



# THE REASON FOR THE SEASON IS ECONOMICS!

The title really should be "The Reason For The Season Is Utility!" But that sounds like ad copy for the power company, though electricity is important for all the Christmas lights.

In economics, "utility" is the satisfaction people get from the consumption of goods and services. It is an axiom of the science of economics that everyone wants to maximize their utility. And it is that satisfaction – which everyone seeks – that is behind the commercialism and profit-seeking business activities that often come in for so much criticism and even condemnation during the Winter Holidays. But facts are facts. Christmas as we know it today is a product of the Industrial Revolution and its transformation of human society into one of relative wealth and plenty.

Even hypocrisy has its utility. That is, people get satisfaction from espousing principles and ideals that are widely thought to be admirable. At the same time, many of them also take pleasure in the conveniences of modern life including "low culture" kitsch, "unhealthy food," and a wide range of moral "vices." The concept of utility also explains why 70% of women who have abortions are also Christians and 23% consider themselves evangelical Christians. [<http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2015/11/23/women-distrust-church-on-abortion/>] Maximizing utility often creates what appears to be hypocrisy but at the same time seems to make perfect sense to the people involved.

And so it is with Christmas. "Everyone knows" that it is nothing but a shopping marathon, an orgy of conspicuous consumption, an occasion for wasteful spending on things that people don't need, a traffic and parking ordeal and frustration with not being able to find what one wants at an acceptable price. But, for each individual, it's about purchasing that gift item that a loved one may need whether it be socks, a sweater, a laptop or some other useful or needed item. It may be about giving or receiving something special that has an emotional impact for giver and recipient. Or it may be a less inspired item that would at least be acceptable to a friend, relative or coworker that one does not know well. Nor should it be forgotten that methods of transporta-

tion and communication undreamed of 100 years ago allow these goods and services to be disseminated all over the globe.

Christmas is really an extraordinary annual event in which people participate in an enormous and complex web of social interactions in which they play a variety of roles serving many purposes. It does require the participants to put forth some effort. But each seeks to maximize their utility and, significantly, by contributing to the satisfaction of others. This is both intentional and unintentional. For one should not forget the utility of those making, selling and transporting the goods and services that are being consumed. If there is an "orgy" it is one of human satisfaction and, importantly, by a means that establishes, maintains and strengthens human relationships of many kinds. And what is wrong with this?

It's only wrong to those who object to human happiness, or, rather, the idea of the pursuit of happiness, since not everyone's efforts to maximize their utility are successful. Interestingly, those who object to human happiness tend to base that attitude on supernaturalism and superstition. So, for example, H.L. Mencken described Puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." And the famed "Mother Teresa," 1979 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, said that "terrible pain is only the kiss of Jesus" and "there is something beautiful in seeing the poor accept their lot ... The world gains much from their suffering." It is telling that her sect and some other forms of supernaturalism encourage self-flagellation. But the traditional religious traditions recognize their enemy in materialism because real human happiness transcends superstition. Voltaire, in his 1733 Philosophical Letters, wrote:

"Go into the Exchange in London, that place more venerable than many a court, and you will see representatives of all the nations assembled there for the profit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian deal with one another as if they were of the same religion, and reserve the name of infidel for those who go bankrupt. ... If there were only one religion in England, there

would be danger of tyranny; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live happily together in peace."

The last part of this passage is quoted more often than the first, but the first is the more important. Indeed, although our modern world encompasses many religions, we see that this does not necessarily allow them to "live happily together in peace." But what Voltaire saw was that economic incentives, and, in particular, the drive to maximize utility – the pursuit of happiness – breaks down the barriers thrown up by religious doctrines and dogmas. When there is more to gain by cooperation than by conflict, people will cooperate.

This is the greatest and most important contributor to peace on earth, surely. It is true that a love for comfort and ease and especially for material things can eclipse the value of other, more important things. But it's wrong – factually wrong and morally wrong – to condemn the commercial elements of Christmas and to glorify poverty and misery. It is the hope of overcoming hardship and suffering for more and more of us that motivates goodwill towards others and the real spirit of Christmas of generosity, joy and hope. Profit is not a bad thing but a wonderful thing when we realize, as Voltaire did, that it is "for the profit of mankind."

**SOME CHRISTMAS FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

"Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas."  
-Calvin Coolidge

"CALVIN: This whole Santa Claus thing just doesn't make sense. Why all the secrecy? Why all the mystery? If the guy exists why doesn't he ever show himself and prove it? And if he doesn't exist what's the meaning of all this? ... actually, I've got the same questions about God."  
-cartoonist Bill Watterson

"A lovely thing about Christmas is that it's compulsory, like a thunderstorm, and we all go through it together."  
-Garrison Keillor

"I think commercialism helps Christmas and I think that the more capitalism we can inject into the Christmas holiday the more spiritual I feel about it "  
- Craig Ferguson

**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 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-1st Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant "The Vineyard" - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

**Game Night:** This is 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!

**Freethought Book Club February 20, 2016**  
THE BOOK: Breaking The Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon by Daniel C. Dennett. Available FREE at [http://skeptdic.ru/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Daniel\\_C\\_Dennett\\_Breaking\\_the\\_Spell\\_Religion.pdf](http://skeptdic.ru/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Daniel_C_Dennett_Breaking_the_Spell_Religion.pdf) Location/details to be announced.

**Communitas Dinner Group: To be Announced!**  
**Have Another Idea?** Email or call! & LIKE US at <https://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/>

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:  
"THE MEANING OF LIFE"  
(You must not miss!)  
> Sunday, January 3, 2015 <  
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH  
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western)**

The North Texas Church of Freethought  
The Fellowship of Unbelievers  
Pastor (It's a Job Description, NOT a title!) Tim Gorski  
Presenters The Atheist Missionary & Tim Gorski  
Operations Coordinator Will Smith  
Welcome Coordinator Mark Barnick  
Videographer: John Gauthier  
WebPage/Management Saturn Consulting

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