The Achievements of Paul Kurtz

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Paul Kurtz was born into a family with relatively recent memories of Russia and with a great enthusiasm for American society and what it could offer those who worked hard. Martin Kurtz, a businessman, and his wife Anna, lived in Newark, New Jersey when their son Paul was born on December 21 1925. The value of education was well understood and Paul was destined for a university education. But soon after enrolling at Washington Square College at New York University, he volunteered for military service. Not quite 19, his unit was rushed to the front during the height of the Battle of the Bulge. A few months later he was among the forces that liberated Dachau concentration camp. He stayed with the American forces in Germany for eighteen months after the war before being demobilized.

Once again a civilian, Kurtz resumed his studies at New York University before moving on to Columbia University, where he took his PhD in 1952. He was a student of Sidney Hook and retained a lifelong relationship with the older philosopher. And through Hook, Kurtz stands in direct line from John Dewey. It is not overstating things to say that Kurtz's work cannot be understood without appreciating how comprehensive the influence of Dewey and Hook has been. Like Hook, Kurtz has always been keen to distance humanism from dogmatic interpretations and unsavoury allies. And like Dewey, Kurtz has wanted to emphasize the positive elements of nonreligious living. Having said this he has also been more willing to criticize religion than either of his mentors. Originally he was willing to use religious language to articulate humanist concepts and values, but after the 1970s he turned against this. In the tradition of Dewey and Hook, Kurtz has devoted his career to outlining a naturalistic and optimistic philosophy of life. But it was Kurtz's fate to be prominent at a time of resurgent fundamentalism on the one hand and postmodernism on the other, which required a whole new approach to problems his mentors thought long dealt with.

Kurtz's doctoral dissertation was called "The Problem of Value Theory." His academic career was devoted to justifying the methods of objective inquiry, although he was also very interested in the history of American philosophy. This was reflected in his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that Paul Edwards edited in the 1960s, and which has long been regarded as uniquely authoritative. As well as entries on Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776) and Elihu Palmer (1764-1806), Kurtz was entrusted with the important article on American Philosophy. He developed this interest by editing two extensive anthologies of American philosophy. He also continued to work in value theory and decision theory, his principal contribution being *Decision and the Condition of Man*.

But Kurtz was as much of a public intellectual as he was a cloistered academic. In the manner of Dewey and Hook, Kurtz was actively involved in political and social issues of the day. So when he was offered the editorship of *The Humanist*, the magazine of the American Humanist Association (AHA) in 1967, he took it. On assuming the editorship, Kurtz gave every impression of being a young man in a hurry. Shortly after taking the editorship, he wrote:

> A person who leaves the traditional church in revolt does not want a warmed over dish of platitudes as a weak substitute, as he has been often served by organised humanism in the United States. If one reads what many professional humanists write

> about, one often finds the same old clichés and slogans. Humanism should be concerned with moral choice and social change, and not just theorize about them. (1967a, 151)

Kurtz's organizations

Dewey and Hook lived their public lives through various organizations and committees. Kurtz carried this tradition on but with the important addition of having a real facility in building sustainable organizations, a rare ability among philosophers. The important caveat to this is that, in the end, the organizations needed to be his creations. He worked for many years in the AHA and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), among others. But in the end Kurtz was at his best when he could fashion an organization in his own image. The first of the organizations he founded (or co-founded) was CSICOP, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (now known as the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry) which was launched in 1976. This was followed by the Council for Secular Humanism (1980); International Academy of Humanism (1983); Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (1983); Secular Organizations for Sobriety (1988); African-Americans for Humanism (1989); Center for Inquiry (1991); Society of Humanist Philosophers (1997); the Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health (2003); and the Institute for Science and Human Values (ISHV) in 2010.

Until his departure in 2010 and the formation of the ISHV, Kurtz's flagship was the Center for Inquiry (CFI), the umbrella for all the other organizations. The stated goal of the CFI is "to promote and defend science, reason, and free inquiry in all aspects of human endeavor." He wanted the CFI to be the premier humanist think-tank for the world, combining skeptical inquiry into paranormal phenomena, undertaken by CSI, and articulation of the humanist outlook by the Council of Secular Humanism, as well as the work of the smaller organizations. It sees its purpose as contributing to the public understanding of science and reason, with particular reference to their applications to human conduct, ethics and society. The principal CFI is located in Amherst, New York, adjacent to the State University of New York at Buffalo and is known as the Center for Inquiry–*Transnational*.

A major problem for many organizations formed by one dynamic individual is to manage the succession to the next generation of leaders who can carry on the work. Kurtz is not alone among such people not to have excelled in this respect. After a messy departure from the CFI in 2010, he went on to found the ISHV. Both organizations continue to give life to Kurtz's vision to this day.

Kurtz's other main creation has been Prometheus Books, which he began in 1969. Earlier freethought leaders had established publishing operations, but with the exception of Watts & Co. in Britain, none lasted for long. Kurtz understood, where his predecessors did not, that a publishing house could not survive if it confined all its publishing activity to freethought alone. Certainly, humanism around the world would be immeasurably poorer had Prometheus not been around.

The extent of this achievement is remarkable. Few other significant humanists have made such significant and lasting contributions in this way. The only two who invite comparison would be Charles Albert Watts and the Venerable Master Xingyun. Watts founded Watts & Co. publishers, the Rationalist Press Association, and its journal, now called the *New*

Humanist in Britain. And Xingyun is the founder of the worldwide Buddhist organization Foguangshan, which teaches what it calls Humanistic Buddhism.

Kurtz's Writings

Paul Kurtz is certainly one of the most prolific humanist authors of the last hundred years, being matched only by Isaac Asimov, Bertrand Russell or Joseph McCabe. The published bibliography of his writings between 1952 and 2003 runs to 79 pages. For our purposes we can distinguish four main categories of work. There are (i) the academic books and collections of essays; (ii) his shorter, more popular works; (iii) the edited collections of essays; and finally (iv) his articles.

Among the academic works of humanist philosophy one would count *Decision and the Condition of Man* (1965); *The Fullness of Life* (1974); *The Transcendental Temptation* (1986); *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1988); *Eupraxophy: Living without Religion* (1989); and *Skepticism: Inquiry and Reliable Knowledge* (1992). The collections of his essays include *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (1983); *Philosophical Essays in Pragmatic Naturalism* (1990); *Embracing the Power of Humanism* (2000); and *Skepticism and Humanism: The New Paradigm* (2001).

His shorter, more popular works include *Exuberance* (1978); *The Courage to Become* (1996); *Affirmations* (2004); and *What is Secular Humanism?* (2007). These works are the simplest introductions into Kurtz's humanism and spend relatively little time discussing religion. Similar in purpose to these shorter works are the three manifestoes Kurtz has written and guided to publication: *The Humanist Manifesto II* (1973); *The Secular Humanist Declaration* (1980); and *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism* (2000).

Kurtz has also edited or co-edited several collections of essays on various topics. These include *Moral Problems in Contemporary Society* (1969); *The Humanist Alternative* (1973); *A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology* (1985); *Building a World Community: Humanism in the Twenty-first Century* (1989); *Challenges to the Enlightenment* (1994); *Skeptical Odysseys* (2001); *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (2003); and *Science and Ethics* (2007).

Kurtz's academic books have had a mixed career, having been largely ignored by the academic community. In part this can be put down to being out of step when academic fashions have moved to other questions. And, though these are described as his "academic books," Kurtz hoped for a wider readership for them, an ambition often fatal to achieving scholarly acclaim. Ironically, these books have not enjoyed the influence he hoped they might have among the general humanist readership, particularly outside the United States, where Kurtz's writing style has found less favor. They have fallen into the trap of being not academic enough for the specialists but too academic for the non-specialists. The most successful of them was *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism*, his main contribution toward articulating a genuinely non-religious ethics, and which has been translated into many languages.

In some ways, his shorter books have been the most successful. They have flown below the radar-screen of the academics and have gone straight to the non-specialist reader. With the exception of Hector Hawton, and, more recently, Richard Norman in the United Kingdom

and Corliss Lamont in the United States, there had been a shortage of good outlines of humanism for the non-specialist.

But in many ways the most useful of Kurtz's published works are the edited collections of essays on various topics. The essays, brought together in works from *Moral Problems in Contemporary Society*, published in the late 1960s, to *Science and Ethics*, published forty years later, are an impressive collection of the variety of opinions that can plausibly be called humanist.

Kurtz's exuberant humanism

In the field of ideas, Kurtz's single greatest contribution has been as the articulator and defender of naturalistic humanism. As with anyone who has written extensively over a long period of time, one can see continuities and changes, but in most respects the core of his humanism remained the same. What changed every now and then was his preferred packaging. He has always been aware of the dangers of an unduly dogmatic reading of humanism. "I am wary," he said at a conference in 1980, "of any *ism* (including human*ism*) that sets itself up as a doctrine or creed, seeks uniform agreement among its proponents, or attempts to legislate a moral code." (Storer, 11)

Perhaps the most important area where Kurtz has shifted course has been in his willingness to offer a substantive definition of humanism. Broadly, he has followed two contrasting approaches. On the one hand he has been largely content to see humanism as a "general outlook, a method of inquiry, an ethic of freedom…" (Storer, 13). But at other times he has been more of a mind to offer a definition

> Although humanists share many principles, there are two basic and minimal principles which especially seem to characterise humanism. First, there is a rejection of any supernatural conception of the universe and a denial that man has a privileged place within nature. Second, there is an affirmation that ethical values are human and have no meaning independent of human experience; thus humanism is an ethical philosophy in which man is central. (1973a, 2)

This passage reflects the ambivalence in, on the one hand, acknowledging that humanity has no privileged place in nature while, on the other hand, appearing to place humanity back on center stage. In fact, there is no actual contradiction here because Kurtz is placing humanity at center stage only in the sense that Protagoras understood when he said humanity is the measure of all things. In the absence of any objective supernatural set of standards, we can do no more than operate according to our own lights, with all the flaws implied by that.

In the end, Kurtz preferred not to define humanism in the sense of articulating a creed, preferring to speak instead of its characteristics. "Humanism includes at least four main characteristics: (1) it is a method of inquiry; (2) it presents a cosmic world view; (3) it contains a concrete set of ethical recommendations for the individual's life stance; and (4) it expresses a number of social and political ideals." (1989, 24) The main advantage of this approach is that it doesn't tie humanism down to any one set of beliefs. Confucian humanism will be at odds with Benthamite utilitarianism, just as American religious humanism will have relatively little in common with Indian materialism or British atheism. But what unites these and other humanist approaches is possession of a world view and a range of ethical, political and social views arrived at through consistent application of a skeptical, reasoning

method of inquiry, complete with its willingness to keep an open mind, based in turn on an understanding of the limitations of our present knowledge. This open-ended definition of humanism emphasizes the ongoing, the dialogical and the transcultural.

The strength of this approach is also its principal weakness. One is left uncertain as to what a humanist believes. We could replace "humanism" with "Islam," for instance, and, with due changes to the preferred method of inquiry, continue merrily on our way. So a process understanding such as Kurtz's is less a problem for those who already count themselves humanists, but for those inquiring from without, it can seem altogether too insubstantial.

This core dilemma has shown itself in Kurtz's writing, which has see-sawed between criticizing some element of religious or paranormal behaviour and articulating some aspect of the humanist world view. The single most effective phrase in Kurtz's critical works was when he spoke of the transcendental temptation, which he used toward the end of his 1986 book by that title to refer to the temptation to look to the consolations of magic and religion rather than take responsibility for one's life and face reality. (1986, 449-461) The transcendental temptation is the clearest form of anthropocentric conceit we are prone to. Unfortunately, Kurtz has not developed this insightful phrase, the job being taken up by the Russian philosopher, Valerii Kuvakin.

Kurtz sees humanism as what we can become if we dare to reject the transcendental temptation. Rejecting temptation takes courage and a mood of affirmation. Here Kurtz often retells the Prometheus story, where the titan heroically stands up to Zeus's tyranny on behalf of humanity. His short books (*Exuberance*, *The Courage to Become*, *Affirmations* and *What is Secular Humanism?*) all outline in various ways this picture of a life-affirming, exuberant humanism.

> Human life has no meaning independent of itself. There is no cosmic force or deity to give it meaning or significance. There is no ultimate destiny for man. Such a belief is an illusion of humankind's infancy. The meaning of life is what we choose to give it. Meaning grows out of human purposes alone. (1985, 174)

This passage, and the many others like it, has been ignored by the American fundamentalists, determined to prove, against all odds, that humanism is a religion. But it has also been overlooked by those in the academic community who contrived to see secular humanists as the opposite side of the coin as fundamentalists.

The Humanist Manifesto II

The best way, in the space available, to follow Kurtz's evolving conceptions of humanism is to examine each of the public manifestoes he has been involved with. It was in the spirit of engaged philosophy that Kurtz led the campaign in 1973 for a revised humanist manifesto. The original Humanist Manifesto was by this time four decades old and was in many respects unsatisfactory and obsolete. Over several issues of the *Humanist*, he ran features from leading thinkers as to what the Humanist Manifesto had achieved forty years previously, and what aspects of it now needed reworking. Most people agreed that the manifesto needed updating, including several of the signatories of the original.

The *Humanist Manifesto II* was a great improvement on the original. It was better prepared and marketed than its predecessor. Kurtz had gathered 114 signatories by the time of

publication and altogether 261 prominent thinkers from around the world put their name to it. It was also better thought out, being more specific about what humanism actually is and what it is not. And it canvassed a wider range of issues than its predecessor. And while the *Humanist Manifesto II* was a more consistently secular document, it was not antireligious in an unhelpful way. It acknowledged that religion can inspire dedication to commendable ethical ideals. And finally, the *Humanist Manifesto II* was careful not to set itself up as a rival creed. "These affirmations are not a final credo or dogma but an expression of a living and growing faith. We invite other in all lands to join us in further developing and working for these goals." (1973, 24)

While the *Humanist Manifesto II* made plain its rejection of traditional monotheistic religion, it also distanced itself from religious humanism:

> Some humanists believe we should reinterpret traditional religions and reinvest them with meanings appropriate to the current situation. Such redefinitions, however, often perpetuate old dependencies and escapisms; they easily become obscurantist, impeding the free use of the intellect. We need, instead, radically new human purposes and goals. (1973, p 16)

This unambiguous rejection of religious humanism went on to have important and unhelpful consequences for the unity of the humanist movement in the United States. Some religious humanists have accused *Humanist Manifesto II* of being too rigidly secular. Ironically, these criticisms coincided with American fundamentalists accusing humanism of being "just another religion."

In recognition of the mixed record of the previous four decades, the *Humanist Manifesto II*, was careful to avoid the facile optimism that been a feature of its predecessor. It spoke of Nazism, totalitarianism, the harmful as well as the good products of science. Other contemporary evils listed included abuse of power by military and industrial elites, racism and sexism. So the second manifesto set an altogether darker scene than its predecessor.

Against this backdrop, the *Humanist Manifesto II* made eighteen main points, grouped into the fields of religion, ethics, the individual, democratic society, humanity as a whole. The main points were:

- moral values derive from human experience;
- reason and intelligence are humanity's most effective instruments;
- economic systems should be judged by how they help humanity, rather than along ideological lines;
- affirming the moral equality of all;
- a call to transcend the limits of national sovereignty; and
- adopting planetary solutions to planetary problems.

Without using the phrase, the *Humanist Manifesto II* was a call for planetary humanism. "What more daring a goal for humankind," the *Manifesto* concluded, "than for each person to become, in ideal as well as in practice, a citizen of a world community. It is a classical vision; we can now give it new vitality." (1973, 23)

Ever the public intellectual, Kurtz also saw to publication a collection of essays which was designed to complement the manifesto. The two previous attempts to put a book of this sort

together had not been particularly successful. Julian Huxley's *Humanist Frame* (1961) was too technical, even technocratic, while A. J. Ayer's *Humanist Outlook* (1968) was too diffuse. The essays in *The Humanist Alternative* were shorter, snappier, and conveyed more attractively what humanism actually meant to each contributor. While less transnational than would now be seen as adequate, *The Humanist Alternative* made some effort to include humanists from outside the Anglo-American world. The Indian campaigner, Gora, got his first major international exposure in this book.

The overriding impression of this collection is of the variety of viewpoints from people who called themselves humanists. Kurtz addressed this issue in his essay, which he used as a conclusion to *The Humanist Alternative*. Under the title "Is Everyone a Humanist?," he welcomed the apparent trends toward openness in both the Catholic Church and the Marxist countries, both of which used the word humanism, though suitably prefixed by "Christian" and "Socialist" respectively. But, he added, "we should surely insist that a theistic or totalitarian ideology cannot be considered humanistic in its essential nature if one of the most basic of human rights–the right of individuals to the free use of knowledge–is ignored." (1973b, 185-6)

The Secular Humanist Declaration

The decade after the Humanist Manifesto II was a gloomy one for humanism. Inside the movement, relations between Kurtz and the AHA deteriorated until he left in 1977. And in society at large, religious fundamentalism, which had been simmering below the surface since the Scopes Trial of 1925 burst into a new phase of angry assertiveness. It was against this background of growing irrationalism and paranoia in public discourse that Kurtz set about creating his own humanist organization, with its own distinctive brand of humanism. In 1980 he established the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH), "democratic" to distinguish it from Marxist humanism, and "secular" to distinguish it from the religious humanism preferred by the AHA. In 1996, once the danger of association with Marxism was over, CODESH became the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH). Coincident with this, Kurtz established *Free Inquiry*, which quickly established itself as a leading humanist journal. And, to help launch CODESH and *Free Inquiry*, Kurtz wrote the *Secular Humanist Declaration* to act as the flagship document of the movement.

Only seven years previously, the *Humanist Manifesto II* had been widely praised. Even the *New York Times* called it a philosophy for survival. But in seven short years the climate had changed considerably. In 1973 Kurtz could plausibly ask if everyone was a humanist, but in 1980 humanism looked, even to its friends, more like a battered relic of the past, or, to its enemies, a vicious plot to undermine all that was best in America. Many sections of society were anxious about the growing fundamentalist threat, but few seemed able or willing to organize any coherent response. And many in the academic community were pleased to dismiss humanists as no more than the opposite side of the same coin as fundamentalists.

So, with a backdrop of his own estrangement from the AHA and the defeat of Jimmy Carter at the hands of a Republican Party on a sharp rightward trajectory, Kurtz felt the need for a new voice. The major change, of course, was adding "secular" to "humanism." This coupling was relatively recent, going back only to 1958, but it was naming an increasingly identifiable humanist position: one that did not see value in simply repackaging a non-religious life-stance in the language of religion shorn only of supernaturalism. Kurtz was just as keen to

articulate this non-religious life-stance, but he was no longer prepared to use religious language to make his point.

Kurtz was anxious that secular humanism should not simply be a reaction to Christian fundamentalism and took care to identify threats posed by fanatical Islamic sects, cults and the paranormal. But he was no less critical of authoritarian ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism and Nazism. He criticized the traditional leftist orientation of the humanist movement, arguing that conventional distinctions between “right” and “left” were rapidly becoming anachronistic. He called for a broad coalition of left and right, neo-liberals and social democrats to defend the free society.

In stark contrast to the line adopted by the fundamentalists, the Secular Humanist Declaration was specifically inclusive:

> We are apprehensive that modern civilization is threatened by forces antithetical to reason, democracy, and freedom. Many religious believers will no doubt share with us a belief in many secular humanist and democratic values, and we welcome their joining with us in the defense of these ideals. (1980, 10)

The Declaration went on to itemize these ideals. They were four main types of ideals mentioned:

- free inquiry, reason;
- ethics based on critical intelligence, education, including moral education;
- a commitment to science and technology and the findings of science such as evolution;
- separation of church and state, the ideal of freedom, religious skepticism.

Kurtz ended the Declaration with this rallying cry:

> We believe that it is possible to bring about a more humane world, one based upon the methods of reason and the principles of tolerance, compromise, and the negotiations of difference. We recognize the need for intellectual modesty and the willingness to revise beliefs in the light of criticism. Thus consensus is sometimes attainable. While emotions are important, we need not resort to the panaceas of salvation, to escape through illusion, or to some desperate leap toward passion and violence. We deplore the growth of intolerant sectarian creeds that foster hatred. In a world engulfed by obscurantism and irrationalism it is vital that the ideals of the secular city not be lost. (1980, 24)

The Declaration got some worthwhile coverage on the front page of *New York Times*, but the article’s title “Secular Humanists Attack a Rise in Fundamentalism,” helped reinforce the perception of secular humanism’s negative bent. In fact the Declaration was relatively inclusive and displayed few of the faults its critics regularly accuse it of, being neither arrogant, nor speciesist, dogmatic, or hegemonic. It was certainly not unduly optimistic. It was rather, a renewed call on behalf the traditional humanist values of toleration, free inquiry and open-mindedness. But the gloomy picture painted in the introduction gave the rest of the Declaration too strong a sense of being on the defensive. Many people, allies and opponents of humanism, objected to religion being exposed to criticism. To this Kurtz replied:

> We share with many religionists their commitment to the values of a free society. But some dogmatic religionists are intolerant and wish to impose their views on others. Part of their growing influence may be attributed to the fact that the views they express often go unchallenged. Some skeptics ask, "Why take them seriously?" Others behave ostrich-like, hoping that they will go away. But doctrinaire religions must be taken seriously, for they have a powerful influence on the lives of countless people. That is why we believe that religions should not be immune to free inquiry or critical scrutiny.' (1981, 1)

This has remained a central element of the secular humanist worldview. Secular humanists are often attacked for criticizing religion, the implication being that such behavior implies lack of respect. The paradox is that secular humanists show religions the courtesy of taking their truth claims seriously, and seeing it as a worthwhile exercise to expose those truth claims to scrutiny. The problem is that respect shown in this way seems to please neither the religious people being criticized nor humanist allies anxious not to criticize at all.

The Debate over Eupraxsophy

As *Free Inquiry* approached its tenth anniversary, Kurtz felt the need for a new direction. This restlessness has been a feature of his career, combining the entrepreneur's dissatisfaction with things as they are with the philosopher's temptation to coin new words. None of which have been particularly successful. He tried the term "igtheism" at one stage, to denote not outright rejection so much as our ignorance of what theologians really mean when they employ grand phrases like "ground of being" or "maker and ruler of the universe." (1992, 196-7) He has also been tempted on occasions to speak of neohumanism.

The most ambitious term Kurtz coined, and the one he persevered with the longest, was "eupraxsophy." Certainly, the criticism of religion would continue, but, he announced "secular humanism must go beyond criticism and affirm a positive outlook." (1989/90, 64) It is important to recall that America's best-known atheist at the time was Madalyn Murray-O'Hair, whose abusive antics served to confirm people's worst fears about non-believers. Secular humanism *is* atheistic, but Kurtz didn't want to limit it in that way. But he was just as anxious not to make the AHA's mistake, as he saw it, of employing religious vocabulary while speaking of humanism. And this was more than quibbling over words, because the religious right was making it a central part of their campaign that teaching evolution in schools was unconstitutional by virtue of being a principal tenet of what they called the religion of secular humanism. Kurtz saw the need to forge a line between the Scylla of abusive atheism on the one hand and the Charybdis of the "me-too" substitutionism from religious humanists on the other.

It was partly to circumvent this impasse that Kurtz developed the term "eupraxsophy." He wanted to unite the unambiguous naturalism of the atheists with the social compassion of the religious humanists. And he wanted to do this while simplifying the message, by condensing it the humanist ethic into one word. All without employing a religious vocabulary. It was a very ambitious plan. With that in mind he wrote *Eupraxophy: Living without Religion* (1989) to launch the word, and returned to it at the end of *The New Skepticism* three years later.

Eupraxsophy owes an intellectual debt to Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*, and yet it goes further in one crucial sense. Aristotle saw the final goal as the contemplative life, whereas eupraxsophy seeks a dynamic fusion of contemplation and action. The nub of the question,

Kurtz wrote, is not just to love wisdom, but the *practice* of it. Here is where the debt to Dewey is a positive one, because eupraxsophy owes a lot to Dewey's slogan of intelligent action. Eupraxsophy is an amalgam of *eu* (good, well), *praxis* (conduct, practice), and *sophia* (scientific and philosophic wisdom). Brought together, eupraxsophy stands for "good wisdom and practice in conduct." The word was initially spelled "eupraxophy," but after some confusion about how the word should be pronounced, an "s" was added after the "x." It is unlikely that this helped.

Eupraxsophy was a commendable idea, based on a perceptive reading of the divisions within the humanist movement. But it would be naïve not to see its faults. Two objections have dogged eupraxsophy since its inception. One line of criticism asked: Why bother with a new term at all? Tim Madigan, at the time editor of *Free Inquiry*, offered in response the historical parallel of T. H. Huxley who, in 1869, felt the need for a new term. Being unable to identify with any of the theological or philosophical titles then on offer, he coined the word "agnostic," which has remained in use to this day. (Madigan, 9) What this attempted parallel did not address, however, was whether "eupraxsophy" did actually fill a need in the way that "agnostic" did.

A second line of criticism asked; why *that* term? One perceptive critic said that, whatever the faults of humanism as a label, it is at least accessible. "Better stay on the ground (and, if necessary, in the mud) struggling to retain clarity with other people than to retreat to the stratosphere with a dictionary." (Matsumura, 3) Outside the United States, which didn't properly appreciate Kurtz's motivations, the reaction was one of blinking incomprehension. In Britain, in the context of a generally supportive review of the word, the reviewer was skeptical about what he saw as an "ungainly neologism." (O'Hara, 24)

Another, less commented upon, problem with eupraxsophy was Kurtz's anxiety to put as much distance between his new concept and religion. He did this by way of a robust critique of functionalist approaches to religion, stressing instead the differences in what humanists and religionists believe. But at the same time, he wanted eupraxsophy to get beyond the squabbling over details he felt atheists and evangelicals were engaged in. But by insisting the "positive outlook" of eupraxsophy could arise only from a naturalistic perspective, he shut down the possibility of forging common ground with like-minded religious progressives while also rendering the term unnecessary to those already within the humanist movement. Despite Kurtz's efforts, eupraxsophy has not been taken up by the humanist community.

Kurtz as Prophet of Planetary Humanism

The other significant aspect of Kurtz's work, and one which has grown in importance through the second half of his career, is his work as a prophet for planetary humanism. Speaking to a conference in Canada in 1991, Kurtz spoke of the need "to build an ethical commitment to the world community as our highest moral devotion." (Goicoechea, 324) While plenty of humanists have spoken in these terms, Kurtz has worked more consistently toward this aim than anyone else. He first wrote about this in *The Fullness of Life* (1974) but it is characteristic of Kurtz that he then devoted time and effort toward realizing this goal. The first significant milestone was the Declaration of Interdependence, which he drafted for the occasion of the Tenth World Congress of the IHEU, held in Buffalo, New York, in August 1988. The Declaration was signed by some very prominent humanist scholars like E. O. Wilson and Isaac Asimov.

The Declaration called for the creation of a world community built upon shared transnational values. It began with the recognition that we need a new global consensus, the core of which was the understanding of our common humanity and of the moral truisms shared by us all. “It is time that we clearly enunciate these ethical principles so that they may be extended toward all members of the human family living on this planet.” The Declaration then itemized a range of rights and responsibilities which are common to us all and ended with a set of aims that would constitute a program for planetary humanism:

- The need to develop a worldwide awareness of our mutual interdependence.
- The challenge to develop scientific education on a global scale along with an appreciation for critical intelligence and reason as ways to enhance human welfare.
- The need to create new democratic and pluralistic institutions on a global scale.
- A new global economic system based on economic cooperation and international solidarity needs to emerge.
- The requirement of an international environmental monitoring agency which can oversee the appropriate standards for the disposal of industrial waste and the control of toxic emissions.
- The duty to curtail excessive population growth, to maintain a healthy environment, and to preserve the earth’s resources.
  (1988a, 4-7)

Five years after the Declaration, a remarkably similar document was issued by the dissident Catholic theologian Hans Küng, and endorsed by the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993. He went on to write the widely acclaimed *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. Nowhere was the priority of the Declaration of Interdependence acknowledged.

Ten years further on, Kurtz revisited the global interdependence theme with the third of his major manifesto projects, *The Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*. The core insight of planetary humanism is that no major problems can be solved on anything less than a planetary scale. Climate change, preservation of resources, the maintenance of clean air, population pressure, technological change, globalization; these are all planet-wide problems that cannot be solved by this or that legislature working in isolation. And all the old tribalisms and antagonisms, whether of race, religion, creed, class or culture, are–at best–incidental to the overriding fact of our common dependence on the Earth. It is now imperative that humans see themselves as humans first and that all more local and trivial affiliations be either jettisoned or consigned to some harmless category for our leisure hours. And, related to this is the other core insight of planetary humanism: any proper understanding of planet-wide interdependence means that *Homo sapiens* aren’t the only species to be taken into account. All species on the planet are inextricably interwoven in complex webs of interdependence. As part of outlining a new global agenda, the manifesto called for:

- backing the United Nations as the principal coercive agency of the world;
- support for the existing international conventions regarding human rights;
- fighting tax avoidance among the largest multinational corporations;
- developing a suitably transnational system of international law; and
- greater effort to raise awareness of and to combat environmental deterioration.

In order to put this agenda into effect, the *Humanist Manifesto 2000* advocated:

- an effective global governance based on popular elections;
- a workable international security system and greater powers for the World Court;
- the creation of an effective planetary environmental monitoring body;
- planning an international system of taxation for the sole purpose of assisting the underdeveloped nations;
- development of global institutions to monitor and regulate the behavior of multinational corporations; and
- keep alive the free market of ideas.

Humanist Manifesto 2000 is the fullest humanist expression of the need for rationality, common effort, and global governance. As with the previous documents, *Humanist Manifesto 2000* was signed by a wide variety of some of the most reputable academic and other leaders in the world at the time, including many from outside the United States.

As if choreographed, the *Humanist Manifesto 2000* appeared only shortly before the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan announced the Millennium Development Goals, an ambitious program for the eradication of poverty. The Millennium Development Goals are clearly compatible with the principles of planetary humanism and the vision outlined in *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, so that working toward their successful implementation is one of the best ways to give practical expression to twenty-first century humanism.

Evaluating Kurtz's legacy

Paul Kurtz's work has not received the sort of attention it deserves. Hopefully this will change in the years to come. There remains a pressing need for a biography of him as well. It's too early to evaluate Kurtz's legacy, but a few comments can be made. One of the most significant successes of his career has been his work promoting a skeptical attitude toward paranormal claims. CSI has spawned a worldwide movement and deserves much of the praise for consigning many paranormal movements–think of crop circles and UFOs–to the realm of quaint relics, alongside phrenology and divination.

In the area of humanist thinking, which this chapter has focused on, Kurtz deserves recognition for his career-long efforts to reorient humanism as a positive naturalistic world view. He understood better than most that humanism cannot operate as an immovable creed when he spoke of humanism as first and foremost a method of inquiry. He also understood the need to articulate a simple, attractive humanism, capable of being understood outside the academy. It is inevitable that this has meant he has skirted close to outlining the very creed he knows humanism cannot legitimately offer. His career can be seen as an ongoing series of attempts to square this particular circle. In this sense, therefore, Kurtz has lived and breathed his humanism consistently.

A second point is that Kurtz has understood the pressing need for institutions and means of communication for a program to have an ongoing impact. His very success in creating these has been a major reason for his unpopularity among some American humanists, who have shown less energy and single-mindedness in this respect, and have been less successful in attracting lucrative donations.

A more intractable weakness of Kurtz's humanism is the specifically American confidence in plenty which underpins and bankrolls his exuberance. While speaking on the meaning of life in one of his books he says: "For the humanist the great folly is to squander his life, to miss what it affords, not to play it out." (1974, 88) Elsewhere he describes the "first humanist virtue" as "the development of one's own sense of power–of the belief that we *can* succeed, that our own preparations and efforts *will* pay off." (1985, 175) This is all very well, so long as one can take for granted the arrival of the next meal and pay check. But millions of people do not have this luxury, and humanism needs to speak to them as well.

A similar weakness is the entrepreneurial quality of his humanism. Later in the same book, he declares: "The full life in the last analysis is not one of quiet contentment, but the active display of my powers and of their development and expansion." (1974, 102) To succeed, he went on, is not simply to fulfil one's aims, but to exceed them. Without doubt, these are the qualities that drove Kurtz to achieve so many valuable things. But as a model for everyone–as he maintained it was–is to limit the appeal of his humanism to ambitious go-getters. As the Marxist philosopher Mihailo Marković, noted, while anyone *can* have the potential to communicate meaningfully and to act creatively, it is a different matter what someone "crushed by the misery of the whole social environment" might actually choose to do. (Storer, 32) It certainly need not be directed toward something as abstract as self-realization.

The paradox with all this is Kurtz's undeniable record of practical aid and support for humanism outside the United States, notwithstanding a certain blindness to the restricted appeal of his brand of humanism outside of the prosperous West. He was a leading figure in re-orienting the IHEU to look beyond the confines of Northern Europe. And since founding the Center for Inquiry in 1991, he has consistently worked to build viable humanist organizations around the world. Thousands of Prometheus Books titles have been donated to impecunious humanist groups in developing countries. It is worth repeating: nobody has done more to build and support humanism outside the United States than Paul Kurtz. As the leading spokesman for planetary humanism, that seems to qualify as his most impressive achievement.

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