



BULLETIN of THE NORTH TEXAS CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT

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JUST KIDDING

“I was just kidding!” ... “I was only joking!” ... “What? Can't you take a joke?”

These are often the excuses given when someone takes offense at being verbally attacked and the attacker, who may or may not have been “joking,” wants to avoid blame. It's an easy out since the victim isn't bleeding and the source of the insult or ridicule “wasn't being serious.” One of the first things we teach children is that “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me.” Nevertheless, insults and ridicule do hurt. They are – almost always (though with the universal qualifier “depending”) – intended to hurt. At the very least, they are intended to assert or enforce social dominance.

The process of natural selection makes it easy to understand why this is. In the struggle for survival and reproductive success, even among cooperating members of a tribe, both are enhanced for individuals with higher social status. Of course, the same process also selects for one tribe wiping out another other tribe in the next valley and stealing all their stuff for the same reason: it improves the attackers' chances for survival and differential reproductive success. Likewise with infanticide, as long as the victims are not closely related. The Bible, despite its obvious defects, remains a good record of these ancient values and practices. And there is a connection between aggressive humor and violent aggression. The one is nonlethal behavior among members of a community and the other is potentially lethal action against outsiders.

So what has changed? Why, from our vantage point in the 21st Century, are these biblical precepts and practices – often pointed out by atheists – understood to be so loathsome and barbarous? Why does aggressive joking tend to be questioned and critiqued even when – perhaps especially when – it

reinforces the social hierarchy by targeting those of lower social status who therefore “deserve it?”

It has been a long process. At one time, “just kidding” was the only way to call attention to the failings and faults of those enjoying higher social standing. Ancient writers such as Aristophanes, Seneca the Younger and Petronius made effective use of satire to do this. Indeed, all humor was then regarded with some suspicion, in part because of its potential to be used aggressively. People like to laugh. But few like to be laughed at.

It seems that humor, like other human interactions, has been domesticated. Humanity went from being a social species organized in scattered small tribes to nations and empires with rulers who understood that people were more valuable alive and contributing to an active economy than plundered and dead. Now we have become a hyper-social species that is highly and intricately organized on a global scale. Not just the people in the next valley but even those on the other side of the world have become important to the survival and success of the whole civilization. No one should be thought of as truly an outsider. Importantly, those with high social status depend on and are benefited by the happiness and efforts of those of lower status. And they don't want stupidity and short-sightedness to spoil things. Curiously, while those with higher social status possess greater wealth and may enjoy better health, even those with lower social status in the 21st Century enjoy greater health and longevity than those of higher status in the past. In addition, higher status individuals in modern times tend to leave fewer offspring than those of lower status.

The point is that joking is an important element of the human condition. But it is sublimated aggression. Like other important elements of the human condition, humor figures in the distinctly

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human way of living and flourishing. Yet jokes that come at the expense of others, that have the effect of imposing social dominance through ridicule and embarrassment, are not “just kidding.” Of course, humor that calls social hierarchies into question, such as satire, may be a very good thing. But it, too, is not “just kidding.” Rather, it serves an important purpose in encouraging thinking and progress.

Whenever it is said that something is “just kidding” or “only joking,” the truth is that something more is going on.

ON RATIONAL RELIGION

“The point is that naturalism replaces theism but it doesn’t replace religion. It doesn’t necessarily provide answers to the hard questions of meaning and fulfillment and purpose. I think that it can. I find naturalism, personally, to be an inspirational and profound view of the world.

Ironically, the part I find most inspirational is the fact that someday I will die. Everyone in this room will someday be dead and there will not be an afterlife, a continuance, a judgment. The lives we lead now are not dress rehearsals. They are the only performance we have. Therefore, what matters is what is here: the people we know and love, the lives we can change, the good we can do for the world. That is all there is, so of course that is what matters.

Another way of putting it is naturalism has addressed the easy questions, the basic physical features of how the world works, but there are hard questions of meaning and purpose and fulfillment yet to be answered. What I like to say is we have picked the low-hanging fruit off of the tree of knowledge but there’s a lot of succulent goodies up there on the higher branches, and we’ll get there faster if we all climb together.”

Physicist/Cosmologist Sean Carroll in debate with William Lane Craig at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA, March 2014 at <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/god-and-cosmology-the-existence-of-god-in-light-of-contemporary-cosmol/>

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 - 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-first Sundays of the month, 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!

Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH: “VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE”

> Sunday, May 6, 2018 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then take the frontage road east just past the Best Western; service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee and snacks - you can bring some! - and conversation)

THANK YOU !!
FOR YOUR GENEROUS
DONATION OF TIME & FINANCIAL
SUPPORT to the NTCOF !!
It is needed, appreciated and
Tax-Deductible !

The North Texas Church of Freethought The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Pastor (It's a job description, not a title!) Tim Gorski
Presenters (how about YOU?).....John Gauthier
Tim Gorski
Social Media Czar.....Aaron Kelton
Welcome Coordinator.....Mark Barnick
Videographer.....John Gauthier
Webpage Management.....Saturn Consulting

**mailing address: 1001 N Waldrop Dr #815
Arlington, TX 76012
(214) 702-2050**

**www.churchoffreethought.org
info@churchoffreethought.org**