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THE FUTURE: UTOPIA OR DYSTOPIA?

The ability to look beyond the moment is a distinctive trait of the human species and a vital element of perhaps humanity's greatest accomplishment: the sciences. But it is also a source of great anxiety and unhappiness, as well as of hope.

Long ago, people simply wanted to know whether that season's hunting and gathering and, later, the harvest, would be successful. Not long after that, they wanted to know the outcome of events such as which side would win a battle. Today we think of how significant social and political changes as well as new technologies and unexpected cataclysmic events may transform human living conditions on the scale of decades, centuries, and even millennia.

The Bible reflects the context of ancient societies when most people were ruled by kings and warlords. If the ruler were wise, led by deities or advised by those who spoke for such deities, it was supposed that life would be good. Rule by the actual deity was seen as the ultimate goal. Although democracies emerged in ancient Greece, it was unclear that they were superior to having a wise and benevolent ruler.

The idea of the rule of law came into being at least as long as 3700 years ago with the Code of Hammurabi. Biblical commandments came much later. But again, those rules or laws were just what someone said they were, whether Hammurabi, "channeling" of an alleged deity, or a king given authority by "God," as Saint Paul taught:

"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted ... for the authorities are God's servants ." [Romans 13:1-6]

It was a long time before anyone could get away with questioning that dogma. And under such

circumstances it was difficult to think of an ideal society in terms more specific than one that was wisely ruled.

Perhaps the first detailed account of how a society might be ideally structured was the Republic, written as a Socratic dialog by Plato in about 380 BCE. This work has had a lasting and significant influence in philosophy and political theory. In it, Socrates discussed with others the meaning of justice and concluded that a just society is necessary to be a just person. The ideal state would therefore be that of the hypothetical "Kallipolis," or "beautiful city," ruled by a philosopher king and a class of philosophers supported by a class of workers and a class of soldiers.

Unlike anything to be found in the Bible or in vague Christian ideas of "heaven," Plato's Republic sketched out the specifics of life in "Kallipolis." Among other things, the philosopher class would hold their wives in common and people were not even to know who their parents were. Justice was defined as everyone keeping in their "place." Interestingly, wars were to be fought by outside hired mercenaries which would have the effect of killing off the most violently-inclined peoples. Following Plato, others wrote similar works including Aristotle [384-322], Zeno [334-262 NCE], Cicero [106-43 BCE], Tacitus [56-120 CE], and even the early Christian cleric Augustine [354-430]. Zeno's vision was of one in which all citizens are educated in philosophy and no one ruled over others.

Many have found fault with "Kallipolis." In many ways it is more of a dystopia than a utopia by modern standards. Still, it was the first work to seriously consider the specifics of a ideal society. Indeed, although one might suppose that the word "utopia," coined by Thomas More for his 1516 book of the same title, comes from the Greek EU – meaning "not." So utopia is "noplacement."

The British novelist and poet Samuel Butler [1835-1902] wrote an 1872 book entitled Erewhon,

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which was understood to be the word “nowhere” spelled backwards, literally the same as the word intended by More's “utopia.” Butler's work was a satire on Victorian society and so it is reasonable to suppose that all such works even going back to Plato were in some sense a criticism of their time.

Beginning in the early 20th Century, dystopian accounts began to appear. The American writer Jack London [1876-1916] – famous for his works Call of the Wild and White Fang – also wrote The Iron Heel which appeared in 1908. It describes the rise of an oligarchy of big business interests that control the military, destroy the middle class and set the working classes against one another in a world of regional empires. All efforts at change fail for 300 years before the Brotherhood of Man is finally brought about.

In 1910, H.G. Wells' When The Sleeper Wakes appeared in which a man falls asleep for 200 years. When he wakes up he finds that his assets have increased astronomically and have been used to buy up a good part of the world's assets which maintain a plutocracy of which he is legally the owner. The protagonist encounters revolutionaries who manage to assume power but finds that their leader simply assumed personal control so that nothing really changed. The protagonist dies trying to bring about real change

In 1948, British writer George Orwell's 1984 appeared and is perhaps the best known dystopian novel. Orwell explored in detail the ways in which a brutally repressive regime actually operates and maintains its power.

During those postwar years when nuclear destruction threatened, others wrote or portrayed in film post-apocalyptic dystopias. The Star Trek television series and films broke this pessimistic trend. Gene Roddenberry, the creator of Star Trek, foresaw a future in which humanity avoided destroying itself and went on to enjoy the benefits of advanced technologies shared by all nationalities and ethnicities who cooperate in peaceful inquiry and exploration.

What will the future actually bring? Judging from past visions of both utopias and dystopias, it is likely that there will be good and bad. And some of the good may come with unhappy consequences and some of what may be feared as bad will turn out to be less threatening than anyone could have thought, if not actually beneficial.

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:

“LOVE IN THE AGE OF REASON”

**Sunday, February 4, 2018 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH**
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western; service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee, 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?).....John Gauthier,
Mike Zaff and Tim Gorski
Social Media Czar.....Aaron Kelton
Welcome Coordinator.....Mark Barnick
Videographer.....John Gauthier
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