



## SCRIPTURE, LAW AND SOCIETAL EVOLUTION

Much of the writings that Jews revere as the Torah and that Christians worship as the Old Testament are basically Bronze Age legal codes. Exodus' "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" and the infamous passage from Leviticus' "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death" were a part of the law of those times. These examples suggest that then, as now, the law was used to persecute social subgroups.

But now, as then, the law's production of a torrent of writings sometimes results in words that inspire us. Perhaps for Americans the best examples are the opening passages of the Declaration of Independence and of the US Constitution. The First Amendment, too, voices some of our most important ideals in terms that appeal to us emotionally as well as intellectually. And the law and legal decisions provide many more examples of such solemn and well-put expressions. One of these came out of a case, De Leon v. Perry, decided just this past Wednesday, February 26th, by Federal District Judge Orlando Garcia. In overturning Texas' ban on same-sex marriage, Garcia wrote:

"One of the court's main responsibilities is to ensure that individuals are treated equally under the law. Equal treatment of all individuals under the law is not merely an aspiration — it is a constitutional mandate. Consequently, equal protection is at the heart of our legal system and is essential for the existence of a free society. Today's Court decision is not made in defiance of the great people of Texas or the Texas Legislature, but in compliance with the United States Constitution and Supreme Court precedent. Without a rational relation to a legitimate governmental purpose, state-imposed inequality can find no refuge in our United States Constitution. Furthermore, Supreme Court precedent prohibits states from passing legislation born out of animosity against homosexuals (Romer), has extended constitutional protection to the moral and sexual choices of homosexuals (Lawrence), and prohibits the federal government from treating state-sanctioned opposite-sex

marriages and same-sex marriages differently (Windsor). Applying the United States Constitution and the legal principles binding on this Court by Supreme Court precedent, the Court finds that Article I, Section 32 of the Texas Constitution [prohibiting gays from marrying and the recognition of marriage between homosexual persons in other states] and corresponding provisions of the Texas Family Code are unconstitutional."

Though the words are perhaps not so striking and the phraseology not so soaring, it is a straightforward no-nonsense expression of fundamental principle. Garcia acknowledged that his decision would go on to be reconsidered. If he is correct and the case reaches the US Supreme Court and is rightly decided there, more striking language affirming equal justice under the law is likely to be the result.

In any case, "gay marriage" is destined to become, simply, "marriage." Eventually, some other benefits may come from such steps forward. One may be that the whole concept of a one-size-fits-all domestic "contract" created and endorsed by government may be questioned. For it is clearly discriminatory with respect to those who have mated and those who have not. And its terms change when people cross state lines. What rational purpose of the government, or of society generally, after all, is served by "the institution of marriage?" Why cannot the ends it now serves be met equally well by people deciding for themselves what the terms of their relationships — and any dissolution of their relationships — will be? People already take their disputes to the courts arising from all sorts of issues involving their business and personal affairs. Why should family relationships be any different inasmuch as it is well-known that a marriage certificate does nothing to prevent such disputes from arising? There may come a day when "the institution of marriage" itself is seen as an unwarranted infringement of the freedom of association which courts have found to be implicit in the First Amendment's guarantee of "the right of the people peaceably to assemble."

# CONSCIOUSNESS AS AN EPIPHENOMENON

“The consciousness of brutes would appear to be related to the mechanism of their body simply as a collateral product of its working, and to be as completely without any power of modifying that working as the steam-whistle which accompanies the work of a locomotive engine is without influence upon its machinery. Their volition, if they have any, is an emotion indicative of physical changes, not a cause of such changes. ... It is quite true that, to the best of my judgment, the argumentation which applies to brutes holds equally good of men; and, therefore, that all states of consciousness in us, as in them, are immediately caused by molecular changes of the brain-substance. It seems to me that in men, as in brutes, there is no proof that any state of consciousness is the cause of change in the motion of the matter of the organism. If these positions are well based, it follows that our mental conditions are simply the symbols in consciousness of the changes which takes place automatically in the organism; and that, to take an extreme illustration, the feeling we call volition is not the cause of a voluntary act, but the symbol of that state of the brain which is the immediate cause of that act. We are conscious automata, endowed with free will in the only intelligible sense of that much abused term – inasmuch as in many respects we are able to do as we like – but none the less parts of the great series of causes and effects which, in unbroken continuity, composes that which is, and has been, and shall be – the sum of existence.” [excerpt from TH Huxley, “On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and Its History,” 1874, from Collected Essays.]

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:  
 “THE FUNNY SIDE OF  
 FREETHOUGHT”  
 >>> Sunday, April 6th, 2014 <<<  
 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 our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:**

**- [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) -  
 JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion. We had been meeting 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. Last month - and probably today - we met (meet) at the Jason’s Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

**Freethought Salon:** Get together to discuss today’s service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site!

**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!

**Have Another Idea?** Email or call us about it!

**“How can we square this self-conception of ourselves as mindful, meaning-creating, free, rational, etc., agents with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles?”  
 - John R. Searle (1932-)**



The North Texas Church of Freethought  
 The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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 Welcome Coordinator: Mark Barnick  
 Videographer: John Gauthier  
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