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The Fellowship Of Unbelievers

Resisting Supernaturalism and Irrationalism Since 1994

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ARE SCIENCE AND RELIGION COMPATIBLE?

This question and a related one, “Are science and religion incompatible?” have long been puzzled over. Another version juxtaposes faith and reason. Whether they are compatible has been answered both “yes” and “no,” often emphatically if not violently. The problem was clearly recognized as urgent from the beginning of rational inquiry and the rise of what was at first called “natural philosophy.” The New Testament refers to this threat:

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.” [Colossians 2:8]

“avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called”
[1 Timothy 6:20]

Yet by this time the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c 20 BCE – c 50 CE) had already found a way to harmonize the Torah with the ideas of Plato. In particular, Philo found a use for the Greek philosophers' concept of “logos,” the principle of reason and knowledge, what we might describe today as “the logical appeal” of an idea or argument, and from which we get the word “logic.” Philo equated “logos” with the mind and thoughts of God, something outside of space and time like Platonic Forms, but creating as well as pervading the universe and mediating between God and humanity. Philo also allegorized Old Testament characters and events, interpreting them as symbolic expressions of the human condition and its challenges.

Philo's co-religionists were not receptive of such ideas. But those Jews who later became known as Christians were. Decades later, in the Gospel of John, written about 90-100 CE, Jesus was identified with the “logos.” The abstraction used to relate supernatural religion with rational philosophy, became reified back into the concrete and specifically into what later became accepted as “the historical Jesus” by Christians. But this incorporation of

strands of Greek rationalism also made it possible for science to eventually develop in Europe. It is notable in this connection that there were hardly any Jews who contributed to the sciences until their cultural assimilation and secularization beginning in the 18th Century. Likewise, Muslims have been hobbled by that tradition's failure to embrace or make any serious effort to incorporate reason into its ideology. Rather, one of Islam's most influential theologians, Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111), denied the principle of causality, saying that Allah can “create the satisfaction of hunger without eating, or ... even the survival of life when the head has been cut off.” And what is the point of studying nature if all that can be observed are the whims of a supernatural being?

Of course, even among Christians superstition remained – and still remains – rampant. It has steadily retreated, though not without serious resistance, before scientific progress. The most egregious were the first to be eliminated. “Witches” were executed up until 1798 in Brazil, 1782 in Switzerland, 1750 in Austria, 1749 in Germany, 1742 in France, 1727 in the UK, 1710 in Ireland, and 1692 in colonial America during the famous New England Witch Hysteria that we take note of each year in October. But today in sub-Saharan Africa, among native tribes in Amazonia, and in the countries of India, Indonesia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Saudi Arabia, witch-hunts and killings continue. Although often these are extra-judicial, some of these nations have laws criminalizing witchcraft and sorcery. The numbers murdered in these regions are thought to far exceed those in Europe before the 18th Century.

These are horrifying facts. As horrifying are the oppressive belief systems that victimize entire societies and cultures by supporting ignorance and preventing rational thinking. Those affected may

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use technologies that are the fruit of science. They as likely also reject or misapply technologies that could save far more lives than are lost in such barbarities as the killing of “witches.” Even worse, people in such societies where supernaturalism is accepted as real are effectively shut out of participation in the scientific enterprise. Their lack of appreciation not just of the methods of science and reason but of the basis for those methods is a tremendous loss of “human capital.” In the USA today there is a similar if less obvious problem with those who promote the reality of “Creationism,” of “race,” of “psychic powers” and other supernatural and pseudoscientific nonsense with the justification of a supposed right “to believe whatever you want.” One can swivel one's head around 360 degrees as well, but not without certain untoward consequences!

Science is certainly compatible with things that that are not in the purview of the scientific method. By the time of Galileo (1564-1642) most people would have understood his saying that Christianity and the Bible were about:

“how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go”

In the 21st Century it is recognized that while science has solved and can in principle solve many problems, not all problems are scientific problems. As Albert Einstein put it in 1939:

“Objective knowledge provides us with powerful instruments for the achievements of certain ends, but the ultimate goal itself and the longing to reach it must come from another source. ... our existence and our activity acquire meaning only by the setting up of such a goal and of corresponding values. ... To make clear these fundamental ends and valuations, and to set them fast in the emotional life of the individual, seems to me precisely the most important function which religion has to perform in the social life of man.”

In this and other contexts, much depends on how “religion” is understood. Supernaturalism and pseudoscience, claims about the objective world not supported by facts and reason and, especially, beliefs controverted by facts and reason, are incompatible with science and with human well-being. But efforts to make sense of the human subjective experience, of informing, orienting and directing the emotional elements of the human condition are not just compatible with but vital for the success of the enterprise of science and for humanity to survive and thrive.

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 I-635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums on most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast/coffee (or not), in the atrium of the Embassy Suites DFW Airport North – on Bass Pro Drive in Grapevine beginning at 10:00 AM.

Game Night: Most Friday nights 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 Imperial 2030, Dominion, Evolution, Le Havre, Ticket To Ride, 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 www.twitter.com/ntcof !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
Special Guest Speaker Professor of Religious Studies Christel J. Manning
“LOSING OUR RELIGION”
> Sunday, October 7, 2018 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
(114 Freeport Parkway exit, take the frontage road east just past the Best Western; service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee and snacks - you can bring some! - and conversation)**

**THANK YOU !!
FOR YOUR GENEROUS
DONATION OF TIME & FINANCIAL
SUPPORT to the NTCOF !!
It is needed, appreciated and
Tax-Deductible !**

**The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers**

Pastor (It's a job description, not a title!)..Tim Gorski
Presenters (how about YOU?).....Will Smith
.....Tim Gorski
Social Media Czar.....Aaron Kelton
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Videographer.....John Gauthier
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