

## Editorial: *in memoriam* Paul Kurtz

*Pe 21 octombrie 2012 a murit Paul Kurtz, important filozof american, părintele umanismului secular. Noua Revistă de Drepturile Omului a publicat două dintre textele sale referențiale dedicate umanismului secular și principiilor neo-umanismului secular, de o relevanță directă pentru gândirea și practica drepturilor omului. În anul 2008, Paul Kurtz a venit la București la invitația lui Beth Ciesielski, inițiatoarea și directoarea executivă a Centrului pentru Conștiință Critică din București. Filozoful a făcut o donație de carte și a vorbit studenților despre o lume rațională, mai dreaptă și mai fericită. În memoria lui Paul Kurtz, publicăm gândurile dedicate marelui dispărut de Beth Ciesielski.*

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On Sunday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, a great man who fought in and survived WWII died; the Philosopher Professor of Secular Humanism, Dr. Paul Kurtz, at age 86.

He contributed on a worldwide level to our understanding of the value of ideals. Dr. Kurtz championed liberal thinking concerning the separation of church and state; both crucial elements for a successful, open and tolerant country.

Dr. Kurtz was a true partner in promoting the concepts of progressive thinking, equal opportunity and justice for all, and against any ideology which seeks to control and conform people for religious or political purposes. He strongly supported the ideas of Free Thinking which emphasize the right to think for yourself and that all people are responsible for their lives, for being and doing good for others.

In 1973, Professor Kurtz drafted what came to be known as Humanist Manifesto II. In its best-known dictum, it declared, „*No deity will save us; we must save ourselves*”.

Dr. Kurtz visited Romania for his first and last time in the Spring of 2008. He already had an encyclopedic knowledge of the country’s history of occupation, a country which most people had not thought of in the 50 years of Stalin’s crushing, smothering embrace. But Dr. Kurtz was a man full of intellectual curiosity who valued the skill of questioning as a skeptic but not as a cynic. He warned against blind allegiance to an ideology or any leader as he had personally witnessed the terrible results of that in the Holocaust death camp of Dachau.

Dr. Kurtz instead affirmed the philosophy of „Joyful and Creative Exuberance” one of the titles of his 50 books and thousands of articles on how to live the full life of a decent, modest and idealistic person. He was also pragmatic in the best sense of the word, encouraging optimism, cooperation, compromise and compassion whenever possible, even when not deserved in the hopes that one day it would be.

Romania was the among the last of the former Soviet countries to break free from its imposed Soviet history and then only with the murder of its former president and his wife, the capriciously brutal Nicholas Ceaușescu. Who could have believed in the last days of his harsh regime when the Romanian Orthodox church was still such an obsequious dedicated partner in urging subservience of the people to the communist nationalism of dominance and control, while offering comfort and faith only in the afterlife... that one day a man opposed to superstition and unreason, Dr. Paul Kurtz, would come and speak openly to the students of the State University for Political Science in Bucharest (SNSPA) about the importance of Free Thought, Free Speech, personal responsibility, rationality, scientific inquiry, human rights and the separation of church and state to achieve a modern pluralistic democracy in which it was not your religious affiliation but your personal behavior that indicated your value and values.

Because of Dr. Kurtz, the Romanian Center for Critical Conscience (<http://www.constiinta-critica.ro/index.php>) was created and other humanists groups became stronger in their efforts to initiate dialogs with Romanians about the choices they must make for the future of their country regarding the need for European laws dealing with the fair treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, women, homosexuals and immigrants and what it meant to be part of a larger developing world where bigotry and prejudice were found predominately in the poorest of countries in terms of economic, education, social, and health standards. He was a true hearted visionary who inspired people everywhere to live the examined and positive life.

There is today a Dr. Paul Kurtz library located at SNSPA that is filled with many of his books and other books on the topics of humanism, secularism, philosophy, the equality of women, ethics, mythology, science and religion and being good without god. A populace educated in the techniques of compare and contrast; essential to all rational reasoning, is dangerous in that it cannot be easily made submissive by the pernicious dictates of others. His numerous and widely read books notwithstanding, what will be Paul Kurtz's long lasting legacy is his philosophy of life... to think, to analyze, to be equal in the legal and ethical treatment of others and not to spare on kindness, even for yourself. He urged people to understand that dissent from the presently accepted norms of society is far more important than the self-serving claims of religious blasphemy or hypocritical political cries of treason or unpatriotism, because societies, institutions and countries must change or they will stagnate and fossilize if they do not accept and encourage open debate and new ideas.

Dr. Kurtz also epitomized the importance of strength of character in never acting small, no matter how small you or your country may seem on the world stage. The culture of a country cannot depend only on its costumes or food or history, it must depend and promote the values of its people, even those who have already left its borders in search of a better life than offered in Romania even today. Romania will depend on the positive influence of its diaspora and worldwide friends as long as its political and religious leaders think they are not accountable to anyone. In that regard, Romania has a true friend in the philosophical wisdom of Dr. Paul Kurtz.

*Beth Ciesielski*