

Blake Smith on “Bigfoot & Aliens: A New Religion?”

If you are into skepticism and especially cryptoids, Atlanta Freethought Society is eager for you to hear our next speaker! **Blake Smith** is a writer and researcher, computer automation specialist, and the host of the podcasts **MonsterTalk: The Science Show about Monsters**, and **In reSearch Of...(IRO)**. MonsterTalk has been using mon-



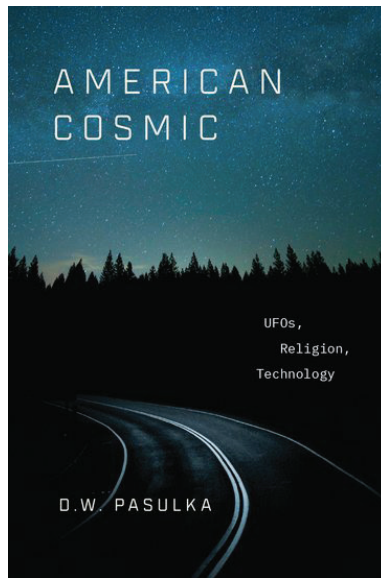
Blake Smith

sters as a springboard to discuss science topics since 2009, and IRO is doing an episode-by-episode rewatch of the 1970s pioneering paranormal show **In Search Of....** and adding in the science and context that the original producers chose to leave out.

He will be giving a talk titled **Bigfoot & Aliens: A New Religion?** What

began as a phenomenological approach to mysteries (What are people seeing in the sky? What are people seeing in the woods?) has changed to something more like a religion of the unknown. Is this new?

In her book **American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology**, Diane Pasulka argues that there is a new religion emerging from the world of UFOs and UAPs. This talk will discuss the secret religious threads weaving together these seemingly unrelated fields of monsters and aliens.



The Smith program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of Zoom-based

AFS Calendar

| | | |
|--------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Apr 13 | GAME NIGHT!! | 6 pm |
| Apr 14 | Board of Directors | 11 am |
| Apr 14 | General Meeting (Live/Online) | 1 pm |
| May 11 | GAME NIGHT!! | 6 pm |
| May 12 | Potluck Lunch | 11 am |
| May 12 | General Meeting (Live/Online) | 1 pm |

All events are combo Live/Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

AND in-person socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. Eastern in the US, for any interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. on Sunday, 10 March, via Zoom and in AFS Hall. We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about skepticism and the unwillingness to believe claims without conclusive evidence. All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course. Details (the same as last month) on the Zoom meeting number are shown below.

AFS April Meeting

Apr 14, 2024 1:00-2:30 PM (eastern)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911

Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall

Atlanta Freethought Society

GAME NIGHT

Please come hang out with us for Game Night on Saturday, March 13, starting at 6 pm! We've been having loads of fun playing games and catching up with friends old and new! We'd love to have you! Please bring snacks, beverages (beer and wine okay), and any games you'd enjoy sharing.



For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society

Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 and also presented online (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy. Announced events are subject to change.



14 Apr Blake Smith

12 May TBA

9 Jun TBA

14 Jul TBA

11 Aug TBA

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org. To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as “the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.”

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other’s company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

Editor: Laura Ross
Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
4775 N. Church Lane SE,
Atlanta, GA 30339,
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send
e-mail to Laura@LauraRossDesign.com
or luara.mom@gmail.com

2024 Board of Directors

Mark Banks
Michael Buckner
Beth Davis, Secretary,
George Craig
Laura Ross, President
Judy Thompson
Steve Yothment, Treasurer

Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 30, Number 4, April 2024 CE
Copyright © 2024 by the Atlanta Freethought
Society, Inc. Signed articles are all copyright
© 2024 by their respective authors.

Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person,
\$20 for low income.

Membership includes voting privileges and
AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

Sustaining Membership is \$100.

Life Membership is \$1000.

Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks or money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society
(or Paypal to afs@atlantafreethought.org).

Visit our Meetup page at
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

See AFS events and member views at:
facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Wordpress specialist: Beth Davis
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,
Steve Yothment

Don't Atheists Substitute Self-Worship for Reverence for God?

by Ed Buckner • [Letters to a Free Country](#)

Don't atheists substitute self-worship for reverence for God?

No.

And for pretty much the same reasons as [last week's question about atheists hating god](#)—if an atheist by definition doesn't think any god(s) exist, that would necessarily mean he *couldn't* think he himself was some kind of supernatural being or he'd be thinking his own existence wasn't possible—and even **Rene Descartes** would admit that made no sense.

Of course, most critics of atheists probably don't mean that atheists literally think they (we) are god(s) as much as that we're just too selfish, arrogant, and self-centered to see how foolish we're being to not see the reasons for "God's" existence right in front of our eyes.

So, can atheists be arrogant, self-centered, and selfish? Sure. (Theists, too.) Is that self regard the only thing keeping them/us from seeing "The Truth"? Maybe for some atheists who are just not thoughtful and reasonable that has something to do with their irreligiosity.

But for the great majority of atheists I've known—lots of us—that really isn't the problem—we have carefully reviewed all the proposed evidence and logic and simply aren't persuaded.

Let me try a (doubtful?) parallel: imagine, my Christian friend, that I'm a devoted fan of a sports team—say the Atlanta Falcons—and I approach you and say, "The Falcons are going to win the Super Bowl for the next ten years in a row and by more than five touchdowns each year!"

Would you accept my prediction—or would you be skeptical? Maybe even real skeptical?

Do you think my great enthusiasm increases the chance that the team will do well?

Does my support make you more likely to become a fan?

Does my declaration convince you that I'm a fan?

Does the fact—and it is a fact—that my prophecy *could* come true—make it more credible in your opinion?

If the Falcons win their first game of the first season, would that be enough evidence to persuade you that my prediction will come true? That it is even slightly more likely to come about? And would it matter that I experienced

the thrill of that victory in person from my 50-yard-line seat?

What sort of evidence would change your mind about my prediction?

What if I told you—"You're being selfish by not accepting my prediction. Quit being so 'logical' and 'cold'—the Falcons deserve your confidence, not your hard-hearted cynicism." Would that make you more likely to become a believer? Why or why not?

If I told you that I could explain why I'm sure my prediction would surely come about, similar

to what Christians say about their beliefs ("... be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"—I Peter 3:15), what could I possibly say then that would convince you?

I'm pretty sure my Christian readers are muttering, by now, that the fortunes of the Falcons are not remotely as important or meaningful as Christian faith. (I'm not really even a Falcons fan, by the way.) And if Christian faith is in fact justified by the truth, you're correct. But first you must get me past my inability to think it is justified.

And, I remind you, I don't claim that my unbelief means you're

wrong or even that my unbelief counts as evidence that you are. But your belief doesn't count as evidence for theistic truth, either.

Note: Anyone may copy and publish what I or my guests write, provided proper credit is given, that it's not done for commercial purposes, that I am notified of the copying (you can just leave a comment saying where the copy is being published), and provided that what we write is not quoted out of context or distorted.

Thanks for reading *Letters to a Free Country!* Subscribe for free—always/guaranteed—to receive new posts and support my work.



The answer for dark days is to find a way through them

by Rachel Laser • au.org

Editor's note: This blog post by AU President and CEO Rachel Laser originally appeared in the April 2024 issue of AU's Church & State magazine.

During a recent trip to California, I was fortunate to hear Kate Kendell, the chief of staff at **The California Endowment**, speak to a group of law students and recent graduates. Kate previously led the **National Center for Lesbian Rights** for 22 years and served as the interim chief legal officer at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Kate's talk was about how she has approached legal and personal challenges throughout her career and how she stays motivated given the current legal landscape. She empathized: "I know it can feel overwhelming, but something worse happened before, and we found our way out of it." Kate described the early days of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, when government officials not only didn't act to address the health crisis, but some were even celebrating the disproportionate effect the illness had on gay men.

I wondered whether a group of young adults would agree that things were worse back then. Just a few weeks ago, **Nex Benedict**, a nonbinary teenager in Oklahoma who used they/them pronouns, was beaten in a public school bathroom and then ended their own life – following the governor and superintendent of public instruction spewing hateful rhetoric and implementing a series of anti-LGBTQ+ policies.

What Gen. Z has seen

During their adult lives, the young people Kate spoke to have seen religious extremist lawmakers ban LGBTQ-inclusive books and deny transgender people access to sports, and even health care. They've seen the U.S. Supreme Court rule there's a constitutional right for some businesses to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, overturn *Roe v. Wade*, effectively eliminate the use of affirmative action in college admissions, deal devastating blows to voting rights and severely undermine church-state separation. Things understandably feel bleak to Generation Z. Would any time seem worse to them?

I'm not of their generation, so to better understand what they might be thinking, I relied on an exercise I used when I was an educator on racial justice issues. I would ask workshop participants to think about racism in this country today as compared

to the 1950s. They were to stand in one place in the room if they thought racism was worse today, another if they thought it was about the same today and a third spot if they thought racism was worse in the '50s. Inevitably, the room would split evenly into thirds. Each group would then get a chance to explain themselves and induce people to join them.

What struck me was that no matter where they were standing, everyone agreed that racism was a vicious problem in the past but also saw how we had triumphed over parts of it. Everyone also agreed that new manifestations of racism were present today but took hope from what the leaders of the past were able to accomplish.

The past as a guide

Similarly, Kate helped us remember that no matter how bad things are today, the LGBTQ+ community has overcome horrific moments in the past and gone on to make great progress for decades. She helped us remember that we too can overcome the challenges of today, make gains and live to tell a new generation about it.

Church-state separation has seen many difficult moments across our history, but it has also enjoyed some great victories. In the 1940s, some rural public schools were being taken over by churches – until Americans United put a stop to it. In 1960, a Catholic running for president, **John F. Kennedy**, felt compelled to verify that he would put his country before the Vatican – and

Dark Days continued on pg 5

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A \$1000 life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

| Membership Dues | # of mems | Total |
|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Individual | \$50 | _____ \$ _____ |
| Low Income | \$20 | _____ \$ _____ |
| Sustaining Member | \$100 | _____ \$ _____ |
| Life Member | \$1000 | _____ \$ _____ |
| Subscription only | \$30 | _____ \$ _____ |
| Extra donation (Thank you!) | | _____ \$ _____ |
| | Total: | _____ \$ _____ |

- Receive PDF of newsletter by email
- Receive paper newsletter by post

Save time, postage, and keep your hands clean by making a payment via **Paypal** to:
afs@atlantafreethought.org

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone: H _____ W _____
 Email: _____

Declaring that frozen embryos are children: Ala. ruling shows the real-world harm of religious extremism

by Sofia Tomov • au.org

Thanks to a recent Alabama Supreme Court decision that classifies embryos as children, a frozen embryo has more rights than a person with a uterus. After the ruling on Feb. 16, several fertility clinics in Alabama paused in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments, although they've since resumed some of them after state lawmakers passed legislation that supposedly shields the clinics from legal liability – although [critics say](#) it doesn't go far enough.

The reason behind this ruling? “Human life cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God, who views the destruction of His image as an affront to Himself,” [asserted Tom Parker](#), chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, in a concurring opinion.

While the separation of church and state is a founding principle of American government as written in the U.S. Constitution, this decision reflects a blatant ignorance of the constitutional protections intended to not only safeguard individual religious expression but also to prevent one particular set of religious beliefs from dictating government policies. By using Bible quotes and fundamentalist Christian ideology as legal reasoning, the Alabama Supreme Court has not only violated the Constitution but has codified religion into law in a way that will cause direct harm.

Fallout from the ruling

Here's what is already starting to happen as a result of this ruling:

People are struggling to access necessary health care. Doctors fear being charged with wrongful death of a minor if a frozen embryo becomes damaged prior to being transferred into a uterus (a small but natural possibility). The closure of clinics will prevent people from accessing fertility care and having children when they might otherwise be unable to for medical reasons. This is tied to the broader trend of restricting reproductive health care in any form – whether that be IVF or abortion – which has led to shortages in OB/GYN care as doctors avoid practicing in states where they fear criminalization for providing care, [reports the Journal of the American Medical Association](#). This is life-threatening to people in Alabama, as the state already has an overall maternal mortality rate nearly double the national average, and a far higher Black maternal mortality rate of 100.07 deaths per 100,000 births. Black people are already three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white people, and any laws restricting access to reproductive healthcare further increase this harm while targeting marginalized communities.

People are experiencing a violation of the human right of bodily autonomy. Bodily autonomy, which the United Nations defines as “the power, agency, and ability to make choices over our bodies and futures without violence and coercion” – is a fundamental human right. Defining embryos as children and criminalizing doctors for natural and unpreventable risks associated with IVF violates bodily autonomy in two major ways: It prevents people who want children and may be incapable of having children without IVF from starting a family and it prevents people in need of an abortion from accessing care due to policies that deem a frozen fetus of greater value than a living, thinking person making a decision about their health, livelihood, and future.

A dangerous and nonsensical precedent has been set. Using religion in place of logical and legal reasoning has opened up some absurd questions – does every frozen embryo get a Social Security number? Can frozen embryos be considered dependent children for tax purposes? Does everyone's legal age in Alabama suddenly increase by nine months now? Clearly, Christian Nationalist policymakers ignore factors that are supposed to inform legal policy in favor of personal religious ideology that is not only unjust but

completely breaks down when questioned logically. This raises some other, less absurd questions – what injustice might be coming next? If the constitutional protection of church-state separation can be violated so grossly in Alabama without consequences, how far can religious extremism be used to fuel policy decisions before it is stopped?

What you can do

When the breakdown of logic and reason becomes normalized in government, what is the best way to resist and protect our communities?

While confronting this policy injustice may feel like an insurmountable task when policymakers ignore both logic and their constituents, any action – no matter how small – can cause significant change. Resistance can take a variety of forms depending on your skills, passions and needs. For example, resistance may look like gathering in protest to express direct opposition to unjust policies, working with community organizations that meet the needs of people impacted by these unjust policies, donating/fundraising to support impacted communities and educating yourself and others on the systems of oppression that shape these policies – to name just a few.

Regardless of the form of resistance that you choose, your voice matters and can help enact real change.

Sofia Tomov is a member of Americans United's Youth Organizing Fellowship.

Dark Days continued from pg 4

he overcame prejudice to win.

In 1962's landmark *Engel v. Vitale* decision, the Supreme Court struck down coercive, state-sponsored prayer in public schools. We saw great strides in women's rights in the 1970s and LGBTQ+ rights in the decades that followed, culminating in the high court's 2015 marriage equality ruling.

A counterblast to the backlash

Now we're seeing an inevitable backlash to the expansion of those rights. But this cycle is playing out predictably with a counterblast to the backlash. Americans realizing their rights are in jeopardy and voting to support abortion rights even in red states is just one example.

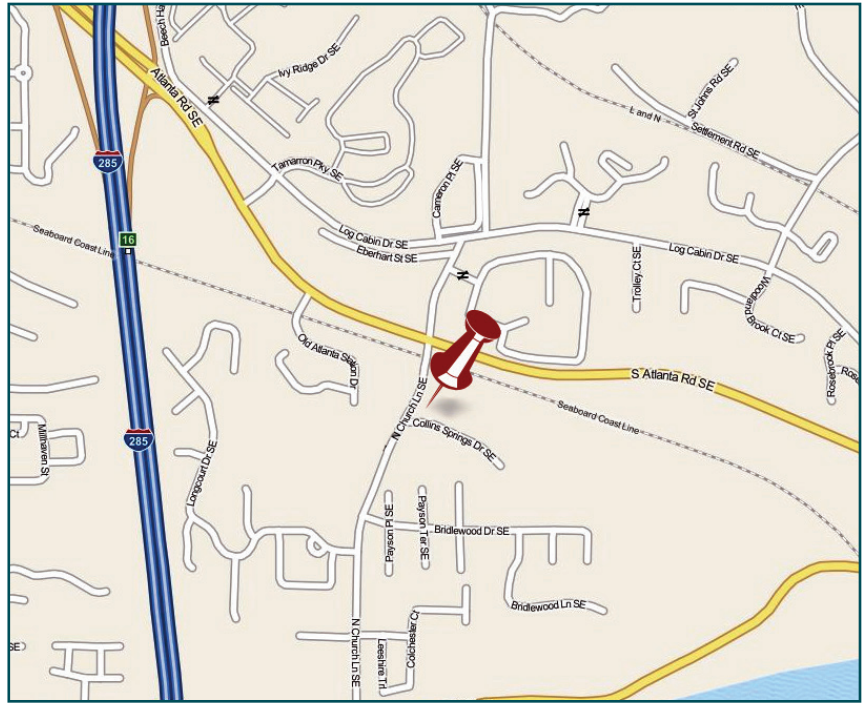
You get the point. Again and again, America has come back from colossal challenges to our country's core values and made progress. That spurs a new wave of challenges, though – and that's why groups like Americans United are so important. We will never stop being the watchdogs that protect your freedoms and equality. Together, like Kate reminded us, we will continue to find our way out of it.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Blake Smith
4/14/24 1:00 pm EST
(At Hall and on Zoom)**



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
4775 N Church Lane SE
Atlanta GA 30339

