



## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Education is a central and vital part of becoming and remaining what it means to be a full and complete human. It might be said that it defines humanity. That is, one cannot live as a human being without abilities that must be learned, especially the essential faculty of language. Language, at a minimum, is required for participation in human society and culture, the *sine qua non* of the human mode of survival. As UNESCO puts it: "Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights."

"Rights" is a word that is easily and habitually abused, of course. Some use it as a way to give apparent moral force to just about anything, including mistreatment of others. On the other hand, those who take the word seriously say that every right entails a responsibility. The rights of free speech and free exchange of goods and services, for example, entail a negative – and therefore "costless" – responsibility not to interfere with others exercising such rights. But rights to food, clothing, education, medical care and the like are controversial because they seem to place a positive burden on others who must provide these things. Still, it can be agreed upon that children have rights to these things and that parents bear the responsibility – it should be a welcome responsibility! – to provide for their children.

That children are entitled to an education does not end controversy. This is because, while knowledge and skills allow us to participate in human society and culture, they also thereby affect society and culture. People educated to believe particular things and think along particular lines create and maintain different cultures than people who believe and think differently. This is the essence of human progress: that beliefs and ways of thinking give way to better ones. It is what distinguishes the 6th Century from the 21st and the United States from Afghanistan.

Even within the United States in the 21st Century, there is passionate controversy about

many aspects of education. Those who hold archaic beliefs, who are used to outmoded ways of thinking and even regard some knowledge as corrupting, struggle against anything outside of these bounds. Parents are often reluctant to think that their children have serious problems. Children may suffer from abuse and conflict at home as well as perverse social pressures among their peers. Bureaucracy and legislative mandates frustrate teachers and school staff, some of whom are unwilling or unable to meet their responsibilities. Some are just trying to get through each day in the hope of retirement. Perhaps the most difficult issue is that, as Paul Reville, Professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education puts it: "We're afraid to admit that demographics still predict destiny." Zip codes seem to dictate success in education and life generally better than anything else.

There are many reasons for hope and higher expectations. Perhaps the greatest is that access to information has been monumentally increased by the internet. Perhaps nothing since the printing press offers greater promise for the dissemination of knowledge and ideas. But this will depend heavily on increased awareness and understanding of, and an ability to apply, the principles of doubt and critical thinking.

People will need to be much more open to the possibility that what they believe is wrong, or at least incomplete. People will need to be able to appreciate that beliefs must be held together with the basis for holding them. People will need to be able to hold different and perhaps conflicting beliefs without, as is usually the case, compartmentalizing them. Most of all, people will need to learn not to take their beliefs so personally. For while ideas are important, and consequential, there is a sense in which we are not our ideas. Our beliefs need not define us. Knowledge and understanding are tools of which we must be the masters and not the other way around.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT ON EDUCATION**

“You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then — to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting.” [T.H. White, The Once and Future King]

“Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this: ‘You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself — educating your own judgements. Those that stay must remember, always, and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society.” [Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook]

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” [Plutarch]

“Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned; and, however early a man’s training begins, it is probably the last lesson that he learns thoroughly,” [TH Huxley, Technical Education]

**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:** 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 Le Havre, Carcassonne, and other fun games!

**Freethought Book Club August 20, 2016**  
THE BOOK: Undeniable by Bill Nye “The Science Guy.”  
Location: Farina’a Winery, 420 S Main in Grapevine, TX. at 4:30 PM!

**Communitas Dinner Group: To be Announced!**  
**Have Another Idea?** Email or call! Read bulletins & 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 signup for our Twitter feed at [twitter.com/ntcof](http://twitter.com/ntcof) !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:  
“MEDIA MATTERS”  
How Do You Get Your Information and  
Where Does it Come From?  
> Sunday, September 4, 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

Pastor (It’s a Job Description, NOT a title!)	Tim Gorski
Presenters	Tim Gorski
Operations Coordinator	Will Smith
Welcome Coordinator	Mark Barnick
Videographer:	John Gauthier
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