



STATEMENT DR503-1

**IMAGINE THERE'S NO HEAVEN:  
CONTEMPORARY  
ATHEISM  
SPEAKS OUT IN  
HUMANIST MANIFESTO 2000  
Part 1**

**BY BOB AND GRETCHEN PASSANTINO**

This article first appeared in the Volume 22 / Number 3 issue of the *Christian Research Journal*. For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

When John Lennon first penned his now famous lyrics, he was not so much denying God as affirming a golden planetary age he thought could be achieved through human effort toward peace, prosperity, and sharing. Imagine — if men and women loved each other enough that no one took advantage of anyone else. Imagine — a world in which war has been eradicated by multidiversity and cultural awareness. Imagine — a world where men, women, and children willingly conform to the same universal human rights spawned by biological and social evolution. Who needs God or heaven, when we can have Utopia here and "the world will live as one"?

This is precisely the world envisioned by people who believe that God, the supernatural, and life after death are untrue and/or irrelevant. As the nonreligious worldview gains greater acceptance and more adherents, it is increasingly important for Christians to reevaluate how *thinking* nonreligious people define themselves, understand reality, and approach the question of whether God exists.<sup>1</sup> This movement, loosely called "humanism," is composed of atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and doubters. The humanist movement is becoming increasingly sophisticated in its philosophical argumentation, political activism, and active engagement with Christians.

To understand and communicate the gospel clearly to humanists is an important part of apologetics. When Jesus commanded us to "make disciples" throughout the world,<sup>2</sup> he did not exclude those who present themselves as intellectually superior to believers. Jesus died for skeptical, philosophical thinkers as surely as he died for anyone else.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Skeptics regarding God are increasingly reluctant to accept the label "atheist," that is, one who believes that God *does not exist*. Skeptics realize that a commitment to this definition makes the atheist vulnerable to attack. The Secular Humanism Organization accepts the term "atheist," but instead of defining it as a conviction that God does not exist, defines it as an *absence* of belief.<sup>3</sup> The organization also broadens its ranks to include other terms that dismiss the relevance of any god or supernatural reality:

*Secular humanists typically describe themselves as atheist (without a belief in a god and uncertain as to the possibility)...Secular humanists do not rely upon gods or other supernatural forces to solve their problems or to provide guidance for their conduct. They rely instead upon the application of reason, the lessons of history, and personal experience to form an ethical/moral foundation and to create meaning in life.<sup>4</sup>*

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271  
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

There are several problems with trying to defend the label "atheist" as one who is convinced that God does not exist.

**Atheists.** First, an atheist is faced with proving a "universal negative," which is very difficult (but not always impossible) to do.<sup>5</sup> For example, in order to prove with complete certainty that there are no white crows anywhere in the universe, we would have to search every portion of the universe thoroughly and simultaneously (in case the white one flies away as we approach). By analogy, to prove with complete certainty that God does not exist would require virtually infinite knowledge of the material world and the immaterial world and anything hypothetically "beyond" both states of existence.

Second, the atheist must produce better alternative explanations to account for the wealth of empirical and scientific evidence that points to an intelligent designer. This entity certainly must be greater than the universe produced.

Third, most atheists are materialists, believing that the only reality is the physical universe. They find it difficult to address adequately the existence of nonmaterial realities, such as numbers, moral values, ideas, and consciousness. For these and other reasons, most unbelievers avoid the label "atheist."

**Agnostics.** Such God-doubters redefine the term "atheist" to mean "agnostic," equivalent to *nontheist*. Or they may simply prefer to say they are "agnostic," *having little or no knowledge* that would lead them to believe any god or gods exist. The term "agnostic" was devised by T. H. Huxley, who said that one must follow reason "as far as it can take you," but then, as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes, "frankly and honestly to recognize the limits of your knowledge."<sup>6</sup> Agnosticism may be applied in a limited way to a variety of worldview areas, although in this article we refer specifically to agnosticism about the existence of God.

Agnostics may argue that *they* do not have sufficient information to believe that God exists, but that such information might be possessed by someone else, and might, in fact, come into their possession in the future. This kind of agnostic is the easiest kind to talk with, because he or she is open to evaluating new arguments and evidence. This kind of agnostic is not predisposed against the gospel and is willing to consider changing his or her beliefs.

Other agnostics believe that no one can know at this time that God exists. They acknowledge, however, that it may become possible to know in the future (e.g., when science becomes sufficiently advanced, or humans evolve enough mentally and spiritually).

Some agnostics believe that it is *inherently impossible* to know if God exists. They might think that God is so "other" or qualitatively different that He is impossible to "know." They might argue from analogy that just as it is impossible for a snail to understand a mathematical formula, or for a man to understand what it is like to be a woman, so is it impossible for a human to understand or know God.

Another agnostic might argue that human language is based on human experiences in the material world, and so it is limited to describing things in the material world. Since God is immaterial, we can never use language that adequately describes Him, nor can He communicate His existence to us. Still other agnostics maintain that we can only *know* what we can test *empirically*, or with the senses, such as in a laboratory. Since God is immaterial (if He exists), He cannot be empirically discerned and therefore we can never know of His existence. These last two kinds of agnostics are the most difficult to communicate with, but even they can be challenged to consider the claims of Christianity. Like people everywhere, they have a conscience and are confronted with God's power and wisdom in His creation (see Rom. 1:20-32; 2:14-15).

**Skeptics.** Sometimes God-doubters merely refer to themselves as "skeptics," who *critically analyze objects, ideas, and events* as they encounter them, supposedly from a neutral position, without any preconceived bias, presupposition, or worldview. A related term is "rationalist," or someone who uses reason to come to conclusions in contrast to mere intuitions, experiences, emotions, or directives from others. When God-doubters call themselves "rationalists," they are usually assuming that one cannot be rational and religious. This is a false assumption.

Christians ought to be "skeptics" and "rational theists" in the sense that the Bible teaches us to "test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21-22) and "examine the Scriptures" (Acts 17:11).<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures accepted by Jews, Muslims, and Christians provide us with the standards of evidence or skeptical inquiry on which most legal systems today are based (see, e.g., Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Jesus repeats this principle of healthy skepticism (see Matt. 18:16; John 5:31-47; 8:14-18). This tradition of rational inquiry has been at the core of Christian theology for two thousand years.

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271  
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

When the humanist describes himself (or herself) as a skeptic, however, he means a skeptic of a certain kind. Specifically in this discussion, he means a skeptic who already *presupposes* that God's existence is irrelevant to the material reality around us and undetectable in any way, and that God is incapable of intervening in our world even if He does exist.

**Humanists.** While no one group of like-minded individuals controls or directly leads any other, the umbrella term under which most God-doubters gather is that of "humanism." The new *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, which speaks for nonreligious humanists, declares its "renewed confidence in the power of human beings to solve their own problems and conquer uncharted frontiers."<sup>8</sup> Sometimes humanists define themselves as "secular" humanists; that is, those who have no religious beliefs, practices, or considerations. Another self-definition concludes, "Humanists reject supernatural, authoritarian, and anti-democratic beliefs and doctrines."<sup>9</sup> The human-centeredness of secular humanism is abundantly clear in this statement:

*Free of supernaturalism [secular humanism] recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values — be they religious, ethical, social, or political — have their source in human experience and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.*<sup>10</sup>

Just as there are Christian skeptics and rational Christians, there can be Christian humanists, in a very limited sense of the term. Christian humanists place humanism within the context of a worldview in which God is the creator and sustainer of all things, and human beings who bear His image are capable of a creative and fulfilling existence. Nevertheless, the far more common use of the term humanist is to describe a God-doubter who seeks meaning to life and personal fulfillment within or among humans, without regard to anything supernatural, including God.

**Christian Approaches to the Humanist (Atheist) Worldview.** There are two ways we can approach humanists, or God-doubters. The first is to examine the humanist's philosophy of life and its foundation. The second is to examine rational arguments for and against the existence of God. This includes both critiquing the humanist case and defending one's own beliefs.

We should carefully examine the humanist's worldview and also attempt to discover if there is a rational or evidential justification for it. A humanist who depends on rational inquiry to discover truth should have some sort of justification for his faith in rational inquiry. In other words, does he have a reason for reason, or does he accept it by blind faith? Most rational people would agree that the humanist who responds "Reason just is," or "it's the inherent properties of matter," or "it's a survival mechanism of evolution," has not demonstrated an adequate justification for his worldview. Which is more reasonable — to believe that we can trust reason as a tool for discovering truth because a reasonable God gave us reason, or to believe that we can trust reason just because we can?

## THE LEADERS AND THEIR BELIEFS

**Paul Kurtz.** The foundational humanist document for the twenty-first century is the *Humanist Manifesto 2000 (HM2K)*. It was created by one of the world's leading secular humanists, Paul Kurtz, who was instrumental in formulating and promulgating previous versions of the Humanist Manifesto:

*Paul Kurtz is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, founder and chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), the Council for Secular Humanism, and Prometheus Books. He is a former Co-President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). BA, New York University; MA and Ph.D., Columbia University. He is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Humanist Laureate and President of the International Academy of Humanism.*<sup>11</sup>

**Other HM2K Leaders.** Signers of the *HM2K* represent a broad spectrum of academic professionals. British scientist Richard Dawkins, known popularly for his book *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence Reveals a Universe without Design*, in 1990 "received the Michael Faraday Award from the British Royal Society as 'the scientist who has done the most to further the public understanding of science.'"<sup>12</sup> Other signers include anthropologist Richard Leakey, physicist Sir Harold W. Kroto, International Space University chancellor Sir Arthur C. Clarke, Danish biophysicist Jens C. Skou, chemists Mario Molina and Herbert Hauptman, and numerous Nobel Laureate honorees.

**A Bird of a Different Feather: Madalyn Murray O'Hair.** Such academics stand in sharp contrast to some of the more colorful atheists of previous times. *American Atheists* founder Madalyn Murray O'Hair was known more for

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271  
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

her coarse language and rather outrageous outbursts against public displays of religion than for her intellectual prowess. She came to public attention in 1963, when her 1959 case involving her son reached the Supreme Court. In *Murray v. Curlett*, the Court outlawed mandatory prayer in public schools and provided the impetus for Murray's more-than-30-year career to create an America free *from* religion. Murray frequently debated in public, vociferously denouncing Christianity and championing the cause of atheism. She filed many lawsuits championing a religion-free American society, including the demand that American currency and coins no longer carry the words "In God We Trust."<sup>13</sup>

She seemed to alienate almost every other like-minded organization. The long-running animosity between American Atheists (O'Hair's organization) and the United Atheists as well as the Freedom from Religion Foundation is well known. One fellow-atheist critic noted, "Because she was the atheist most frequently on display, people thought that you had to be, you know, vulgar - and, well, how would you say it without being rude? — pugnacious."<sup>14</sup> Although she sometimes bragged that AA membership exceeded 75,000, it more accurately hovered at around 5,000.

In 1995 she and her close family<sup>15</sup> disappeared with large portions of the assets of her various organizations, and they are presumed murdered.<sup>16</sup> She was known, says journalist Louis Dubose, as "ballsy, fearless, principled, vulgar, courageous...the most hated woman in the world [and] the buxom bitch."<sup>17</sup>

**Other Atheist Luminaries.** Whether known for philosophical sophistication as Paul Kurtz or for unbridled anger as Madalyn Murray O'Hair, atheists are united by their dogmatic denial of all evidence for the existence of God and in their reverence for the supremacy of the materialist worldview. Notable atheists listed with documentation on the "Atheist Celebrities" Web site include philosophers (Thomas J. Altizer, Paul and Patricia Churchland, Paul Edwards, Antony Flew, Michael Martin, Kai Nielsen), scientists (Francis Crick, Richard Leakey, Stephen J. Gould), politicians (Fidel Castro), celebrities (Woody Allen, Ingmar Bergman, Bill Blass, Marlon Brando, Warren Buffett, George Carlin, Dick Cavett, George Clooney, Patrick Duffy, Katherine Hepburn, Arthur Miller, Jack Nicholson, Penn and Teller), businessmen (Bill Gates) and others whose names are well-known - or notorious (Larry Flynt, Bob Guccione, Derek Humphry, Jack Kevorkian, Marilyn Manson, Howard Stern).<sup>18</sup> Other well-known atheists/humanists include Michael Shermer, Dan Barker, Jim Lippard, and Steve Allen.

**Humanist Statements of Belief.** Among the many assertions by humanists about their beliefs, certain themes are held almost universally: (1) the existence of God and/or the supernatural is at best irrelevant and unknown; (2) human significance and fulfillment is achieved through human effort alone; (3) religion and belief in God are antithetical to genuine human endeavor and growth in knowledge of reality; and (4) material existence ("the world we live in") is the only reality we know or experience.

Humanists, then, are not neutral when it comes to belief in God, the supernatural, or any religion, including Christianity. Humanism is opposed to belief in God, accepting evidence for anything supernatural, and all forms of religious faith, especially Christian belief and practice. In the next issue, we will examine why humanists believe their presuppositions are reasonable and why they believe their antipathy for Christians and other religionists is justified. We will find that they fail on both counts.

American Atheists promotes a philosophy congruent with what we have already briefly defined. The current American Atheists creed declares:

*An Atheist loves himself and his fellow man instead of a god. An Atheist accepts that heaven is something for which we should work now — here on earth — for all men together to enjoy. An Atheist accepts that he can get no help through prayer, but that he must find in himself the inner conviction and strength to meet life, to grapple with it, to subdue it and to enjoy it. An Atheist accepts that only in a knowledge of himself and a knowledge of his fellow man can he find the understanding that will help to a life of fulfillment.*<sup>19</sup>

Other humanist organizations have similar refrains in their definitive statements. The Freedom from Religion Foundation states:

*No one can be a freethinker who demands conformity to a bible, creed, or messiah. To the freethinker, revelation and faith are invalid, and orthodoxy is no guarantee of truth....*

*Freethinkers are naturalistic. Truth is the degree to which a statement corresponds with reality. Reality is limited to that which is directly perceivable through our natural senses or indirectly ascertained through the proper use of reason....*

*Freethinkers know that meaning must originate in a mind. Since the universe is mindless and the cosmos does not care, you must care, if you wish to have purpose....*

*Freethinkers are convinced that religious claims have not withstood the tests of reason....Most freethinkers consider religion to be not only untrue, but harmful. It has been used to justify war, slavery, sexism, racism, homophobia, mutilations, intolerance, and oppression of minorities. The totalitarianism of religious absolutes chokes progress. . . . Secular humanism has no god, bible or savior. It is based on natural rational principles. It is flexible and relativistic — it is not a religion.<sup>20</sup>*

The American Humanist Association asserts that "we work for church-state separation, for understanding the universe using science and philosophy — without reference to a god or the supernatural, and for intellectually defending the rights of people who do not accept theistic beliefs."<sup>21</sup>

In a similar vein, the *Council for Secular Humanism* publishes "A Statement of Principles," which includes the following affirmations:

*We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.*

*We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.<sup>22</sup>*

The American Humanist Association ends its definition of humanism with the bold declaration, "Humanism is a philosophy, worldview, or life stance based on naturalism — the conviction that the universe or nature is all that exists or is real."<sup>23</sup>

The words of world-known writer and atheist, the late Isaac Asimov, former president of The American Humanist Association, starkly represent humanism's rejection of God:

*I have never, in all my life, not for one moment, been tempted toward religion of any kind. The fact is that I feel no spiritual void. I have my philosophy of life, which does not include any aspect of the supernatural and which I find totally satisfying. I am, in short, a rationalist.<sup>24</sup>*

**A Massive Presupposition with No Justification.** Each of the preceding definitions, declarations, and assertions about humanism (and tangentially about Christian theism) assumes certain universal standards but provides no rational explanation for those universal standards or for why we should accept them without justification.

The core of humanism is the conviction that the means to personal development, human fulfillment, and global advancement is only to be found in humanity's efforts within a completely naturalistic world where the only reality is matter. But nowhere does the humanist convincingly explain how or why he or she knows this to be true. If humanity is nothing more than a relatively short-lived stage in the long process of evolution (the development of all things from energy and matter in random motion over time), then what justification do we have for thinking that in our species lies the salvation and fulfillment of the world? Perhaps humanist scientist Richard Dawkins is not too far off when he accuses the *HM2K* of "speciesism," or unwarranted species self-centeredness.<sup>25</sup> Speaking about the *HM2K* statement on universal human rights he remarks: "Its ethical provisions are unquestioningly speciesist. The *Manifesto* assumes, without discussion or question, that the only beings worthy of ethical consideration are members of the species *Homo sapiens*. I find this unevolutionary."<sup>26</sup>

The universal standards assumed by humanists in their definitions, declarations, and assertions fall under the same kind of criticism as Dawkins gives humanist ethics. There are only three ways to respond to the foundationless pontification of universal principles by humanists.<sup>27</sup>

First, one might make no attempt to provide a rational foundation and simply say "that's just the way it is," or "it's just the inherent properties of matter," or "it's self-evident," or "everybody knows," and so on. Of course, when the humanist demands such proofs from Christians who respond in like manner ("God just is," or "Deep inside you

know God exists," or "Just have faith"), the humanist loses not a moment in rejecting and often ridiculing the Christian for not justifying his or her belief. This "blind faith" in universal truths and principles is the kind of humanism represented in *Free Inquiry* magazine, the *HM2K*, and by many others.

Second, one can admit that his or her worldview is without foundation, that such a "blind faith" is not rational, and that, as a rationalist, one ought to look for a foundational justification for universal values and principles. This kind of humanist, by far in the minority, is the one most open to the rational claims of Christianity, such as the positive arguments for the existence of God, that will be provided in the second installment of this article.

Third, one can metaphorically throw up his or her hands in frustration and abandon universal truth, values, and principles altogether. Although this response is irrational, it allows the humanist to avoid having to justify his or her worldview or abandon it for Christian theism. Humanists in this category are many in number and are very successful at popularizing their meaningless relativism as a radical expression of the current fad, "postmodernism."<sup>28</sup>

### **POSTMODERNIST RELATIVISM**

Postmodernism has permeated every area of our society.<sup>29</sup> Many postmodern humanists recognize that humanism has no foundation for justifying belief in universal absolutes that govern all of material reality (such as scientific laws, universal human rights, absolutes, truth and the possibility of knowing truth, and absolute ethics).

For example, at one humanist meeting we attended in 1999, a young speaker lectured that Christianity is narrow-minded foolishness because it claims that it is possible to know that God exists and that there is a universal, absolute system of ethics by which all ultimately will be judged. How arrogant, he proclaimed, that Christians should dare to say they were right when *there was no such thing as right*. During our discussion with him after his presentation, we asked him how he could be so arrogant as to say that *he* was right and that we were wrong when, according to him, *there was no such thing as right*.

We expected a longer fight and more obfuscation, but instead he rapidly gave in and declared that it might well be that secular humanism and Christianity were both true, that absolutism and relativism could both be accurate, and we might all know and not know anything and everything. We assume his completely irrational response did not accurately reflect the way he lived his life on a daily basis. Yet, his response was consistent with his devotion to inconsistency and radical postmodernism.

Unfortunately, like this young speaker, postmodern humanists don't turn to Christian theism, which alone can provide the logical foundation necessary for rational discourse and inquiry. Nor do they join their fellow humanists in holding to universal absolutes without any justification or explanation for their confidence in absolutes. Instead, postmodern humanists simply retreat into philosophical nihilism, the belief that, in the final analysis, there is no meaning or significance to anything at all, including their own existence, ideas, values, and actions.

The signers of the *Humanist Manifesto 2000* make it clear that they are absolutists who reject the relativism of the postmodernists:

*There has emerged in many Western countries a so-called postmodernist ideology that denies the objectivity of science, deplors the use of modern technology, and attacks human rights and democracy. Some forms of postmodernism counsel defeatism: at best, they offer no program for resolving the world's problems: at worst they deny that solutions are either possible or achievable. The effects of this philosophical-literary movement are counterproductive, even nihilistic.*<sup>30</sup>

Christians agree with this criticism, but from an entirely different, theistic, worldview. Nihilism is the anti-faith of irrationalism and despair, and it can't even "pull itself up by its own bootstraps." For it remains mired in its own quicksand of self-contradiction.

Absolutist humanism fares no better. It clings to the illusion of having escaped the quicksand, but careful examination will show that there is nothing holding the boots above the sand, and it, too, will inevitably sink out of sight. Only the Christian worldview can provide the sturdy foundation upon which our absolutes can rest confidently above the mire.

Nearly an entire issue of *Free Inquiry* magazine was devoted recently to dismantling the claims of postmodernism, subjectivism, and relativism.<sup>31</sup> Author Matt Cherry's article, "Truth and Consequences," declared:

**CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271  
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299**

*[Postmodernist thinkers] reject the very notion of "truth" itself. They argue that there is no "objective knowledge" and no "facts," only personal interpretation, and that "reason" and "science" are no better than any other "myth," "narrative," or "magical explanation."...And if even science cannot claim any cross-cultural truths, then moral concepts must also be completely relative — no more than a matter of taste or tradition. These theories about the nature of truth have real-world consequences. If taken seriously they would, for example, destroy support for science, social reform, and universal human rights.*<sup>32</sup>

Harvard professor Edward O. Wilson argues, "We must know, we will know," in his article, "Back to the Enlightenment." He points out, "Enlightenment thinkers believe we can know everything, and radical postmodernists believe we can know nothing."<sup>33</sup>

Both Cherry and Wilson sound as though they would welcome the absolutism of rational Christian theism, that is, that there are absolutes, truth exists and can be known, and so forth. Yet, they reject Christian theism without a second thought because *its foundation is a God who is eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, the creator and sustainer of the regularity, orderliness, morals, values, and truth we encounter in reality.* The absolutist humanists come close to Christian theism, but they are unwilling to relinquish their preconceived faith in naturalism as the sum total of reality, of the material world as all that is. Consequently, they fall light years short of the truth.

Xiaorong Li, of the organization Human Rights in China, concurs in the same issue of *Free Inquiry* that postmodernism is deadly to any idea of universal human rights. This is no mere academic debate or philosophical speculation. Postmodernism has the potential to perpetuate human suffering, persecution, and even death. When the postmodernist asserts that there are no absolute ethics, no universal human rights, no indubitable cultural norms, the result is individual, social, and cultural isolationism of the worst kind. She notes that when President Clinton questioned human rights violations in China, the Chinese government responded "that their political repression is justified by traditional 'cultural values.'" She quotes Chinese president Jiang Zemin's justification of government authoritarianism: "The two countries differ in social system, ideology, historical tradition and cultural background; the two countries have different ways in realizing human rights and fundamental freedoms."<sup>34</sup>

Li's incisive dismemberment of postmodernism's rejection of universal norms is so cogent and rational that it bears extensive quotation. The Christian theist will not only agree with her decimation of radical postmodernism, but the Christian can also *justify* her criticisms from a theistic worldview where universal human rights are not dependent on human intuition, experience, evolution, or "just-is-ness." Rather, justice rests on the eternal God who "endowed" humanity with these "inalienable" rights. Humanist Li argues:

*But the existence of moral diversity does no more to justify that we ought to respect different moral values than the existence of disease, hunger, torture, slavery do to justify that we ought to value them. Empirical claims thus are not suitable as the basis for developing moral principles such as "Never judge other cultures" or "We ought to tolerate different values."...*

*What if the respected or tolerated culture disrespects and advocates violence against individuals who dissent? When a girl fights to escape female genital circumcision or foot-binding or arranged marriage, when a widow does not want to be burned to death to honor her dead husband, the relativist is obligated to "respect" the cultural or traditional customs from which the individuals are trying to escape. In so doing, the relativist is not merely disrespecting the individual but effectively endorsing the moral ground for torture, rape, and murder. On moral issues, ethical relativists can not possibly remain neutral — they are committed either to the individual or to the dominant force within a culture.*

*Relativists have made explicit one central value - equal respect and tolerance of other ways of life, which they insist to be absolute and universal. Ethical relativism is thus repudiated by itself.*<sup>35</sup> *(emphases added)*

Other articles in the same issue reenforce Li's devastating critique of radical postmodernism's rejection of objective, absolute ethics. Theodore Schick, Jr., argues that morality cannot be a mere matter of taste, "since cultures are not morally infallible — since they can sanction immoral practices — cultural relativism cannot be correct."<sup>36</sup> In "Why Everything Is *Not* Relative," Harvey Siegel notes relativism's Achille's heel, the problem of incoherence:

*Opponents of relativism have made many criticisms of the doctrine; by far the most fundamental is the charge that relativism is self-referentially inchoerent or self-refuting, in that defending the doctrine requires one to give it up....The most powerful [charge] is that relativism precludes the possibility of determining the truth, justificatory status, or, more generally, the epistemic merit of contentious claims and theses — including itself — since according*

**CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271  
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299**

to relativism no claim or thesis can fail any test of epistemic adequacy or be judged unjustified or false.<sup>37</sup> (emphasis in original)

We can agree with the absolutist humanists that humanistic relativism is bankrupt. Moreover, as we shall demonstrate in Part Two of this article, so is absolutist humanism. There are no good arguments against the existence of God, but there are compelling arguments *for* the existence of God.

**Bob and Gretchen Passantino**, codirectors of Answers In Action, have spent nearly three decades defending the Christian faith. Among the weekly classes they teach is the "Mars Hill Club" philosophical discussion, which tackles problems of unbelief. Mars Hill Club regularly attends local skeptics' meetings, providing an opportunity for individual discussion and apologetics dialogue.

- 1 Many people take little or no time to contemplate the meaning of life or the cause of their own existence. They are not interested in talking about God or any sort of ultimate values or ideas. Like the characters on *Seinfeld*, they are content with "nothing." This article focuses on people who do contemplate meaning and existence, and who are willing to think and talk about the existence and relevance of God.
- 2 Matthew 28:19.
- 3 This definition was popularized by George Smith in *Atheism: The Case against God* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1980).
- 4 "Are Secular Humanists Atheists?" *The Secular Humanism Organization* ([www.secularhumanism.org/intro/what.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/intro/what.html)).
- 5 Some "universal negatives" are provable/disprovable, such as the falsity of the statement, "It is impossible to prove a universal negative," which is, in itself, a universal negative. As long as the parameters are carefully known and explored, one could hypothetically prove a universal negative. Another example would be "There are no elephants of the kind we are familiar with that live under my pond without any breathing apparatus." It is true, however, that often universal negatives are *difficult* to prove.
- 6 "Agnosticism," in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2000* (on-line version at [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)).
- 7 An excellent book on this subject is J. P. Moreland's *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997).
- 8 Paul Kurtz, "Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1999, 4.
- 9 "Definitions of Humanism," The American Humanist Association Web site ([www.humanism.net](http://www.humanism.net)), 1997, 2.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Council for Secular Humanism ([www.secularhumanism.org/home/kurtz/index.htm](http://www.secularhumanism.org/home/kurtz/index.htm)).
- 12 Quoted in Philip Johnson, *Reason in the Balance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 176.
- 13 A popular rumor attributed to her is *false*. It concerns a petition to the FCC to remove religious broadcasting from U.S. airwaves. *This is completely fabricated and was never pursued by O'Hair or any other atheist organization and is beyond the power of the FCC to consider*. See Bob Passantino, *Fantasies, Legends, and Heroes* (Costa Mesa, CA: Answers In Action, 1989), 28 ([www.answers.org/Issues/Fantasies.html](http://www.answers.org/Issues/Fantasies.html)).
- 14 Louis Dubose, "Whatever Happened to the World's Most Famous Atheist?" *The Progressive*, Feb. 1999, 5 ([www.britannica.com/bcom/magazine/article/0,5744,257987,00.html](http://www.britannica.com/bcom/magazine/article/0,5744,257987,00.html)).

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271  
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

- 15 Excepting her son, William Murray (the subject of her original lawsuit), who had been estranged from his mother since his conversion to Christ.
- 16 See news reports, including Dubose.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 ([www.primenet.com/~lippard/atheistcelebs](http://www.primenet.com/~lippard/atheistcelebs)).
- 19 [www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org)
- 20 Dan Barker, "What Is a Freethinker?" ("Nontract #11") (Madison, WI: *Freedom from Religion Foundation*, 1993), 1-3 (also at [www.ffrf.org/nontracts/freethinker.html](http://www.ffrf.org/nontracts/freethinker.html)).
- 21 "Welcome to the American Humanist Association Website," 1 ([www.humanism.net](http://www.humanism.net)).
- 22 "The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles," Council for Secular Humanism ([www.secularhumanism.org/intro/affirmations.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/intro/affirmations.html)).
- 23 "Definitions of Humanism," The American Humanist Association Web site ([www.humanism.net](http://www.humanism.net)) 1997, 3.
- 24 "Rationalism," American Rationalist: The Alternative to Religious Superstition Web site ([www.infidels.org/org/ar](http://www.infidels.org/org/ar)).
- 25 From the humanist's viewpoint it is unwarranted, but from God's revelation we are told that humans alone out of all of God's creation were made "in His image."
- 26 "Manifesto 2000 Commendations and Comments," *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1999/2000, 8.
- 27 Christian author Gregory Koukl explains the three responses as: "One: Morality is simply an illusion. Two: Moral rules exist but are mere accidents, the product of chance. Three: Moral rules are not accidents but are the product of intelligence." (Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Planted Firmly in Mid-Air* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 167.)
- 28 Many people espouse postmodernist ideas without even being familiar with the term or knowing they are postmodernists. For further information on postmodernism, see Stephen Ross, "A Postmodern Promenade," *Christian Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (1999): 56-58.
- 29 A good summary of the evidence for this is found in Beckwith and Koukl. Especially helpful for understanding the history and extent of moral relativism are Beckwith and Koukl's chapter eight (values clarification and education), and Beckwith's chapters nine and ten, on political correctness and multiculturalism.
- 30 *HM2K*, Article II, 8.
- 31 *What Happened to Truth?* issue of *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998.
- 32 Matt Cherry, "Truth and Consequences," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998, 20.
- 33 E. O. Wilson, "Back to the Enlightenment," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998, 21.
- 34 Xiaorong Li, "Postmodernism and Universal Human Rights: Why Theory and Reality Don't Mix," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998, 28.
- 35 Ibid., 29, 31.
- 36 Theodore Schick, Jr., "Is Morality a Matter of Taste?" *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998, 32-34. Although he probably is unaware of it, the principle he has explained was noted two thousand years ago by the apostle Paul in Romans 2:1: "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else,

**CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271**  
**Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299**

for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." Paul's answer was much more satisfying than Schick's, however, because he gave the foundation for ethical judgment and the source of humanity's inward conscience: "Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth" (v. 2).

37 Harvey Siegel, "Why Everything Is *Not* Relative," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998, 35-38.