, in no way diminishes the admiration and appreciation American Atheists California has for the work you have done to produce this event over the past several years.

The idea of Freethought Day—celebrating the removal of spectral evidence from American courtrooms—is an inspired idea and one that any American with

even the most miniscule amount of common sense should appreciate.

But, as Atheist Thomas Edison once said, invention is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. American Atheists California also greatly appreciates that this is a joint event that combines the talents and hard work of

not just AOF, but other Atheist, Humanist and Freethought groups and secular organizations as well. It is this spirit of cooperation among groups that sets the California Atheist movement apart from other states and makes this a very special place for all freethinkers.

For these reasons, I am proud to present you with the Special Events Leadership 2005 award. Thank you

for your hard work and dedication!

Highest regards,  
Dave Kong  
State Director  
American Atheists

*Editor's Note: Kevin Schultz, who serves as AOF's liaison with the American Atheists organization, received this congratulatory message from national AA :*

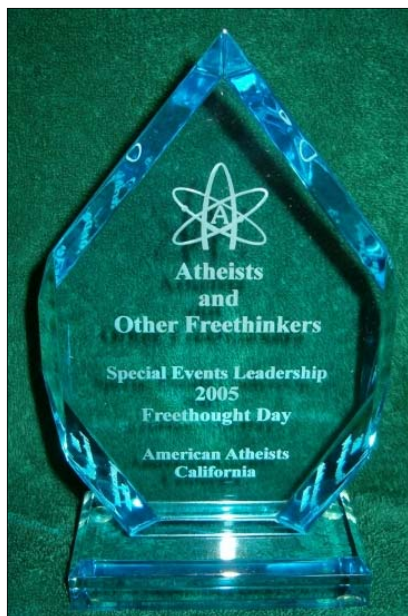
Dear Kevin,

I just received the AOF News & Views and as Affiliate Outreach Director for American Atheists, let me congratulate The Atheists and Other Freethinkers on getting the Special Events Awards from the California branch of American Atheists. I am sure that Dave Kong is quite familiar with your work and activism...

Your group appears to be a good example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts and it is with this attitude that (things) will eventually work in our favor.

Keep up the good work!

Lance M. Wilhelm  
Affiliate Outreach Director  
American Atheists



Award for Special Events Leadership 2005

## “Earth Care” by AOFers Tidying Our Span of Highway

By Don Knutson

In an effort to extend Earth Day into an Earth Weekend, AOFers carried out our regular highway cleanup on Sunday, April 23.

A small group of six turned out on a cool and cloudy morning with tall weeds along the sides of Highway 99 obscuring most of the litter beneath. Still, we accumulated some 15 bags, much of which was big rig tire castings.

Newcomer **Matt O'Loughlin** joined inveterate AOF members

**Dave Flanders, Mynga Futrell, Don Knutson, Tom Nicolette and Kevin Schultz.** Join us for the next scheduled cleanup on **Sunday, June 4 at 8 AM.**

**FREETHOUGHT DAY!**

**2006 PLANNING—JUNE 2**

**Want to join the Committee?**

**Contact Bev at 359-5423**

### Newsletter Submissions

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

**[frethnkr@mindspring.com](mailto: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.



## Did You Know? “Sinful” Sex & “End Times” Thinking Is Not New By Cleo Kocol

At a time in our history when some groups are suggesting that birth control methods are really abortion, and that Armageddon and the Rapture are not far off, it is time to give a brief look at some of the elements in U.S. history behind this type of thinking.

The Puritans believed that people were born tainted with sin. The Reverend Thomas Shepherd said from the pulpit in Cambridge, "thy heart is a foul sink of all atheism, sodomy, blasphemy, murder, whoredom, adultery, witchcraft, and bug-gery, so that if thee has any good thing in thee, it is but a drop of rose water in a bowl of poison."

It's interesting to see how Reverend Shepherd lumped non-theism with sexual habits he deplored. Sex was bad, religion was good, and deviants were whipped, put in stocks or pilloried, forced to wear the scarlet letter, and recant in church. These punishments were lenient when you consider the death penalty was given twice. It is not clear which of the erotic religious laws the condemned broke.

It's not surprising that many Americans in the 1800's found sex less than satisfying, and people began experimenting with community living of various types. Polyandrous and polygynous communities evolved alongside those imposing celibacy on both women and men.

In the 19th century coitus interruptus and reserved ejaculation were considered a good way to "build the good life" in some of these new communities. Young men were instructed in the latter art by women past menopause.

These communities had various religious beliefs, but William Miller of the Baptist faith preached the end of the world. He gave 3 AM, March 21, 1843 as the day and time, and 50,000 Americans took him seriously. When the rapture didn't hap-

pen, he set a date for the next year, and again it didn't happen. The religious-based communities began to lose their appeal.

In 1873 Andrew Comstock imposed his obscenity laws which made illegal the delivery or transportation of "obscene, lewd, or lascivious material." Open to broad interpretation, the law, in 1912, made Margaret Sanger's advocacy of birth control extremely difficult, but Sanger persisted and literally helped save women's lives.

Then a unifying element swept the nation - that is "demon rum," which ended up in the 20th century in constitutional amendments, first in the 18th making it illegal to manufacture, sell, transport, and export intoxicating liquors, and then in the 21st legalizing it.

Today, the pendulum has swung again. Among evangelical Christians, unapproved sex – meaning between the unmarried or gays or lesbians and (increasingly) only for procreation – is a drum they beat unceasingly. Their other belief, end time thinking, is prevalent, and they are not shy about imposing both these beliefs on all Americans.



P.O. Box 15182  
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

*We're on the Web!*  
**aofonline.org**

## May Calendar of Events

Movie Night Social	Friday, May 12, 7 - 9 PM
<b>AOF General Meeting</b>	<b>Sunday, May 14, 2:30 - 5 PM</b>
AOF Board meeting	Monday, May 22, 6:30 PM
Highway Cleanup	Sunday, June 4, 8 - 10 AM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, June 11, 2:30 - 5 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 2:30 - 5 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (10-8-06), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2-11-07). Watch the newsletter for details.

### Directions to AOF's General Meetings

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. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

