

**Upcoming Events** ✧

➤ **Reason Center 2nd Anniversary Celebration**

**Saturday, August 6, 2016, 4 – 6 pm**

Not really an AOF event, but how can we not shout this? Our wonderful [Reason Center](#) (RC) will host a 2nd Anniversary Party this Saturday, August 6, 4pm-6pm. *You* are invited! Festivities will have snacks, crafts, games, trivia, a tour of what Reason Center has become, and a sharing of visions for the future. Lots of visions.

Really, it will be a blast. So be ready to party down. Bring sympathetic friends. Note, RC encourages all who attend to dress in the purple and green spirit of Reason Center freethinkers.

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



➤ **Ryan T. Cragun**

**Sunday, August 14, 2:30 – 4:30 pm**

**Does it help? Does it hurt? What You Don't Know About Religion, but Maybe Should!**

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

What *should* you know about religion? Besides not drinking the Kool-Aid, that is. OK, so they say nonbelievers, on average, know more about faith than do believers, on average -- that's a truism. But truisms aren't always true. And what you thought you knew, and don't, might chill your blood to ice.

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



Another event of the AOF Speaker Series (we say it with pride).

Where will it happen? Where can you hear this exceptional speaker? [Reason Center](#), of course! RC is a priceless regional resource for nonbelievers. So priceless that, for this event only, we suggest a price. That's a voluntary donation of \$2 per person. Dare we call it a love offering?

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

➤ **Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup**

**Saturday, August 20, 2016, 9-11am**

In July 1995, Sacramento-area freethinkers "adopted" a two-mile stretch of Highway 99 from Elkhorn Boulevard to Elverta Road. Since then we have laboured to keep it clean of litter and debris, and received recognition for our work. It is, in fact, one our more successful civic efforts, and shows that freethinkers can also serve the community!

So this time, why not join us? Enjoy a morning commune with nature, and do a good deed for the environment and local area wildlife. The refuse that we collect would otherwise degrade habitat, leading to a slow death for many creatures.

As usual, the activity captain will provide all safety equipment, including comfortable, natty hard-hats and gloves, stylish safety vests, collection bags, and handy trash pickers. The clean-up takes a scant two hours. Please dress for the season. It may be a good idea to bring a backpack or fanny-pack to carry 3 or 4 trash bags.



**Location :** CalTrans Park-&-Ride lot, W. Elkhorn Blvd, see [map](#).

(Travel north from Sacramento on I-5, past the Sleeptrain Arena. Take the "Highway 99 - Yuba City, Marysville" exit. Exit at Elkhorn Boulevard less than a mile north. Turn left, cross the overpass, and the park-&-ride lot will be on your left.)

**Contact :** 916-447-2169 (Don Knutson), or see [Contact Page](#)

### ➤ **Philosophers' Table: Free Will and Evil**

**Sunday, August 28, 2016, 12-1pm**

This month's Philosophers' Table will serve helpings of Free Will and the Problem of Evil. This classic conundrum of religion and philosophy is a rich soil for discussion, debate, and occasional brawls. Does dogma chase its tail? Does dogma catch its tail and bite it? It's a perennial "pet" topic (ohgod please stop) of the philosophically inclined, who do indeed gnaw on it (*please*) doggedly (*stop*). And mind you, it's not *simply* a religious question -- because the conflict of predestination vs. free will is not all that different from determinism vs. free will. Is it? Or no? Well, that's why we have these things.



So come to the Table, bring your favourite chew toy, and share a few gnaws. Afterward, stick around for the monthly Sac-FAN/AOF joint meeting (Reason Center, 1 to 3 pm), and bring something more edible than a chew toy for that.

The general rule at Philosophers' Table talks: respect each other's opinions and feelings, always help the other person be heard, no dogfights. And clean up after yourself. Really, people.

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

### ➤ **Keith Swenson: A Question of Snowflakes**

**Sunday, August 28, 2016, 1-3pm**

Snowflakes in August, yes -- clearly we have an ice theme going on here. But we can learn lots from this, besides remembering to let your little brat brother out of the freezer. Because of all areas where science and the Bible have friction, the topic of *origins* is the war zone, the scorched earth. Exactly why do evolution and [abiogenesis](#) kick up such emotion? It may be that by-your-bootstraps thing, auto-creation, and the idea of organization "creating itself." Even scientifically minded people struggle with that one.



But we humans are small-minded, insular thinkers. What we understand at one level may baffle us at another. The molecular world and the process of long-range natural selection are non-intuitive. We must get through a mental block, a conceptual bias. A way to do this is to observe how snowflakes and ice crystals forms. Crystallization is palpable auto-creation, a spontaneous increase in information without intelligent meddling. It *seems* to violate the 2nd law of thermodynamics. But this mistakes the law, a misunderstanding often promulgated and exploited by creationists.

Intuition may say all things must decay into randomness, but in fact information (organization), like snowflakes, or like the delicate frost-ferns on your windowpanes in winter, often evolves spontaneously on its own. Certain systems display this strange behaviour of auto-creation all the time. Shake a shoebox of marbles, see them nest automatically into lovely hexagonal patterns. That's what we mean!

Evolution is one process of auto-creation among others. We see once we learn to look. And our speaker will help us look.

[Keith Swenson](#) comes to AOF to help us gain a better understanding of:

- Why people find it hard to accept evolution
- What the natural cognitive barrier is, and why it exists
- The role that misunderstanding randomness plays
- The role that misunderstanding entropy plays
- How complex systems display the behaviour of auto-creation
- Several examples of auto creation
- (with luck) an improved way to explain why evolution is really quite reasonable after all!

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

### ➤ **Davis Community Meal – Feed the Hungry**

**Tuesday, August 30, 2016, 4:30pm–7pm**

Freethinkers can also serve the community, right? Well, prove it! Join AOF and Sac-FAN in an effort to feed the poor, the hungry, the indigent, the outcast. Our crack team will set up tables, greet, serve, and clean a bit at the end. No food preparation—the Davis Community Meal staff will take care of that part. Your reward is a possible free meal, camaraderie, loads of gratitude, and an expanded heart. Plus music by a really fun band, the [Regal Beezers](#). Can't make it exactly on time? That's OK, any help is good help!

**Location:** St. Martin's Episcopal, 640 Hawthorne Lane, Davis. Map: <https://goo.gl/9FtkrK>.

**For more information or carpooling, call:** 916-447-2169 (Don).

## ➤ **Hank & Cleo: A Celebration of Life**

**Sunday, September 25, 2016, 1-3pm**

It's not a memorial but a *celebration*, a tribute and paean to the lives of Hank Kocol (July 16, 1937 - Apr 20, 2013) and Cleo Kocol (Jan 12, 1927 - July 5, 2016), AOF charter members, AOF past presidents, artists, activists, humanists, feminists, sparkling minds, and supporters of our community of reason for decades. We would not be here without them, not as we are now. Come share your memories, learn of their amazing adventures together, and possibly leave with a token. Laugh, speak, eat, remember. More details later. Deep in our warrens, we are planning.

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



Visit <http://www.aofonline.org/> for more AOF events (and other news).



## **Natural vs. Supernatural**

by Ken Nahigian

One Christian apologist I admire, somewhat grudgingly, is James Porter (JP) Moreland. Professor of Philosophy at Biola University in La Mirada, CA, Moreland has a background in analytic ontology and philosophy of science, and is even an honorary Board Member of the Internet Infidels. He seems affable and well-spoken. And I particularly like how he defines the distinction between Natural and Supernatural in a way that lets you sink your teeth into it.

Believers & skeptics often argue over this without defining terms. What exactly *is* “supernatural,” and how can we know when we find it? This is an especially troubling question when you remember [Clarke's Third Law](#). If “natural” simply means predictable, then certain quantum events are supernatural. But to *define* the supernatural out of existence as many do (“Anything that exists is natural”), as I have done myself, makes the whole debate seem a bit silly. Tautological. Non-testable. And ultimately, empty.

Moreland's answer—not in these words, but this is my understanding—is that the supernatural exists if the best, most coherent, most useful and parsimonious explanation for something must include some element of consciousness, teleology or subjective intent.

Suppose after much study we finally develop a model that completely explains *everything*, ties it all up in a neat knot; a model as purely mechanical as billiard balls bumping together, plus perhaps a dash of pure randomness. Then would we know the universe is natural. But suppose the final answer we are driven to is that things are a certain way only because something in them “wants” or “intends” this or that outcome. Then we would know that a bit of supernatural is in the mix.

The *something* need not be the Christian God of course, nor any god—perhaps the tooth fairy, or just some ambient, nonspecific magic. But this, to Moreland, is what *supernatural* means.

Of course it's just his definition, which you can reject if you have a better. And of course some difficulty remains in deciding what constitutes a “final” explanation. Perhaps if we work at it just a bit longer, we can reduce the perceived intentionality to more billiard ball bumpings. But at least the idea is within a conceptual box; at least we can work with it.

I might disagree with Moreland on much else, but this distinction satisfies my sense of neatness. So, yes, kudos to him.



## **Support the Reason Center**

This again? Yes, this. Reason Center opened in July 2014, two years ago. Since then it has hosted well over 200 freethought events. Currently the Center has twelve partner organizations. It has opened its venue to the public. It's *rolling*.

The Reason Center mission is 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.

So good, so far. The work continues. But to continue to continue, it relies on continued support for its members and donors. Please consider becoming a Reason Center member or supporter. To set up a monthly or one-time donation visit [ReasonCenter.org](http://ReasonCenter.org). (And yes, donations are tax deductible, so it really does come back to you. Not like a bad pizza.)



## Have blood?

If you do, congratulations. Now donate some of it at the BloodSource. And then use AOF BloodSource ID# 4857. Numerous BloodSource Donation Centers exist -- find them listed at: <http://www.bloodsource.org/Locations>. Donating blood saves lives, and what is more Humanistic than that?

**Not yet a member of Atheists and Other Freethinkers? Well, why not? Join us!**

## Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
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*E-mail is required for newsletter delivery.*

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

### Your Membership Level (annual, please circle):

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

Basic Dues : \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Donation : \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed : \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

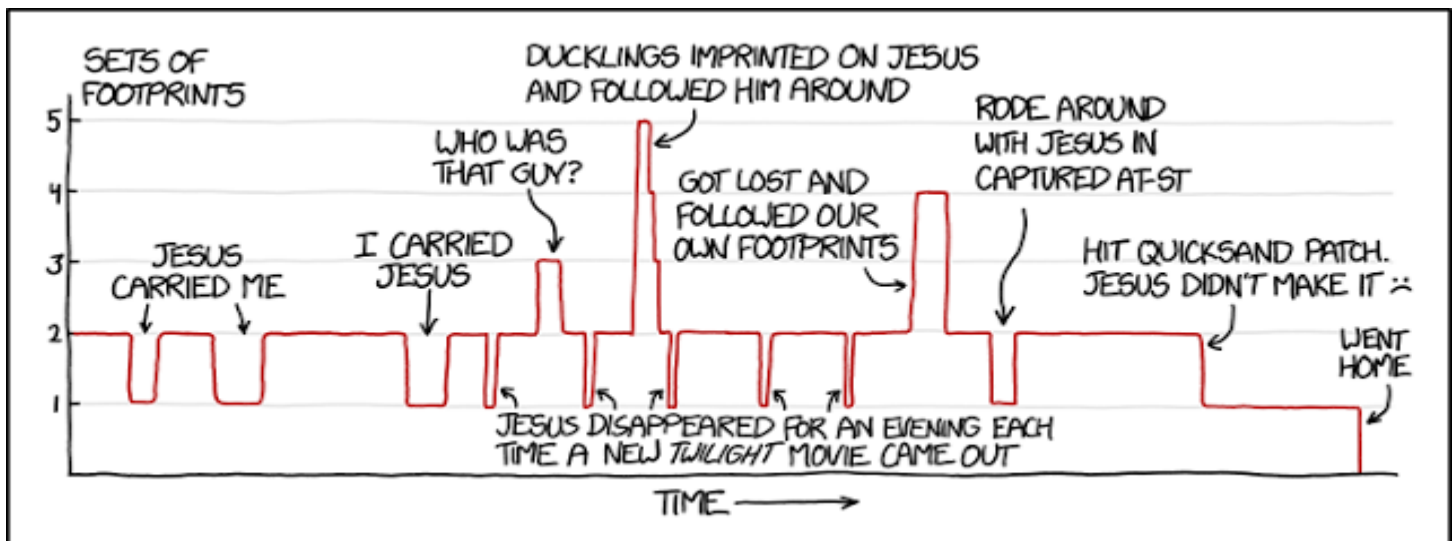
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AOF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association, FEIN 68-0325762. General Meetings are free and open to the public. AOF also hosts civic service projects, dinners, movie outings, parties! To see what awaits you, visit the website, [www.aofonline.org](http://www.aofonline.org); or contact AOF at our 24/7 voice-mail: 916-447-3589; or write to PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. Or talk to us. We love questions. AOF President: Kristi Craven. Vice-president: Mynga Futrell. Editor: Fabulous Fran Evanisko. And all the rest.

“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.”

The priesthood have, in all ancient nations, nearly monopolized learning.... And, even since the Reformation, when or where has existed a Protestant or dissenting sect who would tolerate A FREE INQUIRY? The blackest billingsgate, the most ungentlemanly insolence, the most yahooish brutality is patiently endured, countenanced, propagated, and applauded. But touch a solemn truth in collision with a dogma of a sect, though capable of the clearest proof, and you will soon find you have disturbed a nest, and the hornets will swarm about your legs and hands, and fly into your face and eyes.

~ John Adams



(Thanks yet again to xkcd.com.)