

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

October 2009

Special Points of Interest

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Sunday, October 11, Noon to 5:00 p.m. **FREETHOUGHT DAY LOCATION CHANGE: CÉSAR CHÁVEZ PARK**

This year's Fair is being moved to a different location at quite a late date. Since the new venue is Chávez Park (10th & J, and far away from the usual Old Town foot traffic), the attendance will likely be down unless the freethought community pulls together to support it *in person*.

I hope all who read this newsletter will come out and roam around at the Fair. Enjoy the music, the speaker, and the comedy. Stop by the outreach tables and view the new additions to the Gallery of independent thinkers.

It is time to show the people who put on this outdoor



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AOF November General Meeting, Sun, Nov 8 **November AOF Meeting Welcomes El Porvenir Founder Carole Helper**

Standard Fare

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AOF's November speaker will be Carole Harper founder of El Porvenir, an organization which for 20 years has provided self-help, community-initiated water, sanitation and reforestation projects to remote Nicaraguan villages. Carole lived for many years in Nicaragua and just recently returned to the United States and now lives in Davis. Carole's talk will look at the long-term positive and negative consequences of the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution within the context of Crane Brinton's "Anatomy of Revolution", which models revolutions on the cycles where a country after revolution moves away from the Old Order to the installation of a moderate regime to a radical one.



*All AOF Members Welcome and Encouraged
to Participate*

AOF Upcoming Community Service Events

By Don Knutson



What a crew! Six AOFers turned out to support the California Highway Cleanup Day effort on Saturday, Sep 19 from 8:00-10:00 a.m. Thanks!

From left, **Mario Sandri, Suzanne Donachie, Carolyn Lignos, Mynga Futrell and Ken Nahigian.** Photographer: Don Knutson

AOF 2010 Elections

*Consider Running to
Support Freethought in
the Greater Sacramento
Community*

*Contact
board@aofonline.org
For more info!*

AOF Board (2009)

President: Beverly Church

Board Chair: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Steve Campbell, Debora Smith, Jillian Stanley

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, Debora Smith)
Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, Open)
Social Activities (Team Coordinator, Open)

Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)
"Freethought Friends" (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)
Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson
Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

Freethought Day 2009: Sunday, October 11

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2010: Sunday, February 7

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs
(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell (AAI)
Kevin Schultz (AA)
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)
Hank Kocol (CSH)

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan
Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz
(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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Iran's Flawed 2009 Presidential Elections October Meeting Write-Up By Debora Smith

Dr. Buzz Fozouni spoke to a small group of AOF attendees about the flawed election system in Iran. He explained that the 2005 election had been fraudulent, but not nearly as rigged as evidence indicates that the 2009 election was. The elections in Iran have never been intended to be democratic; Iran is an "Islamic Republic," with no mention of democracy in its title. Dr. Fozouni pointed out that, until the last election, Iranian elections have been reasonably fair and competitive (third only to Israel and Turkey in the Middle East).

The government of Iran is divided into a secular portion and a theocratic portion, and the goal is a theocracy with a republican veneer. There are both elected and non-elected members. The head of the elected segment is the president; the head of the theocratic segment is the Supreme Leader. A powerful governmental authority is the Guardian Council, which consists of six elected lay jurors and six theocrats appointed by the Supreme Leader.

One of the primary ways that the Iranian government keeps control of its elected leaders is via a vetting process, which prescreens national

candidates for their fealty to the Guardian Council. This limits candidates to the existing factions in power, and tries to prevent outsiders (especially secularists) from participating.

Why did the vetting system fail in the 2009 election? According to Dr. Fozouni, this was largely due to a public debate between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad in which an enormous amount of dirty laundry was aired; accusations of corruption within the regime were hurled, and everyone watching was astonished at the unprecedented display. This debate gave the people hope for change, and mobilized the masses for Mousavi.

The Revolutionary Guard, which is a branch of Iran's military and numbers about 150,000, is the coercive force of the regime. They are in control of much of the government, and are deeply involved in corruption, one of their goals being to foster enmity with the US. They work against any improvement in US-Iranian relations. The Revolutionary Guard commands the Basij army, which is nearly a million strong. This was the group that

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AOF Program Continuation

(Continued from page 1)

celebration feel that all their time and work is truly worthwhile.

Freethought Day is a community event to celebrate freethought, liberty of conscience, naturalistic ethics, secular government, and civic values.

Isn't that worth celebrating?

If you need a spur to make the effort to come, and to bring your friends, just think of the several **education goals** that underlie Sacramento's Freethought Day and guide the planning committee::

We want to promote accurate understanding of the heritage of liberty of conscience
We want to raise public consciousness regarding secular governance



(Continued on page 7)

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



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

Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding 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.

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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.

Historical Figures Series

The Boy From Nowhere: Kaspar Hauser

By Ken Nahigian

Mysterious letters, a half-feral child, false memory, blind clues, a mouth closed by murder—what could be better fodder for folklore? From the start this story seems to float on the edge of magic. Little is known, less is certain. In the telling of it and the retelling, a conspiratorial mystique has condensed and thickened, a fog of rumors, wild guesses and outright lies, to obscure the truth. And once again, in the twilight and silence, we will hear the voice of our own wishes.

It began on May 26, 1828, Whit Monday, in Nürnberg, Germany. Late that afternoon a cobbler found a boy in rough peasant clothes, age sixteen or so, wandering as if dazed or drunk. The boy held a letter addressed "To the Honourable Captain of the Cavalry of the Fourth Squadron, of the Sixth Regiment of the Light Cavalry in Nuremberg." Puzzled, the cobbler took the boy to the captain's house. The captain was away, so they waited.

Reportedly servants gave the boy beer and sausage; he spat them out. Finally he took some black bread and water, eating as if starved, but clumsily, and weeping as if in pain. When questioned, he only said "I don't know," and "I would like to be a rider the way my father was." Finally they put the boy in the stable, where he fell asleep.

Returning, the Captain wanted to see his odd visitor at once. But when presented, the boy spoke only a few broken sentences. He seemed impaired, mentally a "three year old" by traditional account. The letter was unhelpful. It said in part:

"Honorable Sir capatain! I am sending you a boy who wants to serve his king. ... this boy has been given to me October 7th of 1812, and me a poor day laborer, I also have 10 children myself, I have enough to worry... I have not let him leave the house since 1812... if you don't keep him you'll have to beat him to death or hang him in the chimney."

The boy, it also said, was raised in the "Christian religion." Enclosed was another letter, from the boy's mother supposedly, but in handwriting identical to the first. It claimed the boy's father was a cavalryman, now dead.

Later police fared no better, getting only the same cryptic "don't know!" But when someone gave the boy a pen and paper, he wrote a name in a "firm, legible" hand. It

was Kaspar Hauser.

A jailer took custody; "Kaspar" received attention and schooling. He became a focus of interest from local nobles and officials. Rumors were rife and strange. But as he learned to communicate, a stranger story took shape. He claimed to have spent his life in a small dark cell with straw for a bed and a wooden horse for a toy. Food was bread and water. Periodically the water would be drugged, causing deep sleep; he would wake to find his straw changed, his



Contemporary Painting of Kaspar Hauser

hair and nails cut. Before release, a mysterious man visited him, the first he had ever seen. The man taught Kaspar to stand, to walk, to write his name, and to parrot a few Bavarian phrases. Bringing the boy to Nuremberg, the man then let him go.

This tale, widely circulated and much embroidered later by paranormalists, brought international attention to Kaspar. Some thought he was a stolen royal child, some a swindler or fraud. Most researchers now agree the story was surely false in most respects—if raised as claimed, Kaspar would have been an idiot and cripple for life. Modern forensic studies (DNA analysis of supposed remnants of hair and clothing) are ambivalent, but put the royal-child theory in doubt. Historical documentation also makes that theory unlikely.

Whatever the truth, Kaspar flourished in a rough way for about five years, moved from household to household. A local professor fostered him, then a municipal officer, a local baron, a British nobleman, a schoolmaster. Incidents followed his peregrinations—assaults, accidents or self-inflicted wounds, no one was sure. Some anthroposophist writers and promulgators of historic mysteries have cast a kind of romantic glamour on Kaspar's life, stressing his contemplative nature, his innocence and natural artistic talent. By other reports he quarreled with his keepers, who might accuse him of mendacity, deceit or spite. His last patron, Anselm von Feuerbach, wrote: "Kaspar Hauser is a smart scheming codger, a rogue, a good-for-nothing that ought to be killed." If that is true, it may explain the frequent address changes.

In mid-December, 1833, five and a half years after the cobbler found the boy limping in the street, the story ended. Kaspar came home with a deep wound. He claimed a stranger had lured him to the Ansbach Court garden, then stabbed him. Searching, police found a purse holding a typically vague note. Advocates say it was Kaspar's enemies, who feared he was near finding the truth of himself. Critics say he had stabbed himself to win attention and sympathy. If so, Kaspar stabbed too deeply; he died three days later.

His headstone read: *Hic jacet Casparus Hauser aenigma sui temporis ignota nativitas occulta mors*, "Here lies Kaspar Hauser, riddle of his time, his birth unknown, his death mysterious." In the Court garden, later, was a monument: *Hic occultus occulto occisus est*, "Here a mysterious one was killed in a mysterious manner."

Today his legacy includes rafts of books and occult essays, novels, plays, major films in 1974 and 1994, operas in 2007 and 2009, a song by Suzanne Vega ("Wooden Horse"), appearances in science fiction stories by Harlan Ellison and Robert Heinlein, uncounted websites, and an annual Kaspar Hauser festival in Ansbach, Bavaria. "Kaspar Hauser" was also the name of an alternative rock band in Massachusetts. If Kaspar sought notoriety, he surely found it.

Neutrality: The Educational Goal; Part 6 in a Series

When Saying “Secular,” Be Specific!

By Mynga Futrell

The term “secular” has several different meanings. And, because people who engage in discussions about religion so often fail to distinguish which meaning they are using at each and every point, there often is misunderstanding. With such touchy subject matter as faith and beliefs, the misunderstanding can lead to trouble, and often does.

For example, when atheists are asking for a *secular nation*, most are wishing to have a neutral government, one that does not press religion on the populace. But that’s not the message that many fellow citizens hear, as is obvious when they respond with allusions to the Soviet Union. Other atheists fail to note that there are plenty of fellow secularists around who want the same sort of secular nation they do, except that these folks are religious, not atheistic.

In schools, a part of what makes so many teachers “secularist-shy” can be traced to this sort of confusion. When a teacher is dealing with students whose beliefs depart notably from his/her own, a dose of clarity is definitely called for. In fact, perhaps there is no more important communication preparation for citizen harmony and understanding than more folks becoming adept with at least three types of dissimilar usage, even to the point of continuously *verbally clarifying* which meaning is in play at any point in time.

Secular, Type A: This most generic usage fits everything from a highway to Macy’s to a backyard barbeque. These are considered secular places and events ***lacking association*** with religion. This casual usage carries “default neutrality,” since it holds sway wherever religion is just not at all a factor.

Secular, Type B: At a somewhat opposite pole is the use of the term *secular* in the sensitive realm of beliefs and values, where strongly held human *worldviews* come into play. That means this usage, unlike Type A, has *a lot to do with religion* because personal worldviews operate in the very same realm. Here the word takes on a ***departure from*** religion connotation. That is, worldviews can be considered either secular *or* religious.

Secular, Type C: Here the term refers to *a form of governance*. Law flows from our secular (type C) U.S. Constitution where ***civic neutrality*** (level playing field) is maximized. Citizens, both religious and secular (type B) Americans, can be secularists (type C) when it comes to the civic arena of a pluralistic nation based on secular (type C) law. These secularists will favor *neutrality* as means to protect the rights of fellow citizens to enjoy the same freedoms they enjoy for themselves.

When you use the term, secular, try specifying exactly which type you mean. Do it immediately after you say the term, such as in: “...secular, in the sense of having no association with religion...” Or “...secular, in the sense of having a nonreligious worldview...” Or “...secular, in the sense of governmental neutrality....” . Craft a best follow-up phrase you like, but say what you *mean!*

By adequately distinguishing connotations at each and every turn, you can do your part to reduce a common cacophony of confusion regarding a key term that is overloaded with meanings.

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“When Saying ‘Secular,’ Be Specific!” is the sixth in a series of mini-commentaries on society and education by Mynga Futrell, Ph.D., director of OABITAR (Objectivity, Accuracy, and Balance In Teaching About Religion). They are adapted from an article published in the quarterly of the California 3Rs (Rights, Respect, Responsibility) Religious Liberty Project in May 2008.

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effectively stifled the “green revolution” or “velvet revolution” that followed the 2009 election. They are committed to preventing any reform of the Iranian governmental system. Two days before the 2009 election the Revolutionary Guard stated on their website that they wouldn’t allow reforms.

Reformists in Iran do not want revolution so much as they want *evolution*; they want a system that evolves out of the old system, with eventual removal of the theocracy as the end goal. They had their hopes raised following the pre-election debate, but now it is much less certain that a reformation will take place.

AOF 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!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

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

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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).

Tidbits, News, and Events of Interest

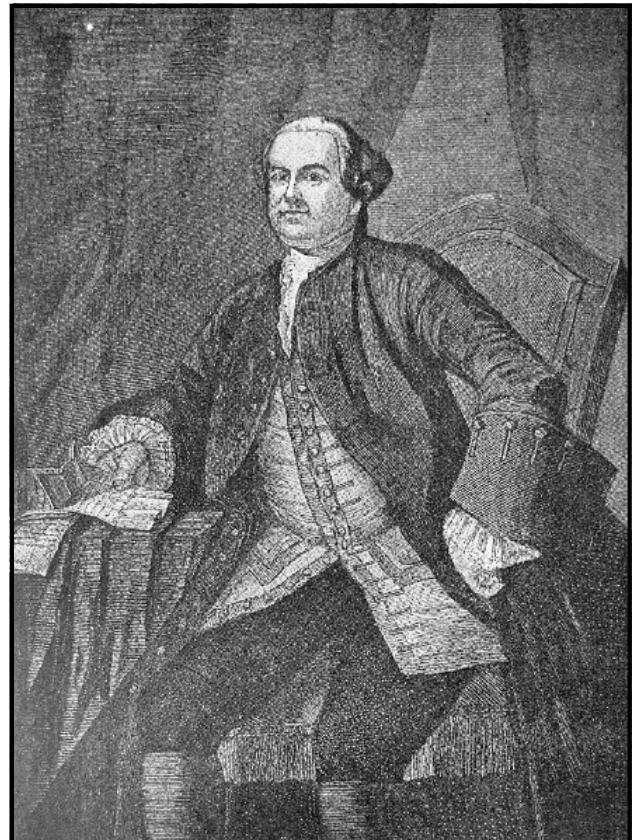
Origins Of Freethought Day: October 12, 1692—One Step Forward

Over 300 years ago, on October 12, 1692, Governor William Phipps of the Colony of Massachusetts made a decision that brought to an end the horrendous Salem Witch trials.

A Christian, nevertheless he declared that spectral evidence (supernaturalism) would no longer be admissible in court, and so the trials, due to lack of appropriate evidence, came to an end. The governor's decision was a distinct departure from the general community's extant thinking and a giant step on the path toward the principle of legal neutrality that would, when the United States incorporated into its brand new Constitution a Bill of Rights, assure each U.S. citizen the freedom to follow his/her conscience regarding matters of ultimate belief.

In our increasingly pluralistic nation of today, the Freethought Day Celebration of Reason and Church/State Separation serves as a reminder that our courts and public institutions should be places of fairness and justice for everyone.

Freethought Day in Sacramento has been an annual celebration of reason and church state celebration since Oct 12, 2002, thanks to our intrepid and tireless Freethought Day Planning Committee and Volunteers! Hats off to all of you who do so much for so many. The world is a better place because of your efforts.



Governor William Phipps, who decided against spectral evidence in court after his wife was accused of witchcraft.

(Continued from page 3)

(legal neutrality)

We want to educate the public regarding the contributions of freethought and freethinkers in advancing human rights, and establishing and preserving a religion/government separation in the U.S.A.

We have some community goals as well.

We want to foster participation of organizations with mutual understanding and support of the mission

We try to publicize freethought organizations and present a positive image to the public

We definitely want to provide enjoyment for those in attendance



We want to be "back in the mainstream" for next year's event. And with your help, we will.

See you there!

Fundraising Efforts Underway Eat Greek And Support Freethought Day, Oct 4-10

The week before the Fair, Sacramento restaurant **Opa Opa** is pairing with the organizers to donate 10% of the purchase from *every customer who mentions Freethought Day* when paying for the meal at the cash register. So, have a delicious lunch or dinner at Opa Opa! 5644 J St # A , Sacramento. (916) 451-4000 .

<http://www.eatatopa.com>

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org!



Newsletter Submissions

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

newsletter@aofonline.org

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

Preference is given to material 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.

Volunteer to Help at Freethought Day!

Staff a table? Help with setup or cleanup? There's lots we need to do. So, phone the AOF voice mail at **447-3589** and find out how you can help make this the best Freethought Day yet!

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.



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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

October/November Calendar of Events

AOF October General Meeting Canceled; Attend FREETHOUGHT DAY!

October AOF Board Meeting Sunday, October 18, 9:30-12:00 p.m.

AOF Dinner Social ; Location TBD. Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net
Thursday, November 5, 6:30 p.m.

AOF November Meeting Sunday, November 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 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" (Oct 2009), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2010-02-07). 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.

