



Marie Bane entertains AOF at the May 26 meeting; photo by Roger Zabke. Ken, sit up straight!

❖ ❖ This Month's Headliner Event ❖ ❖

➤ Liam McDaid: Are Habitable Exoplanets a Chimera?

Sunday, June 23, 2024, 2 pm – 4 pm

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

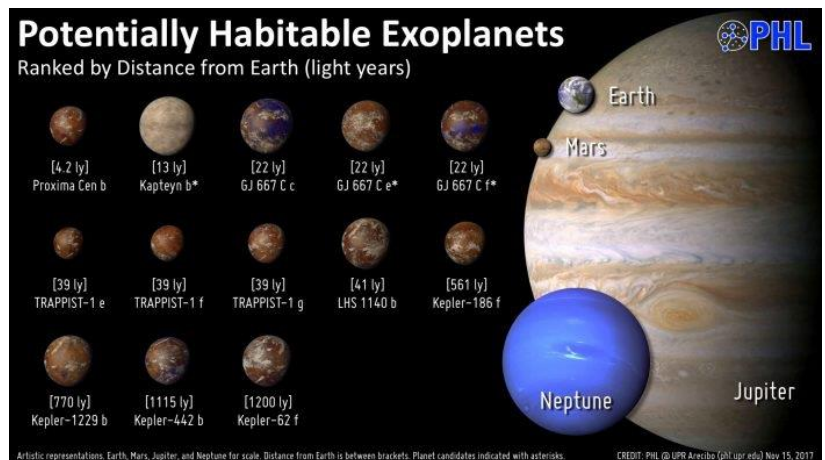
In the last three decades, astronomers have found thousands of planets orbiting other stars, many described as "possibly habitable" or less plausibly "habitable."

Our speaker will focus on what exactly makes a planet habitable and give some insights into why getting hard data to settle issues of habitability is difficult. He will also discuss how odd some of these alien star systems are and how these differences affect claims of habitability.

Liam McDaid, professor of Physics, Astronomy & Geology at the Sac City College campus, Bachelor of Science in Astronomy (Penn State), Master of Science in Astronomy (New Mexico State), Master of Arts in History (Sam Houston State), Master of Science in Physics (New Mexico State), is a total brainbox. Since growing up in Philadelphia, he always had a passion for astronomy. At New Mexico State, he was fortunate enough to share an office with Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of the planet Pluto! In graduate school he moonlighted part-time as a stand-up comic -- "until I had a bottle thrown at me and decided to stop," he says. Liam will guide you through the peaks and precipices of the starry wisdom. Don't miss this exciting presentation.

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Contact for details: See <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.



✧ ✧ Other Upcoming AOF Events ✧ ✧

➤ Free Movie and Discussion

Friday, June 14, 2024, 7 pm – 9 pm

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

It's a free **in-person Movie Night** at Sacramento's [Reason Center](#), in a quiet room with cozy seating and a huge screen and refreshments right at hand. The movie name is a secret because of our [MPLC License](#) and the stodgy rule of law -- but we will slyly slip a hint. This one is an intense 2020 American drama based on a stage play about a blues singer, dramatizing a turbulent recording session in 1920s Chicago. It received eight Critics' Choice Movie Award nominations and nine NAACP Image Award nominations, including Outstanding Motion Picture.

AOF co-sponsors the Movie Night events. The movie team provides popcorn and other munchies - feel free to bring your own snacks as well. We also encourage a post-film discussion, which makes this educational if you stretch the word. No fee to attend. But you know, Reason Center always appreciates donations. We're just saying.

Contact for details: See <http://reasoncenter.com/contact/>

Free Movie Night is a joint venture of AOF and Reason Center. Suggest your own fave film for next time!



➤ Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup

Saturday, June 15, 2024, 9 am – 11 am

Location: Near W. Elkhorn Blvd & Hwy 99, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/zw3Rwct9yR52>.

Contact: 916-805-9337 (Don Knutson), or see [Contact Page](#)

Out on Highway 99, for two miles from Elkhorn Boulevard to Elverta Road, runs a lonely stretch -- *our* stretch! Sac-area freethinkers "adopted" it in July 1995. We have cared for it, nurtured it, lovingly rescued it from litter and debris, and received recognition for our work. One of our successful civic efforts, it proves freethinkers can also serve the community.

So, join us! Enjoy a morning commune with nature, and do a deed for the environment and local area wildlife. The refuse 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. Note, Cal-Trans is now paying a stipend for our work!

As usual, 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 cleanup 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 get there, travel north from Sacramento on I-5 past the Natomas area. Take the "Highway 99 - Yuba City, Marysville" exit. Exit at Elkhorn Boulevard less than a mile north. Turn left, cross the overpass. Park in the park-&-ride lot if possible, or somewhere near it.

This is a great event for older children, but please leave smalls safe at home. Please review the CalTrans Highway Cleanup guidelines at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/maintenance/adopt-a-highway/covid19>.

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



✧ ✧ Other Upcoming Events ✧ ✧

Some local *non*-AOF events worthy of your attention. We won't list them all this time, just highlights. For more, please check the calendar links below.

➤ Blasphemy Breakfasts and a Brunch

Saturday, June 8, 2024, 10 am – 11:30 am, at Mel's Diner, 13399 Folsom Blvd, Folsom, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/ri6JvaBoSZVHTdnU6>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/301121225/>.

Sunday, June 9, 2024, 9:30 am – 11:30 am, at Mel's Diner, 3000 J Street, Sacramento, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/toijMkseMWmTanVP7>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/299832060/>.



Sunday, June 16, 2024, 9:30 am – 11 am, at Mel's Diner, 6708 Lonetree Blvd, Rocklin, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/ZUY2gq72KkmcC4bU6>, details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/299855550/>.

Like to hang 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 don't blaspheme all that much, but dark mutterings may emerge ... be warned. A great place to speak your mind, and a good starter if you are new to meetups. Please RSVP (see the links).

➤ **Sunday Assembly & Potluck**

Sunday, June 9, 2024, 11 am – 1 pm (doors open 10:30am, presentation at 11)

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

Sunday Assembly is a secular celebration of *you*, with music, readings, food and speakers, plus entertainment for children.

Featured presenter is **Chris Conard**, Natural Resource Specialist at the Bufferlands in Sacramento County. His topic: **Birds as a Window into the Environment**. Bring a food dish to share if you wish – it's a potluck too!

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/301129844/>.

➤ **Games at Reason Center**

Friday, June 21, 2024, 6 pm – 9 pm

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

A gathering to play board games and socialize/. Bring some of your own games to share. We have a variety of board and card games. Here are a few: Ticket to Ride, Azul, Camel Up, Labyrinth, Rummikub, and more. But no gambling allowed.

You may bring low-mess snacks if you would like, too. Chips + dip is good.



➤ **Coffee and Community at Reason Center**

Sunday, June 23, 2024, 10 am – 11:30 am

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., see [map](#)

Come to the Reason Center Library for coffee, tea and treats. This event is just a casual conversation on topics of the day, and newcomers are welcome. Hope to see you soon!



➤ **More Events – So many Calendars!**

Really, there's more. And plans change, because we're human. So don't trust the list above. To learn of all those other events, please 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 ✧ ✧

➤ World Environment Day

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

The goal of **World Environment Day** is to stimulate worldwide awareness of environmental issues, and to generate action for conservation. The United Nations General Assembly established [World Environment Day](#) in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Each year World Environment Day celebrations occur at a different location around the globe. To find a location for this year, see: [World Environment Day Events](#).

World Environment Day gives environmental issues a human face, one with which we can identify. The philosophy of the Day has changed little over the last three decades; it still strives to associate faces with environmental issues and empower people to be advocates of sustainable and equitable development. By promoting an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing the attitudes towards environmental issues, and advocating partnerships, World Environment Day strives to ensure all nations and peoples enjoy a safe, clean, healthy, and more prosperous future.

In the words of the United Nations Environment Program, "On this World Environment Day, let us not despair, but instead examine the state of our environment. Let us consider carefully the actions which each of us must take, and then address ourselves to our common task of preserving all life on earth in a mood of sober resolution and quiet confidence."

Groups around the world hold activities to acknowledge and celebrate this day. Find an activity near you, and join the fun!



➤ Juneteenth

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

[Juneteenth](#), an unofficial American secular holiday but official in Texas, commemorates a major milestone: slavery's end in the United States. On June 19, 1865, Union soldiers led by Major General Gordon Granger landed at Galveston, Texas, with news that the war was over and the enslaved were now free. This was *two and a half years* after the Emancipation Proclamation (official on Jan 1, 1863). The Proclamation had had little impact in Texas due to a lack of federal troops to enforce it - but with General Granger's arrival, Union forces were finally strong enough to overcome resistance.

Why two and a half years? Variant stories try to explain. One concerns a messenger murdered on his way to Texas with the news. Another is that enslavers deliberately suppressed the news to maintain the labor force on their plantations. Another, that federal troops actually waited for slave owners to reap the benefits of one last cotton harvest before going to Texas. For some, very likely, President Lincoln's authority over the rebel states was still in question. Whatever the truth of it, conditions in Texas sadly remained status quo well beyond what was statutory.

On arrival, General Granger's first order of business was to proclaim [General Order Number 3](#), which began as follows:

"The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired laborer."

Reactions ranged from shock to jubilation. While many lingered to learn of the new employer-to-employee relationship, others left before offers were completely off the lips of their former 'masters' - attesting to the varying conditions on the plantations and the realization of freedom. Even with nowhere to go, they felt that leaving the plantation would be their first breath of freedom. Moving North was logical; for many it represented true freedom, while the desire to reach family members in neighboring states drove some into Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Settling into these new areas as free men and women brought on new realities and the challenges of establishing a heretofore non-existent status for black people in America. Recounting the memories of that great day in June of 1865 and its festivities would serve as motivation as well as a release from the growing pressures encountered in their new territories.

The celebration of June 19th, coined "Juneteenth" but also called "Freedom Day," "Liberation Day" and "Jubilee Day," began the next year and grew yearly with participation from abolitionists and family of former slaves. The Juneteenth celebration became a time to reassure each other, to gather with family, and to hear speakers recount the abuses of the past. Decades after Emancipation, Juneteenth continued to be revered in Texas with many former slaves and descendants making an annual pilgrimage back to Galveston on the date.

Modern American secularists can mark this day by educating themselves about this stain on our history. A good starting point is [The Middle Passage by Dr. John Henrick Clarke](#).

➤ Solstice (June)

Thursday, June 20, 2024



Called Summer Solstice in the northern hemisphere, Winter Solstice in the southern, people have marked the **June Solstice** in some way or another for thousands of years. Many religions have seasonal holy days linked to this day. It is the day when the Northern Hemisphere has more daylight than at any other time of the year. In the Southern Hemisphere, the least daylight occurs this day in June.

The precise date varies from year to year, but usually it is between the 20th and 23rd of June.

"Solstice" comes from two Latin words: "sol" (meaning sun) and "sistere," (to cause to stand still). At noon in either hemisphere the sun will be high in the sky during summer, low during winter. On the day with the greatest number of daylight hours, the sun reaches its maximum elevation; we call this the Summer Solstice. Likewise, the day with the least daylight is the Winter Solstice.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the June Solstice is officially the first day of summer, also called Midsummer because it comes roughly during the midst of the growing season in Europe.



➤ World Humanist Day

Friday, June 21, 2024

World Humanist Day is a day to spread information and combat misinformation about humanism as a life-philosophy and a means to affect change in the world. This secular holiday dates back to the 1980s, when several local state chapters of the [American Humanist Association](#) (AHA) began celebrating World Humanist Day. Different chapters had different ideas as to when that day should be, however. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the AHA and then the International Humanist Ethical Union passed resolutions declaring the Summer Solstice to be World Humanist Day.

The [American Humanist Association](#), the [International Humanist and Ethical Union](#), the [Council for Secular Humanism](#), the [Campus Freethought Alliance](#) and the [Secular Student Alliance](#) currently celebrate World Humanist Day.

Use this secular holiday to educate the public in your area about humanism, and to gather and celebrate as a humanist community that continues to contribute to the progress and education of the world. A picnic is a particularly good way to celebrate World Humanist Day. Read your favorite humanist texts aloud; spend time socializing with your fellow humanists in a relaxed, natural environment.



➤ Torture Victims Day

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

In 1997, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution **52/149**, establishing June 26 as the United Nations [International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#).

The goal is the eradication of torture and the effective functioning of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (resolution 39/46, annex, 26 June 1987). This day gives us all an opportunity to stand united against cruelty, and remind the world that torture is a violation of basic human rights.

Clearly the abolition of torture is a key issue to freethinkers and humanists, and too often the worst perpetrators of this atrocity are highly religious societies. But secular societies have been far from innocent of it. This is a cause where we can often join hands with our religious brothers and sisters.

Take a moment on this day to visit the [United Nations webpage](#) for this secular holiday.



“At a time when the legitimate aspirations of people in many regions of the world for greater freedom, dignity and a better life are too often met with violence and repression, I urge States to respect the fundamental rights of all people. Torture and other forms of cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment and punishment, wherever they occur and whatever the circumstances, can never be justified.”
Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (2011)



Daniel Dennett
Mar 28, 1942 – Apr 19, 2024
Thank you for everything, Daniel.

The worst vicar of all time?



WARD DRAX FREE was quite possibly the worst vicar of all time. It wasn't so much the gambling, drunkenness and womanizing, as his unshakeable belief that the sole purpose of his job was to fund them.

Coming to the English parish of Sutton, Bedfordshire in 1808, he turned the churchyard into a farmyard. Sheep relieved themselves in the porch, horses and cows disturbed funerals and pigs dug up the graves.

Further fundraising schemes involved stripping off the roof lead and cutting down 300 oak trees. He took a tenth of all village produce, down to 80-year-old Robert Oakes' turnip patch, and charged a fortune for weddings and funerals.

He rattled through services at an impressive speed, often skipping the sermon altogether, and was sometimes able to cancel the whole thing, since no one turned up. Other times he locked up the church for months on end while he hid from his creditors. The importance of worship was not entirely lost on him, though: he once tried to fine parishioners for not attending.

He considered sex to be part of his housekeepers' job description, and sired five children through them alone, despite, it is said, being in every imaginable way repulsive.

Finally, the local squire got him sacked. Rev. Free sold the entire contents of the vicarage, barricaded himself in with the latest mistress, and shot at anyone who approached.

He was eventually starved into submission by a siege of parishioners led by the Archdeacon of Bedford, and left in 1830, after 22 years of service. Failing to get a good reference from his previous employers, Free could get no further ecclesiastical preferment. It was as a beggar that he died in 1843, run over by a varnish maker's cart.



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: Redoubtable Roger Zabkie
Vice-president: Marvelous Mynga Futrell
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Treasurer & Registrar: Kinetic Ken Nahigian
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Advisor: Dependable David Herbert
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Facebook page: Keen Kaeleigh Pontif
Directors at large:
Fran Evanisko, Kaeleigh Pontif

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.

Your humble editor is Fran Evanisko.

Letters, submissions? We love them! See:

<http://www.aofonline.org/read/submission-guide.html>.