



WHAT IF THEOLOGY WERE A REAL SCIENCE?

“Religion” is often used interchangeably with “faith.” So, for example, when the government wants to promote religion these days it calls the relevant programs “faith-based” to justify annual giveaways of \$2 billion and more to religious organizations. Moreover, “faith” is claimed by these religious traditions to be a virtue. In Christianity, the orthodox teaching is that the penalty for the crime of not believing impossible things on faith is eternal torture. At the same time, many believers continue to insist that their theologies – many mutually exclusive theologies at that – are proven fact based on evidence and iron-clad logic.

So which is it? Are theological doctrines proven fact? If so, why is there not at least as much agreement about the existence of God as about the existence of the Higgs boson or of Dark Matter and Dark Energy? Why isn't theology a real science? And, if it's not and has no hope of being real science, what then is the point of interminable debates on the existence of God? If theological assertions are supernaturally-imparted revelations which are to be believed regardless of the facts and reason and even in the teeth of controverting facts and reason, then what more can be said of them?

On one level, clearly, theological doctrines are simply whatever they need to be to gain converts and unquestioning devotion for individuals and organizations that promote them. If Bible-based Creationism needs to be camouflaged as “Intelligent Design Theory” then there are people who will do that. But on another, perhaps more profound level, theological doctrines – and, especially, deities and their purposes and powers – need to have a certain emotional appeal that depends upon their being obscure, mysterious and even mind-numbingly incomprehensible. It may be no accident that beliefs in the supernatural are so irrational, unscientific and even antiscientific.

If God's existence was firmly established and known, it seems likely that he would be no god at all. Why? Because since human beings discovered their power of thought beginning a few hundred years before the current era, we have progressively and inexorably made everything in the objective (inter-subjective) world – the world of our shared experience – an object of study. If God were reliably determined to be a part of that world, then theology would become a science as much as geology, biology and cosmology are sciences. God would actually become much more interesting if that happened. At the same time, most people would probably lose interest in a deity that was an object of academic study and, therefore, “boring.”

A deity that was known to exist would simply be an extremely powerful extraterrestrial of some kind or even an omnipotent extradimensional being like the Star Trek character “Q.” But although the fictional “Q” has godlike powers, he is not an object of worship and it is difficult to imagine him being such except for the ignorant. Indeed, it would be laughable if such a character were to expect worship and wicked if he were to demand it. Nor does it make any sense to suppose that the omnipotence of a being such as “Q” would entitle him to decree what is right and wrong.

This is not merely speculation. There is an obvious historical-cultural precedent. For at one time people worshipped the sun as a deity. And what could be more reasonable given that the sun clearly exists and all life depends on its light and warmth? The only thing that has made it unreasonable is that, because the sun can be observed and studied, we have come to another appreciation of it. That is, that the sun is the nearest star, that all stars are composed largely of hydrogen and helium, that the pressures generated by gravity on such an enormous mass of these gases drives a continuous process of nuclear fusion and that the same gravity holds the earth and the other objects of the solar system in their orbits. This knowledge took a long time and much effort to discover. Yet, despite all this, there is nothing to stop anyone from insisting that the sun is God.

Even now, nothing stops anyone from saying (and many do say) that biological evolution by natural selection (which yet others simply deny) was God's way of creating living things on earth.

But people no longer say that the sun, whatever else it is, should still be worshipped as God. Why? It seems likely that it is for the same reason that people no longer say that god(s) live on Mount Olympus or just beyond the clouds or the sky or in rivers, lakes, streams and forests, even if you can't see them.

Perhaps it is simply a part of human nature that "our reach exceeds our grasp" and that, in cognitive terms, this means that we yearn to understand to the point where we do not understand, or we misunderstand. It is true that an appetite for the weird and the wonderful can be sated by science. But it takes patience and effort, as well as brutal honesty and humility to keep from going astray. For many it is too much. Some even suppose that what they do not understand "proves" the supernatural and they intoxicate themselves in this way. What they fail to realize is that if the supernatural were proven it would cease to be supernatural. It would be natural. What to them is "sacred" would become "profane." This is regrettable. A term like "nature worship" is considered derisive. Yet it is an appreciation of the absolutely awesome and astounding character of the natural world that is continually before us that supplies so much more of a sense of wonder than belief in gods and ghosts for which there is no evidence.

"The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone!"
 - Pope Francis on 5/21/2013; "clarified" the next day by the Vatican to mean that non-Catholics will still go to hell

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
 "WORK AND PLAY"
 AND HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE
 (if there is one)**

**>>> Sunday, September 1st, 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 - 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!

"[Those] who thoroughly know one field are often incompetent to discuss another. ... The old problems, such as the relation of science and religion, are still with us, and I believe present as difficult dilemmas as ever, but they are not often publicly discussed because of the limitations of specialization."
 - Richard P. Feynman, 1956



The North Texas Church of Freethought
 The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Presenters: Professor (Emeritus) Gail Gear
 Tim Gorski

Welcome Coordinator Mark Barnick

Videographer: John Gauthier

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