



## BEING (the) WRONG (gender)

We usually think of "being wrong" as believing things that are not true. Such errors can be deadly to ourselves and others if acted upon, depending on the circumstances. This is how beliefs acquire a moral dimension. In a work entitled "The Ethics of Belief," the 19th Century British mathematician and philosopher William Kingdom Clifford made the argument for what has come to be "Clifford's Credo," which is very much in line with how Freethinkers see things:

"It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

Of course, there are difficulties with making sense of what this means in specific situations, especially concerning the words "believe," "evidence," and what is or not "sufficient." Now, clearly, to send employees into an unsafe workplace because one improperly believes it is safe – an example Clifford used – has definite moral implications. Planning a picnic when one should have known that inclement weather was likely, not so much. What about belief in god(s)? As Jefferson put it:

"It does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

Implicit in this is that if the neighbors believe that their god(s) direct them to pick our pockets and break our legs and if the god-believers act on that, it is a very different thing. And this is the situation today with respect to those who believe their deity "hates fags" and prohibits homosexual behavior as "sinful." The "right" to deny service and otherwise discriminate against gays and lesbians is accordingly being claimed as "religious liberty." It was on the strength of such beliefs that the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, which would have afforded antidiscrimination rights to gays and others in that city, failed as a ballot initiative last November. "Bathroom laws" are now a new cause, with North Carolina having passed a law requiring people to use bathrooms that correspond with the gender on their birth certificates. Amazingly, seven other states are considering similar measures. The Faith and Freedom Coalition, founded and led by Ralph Reed,\* calls North Carolina "ground zero in the war on Judeo-Christian values." Clearly, this hatred of

and discrimination against homosexuals and the transgendered grow out of beliefs that are held without sufficient evidence.

These ways of being wrong – in terms of belief and in terms of the morality of belief – are familiar if not straightforward. Perhaps the more interesting aspect of the controversy are those targeted as being the enemies in Reed's "war." Unsurprisingly, they are dehumanized and demonized by those who claim to be motivated by love. "Conservative" websites are saturated with commenters calling the transgendered "freaks" and "perverts" that they hope will be pepper-sprayed, shot, or worse. There are expressions of concern about "moral rot and " national "depravity," though not with respect to the obviously degrading aspects of communal bathrooms for either sex. Of course there are already laws against assault and sexual assault, in or outside of bathrooms. But it is insisted that there is grave danger of such assault in allowing a male-to-female transgendered person (the example is never of a female-to-male person!) to use a women's restroom. Would someone wanting to do so be deterred by these "bathroom laws?!" And what will the "decent Christian" people tell their sons when someone dressed as a woman comes into the mens restroom?

As sadly amusing as these considerations are, what is more interesting is to consider the "wrongness" of those being targeted in these "bathroom wars," the people who, for reasons unknown, feel that they were born into and inhabit the "wrong" body. This seems very different than feeling a sexual attraction to those of the same – or opposite – or both – gender(s). In homosexuality at least sexual response and sexual behavior are objective facts.

But what about "gender dysphoria," also known as "gender identity disorder?" As with

\*Ralph Reed was Executive Director of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition in the 1990's, which Robertson built when he ran for President in 1988. Reed described his "stealth strategy" of concealing his agenda to get far-right candidates elected to office: "I want to be invisible. I do guerilla warfare. I paint my face and travel at night. You don't know it's over until you're in a body bag. You don't know until election night."

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homosexuality, once classified as a psychiatric disease, the terminology suggests that there is something actually "wrong" with the people affected. (Indeed, a lot of psychiatric terms have pejorative connotations!) But, for their part, the "transgendered" report that it is their own body that is "wrong." How should we think about this belief? Is it an artifact of the roles that the genders are expected to play in our society such that the person just doesn't feel that they are "right for the part?" Or is it really an intrinsic defect? And, if so, is it of one's sense of identity or of one's body? Currently, it is possible to have "sex reassignment surgery" and this may seem the best approach. But what if there were a medical treatment that caused affected people to feel that their bodies were not the "wrong" gender? Would this really be any more drastic than surgery?

What does it "feel like" to be a man, anyway? Or a woman? There are no medical tests that can determine this. Each of us knows the answer for one of these genders, but then only for ourselves. Does a woman (or man) who "feels like a woman (or man)" feel the same – and in what way? – as other women (or men)? Or might someone be a man (or woman) who thinks they know what it feels like to be a man (or woman) but is really experiencing what it feels like to be a woman (or a man)? How could anyone, even ourselves, possibly know this? Is it really just an internal subjective state? Or are people "made to feel" a certain way by their social situations?

The "bathroom laws" themselves hint at such uncertainties. They define sex variously according to anatomy, birth certificate, chromosomes and/or more vaguely "as biologically defined." It shows that, to those who think these "bathroom laws" are "ground zero" in a cosmic event of "spiritual warfare," how gender is defined is not as important as that it is defined. And this is perhaps the actual contention that runs all through these difficulties: that gender is made to matter – that without sufficient evidence too many people insist that it must matter – much more than it should.

**"All our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike — and yet it is the most precious thing we have."**

**-Albert Einstein**

**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 August 20, 2016**  
THE BOOK: Undeniable by Bill Nye "The Science Guy."  
Location (??): Farina's Winery, 420 S Main in Grapevine, TX. at 4:30 PM!

**Communitas Dinner Group: To be Announced!**  
**Have Another Idea?** Email or call! Read past bulletins and service presentations and post on the FORUM at [www.churchoffreethought.org](http://www.churchoffreethought.org) LIKE US at [www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/](http://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/) and sign up for our Twitter feed at [twitter.com/ntcof](http://twitter.com/ntcof) !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:**

**"IGNORANCE"**

**Is It Bliss?**

**Or Just A Good Place To Start?**

**> Sunday, June 5, 2016 <**

**COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH**

**(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western;**

**starts at 10:30 but come at 10 for fellowship!)**

The North Texas Church of Freethought  
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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