

360° Is Just Another Double Negative

By Dennis Payton Knight

Dividing the compass into three hundred sixty degrees provides a way to give directions, instructing one to pivot 90° for a right turn, or 270° for a left. All very handy for getting around the Pentagon.

But it seems to me that, while the marks of 90, 180, 270, even 359, and points in between, are all precise and valuable, 360° just takes you back to the same place. It's like the double negative that serves only to make a sentence worthless. A 360° change in direction is tantamount to admitting "I haven't got no idea." If you say the sentence in a cartoon, you should be portrayed with a shiny lightbulb over your head, only because it means the opposite of what you think you mean. A 360° turn is just as unsatisfying.

Speakers often try to make a sentence "double bad" by using two forms of negation. But, in language, two wrongs *do* make a right. The solution, I think, is to add a third negative to the sentence. As in "I haven't got no idea no how."

Army drill sergeants talk in negatives all the time, but when it comes to giving directions, they never express it in degrees. They bark orders like "right face, HUT!" or "left face, HUT!", and never include the radius. After all, mathematics is not a big part of drill sergeanteeing. But they do curse in double negatives (supply your own examples) so I am giving them their due place in this essay.

The idea of dividing the circle into 360 degrees dates to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon six centuries before the birth of Christ. Babylonians had observed that the year numbered about 360 days. Then they went through mathematical gymnastics that led to agreement that equilateral triangles are divisible by 60 degrees, and six of them arranged together complete a circle of 360 degrees. But explaining *that* would take an essay by itself, which I no longer have interest in doing. So, take my word for it, or look it up yourself.

Politicians, of course, are, from birth, adept at the art of making 360° turns. Their enemies call it flip-flopping, however, because it resembles more somersault than pirouette. Barack Obama supported decriminalizing marijuana as a candidate for the Senate, and then opposed it as a candidate for President. Mitt Romney, in his 2010 book, "No Apology," believed human activity contributed to climate change. A year later in Pittsburg he said, "My view is we don't know what's causing climate change..."

And Donald Trump, before his inauguration, promised "I'm going to be working for you. I'm not going to have time to go play golf." According to Golf News Net, since taking office January 20, 2017, he has played 82 rounds of golf as of this writing on November 26, 2017.

And now I now swivel 360° back to reinforce my original point. Turns out, I haven't got none.