

❖ ❖ **Upcoming AOF Events** ❖ ❖

Never start with an apology they say, but what the hell. AOF apologizes for the technical failure of last month's online presentation by Dr. Michael Canton on [Delsional Thinking](#). We are still learning, and will try another online speaker event at later this month. Meanwhile, Dr. Canton's outstanding presentation is *now available* on YouTube for viewing at any time. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSgqgv44Ngg> and enjoy. Really, it is a blast!

➤ **Free Movie Nights ...**

... are suspended for April at least due to the CONVID-19 lockdown. Stay home instead, be safe, and enjoy a video with your loved one(s). Or talk, a table game, or some serious hugging. What could be better?

➤ **Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup**

Saturday, April 4, 2020, 9am - 11am

The Highway Cleanup *will* go forward, weather permitting, since social distancing is easy on the two-mile stretch of Highway 99 from Elkhorn Boulevard to Elverta Road, which Sac-area freethinkers "adopted" in July 1995.

So, join us! Please. 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 ultimately be swept by the rain into tributaries and into the ocean, degrading habitat, and leading to a slow death for many sea creatures.

As ever, the stalwart 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.

To find the site, travel north from Sacramento on I-5, past the Sleep Train 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 the AOF Contact page (<http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>).

Location: Caltrans Park-&-Ride lot, W. Elkhorn Blvd, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/zw3Rwct9yR52>.

Notes: This is a great event for older children, but please leave smalls safe at home.

In case of rain, excessive mud, rapture or locust plague, the Cleanup will be rescheduled. If unsure, call the Activity Captain (Don).

➤ **History of Quackery**

Sunday, April 26, 2020, 2pm - 4pm

Holes in heads, squirmy leeches and radioactive springs -- these are a few of our favorite things ways people try to flee illness or cheat death. Hopeless of course. Still let us explore the dark side of desperation, the hilarious, bizarre, at times even deadly mithridates peddled by hucksters and shady doctors in the name of medicine and a quick buck. It might be fun. (Yogurt enemas, anyone?)

The AOF Speaker Series brings you an online presentation by collector, hobbyist and quack-watcher Chris Holland. He will follow tear-stained trails into the blind cul-de-sacs of pseudoscience, of Ptolemaic spheres and philosopher's stones. He specializes in archaic and absurd medical practices and turns his gimlet eye on contemporary charlatans. On display will be his collection of vintage medical quackery curios, like the electric shock cures for dropsy.

By the way, Snake Oil was actually a thing, did you know that?

The talk will be about 90 minutes, followed (we hope) by Q&A, possibly by phone. We are working out details.

Location : The World Wide Web, possibly a Zoom link, details later. See the AOF website, <http://www.aofonline.org/>.

Contact : See AOF Contact page (<http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>) or email <programs (at) aofonline (dot) org>.



➤ Free Movie Night (maybe?)

Friday, May 1, 7pm – 10pm

We hope (but don't count on it) to resume the AOF Movie Nights in May, starting with a funny, well-praised 2019 documentary about the remarkable rise and influence of a controversial religious group known as The Satanic Temple. It "challenges preconceived notions of its subject with a smart, witty, and overall entertaining dispatch from the front lines of the fight for social justice," says a critic. We can't name the movie, we have rules, but if you contact Reason Center (see below) they'll tell you, then you can tell anyone.



Free Movie Nights are informal, picnic-style family events. The venue has a huge silver screen and a dynamic sound system. Chairs are available but may be a bit harsh for a two-hour sit, so it's OK to bring blankets, pillows, lawn chairs and your own snacks & beverage, non-alcoholic please. RC often provides fluffy, buttery theater popcorn. Children are welcome if they're cool children -- and if you judge the movie appropriate for tender eyes & ears.

Location : Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento, see map

Contact : See the Reason Center Contact Page

Free Movie Nights generally occur two Friday evenings each month. And you can suggest your own fave film for next time.

❖ ❖ Other Upcoming Events ❖ ❖

➤ Sacramento Skeptics in the Pub

Friday, April 24, 6:30pm – 9:30pm

A monthly meeting devoted to skepticism, rational thought and good beer, designed to promote fellowship and camaraderie among skeptics, critical thinkers, freethinkers, rationalists and other like-minded individuals. Also, beer.

Location: Sactown Union Brewery, 1210 66th Street, Sac. Map: <https://goo.gl/maps/DY1yLewkpVASHnTa7>.

Contact: Email Email "sacskeptics (at) gmail (dot) com" or "sbaker81 (at) comcast (dot) net".

➤ Humanist Salon

Sundays, May 3 (?) and June 7, 2019 10am – 11:30am

The Humanist Salon, a special meetup of the Roseville Compassionate Humanists (<https://www.meetup.com/Compassionate-Humanists/>), is a place where it's safe to be you! It celebrates science, reason, diversity, inclusiveness and equal opportunity, all without religion. "Everyone who is open-minded is welcome to the Salon."

The website currently lists a meeting scheduled for May 3, but the CH recently released this statement: "Due to Social-Distancing associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Humanist Salon gathering will discontinue until June 7." So best to ask.

Location: Roseville Labou, 1730 Santa Clara Drive, Roseville. Map:

<https://goo.gl/maps/UC4975CE19P2>.

Contact: ph. 916-836-5269, or email "info (at) compassionatehumanists (dot) com".



➤ More events

Other freethought events occur in the Sacramento area all the time, even in these lockdown days. Please check the Sacramento Coalition of Reason general calendar at <https://unitedcor.org/event-calendar-2/>.

❖ ❖ Secular Holidays ❖ ❖

➤ Yuri's Night

Sunday, April 12, 2020

Yuri's Night, also called Cosmonauts Day, is a day in honor of Yuri Gagarin, who became the first human in space on April 12, 1961. Twenty years later on the same day the U.S. launched the first space shuttle.

The Soviet Union first celebrated Cosmonauts Day in 1962, on the first anniversary of Gagarin successful flight into space. It was celebrated annually in the USSR and then Russia. The idea for a worldwide celebration of space and technology sprang into existence at the United Nations' Space Generation Advisory Council Conference in September of 2000. The new, worldwide Yuri's Night was first celebrated on April 12, 2001 and has since become an annual international celebration.



Yuri's Night not only celebrates space and technology, but also the principles of freethinking. Once people thought that the other planets travelled around Earth. It took courage as well as intelligence for people to argue against the religiously-ordained view of the Earth as the center of the universe. Yuri's Night not only is about celebrating his historic achievement, but all accomplishments of science that have overturned dogma and advanced our knowledge of our universe.

"Circling the earth in my orbital spaceship I marveled at its beauty. People of the world, let us safeguard and enhance this beauty, not destroy it!" -- Yuri Gagarin

➤ Earth Day

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Earth Day is a day to grow and diversify the environmental movement, and to mobilize our resources to promote a healthy, sustainable planet. Earth Day is the only Secular Holiday celebrated simultaneously around the globe by people of all backgrounds, faiths and nationalities. More than a half billion people participate in Earth Day campaigns every year.

U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson founded Earth Day in 1970 to push the environment onto the national agenda. It is an inclusive event, attracting people of all religions and beliefs. Non-religious groups have many reasons to celebrate Earth Day: those who don't believe in heaven or divine intervention realize that this world is all we have and that it is in our hands to protect it. Those who believe that the scientific method is the best way to gain understanding of our world, can also use Earth Day to promote the best available science about environmental issues. Secular groups can use this annual event to network with environmental groups and other organizations.



You can celebrate Earth Day in many different ways. Events across the globe are often designed to bring notice of the environment to lawmakers. Events also take place on college and school campuses. Meetings intended for the sole purpose of attracting attention to the cause are the most common; these meetings often employ music, speakers, and other attractions to generate attention.



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 set up a monthly or one-time donation, visit ReasonCenter.org.

Support AOF

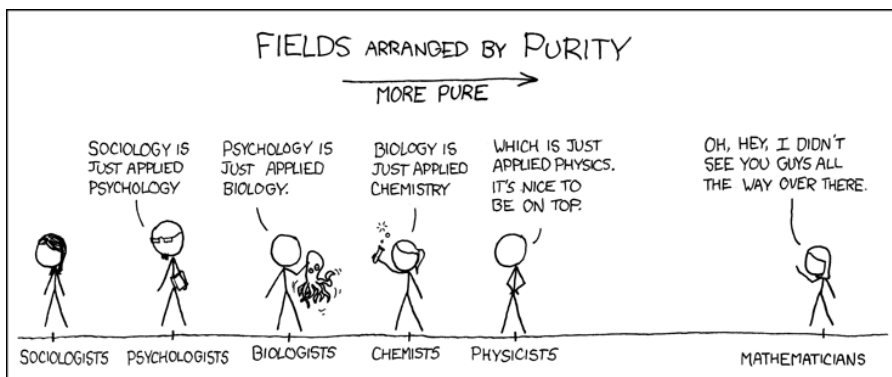
You can support AOF *without spending a dime*. How? When you purchase goods at Amazon.com, simply use this link: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0325762>. Bookmark it now! Prices & service will be the same, but AOF will receive a small kickback for whatever you purchase. Sweet!

Suggest a Meeting

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

Volunteer?

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



Suicide and Christianity

About suicides, there's this. The Old Testament has seven: Samson, Saul, Saul's armor-bearer, Abimelech, Zimri, Razis, and Achitophel. It condemns not one. This is odd because the OT decries many transgressions large and trivial, such as burning yeast or honey (Lev 2:11), eating fat or blood (Lev 3:17), eating owls or storks (Lev 11:13), mixing fabrics (Lev 19:19), speaking names of foreign gods (Ex 23:13), cooking a goat kid in its mother's milk (Ex 23:19), or having a census (2 Sam 24), often with lavish penalties. If suicide was a sin, the silence is surprising.

The New Testament has only one clear suicide (Judas) and almost seems to condone it – Matt 27:3 mentions it almost offhandedly. Only much later did writers begin to say Judas' suicide was a sin.

In fact the very early Church seemed to see suicide as close to martyrdom. "...even the death of Jesus was regarded by Tertullian, one of the most fiery of the early Fathers, as a kind of suicide. He pointed out, and Origen [another major early Christian theologian] agreed, that He voluntarily gave up the ghost, since it was unthinkable that the Godhead should be at the mercy of the flesh." [Alfred Alvarez, *The Savage God*, p.49]

Early Christians condemned the killing of others, even in cases of warfare, self-defense and capital punishment. For example, Tertullian wrote, "Can it be lawful to handle the sword, when the Lord himself has declared that he who uses the sword shall perish by it?" (Tertullian, *De Corona*, p11). But suicide, no. Life was a net of snares and temptations, a tightrope over hell. Many early Christians wanted to get to heaven and saw no good reason to wait.

The Donatist sect (4th-6th century) carried this to logical conclusions. St. Augustine said, "... to kill themselves out of respect for martyrdom is their daily sport." They were noted for leaping from cliffs, burning themselves to death, even inviting travelers to kill the presumably-heaven-bound martyr. The Church declared them heretics and suppressed them with a notable lack of charity (the history is in some dispute). Donatism died out – you get just one guess why.

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, views shifted, until in about the sixth century suicide was an explicit sin and civil crime. St. Augustine was the first Christian to offer any general rebuke (in *The City of God*, fifth century). His reason was a then-novel interpretation of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

The Albigensian or Catharist sect (12th-14th century) was another group soft on suicide. The Church persecuted them in southern France with some savagery because they actively sought martyrdom (and for other "errors"—like believing that religious orders should take their vows of poverty seriously).

Only in the late Renaissance, a thousand years after Augustine, did writers cautiously begin to question the stigma of suicide.

In *In Praise of Folly* (1509), Erasmus defended suicide to escape an unendurable life. Soon after, in his fictional *Utopia* (1516), Sir Thomas More proposed it for the purpose of euthanasia. Shakespeare (1564-1616) portrayed fourteen suicides in his eight tragedies, never condemning but asking:

"Then is it sin / To rush into the secret house of death / Ere death dare come to us?" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV, XV:80-82).

In 1608, John Donne wrote the first English defense of suicide, *Biathanatos*, but apparently had second thoughts (as well as a job, Dean of St. Paul's, that required staying on good terms with the Church). He found it wise to wait until after his death to have it published (1644).

By the eighteenth century, it was common to dissect traditional beliefs from a rational and skeptical perspective. Thinkers challenged religious arguments against suicide, even claimed it as a human right. The subject became a secular issue as much as a religious one.

There was pushback. With dubious logic, religious leader John Wesley (1703-1791) said suicide attempters should be hanged. The eminent legal authority William Blackstone (1723-1780) claimed suicide was a crime against both God and King. And the famed Christian philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose writings remain incomprehensibly opaque, used suicide as an example of moral error that could be demonstrated via the Categorical Imperative.

Even so, gradually, the brutal treatment of suicidal people eased. France relaxed its anti-suicide laws at the time of the French Revolution. The Prussian penal code of 1794 (influenced earlier by the "liberal" monarch, Frederick the Great, and then by the French Revolution) did not punish attempted suicide. England, always a bit slow, listed attempted suicide as a felony until 1961 (de-criminalizing it only to encourage people to seek treatment). Anyone aiding, abetting, or counseling a suicide or attempted suicide is still subject to 14 years imprisonment.

By the late eighteenth century or so, the Romantics (Byron, Keats and Shelley in England, Lermontov in Russia, Chateaubriand and Lamartine in France, Novalis and Goethe in Germany) glorified suicide as the heroic last act of a free man. And views continue to evolve.





Not yet an AOF member? Please join us!

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

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

How to Contact AOF:

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

How to Join AOF:

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

AOF's Facebook page:

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

AOF is affiliated with the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies (ASHS), Atheist Alliance of America (AAA), American Atheists (AA), American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Sacramento Coalition of Reason (SCoR). And the League of Bowlegged Midgets, but not really.

AOF Mission Statement:

“The purpose of Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF) is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.”

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

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

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

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

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

Atheists & Gays responsible for Twitter poll disaster

Republican Arkansas State Senator Jason Rapert, founder of the National Association of Christian Lawmakers (NACL), thinks so! So convinced was he that his views would be shared by others that he launched a poll on Twitter at the weekend asking if the US would be better off with more Christians in elected office. Result:



Love poem in the time of COVID-19

I can't look away from you, your pale face —
glowing, as sun rays levitate through the glass.
You always stand next to the glass.

I zoom in for my writing seminar, words paint the air
I should be looking at the screen but instead,
I'm looking at you.

On Tuesday I burn our rice,
running to the stove, leaving you, I ate cereal
instead and you were there, while I ate, and you
didn't leave me, even when the smoke alarm blared.

They say quarantine will test the limits,
even of beings who have been together for years.
It's been almost 12 months, but still
I wake up next to you daily.
I sit next to you during class.
Each minute my heart grows fonder.

What is love, I ask
over and over as the days grow longer.
It's you, I've decided.

You who remains silent
rather than righteously telling me off
when I decide that by doing 21 push-ups, I'll become jacked.

You who holds my books,
my memories.
You who keeps me warm,
sheltered from the weather.

Oh you. It's always been you.
Oh my beloved, oh my bedroom wall.