

America's blue-collar workers live like Mellons and Rockefellers. As Harvard's Edward Banfield observed in the 1960s, poverty in America is mostly a matter of relative deprivation. Our poor do not have as much as those better off; but they have vastly more than ever before, and they are not living on the hem of death as in past centuries. Moreover, America's poor would be

considered middle class through much of the world, that is to say in many areas under the ministrations of Marxist economists. Yet there is a mystery about what the *Times* rightly describes as U.R.P.E.'s growing influence. Marxist economics and Marxism in general have receded in Europe even among the intelligentsia. Only in England does Marxism hang on. But in America,

particularly in our universities, it seems to be growing, notwithstanding its cruel history and impoverished present. How does one account for this?

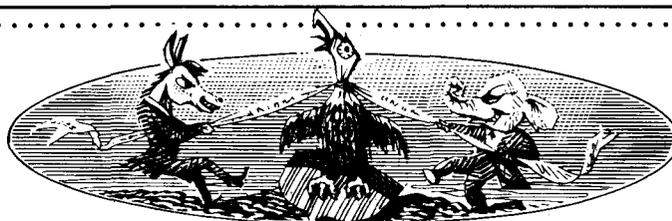
The only explanation for the difference between Marxism's popularity here and in Europe that I can devise is that American academics have only heard the Marxist jingles. They have never been very close to the grim Marx-

ist reality. What is more, Marxism promises excitement. Let us face it, it must have been thrilling at this summer's U.R.P.E. meeting when one stentorian economist rose from the audience and called for arming America's proletariat. Yet that feat has already been achieved by the National Rifle Association. Once again, the private sector delivers. □

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## CAPITOL IDEAS

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### HUMANISTS AND HERETICS

by Tom Bethell

At the time of the Pope's visit the secular humanists met in conference at the American University, barely a mile from where I live. There was to be "dialogue" with Roman Catholic theologians, discussions of humanist values, and an awards banquet, complete with an unmasking of those notorious weeping icons.

A few years ago there was a half-hearted pretense that secular humanists, like unicorns, really don't exist. (See, for example, "The Right's New Bogeyman," by Kenneth Woodward, *Newsweek*, July 6, 1981. "... The target is what Christian fundamentalists label 'humanism'—and their campaign against anyone they regard as a humanist threatens to become as virulent as the anti-Communist crusade of the 1950s.") I decided to confirm their existence with my own eyes.

The conference was organized by Paul Kurtz and *Free Inquiry*, the quarterly magazine he has edited since 1980. A professor of philosophy at the State University of New York (Buffalo), Dr. Kurtz drafted "Humanist Manifesto II" (1973), wrote the "Secular Humanist Declaration" (1980), edited the *Humanist*, and published a collection of his articles under the title *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (1983). Sidney Hook of the Hoover Institution says that Kurtz is "the number one secular humanist in America," reserving for himself the number two position.

Prof. Kurtz himself gave me a friendly welcome, telling me that *Free Inquiry* has 30,000 subscribers. A table was loaded down with humanist literature,

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for example a booklet entitled "A Humanist Funeral Service," by Corliss Lamont. A dean of the university opened the proceedings: "We are with you in your quest for inquiry and openness and development."

I had assumed that secular humanists were first cousins to libertarians, but this turned out to be a mistake. The defining characteristic of secular humanism is the espousal of a worldview from which God is excluded. All other considerations are subordinated to that. On the second afternoon there was discussion of various Christian legal challenges to the public school curricula (federal courts have recently sided with the Tennessee and Alabama school boards in these suits). Someone suggested that the humanists might want to embrace the libertarian solution to such educational dilemmas: vouchers. That way the Christians could have their schools and the atheists theirs.

But the humanists weren't interested. One man from Minnesota told me later that they would view such a proposal with as much suspicion as a constitutional convention. Such a reaction in turn leads Christians to suspect that what appeals to humanists about the U.S. system of public education, from which religion is now so zealously excluded, is precisely its compatibility with the atheist worldview: training grounds, presumably, for more secular humanists.

"Humanist Manifesto I," published in 1933, oddly purports to found a "vital, fearless and frank religion... shaped by the needs of this age." But there was no pie in the sky for John Dewey, Lester Mondale (Walter's brother), and their thirty-six co-signers.

"The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values."

A preface to "Manifesto II" notes that the earlier document had been "far too optimistic": Nazism and "other totalitarian regimes" had intervened. Science itself had "sometimes brought evil." The revised version also dropped the idea that a new religion was a-borning. (Indeed, fundamentalists are wasting their time trying to claim that Sec-Hum is a religion, its ideas thus excludable from schools on First Amendment grounds. The claim by all its leading exponents that humanism is not a religion must be taken as conclusive.)

To their credit, secular humanists insist on definition, so that the notions "true" and "false" still have meaning in their philosophy. I found myself rather admiring their unflinching adherence to their bleak worldview. Dr. Kurt Baier, a professor of philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, may have even slightly shocked this crowd (of about 200) when he said: "It could be worthwhile to snuff out the fag-end of a life."

It was not a young audience—a good many of them wearing Block Bork buttons—and of course secular humanists are old-fashioned in insisting on identity and truth-in-labeling: actually "orthodox" values. They are in this sense "card-carrying," like equally old-fashioned Communists who believed you had to join the party in order to promote the millennium.

At the end of one session, a woman came to the microphone and said she

was a Unitarian. Young people in the church say to her: "This liberal religion is okay, but what sustains you in a time of crisis?" How would the panel respond?

"Well, the question is a difficult one," said Dr. Baier. "But you must ask that person why he or she finds life empty. Sometimes that question comes from neurotics who are self-centered." He added that it was hard to give a starry-eyed answer. "Some may have physical impediments, so it's difficult to give them hope."

"Still, there is a recurring emptiness."

"These people have a hidden 'must,'" said Albert Ellis, award-winning sexologist, now heading something called the Institute for Rational-Emotive Therapy. "There *must* not be these crises."

"Whining and screaming about crises," someone said.

"They can always happily kill themselves," said another.

Baier, from Austria, and an award-winner that night as a "defender of our humanist frame of reference," said this was a "very important question. The real problem for these people is the fact of death. They do not want to die. Religion gives us consolation that we will not."

The moderator then said that we were out of time but that "we will come back to this question of the meaning of life," which "needed to be addressed more fully."

Secular humanists often refer to their small membership, sometimes to their considerable influence. Paul Kurtz said at the outset: "*Free Inquiry* represents a point of view held by tens of millions of secularists and human-

ists in the United States: non-religious people, independent free thinkers, nominal Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and others."

The first day of the conference was devoted to a "dialogue with our Roman Catholic colleagues," most of them purveyors of a theology liberated from the moorings of meaning. Among them were ex-priest Dan Maguire and his wife Marjorie (once a novice in a

nunnery). By some Vatican oversight or Jesuitical chicanery, Dan is permitted to teach theology at Marquette University. One would be inclined to call the Maguires heretics if it weren't so clear they would take it as a compliment. Dan likes to say that he was in the confessional one day when his future wife came in and said: Don't knock sin. Come on out and try it. Their first date, one might say.

In the all-too-short "dialogue" time left over after academic speeches, it was interesting to note the frustration the humanists evidently felt trying to pin down the elusive Maguire. Here indeed, they surely felt, was an ally, a "soul" mate, a non-believer ready to repudiate almost any doctrine. Yet he rejected labels, eluded definition, assumed different shapes, believed his words to mean whatever he wanted when he ut-

tered them; and so his claim to be a believer, without ever having to say what he believed in, drove the humanists to distraction.

Maguire, without a doubt, understood that he enjoyed the subversive leverage of teaching at a (nominally) Catholic university. And this made him useful to the forces of secularism, but only so long as he remained inside the church (just as Malcolm Muggeridge probably had more pro-Christian influence outside it). Maguire boasted that the academic vice-president at Marquette had told him: "Dan Maguire is free to follow his mind wherever it leads him. There is no limit to the pursuit of truth at this university."

But the humanists could not easily follow Maguire's mind. One man wondered how Maguire could both call himself a humanist (as Maguire had), and yet believe in God. "As I understand Christianity and traditional religion," the perplexed one said, "Christians must believe in the divinity of Jesus, the Resurrection, and a life hereafter." Yet these were "totally in opposition to humanism."

"I heard that same statement when I was debating members of the Moral Majority," said the complacent Maguire.

Another questioner asked why those on the panel weren't Protestants. "They say, 'I don't believe in the Trinity, in the Resurrection.' I say why the hell are you a Catholic, then? Most of my Catholic friends are more like you. They enjoy being heretics in the Catholic Church. I just wondered if that was your strategy?"

Maguire: "There's no unity, there are multiple Catholicisms. Partly I'm a cultural Catholic in the same way that I'm an American—and I despise an awful lot that my country represents." He added superfluously: "the labels are meaning less and less."

Fred Edwords of the American Humanist Association and tireless scourge of creationists came to the microphone next. "What is so baffling to many secular humanists, especially those that came out of the church," he said, "is that we're hearing from you all of these wonderful stories about how much room for dissent there is in the church, following your reasoning wherever it leads. I'm inclined to ask you this. Looking at the different doctrines you have rejected, can you be a Catholic and reject them all? And still say publicly, 'I am a Catholic?' And if so, what does it mean?"

"That's a tough one," someone on the panel said.

It seems that when the bishops shrink from excommunication, or (as in the U.S.) oppose it as repressive, it

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is left to the secular humanists to step forward and insist on a little clarity and definition.

"When you say 'reject the doctrines,' I still keep hearing kind of nineteenth-century dogmas," said Maguire in reply, "and worrying about the natural versus the supernatural and then ticking off elements of the old Creed." He babbled on about re-envisioning the world, about "mystery in personal terms," and the "God option," concluding that he would never call himself "exclusively" Catholic anymore because he was "comfortable with other groups." His thick, smothering smokescreen of words seemed to have meaning because his sentences parsed, but in fact they had no real meaning at all.

I could understand why Sidney Hook, number two in the Sec-Hum hierarchy, was so disgusted with liberated theologians and would rather debate old-fashioned Thomists.

There is a real and intriguing division here between the Heretics and the Humanists and I regret to say that the Heretics represent the wave of the future. The secular millions are more in tune with their soft gibberish than with the hard-edged choices the Humanists would force on us.

At the Awards Banquet on Saturday night Richard Dean at my table told me he was a member of Friends Free of Theism, a group that meets in Minneapolis on solstices and equinoxes. A doctor from Boca Raton told me that "once you get rid of the repressive tenets of religion, you get rid of the cause of war."

"Man has to solve his own problems without the help of the deity," said Richard Dean.

"It's nice to have a big daddy to lean on," said another.

Speaking from the podium, Paul Kurtz said that next year the Humanists would perform "sort of an exorcism," putting "all of our condemnations in a box and letting them go over the [Niagara] Falls. How do you like that?" (Hearty applause.)

Shawn Carlson, completing his Ph.D. in physics at U. C. Berkeley, was the concluding speaker. He had brought with him a picture of the Mona Lisa thick enough to conceal some contraption in the back, canvas stapled over it. Referring to the recently weeping icon at St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church in Chicago as a "not-so-miraculous miracle" (a representation of the Virgin Mary, painted in 1962, "wept" an oily substance for seven months, from December 6, 1986, to July 7, 1987), Carlson said he could reproduce the effect. Seemingly planning to do so, he stood his Mona Lisa

on the podium. But she remained embarrassingly dry-eyed.

As it happened I had visited this Chicago church in February and the icon indeed was "weeping" when I was there. Moreover the pastor, Father Philip Koufos, took me behind the icon and there was nothing to be seen except the thin (dry) plywood backing of the icon—no contrivance was or possibly could have been hidden there. (He told

me more recently that more than a million people were anointed with the substance that flooded copiously from the eyes and fingers of this icon, and there have been "45 documented healings" as a result.)

I told Shawn Carlson this and he said: "I am not saying that weeping icons are not miracles." Only that he could reproduce the same effect. But his hadn't worked. The real one had.

He ended his performance by telling us that a couple of religious colleagues in the labs had told him he is "destined to go to hell." But, Carlson told the secular humanists assembled, this didn't worry him. "Because if I am going to hell, all of you are going to hell too." (Did the laughter have a somewhat hollow ring to it?)

"So," Carlson concluded, "see you in hell." □

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## SADAT'S GIFT

A decade later, measuring the change.

On a November evening a decade ago, Anwar Sadat boarded a plane in Egypt and flew into history. The Egyptian president knew the importance of the right sequence of events, timing, and the dramatic gesture. Four years earlier, in 1973, Sadat had shaken Israeli confidence and restored a measure of nationalist pride in Egypt by waging the battles known in the West as the Yom Kippur War. By 1975, Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy had helped secure a single step away from war with the completion of an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement accord on the Sinai Peninsula, in which the two governments agreed that the disputes between them would be resolved not "by military force but by peaceful means."

By early 1977, however, events were taking a turn for the worse. Sadat watched in dismay as Jimmy Carter busily planned for an international conference on the Arab-Israel dispute, a forum that would return the Soviets to a major role in the Middle East, set up a situation in which the more moderately inclined Arab governments would come under enormous pressure to make no concessions, and supply Israel's new conservative premier with a plausible excuse for rejecting peace talks.

So Sadat brought his message straight to Jerusalem. It is hard to recall the euphoria Sadat's visit caused. It was a move of unimagined boldness, a leap of historical faith. In Jerusalem and Cairo, it was a moment of hope. Perhaps the past did not have to be prelude to generations of endless war. Perhaps Arabs and Israelis could make a life together, build a region of peace and prosperity. Sadat in Jerusalem is still a signpost in the landscape of the

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Arab-Israel conflict, but the region it occupies is a lonely one, the road to which it points—direct negotiations, hard bargaining from positions of strength and security, mutual concessions—is one that few Middle Eastern leaders seem willing to travel down.

Ten years after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, how much has changed? What is his legacy? The peace treaty between Israel and the most powerful Arab state on its borders, achieved after sixteen months of tough negotiations, is intact. The psychological impact of a leading Arab nation, arguably the leading Arab nation, making peace with Israel has altered the terms of the debate. Many Arab states have come implicitly—if not explicitly—to accept Israel's right to exist in the region. Of course, the issue of the Palestinians and the occupied territories remains a grave dilemma, a knife pointed at the heart of Israeli democracy.

Ten years later, some of the lead players are gone from the stage. Sadat and Moshe Dayan—Israel's foreign minister during the negotiations—are

dead; Menachem Begin is in seclusion, his triumph with Egypt thwarted by the tragedy of Lebanon; Jimmy Carter, who played an invaluable role in holding the negotiations together once he realized that he would not get an international conference, has taken up a life of carpentry. Others have weathered the decade: Yasser Arafat still runs the multi-billion dollar conglomerate known as the PLO; Hafez Assad remains in power in Syria; King Hussein continues to rule Jordan. And a few of the Indians have become chiefs: Hosni Mubarak, Sadat's veep at the time, now governs an Egypt beset by economic difficulties and decay; Shimon Peres, then the Israeli opposition leader, now runs half the government.

Under a "rotation" deal worked out after the deadlocked 1984 elections, the center-left Peres shares power with the center-right Yitzhak Shamir, who in 1977 was a Begin lieutenant. The Peres half of the government, run from the foreign ministry, pushes hard for an international conference. In terms of domestic Israeli politics, Peres apparently is positioning himself as "the peace candidate" for the 1988 elections.

The Shamir half of the government, run from the prime minister's office and holding a slight edge, sticks to the Camp David approach of direct negotiations and generally takes a pessimistic view of peace talks.

With a divided Israel, an Egypt distracted by internal problems, and a PLO recently reunited with its radical offshoots, the outlook for peace is not on the surface promising. Although Jordan is trying to build support on the West Bank, and the Israelis are not standing in the way of this effort, most Palestinians in the territories are keen in their loyalty to Arafat, the man who, in their view, put the Palestinian cause on the international map. Syria remains a wild card: Assad has his hands full with internal economic problems, a militarily draining occupation of Lebanon, and the politically costly support of non-Arab Iran in its war against Arab Iraq. And, as Daniel Pipes forcefully demonstrated in the July issue of *Commentary*, it is inter-Arab rivalries, not Arab-Israel arguments, that shape Arab positions on the issue of the Palestinians and peace with Israel. The "sheer quantity of the feuding Arab participants," Pipes notes, "acts to prolong the conflict and prohibits a lasting peace."

As to the superpowers, the Soviet Union, frozen out of much of the action in the region in the 1970s, is now moving with intelligence and circumspection. It continues to aid radicals of many stripes—including Syrians, Libyans, and various PLO factions—but the financial leash is a tight one, and the clients know it. At the same time, Moscow is making soothing noises to moderates such as Jordan and Egypt, the nervous Kuwaitis, and the theocratic revolutionaries of Iran. The Soviets have benefited from Washington's disarray. For while the U.S. provided keen attention and a guiding hand during the Egypt-Israel initiative begun in 1977, in 1987 it is merely trying to keep a hand in

