



## HUMANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF DEEP TIME

Deep Time can be understood in a variety of ways. Often, it is equated with geologic time, measured in eons, which themselves are divided further into eras, periods, epochs and ages. Some of these are the familiar Precambrian, Paleozoic, Jurassic and Holocene times. Since the 1970's the earliest chunk of geologic time has been known as the Hadean eon, referring to Hades or the "hellish" conditions of the newly-formed partially-molten earth about 4.5 billion years ago when there was global active volcanism and frequent impacts from meteors and asteroids including the large body that caused the formation of the moon around this same time. But all this began well after – more than 9 billion years after – the Big Bang some 13.8 billion years ago. So Deep Time is also Deep Space, validating Einstein and others who thought of spacetime rather than just space and time as far back as the 18th Century and earlier. Indeed, the farthest known object in the universe, discovered in 2011 with the aid of the Hubble Space Telescope, is about 13.4 billion light years away. The object itself is thought to no longer exist, but its light has been on its way to us for 13.4 billion years, since about 380 million years after the Big Bang.

In contrast to these mind-boggling times and distances, our primate ancestors diverged from those of chimpanzees only about 5 million years ago. And our species, *Homo sapiens*, has been around for no more than about 200,000 years, possibly as little as 100,000 years. Agriculture, the foundation of civilization, was invented around 10,000 years ago. Recorded history begins with the invention of writing 5000 to 6000 years ago. Is it coincidental that up until only a few hundred years ago it was widely supposed that this was also the age of the earth and even the entire universe as James Ussher famously "proved" in the 17th Century from the Bible? Did our kind only "wake up" when it had a way to write down words and so preserve across generations the notions that words stand for?

That humanity has made such a recent appearance in a procession of thousands of millions of years of life on earth clearly came as a quite unexpected realization, one that many people, led by Creationists, still cannot quite accept. On top of finding that the earth is not the center of the solar system, much less of the galaxy, and that billions of other galaxies exist as well as, possibly, whole other universes, the human perspective of its place in reality has been profoundly affected. The child-like and self-centered story in which our ancestors felt they were participating has been replaced with a far larger and more astonishing narrative, one that challenges if not overwhelms our imagination, that, to use Darwin's terms, is one of "grandeur" that is "most beautiful and most wonderful."

Though the idea of God continues to be, in some measure, well-intentioned, for Freethinkers it is one that is simply too small to fit the facts. As the late Christopher Hitchens observed:

"Here's what you'd have to believe to be a theist: For 100,000 years humanity is born, perhaps 25% of it dies in childbirth or very shortly afterwards. Life expectancy, I don't know, 25 for a very long time, infant mortality extraordinary, but after-childbirth deaths I mean, killed by microorganisms we didn't know existed, by earthquakes that we thought were portents, by storms that we didn't know came from our climate system, by other events that arise from our being born onto a cooling planet with deep cracks in its crust – faults in its crust. Then man-made things: turf wars, fights over women, fights over territory, over food, so on. Very, very slow, gradual, exponential upward progress we might like to think. Pretty slow, but at least we can claim out of our own self respect, man-made. And for the first 96,000 years of this experience heaven watches with folded arms, us go through this, with indifference, without pity and then around 4,000 years ago decides, 'Gee, it's time to intervene. And the best way of doing that would probably be in Bronze Age Middle East, making appearances to stupefied, illiterate peasants, which could later be passed on. The news would get to China about a thousand years after that.' That's what you have to believe." ✎

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Carl Sagan put it this way:

“The created gods of the human mind are too small and petty for the grandeur of the stars and universe. Human gods do not even cover the scale of the earth and its history much less the universe.”

And Richard Feynman like this:

“It doesn’t seem to me that this fantastically marvelous universe, this tremendous range of time and space and different kinds of animals, and all the different planets, and all these atoms with all their motions, and so on, all this complicated thing can merely be a stage so that God can watch human beings struggle for good and evil — which is the view that religion has. The stage is too big for the drama.

The key is context. From the perspective of Deep Time, of dizzyingly longer time than we can hold in our memories, individually or culturally, we gain a more mature view of what we are and what meaning is possible for us. Freethought did not come about because anti-religion killjoys came and wrecked a pre-existing happiness. It came about because facts and reason showed a better way. Our ancestors did not have the benefit of our modern perspective. And we do not have the benefit of an even better perspective that, hopefully, those who come after us will have. But we all bear a moral obligation to do the best we can with what we have. Carl Sagan thought that:

“For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.”

✎ in debate with Rabbi Schmuley Boteach, January 30, 2008, accessed at <http://hitchensdebates.blogspot.com/2010/07/hitchens-vs-boteach-92nd-y.html> on 5/31/2013

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:  
THE STATE-CHURCH CHIMERA  
>>> Sunday, July 7th, 2013 <<<  
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT  
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS**

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE  
NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED,  
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:**  
- [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) -  
**JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Sheraton, cross over the freeway and make a left onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114) going west. Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

**Freethought Salon:** Get together to discuss today’s service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site! (May 12th at Jason’s on MacArthur!)

**Game Night:** The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

**Secular Singles:** Freethinkers have met their life-partners through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

**“Historians often convey the impression that the past, since it is now fixed, was a neat, cut-and-dry time. This mistake makes the present seem messy. The past is a far country, but the distance should not confuse us about its turbulent nature.”**  
- Astrophysicist & Sci-Fi Author Gregory Benford



DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought  
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Welcome Coordinator	Mark Barnick
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