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The Fellowship Of Unbelievers

Beginning Religion Over Again Since 1994

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SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

The New Year always brings reflections of the past and future. The one is fixed, “over and done with,” though always subject to reinterpretation, while the other is always uncertain. These ideas – stasis and change – have always been a part of “religious questions.” Prophets feature prominently in the Bible. And what is considered the most highly-developed notion of deity is claimed to include, besides the contradictory attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence, also that of immutability. Indeed, the traditional religions all assert that their dogmas, doctrines and rituals are fixed, absolute and not subject to change.

But long before Christianity was invented lived two Greek philosophers who were preoccupied with the ideas of stasis and change and who famously took opposite approaches. Parmenides (ca 540-470 BCE) argued that all change, including movement, is an illusion. He maintained that change would require that something that is not gives rise to something that is. But this, he said, was clearly impossible. For the idea of nothingness existing is a contradiction in terms and nothing cannot produce something. That all existence is eternal and unchanging, said Parmenides and his followers, can be proven mathematically, as demonstrated by the famous paradoxes named for Parmenides' student Zeno. Aristotle described three of Zeno's Paradoxes thus:

“In a race, the quickest runner can never overtake the slowest [which has a head start], since the pursuer must first reach the point whence the pursued started, so that the slower must always hold a lead.” [also known as the Paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise]

“If everything when it occupies an equal space is

at rest, and if that which is in locomotion is always occupying such a space at any moment, the flying arrow is therefore motionless.” [also known as the Arrow Paradox]

“If everything that exists has a place, place too will have a place, and so on without end.”

That these were considered puzzling 2300+ years ago may seem puzzling today. But the mathematics of that time could not deal with such things as the infinite series required to make sense of the Paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise. And some thinkers consider Zeno's Paradoxes as still having relevance today for philosophy and especially metaphysics. Certainly, we see modern apologists for theism and Christianity continuing to insist that non-supernatural infinities are impossible and “something cannot come from nothing.”

But another approach was taken by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535-475 BCE) who lived at the same time as Parmenides. Heraclitus asserted that all existence, all reality, is in a state of constant change. He famously observed with characteristic oracular ambiguity:

“On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow.”

That is, both rivers and those stepping into them are, from moment to moment, not the same. Moreover, what makes a river different from a pond or lake is that “other waters flow.” A river's remaining in any sense the same means that it is in a state of constant flux.

Although Heraclitus held that life is change, he also recognized a stable underlying order to existence manifesting as a pattern of regularities in change. This he called “the logos” which can be translated as “thought,” “reason” or “word.” It is

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where we get the suffix “-logy” attaching to various scientific disciplines. For it is science that seeks to discover the unifying and uniform principles that lie behind and explain a seemingly chaotic world. It does this by a continual careful process of observation and critical reasoning about objective reality.

The great Greek philosopher Plato's solution to the impasse between Parmenides and Heraclitus was to picture human existence as being restrained in a dark cave being able to perceive only the shadows – the world of appearances – cast by the eternal and unchanging essences of things, or “Forms,” which can only be known in themselves by reason. It is recognizably the view of Parmenides.

These ideas evidently became widely known and accepted. They were adopted by the new religion of Christianity which seized on the “word” translation of “logos,” nonsensically applying it to the new deity of Jesus:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” [John 1:1-14 ca 90-110 CE]

Time and progress gradually revealed that Heraclitus was correct, that reality is indeed in a state of constant flux governed by, among other things, the laws of thermodynamics. Physics has shown that even logic and reason are derivative – indeed, they are generalizations – of observable facts. When the facts showed that time and space depended on frames of reference, it was the idea of fixed time and space that was abandoned in favor of Einsteinian relativity. And when it was found that “particles” such as electrons could behave as interfering waves or ghostly probability distributions it was the concept of particles that gave way, not the surprising new facts. Would facts of any kind cause believers in “holy scripture” to change their minds?

Heraclitus might be gratified to know that even his “logos,” the underlying principles governing change in the world, are suspected of themselves being subject to change over space and time in the universe or, possibly, the multiverse. And Parmenides' idea also survives in the model of space-time as a four-dimensional manifold in which past, present and future are only artifacts of perception in a particular frame of reference. It is yet another instance of the truth of Niels Bohr's observation that:

“The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.”

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)(and you can bring whatever you want to eat!), in the atrium – usually towards the back – 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, Terraforming Mars, Le Havre, Caverna, and other fun games!

Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins, articles and post on the FORUM under SERVICES at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at [facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/](https://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/) and sign up for our Twitter feed at www.twitter.com/ntcof/ !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH “A VALENTINE FOR FREETHOUGHT”

> Sunday, February 2, 2020 <
**HERE at the Hawthorn Suites
DFW Airport North
at 10:30 AM**

THANK YOU !!
FOR YOUR TIME and
FINANCIAL SUPPORT
of 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
A/V Wranglers.....John Hendricks
and Edwin Pegelow
Welcome Coordinator.....Mark Barnick
Videographer.....John Gauthier
Webpage Management.....Saturn Consulting

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