

The Faith of an Empathetic Humanist

by Paul Kurtz

What I think is rather unique about humanism today as a first principle is that “we are citizen du monde;” that is, citizens of the world community, members of the human species over beyond our gender, national, racial, or religious affiliations, which all too often have separated human beings in the past.

We are planetary dwellers before we are Americans or Russians, Chinese or Africans. ancients or moderns. We are not confined by our planet or solar system, but are capable of exploring galactic space. Our true identity is universal; we are not defined by the isms of the past, as Christian or Jew, Hindu or Muslim, nonbeliever or believer. Rather we are defined by our humanity, which is open-ended and as such we share a common set of obligations, to the planetary community of which we are each an integral part. Our humanity (human, not male or female per se) is what is our essential characteristic. This entails the potentiality to actualize the highest potentialities of which we are capable for ourselves and our fellow and sister human beings, past present and future, our preservation and fulfillment.

What is remarkable about the human species is our indefinability; our essence is not constrained by a fixed human nature; for we have the opportunity to define ourselves; and we have done so in every historic period, by means of knowledge and invention. We have the freedom to enter into the world and change it. We are best characterized by our *creativity*, which takes on new dimensions in every age, as Egyptians, Europeans, Asians, North or South Americans, artists or poets, architects or builders, scientists or philosophers, and whatever we will to become in future civilizations yet to emerge.

The key to understanding who and what we are is that our futures, as individuals, societies or cultures, are not fixed or pre-ordained by some hidden hand of God; that what will become of us depends in part on what we choose to become; that we need to shed the illusions of the past by the use of science, reason, and wisdom; that we need in every age to summon the courage to enter into the world boldly and to create new institutions and civilizations. These should be both intelligent and compassionate, recognizing both our limitations and the opportunities for achieving the good life for ourselves and our fellow human beings. Thus we need to shed the false illusions of the past. We need to recognize that “no deity will save us, but that we must save ourselves.” (*Humanist Manifesto II*) We should always bear in mind that humans are not Gods and are capable of mistakes and errors. Yet with dedicated purpose and a willingness to change, we can draw upon the discoveries of the past and resolve to build a better world in the future.

The human condition depends on whether we discover—whatever the society or time in which we live—what it is possible and impossible for us to achieve, and the recognition that what will be is not foreordained, but depends in part by what we resolve to do; by the choices we make, by our failures and successes, by the plans we forge and our willingness to change in the light of circumstances. Our future as human beings depends clearly upon the knowledge we can draw upon. But it also depends upon whether we have cultivated the

capacity for *good will* and a *positive outlook*. This means that in spite of adversity and misfortune we are still able to express our conviction, that we can create a better life; for ourselves, for those we love and admire, for our neighbors, and for the diverse communities in which we live.

This is the faith of a reconstructed secularist and humanist, still believing in our capacity to live a significant life that we can share with others. This may be at times difficult, but it is one that can be meaningful and one that can be rewarding.