



The Enlightenment



A Publication of the
Humanist Association of London and Area
An Affiliate of Humanist Canada (HC)

Volume 7

Number 4

July 2011

Paul Kurtz – Philosopher, Educator, Author, Humanist

Paul Kurtz, born in 1925 in Newark N. J., has been called the father of secular humanism. He is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, founder and past chairman of the Committee for Skeptical Enquiry, the Council for Secular Humanism, the Center for Inquiry, and Prometheus Books. He has published over 800 articles or reviews and has authored over 50 books. For many years he was also the editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine. As a result of all these activities and the numerous conferences he organized and chaired, he was probably, and still may be, the most famous humanist in the United States. In 1999 he was given the International Humanist Award by the International Humanist and Ethical Union. The asteroid (6629) *Kurtz* was named in his honour.



Paul Kurtz

On May 18th, 2010, Kurtz resigned from all the positions mentioned above due to tension with these bodies over the future of humanism. Kurtz is urging a more accommodationist approach to religion while his successors argued for a more adversarial approach. This was after he issued his new “Neo-Humanist Statement of Secular Principles and Values: Personal, Progressive and Planetary,” on March 2nd, 2010. The Preamble to this document states: Our planetary community is facing serious problems that can only be solved by cooperative global action. Fresh thinking is required. Humanity needs to reconstruct human values in the light of scientific knowledge. We introduce the new term “Neo-Humanism” to present a daring new approach. The Next Step Forward states: There are various forms of religious and non-religious beliefs in the world. On one end of the spectrum are traditional religious beliefs; on the other “the new atheism.” Not enough attention is paid to humanism as an alternative. The new statement advocates non-religious secular Neo-Humanism. The Sixteen Recommendations and the full document can be viewed online at www.paulkurtz.us

This document is of course a sequel to others of a similar nature. Humanist Manifesto I was issued in 1933 and dealt with humanism as a religious movement. Humanist Manifesto II was written in 1973 by Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson to update and replace HM I. Humanist Manifesto III, published in 2003 is much shorter, listing just 6 primary beliefs. HM II and III were published by the American Humanist Association. Humanist Manifesto 2000, in book form rather than essay-length, was published in 2000 by the Council for Secular Humanism.

President's Remarks

During the months of May and June, the members of HALA put on two public events on "The Evolution of Belief" at the Wolf Performance Hall. I think we would all agree that these were a great success, attracting a good attendance, and generating a great deal of interest and discussion. I was particularly pleased to see such a large number of young people in the audience. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those who worked hard on the organization and set-up of the events, helping to make everything run smoothly. Events such as these allow us to fulfill our mandate as a charitable organization to educate the public about Humanism, and we can look forward to more of these in coming years. In this issue of the *Enlightenment*, Don Hatch has once again put together a very interesting and thought-provoking series of articles. Goldie Emerson has written a very insightful essay on the ethical importance of placing constraints on capitalism to avoid excessive disparity between the rich and poor. Don McCuaig has provided some practical suggestions for preparing for death with dignity. Most of us try to avoid thinking about death as much as possible, but it is important to be realistic about these issues. This issue also contains a very enlightening essay on the meaning of secularism and its importance in a democratic society. After a cool, wet spring, it looks like the summer weather has finally arrived. I wish you all a very enjoyable and refreshing summer, and I look forward to seeing you all at our HALA picnic in July. ~ Rod Martin

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second Wednesday of the months September to July inclusive at 7:30 p.m. Please use the rear door off the parking lot. *The Enlightenment*, edited by Don Hatch, is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. Please note: We reserve the right to edit and publish articles at our discretion.

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New members are welcome. Contact Membership Secretary, Walter Heywood (519) 434-9237 e-mail wjheywood@yahoo.ca Membership fees are listed below.

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Single	\$40	\$22	\$20	\$10
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Life	\$700			

Capitalism Needs Controls to be Moral

By Goldwin Emerson

Extreme differences between wealth and poverty raise important ethical questions about equality, justice, and compassion. In general, good ethical principles urge those with great wealth to share some of it with those who have little. The definition of wealth could be extended beyond money and include housing, food, health care, education, and other measures of well-being. These features represent wealth, but their absence constitutes poverty.

Government policies such as the collection of income taxes are meant to equalize, or at least narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Whether this approach is effective in limiting the highest income earners is questionable. It may, however, reduce the differences between the living standards of middle and lower income earners. On the other hand, harmonized sales taxes (HST) do *not* have the effect of bringing the poor and the rich closer together.

Except for the relatively few philanthropists, those who are wealthy argue that they have worked hard to acquire their wealth. Many prosperous citizens credit wise management such as planning ahead, judicious decisions, and expedient savings. Lower income citizens see the world differently. They view their work as being at least equally hard and with few luxuries or comforts. Some educational goals lie beyond their reach and health care such as dental work, eye examinations and nutritious food may not be within their means.

The wealthy speak fondly of the *capitalist* system, a term used almost synonymously with democracy, although capitalism also flourishes within both communism and dictatorships. Unfortunately, the inequalities between wealth and poverty in western world capitalism have grown in the past forty years.

Long ago, Adam Smith (1723-1790) in his *book Wealth of Nations* addressed the problems caused by extreme capitalism. Although Adam Smith is frequently quoted by hard-nosed capitalists, he was conscientious in his desire to help the poor. As well as being a distinguished economist, Adam Smith was for a time a moral philosopher at the University of Glasgow. He empathized with the burdens of the labouring class and wrote about the need to develop systems of sharing. To paraphrase his plan, it can be described simply as the government developing controls that worked like a "bungee cord." When the wealthy became too far above the middle wage earners, the government could use regulations to draw the wealthy back down to a level closer to the middle wage earners. When the poor became too needy, regulations pulled their level up like a bungee cord, towards the middle wage earners.

Another writer of the same era, John Ruskin (1819-1900), expressed, in his book *Unto This Last*, the need to restrict the limits of extreme capitalism. He tells the story of a village blacksmith who shod horses for the price of \$1.00 per shoe. When a stranger came through town with his horse, which had lost a shoe, the unfortunate traveler was more or less at the mercy of the blacksmith. There was no solution except to replace the missing shoe before he could travel further. In this case, the unethical blacksmith put his most aggressive capitalist impulses to work and charged \$10.00 per shoe. Ruskin used this story to point out that capitalism needs controls if it is to be a moral system.

We can't easily make comparisons between today's prices and those of 100 years ago, but we can question how much is too much for today's highest paid workers. An interesting article

appeared in the Jan. 7th London Free Press about Senator Raymond Lavigne, who earned nearly \$390,000 in salary over the past three years and ran up an expense account of approximately \$320,000 for the same period, a total of \$703,855. Also in the Free Press, we read of Canadian executives earning over \$24,217,040 in one year. In 2009, Hunter Harrison earned \$17,343,160 as Chief Executive Officer of Canadian National Railways. Reading this, I thought about the old rusty green CNR overpass on Oxford Street. I wondered how much it would cost Hunter Harrison to arrange for a much-needed new paint job.

Since the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, perhaps it is time to bring out that ethical bungee cord again.

The Lord's Prayer at Ontario Municipal Council Meetings

On September 23rd, 1999, the Ontario Court of Appeal declared the practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer at municipal council meetings to be illegal in the case of Freitag versus the town of Penetanguishene, and contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Notwithstanding the Court's decision, a number of municipalities have continued with the recitation, imposing the prayer on everybody, be they Christian or not. Secular Ontario is challenging several of the communities that are still reciting the prayer at council meetings, and one of these communities is Hastings Highlands whose council meets in the village of Maynooth, situated 20 kilometers north of Bancroft. Secular Ontario member Dagmar Gontard-Zelinkova is actively in the process of pointing out the illegality of opening meetings with this prayer, and on January 26th 2011 she made a logical, well-thought-out presentation to the council, explaining why they should cease reciting the Lord's Prayer at future meetings. Well before the meeting she sent each councilor an essay on secularism (printed below) in order that they be aware of what secularism is all about. Neither Dagmar's essay nor speech struck a favourable cord, and after a vote council decided to continue with the prayer. On March 10th, 2011, Dagmar's lawyer sent council a "cease and desist" letter saying that non-compliance with the 1999 ruling would result in taking the council to court. They are still waiting to hear council's decision.

SECULARISM AS A GUARANTOR OF SOCIAL HARMONY

By Dagmar Gontard-Zelenkova

On November 26th, 2010, one of the Munk Debates brought together two men from different ideologies, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, a convert to Catholicism, and Christopher Hitchens, one of the world's best-known atheists. The title of the debate was: "Be it resolved, religion is a force for good in the world." The debate proceeded smoothly, with both debaters showing a high degree of civility and respect for each other. Thanks to this respectful approach on totally conflicting opinions, those who watched or listened will remember a harmonious encounter of two courteous adversaries.

I submit that this harmony amid divergent ideas is the very essence of secularism. This may come as a surprise to those who claim: "secularism aims at the eradication of religions." It is obvious that etymological confusion plays a role here, stemming probably from the common misconception of the so-called "secularization of society", where secularization is equated with atheism.

A brief etymological reminder is necessary. The term 'secularism' was coined by the nineteenth century English Humanist George Jacob Holyoake. Initially it was a socio-political program, aimed at defining sources of knowledge, best suited to informing leaders of society in making choices in areas such as education, politics, art, etc. Over time, the term evolved and secularism has been used to describe various concepts, one of them being the relation between state and religion, in other words: the separation of Church and State. In this concept, secularism is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Interestingly, in France, the term 'laïcité' is being threatened by etymological confusion as well. Indeed, under the constant pressure of the ever-increasing demands for religious accommodations, we now hear such terms as "open laïcité," "hard laïcité," "political laïcité," to name just a few. Confusion reigns supreme, yet the French law of 1905 successfully achieved an official separation between Church and State, thus putting an end to centuries of bloody inter-religious fights.

As a secularist, I want to make it very clear, I am promoting secularism, without any adjective. I am promoting the separation of Church and State, I am not advocating the death of religions. It is important to know what we are talking about. The concept of secularism – or laïcité - boils down to two words: separation and respect. In this conception, secularism relies on the division between private life, where various beliefs belong, and the public sphere, in which each individual should appear simply as a citizen equal to all other citizens, devoid of ethnic, religious or other particularities. This concept of secularism does not imply any hostility of the government with respect to religion. It does imply that government and political issues should be kept separate from religious ones. This is meant to protect both - the government from any possible interference from religious organizations, and, vice versa, to protect the religious organizations from political quarrels and controversies.

A recent survey of history shows that quarrels, disguised under the religious cloak, are springing up again. In God's name, killings are taking place all over the world. In the Middle East, Christians are being massacred, while in Mumbai, where they have been peacefully living for many centuries, the Jews are now targeted. Not so long ago, in Florida, a minister of a small religious congregation threatened to engage in a histrionic show of burning Korans. In British Columbia, under the pretense of religious requirements, legalizing of polygamy is demanded. In other places, frustrated faith groups strike alliances and lash out against atheists. All over the world, under the pretense of "religious freedom," inconceivable criminal acts are tolerated due to political correctness. And, everywhere, religions compete with each other – while, in the UK, the private Muslim schools, financed by Saudi Arabia, educate children about chopping off of hands, in Southern Ontario the Gideons insist on distributing Bibles in public schools and the Muslims claim the right to distribute Korans.

What is the driving force behind this? Could it be that people are looking for some kind of identity? For some sort of community? What about those who are turning religion into a badge of identity, used in opposition to others – the burqua being such an example of religion being totally hijacked. What is it that we are observing here? Isn't it some kind of religious nationalism? I contend that, once we take the theological clothes from these movements, they are, simply, political and social movements.

It seems to me that something important is obfuscated here. Something that harks back into the infancy of humanity, something that dives deep into our subconscious, and that something is the

profound yearning for spirituality. No matter what sources we get it from – some may get it from sending prayers to some supernatural being while others may get it from nature, by simply listening to babbling brooks – no matter what external envelope of any particular faiths this need for spirituality takes on, it is part of each of us. And this yearning for spirituality, this need, is documented scientifically. “God is a state of mind,” writes Dr. Robert Buckman in one of his books. Let me quote him: “Our brains lead us to readily undergo experiences that we have chosen to call god or spirituality or oneness-with-the-universe or similar words or names. If the limbic system is activated by means of the right temporal lobe, a person will have an experience of spiritual or divine nature. God is – literally – a state of mind.”

An interesting conclusion, based on the experiments conducted by scientists worldwide, one among them being our Professor Michael Persinger, in Sudbury. It’s also in line with the conclusions of Daniel Baril, a Quebec anthropologist, who sees religion as a by-product of evolution and contends that it would take the mutation of our species to make religion disappear. All this may be contradicting Sam Harris, who heralded the “end of faith” in his book of the same name, in 2004.

Be that as it may, from the secularist point of view, this theological-philosophical-biological debate is certainly interesting, but should be left with the experts in related fields. The secularist’s interest lies elsewhere – in separation and respect. There are some fourteen hundred religions worldwide and, of course, they can’t all be “accommodated.” But the secularist is not interested in weighing their respective merits, or in establishing their hierarchy. Secularism strives to guarantee the right of people, of all peoples of the world, to choose and practice the religion of their choice, or not to choose any. In order to avoid inter-religious fighting, the secularist invites people to worship in places designated to the specific religions. Faith should remain a private affair! From the secularist point of view, separation and respect are the cornerstones of social harmony.

Separation and respect! Those two words have to be hammered in again and again! In this regard, I believe, the debate of November 26th, 2010, is of utmost importance. It is also a shining example of what a secular state can accomplish. The debate was broadcast worldwide, and I was happy to read comments coming from countries beyond the Atlantic Ocean. They read: “Well done, Canada! Way to go!” One very interesting comment came from Quebec. It read:

“It was a real joy to see two men of this caliber fencing with superlative English prose. This type of debate is quintessential to our common Western civilization. This type of public civilized debate about humanity’s deepest convictions does not exist outside the West: not in China, not in Arabia, not in Africa, not yet in Latin America or Russia. It is to the credit of Canada that such a debate did happen in one of our cities rather than within the USA or Britain, as one would have expected, considering the origins of the speakers. With this debate, Canada is unexpectedly taking a kind of lead in reasserting Western values.” In case you are wondering, Christopher Hitchens won the debate.

As a secularist and as a Canadian, I am proud of being a citizen of this great country.

Dagmar Gontard-Zelinkova is a francophone, European by birth. She lived in Europe for about 20 years and in Africa for another 20 before making Canada her home. She is a member of Humanist Canada, Secular Ontario, the Centre for Inquiry, the Canadian Secular Alliance, and

has volunteered for Dying With Dignity. She is a lover of nature and animals and lives on a beautiful wooded property on Baptiste Lake.

Preparations

The subject of death is one that most people are reluctant to talk about, but eventually it cannot be avoided. In the following article, HALA member Don McCuaig offers sound advice on how thoughtful preparation can ease the anxiety resulting from the death of a family member.

ON THE GOOD(?) DEATH

By Don McCuaig

Throughout history references have been made to the achievement of the "good death". In *Ars Moriendi* (1415, 1450 CE), two Latin texts prescribed methods to obtain this goal according to the Christian principles of the time. Following the horrors of the Black Death that swept Europe (peaking 1348-50 CE) the Church sought to provide advice as to the proper preparation for death. This would ensure the soul's preparation for life hereafter. It was one of the first books, complete with woodcuts, to be printed with the new movable type and hence was widely distributed throughout Europe. The above, however, were 'nouveaux arrivées' relative to the ancients for whom the passage of the soul had long been a concern. The Egyptian Book of the Dead (1240 BCE), Thanatos of Greek mythology, the elaborate funerary and burial practices of the Romans, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead (8th century CE), all preceded the *Ars Moriendi*.

Current philosophies have developed to include the concept of "dying with dignity". For some individuals this may include a medically-induced death. Certain jurisdictions (Netherlands and Oregon for example) have such legislation with stringent guidelines in place. In the book, *How We Die* (1994) Sherwin B. Nuland, who taught surgery and history of medicine at Yale University for three decades, analyzes all aspects of how we die. Essentially a human is "an obligate aerobe" - we need oxygen. Some 85% of the aging population dies from one or a combination of only seven major entities: arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), hypertension (high blood pressure), adult-onset diabetes, obesity, mental depression states such as Alzheimer's and other dementia, cancer and decreased resistance to infection. Concomitant with technical advances in medical techniques and procedures, some 80% will end life in a hospital, frequently alone and often connected by tubing to machines that sustain the living state. Is this the "good death" about which we read? Irving Layton, our Canadian 'man of letters' commented that "It's not death that worries me; it's the preliminaries."

If we know about an ailment, does it not behoove us to have it researched as to its manifestations and its eventualities? This can provide a framework for our response to various palliative efforts. To quote Michel de Montaigne (1533-92 CE) "To begin depriving death of its great advantage over us, let us adopt a way clear contrary to the common one; let us frequent it, let us get used to it..." While we cannot totally chart our death, by thinking about it we may be able to ameliorate the situation for ourselves and for our survivors by establishing and making known our wishes. Have you considered under what conditions:

- (a) You would NOT wish heroic measures, e.g. CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation)?
- (b) You would insist on DNR (Do Not Resuscitate)?

Arriving at the point of this type of decision-making regarding death guidelines will require careful assessment of several factors. Hope, which Dr. Nuland defines as an abstruse concept that can

range in expectation from the very highest to the very slightest, is a consideration. A doctor may hope that a treatment may cure or that a cure may yet be found. Does this rather reflect a reluctance to bring bad news that may cause a patient to lose 'hope'? Does retention of a 'false hope' result in denial which in turn may cause those around you to maintain a facade, impairing communication about the reality of the situation? The time to contemplate some of these issues is when one is relatively well. You have the right to assume control and to effect self-determination. As part of your control, you are entitled to weigh any medical procedures offered and, in light of your research, deliberations and philosophy, decide whether to accept or reject. In Dr. Nuland's experience, one of the negatives associated with high-tech medicine is that death (some 80%) frequently occurs in hospitals and often people die alone. Increasingly, palliative care is available where, through proper pain control, death can occur in the more comforting setting of a hospice or even at home.

In fashioning more (even some) control over the process of dying, here are some ideas/suggestions: Have you discussed your thinking and beliefs with your medical doctor? With your spiritual contact? Have family and survivors been apprised of your wishes and to what extent do they concur? Have you completed a Medical Power of Attorney? Have you arranged for Legal Power of Attorney? Have you decided on the type of funeral arrangements you would prefer and has this been communicated (in print, as well) to someone likely to follow your wishes? You may even have ideas which others deem extreme. Although medically-assisted death is illegal in Canada, you do have the right to refuse food and water if institutionalized. There are a number of other rights, too - such as the right to sufficient pain control, and the right to stop or refuse treatment.

Also, the organization, Dying With Dignity, has a free Client Support Program to help people explore and understand all their end-of-life options whereby appropriate staff and professionally-trained volunteers provide information regarding legal end-of-life options, including that of hastening death. They do not encourage anyone to end life, do not provide the means to do so, and do not actively assist in a person's death. They do, however, provide information and emotional support to any client who is facing a terminal or incurable progressive physical illness and who requests their support.

And in death, Robert Frost's words:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
Miles to go before I sleep,
Miles to go before I sleep."

Perhaps the journey's end may be closer than expected. And maybe it's not so much "ars moriendi," but rather to a greater degree now, "ars viviendi", the art of living. While Dylan Thomas urged us "do not go gentle into that good night", an alternative is to go at least informed, and somewhat prepared.

Don McCuaig is the Chair of The Memorial Society of London. This group offers unbiased information for those who wish to pre-plan a funeral, in order that consumers can navigate the complex and sometimes confusing world of funeral arrangements. For instance, they can provide instructions on how to bypass funeral homes and reduce the cost of funerals from thousands to hundreds of dollars. Don has written two other articles on dying – The Last Passage and Should Your Last Act be One of Pollution?. Don's working career was spent as a high school teacher in London, first as a math teacher, and later as a career and personal counselor.