



“DO YOU WANT TO BE YOUR OWN GOD?”

Mormons do. Their doctrine is that the biblical “Fall” was a necessary “fall up.” They teach that the reward for devout living is being “exalted” to the status of the biblical deity and having charge over one’s own planet/creation.

But what do believers – Christians, mostly – mean when they accuse atheists of “wanting to be their own God?” Certainly, it is not supposed that unbelievers aspire to omnipotence or omniscience or think themselves immortal. Rather, believers take it that anyone who doesn’t believe in “God” must intend to usurp divine moral authority, which in their theology is “God’s” authority to arbitrarily decree what is right and what is wrong. In their theology, too, the personification of evil, Lucifer or Satan, “the devil,” earned that status precisely because of an attempt to overthrow “God.” This of course equates atheism with unmitigated ultimate evil. It is why believers suppose that unbelievers are apt to engage in all manner of heinous and criminal behavior, even though the facts do not support such a view.

The idea that a deity has the authority to dictate what is right and what is wrong without regard to any external standard is a meta-ethical theory called in philosophy “divine command theory.” It takes the second horn of the famous Euthyphro Dilemma, found in Plato’s Dialogue of the same name, in which Socrates asks Euthyphro:

“Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?”

Paul takes up the issue in Romans 9. There he discusses the Old Testament story of Yahweh hardening Pharaoh’s heart and then punishing Pharaoh and the Egyptians for it. Paul asks whether this is fair. He answers in verses 20-21:

“O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed

it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

Freethinkers strenuously object to this. They do “repliest” against “God.” For they hold that right and wrong are rooted in objective reality, and specifically such things as the nature of humanity as a social species and in what is demonstrably helpful or harmful to human well-being. They would say of Paul’s potter that if the “vessels” were sentient and could be regarded as moral beings, that the potter would have no right to exercise “power” over them. Rather, the potter would have an absolute obligation to respect their rights as moral agents, as ends-in-themselves.

Likewise, if a superhuman extraterrestrial/extradimensional/extratemporal being had created the universe and everything in it, it would not be entitled to impose or enforce a “divine command” system of morality on created sentient beings such as humans. Rather, such a being would be obliged to look to the nature of reality to resolve moral questions, just as humans do. That such a being had made the reality would be irrelevant. So in this sense Freethinkers “want to be their own God.” More accurately they assert that even a being powerful enough to make universes can and should be held morally accountable.

Now what about such divine attributes as omnipotence, omniscience and immortality that were earlier dismissed? Although humans are very far from being all-powerful, it is a fact that each and every human being has a power of action that exceeds that of every other human being. For although no one is in control of others, everyone is in control of their own thoughts and behavior. Indeed, it was known to the ancient Stoics (though unfortunately not taught in the

Bible!) that a basic element of mental well-being depends on accepting that one cannot control others while at the same time realizing that one can control oneself. Therefore one should not become distressed by what others say and do but, rather, take control of and responsibility for one's own thoughts and actions, including the way in which one reacts to others.

And so it is with omniscience. It is almost certainly beyond hoping for an ability to "know everything." But everyone has access to their own mind and their own thoughts that cannot be directly known by anyone else. Because of this, even when no one else can see what we are doing, we know it. Because we are always there and cannot escape ourselves. For we are the obligatory observers of all that we think and do.

We may also explore the idea of omnibenevolence. To be consistently, universally and impartially good is the essence of "The Golden Rule." And there is in most people a strong affinity for this, which is shown by Socrates' observation (in another of Plato's dialogues, Protagoras) that no one knowingly does wrong. People always act in the belief – though it may be a mistaken belief – that they are justified in their actions.

Too, the idea of moral reciprocity depends on self-regard, for we are to treat others as we would be treated. This matters because when no one else is there for us, and especially when we may feel hated by everyone, we can still feel love and compassion for ourselves. Surprisingly, this is often difficult, either because people rely so much on others' opinions or because, as mentioned, people are aware of their innermost thoughts and therefore their failings. Perhaps this is why so many people resort to projecting a sense of self-love, of self-esteem, on an imaginary/supernatural deity. We may well ask whether it is better to feel loved by an imaginary friend than by no one at all. Yet it is much better to cultivate a strong sense of compassion for oneself.

All of these things could be elaborated on, and have already been in many different ways by mental health professionals and scholars. It is not represented as "wanting to be your own God." But in some sense that is what it really is.

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:

- 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 Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant "The Vineyard" - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

Game Night: 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 Le Havre, Carcassonne, and other fun games!

Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:

"OVERCOMING FEAR"

> Sunday, September 3, 2017 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
 (Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the front-age road east just past Best Western; service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee, snacks - you can bring some! - and conversation)

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

The North Texas Church of Freethought
 The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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