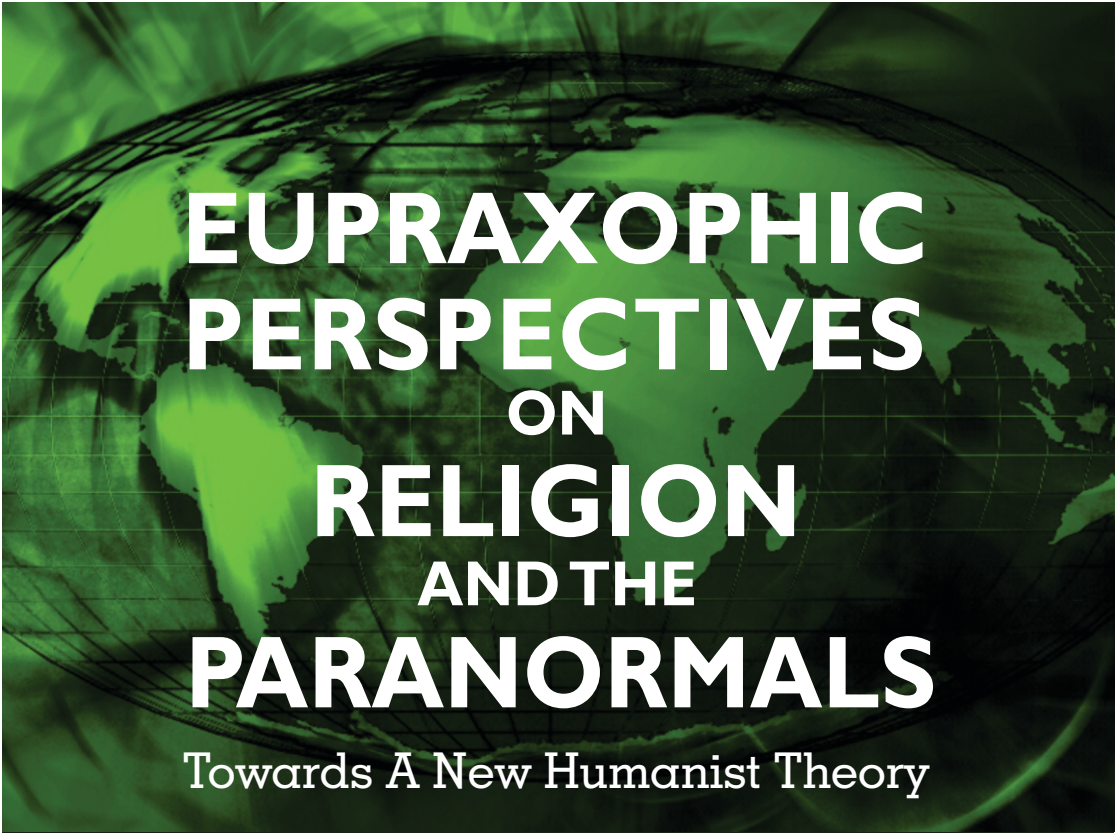




EUPRAXOPHIC PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND THE PARANORMALS

Towards A New Humanist Theory

Ejikemeuwa J. O. NDUBISI

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In memory of my beloved Parents,
Mr. Raphael Ndubisi Onah (1940 – 1981)
&
Nnemuruoha Susanna O. Onah (1950 – 2021)

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Foreword

In *The Meaning of Human Existence*, Edward Osborne Wilson is reported to have attempted answers to the puzzles of human existence namely, who am I? what should I do in life? What is the meaning of life? These interrogatives which have situated the human species on an evolutionary continuum have not been fully answered by humans from time immemorial. Argued pointedly, Osborne acknowledged the fact that science latterly established the origins of *Homo sapiens* and the ultimate insignificance of the species in the universe though, humans still remained beholden to primitive survival impulses that lacked utility in contemporary society, leading to religious and tribal conflicts.

On account of this logic, we may suppose an incipient that evolution enabled by further scientific inquiry would grant humanity a more fulsome understanding of itself on a cosmic scale. Scientific and grounding as the Osborne position is, it is but only one chapter of the commentary on the Philosophy of Man. This explains why the human mind conceptualizes and reflects on issues from the within and without itself all in an effort to pierce the veil of life to access the nature, sources and limits of human knowledge. While such advances in the history of epistemic research have improved the nature of human knowledge, fundamental challenges on many vexed questions of life in the areas of religion and the mysteries of the universe have remained unbounded and far from complete. It is this informed presupposition that has ignited the curiosity of the author in this book to interrogate thus; has/can human intelligence avail the limit of knowledge; will man ever be able to provide all the answers to all puzzles? Similar intellectual preoccupations have occupied the rational mind of the American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky to conclude that humans

Foreword

alone have unlimited cognitive powers that set them apart from all other animals. This is truly the mind-set of the author of the book, *Eupraxophic Perspectives on Religion and the Paranormals: Towards a New Humanist Theory* in his attempt to ask questions and question answers on the vexed issue of whether humanity is fully equipped to think about the mysteries of nature in the secular age that has confronted human beings.

Detailed in twelve chapters, Philosopher Ejikemeuwa Ndubisi has explored in this book, a new approach to understanding the fundamental challenging questions of life namely, in the absence of religion, how do thoughtful contemporary individuals find meaning in a secular world? Making use of Kurtz's new philosophy, *eupraxsophy*, from three ancient Greek roots, which literally means good practical and wisdom. The author interrogates the philosophy, science, and ethics that provide a secular moral vision, which respects the place of human values in the context of the natural world. He however argues on the contrary that, the new secular philosophy, *eupraxsophy*, so propagated by Kurtz has so far offered no compelling secular narratives to replace the traditional religious conceptions of the universe so entrenched in civilization.

Taken together, the author's central issue of discourse in this book is on understanding the puzzles of life based on our knowledge and faith claims. While religion makes claim to knowledge with reference to a supernatural being or a deity, the *paranormals* try to interpret the puzzles of life beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation. Religion and the *paranormals* tend to go beyond nature in their quest to understand nature.

In what can be called *mysterian* argument, the author asserts in series of arguments that humanity suffers from “cognitive closure” with respect to certain problems and that some of the puzzles that lay bare before the human mind are closed off from some of the world's wonders and believes. This suggests why philosophical conundrums such as the mind/body problem prove to be intractable to the human mind. Engaging in a critical appraisal of Paul Kurtz's *Eupraxophy*, this author has in this work, critically examines the humanist philosophy which characterizes a secular orientation to life that stands in contrast to religion, the good and wellbeing of the human person from the point of view of the natural light of reason. According to the author, there are basically two principles that characterize Kurtz's Humanist Philosophy namely, the rejection of any supernatural interpretation of the universe and a denial that the human person has a privileged place within nature. This book pontificates that every claim to knowledge must be empirically justified for it to be accepted as a true knowledge. As a justification of this strand of philosophy, Ejikemeuwa raised and answered some fundamental questions thus; how reliable are the claims of religion and the *paranormals*? Can the claims of religion and the *paranormals* be rationally and objectively demonstrated? Is there any basis for religious and paranormal beliefs? To what extent can we say that the claims of religion and the *paranormals* are meaningful or meaningless? Do religion and the *paranormals* have anything to add to human knowledge? The argued position of the author here is that, since humanism in general is all about the good of the human person, accepting and practicing the culture of critical-inquiry-before-belief will certainly help to bring about growth and development very close to our society.

Foreword

The author thus submits in this book that, it is only the proper application of reason that can help the human person to understand the mysteries of life and be able to solve human problems, be they of social, economic, political and health implications. Discerning heavily from philosophy, science, and ethics, the book provides a thoroughly secular moral vision, which respects the place of human values in the context of the natural world and presents an empirically responsible yet hopeful picture of the human situation and the cosmos in which we abide.

These existential traditions have informed the author's strides in unraveling the fundamental locus of why man exists, what he lives for and the ultimate goal and purpose of his existence. To the credit of the author, this book has been added to the shelves of humanist scholars and students of philosophy of Religion alike. The Philosophical mastery of this author with his historical sweep, anecdotal delight with broad conceptual vision and command of sources with creative leaps has earned this book a place in the area of philosophical thinking about Religion. Couched in the highest philosophical tradition, this masterful synthesis produces a deeper understanding of not only the human condition but the puzzles of everyday challenges that can provoke an existential crisis. This explosive and incisive book exposes *eupraxsophy* as a brand of humanism that moves above and beyond the current "new atheism"¹ and has successfully bridged the cultural divide between science and value and provides a genuine and constructive alternative to religion.

¹Meaning and Value in a Secular Age: Why Eupraxsophy Matters - The Writings of Paul Kurtz edited by- Paul Kurtz, retrieved from: <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781616142797/Meaning-and-Value-in-a-Secular-Age-Why-Eupraxsophy-Matters-The-Writings-of-Paul-Kurtz>

As the president of the Association of Philosophy Professionals of Nigeria (APPON), I am particularly delighted to be associated with this most lucid and authoritative summary of the nature of human existence and ideas. Written with eloquence and scope, the book has succeeded in brilliantly making Kurtz's brand of humanism sufficiently comprehensible. Professor Ejikemeuwa Ndubisi's narrative in this book has no doubt placed the concept of *eupraxsophy* in historical perspective, it has shown its critical relevance and importance in contemporary times. Those who want to engage in rigorous philosophical thinking about religion and the unanswered questions of the universe should read this book. Those who want to understand the secular moral vision and the place of human values in the context of the natural world that bridges the cultural divide between science and value should read this book. For the atheists, the contents of this book will surely provide a genuine and constructive alternative to religion and invigorate contemporary studies in the philosophy of Man. We at the Association of Philosophy Professionals of Nigeria are excited with this novel area of philosophical research and studies. It is therefore highly recommended to philosophers and non-philosophers alike.

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15th June, 2023

Introduction

Human life is full of puzzles and wonder. Certain things in the world appear to be mysterious. More so, the human person is a being that desires to know. In a bid to understand the puzzles of life, some people make certain claims to knowledge. While religion makes claim to knowledge with reference to a supernatural being or a deity, the paranormals try to interpret the puzzles of life beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation. Religion and the paranormals tend to go beyond nature in their quest to understand nature. This study, therefore, concerned itself with a critical appraisal of Paul Kurtz's Eupraxophy. Eupraxophy is the humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz. It is concerned with the good and wellbeing of the human person from the point of view of the natural light of reason. Kurtzian Eupraxophy is based on the proper use of reason, critical intelligence and wisdom. It therefore rejects any supernatural interpretation of the world and sees the human person as the measure of all things. For Kurtz, every claim to knowledge must be empirically justified for it to be accepted as a true knowledge. Against the understanding of Paul Kurtz's Eupraxophy, some fundamental questions quickly come to mind: How reliable are the claims of religion and the paranormals? Can the claims of religion and the paranormals be rationally and objectively demonstrated? Is there any basis for religious and paranormal beliefs? To what extent can we say that the claims of religion and the paranormals are meaningful or meaningless? Do religion and the paranormals have anything to add to human knowledge? This book in your hands is an attempt to provide answers to the above and the related questions.

More so, the way and manners religious and paranormal believers practice their beliefs have some social, economic, political and health implications. It is the submission of this study that it is only the proper application of human reason that will help the human person to understand the puzzles of life and be able to solve human problems. This book, among other things, calls for a total transformation from the culture of believing-without-inquiry into critical-inquiry-before-believing. This, in the view of this author, is one of the ways to minimize the excesses or the irrationalities of religious and paranormal beliefs.

Chapter One

Justification of Knowledge Claims

It is undeniable the fact that human person is a rational animal. This presupposes that the human person makes efforts to employ reason in his dealings with the world. The rationality of the human person is made manifest in his quest to interpret the wonders of life. Faced with the puzzles of life, the human person, down through the ages, has made effort to interpret the reality of life and the world in diverse ways. The human person desires to give answers to everything. No wonder during the Golden Age of Western Philosophy, Aristotle exclaimed that the human person by nature desires to know. The attempt or the quest to understand or unravel the puzzles of life, following Aristotelian position, is a natural phenomenon.

As the human person makes efforts to explain the reality of life, varied opinions emerge. The reality of life is interpreted differently by different people. Different philosophers hold different views about life depending on the philosophical camp that one belongs to. More so, a person's interpretation of the reality of life is highly dependent on the 'goggle' he/she is wearing at the point in time. A person wearing black goggle will certainly see objects as black; likewise, a person wearing red or blue goggle will see things as red or blue as the case may be.

On several occasions, I have heard different people use such expressions as: “Witches are after my life”, “This is my star and nobody can change it”, “Prayer is the key to every problem”, “One must believe in God in order to be moral”, “I communicate with and also gain information from my late father”. These and the similar expressions form the convictions of many persons and we witness them every day in our contemporary society. The pathetic story of Duru has

plunged my inquisitive mind into deeper philosophical reflection. Duru was sick. Instead of seeking for medical attentions in the hospital, he went to see a pastor. The pastor in question is not a medical doctor. The pastor told Duru that the sickness was a spiritual attack. Duru was asked by the pastor to do some incantations in the middle of the night for twenty-one (21) days for him to be released from the spiritual attack. Almost everybody around pleaded with Duru to go to the hospital but he refused and kept following the instruction of the pastor. When his sickness deteriorated, he was rushed to the nearby hospital and after diagnosis, it was discovered that Duru has been suffering from acute malaria. It was after some medical treatment that Duru regained his health. There are instances of this type of story both among the learned and the unlearned of our society. The experience of Duru and other related experiences spurred the me to reflect on the grounds for our claims to knowledge. This type of experience points to the fact that the rationality of the human person has been seriously downplayed. This is the type of situation or experience that Paul Kurtz would refer to as “the collapse of courage, a failure of nerve, an escape from freedom, and a retreat from reason into the myths of consolation.”¹

Each day people make claims to knowledge about one thing or the other. To claim to know something implies some degrees of certainty. Invariably, certainty implies knowledge. In its traditional characterization, knowledge is generally understood as a justified true belief.² This understanding presupposes that for every claim to pass as knowledge it must be justified. Justified true belief simply means “belief that can be demonstrated, that is, proved or shown to be the case.”³ This implies that if I claim that Rev. Fr. Prof. Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu is a professor of philosophy from Tansian University, or

that I received a message from my late father, these claims have to be demonstrated to be the case for them to be regarded as knowledge. Hamlyn has this to say regarding the justification of knowledge: “one condition of being said to know something is that what one claims to know must be the case. If it is object that one claims to know, this must exist, and if what one claims to know is formulable in a proposition, this must be true.”⁴

One thing to note is that it is not enough for one to say that something is the case, but it must be shown to be the case. It must be noted that any claim that lacks proper justification is not knowledge. So for the fact that the human person is a rational being that always desires to know, there must be a rational justification for whatever he claims to know or whatever he does. When a person says “Witches are after my life” or “I am communicating with spirits”, what actually does such a person mean? Can such a claim be rationally justified or demonstrated?

Several claims have been made on the basis of religious and/or paranormal beliefs. In this regard, certain questions come to mind: How reliable are the claims of religion and the paranormals? Can the claims of religion and the paranormals be rationally and objectively demonstrated? Is there any basis or foundation for religious and paranormal beliefs? Do religion and the paranormals have anything to add to human knowledge? How can one be justified in holding unto religious and/or paranormal beliefs? The attempt to answer these and the related questions is the thrust of this book.

It is important to note at this point that the focus of this book is to establish the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of religious and paranormal beliefs using the focal lens of Paul Kurtz's Eupraxophy. The many works of Paul Kurtz cover some areas in metaphysics,

epistemology, politics, ethics and society. This book basically revolves around religion, the paranormals and Paul Kurtz's humanist philosophy.

Sequel to the fact that the human person always desires to know, many people make varied claims to knowledge. These claims can sometimes be contradictory. This brings about the need for justification of knowledge claims. This book is therefore very significant in the sense that it will help to restore the dignity of the human person as a rational being. The significance is further made manifest in its effort to enthrone the application of reason and science in establishing knowledge claims and also in solving human problems. Also, it will help to transform the minds of our contemporary society, especially Nigerians, from the culture of believing-without-inquiry into the culture of critical-inquiry-before-believing. It will also serve as an eye-opener to many people who undermine the power of human reason and also to those who fall prey easily to some of the irrational claims of religion and the paranormals.

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Chapter Two

Understanding the Key Concepts

Following the unique nature of this book, it is pertinent that some operational terms be properly explained. It is said that for any work to be philosophical, there must be clear definition of terms used. This is because of the simple fact that “clarity of terms is basic to the clarity of thoughts/ideas.”¹ Therefore, at this point, I shall make attempt to explain the relevant operational terms in this book.

Eupraxophy

This term was coined by Paul Kurtz. For him humanism is Eupraxophy.² Eupraxophy as a term is used by Paul Kurtz to describe his understanding of humanism. He noted that there is no English word that can perfectly describe the true meaning of humanism.³ So for him, Eupraxophy is a term that can be used in many languages. He explained: “I think we will have to coin a new term in order to distinguish non-theistic beliefs and practices from other systems of beliefs and practices, a term that could be used in many languages.”⁴ So Kurtz coined the term Eupraxophy from the Greek roots: *eu*, *praxis* and *Sophia*. *Eu* is a prefix which means good, well and advantageous; *praxis* is referred to practice or action; the suffix *Sophia* simply means wisdom. Literally, Eupraxophy means good practical wisdom.

Eupraxophy is understood as a constitution of guiding convictions and practices, which are determined by the rational exploration, study and explanation of human nature, knowledge and experiences.⁵ Humanism understood as Eupraxophy is “based upon reason, critical intelligence and wisdom.”⁶ In this book, therefore, the term Eupraxophy is used to refer to the humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz.

Humanism

Etymologically, the term humanism is derived from the Latin word *humanus* which literally means human. The implication of this etymological understanding practically shows that humanism is a man-centered philosophy. It is a philosophy that generally sees the human person as the measure of all things. Nicola Abbagnano succinctly observed, “Humanism is any philosophy, which recognizes the value or dignity of man and makes him the measure of all things or somehow takes human nature, its limits, or its interests as its themes.”⁷ In the view of G. Ro, humanism is a term used to refer to varieties of beliefs, methods, and philosophies that place central emphasis on the human person. He further maintains that humanism is used “with reference to a system of education and mode of inquiry that developed in northern Italy during 14th century and later spread through Europe and England.”⁸ It is clear from the report of Ro that humanism deals with methods of acquiring knowledge.

From the historical perspective, the term is much related to the Renaissance. This was the movement that is centered on the potentialities and achievements of the human person as manifested in the educational model of the period.⁹ Lawrence S. Cunningham noted that humanism, which is also known as New Learning, was introduced originally to recover learning of ancient texts.¹⁰ Battista Mondin views humanism as a project in which “man is the supreme question for man.”¹¹ Corliss Lamont believes that the philosophy that has the capacity to liberate the creative energies of humankind and to unite peoples of the earth can best be described as humanism.¹²

Humanism is referred to that school of thought, movement or ideology that preoccupies itself with the good of the human person.

That philosophy is humanistic that concerns itself with social justice, non-violence, equality of the human person, human freedom and world peace. In sum, humanism is concerned with the happiness of the human person.

The above definitions of humanism point to the fact that humanism is occupied with the good and welfare of the human person. It is this understanding that gave rise to the different versions of humanism that exists today. These versions of humanism claim that they have the good of the human person as their basis. Paul Kurtz has this to say in this regard:

The term humanism has been used in many senses. There are scientific, religious, atheistic and ethical Humanists. Indeed, many Marxists, existentialists, liberals, naturalists, experimentalists – even Christians, today claim to be Humanists. All loudly declare that they are for man, that they wish to actualize human potentialities, enhance human experiences and contribute to happiness, social justice, democracy and a peaceful world. All say that they are opposed to authoritarian or totalitarian forces that dehumanize man. All profess compassion for human suffering and commitment to the unity of mankind.¹³

Prominent among the varieties of humanism are Renaissance humanism and philosophical humanism. Renaissance humanism is seen as the activity of scholars, writers and civil leaders who engaged in cultural education and educational reform during the 14th and the early 15th centuries.¹⁴ Frederick Edwards holds that Renaissance is “the spirit of learning that developed at the end of the middle ages with revival of classical letters and a renewed confidence in the ability of human beings to determine for themselves truth and falsehood.”¹⁵ On the other hand, philosophical humanism is any approach or way of life that is centered on the human person, his needs and interests. Under this

type of humanism, there are Christian humanism and Modern humanism. Christian humanism is the philosophy that seeks for the good of the human person within the framework of Christian doctrine. It is from this perspective that one can talk of Islamic humanism, Buddhist humanism or Jewish humanism as the case may be. Modern humanism as the second aspect of philosophical humanism is also known as naturalistic humanism, scientific humanism, ethical humanism or democratic humanism. This is a type of humanism that rejects any supernatural interpretation of the world.¹⁶ It primarily relies on reason and the method of science for its claim to knowledge.

Modern humanism has two categories, namely, secular humanism and religious humanism. Secular humanism is a philosophical stance that embraces human reason, metaphysical naturalism, altruistic morality and distributive justice; it is a rejection of any supernatural claims and also a rejection of the pseudo-sciences. Secular humanism is seen as an outgrowth of 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 19th century free-thought.¹⁷ It is the belief that dogmas, ideologies and traditions, whether religious, political or social, have to be subjected to critical reasoning and not simply accepting them on the basis of faith or authority. On the other hand, Religious humanism as an aspect of Modern humanism is “an integration of humanist ethical philosophy with religious rituals and beliefs that center on human needs, interest and abilities.”¹⁸ It is important to note that on philosophical grounds, both secular and religious humanism share the same views.

Secular and Religious Humanists both share the same worldviews and the same basic principles. This is made evident by the fact that both Secular and Religious Humanists were among the signers of Humanist Manifesto I in 1933 and Humanist Manifesto II in 1973. From the stand point of

philosophy alone, there is no difference between the two. It is only in the definition of religion and in the practice of the philosophy that Religious and Secular Humanists effectively disagree.¹⁹

However, the current general usage of the term, humanism, is referred to that particular philosophy that tries to explain reality only from the point of view of the human person. It is a philosophy that looks at the human person as the measure of all things. This is a philosophy that most people often referred to as atheistic humanism or simply secular humanism. This is the type of humanism that is being referred to in this study. Henceforth, we shall use the term Humanism with capital 'H' and without any adjective to refer to Secular Humanism. In line with this understanding, Herbert A. Tonne writes: “Functionally and pragmatically, humanism is a genteel, gentrified term for agnosticism, atheism, freethinking, non-belief, or other terms used for a non-theistic posture.”²⁰

Man

The concept, man, is derived from the Latin word 'humanitas' which simply means human nature. It is a concept used to classify the species of 'homo sapiens' (a Latin word for wise man). Man belongs to the genus: animal. Among animals, man is seen to have a highly developed brain which is capable of practical reasoning, language, introspection and problem-solving. This potentiality for high mental activity is what distinguishes man from other lower animals and this allows man to manipulate and make greater use of tools than any other living species.²¹ Man is a being capable of making positive changes in his environment.

Philosophers generally see man as a being endowed with rationality. Aristotle is reported to have said that man is a social animal.

Thomas Aquinas views man as rational subsistent; for Martin Heidegger, man is a symbolic being. Nietzsche observed that man is a rope stretched between the animal and the superman, a rope over an abyss.²² Regarding man, Shakespeare made this exclamation: “What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In firm and moving how express and admirable! In action how an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animal.”²³ In this book, therefore, the concept, man, is used as a generic term to stand for human person, both male and female unless otherwise stated. Man is understood in this book as a rational being. This understanding does not negate the fact that man is also an emotional being, a being with feeling. The notion here is that man is a being that is more rationally inclined in his interpretation of reality.

Religion

Religion has to do with a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe. This understanding is much more made manifest when religion is conceived in relation to a supernatural agent or agents.²⁴ According to Cicero, the term religion is derived from the Latin word “relegere” which simply means “go through again, read again”. However, there is a shift from this etymological understanding. Modern scholars such as Tom Hanpur and Joseph Campbell are of the view that religion is derived from the Latin word “religere” which means to bind again; to connect.²⁵ The implication of this particular etymological definition is that religion reconnects the believer to the Supernatural Being. Edward Burnett Tylor defined religion as “the belief in spiritual beings.”²⁶ Tylor argued that narrowing the definition of religion to mean the belief in a supreme deity or judgment after death would exclude many people from the category of religious. For him the

belief in spiritual beings exists in all known societies. In the words of Durkheim, religion is seen as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.”²⁷ The understanding of sacred things here implies things set apart or forbidden. Also sacred things are not limited to gods or spirits; they include rocks, trees, springs, etc. Sacred things are encapsulated in religious beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends.

We must note that there are varied understanding of religion. Some scholars conceive religion as a worldview or as a strong belief in something. However, religion as used in this book is referred to belief or set of beliefs in a superhuman or supernatural being. It is also understood as the worship of supernatural being or beings.

Paranormal

The concept, paranormal, is a coinage that designates experiences that lie outside the range of normal experience or scientific explanation.²⁸ It has been discovered that the use of the word, paranormal, has been in the English language since at least 1920.²⁹ Etymologically, the word consists of two parts: para and normal. The word *para* has both Greek and Latin origin. The Greek meaning of para means “similar to” or “near to” as in paragraph. But in Latin, it means above, against, counter, outside or beyond. The understanding of the term in this study is not in the sense of Greek origin but in the sense of its Latin usage which means against, counter, outside or beyond normal.³⁰ According to the Journal of Parapsychology, the term paranormal is used to describe “any phenomenon that in one or more respects exceeds the limits of what is deemed physically possible according to current scientific assumptions.”³¹ The implication of the above understanding is that what is normal is that which is within scientific explanation. It therefore means that anything outside, beyond or contrary to normal scientific

knowledge is regarded as paranormal. Therefore, the term paranormal is understood in this book as any claim to knowledge or belief that is beyond the range of scientific explanation or normal experiences. Paranormal beliefs include those that pertain to ghosts, extraterrestrial life, extrasensory perception (ESP), unidentified flying objects (UFOs), telepathy, faith healing, clairvoyance and other related subjects. It has to do with superhuman or supernatural beliefs.

Science

The term science is derived from the Latin word “scire” which simply means “to know”. This etymological understanding shows that science means any form of organized knowledge. It is a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and prediction about the world.³² As understood in this book, scientific knowledge is simply a type of knowledge that is acquired through an organized study using observation and experimentation to explain natural phenomena. “It is knowledge which is general, that is, in much specific propositions are all deduced from a few general principles.”³³ Science has to do with knowledge of facts that are verifiable. It deals with the systematic method of acquiring knowledge. Science “refers to an active process of investigation, a procedure for testing hypothesis and laws.”³⁴ Science is all about methods of inquiry. This is the understanding of science as employed in this book.

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Chapter Three

Religious and Paranormal Beliefs

Every day, human beings make series of claims. These claims are made based on certain beliefs. Both the religionist and the paranormalist make certain claims. The claims of religion and the paranormal have some epistemological basis. This chapter, therefore, attempts to analyze the nature of belief, religious and paranormal beliefs, and the basis for belief in general and also the basis for religious and paranormal beliefs in particular. This analysis will help to appreciate better the Eupraxophic perspectives on religious and paranormal beliefs.

Nature of Belief

Belief is generally understood as the state of the mind to trust or have confidence in a person or in something. We use the noun 'belief' and the verb 'believe' very often. And so we hear people say: "This is my belief"; "I believe him"; "She believes in her job". The tenth edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines belief as a "conviction of the truth of some statement or reality of some being or phenomenon esp. when based on examination of evidence."¹ More so, the Microsoft Encarta Dictionary views belief as the "acceptance by the mind that something is true or real, often underpinned by an emotional or spiritual sense of certainty."² The above definitions presuppose that there has to be some basis for any particular belief. One does not believe for believing sake. In his work, "Knowledge, Belief and Faith: A Comparative Study of Christian and Islamic Epistemologies", Mohammad Iqbal Afaqi noted that belief "has been shown as an assent or acceptance of a proposition as true on grounds of

authority or evidence.”³ In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume gave a deeper illustration on the nature of belief. He avers that belief,

Consists merely in certain feeling or sentiments; in something that depends on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles of which we are not master, when we are convinced of any matter of fact we do nothing but conceive it along with certain feelings.⁴

The implication of the position of Hume is that a belief has to arise from a particular cause. It is pertinent, at this point, to distinguish between knowledge and belief. Afaqi observed that in traditional philosophy belief and knowledge were accepted as mental faculty *sui generis*. However, Plato is of the view that belief and knowledge are not the same. For instance, a jury may believe that the accused is guilty but does not have enough evidence to claim knowledge to that effects.⁵ This is why Afaqi said that “in believing we may be wrong.”⁶ H. H. Price gives an insight to the distinction between belief and knowledge. Price argued that by definition, knowledge is infallible, but belief is always fallible.⁷ In the traditional characterization, knowledge is seen as a justified true belief. Therefore, one can say that belief generally has to do with the state of the mind that arises from certain causes or principles.

Having taken a glance at the general understanding of belief, we shall now focus our analytical searchlight on the religious and paranormal beliefs.

Religious Beliefs

It is pertinent to note that religion, as stated in chapter one, is used in this study not simply as a worldview or a strong belief in something, but as a belief or set of beliefs in a supernatural or a superhuman being.

Religion is seen as a relationship between “the human person as the divine person believed to exist.”⁸ The point we have to note here is that belief is central to the nature of religion. It therefore follows to say that without a belief in a supernatural being, there is no religion. It is in this regard that Omoregbe observed that “where a belief in a deity is lacking there can be no religion.”⁹ Religion is understood here as a relationship between the human person and a transcendental being believed to exist.

The question as to whether or not such a transcendental being (deity) really exists does not arise. So long as the religious man believes that such a being really exists and believes himself to be in dialogical relationship with him, he is practicing religion. Such a being may not actually exist, yet so long as he believed in reciprocal activities with him, religion is established.¹⁰

The basic thing we have to note is that a religious person is essentially a person of belief. It is belief that characterizes a person as being a believer or not. But we are not talking about belief in anything, but belief in a transcendental being. In our society today, there are many religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, African Traditional Religion, etc. However, our focus shall be on Christianity and Islam.

Christian Religious Beliefs

Christianity is a religion founded by Jesus of Nazareth. It has to do with those that accept the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity has been defined as “the religion derived from Jesus Christ, based on the Bible as a sacred scripture and professed by Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant bodies.”¹¹ The Oxford Dictionary has this to say about Christianity:

Christianity is today the world's most widespread religion, with more than a billion members, mainly divided between the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox Churches. It originated among the Jewish followers of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who believed that he was the promised messiah (or Christ) but the Christian church soon became an independent organization, largely through the missionary efforts of St. Paul.¹²

The basic understanding of Christianity from the above analysis is that Christianity is a religion that is anchored on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. There are some beliefs that Christianity as a religion holds which include the following:

1. Bible

Christians believe that the Bible (the sacred scripture) is the word of God.¹³ Bible, therefore, becomes the reference point for Christian life. For some Christians anything outside the Bible does not hold water. Bible is believed to be the words breathed out from God.¹⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church said that the “sacred scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵

2. God

Christianity believes in one God. For the simple fact that Christians believe in one God, Christianity is seen as a monotheistic religion. But the monotheistic nature of Christianity can be defined as a liberal monotheism.¹⁶ It is liberal monotheism in the sense that it accommodates belief in three persons in one God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. This is the belief in the triune nature of God.¹⁷ Christians affirmed: “Trinity is One. We don't confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'Consubstantial

Trinity”¹⁸ Christians entertain the belief that “God is infinitely good, infinitely powerful, all-seeing, omnipresent, etc.”¹⁹ This belief accounts for the total surrender of Christians to their God. God is understood as the creator of the whole world. This is called belief in creationism as against evolutionism.

3. *Human Being:*

Since God is seen as the creator of all things, Christians also believe that God is the creator of the human person. It is believed that human being is created in the image and likeness of God.²⁰ So, the being of the human person is derived from the being-ness of the being of God.

4. *Spiritual Beings:*

Christians believe in the existence of spiritual beings such as angels, Satan and evil spirit. God created angels to serve him; it is believed that they are God's ministers. Omoregbe affirmed that “Christianity teaches that there are spiritual beings called angels.”²¹ Satan is believed to be the head of the fallen angels.²²

5. *Eschatology:*

Christians believe in eschatology. Eschatology has to do with the study of the last things which include death, judgment, hell and heaven. It is a strong belief among Christians that there is an afterlife. This presupposes the reason for encouraging people to lead a good life in order to inherit heaven on the Last Day.

6. *Morality:*

Christians entertain the belief that God is the source of all goodness. And so they believe that all good actions come from

God; invariably, without belief in God, there is no morality. From this understanding, it means that believing in God is a *conditio sine qua non* for morality.

7. *Miracle/Prayer*

The belief in miracle is not exclusive to Christians. However, miracle is at the centre of Christian belief. Jesus is believed to have performed many miracles while on earth. After his death, he was miraculously raised from the dead. His disciples are believed to have performed many miracles after his death. Miracle, for Christians, is a way of proving the power of God. More so, Christians believe that prayer can do the 'impossible'. This explains why Christians pray every day, seeking for God's favours and blessings since God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.²³

One thing we must note is that there are other aspects of Christian beliefs. However, the ones enumerated above are for the purpose of our discussion in this study. The detailed discussion on Christian beliefs is outside the scope of our inquiry.

Islamic Religious Beliefs

Islam is one of the world's religions. It was founded by Prophet Mohammad. However, Omoregbe reports that some orthodox Islamists reject the idea that Islam was founded by Mohammad. This group maintains that Islam “was not founded by Mohammad but by Allah himself. Mohammad was only a messenger through whom Allah made his message known to mankind.”²⁴ In any case, the fact is that

Prophet Mohammad is generally regarded as the visible founder of Islam.

Islam is a religion of submission to the will of Allah as revealed in the teachings of Prophet Mohammad. The *Islamic Bulletin* has it that “Islam means to submit freely to The Commandments and Will of the One and Only God (Allah). This submission should come from within, from sound belief in and conviction to Allah, with no doubt. It should also come from love, trust, and affection.”²⁵ Islam is anchored on some fundamental beliefs as we shall see below:

1. God:

Islam is a religion that believes in one God. It is a monotheistic religion. It is also seen as a rigid monotheistic religion as against the liberal monotheism of Christianity. It does not accommodate the triune nature of God. God is one and does not have a son. The word for God in Islam is Allah. Islam believes that God is the creator of the whole universe.²⁶ Scholars have noted that Islam emphasizes the divine attributes of God.

Islam places emphasis on God's attributes and often addresses him by his attributes – 'the Compassionate', 'the merciful', 'the omnipotent', ... omniscient, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-wise, all-just, and so on. God is said to have ninety-nine names, that is, ninety-nine attributes, and this forms the basis of the Muslim Rosary consisting of the ninety-nine beads.²⁷

2. Human Being:

Moslems believe that God is the creator of the human person. There is this belief in Islam about the oneness of the human person. In Islam “people are created equal in the sight of Allah. There is no superiority of one over another for any reason except

piety and righteousness.”²⁸ It is fundamental to Islamic belief to respect the dignity of the human person not minding the nationality, race, ethnic group or religious group that one belongs to. In fact, Islam believes in the equality of the human person as a creature of Allah.

3. *Angels/Devils*

It is the belief of Islam that some spiritual beings exist, such as angels, the devil and his agents. Angels are believed to be the messengers of God; while devils are bad angels. Moslems believe that it was one of the angels that was sent by Allah to dictate the content of the Quran to Prophet Mohammad.²⁹

4. *Books of Allah*

Central to the belief of Islam is the idea that God revealed his words to mankind through his prophets. This is why the books are accepted by Moslems as sacred books. The *Islamic Bulletin* records that the five most notable books of Allah are (1) Abraham's Scrolls (2) Zabur (Psalms) revealed to Prophet David (3) Tawrah (Torah) revealed to Prophet Moses (4) Injil (Gospel) revealed to Prophet Jesus (5) Quran revealed to Prophet Mohammad.³⁰

5. *Day of Judgment*

For Moslems, there is a day set aside by Allah to judge all men and women. It is the last judgment day. This is the day when the good will be rewarded with heaven and the bad will be punished with hell fire:

Following the General Judgment on the Last Day, the good people who have served Allah will go to heaven for their reward while all the

wicked people (and idol worshipers) will go to hell fire where they will be tormented forever. The believers who served Allah ... will be provided with beautiful girls, nice clothes, nice music and continuous feasting.³¹

6. *Morality*

The idea of morality in Islam is based on God. Omoregbe relates that “Islamic ethics is centered on God consciousness and universal brotherhood.”³² The understanding of universal brotherhood is on the basis that all human beings are God's creatures; all were created by one father and should be able to relate as people who have common origin. Islam encouraged the Moslem to be compassionate, just, meek, truthful and to strive to do good all the time.³³

7. *Pillars of Islam*

Moslems are expected to adhere to the pillars of Islam. For one to be regarded as a true Moslem, one must strive to abide by the demands of these five pillars of Islam. These include (a) Shahada (creed), (b) Salah (prayer), (c) Seyam (Fasting), (d) Zakat (charity) and (e) Haji (pilgrimage). Every true Moslem is expected to recite the creed every day. This is the verbal commitment and pledge that there is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”³⁴ It is also mandatory for Moslems to pray five times a day: at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and at night. Moslems are also obliged to do fasting especially during the month of Ramadan from dawn to sunset. Also Moslems are encouraged to give alms (charity) in Allah's name. Another religious exercise that constitutes the five pillars of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. This

pilgrimage is required of every Moslem at least once in a lifetime especially if financially and physically able.³⁵

Paranormal Beliefs

It is good to note that the understanding of the paranormal as stated in Chapter One has to do with the claim to knowledge or beliefs that is beyond the range of scientific explanation or normal experience. Belief in paranormals is seen from the point of view of extrasensory perception (ESP). This is awareness beyond the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. When someone experiences something without using any of the five senses, it is said to be 'extrasensory' – beyond the senses.³⁶ When we talk of paranormal beliefs, the following quickly come to mind:

- (a) *Precognition*: This is the claim to know the future without any basis on the normal five senses.
- (b) *Clairvoyance*: This is the claim to see things beyond the normal sight without any material support.
- (c) *Telepathy*: This is the claim to communicate between minds through extra-sensory means.
- (d) *Psychokinesis*: This is the claim that one can affect objects by mind-power without physical contact.
- (e) *Ghosts*: This is the claim that people's spirit can exist independent of their bodies. Ghosts are sometimes referred to as the souls of the dead that visit the living.
- (f) *Faith-healing*: This is the claim that a person can receive cures from illness without medical treatment. This belief is rampant in our contemporary society.
- (g) *Levitation*: This is the claim that somebody or something can float in the air without any material or scientific support.

- (h) *Astrology*: This has to do with the claim that human life and terrestrial lives are influenced by the positions of stars. It is said that “astrology is the most popular and widely used of the paranormal arts.”³⁷

We must note that there are other aspects of paranormal beliefs apart from the ones mentioned above. The ones stated are simply for the purpose of our discussion in this study. It has been observed that belief in the paranormal is on the increase in our contemporary society. A recent survey of students carried at Hollins College, Virginia reveals that 37% believed in ghosts, 64% believed in telepathy and 46% believed that one can make plants grow by talking to them.³⁸ Eve and Dunn exclaimed:

Surprisingly even those in the general population who have had scientific training believe in the paranormal. Thus a survey of high school biology teachers showed that 34% agreed that psychic powers could be used to read other people's minds, 22% believed that ghosts exist, 18% believed there is a supernatural force operating in the Bermuda Triangle.³⁹

From the observation of Eve and Dunn, it is clear that belief in the paranormals has to do with both the educated and the uneducated. Oguejiofor reveals that “all societies, both industrialized and developing ones have a good dose of occult belief and practices as well as belief in the paranormal.”⁴⁰

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General Basis for Belief

There are reasons for the claims that people often make. The reason may or may not be reasonable. Our concern now is not on the reasonability of the reason which people have while holding a particular belief; the concern here is simply to analyze the foundation for belief or knowledge claims. Researches have observed that the basis for holding to a particular belief includes the following:

Appeal to Custom

Some people tend to believe something based on custom. Appeal to custom therefore becomes the basis for the belief such a person holds. Custom has to do with the way of life of a people. "There are customs with regard to everything: food, clothing, education of children, attention for the aged, sexual initiation, religious beliefs, social, political and economic organization, etc."¹ Every society has a custom that is peculiar to it. Custom has to do with the habit of doing things. These habits or ways of life are transmitted from one generation to another. Customs "have their value as passing on to future generations in ready-made form the profitable experiences of our elders."² One thing to note about custom is that it has to do with habit. People tend to continue to do a particular thing even when they do not have any rational justification except that it is customary. Austin Fagothey observed that custom, "can so pile up that a whole people will persist in doing a thing in a wasteful or illogical manner, even after they recognized its absurdity, because they find it easier to conform to prejudice than to try to make themselves abandon familiar pattern of behavior."³

The point I am trying to establish here is that most people try to justify their belief on the basis of their custom. Most of the things we do have their basis on custom: the way we cook; the clothe we wear; the church we attend; etc. This is why Paul Kurtz argued that one may become a Methodist, a Roman Catholic, a Hindu, a Jew or a Muslim simply because of the fact that it is the religion of their people and not out of any rational conviction.⁴ Custom is very important in human society; the human person can hardly live without custom. This is because of the simple fact that custom provides stability and continuity in the society. But one major character of custom is that it lacks logicity and it is oftentimes rigid and dogmatic.

Appeal to Authority

It is a well-known fact that some people are more knowledgeable in some fields than others. There are experts in all fields of knowledge. An expert in a particular field is regarded as an authority in that field. So in this regard, we can talk of an authority in philosophy, mathematics, microbiology, computer science, etc. The general understanding is that an authority should know better than others who are not in that field.

It is an undeniable fact that there is no person that knows everything. Since the human person cannot claim to know everything, there is a need to rely on others. Kurtz is of the view that for the fact that we cannot test everything by ourselves, we need to rely on the knowledge of experts.⁵ This goes to amplify the importance of division of labor. If someone asks me the basis for my belief that there are nine planets, I will only refer to my studies in geography. If I go to the hospital and a medical doctor prescribes some medicines for me, I will only accept his prescription on the ground that he is an authority in

healthcare. Therefore, we say that some of our beliefs are simply based on appeal to authority. Most believers tend to believe whatever their pastors and elders tell them. Some religious people do not care to ask further questions in so far as the pastor has proclaimed something. But one thing we must note is that that one is an authority in 'A' does not make one an authority in 'B'. It is good to note that appeal to authority has to be employed properly to avoid committing the fallacy of *Argumentum ad Verecundiam*.

Appeal to Intuition

Intuition is defined as “the state of being aware or knowing something without having to discover or perceive it, or the ability to do this; something known or believed instinctively without actual evidence for it.”⁶ The tenth edition of the Merriam Collegiate Dictionary sees intuition as “the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference.”⁷ One thing to note from the above definitions is that intuition has to do with belief or knowledge-claim that has no rational or empirical evidence. It is a form of knowledge that comes to mind as a flash of light. Most often, one does not need to work for it or engage oneself in any serious exercise; it comes effortlessly.

Intuition has to do with the power to understand another person's feeling without any conscious study. It has to do with the capacity to comprehend something without conscious reasoning.⁸ Omoregbe observed that “In intuitive knowledge we do not prove or even acquire what we know, we simply discover it without laboring for it or reasoning about it. It comes simply and suddenly as an insight unexpectedly.”⁹

From our analysis so far, it is generally accepted that intuition is the basis for some of our knowledge-claims or beliefs. David Sosa is of the view that some truths are acquired only through intuition.¹⁰ The experience of artists, poets and musicians will amplify our understanding of intuition.

Appeal to Sense Perception

Sense perception has to do with the capacity to see, taste, touch, smell or hear something. It is seen as the basis for most of the things we claim to know. More so, it emphasizes the place of the five external senses as the foundation for all our knowledge claims. The basis for appeal to sense perception is on the ground that the senses do not deceive us. Omoregbe affirms: “The senses in themselves do not deceive us when exercising their proper function of bringing us into contact with the external world ... The objects of sense-perception are material objects, and they have to appear in space and time.”¹¹

One important thing to note is that people tend to base their knowledge claims or beliefs on sense experience. It must be observed that there are objections to the reliability of sense-perception. This notwithstanding, it is not our concern now to justify the reliability of sense perception; rather to establish the basis of some claims that people make. The argument on the validity of sense perception is a case for another time.

Appeal to Reason

Reason simply means “the capacity for logical, rational and analytic thought”¹² Many people are not disposed to accept anything that is contrary to reason. For such people the basis for belief must be rational. Anything outside reason is useless and meaningless. Reason is

perceived as the sure foundation for knowledge-claims. It has to do with the capacity of the human mind to comprehend reality. For instance, a thing cannot be and not be at the same time under the same condition. This is practically contrary to reason. In the view of Onwuama “appeal to reason is contrasted with revelation as in religion”¹³ We must also note that Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, among other philosophers, distinguished reason from sense perception. For them, while the sense is concerned with the appearances, reason is concerned with the essences of things.¹⁴ Reason is also viewed as “the capacity for consciously making sense of things, applying logic, for establishing and verifying facts, and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs based on new or existing information.”¹⁵

Appeal to Faith / Revelation

Faith has to do with a firm trust in something or somebody. To have faith in somebody is to have a strong belief in that person. Faith is defined as a “belief in, devotion to, or trust in somebody or something, especially without logical proof.”¹⁶ It is also defined as a “belief and trust in and loyalty to God; belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion; firm belief in something for which there is no proof.”¹⁷ One thing that is clear from the above understanding is that faith has to do with strong trust that oftentimes does not have empirical proof. Benignus contrasted faith with knowledge. He asserts: “Knowledge is of the things seen, but faith is of what appears not.”¹⁸ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sees faith as a “personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed.”¹⁹

The issue of faith is something that is central to religion. Many people make appeal to faith even when there is empirical evidence to the contrary. Paul Kurtz observes that “one kind of appeal often made to support a belief is the existence of faith.”²⁰

Many people insist that their beliefs are true because of an inner light, a certainty, or a conviction that they are so. Theologians command this appeal to faith, extolling it as the highest of the human virtues. They promise that belief in the existence of God based upon the commandment of faith, in spite of paradoxes, doubt, or a lack of evidence, will be rewarded at the final judgment day.²¹

Another factor accounting for the foundation of people's belief is revelation. Revelation simply means to disclose something or to make something known. It is also understood as “an act of revealing or communicating divine truth ... something that is revealed by God to humans.”²² The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines revelation as “the communication of some truth by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature.”²³

One thing we must note is that that which is revealed is oftentimes beyond the capacity of the human mind but has to be accepted on the ground of faith.

The truth revealed may be such as are otherwise inaccessible to the human mind – mysteries, which even when revealed, the intellect of man is incapable of fully penetrating. But revelation is not restricted to these. God may see fit to employ supernatural means to affirm truths, the discovery of which is not per se beyond the powers of reason.²⁴

It is argued that revelation is necessary since it is a means through which God communicates his will to mankind. It is also a general belief among believers that God may choose to reveal himself through dreams, visions and other physical manifestations; he may also inspire prophets who in turn reveal his message to the people. Christians

accept generally that God revealed himself in the Bible; for Moslems, the revelation of God is made manifest in the Quran.²⁵ This type of revelation is known as public revelation as against private revelation. Private revelation has to do with the claim that God reveals some mysteries to individual persons. The truth of the matter is that some people base their beliefs on faith and revelation. The argument regarding the credibility and acceptability of faith and revelation does not concern us for now.

Endnotes

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Basis for Religious and Paranormal Beliefs

Basis for Religious Beliefs

Religion, as stated earlier, has to do with belief or a set of beliefs in a personal God or gods. From our analysis so far, it is evidently clear that belief in God which is central to religion is predominantly on the appeal to faith. It is often said that without faith, there is no religion. Faith is the source of religious beliefs; it goes beyond the ordinary reason.¹ Thomas Nagel, in his article “A Philosopher Defends Religion” noted that “God endows human beings with a *sensus divinitatis* that ordinarily leads them to believe in him.”² The implications of Nagel's position is that faith is a gift of God since it is only God that endows the human person with the capacity to believe in him. It follows to say that faith is not common to all human beings; it is meant for those who are privileged to receive it. Nagel went further to paraphrase Plantinga's views on this issue about faith thus: “faith is a kind of cause that provides a warrant for theistic belief, even though it is a gift and not a universal human faculty.”³

Faith as the central basis for religious belief is grounded on revelation. For the three popular world religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – their faith is supported on revelation. Christianity accepts the revelation of God through Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament; Islam heeds to the revelation of Allah to Prophet Mohammad as recorded in the Quran; the Jews conforms to the words of the Old Testament as revealed to Moses and the Prophets.

The Sacred texts of the three major monotheistic religions of the world, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are based upon alleged miraculous revelations received from on high. These documents affirm that three

great figures, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, have had contact with God and brought messages to earth as his prophets or, in the case of Jesus, as his son ... Appeals to revelation have been made by others: Paul of Tarsus, Joseph Smith, Baha'u'llah, Ellen White, Mary Baker Eddy, Oral Roberts and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.⁴

The basis for religious belief is also anchored on the appeal to authority. Religious people regard their founders, prophets, clergy, etc. as authorities; and as such make appeal to them for their beliefs. It does not matter whether the particular 'authority' being appealed to is logical or illogical. What matters is that the prophet or the pastor has spoken. In sum, we can say that the core bases for religious beliefs are appeals to faith, revelation and authority. However, we have to note also that religious beliefs can also be based on intuition, customs and sense-experience.

The Basis for Paranormal Beliefs

The understanding of the concept paranormal, from our earlier analysis, has to do with the claim to knowledge beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation. Paranormal belief has to do with any claim to knowledge that defies known science. Our concern now is to find out the basis for paranormal beliefs.

Recent studies have shown that the basis for the increase of the belief in the paranormals is custom or popular opinion. For Emeka Onwuama, belief in the paranormal is being reinforced by popular opinion or tradition. He observed:

Different sorts of groups, in offices, for instance, accept the popular notion that occult practices are potent; consequently, events are readily interpreted through the prism of the occult ... The result is the reinforcement of both the belief and the practice of the paranormal and the occult.⁵

Many people tend to believe in the paranormal because of what other people say. The alleged testimony being made in the churches and public places is an amplifier to the belief in the paranormal. The influence of the media cannot be overlooked in this regard. Christopher C. French and Krissy Wilson are of the view that the media has a great influence on people's assent to paranormal.⁶ They argued that the “uncritical media coverage of paranormal claims and reports of all manners of anomalous events and experiences may have a powerful influence over a largely uncritical audience ... such programmes creates an atmosphere of acceptance that paranormal phenomena must and do exist.”⁷

Another factor underlying belief in the paranormals is perceptual bias. When one's perception is already biased by religion, custom, or individual society, etc., one can begin to see or hear what is not visible or audible. This bias has to do with expectations. Some people may claim to see ghosts based on the expectations they earlier entertained. This is why French and Wilson noted that “perception in itself can often be influenced by our expectations, particularly in less than perfect observational conditions.”⁸

Another basis for paranormal beliefs stems from intuition. Some scholars are of the opinion that intuition is a higher form of knowledge. Studies have shown that intuition gives credence to paranormal beliefs.⁹ Annika Svedholm strongly argued that belief in the paranormals “lies in biases in intuitive processing.”¹⁰ It is also important to note that belief in the paranormal is influenced by appeal to authority, faith and revelation. Some pseudo-scientists, parapsychologists, and religious leaders are seen as authorities in their respective areas; and as such people tend to accept whatever they say

without objective critical inquiry. On this note, one may agree with French and Wilson that poor critical thinking is responsible for belief in the paranormals.¹¹

Endnotes

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Conversations on Kurtzian Eupraxophy

Philosophers have deliberated on one of the major variables of this book: Kurtzian Eupraxophy. Thinkers and scholars have varied ways of approaching the same reality. The concern of this chapter is to look at the ongoing conversations as they bother on our subject matter.

In his *The Philosophy of Humanism*, Corliss Lamont, a notable humanist and a contemporary of Paul Kurtz observed that humanism is the best philosophy “calculated to liberate the creative energies of humankind and to serve as a common bond between the different peoples of the earth.”¹ This position of Lamont is in agreement with the submission of Edward P. Cheyney. For Cheyney, Humanism meant many things:

It [Humanism] may be the reasonable balance of life that the early Humanist discovered in the Greeks; it may be merely the study of the humanities or polite letters; it may be the freedom from religiosity and the vivid interests in all side of life of a Queen Elizabeth or a Benjamin Franklin; it may be the responsiveness to all human passions of a Shakespeare or a Goethe; or it may be a philosophy of which man is the centre and sanction. It is in the last sense, elusive as it is, that Humanism has had perhaps its greatest significance since the sixteenth century.²

Both Lamont and Cheyney conceive humanism as that philosophy that is concerned with the good of the human person. Referring to the contemporary understanding of humanism, Lamont notes that it is a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science and democracy. This observation of Lamont has been seen to be in the same line of thought of the humanism of Paul Kurtz. According to Lamont, there are ten central propositions in Humanist philosophy.³ They are

summed thus: (1) Humanism believes in a naturalistic metaphysics or attitude towards the universe that considers all forms of the supernatural as myth; and regards Nature as totality of being. (2) Humanism believes, following the laws of science, that we human beings are an evolution product of Nature of which we are a part; that the mind is indivisibly conjoined with the functioning of the brain; and that as an inseparable unity of body and personality we can have no conscious survival after death. (3) Humanism believes that human beings possess the potentiality of solving their own problems, through reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision. (4) Humanism believes that human beings possess genuine freedom of creative choice and action, and are, within certain objective limits, the shapers of their own destiny. (5) Humanism believes in a morality that is grounded in this-worldly happiness, freedom, and progress. (6) Humanism believes that the individual attains good life by working for his good and that of the community. (7) Humanism believes in the widest possible development of art and the awareness of beauty. (8) Humanism believes in a social progress that is geared towards democracy, peace and high standard of living. (9) Humanism believes in the complete social implementation and thereby in democratic procedures and parliamentary government. (10) Humanism believes in the unending questioning of basic assumptions and convictions, including its own.

Lamont further posited that:

Humanism is the viewpoint that people have but one life to lead and should make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness; that human happiness is its own justification and requires no sanction or support from supernatural sources; that in any case the supernatural, usually conceived of in the form of heavenly gods or immortal heavens,

does not exist; and that human beings, using their own intelligence and cooperating liberality with one another, can build an enduring citadel of peace and beauty upon this earth.⁴

It must be noted that central to the humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz is the cosmic view of the universe. In this sense, Allan Booth argued that “Humanism is quickened by the notion that intelligent man and his world are the focus and measures of all things. This doctrine in its fullest acceptance, disbelieves that individual and group are subject to divine designs and constraints beyond human comprehension and control.”⁵ In his essay “Humanist Responsibilities”, Horace L. Friess views Humanism as a “perceptive loyalty to man and a generous caring for him.”⁶ Fries went further to argue that humanism is the tendency to stress human self-understanding and self-determination. J. P. van Praeg points out that Humanism is an attempt to provide a coherent answer to the question of human existence.⁷

The humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz as stated in chapter one, is summed up in one word: Eupraxophy. In the view of Ian Johnston, the term Eupraxophy as used by Paul Kurtz has some resemblance or echo of Aristotle's *eudemonia*. At this point we must recall Aristotle's notion of *eudemonia*. For Aristotle, the ultimate end of human actions is *eudemonia* (happiness); it consists in acting in accordance with reason.⁸ *Eudemonia* as used by Aristotle has some connotations of wellbeing. He distinguished between happiness and pleasure. Happiness, Aristotle maintained, cannot be divorced from pleasure. One who is happy will necessarily find pleasure in his way of life. However, the converse is not true. The fact that a person experiences pleasure does not entail that the person is happy. So Johnston argued that Paul Kurtz, just like Aristotle, emphasized the power of human reason in the cognitive domain. He therefore writes:

[T]he strength of Kurtz's affirmation rests on its central Aristotelian emphasis that the most fully realized and fulfilling human life comes, not from seeking out happiness or fulfillment or whatever or from following other people's leads in a spirit of passive obedience or resignation, but from living up to a self-imposed standard of excellence in everything we do, from loving our partners to acting on behalf of planetary humanism or taking care of our own health.⁸

Johnston noted that what matters for Kurtz is not conquering the mystery of nature but “conferring value on individual human existence and infusing it with joy.”⁹ This, in the view of Johnston, is the concern of Kurtz. Johnston further observed that Paul Kurtz sees secular humanism as the most appropriate responses to human condition. The dignity and value of human life “come from the way we actively respond to our fate, acting as autonomous rational moral agents, not from the extent to which we are successful at explaining that fate away.”¹⁰ In his understanding, Kurtz lays more emphasis on the autonomy of human rationality. Floris van dan Berg also argued that Kurtz's secular humanism is a comprehensive well-rounded philosophical stance. For van dan Berg, Kurtz “uses the best of human achievements – in science, human rights, and philosophical concepts or reason, liberty, individuality, democracy, and tolerance – to create the best of best.”¹¹

In his essay, “Bound to Earth: The Secular Humanism of Paul Kurtz”, James Barta noted that the philosophy of Kurtz can be said to be in the line of thought of Socrates, Mill and Kant in the pursuit of a rational philosophy that critically examines the traditional beliefs.¹² This pursuit of rational philosophy, in the view of Barta, is made manifest in the *Humanist Manifesto II* which was masterminded by Paul Kurtz. Barta argued that for Kurtz, the concern of the humanist is

to discover wisdom and also to practice wisdom. This is encapsulated in Eupraxophy. Barta summarized the humanist philosophy of Kurtz thus: (1) a method of inquiry (2) a naturalistic cosmic outlook (3) commitment to humanistic ethics (4) non-theistic (5) democratic perspective and (6) planetary in scope.¹³ Barta further noted that the humanist philosophy of Kurtz covered a very wide range. It is Kurtz's commitment to free inquiry that led him to attack the claims of religion and the paranormals. Barta relates that Kurtz's combination of skepticism with scientific ways of verification leads to objective knowledge. But this type of verification or method of carrying out investigation is lacking both in religious and the paranormal beliefs. And so, Barta noted that Kurtz supposes that religion and science came from two different conception of truth.

Science, he [Kurtz] claims, is based upon free inquiry, critical thinking, and the willingness to question assumption, seeking to objectively justify universal principles, while religion uses authority, which it uses to block inquiry and obfuscate truth.¹⁴

It is evidently clear from the analysis of Barta that Kurtz distrusted religion as a source of genuine knowledge. Barta pointed out a kind of similarity between Kurtz and David Hume. It must be recalled that David Hume criticized the authenticity of miracles and the proof for God's existence as the product of delusion.¹⁵ Barta therefore observed that Kurtz did not only attack Jesus but also objects to the reality of miracles in Christendom. Consequently, Kurtz claims that scientific progress could only occur when theological and philosophical authorities of the past must have been discarded and thereafter a fresh bold approach to nature then adopted.¹⁶ For Kurtz, religion does not give free hand to skeptical inquiry. He pointed to Galileo and Bruno as a clear manifestation of how religion makes every effort to suppress

free inquiry.¹⁷ Arguing for Kurtz, Barta notes that when it comes to knowledge, science and skeptical inquiry yield truth, while religion merely expresses hope.¹⁸ The implication here is that science is the only source of genuine knowledge while religion is all about wishful thinking. This is why Kurtz debunked and mistrusted the transcendent. He raised philosophical objections to theism and more specifically to Christianity. For him, the claims of classical proofs for God's existence are inadequate. Kurtz went as far as saying that theists cannot define God because of the fact that the concept, God, transcends understanding.¹⁹ Barta puts Kurtz's views thus: "People most often believe in the mystical and religious, because they are ignorant of the real causes at work and instead indulge the supposition that there is an unknowable, supernatural cause."²⁰ Paul Kurtz, we must note, was a strong believer in the power of human reason and objective knowledge.

On another note, Barta argued that Kurtz's insistence on methodological and scientific naturalism is not justifiable. He therefore argued that "if he [Kurtz] states that science does not deal with the transcendental, he must clearly define the line of demarcation between science and non-science"²¹ But for Barta, Kurtz failed to actually demarcate between science and non-science. J. P. Moreland and William L. Craig argued in the line of Barta that no one has been able to draw a line between science and non-science.²² Barta therefore questioned Paul Kurtz's position on religion:

If in Kurtz's view science is to verify knowledge, on what basis can he say that there is no God, which might explain natural phenomena? He can only do so after scientifically investigating the claims for God. Should Kurtz restrict science to natural explanation, then before starting his project, he had already rejected the possibility of supernatural explanations. Science should pursue the best

explanation of phenomena and not artificially restrict the scope of its inquiry to material causes.²³

On the issue of ethical theory, it must be recalled that Kurtz made every effort to justify ethics from the point of view of human needs and interests. It is on this note that Barta argued that needs do not produce ethical claims. For Barta a need alone does not establish a claim. For instance, the fact that I need your car does not guarantee that I have a right over your car or even to possess your car. But it is quite clear that needs or interests do not justify one's claim over something. This is why John Warwick Montgomery observed that "If interest produces rights, then one must attribute rights to animals or artificial objects."²⁴ So, it is quite clear from the arguments of Barta and Montgomery that needs or interest do not justify one's claim over something as Kurtz argued. Furthermore, against Kurtz's argument that religion bases its ethical obedience on the fear of punishment which he considered to be immoral, Barta commented that "even if Kurtz is right that obedience from fear is immoral, Christianity believes love is the true motivation for obedience."²⁵ One can see that there is a good point in the argument of Barta. This is because if it is true that religion base their morality on fear of punishment, one can even not bother about the punishment especially when one thinks that one would have sufficient gain. This goes to amplify the submission of Christianity that it is love and not fear that justifies ethical theories.

In his work, "The Best of Best: Paul Kurtz's Philosophy of Humanism", Floris van dan Berg argued that humanism according to Kurtz has two dimensions. "On the other hand, there is the critical, negative dimension; the freethinking traditions of atheism and the critical approach to paranormal, pseudoscientific, and other nonsensical and false claims."²⁶ But on the other hand, van dan Berg

argued that the other dimension of humanism is the assertive one. This is the type of humanism that is not concerned about the negative, that is, “what we do not believe in” but with the positive, that is, “what we believe in.” This is the type of humanism that creates “a philosophy of life, a better and more just world in which individuals can flourish as individual and be happy.”²⁷ In the understanding of Kurtz, van dan Berg pointed that “Humanism is not just an intellectual position; humanism is humane.”²⁸ The implication of this submission is that humanism is all about being friendly and living the good life devoid of any supernatural or theistic inclination.

For Stevenson D. Schaefersman, “Humanist believe that humans can live moral, happy, and productive lives on the basis of human reason and experience, without relying on the supernatural.”²⁹ This is in the line of thought of Kurtzian idea of morality without religion. It is in this sense that Schaefersman describes humanism as a rejection of all forms of theism, supernaturalism and their associated miracle, superstitions, dogmas, authoritarian beliefs, and wishful and hopeful thinking.³⁰

It has been argued by some philosophers that Paul Kurtz placed more emphasis on the power of human reason. Louis Midgley exclaimed that “Kurtz lauds reason and promotes a scientific-naturalistic outlook.”³¹ This is a view that there must be evidence for any knowledge claim. In this line of thought Schaefersman observed: “Humanist do not believe whatever feels good, but only what we are allowed to believe by the available evidence.”³² This humanist position is in opposition to faith which is seen as a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence. Schaefersman further argued that “Faith promotes dogmatism, since there is no method by which one can use

faith to decide among different points of view or even between truth and falsehood.”³³ For Christians, faith is a virtue; it is seen as a supernatural gift of God. But for Schaefersman, S. M. D'Agostino, Paul Kurtz and other Humanists, faith is seen as a vice because of the fact that it weakens the capacity of human rationality. S. M. D'Agostino said that most of the major religions would in most cases agree that “there is either no factual evidence or insufficient evidence to prove their doctrines beyond a reasonable doubt.”³⁴ The implication of the observation of D'Agostino is that there is no rational basis for religious belief. He therefore noted: “No intelligent person should ever accept a proposition on faith ... faith is a highly inadequate intellectual method, as it can provide the same warrant for both a proposition and its contraries, and even in some cases its self-contradiction.”³⁵

Timothy J. Madigan in his essay “Deliver us from Religion” traced Humanism to John Dewey, Sidney Hook and Paul Kurtz. Madigan observed that the named philosophers “emphasized a method of inquiry rather than a set of dogmatic belief.”³⁶ He noted that Kurtz was very critical of religion. He therefore argued that what disturbs Humanists about religion is their “tendency to pigeonhole people and to provide one with readymade answers that adhere to timeless truth.”³⁷ Madigan observed that Humanists, especially Paul Kurtz will certainly agree with the statement of C. S. Peirce that the only commandment for people to follow is: “Thou shalt not block the road to inquiry.”³⁸ Humanism encourages people to think for themselves contrary to the positions of religion and the paranormals.³⁹ Humanism does not put a stop to the extent the human mind can go. There is no barrier to knowledge acquisition in so far as there is an evidence to substantiate the claim made.

In his “Rebuttal” to Paul Kurtz’s humanist philosophy, John M. Frame argued against some of the submissions of Kurtz. Frame questioned the viewpoints of Kurtz on morality. Kurtz had said that we should test moral principles by their consequences. But Frame noted that “we know only the short-term consequences of our decisions. History is not easy to anticipate.”⁴⁰ Frame argued that it is not possible to determine the long-term consequences of one’s action. For him, consequences should not be a criterion to determine what is moral or not. He argued that there is no way Columbus could have imagined the consequences of his Western journeys. Furthermore, “even if we had a crystal ball to tell us the long-term consequences of our decisions, we would still need an additional standard to evaluate those consequences.”⁴¹ Frame, therefore, argued that we need a principle other than “the consequences” if we are to choose between one set of consequences and another.⁴² Paul Kurtz said that each principle can be tested by its consistency with other cherished principles. This is to determine the reliability of the principle. On this note, Frame questioned thus: “Which principle should we cherish most? Do we compromise **B** to maintain consistency with **A**, or the reverse? Equality of wealth or of opportunity? The right of women to choose or the right of a child to life? Or is the highest principle, after all, the law of God, with which absolutely every other principle must be made consistent?”⁴³ Frame argued that Kurtz has no answer to the questions he raised. And so he concluded that Kurtz’s notion of “consistency with other principles” is at the long run another form of arbitrariness.⁴⁴ The conclusion of John M. Frame against the view of Paul Kurtz is that “without God, anything is permitted.”⁴⁵ We can see from this analysis that Frame is of the view that there cannot be morality without belief in God.

Michael J. Rockler argued that Paul Kurtz identified a phenomenon which he (Kurtz) called “the transcendental temptation”. Kurtz critically analyzed the bases of religion and the paranormals. For Kurtz, as related by Rockler, there are some great similarities between the paranormal belief system and religion. Rockler posited that Kurtz described “a need by human beings to search for an existence beyond themselves - to seek to transcend.”⁴⁶ He noted that this transcendental temptation can affect even the most rational of women and men.⁴⁷ In short one can say with Kant that human mind has the tendency towards the unknown. We must recall the distinction made by Kant between the phenomenon (thing-as-it-appear-to-us) and the noumenon (thing-as-it-is-in-itself).⁴⁸ But the conclusion of Kant is that we only know the phenomenon but not the noumenon.⁴⁹ But despite the fact that it has been said that the human person has the tendency toward the unknown – the transcendental temptation, it has also been observed, in the view of Kurtz, that there is one man who never yielded to that temptation. Rockler noted that “while John Dewey and Bertrand Russell are identified as secular humanists, Dewey, perhaps because of his Vermont upbringing, ultimately succumbed to the transcendental temptation. Russell did not.”⁵⁰ The point Rockler is trying to establish here is that the tendency to fall victim of transcendental temptation is not coeval with human nature. Rockler further argued that “Russell offers a perspective on the development of Kurtz's transcendental temptation”⁵¹ The notion of transcendental temptation is developed from childhood. It is not natural; it is something we learn as time goes by. Russell argued that most of the things we did as children were either approved or disapproved by adults. And this is how we begin to perceive certain things as right or wrong. Russell therefore writes:

conscience is a product of education, and can be trained to approve or disapprove, in the great majority of mankind, as educators may see fit. While, therefore it is right to wish to liberate ethics from external moral rules, this can hardly be satisfactorily achieved by means of notion of conscience.⁵²

In his review of Paul Kurtz's humanist philosophy, Sergio A. Rosales noted that the idea of heaven or paradise is simply the figment of human imagination. He agrees with Kurtz that the human person simply “deceives himself about his ultimate destiny so as not to be tormented by the contemplation of it”⁵³ This is why the human person devises the idea of paradise fiction to provide succor for himself. In actual sense, there is nothing like heaven or paradise. In this perspective, Rosales noted in his review that “insofar as we began to understand the machinery of the natural world, all the gods, one by one, began to fall.”⁵⁴ In the view of Rosales, Kurtz was a skeptic and this is what is needed in this contemporary world. There must be evidence for any claim one makes.

For Richard Garrard, Kurtz does not merely focus on fundamental Christians, but also on all those who ignore empirical evidence and logic in construing a supernatural worldview.⁵⁵ He argued that we cannot attain true knowledge if we blatantly ignore empirical evidence. And so he maintains that both religion and the paranormals should try to make clearer about the assertions of what they believe in.⁵⁶ One important thing to note in Garrard is his observation that “Kurtz does not claim that the scientific method has left the world without mysteries, only that it is the best tool we have for dispelling ignorance.”⁵⁷ What Garrard is saying is that though science, which Paul Kurtz heavily relied on, does not claim to know everything, but its insistence on evidence before accepting any knowledge claim is of

paramount importance. This will help to curtail arbitrary claims to knowledge. It goes to say that whatever cannot be said clearly should not be said at all. To be clear about something is to have reliable evidence which can be verified or confirmed by a neutral party. Garrard therefore pointed that Kurtzian humanist philosophy is “an insightful, courageous contribution to the field of the objective study of religious behavior.”⁵⁸ In the same vein, Paul L. Laclair observed that for Kurtz “all that takes the name 'religion' is the same: superstitious and irrational”⁵⁹

Austin Cline argued that there is one philosophy that holds out a significant amount of promise for mankind. This type of philosophy is secular humanism and the major proponent was Paul Kurtz.⁶⁰ Cline leveled encomiums on Kurtz for his contributions to human knowledge that is devoid of any theistic or religious assumptions. Cline argued that it was Kurtz's commitment to cosmic understanding of the universe that gave rise to the coining of the word “Eupraxophy” which can stand for Kurtzian humanist philosophy. Austin Cline writes: “Eupraxophy is a way of life that involves commitment to a good life that is passionate while also being tempered by wisdom and guided by scientific, practical skepticism.”⁶¹ This understanding of Cline portrays the summary of humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz.

Although a great deal of writing on humanism tends to focus on philosophical critiques of religion and promotion of science, Kurtz's idea of Eupraxophy includes a deliberate component of action in the world around us. Philosophical thinking may be an important component of Eupraxophy, but “eupraxophers” are not idle philosophers in ivory towers.⁶²

Cline saw a deliberate intention to better the world around us in the Kurtzian philosophy. The humanist philosophy of Kurtz is not the type

of philosophy that encourages idleness in the name of total dependence on any supernatural being rather it is a philosophy that encourages the human person to be active in the world. “Eupraxophers make choices – the most reasonable ones in the light of the best available evidence – and this enables them to act ... the primary task of Eupraxophy is to understand nature and life and to draw concrete normative prescriptions from this knowledge.”⁶³ Cline therefore, lamented that only few people understand what secular humanism actually is and what it actually stands for. For Cline, “there is a lot of misinformation out there, much of it spread by conservative, evangelical Christians who try to blame secular humanism for every evil under the sun.”⁶⁴ This is why he argued that there is need to have a good source of information regarding Humanism. There is need for people to know what secular humanism is all about and what it is not. This, in the view of Cline, is what Kurtzian humanist philosophy has set to achieve. Cline noted that Kurtz has made effort to state in clear terms what secular humanism stands for. He went as far as tracing the origin of secular humanism to the early Greek philosophers. He therefore argued that this Kurtzian approach is very important in the sense that “so many people have been told that secular humanism is a modern, atheistic conspiracy against Christianity.”⁶⁵ Cline is of the view that many people do not realize the fact that many of the principles of modern humanism have been there before Christianity and they have become part of western culture. He further relates:

Kurtz explains six important characteristics of secular humanism: the emphasis on methods rather than conclusions, naturalism, non-theism, ethics, democracy, and a planetary scope. None of these are completely unique to secular humanism and they can be found in other aspects of western culture. This isn't a disadvantage, though, because it should help

people recognize their value. Putting them all together, though, is what creates a secular worldview which provides an alternative to traditional, theistic, and supernatural religions. Because people can relate to, understand, and accept each individually, then there is some hope for them being able and willing to consciously adopt them as a unit.⁶⁶

As an admirer of Kurtzian philosophy, Cline noted that Paul Kurtz was one of the philosophers who made a case that neither religion nor theism is necessary for the existence of the good life. He argued that morality is not dependent on theistic belief. Cline further noted that Ethical philosophy can be divided into two fundamentally different and diametrical opposed approaches: deontological (non-consequentialists) and utilitarian (consequentialists). The deontological approach to ethics is characteristic of theistic belief. It is the type of morality that is based on something other than the consequences.⁶⁷ This is a kind of ethical belief that something is moral for the fact that it has been commanded by an authority. The authority can be God, king, parent, custom, etc. Cline argued that for theists, divine command is considered to be the valid source of any moral principle. So for them, without God, there cannot be morality.⁶⁸

A deontological position is one which includes the idea of absolute certainty. So long as ethical actions are defined by a clearly discernible obedience to a god's commands, it is easy to know for sure when a person is being moral or immoral.⁶⁹

Cline is of the view that the deontological approach to moral issues is very attractive to people “not simply because certainty is by itself attractive, but also because doubt about the proper moral course of action is especially distressing.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, the utilitarian approach is diametrically opposed to the deontological approach. It states that morality should be based on the consequences of the action.

“The ethical egoists essentially say that human beings ought to act in their own self-interest, whereas utilitarians essentially say that human beings ought to act in the interest of all concerned.”⁷¹ According to Cline, under the utilitarian perspective, actions are judged based on how well they achieve a certain goal, for instance, the happiness of the people concerned. It must be observed that while the deontological ethics ignore the consequences of actions as irrelevant, the utilitarians rely on them for their moral judgments. At this point, Cline pointed that Paul Kurtz rejected the deontological approach to morality. He observed: “Kurtz argues instead for a humanistic ethics which incorporates both objective and relativistic aspects.”⁷² The implication of this position is that morality is universal but relative to human needs. On a face value, this might seem contradictory, but on a closer look, it will be discovered that there is no contradiction therein.

In response to Paul Kurtz's essay “Morality is Natural”, Brena Watson wrote an essay titled: “Moving Beyond Secularist/Religious Apartheid? – A comment Following Paul Kurtz's Article 'Morality is Natural’”. While applauding the ingenuity of Paul Kurtz, Watson questioned the distancing of morality from religion. He writes: “I am not arguing against the proposition that morality is natural, for at least five fairly obvious reasons present themselves for leaving belief in God out of consideration.”⁷³ The five reasons given by Watson are summed up thus: (a) Everyone can come together on the basis of their humanity – what they have in common. (b) It is indisputable that goodness can be practiced by people who appeal to no religious motivation. (c) Religion can promote extremism and attempts to push its own ideology on to everyone else, hence offending against autonomy. (d) Full lives can be lived without explicit reference to God. (e) The concept of natural law developed over centuries indicates clearly that theists also can see that

morality is natural. Therefore, following the above reasons, Watson argued that the idea of good or evil, right or wrong is innate, that is, they are natural to the human person. However, Watson is of the view that the arguments of Paul Kurtz can be challenged. He noted that it is true that Kurtz claimed to offer an empirical justification for his argument but it does not amount to anything more than general observation.

He [Kurtz] states that 'general moral principles have evolved in human culture over a long period of time and there is a broad consensus concerning their viability.' He gives no evidence however that this development has nothing to do with religion. There is indeed strong empirical evidence to the contrary. Historically the powerful and integrating presence of religion in every society is well known.⁷⁴

The argument of Watson is that the moral principle associated with Christianity cannot be said to be irrelevant or that their source is irrelevant. Watson is of the view that Kurtz did not offer any argument to support his claim. He argues that “secularists in our civilization are living off the moral capital accumulated over centuries of immersion in Christian ideals.”⁷⁵ More so, Watson observed that Kurtz appealed to consensus and longevity in his arguments. He therefore argued that Kurtzian type of argument is not free from being fallacious. For Watson, “Truth cannot be established on the basis of consensus”⁷⁶ It must be recalled that before 17th century, it was generally believed that the earth was at the centre of the universe and that the sun and all the planets move round the earth. But Copernicus changed this view by proving that it is the sun that is at the centre of the universe while all the planets move round it.⁷⁷ This Copernican Revolution, according to Watson, is a pointer to the fact that “length of time alone is a weak criterion for truth because it is easy for misconception to be handed on from generation to generation, such as, for example the validity of

slavery or the inequality of the sexes.⁷⁸ For quite a long time, slavery was believed to be natural until recently. There is this consensus belief that some people are born to be slaves. But all these ideas have changed. So it goes to say that Kurtz's appeal to the consensus and longevity of principle are questionable and also fallacious.

Watson pointed out Kurtz's optimism on the use of reason to establish moral principles. He argued that "Reliance on reasoning by itself will not do as the basis for a moral civilization."⁷⁹ Brenda Watson is of the view that philosophers have not been able to agree on any understanding of morality which can command the majority of intellectuals not to talk of the whole society. "Taught to question in the name of reason, there are always more reasons waiting in the wings to challenge any presumed consensus reached."⁸⁰ One of the problems for not reaching a consensus as noted by Watson is that reasoning process must begin from somewhere and this is the reason for different outcomes.

In the view of Louis Midgley, Paul Kurtz eulogized reason. He made every effort to promote human rationality and foster scientific-naturalistic approach to reality. Midgley argued that although Socrates, Epicurus, Lucretius among others are seen as exemplars of secular humanism, it is Karl Marx that is the modern oracle for Kurtzian ideology.⁸¹ He argued: "Karl Marx, for a large part of the world, has been the most influential humanist of the twentieth century, even though his followers have taken a different approach. Marx was a disciple of the Enlightenment. He, too, rejected traditional religion and was committed to reason."⁸² This rejection of traditional religion and commitment to reason are the bases of Kurtzian humanist philosophy. So Midgley can be said to be justified in a sense in classifying Marx as the "modern oracle for Kurtzian ideology."⁸³

In a work titled: “Paul Kurtz: A Worldwide Champion of Secular Humanism & Skepticism,” the Peruvian Rationalist Humanists (PRH) extolled the humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz. We have to note that Peruvian Rationalist Humanists is a philosophical group/society that concerned itself with the interpretation of reality from the point of view of reason and science, without relying on supernatural and paranormal beliefs. In the view of PRH, “Paul Kurtz is certainly one of the most prolific humanist authors of the last hundred years, being matched only by Isaac Asimov, Bertrand Russell or Joseph McCabe.”⁸⁴ PRH relates that although Humanism shares many principles, there are basically two principles that characterize Humanism. In the view of Kurtz, these two basic principles are the rejection of any supernatural interpretation of the universe and a denial that the human person has a privileged place within nature. The second principle is the affirmation that ethical values have their foundation in human nature and have no meaning independent of human experience.⁸⁵ This view of Kurtz appears to be contradictory. This is because of the fact that it is said that humanity has no privilege place in nature and at the same time placing humanity at the centre. At this point, PRH argued that there is no actual contradiction. This is because “Kurtz is placing humanity at centre stage only in the sense that Protagoras understood when he said humanity is the measure of all things. In the absence of any objective supernatural set of standards, we can do no more than operate according to our own lights, with all the flaws implied by that.”⁸⁶

In a bid to establish a kind of humanism that would go beyond just criticizing religions, Kurtz coined a new word, Eupraxophy, as we have stated earlier. PRH notes that Eupraxophy is indebted to Aristotle's concept of eudemonia. “Eupraxophy owes an intellectual debt to Aristotle's concept of eudemonia, and yet it goes further in one crucial

sense. Aristotle saw the final goal as the contemplative life, whereas Eupraxophy seeks a dynamic fusion of contemplation and action.”⁸⁷ The concern of Kurtz as related by PRH was not only the theory but more importantly, the practice. So Eupraxophy is a commendable philosophy.

In his article, “Debunking Christianity: Paul Kurtz on Why Eupraxophy Matters,” John W. Loftus argued that Kurtz has done much to advance “a positive image for a secular society devoid of religion [more] than any other person in our generation, and perhaps in our history.”⁸⁸ Loftus is of the opinion that “Eupraxophy does matter if we want to change our world.”⁸⁹ The implications of Loftus' observation is that if we want to progress, we must engage our reasoning faculty into action – this is the core message of Paul Kurtz's Eupraxophy. Loftus further argued that Kurtz can be likened to Karl Marx in the sense that the latter sees the goal of philosophy not just simply to understand the world, but to change the world. This is in agreement with Kurtz when he says that Eupraxophy is not just about the love of wisdom but the practice of wisdom.

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Analysis of Kurtzian Eupraxophy

Life and Times of Paul Kurtz

Paul Kurtz was a renowned American Humanist, Skeptic and Pragmatist philosopher. He was born on 21st December, 1925 in Newark, New Jersey, USA to the family of Martin Kurtz and Sara Lasser. His spirit of critical inquiry and humanism began at the early stage when he was still twelve years old. At this time, he questioned the Old Testament's story of creation. He could not fathom how the whole world could have been created in six days. He questioned: "How could the world have been created in six days, I asked, when the fossil record as uncovered by anthropologists, paleontologists, and other scientists show long stages of evolutionary change from which the human species eventually emerged."¹

Upon finishing his high school, Paul Kurtz began his philosophical pursuit at Washington Square College of New York University. He was interested in religion, politics and the arts at the early stage of his life. It was in New York University that he encountered Sidney Hook, a renowned philosopher. Kurtz acknowledged that his initial encounter with Hook sparked off great interest of philosophy in him. It must be noted that shortly after his enrollment at the University of New York, Kurtz enlisted for US Army at the height of the World War II. During the war, he served in a unit that liberated the Dachau concentration camp. At this time, he interrupted his studies. It was after being demobilized at the end of the war that he resumed his studies at New York University.² Having studied under Sidney Hook, he was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Hook and also John Dewey. It must be noted that Sidney Hood was a student of John Dewey.

As a young scholar, Kurtz was influenced by Marxism as an ideology. One thing to note is that Marxism dominated the intellectual life of the people in the 1930s and 1940s. At this early stage, Kurtz was in love with Marxism. But this type of love relationship was going to be short-lived. In an interview granted to *Super Scholar*, Kurtz remarked: "I became disenchanted with Marxism, having seen the repressive regimes, the communist regimes."³ In another explanation, he noted: "Soviet Prisoners related to me tales of horror and hardship they had endured under Stalin. This led me to question my earlier idealistic commitment to Marxism."⁴ It is quite clear that Kurtz's interest in the freedom and rationality of the human person is premised on his experience during the World War II and his earlier romance with Marxism. The earlier belief of Kurtz that human life and society can be improved by the use of science, reason and humanist ethics shaped his philosophy to a large extent.

Paul graduated with BA in Philosophy in 1948 from New York University. Thereafter, he went to Columbia University for his postgraduate studies. It must be noted that his master Sidney Hook also studied at Columbia University under John Dewey. And so Kurtz thought it wise to tap "straight from the horse's mouth and study with other Deweyites."⁵ Dewey's influence in the university was still very strong and so Kurtz swam in the 'Deweyian River' just like his master Hook. While at Columbia University, Kurtz studied with some of Dewey's students, namely, Ernest Nagel, John Herman Randall Jr., Herbert W. Schneider, Irwin Edman, Charles Frankel, Justus Buchler and Horace W. Friess.⁶ As a member of the philosophical club in Columbia University, Kurtz was very instrumental to inviting John Dewey to lecture at the Low Memorial Library. This was an exciting

moment for Kurtz. Paul Kurtz completed his postgraduate studies at Columbia University with MA in 1949 and PhD in 1952. After the completion of his PhD, Kurtz began to teach at Trinity College Connecticut that same year. From 1961 to 1965 Kurtz was a professor of philosophy at Union College in New York State. During this period, he was also a visiting lecturer at the New School for Social Research. It was in 1965 that he became a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York where he stayed till his retirement from teaching in 1991. Kurtz lectured in many renowned universities throughout the world, namely, Oxford, Cambridge, University College (London), and University of London, University of Heidelberg, Free University of Brussels, University of Warsaw, Cleveland State University, University of Iowa, University of Toronto, Richmond University, University of Kansas and many others.

Kurtz was highly responsible for the secularization of humanism.⁷ Before he embraced secular humanism, humanism was believed to be a religion or a pseudo-religion through the influence of fundamentalist Christians. It was against this background that Kurtz made every effort to strip Modern humanism of any religious aspect found in the earliest humanist movement. He never left any stone unturned in defense of science and reason against all forms of superstitions, mythology and fraudulent deception.⁸ In 1967 Kurtz joined the leadership of American Humanist Association (AHA). It was in 1969 that he founded Prometheus Books, a publication house that was intended to propagate the values of Humanism, Secularism and Free Inquiry. He was the founding chairman of the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormals (CSICOP) now known as the Committee

for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI), an organization formed by scientists and scholars to examine paranormal phenomena. Kurtz was the editor-in-chief of the Free Inquiry Magazine which he founded and also the Co-President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). It was in 1980 that Kurtz founded the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism which primary “task was not only to examine religious claims critically but also to provide a positive and constructive alternative—a Eupraxophy (good wisdom in practice)—to the reigning religious orthodoxies.”⁹ Paul Kurtz was also a Humanist Laureate and President of the International Academy of Humanism. His renowned quest for the promotion of organized humanism led him to found the Institute for Science and Human Values in 2010 and also the Journal of that Institute known as “The Human Prospect: A Neo-Humanist Perspective.” It was on the 18th day of May, 2010 that he resigned from several of his positions.

The many works of Paul Kurtz attest to his commitment to Secular Humanism. He published hundreds of articles and authored or edited over 40 books.¹⁰ Several of his works present his philosophical views on science, naturalism, epistemology, ethics and politics. He co-authored the Humanist Manifesto II with Edwin Wilson in 1973. Some of his major works include: *Decision and the Condition of Man* (1965), *The Humanist Alternative* (1973), *The Fullness of Life* (1974), *Exuberance: An Affirmative Philosophy of Life* (1977), *A Secular Humanist Declaration* (1980), *Philosophical Essays in Pragmatic Naturalism* (1981), *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (1986), *The Ethics of Humanism* (1987), *Eupraxophy: Living Without Religion* (1989), *The New Skepticism: Inquiry and Reliable Knowledge* (1992), *The Courage to Become: The*

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Later in his life, Kurtz suffered heart arrhythmia and died at his home in Amherst, New York on 20 October, 2012. Kurtz has been acclaimed as the father of Modern Secular Humanism. He was a legendary figure among the American Humanists. Humanism was a way of life for Paul Kurtz.

Humanism: What it is not

In our discussion of Humanism in Paul Kurtz, it is pertinent that we begin with *via negativa*. This means that we have to state what humanism is not, before stating what humanism is. This is to enable us get the proper understanding of the subject under discussion. It must be observed that there existed some misconceptions about Humanism. There is this misconception that Humanism is a religion. Some scholars tried to argue this point of view. Kurtz himself observed: “Many authors, including some prominent humanists, have called humanism a religion.”¹¹ Julian Huxley sees humanism as a religion, but unlike traditional religions, it is a religion without revelation.¹² Paul Tillich, a well-known Protestant Theologian argued that humanism is a religion. His understanding of religion is that which expresses the ultimate concern of the human person. This ultimate concern can be manifested in Christianity, Buddhism and Modern Secular Humanism.¹³ In the understanding of Tillich, humanism is a religion. This, for him, is because of the fact that it performs “psychological,

sociological and existential functions similar to that of theistic systems of belief.”¹⁴ Kurtz observed that some humanist organizations are presented in religious garments. He exclaimed: “Interestingly, most major humanist organizations in North America have followed the religious model, attempting to create societies, chapters, or churches that would perform the functions of traditional religions – albeit without their content.”¹⁵

For David A. Noebel, secular humanism is a religion. He defined religion as “any set of beliefs or system of thought that contains a theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, economics, politics, law and history.”¹⁶ He therefore argued that secular humanism is a religion because, according to him, secular humanism contains, as all worldviews contain, a theology.¹⁷ He elaborated his argument thus:

Secular humanism is a comprehensive worldview that consists of a theology (atheism), philosophy (metaphysical naturalism), ethics (moral relativism), biology (spontaneous generation / evolution), psychology (self-actualization), sociology (feminism/homosexuality), law (positivism), politics (French Enlightenment II).¹⁸

The argument of Noebel is that secular humanism does not only portray a philosophical view but also a religious view. Gerald A. Larue stated that humanism is “a religion to meet the psychological needs of our time.”¹⁹ For the 1979 Humanist of the Year, Edwin H. Wilson, “Humanism in a naturalistic frame is validly a religion.”²⁰ It has been argued that the Supreme Court of the United States in 1961 viewed Secular Humanism as a religion. It reads: “Among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God is Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture

Secular Humanism, and others.”²¹ However, it has been observed that the above quotation attributed to the Supreme Court of the United States was a footnote in the case of *Torcase v. Watkins* as made by Justice Hugo Black. And as a footnote, it is considered as a personal decision and not the decision of the Supreme Court.

Despite various arguments stating that secular humanism is a religion, Paul Kurtz stated emphatically that Secular Humanism is not a religion. One thing we must note is that it is contradictory to refer to secular humanism as a religion. This is because of the simple fact that the concept 'secular' means non-religious. Put differently, we can say non-religious humanism. Therefore, it is quite illogical to talk of non-religious religion. It is also good to observe that notable humanists such as Sidney Hook²², Joseph Fletcher²³, Corliss Lamont²⁴, among others maintained that secular humanism is not a religion. Kurtz recalled:

No doubt, the fact that humanism in America at its inception in the 1930s and 1940s was closely related to Unitarianism, and was endorsed by many Liberal Unitarian ministers, is the primary reason for its emphasis on religiosity. This form of religious humanism, of course, rejects the God of traditional theism, and it tries to create a humanistic religion amenable to the scientific outlook.²⁵

Therefore, given the above background, it is important that we note in categorical terms the submission of Paul Kurtz: “I [Paul Kurtz] submit that secular humanism is not a religion, nor is it religious. It does not contain a theology, but bases its views on scientific evidence. It does not have a ministry or chaplains.”²⁶ The pertinent question now is: If secular humanism is not a religion as argued by Kurtz, then what is it? We shall find the answer in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Humanism as a Eupraxophy

Having stated above that Humanism is not a religion, Paul Kurtz went further to state in clear terms what Humanism is all about. First of all, he noted that there is no English word that can adequately describe the full nature of Humanism. Therefore, he deemed it very necessary to coin a new word. He said: “I think we will have to coin a new term in order to distinguish nontheistic beliefs and practices.”²⁷ His major aim was to distance secular humanism from theistic beliefs. He noted that this new term is a term that can be used in all languages. He therefore came up with the term *Eupraxophy*. Without mincing word, Kurtz said that Humanism is a Eupraxophy.²⁸

Eupraxophy as a term is derived by Kurtz from three Greek roots: eu-, praxis and Sophia. Kurtz himself analyzed the concept thus:

Eu- is a prefix which means “good”, “well”, “advantageous”. It is combined in words such as eudaemonia, which means “well-being’ or “happiness”; it is used in euthanasia, eulogy, euphoria, etc. Praxis (or Prassein) refers to “action, doing, or practice”. Eupraxia means “right action’ or “good conduct’. The suffix Sophia is derived from sophos (“wise”) and means “wisdom”. This suffix appears in the term philosophy, combining philos (“loving”) and Sophia (“wisdom”) to mean ‘love of wisdom’²⁹

So, from its etymological understanding Eupraxophy simply means good practical wisdom. Kurtz observed that philosophy understood in its original sense, as metaphysics, was concerned about the investigation of general principles by which we can understand nature and interpret reality.³⁰ Metaphysics, we must note, is a science of being as being; it studies whatever is in so far as it is.³¹ However, Kurtz remarked that metaphysics has suffered disrepute in the modern times

especially in the hands of skeptical critics. Metaphysics makes attempt to analyze and interpret the basic concepts of the sciences, and to make some sense out of them, and if possible, to unify them. This task of metaphysics, in the words of Kurtz, is a “very complex task today because of the continuing proliferation of new fields of learning and the enormous difficulty of any one mind being able to master the expanding corpus of knowledge.”³² Kurtz also noted that philosophy was not only concerned about metaphysics but also focuses on epistemology. Epistemology is concerned about the validity of truth claims and methods of knowledge acquisition. Philosophy also bothers on other areas such as politics, logic, philosophy of science, ethics, philosophy of religion and indeed, almost every field of human endeavor.

Philosophy in its original characterization has to do with pure inquiry; it was more of contemplation than action. Kurtz observed that there were some philosophers that did not stop at contemplative wisdom but moved further to practical wisdom. Such philosophers include Socrates, Aristotle, Spinoza, Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Russell, Sartre, Dewey, among many others. Kurtz also noted that Karl Marx “clearly marked a break with the contemplative mode of philosophy, particularly when he said that the task of philosophy was not simply to interpret the world but also to change it.” Philosophy in this sense is not just about love of wisdom but more than that it is the practice of wisdom. This is what Eupraxophy is all about. Humanism as Eupraxophy is distinct from pure philosophy. Kurtz explains:

Eupraxophy differs from antiseptically neutral philosophy in that it enters consciously and forthrightly into the marketplace where ideas

contend. Unlike pure philosophy, it is not simply the love of wisdom, though this is surely implied by it, but also the practice of wisdom ... it takes us one step further by means of commitment; based upon cognition, it is fused with passion. It involves the application of wisdom to the conduct of life.³⁴

It is pertinent to note that the primary task of Eupraxophy, according to Kurtz, is “to understand nature and life and to draw concrete prescriptions from this knowledge.”³⁵ Kurtz observed that historically there existed other eupraxophies. He stated that in the Greek and Roman world, Epicureanism, Stoicism and Skepticism were seen as eupraxophies. This is because of the fact that each of them had a metaphysical world views, ethical recommendations about the good life and more so epistemological theories. Also included among kinds of eupraxophies are Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, among others. He went further to note that some of the eupraxophies were primarily concerned with eupraxia, deemphasizing the Sophia. Marxism for example focused primarily on social praxis. Kurtz therefore maintains that the Eupraxophy of modern secular humanism is quite distinct from the previous eupraxophies. Humanism as a Eupraxophy, according to Kurtz, has four major characteristics: (1) A Method of Inquiry, (2) A Cosmic Worldview, (3) A Life Stance and (4) Social Polity. We shall now discuss these characteristics of Eupraxophy in detail.

Eupraxophy as a Method of Inquiry

The first feature or characteristic of Eupraxophy is the method of inquiry. According to Kurtz, this feature can be said to be the very basic feature of Eupraxophy and it is very important to Eupraxophers. One thing we must note is that philosophy in general is concerned

about truth and meaning and this is what epistemology, as a major branch of philosophy is all about. Kurtz maintains that “Epistemology is also very pivotal to secular humanism.”³⁶ Humanist epistemology enables us to understand reality from the point of view of the natural light of reason alone. Kurtz stated in clear terms that Humanist Epistemology encourages free and open inquiry and detests any attempt to stifle or block inquiry. He maintains that the “first principle of humanism is a commitment to free inquiry in every field of human endeavour.”³⁷ The implication of this principle is that any attempt to stop a person from exercising his/her power to investigate any reality is not acceptable. However, Kurtz maintains that the Orthodox religions move in the contrary. This is because one is not allowed to investigate everything; there are certain things that are sacred and 'no-go-areas' that they claim should not be subjected to open inquiry. But this approach of religion and also the paranormal is antithetical to Humanist epistemology. So Kurtz noted that Eupraxophy as a method of inquiry focuses on skepticism, scientific method and critical intelligence.

Skepticism

Kurtz affirmed that skepticism is fundamental to any form of inquiry. For him, it is a *conditio sine qua non* for free and objective inquiry. He argues that if used with moderation, skepticism is good for a healthy mind, but if taken to excess it can lead to an overwhelming doubt. We must note that for one to accept to investigate something there must be some elements of skepticism in the person; if not, the investigation is meaningless. One first of all has to cast some doubts on the objects of inquiry. It is in a bid to clear the doubt and to arrive at objective knowledge that inquiry is embarked upon. Kurtz averred:

Skepticism, if properly understood, is not a metaphysical picture of the unknowability of “ultimate reality”; it does not lead to an inevitable epistemological impasse; it need not culminate in an existential despair or nihilism. Rather it should be considered as an essential methodological rule guiding us to examine critically all claims to knowledge and affirmations of value.³⁹

Kurtz further argues that skepticism is very important in the sense that it enables us to understand the true nature of a thing as it is. It is skepticism that brings out the human person out from the dungeon of deception and dogmatism. In the words of Kurtz, a skeptic is the person “who is willing to question any claim to truth, asking for clarity in definition, consistency in logic, and adequacy of evidence.”⁴⁰ The fact is that we cannot talk of objective inquiry if skepticism is downplayed. Skepticism is a powerful tool for objective and reliable knowledge. It is an essential ingredient for any serious reflective thinking. Skepticism, for Kurtz, is “the intractable foe of pretentious beliefs systems.”⁴¹ Skepticism would want to know the basis for every truth claim. It demands reasons, evidence, and justification for any belief. This singular approach enables skeptics to unravel contradictions inherent in religious and paranormal beliefs. As skeptics continue to question truth claim, “they discover hypocrisies, double standards, disparities between what people profess and what they actually do; they point to the paucity of evidence for most of humankind’s revered belief systems.”⁴² The fact is that skepticism gives room for genuine inquiry.

Paul Kurtz went further to discuss three forms of skepticism. This is to enable us ascertain the type of skepticism that a humanist eupraxopher requires. The three forms or types of skepticism as stated by Kurtz include Nihilism, Mitigated Skepticism and Skeptical Inquiry.

Nihilism

The first kind of skepticism as identified by Paul Kurtz is nihilism. Etymologically, nihilism is derived from the Latin word 'nihil' which simply means 'nothing'. As a form of skepticism, nihilism is seen as the total rejection of any form of knowledge. It is a “complete rejection of all claims to truth or value.”⁴³ This type of skepticism is characterized by unlimited doubt. One important thing to note about nihilism is its insistence that knowledge is not possible. Nihilists argue that there is no certainty, no truth at all. However, it has also been discovered that this type of total skepticism is self-contradictory. This is because of the simple fact that nihilists believe that we cannot know anything for certain; if they are certain about their assertion, it follows that we are certain that we cannot know anything for certain. This is quite contradictory! Kurtz stated that this type of skepticism will certainly end up in utter subjectivity, solipsists that are imprisoned in their own worlds who are confused about the nature of knowledge.⁴⁴ Kurtz is of the view that nihilism as a method of inquiry is not possible. He argued: “One can doubt things some of the time, but not all things all of the time – else inquiry and life would be impossible.”⁴⁵

Mitigated Skepticism

The second form of skepticism as identified by Paul Kurtz is mitigated skepticism. This type of skepticism is also associated with David Hume. One thing we must note about Hume is that he was an empiricist that took empiricism to its logical conclusion. Mitigated skepticism, unlike nihilism, is “not total but only partial and limited, forced upon us by the exigencies of living.”⁴⁶

Mitigated skeptics have confronted the black hole of nothingness and are skeptical about the ultimate reliability of knowledge claims. They are convinced that foundations of knowledge and value are ephemeral and that it is impossible to establish ultimate truths about reality with any certainty. Nonetheless, we are forced by the exigencies of practical life to develop viable generalizations and to make choices, even though we can give no ultimate justification for them.⁴⁷

The point Kurtz is trying to drive home in the above quotation is that even though we do not have ultimate justification for our claim to knowledge; we make our inferences based on custom and habit. For instance, it is true that there is no necessary connection between a cause and its effect, as argued by Hume, but we may base our argument on habit. For the fact that **B** follows **A** on several instances, we may conclude that **A** is the cause of **B**. This conclusion is based on experience for the truth claim. Mitigated skepticism, according to Kurtz, is a kind of compromise between absolute dogmatism and total skepticism (nihilism).

Skeptical Inquiry

The third kind of skepticism is different from the two kinds of skepticism discussed earlier. Kurtz posits that this type of skepticism is a strong critic of nihilism and mitigated skepticism. The motivation of skeptical inquiry is inquiry rather than doubt. Another name for skeptical inquiry is new skepticism. The major difference between skeptical inquiry and the other two types of skepticism is that it is positive and constructive. In the words of Paul Kurtz, skeptical inquiry,

... involves the transformation of the negative critical analysis of the claims to knowledge into a positive contribution to the growth and development of skeptical inquiry. It is basically a form of

methodological skepticism, for here skepticism is an essential phase of the process of inquiry; but it does not and need not lead to unbelief, despair, or hopelessness. This skepticism is not total, but is limited to the context under inquiry. Hence we may call it selective or contextual skepticism, for one need not doubt everything at the same time, but only certain questions in the limited context of investigation.⁴⁸

Skeptical inquiry, according to Kurtz, believes not only that knowledge is possible but more so that knowledge can be reliable. It works with best evidence and reasons available at the time of inquiry. As a new skepticism, it does not lead to ultimate uncertainty but it is rather “impressed by the ability of the human mind to understand and control nature.”⁴⁹ Kurtz maintains that skeptical inquiry is not dogmatic. This is because of the fact that it does not entertain any form of a priori rejection of any claim to knowledge without proper investigation. This type of skepticism does not close any door for investigation in any field of knowledge. For Kurtz, skeptical inquirer “should have an open mind about all questions and not seek to close responsible inquiry in any field.”⁵⁰ The task of the skeptic is to engage in an open investigation; if after the investigation, he/she can now accept or reject the claim based on the available evidence. But if there is insufficient evidence in support of the claim, the skeptic may conclude that the claim is unlikely, improbable, or false; or he may continue further investigation if it is possible or better still suspend judgment.⁵¹ This is what is known as agnosticism. For Kurtz, agnosticism in this context is the better option. He further argued that “skepticism in this sense [skeptical inquiry], provides a positive and constructive Eupraxophy that can assist us in interpreting the cosmos in which we live and in achieving some wisdom in conduct.”⁵² In sum, what we must note is that skeptical inquiry is practical-oriented. It

makes efforts to answer the questions about life, death, just society, morality, disease, etc., based on the available evidence. Skeptical inquiry tries to strike the mean between two extremes: one extreme is total rejection of human knowledge; the other is to accept everything as knowledge without questioning. It is the view of Kurtz that for life to be meaningful there should be some honest doubt about our claim to knowledge.

The Scientific Method

We have stated above that one of the major features of Eupraxophy is the method of inquiry. This method of inquiry is characterized by skepticism (as stated earlier), scientific method and critical intelligence. However, this section focuses on scientific method. The question here is: Is there anything as scientific method? If yes, how does it operate? In answer to these questions, Paul Kurtz affirmed that there is something known as scientific method. He said: "Scientific methodology is surely not an esoteric road to knowledge available only to a limited sophisticated elite. Rather, it grows out of the interests and purposes of ordinary life, and it is continuous with the use of critical intelligence elsewhere."⁵³ The point Kurtz is trying to establish here is that scientific method is not something hidden nor is it the privilege of a selected few. It is a way or manner of carrying out investigation / inquiry. For Kurtz, "scientific inquiry grows out of the practical interests of everyday life."⁵⁴ This simply means that it has to do with human experience. Simply put, it has to do with that which the human mind can comprehend. Scientific inquiry grows out of social, political and economic needs of the human person and the human society. Even though that scientific inquiry may grow out of social, political or economic needs, the most important thing, according to

Kurtz, is the method of justifying our truth claims. He argued:

What is central from the standpoint of science is not so much the genesis of an idea or hypothesis as its validation and verification. Thus it is the criteria of validating or verifying knowledge, how we establish or warrant belief that should concern us. This does not mean that the scientific inquirer might not possess certain qualities of mind that are essential in the course of his research. He or she must be a keen observer of the facts. His mind must be passive, as it were. He should listen to what nature tells him without allowing his pre-conceived biases to intrude.⁵⁵

Kurtz maintains that the scientific inquirer must ask questions of nature. This means that he is not concerned with supernatural issues. Scientific method therefore, has to be systematic, coherent, orderly and relevant to human needs. It is the view of Kurtz that there are no absolute standards for scientific inquiry. Relating the view of Feyerabend, Kurtz insisted that “there are no firm and unchanging, absolute binding principle involved in scientific inquiry.”⁵⁶ The implication of this view is that scientific method of inquiry is dynamic; it is neither rigid nor dogmatic. The most important thing in science, according to Kurtz, is not to make a claim but to show how to verify and validate the claim made. The next subsection shall focus on how to validate truth-claims.

Criteria for Testing Truth-Claims

According to Kurtz, there are basically three criteria for testing truth-claims. There may be other criteria, but these, according to Kurtz, are the most important ones: (a) Evidence (b) Logical Coherence and (c) Pragmatic Consequences.

a. Evidence

It is the view of Kurtz that for a truth-claim to be accepted there must be some evidence in support of the particular claim. It is not enough to say that something is the case, but one has to show that what one says is the case. This can better be established by the use of the principle of inter-subjective corroboration. This principle has to do with public evidence. It rejects the idea of private or subjective observation. For Kurtz, every claim must be capable of independent corroboration by impartial observers. Kurtz relates: “Science cannot accept subjective claims to truth; it needs to replicate the experience or experiment. This means that any scientist in any laboratory under standard conditions could achieve the same chemical reactions or observe the same phenomena with his instruments.”⁵⁷

Kurtz argued that it is this principle of inter-subjective corroboration that distinguishes science from pseudo-sciences. He said that one of the problems of religious and paranormal beliefs is their inability to withstand independent observations. Kurtz strongly states that it is not enough to test something just once; we need to test and re-test in order to establish the veracity of a particular claim. What we should note is that Kurtz is not saying that there is no subjective approach to truth. His position is that “purely subjective or private paths to truth need not be arbitrarily rejected, but, on the other hand, they are not admissible to the body of knowledge unless they can be reliably corroborated by others.”⁵⁸

b. Logical Coherence

The second criteria for testing truth claims according to Kurtz, is logical coherence. In order to engage in any discussion, we have to first of all understand the terms being used. This is what is generally known as 'definition of terms.' The next thing is to examine the contexts in which the terms are being used and finally, we need to understand the

role the terms play. Kurtz argued: “we cannot say that something is true if it is gibberish or nonsensical. But to make it clear still leaves open the question of whether it is true.”⁵⁹ One important thing here is that if a particular truth has been established, it then becomes logical to build on. So Kurtz said that there has to be logical coherence as we embark on scientific inquiry. His argument is that “a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the truth or adequacy of a hypothesis is that it can be consistent with other statements that are accepted”⁶⁰ It is quite rational and logical to judge hypothesis, beliefs or theories in relations to those that have been accepted to be reliable.⁶¹ This is what this particular criterion is all about.

c. Pragmatic Consequences

The third criterion for testing truth claim is known as pragmatic consequences. Kurtz argued that this criterion is very important in knowledge acquisition. This is because of the fact that it helps us to ascertain the veracity of our propositions. For instance, if one says 'sugar is soluble' it means that if we put a cube of sugar into a glass of water, it would most likely dissolve. This is the pragmatic consequences of the claim 'sugar is soluble'. More so, this criterion suggests practical application of truth-claims. If one claims that *paracetamol* cures headache, it means that the recommended dosage should be given to a patient suffering headache in order to establish the pragmatic consequences of the claim. One important thing to note is that “we might not always value the technological applications, but the results of ideas are relevant in some way to their truth.”⁶² What this criterion is proposing is the practical application of truth-claims.

Critical Intelligence

The third feature of Eupraxophy as a Method of Inquiry is critical intelligence. We have made attempt to discuss scientific method in the previous section as an approach towards ascertaining truth-claims. However, Kurtz recognized the problem of restricting scientific method to the empirical world alone.⁶³ It is against this backdrop that he argued for critical intelligence as a broad understanding of method of inquiry. For him critical intelligence “incorporates the use of both reason and experience in developing knowledge; and it applies not only to scientific and technical fields of inquiry but also to ordinary life and to normative areas, such as ethics and politics.”⁶⁴ As a method of inquiry, critical intelligence is applied to every field of study. It has no restrictions. It has no boundaries. It is not applied to science only or religion only. One pertinent thing to note is that critical intelligence simply involves the use of common sense and practical wisdom.⁶⁵ In the view of Paul Kurtz critical intelligence is the core of Eupraxophy.

Kurtz stated that critical intelligence is that noble instrument that enables the human person to adapt and also to survive the vicissitudes of life. He argued that the development of critical intelligence should be the primary aim of education. It is the presence of critical intelligence, according to Kurtz, that distinguishes an educated person from an uneducated person.⁶⁶ It tries to probe and analyze hypothesis or beliefs. Critical intelligence, Paul Kurtz argued, “appraises evidence and evaluates ideas; it sees relationships and infers conclusions. Like a pruning knife, it can be a powerful instrument, enabling us to get to the heart of an issue, to repair and correct deficiencies, to discover new truths and discard misconceptions.”⁶⁷

Critical intelligence has to do with objective approach towards testing truth-claims.⁶⁸ It does not take anything for granted. It makes effort to analyze and explain everything from the point of view of the best available knowledge. It has 'no-go-areas'. Kurtz affirmed: “What is distinctive about humanism as a Eupraxophy is that it wishes to extend the methods of objective inquiry to all areas of life, including religious, philosophical, ethical, and political concerns that are often not unexamined.”⁶⁹

In *The Courage to Become*, Paul Kurtz discussed the three basic virtues of humanism which include courage, cognition and caring. The area of concern here is on his discussion on cognition. Cognition as discussed by Kurtz is synonymous with critical intelligence. And so in embarking on critical intelligence, he maintained that a eupraxopher has to follow the rules of reason / critical intelligence. Therefore, it is pertinent that we highlight the rules of critical intelligence as discussed by Paul Kurtz.

Rules of Reason

Having discussed the three features of Method of Inquiry – Skepticism, Scientific Method and Critical Intelligence – Kurtz deemed it very necessary to outline what he called the rules of reason. These rules will be of great help as we embark on our skeptical and critical inquiry. Kurtz is of the view that any unbiased and unprejudiced inquirer should be able to verify or validate a truth-claim. The essence of these rules of reason is to enable us attain objective and reliable knowledge.

The five rules of reason as stated by Paul Kurtz are briefly discussed below:

- i. The first rule of reason states that “We should not accept a belief as true if there is a preponderance of evidence against it, if it is found to be rationally inconsistent with other well-founded beliefs, or both.”⁷⁰ This rule simply implies that we should not cling to any belief if there are grounds that undermine its claim. So any religious, political or moral belief system that does not stand the test of the rule should be discarded. Kurtz cited examples of people who persistently cling to their belief even when there are evidences to the contrary. The Millerites are a group of believers who persisted in their dogmatic belief that the world will come to an end in 1843 or 1844 even when the prophecy did not come true. Also the belief that the earth is flat has been refuted. It is irrational for one to continue to persist in such belief when there are contrary evidences.
- ii. The second rule of reason states that “We ought not to accept a belief if there is inadequate evidence and insufficient reason to do so.”⁷¹ The implication of this rule is that although a body of knowledge may not have been refuted decisively to everyone's satisfaction; there are inadequate evidences in its favour. And so, for the fact that Mr. **A** cannot refute decisively what Mr. **B** is saying does not guarantee the veracity of Mr. **A**'s position. Paul Kurtz therefore went further to explicate the import of this rule. He said that a belief is true if, and only if, there are adequately justifying grounds to support it and also that “the burden of proof rests with the claimant to come up with sufficient evidence and to demonstrate why the belief must be accepted.”⁷²

- iii. The third rule of reason stipulates: “One should accept a belief only if there are objective grounds, that is, adequately justifying evidence and sufficient reasons.”⁷³ This rule is a kind of a follow-up from the second rule. To illustrate this rule, the propositions “Nigeria is a western African country” can be ascertained by referring to an atlas that defines countries in Africa with their geographical locations. One pertinent question to ask now is: what are the things that constitute the adequate grounds for accepting a truth-claim? In answer to this question, Kurtz affirms: What is adequate depends upon the context of inquiry. The reality is that the door can never be closed to ongoing inquiry. We should have an open mind and be prepared to modify our formerly established beliefs if they have been refuted or shown to lack sufficient evidence.⁷⁴
- iv. The fourth aspect of the rule of reason states: “If we do not have adequate or sufficient grounds for believing that something is the case, then we should suspend judgment.”⁷⁵ This rule tries to clarify a situation where there are many unanswered questions regarding one's belief. In a situation whereby one does not have adequate evidence either for or against, the best position, according to this rule, is to suspend judgment. This is what is known as agnosticism. Kurtz cited Russell as saying that “the most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way.”⁷⁶ However, there are situations that warrant that we take a position even when there are insufficient evidence. In such a case, Kurtz admonish that we act based on the available evidence, knowing too well that it may be fallible and at best

only probable. On the other hand, it is a known fact that it is impossible for one person to have a grounded knowledge in every field of life. No person can claim to have the wherewithal, time, energy, money, competence or skills to personally verify each and every field of human knowledge. So, for one to suspend belief in what one does not have adequate or sufficient reason would imply that one will know little about the world. This impasse is what the fifth rule addresses.

v. The fifth rule of reason states:

I will defer to experts in many or most cases, but only if I think that they are reliable and objective, that is, if their judgments are based upon sufficient evidence and adequately justifying reasons and the grounds for their judgments can be evaluated, replicated by other competent inquirers, or both.⁷⁷

The implication of this rule is that one can defer to experts only if one believes that they are qualified and more so, on the ground that other qualified inquirers can examine the grounds for the judgment and agree that the grounds are justified. Kurtz relates that qualified experts do not make their judgments on revelation, fiat, caprice, intuition or power.⁷⁸ That they are considered experts in their fields does not guarantee their judgments. Their judgments are guaranteed only on the available evidence and reasons.

One pertinent point to note is that these five rules of reason, as discussed above, are the practical means of evaluating truth-claims. They are very important tools to either validate or refute truth-claims. So far, we have tried to do justice to 'A Method of Inquiry' as an essential feature of Eupraxophy. It is important that we note that

according to Kurtz 'A Method of Inquiry' "is so important that it may even be said to function as the basic principle of secular humanism."⁷⁹

Eupraxophy as a Cosmic World View

The second major characteristics of Eupraxophy is that it presents a cosmic world view. Eupraxophy does not only talk of a method of inquiry but makes effort to interpret and understand the cosmos and the place of the human person within it. What Kurtz tries to established here is that Eupraxophy does not interpret things from the supernatural point of view; it does not see things that happen in the universe as being caused by a being that lies somewhere in heaven.

The tendency to give a supernatural interpretation to human experience is what Paul Kurtz termed as 'The Transcendental Temptation'. Humanist Eupraxophy is therefore non-theistic. Kurtz argued:

There is insufficient evidence for the claim that there is a divine creator who has brought the universe into being by act of will. The invoking of God as a cause of everything that is, is mere postulation without sufficient evidence or proof. It is a leap outside nature. The concept of a transcendental supernatural being is unintelligible; the idea of a First Cause, itselfuncaused, is contradictory.⁸⁰

The simple interpretation of the above citation is that Eupraxophy is non-theistic. It believes in analyzing and explaining human experience based on the best available scientific knowledge. It is highly dependent on scientific knowledge. Kurtz observed that even though scientific method of inquiry can be fallible, it is the best means of ascertaining truth claims. In *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*, Paul Kurtz argued: "The methods of science are not infallible, they do not present us with unchanging, absolute truths; yet

on balance, they are the most reliable methods we have for expanding knowledge and solving human problems.”⁸¹ Since scientific method is the most reliable method, Kurtz advocates for its application in interpreting the universe. Kurtz maintains that “natural processes and events are best accounted for by reference to material causes.”⁸² In *The Courage to Become: The Virtues of Humanism*, Kurtz noted that one needs courage in order to be able to face the universe in the light of reason that is devoid of supernatural creator.⁸³ The point here is that we need courage to face the universe as it is. In the view of Kurtz, it is cowardice and fear that make people to give transcendental interpretation to human experience. He is of the strong view that everything that happens in the world should have natural explanation:

Objects or events within the universe have material explanations. All objects or events encountered have a physical character. Matter, mass and energy may, however, be organized on various levels, ranging from the minute microparticles on the subatomic level in fields of energy to gigantic objects such as planets, moons, comets, stars, quasars, and galaxies.⁸⁴

The human person, according to Kurtz, is a product of nature, and as such, should be able to understand the universe through natural and not supernatural means.

Eupraxophy as a Life Stance

The third feature of Eupraxophy has to do with a concrete set of ethical recommendation for the individual's life stance. It is concerned about the ethics of Humanism. One fact that is not deniable is that the human person is constantly faced with the problem of choice – What do I choose? How do I live? Is this action good or bad, right or wrong? These are some of the problems the human person faces every day. The

proper answer to the above questions constitutes the concern of Paul Kurtz in this section. Kurtz noted that many critics of secular humanism argued that Humanism does not have proper moral standards. They argued that secular humanism allows subjective taste and caprice to prevail.⁸⁵ These critics – the theists – strongly believe that without the belief in God that the human person cannot make any responsible choice.⁸⁶ The simple interpretation is that the human person is not free. However, Kurtz denied all the charges leveled against secular humanism by its detractors. He argued that all the charges are unfounded. For Kurtz, the charges evolved from ignorance. Paul Kurtz therefore argued for an autonomous ethics devoid of any belief in any supernatural being:

By arguing that ethics is autonomous, I [Kurtz] simply mean that it is possible to make moral judgments of good, bad, right and wrong independently of one's ultimate foundations; i.e., there is a fund of common moral decencies that can be developed in human experience. Yet humanist ethics does have foundations, and these are its Eupraxophy, which in the last analysis completes it; for when questions of “ultimate” obligation or “ultimate” moral purpose arise the theist falls back to God, whereas the humanist is skeptical of that claim and places his ethics in a naturalistic evolutionary universe that is devoid of purpose. The humanist life stance thus has its grounding in nature and human nature.”⁸⁷

From the above, Kurtz observed that there are two basic approaches to moral life: the transcendental theistic approach and the humanist approach. Eupraxophy as a life stance is concerned with the humanist ethics. Kurtz is of the strong view that the human person can lead a good life without any belief in God. Morality, he argued, must not be based on transcendental theistic system. He maintained that “those

systems which claim to deduce our moral obligations from a belief in God often promulgate contradictory codes of behavior.⁸⁸ For instance, both Christianity and Islam claim to base their belief on God's revelation. But while Christianity encourages monogamous marriage, Islam encourages polygamous marriage. This simple example amplifies Kurtz's view that theists promulgate contradictory codes of behavior.

Eupraxophy as a life stance is very clear in its conception of good practice and right conduct.⁸⁹ It is based on critical ethical inquiry. This is what enables the eupraxopher to transcend the dogmatic teaching of theism. Paul Kurtz therefore affirmed:

Here there is the humanist life stance: humanists do not look upward to a heaven for a promise of divine deliverance. They have their feet planted squarely on Mother Earth, yet they have the Promethean fortitude to employ art, science, sympathy, reason, and education to create a better world for themselves and their fellow human beings.⁹⁰

One important point to note here is that the destiny of the human person is in his hands. It is not God or any deity that defines one's life; it is the individual person that defines his/her life through the proper application of critical intelligence. Kurtz noted that "we need to cultivate the capacity of critical intelligence in ethical inquiry and the knowledge of good and evil so that we can make sensible choices"⁹¹ Kurtz observed that for the theist "the ultimate virtues are total obedience to God's command, faith in his deliverance and some form of worship."⁹² One is virtuous who does not question the supposedly divine injunctions. He is virtuous who believes that there is a being outside himself that directs his life. The virtuous person, for the theists, is the one who meticulously follows the instructions of the sacred

books. The implication of this theistic position is that the good life is impossible without belief in God. This claim, in the view of Kurtz, has no convincing practical evidence.

Therefore, humanist Eupraxophy emphasizes three basic virtues, namely courage, cognition and caring. These essential virtues are “related to the entire constellation of virtues and are perhaps even foundational to them.”⁹³ But one thing we must note is that the concept of virtue, according to Kurtz, is related to common moral decencies.⁹⁴ These common moral decencies are the basic principles that a morally developed person should recognize as worthy in human society. Paul Kurtz noted:

Most (if not all) of the common moral decencies are accepted by humanists and theists alike. They need not derive their authority from theological or metaphysical foundations; they are tested in human experience and reaffirmed by their consequences in behavior.⁹⁵

The Virtue of Courage

According to Kurtz, courage is central to all virtues. It has to do with the very nature of human condition. In discussing the virtue of courage, Paul Kurtz first of all noted that “the goal of human life is surely to survive.”⁹⁶ This assertion presupposes that it is natural to the human person to struggle for his welfare and sustenance. Human life is all about what the human person makes of it. A person's life depends on how he/she responds to challenges in life. It is the human person that defends his being and makes his environment habitable. This is why Kurtz said that in order to achieve the goal of the human person; it requires a quality of character that is basic to all human enterprise. This quality of character is what he referred to as courage. For him, courage is the endeavor to persist; courage is fortitude; it is the active will-to-

endure. Courage is achievement motive; it is the stout determination to achieve our goals and exceed our natures.⁹⁷

The human species differs qualitatively from other species on this planet, which seek primarily to satisfy their instinctive needs. We differ from them on a scale of magnitude. For we are not simply passive products of natural forces, responding to within our biological being, but rather interactive participants in the world about us. Other species respond to stimuli in their environment, and they seek to adapt in order to survive. We differ from them because we are builders of culture. As such, we enter into the natural, socio-cultural environment, and we constantly endeavor to change it.⁹⁸

The main point Paul Kurtz is trying to establish here is that the world is what we make of it. Put in another way, the world is a product of our dreams and the world can become a better place only when we are able to actualize our dreams. And this cannot be possible without the virtue of courage. It is courage that enables us to relate with nature. Kurtz is of the view that human history is not fixed; it is not something that has been pre-determined by any supernatural being. No. Human history “depends upon the natural order but also on contingency and what we resolve to undertake.”⁹⁹ We must not forget that the goal of the human person is the preservation of his/her life here on earth. And so, the human person makes effort to introduce new objects into nature. This is why we have bridges and tunnels, governments and constitutions, roadways and dams, computers and satellites and so on. All these are the products of the human mind which cannot be achieved without courage. Eupraxophy as a life stance is characterized by courage. Courage, in the words of Kurtz, “is essential to the human drama”.¹⁰⁰ This is because, as he noted, courage is related to creativity. To be creative one has to be courageous. And the world cannot be a better

place for the human person without the virtue of courage. Courage enables the human person to create new ideas for the good of the human person.

Kurtz observed that many conservatives resist changes and abhor novelty, but this is against human species, since the human species is by nature radical in innovation. Human inventions were carried out in response to human need. And any person, who is allergic to change, cannot make anything meaningful in life. “It is the will to live that is the spring of motivation, the spark of inventiveness; and it is the drive to achieve our goal, whatever they are, that is essential.”¹⁰¹ This is what he referred to as the vitality of courage. As human beings, our task is not only to survive, to be, but also to become, to forge our own realities. This is the *kpm* (core) of the virtue of courage. It is not only the courage to be, but more so, the courage to become. This has to do with taking our destiny into our own hands and assuming responsibility for our future being.

In the view of Kurtz, it makes no sense for one to go into prayer when somebody is hungry or is facing a problem. This is a sign of weakness and helplessness. And this, for him, is one of the major problems of theistic religion. Theists always interpret human experience from the point of view of God instead of making effort to change situation for better. This is a sure sign of fear and cowardice. In Kurtz's words, this attitude of theistic religion is “a collapse of courage, a failure of nerve, an escape from freedom, and a retreat from reason into the myths of consolation.”¹⁰²

The Virtue of Cognition

The second basic virtue of humanist Eupraxophy is known as cognition. It is seen as the highest good achievable by the human person. Kurtz observed that Humanist eupraxophers value cognition or reason very high. This is because of the fact that the proper use of the power of reason invariably leads to the good life. In his view, reason is the source of human happiness. Kurtz relates that philosophers generally are of the opinion, that “without reason life would not be worth living.”¹⁰³ John Stuart Mill is reported to have said that he would rather be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. This statement is a way of extolling the virtue of cognition. This virtue is viewed by Paul Kurtz as the key epistemic virtue that can be justified only on pragmatic and ethical grounds. This virtue is in contradistinction to theistic doctrines that extol faith, love, revelation, authority, mysticism or the will to believe as the ground for attaining absolute truth and righteousness.

The Virtue of Caring

It is a well-known fact that the human person at birth is so helpless that he cannot survive without the help of another person. This is a sure sign that the human person is a “being-with-others” to use the words of the existentialists. The whole life of the human person is in relation to the other person. This is why this virtue of caring is very essential for the full realization of our being human. Caring is seen as the core of moral actions. Kurtz affirmed that “the key of moral conduct and a vital humanistic virtue is the presence of a genuine state of caring.”¹⁰⁴

The virtue of caring has to do with having regard for other persons. It is an expression of a genuine feeling towards the need of the other

person. Paul Kurtz is of the view that a “caring person is not indifferent to what happens to others, to their interests and needs.”¹⁰⁵ It will not be an overstatement to say that it is rational to care for the other person in need. There is always that natural tendency in human beings to care for the less privileged, the orphan, the widow, the rejected, etc. In the view of Kurtz, caring is all about being interested in the well-being of others. This is the virtue that characterizes the human person as a social animal.

Kurtz distinguished two aspects of the virtue of caring, namely compassion and benevolence. For him, “compassion is an attitude or belief that someone is in need and a concomitant wish that the deprivation be reduced.”¹⁰⁶ Compassion has to do with one being sympathetic towards others. It is a commitment towards alleviating the pain of the other person. Compassion arouses a humane attitude toward others. The second aspect of the virtue of caring is benevolence. This is not just the desire to reduce the plight of the people but the urge to contribute positively to other person's joy, happiness or well-being. A person may not necessarily be suffering for him/her to receive benevolence from another. It is an act of benevolence to support the building of a public library or to donate books to schools. These are expressions of benevolence. It bothers on promoting the good of others.

Eupraxophy as a Social Polity

The fourth feature of Eupraxophy, according to Paul Kurtz, is that “it expresses a number of social and political ideals.”¹⁰⁸ In the previous section, we discussed Eupraxophy as a Life Stance. However, Paul Kurtz noted that Eupraxophy is not only concerned about the

individual's life stance; it is also concerned about the realization of the good society.¹⁰⁹ This is the central focus of the fourth character of Eupraxophy. In *Affirmations: Joyful and Creative Exuberance*, Kurtz stated the affirmations of secular humanism:

We [Secular Humanists] believe in an open and pluralistic society, and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities ... We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance ... we believe in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.¹¹⁰

Secular humanists believe that one should do what is good not necessarily because it has been commanded by God or by law, but because of the simple fact that it is good to do what is good. Every human person should be able to work for the good of the human society. If the society is peaceful, the individual person certainly will have peace.

Kurtz observed that most philosophers in the past have concerned themselves about the just society. Both Plato and Aristotle were greatly involved in channeling a course for a just society. Many other philosophers were also involved about the concrete recommendations for a good and just society. Paul Kurtz argued in this regard:

Surely humanist Eupraxophy must deal with the well-being of humanity on the larger scale, for if the ultimate good is life here and now, then this cannot be achieved by the solitary individual alone but only in concert with others within a larger sociocultural context. It is clear that Eupraxophy does not simply delineate a theoretical intellectual position but also has something to say about social practice.¹¹¹

Eupraxophy as a Social Polity does not deal with the theoretical aspects of social and political life only but much more on the practical life of the society. Kurtz extolled Marxism to the extent that it tried to move philosophers from mere contemplation of ideas to the practical application of ideas. This is the sense that Kurtz regarded Marxist philosophy as a Eupraxophy. However, Kurtz noted that Marxism has been misinterpreted by the latter-day Marxists.

According to Kurtz one important feature of Eupraxophy as a Social Polity is its emphasis on human freedom. It is impossible to talk of a just society without freedom. Kurtz affirmed: “The good society must seek to maximize freedom of choice and the autonomy of the individual as a basic value, and this cannot be sacrificed at the altar of the collective.”¹¹² Kurtz is of the view that the individual has to be free in thought and in conscience.¹¹³ Humanist Eupraxophy encourages philosophical, religious, intellectual, scientific, political and moral freedom. The human person should be free to do whatever he/she wants to do to the extent that he/she does not infringe on the rights of others or constitute nuisance to the society. There should be freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The individual should be free to form voluntary association and to pursue one's life style as one sees fit so long as one does not harm or limit the freedom of others. In the view of Kurtz, it is the recognition of the full range of civil liberties that characterizes a just society. In *A Secular Humanist Declaration*, Paul Kurtz posits:

There are many forms of totalitarianism in the modern world – secular and nonsecular – all of which we vigorously oppose. As democratic secularists, we consistently defend the ideal of freedom, not only freedom of conscience and belief from those ecclesiastical, political, and

economic interests that seek to repress them, but genuine political liberty, democratic decision-making based upon majority rule, and respect for minority rights and the rule of law. We stand not only for freedom from religious control but for freedom from jingoistic government control as well.¹¹⁴

The fact is that the human person can relate very well in the society when he is free to choose what he wants to do without infringing on other people's right. For Paul Kurtz, the best political system that recognizes human freedom is democracy. This is why he affirmed: "We [Secular Humanists] believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities."¹¹⁵ Apart from the concern to maximize human freedom, Eupraxophy as a Social Polity has other ideals. And so it is important at this point to outline other socio-political ideals of Eupraxophy. Eupraxophy as a Social Polity,

- transcends divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationalities, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.¹¹⁶
- believes in the cultivation of moral excellence.¹¹⁷
- is concerned with securing justice and fairness in the society.¹¹⁸
- is strongly committed to the principle of separation of church and state.¹¹⁹
- believes in developing human talents and potentials.¹²⁰
- believes that mature people should be allowed to express their sexual preferences.¹²¹
- strongly believes that moral development should be cultivated in children and young adults.¹²²
- encourages active participation in politics.¹²³

Another important element of Eupraxophy as a Social Polity is tolerance. Kurtz observed that tolerance is very essential in human society. It is tolerance that engenders a just society. For Kurtz, “a just society will allow alternative points of view and a plurality of life styles, beliefs, and moral values, all existing side by side.”¹²⁴ It must be observed that what we have done so far in this section is simply to point out some of the socio-political ideals of Eupraxophy. One important thing to note also is that humanist Eupraxophy is committed to the wellbeing of human society.

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Eupraxophic Perspectives on Religious Beliefs

Preamble

It is pertinent to note that for Paul Kurtz, one essential thing about Eupraxophy is that it extends its methods of objective inquiry to all areas of human life. He affirmed: “What is distinctive about humanism as Eupraxophy is that it wishes to extend the methods of objective inquiry to all areas of life, including religious, philosophical, ethical, and political concerns that are often left unexamined.”¹ The implication of this Kurtzian affirmation is that there is no no-go-area for Eupraxophy. However, we shall limit ourselves to Kurtzian eupraxophic perspectives on religious in this and thereafter focus on paranormal beliefs in the chapter that follows.

However, before going into the 'intensive scrutiny' of the religious beliefs, it is pertinent that we understand the three critical approaches to the God-talk as discussed by Paul Kurtz.

Three Possible Positions of the Skeptical Inquirer on Theism

Paul Kurtz stated that skeptical inquiry is a new form of skepticism that has inquiry as its motivation rather than doubt. It believes that acquisition of knowledge is possible. We have discussed Kurtzian understanding of skeptical inquiry in the last chapter. This notwithstanding, it is good to note that the major difference between this form of skepticism (skeptical inquiry) and other forms of skepticism is that skeptical inquiry is positive and constructive.² Skeptical inquiry is dynamic and not dogmatic. It demands evidence and reasons for any truth-claim.

[Skeptical Inquiry] holds that we should never by a priori rejections close the door to any kind of responsible investigation. Thus it is skeptical of dogmatic or narrow-minded atheism and aparanormalism. Nonetheless, it is willing to assert reflective unbelief about some claims that it finds lack adequate justification. It is willing to assert that some claims are unproved, improbable or false.³

Kurtz, therefore, observed that there are three possible positions to be taken by a skeptical inquirer concerning the belief in the existence of God, namely, Igtheism, Atheism and Agnosticism. We shall briefly analyze these terms and thereafter move to the detailed Kurtzian critical look on religion.

Igtheism

Paul Kurtz first of all noted that there are at least two senses of talking about God. In the first sense, God is seen as a being that transcends the natural means of perception and cognition. While the second sense holds that God “is immanent in nature and that he reveals himself to man at some times in history.”⁴ For Kurtz, “it is this first sense of God as an infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent being that is most troubling, since it resists any kind of identifiable definition.”⁵

Igtheism as an approach to God-language was introduced by Paul Kurtz. He said:

I [Paul Kurtz] have introduced the term Igtheism because the kind of theistic being discussed by theologians and philosophers is irreducibly unintelligible. Here *ig* is derived from “ignorant” for we are totally incapable of knowing what is meant by “theism” when we use the term “God” to denote a transcendental being or the “ground” of being.⁶

The point being made here is that the concept of God is indefinable. And there is no way one can engage in philosophical discourse without proper definition. Kurtz argued that the idea of God as a transcendent

being has no experiential referent and so it makes no sense to say that God exist. More so, the terms used by theologians to describe God are simply analogical and these have no literal or descriptive meaning. The God-language is meaningless; it is used out of ignorance. This is what Igtheism is all about. Paul Kurtz further argued: "If we make a claim to know something about the universe, then we must use words in a descriptive or referential sense; and there are reasonable standards that we have to follow if we are to make sense. To talk about God in a transcendent sense is to utter indefinable, even nonsensical language."⁷

We have to note here that it is a known fact in philosophy of language that some philosophers hold that words or sentences are meaningful to the extent that they refer to something.⁸ Bertrand Russell is of the view that what determines meaning is reference. For him any word or sentence that has no reference has no meaning.⁹ Russell went further to argue that it is only by linking meaning with reference that we can remove those words that pretend to be meaningful when they do not refer to anything in actual sense. It is in the same line of thought of Russell that an igtheist approaches the God-language.

Paul Kurtz observed that God-talk can have multiplicity of functions. It can be used in an expressive or an evocative way; it can be used in an imperative-normative way. When used in an expressive and evocative way it elicits our innermost feelings about our relationship with reality. It is used to weep up some kind of emotions in us. Also, in a ceremonial way it is used in celebrations such as birth, marriage and death. Kurtz observed that in this sense "God is the poetic-legal symbol used to "sanctify" or certify an event or relationship as valid before society."¹⁰ Furthermore, when used in an imperative-normative way, it is used to ascribe some moral codes to some divinity. But this is actually the projection of the person or group of persons that hold the belief not

necessarily that God said this or that. Kurtz stated that the he does not actually argue against the multiple functions and meanings of religious language but that the idea that 'God exist' is highly incomprehensible since it is intended as a statement of fact. He argued further:

My [Paul Kurtz] only point here is that the phrase “God exist” is at the very least intended as a statement that has existential import, and that the theist in this sense is making a “factual” claim, which by definition is “nonfactual” in that God exceeds the category of observable fact. That is why I can maintain, as a skeptic that I am an igtheist, for I do not understand what the theist is talking about. I cannot say whether or not such a being exists since I do not comprehend what is being asserted.¹¹

The position of the igtheist is that before we can talk about whether God exists or not, we need to understand and ascertain what God actually denotes or designates. But since this has not been convincingly carried out by the theist, the whole God-talk, as maintained by the igtheist, is based on ignorance.

Atheism

The second possible position to be taken by a skeptical inquirer, according to Paul Kurtz, is atheism. Literally speaking, atheism is an opposite of theism. An atheist is a person who does not believe in God. Atheists “think that the proposition “God exists” is false, unlikely or improbable.”¹² Kurtz went further to distinguish two kinds of atheism: Dogmatic or totalistic atheism and reasoned atheism. The Dogmatic atheist simply disbelieves in the existence of God. In the words of Kurtz, “This form of atheism expresses a form of fervent disbelief, the adamant conviction that atheism is simply true and needs no justification.”¹³ This form of atheism has a deeper and inner aversion against theism. It simply considers theism as false. The atheists that

belong to this group do not give reason or evidence for their position. Their objection to theism may simply be “idiosyncratic, based on personal psychological, sociological or political objects.”¹⁴ The point here is that these atheists have no rational ground for their position.

The second form of atheism, which is the one championed by Kurtz, has to do with the careful examination of the case for and against God's existence in order to ascertain its position. Paul Kurtz maintains that this form of atheism “makes sense only if it is a reasoned position, arrived at after long and intelligent inquiry. Disbelief needs to be justified as a meaningful alternative to theism.”¹⁵ It means that if one says that one does not believe in God, one has to give reason or reasons for not believing in God. This form of atheism can be seen as a form of knowledge since the general understanding of knowledge is a justified true belief. So a justified true disbelief in theism is a form of knowledge. Kurtz maintains that the case for God's existence has not been conclusively demonstrated and the alternative naturalistic explanations of the universe and human life are the better position. So since the theist claims that God exists, the burden of proof lies on him to demonstrate his claim. But since he cannot conclusively demonstrate his claim, the atheist takes the alternative position and the burden of proof does not lie on him to disprove that God does not exist. What the atheist is saying is that there is nothing in the universe that rationally points to the existence of a transcendent being and one cannot hinge the idea of God's existence on faith. Knowledge cannot be based on faith.

It is pertinent, at this point, to note the argument of Alvin Plantinga concerning our subject matter. Plantinga is of the view that theists do not have to bear the burden of proof to substantiate their claim for God's existence.¹⁶ Plantinga holds that there is no adequate fundamentalist basis for knowledge. In this sense, “it is not unreasonable for Christians

to believe in God, which itself is a basic belief, not needing any further justification.”¹⁷ This position of Platinga is not acceptable to Kurtz. Therefore, Kurtz argues that if Platinga's argument is anything to go by, it follows that anyone can argue in similar way that his belief is basic and not need any justification. Kurtz further argued that following Platinga's argument, “Muslims or Buddhists might simply proclaim the truth of Islam or Buddhism and deny the need to support their beliefs. Similarly, those who believe in reincarnation or even Santa Claus, might insist that their beliefs were true and that the burden of proof would not be upon them to justify them.”¹⁸ Kurtz strongly argued that no one is entitled to hold any belief without convincing demonstration.

Agnosticism

According to Kurtz, the third position which a skeptical inquirer can take concerning the existence of God is agnosticism. He noted that this form of skeptical inquiry was popularized since nineteenth century by such great minds as T. H. Huxley, Leslie Stephen, Clarence Darrow, among others.

Basically there are three forms of agnosticism. In the first instance, agnosticism is viewed as a negative of Gnosticism. It states that there are certain things that are basically unknown or unknowable. In this regard, the idea of God as a transcendental being cannot be known by the finite mind of the human person. Kurtz pointed out that in this form of agnosticism, some religious people may fall in line. This is because they accept their inability to know God. But the question now is: what is the basis for postulating the existence of a being that cannot be known? This is where the religious people got it wrong. Though they would rely on faith as their basis for such belief but Kurtz noted that such basis is fallacious. He said: “To merely state that we have faith is to beg the question.”¹⁹

The second form of agnosticism according to Kurtz is similar to classical Pyrrhonic Skepticism which is known for disputing the possibility of attaining truth and so posits the need for total suspension of judgment. These agnostics maintain that having examined the arguments in favor of God's existence, they are not satisfied with the claim; also they do not think that the existence of God has been disproved by the atheists. Therefore they maintain that "it is impossible to ever know such ultimate truths and that they will remain neutral and suspend judgment."²⁰ So they are not satisfied with the argument for and against God's existence. According to Kurtz, this form of agnosticism as applied to God's existence is fundamentally untenable.

The third form of agnosticism, in the view of Kurtz, is the one introduced and defended by T. H. Huxley. Kurtz went further to present his argument in Huxley's words:

Agnosticism is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle ... Positively the principle may be expressed as in matters of intellect, follow our reason as far as it can take you without other consideration. And negatively, in matters of the intellect, do not pretend conclusions are certain that are not demonstrated or demonstrable.²¹

In the view of Kurtz, this third form of agnosticism is the one that expresses a basic methodological principle of constructive skeptical inquiry. It holds that the method for knowledge acquisition has to be objective and beliefs have to be accepted only on the ground that they have been properly justified by reason and evidence. It follows that any belief that has no objective justification is inadequate. Kurtz therefore posits that with reference to belief in God, "an agnostic could consistently doubt or deny its claim because it does not meet the demands of objectivity or adequacy."²²

Having briefly examined the three possible positions of the skeptical inquirer on God – Igtheism, Atheism and Agnosticism – we shall now take a closer look at Kurtzian critique on religious beliefs.

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Religious Beliefs

It is pertinent to note that the concept of religion, as stated in chapter One, is used in this study to refer to a belief or a set of beliefs in a supernatural being or the worship of supernatural being or beings. This delineation is very important. Paul Kurtz noted that religion does not deal only with the supernatural; it also deals with the natural but lays more emphasis on the supernatural. He observed thus:

Religions postulate a deep division of reality into two separate realms: the profane and the sacred. The first is the natural and material world of everyday life, a world that we encounter in experience, endure, enjoy, or suffer; it is the world of brute facticity directly perceived by our sense organs and understood by rational inference and explanation. The second is the unknown world beyond, which transcends the present capacities of acquaintance or understanding; it lies hidden and is mysterious.²³

Kurtz pointed that human beings are yet to understand fully the paradox of material world and worse still, religion is complicating issues with the postulation of another transcendent world. The central focus of the religions of the world is the supernatural being or supernatural beings. It is good to note at this point that the major point of Kurtzian critique of religion is applied to the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. These religions, for him, “postulated the existence of a divine creator of the universe who promises eternal salvation.”²⁴ The belief in God, the transcendent being, is premised on certain 'convictions' by the believer. In a bid to substantiate his claims about his religious beliefs, the believer makes appeal to revelation, faith, mystical experience, religious experience, miracles and deductive

arguments. Kurtz therefore tried to critically evaluate the basis for the belief in God through the use of his 'eupraxophic lens'. He exclaims:

The methods of critical intelligence should not be viewed as intellectual skills that only a limited technocratic elite will employ in specialized fields. They can be employed in all areas of life; in particular they can be employed to examine the claims of religion ... secular humanists have an obligation to submit the religious belief systems that prevail in society to intensive scrutiny.²⁵

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Revelation

Paul Kurtz remarked that one of the means for justifying the belief in God by most of the major religions is revelation. Christianity, Islam and Judaism draw upon revelation to authenticate their theistic position. The understanding of revelation among religious people is "the revealing or disclosing of some form of truth or knowledge through communication with deity or other supernatural entity or entities."²⁶ The orthodox Jews believe that the Torah was divinely revealed by Yahweh. Christians also accept the Old and New Testaments of the bible as the revealed word of God. They believe that God revealed himself through his words in the bible. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that God is the author of the bible, the sacred scripture. It went further to assert:

For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the ground that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.²⁷

In similar way, the Moslems believe that Koran, their sacred book, was revealed to Prophet Mohammed word to word by God.²⁸ Moslems also believe that the Koran is the final revelation of God to humanity. So

Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other major religions see revelation as a message from God. Consequently, their belief in God is authenticated by such revelations.

Regarding the reliability of revelation as the basis for God's existence, Paul Kurtz posed some pertinent and critical questions: Is the testimony of the revelation corroborated by independent, impartial observer? Should we take such revelations as being veridical? Can there be alternative naturalistic and psychological explanations to account for the alleged experiences? Following his humanistic Eupraxophy, Kurtz argued that the idea that revelations, as postulated by theists, are messages from God is highly doubtful. He argued: "The accounts of prophecies and revelations in the Bible are clearly uncorroborated."²⁹ He pointed out that there was no independent impartial observer to corroborate the experience of the prophets or the receivers of the revelations. More so, there was no one to actually check the authenticity of the revelations. This is a serious problem and so a humanist eupraxopher has to cast serious doubt on revelation as the basis for the belief in God. Kurtz further argued that the so-called revelations by Moses, Prophets, Jesus, Apostles, Mohammed, etc. had no inter-subjective corroboration. And as such, there is no way to verify such claims. Such revelations are only accepted by believers but make no sense to an unbeliever.

What constitutes adequate corroborative testimony? There is of course, firsthand testimony based upon direct observation. But if a prophet is alone when he undergoes an experience, then we can question whether or not he is accurate in portraying what transpired. We can ask, was he truthful? Was he a disturbed personality? Did he suffer hallucinations? Did he believe in it himself? It is clear that reports of bizarre, purely private experiences are to be taken with great cautions ... it is important that some secondhand testimony be available to support a revelatory claim.³⁰

On another note, Kurtz pointed out the contradictions inherent in the acclaimed revelations. Many of the revelations in the New Testament are said to replace or modify the ones in the Old Testament. The Moslems maintain that Koranic revelations supersede that of Judaism and Christianity. Does it mean that there are different revelations to different groups? How do we compare the various revelations? This is quite problematic. For instance, while Christianity preaches monogamy as a form of marriage, Judaism and Islam encourage polygamy. Does it mean the same God revealed different things to different religious groups? Or are there different Gods for different people? Does God speak with different tongues? Paul Kurtz questioned further: should we accept the revelation in Torah and reject that of Koran and the Bible? It must be observed that Christians reject Mohammed as a false prophet basically because of his denial of the divinity of Christ. Kurtz therefore argued that “the internal contradictions within the entire body of alleged revelatory experiences are difficult to reconcile.”³¹

It is the view of Kurtz that we have to be extremely cautious and skeptical about the claims made in the name of revelations. He said: “none of the classical cases of revelation satisfies the demands of reasonable common sense.”³² Therefore, revelation, for him, cannot be used as the basis for belief in God.

Eupraxaphic Perspectives on Faith

Kurtz observed that another argument in support of belief in God by the religious people is faith. Many people claim to believe in God basically on the ground of faith. Many theologians and religious people extol faith as the highest of virtues. In its general definition, faith is seen as a strong belief or conviction about something or somebody without necessarily any empirical evidence.

In discussing faith as a basis for religious belief, Kurtz first of all distinguished three kinds of faith: (1) Intransigent faith, (2) Willful belief and (3) Beliefs framed as hypothesis and based upon probabilities. Let us briefly analyze these three kinds of faith:

1. Intransigent Faith

For Kurtz, this kind of faith is very rampant. This has to do with a tenacious belief in something in spite of strong evidence to the contrary.³³ This type of faith can be regarded as totally irrational in its extreme form. A typical example of this type of faith is the case of a husband that committed an act of infidelity and the wife refuses to accept the fact despite clear evidence. Another instance is the persistence of religious beliefs in spite of the scientific discoveries and strong evidence to the contrary. Intransigent faith is based on certain psychological dispositions and habit that oftentimes hinder the ability of the individual to recognize the actual situation. Kurtz pointed out the persistent belief in creationism despite available evidence of the evolutionists. He observed:

It is well over a century since Darwin wrote. Yet creationists still stoutly deny the theory of evolution. They reject the wide range of data assembled from biology, geology, paleontology, anthropology, astronomy, etc. which all point to evolutionary process in the universe. Instead, pointing to the gaps in the fossil record that exist, creationists totally reject evolution ... But it is a mask for the doctrine of religious creationism outlined in the Book of Genesis: that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, including all the species, which are fixed in kind.³⁴

Kurtz further argued that most religious people try to subvert the rational evidence in order to accent to their belief. This type of belief has no rational basis. Kurtz sees faith as a refuge that enables someone

to withstand the challenges of his beliefs. Intransigent faith, he maintains, is the tool of religions to support their beliefs.

2. Willful Belief

This is a second kind of faith according to Kurtz. It has to do with beliefs where there are insufficient or no evidence either way to enable one to make a rational choice. Kurtz noted that it was William James that labeled this type of faith as “the will to believe”. According to Kurtz, William James “claimed that in some cases, notably in religion, we can resolve to believe that something is true.”³⁵ This is the resolve to believe in something that is not derived from sufficient evidence but on the willful belief. One decides to believe regardless of the evidence that would have given rise to rational support to such belief. The willful belief can be seen where there is no evidence for or against; or where there may be some evidence on both sides.³⁶ It must be noted that willful belief provides hope and meaning for some persons but may also bring negative effects for many others. The theist believes in God, not because he is fully convinced of his existence, but for the fact that he wishes to believe. Paul Kurtz writes:

I [Paul Kurtz] submit that the most viable option in cases where there is no objective evidence and we have to choose would be to flip a coin and hope for the best. It then becomes a question of one's prejudices and values intervening. But if we don't have any evidence either way, then why not admit it and leave it at that? Again, we run the risk, retorts the believer, that some vindictive deity will punish us for failure to believe.³⁷

Looking at the above citation, it follows that the believer willfully believes in God to avoid probable punishment, and not necessarily because of any rational evidence. Kurtz pointed out Sidney Hook's response should he be confronted by his maker at the Judgment Day for

not believing. Hook is reported to have replied: "I would say: 'you didn't give me any evidence' and trust that if God were a rational being he would respect rationality in his creatures."³⁸ So one can have the will to believe or the will not to believe. The point being made here is that willful belief does not make something true but simply confirms our prejudices. Kurtz argued further that faith in this sense "never proves a point; it only registers our convictions"³⁹

3. Beliefs Framed as Hypothesis and Based upon Probabilities

This is the third form of faith as discussed by Paul Kurtz. He said that this involves "beliefs held with varying degrees of probability, based upon evidence, but none with complete certainty."⁴⁰ This type of belief is based on some evidence and does not go beyond the ground of corroborating evidence. It is not taken as absolute as in intransigent or willful beliefs but is flexible and based on the principle of fallibilism. This kind of faith is all about probabilities and is far from dogmatism and absolutism. According to Kurtz, in this form of faith, "truth values are simply equivalent to or a function of their supporting grounds."⁴¹ This is not the type of faith expressed by theists.

Having distinguished the three forms of faith, Kurtz maintains that intransigent faith and willful belief are the tools in the hands of believers to affirm God's existence. As stated above, these forms of faith either do not have evidence or lack sufficient evidence to warrant rational belief. We must note that Kurtzian criticism of faith as the basis for belief in God is on intransigent and willful beliefs. Faith, as posited by theists to justify belief in God lacks merit. The whole scenario is like telling someone to accept as true what is conspicuously untrue simply on the ground of faith. The whole talk about faith relegates human reason to the background. For Stephen D. Schafersman, "Faith

weakens the intellect by destroying the value of reasoned and empirical thinking.”⁴² It is a fact that nobody talks of faith when there is evidence. We only bring faith to substitute our emotions for evidence. This is why Kurtz says that “faith never proves a point; it only registers our convictions.”⁴³ For the fact that faith demeans the value of human rationality, it has to be seen as a vice and very far from being a virtue as argued by theists.

Faith promotes dogmatism, since there is no method by which one can use faith to decide among different points of view or even between truth and falsehood. Faith frequently results in censorship, because if contrary evidence might induce doubt, faith holds that it must be suppressed, it obviously can't be fought by using reason, since faith does not use reason. Faith does not result in reliable knowledge, since knowledge is justified true belief, and faith can only justify its beliefs by either revelation or authority.⁴⁴

The argument here is that faith is opposed to reason. And since faith is opposed to reason, it cannot be used as the basis for belief in God. Faith-talk cannot be sufficiently justified. So following critical thinking Kurtz maintains that a humanist eupraxopher does not have anything to do with belief in God's existence based on faith. “Dogmatic faith,” said Kurtz, “enslaves thought.”⁴⁵ Therefore, belief in God cannot be justified simply on the ground of faith. Faith contradicts the rules of reason as stated in Chapter Four. It is foolishness, in the view of Kurtz, for a rational person to believe in God on the ground of faith despite all the scientific evidence to the contrary.

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Miracles

Appeal to miracle, according to Kurtz Eupraxophy, is another argument employed by theists to demonstrate God's existence.

Generally, a miracle is understood as an occurrence that is not attributed to physical, human power or the laws of nature. It has to do with the events that are attributed to a supernatural being. Miracle is also understood as an occurrence that defies any known science; it is an event that goes against the laws of nature. Religious people often make reference to miracle to justify their belief in God. Paul Kurtz writes:

The appeal to miracles has been adduced in history to demonstrate that God intervenes in history and sets aside the laws of nature; and this is taken as sign of the divine hand at work. Volcanic eruptions, floods, victories in time of war, and the sudden remission of illnesses have been seen by believers as miraculous occurrences.⁴⁶

According to the theist, for the fact that an occurrence defies present scientific knowledge, presupposes the existence of God. But this is all about interpretation. To interpret an event as miraculous is simply to express a belief and disposition of one's mind. The fact that an unusual occurrence defies the scientific knowledge today does not mean that science of tomorrow will not find explanation to it. The fact is that human knowledge develops and as such, there is no need to attribute an occurrence to a supernatural being outside nature since there is no empirical verification to such claims.

More so, some alleged miracles are due to lack of proper knowledge about the natural causes.⁴⁷ Some acclaimed miracles are based on deception. Kurtz related the view of David Hume on miracle. We must recall that Hume dealt a critical blow on the authenticity of miracle as a basis for God's existence.⁴⁸ Kurtz reported that "David Hume has forcibly argued that the term miracle is often a substitute for ignorance of the real causes at work. If the events are favorable to human interest, he argued, this can be attributed to coincidence rather than divine intervention, and further investigations usually

demonstrate that the alleged miraculous effects were due to natural causes.⁴⁹ Most of the events acclaimed as miracles have natural explanations. Kurtz argued that there is no evidence to objectively convince a rational mind that a miracle has occurred or that a miracle is an act of God. For Kurtz, it is all about the figment of human imagination. He therefore concludes that the alleged miraculous powers of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed were simply creative figments of human imaginations and not evidence of God's existence.⁵⁰ So the question of God's existence on the basis of miracle is highly fallacious and contrary to the rules of reason.

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Mystical Experience

The appeal to mystical experience, according to Kurtz, is another strong point for the justification of belief in a transcendent being by religious people. Some religious people believe that they have a special kind of experience which point to the fact of God's existence. This kind of experience is observed in most religions of the world. Kurtz relates that "mysticism is applied to that specialized class of experiences in which mystics claim to have some direct encounter with a spiritual reality."⁵¹ Mystical experiences are characterized by subjectivity and introspection. Mystics at times claim that they have left their bodies. It is only the experiencer that knows actually what he/she has experienced.

Mystics claim that they experience divine encounter; that they are conscious of a reality that is beyond our normal sense perception. For them, this experience is so strong, deep and immediate that it cannot be doubtful. And so the 'reality' of this experience accounts for theistic belief in God's existence.

Paul Kurtz, following his humanist Eupraxophy, is very critical of the claims of the mystics. It will be very hard for a eupraxopher to accept the belief in God on the ground of mystical experience. The question now borders on how to accept the veracity of mystical claims. Kurtz argued that “a classical mystical experience, taken by itself is private and subjective, unanswerable to controlled examination or corroboration, and therefore cannot be easily accepted as evidential.”⁵² Kurtz maintains that for the fact that mystical experience cannot be objectively verified by an independent observer, it lacks merit as the basis for God's existence. Furthermore, mystical experience may involve a distortion of perception or a pathological state of consciousness, and as such cannot be reliable. In this regard, Bertrand Russell observed: “From a scientific point of view, we can make no distinction between that man who eats little and sees heaven and the man who drinks much and sees snakes. Each is an abnormal physical condition, and therefore has abnormal perception.”⁵³ In a sense, mystical experience can be seen as an abnormal condition. It is worthy to note that there are some drugs that can induce mystic-like experience. The question now is: Is God to be found by taking drugs? This boils down to the fact that it is all a matter of interpretation. A Christian mystic sees Christ in his mystical experience while a Moslem sees different thing. So the idea of inferring the existence of God from the experience of the mystics is contradictory to the rules of reason and as such cannot be accepted by a humanist eupraxopher.

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Deductive Arguments

Having taken a critical look at revelation, faith, miracle and mysticism as the basis for religious belief, Kurtz went further to make a critique of deductive arguments. Deductive arguments manifest various attempts

by theologians and philosophers to demonstrate the existence of God. The arguments can be summed up as ontological, cosmological, teleological or design arguments. Paul Kurtz was very critical of these deductive arguments.

Kurtz argued that the ontological argument is inadequate to convince someone who does not have a prior belief in God to accept such belief. We must recall that ontological argument was popularized by St. Anselm. The argument states that God is the greatest possible being and as such to conceive the greatest possible being as not existing is not practicable. Anselm argued:

If that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought of as not existing, this very thing than which greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. But this is contradictory. So, then, there truly is a being than which a greater cannot be thought – so truly that it cannot even be thought of as not existing.⁵⁴

Kurtz remarked that the ontological argument “employs a formalistic method of proof that proceeds by the tautological analysis of the meaning of the concept of God.”⁵⁵ This argument has been criticized on the ground that it assumed what it sets out to prove. The fact that some people conceive in their mind a greatest possible being does not posit the real existence of such a being. Kurtz argued: “The very fact that some individuals have an idea of God that entails existence as part of its meaning does not necessarily demonstrate that the idea must exist independent of the concept in their minds.”⁵⁶ The fact is that whatever can be conceived has existence. But another important fact to note is: That such a being has existence in the mind does not necessarily translate to actual existence. This is the major problem with the ontological argument. Kurtz therefore observed that ontological argument is fallacious. He argued: “The basic fallacy of the ontological

argument is that it is dealing with purely analytic statements, but whether they apply to the real world out there can only be determined by experience. To use a predefined concept to demonstrate the existence of God is to beg the question.”⁵⁷

The cosmological argument, according to Kurtz, is the “most pervasive in the history of thought.”⁵⁸ The cosmological argument is an attempt to provide answer to the question of motion, causality, contingency and necessity. The argument posits that everything that is moved is moved by another. In this regard, Aquinas states that it is either we trace motion to an infinite regress (which for him is impossible) or we can postulate an unmoved mover, first cause, necessary being which he called God. This is the summary of the cosmological arguments for the justification of the belief in God's existence. Kurtz therefore argued that the idea of the unmoved mover or the First Cause can only make sense within the natural order. But for Aquinas and other religious people to move beyond the natural world to postulate a transcendent being is not in accordance with practical reason; it is a mark of ignorance and foolishness. He therefore observed:

Aquinas' argument only pushes our ignorance back one step, for one can always ask, what caused this being? The question is illegitimate, we are told. But why is it any more illegitimate than asking for the cause of the universe? Aquinas has postulated an infinite regress. Moreover, there are other possible options: why not say that the universe is infinite, without beginning or end (God is alleged to be infinite), or that matter, mass or energy is eternal, or that the universe is a product of chance or that there are constant processes of creation going on? In any case, to use the term cause in a transcendental sense is to stretch its meaning inadmissibly. They make little sense when we extrapolate them outside the universe and endow them with transcendent meaning.⁵⁹

Paul Kurtz maintains that the cosmologist has not been able to fully demonstrate the existence of God. This is because of the simple fact that using cosmological argument to justify the belief in God is beyond the range of verifiable evidence. Therefore, the argument according to Kurtz lacks merit. Kurtz is of the view that “The invoking of God as a cause of everything that is, is mere postulation, without sufficient evidence or proof. It is a leap outside nature.”⁶⁰

Another deductive argument that attracted the critical attention of Kurtz is the Teleological or Design argument. The teleological argument states that there is order in nature and that everything is working according to purpose. So there is no better way to explain the order in nature than to postulate a divine intelligence that is responsible for the order in the universe. In analogical sense, human beings act for a purpose; a hunter shoots an arrow to kill an animal; a student studies hard in order to pass his examination. In the same vein the universe is not purposeless. There must be an orderer whom Aquinas called God. For the theists, it is God that designed and planned the universe in its perfect shape. And so, it is impossible to explain the order and design in nature without postulating a designer. Therefore, the logical inference is that God exists.

Kurtz, therefore, questioned: if we infer that God exists from the harmony and order which we experience in the universe, what about the disharmony and disorder in the world? Following the cosmological argument, it means that God is the cause of disorder and disharmony in the universe. This argument boils down to the age-long problem of evil. The world is not only about the good, there is also evil in the world. There is constant conflict in the world. Kurtz averred: “Order does not imply design or the existence of a draftsman. Indeed, nature is often the scene of conflict, chaos, and disorder. Species struggle for survival,

there are cosmic collisions, star systems come into being, explode, or begin to cool down. We cannot read purpose or design into natural processes.”⁶¹

It is the view of Kurtz that design argument has the tendency to reduce everything to the anthropomorphic view of the universe; this can be seen as man creating God in his own (man's) image and likeness.⁶² One thing we must note is that God exists more because of the order and harmony in the world, than the problems of disorder and disharmony observable in the universe pose many questions as to the veracity of such claim. Both natural and moral evils in the world question the existence of such a God whom Christians qualify as being omnipotent, omnipresent, omnibenevolent and omniscient. From the above critical analysis, Kurtz strongly affirmed that God does not exist.

God does not exist. He is not a separate person or a being, an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent creator of the universe. These are anthropomorphic misattribution. To worship such a being is mistaken. Prayer is only a psychological reaction to the trouble we encounter and an expression of hope that we will overcome them. No one is on the other side of the transaction to hear our supplications, no one with whom we can plea-bargain for salvation.⁶³

The point being made here is that there is no rational ground to establish or to justify theistic belief in God. It is also good to note that there could be other theistic arguments for God's existence; but none of the theistic arguments, in the views of Paul Kurtz, can withstand the critical mind of a humanist eupraxopher. More so, the claim that God exists has not been sufficiently corroborated, verified or validated.⁶⁴ He said that all the arguments adduced for God's existence are unconvincing. He therefore states unequivocally thus:

We find insufficient evidence for the prophet's claims of a divine revelation, a resurrected deity, heaven, hell, angels, and demons. Let us make that point without equivocation, and let us try to persuade society at large that skepticism is a responsible posture. We have examined the arguments adduced in behalf of God and we find them unconvincing. The so-called deductive proofs are fallacious, the appeals to 'mystical experience' insufficient, the argument that religion is pragmatically useful questionable.⁶⁵

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48. For a detailed understanding of Hume's Critique on miracles as the basis of God's existence, see David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. Niddite, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
49. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 207
50. Ibid., 207
51. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 92
52. Ibid., 104
53. Bertrand Russell, "Mysticism" quoted in Walter Kaufmann,

Critique of Philosophy and Religion (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), 315.

54. St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, quoted in Joseph Omoregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion* (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 1993), 78.
55. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 210
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Kurtz, *Eupraxophy*, 32–33
61. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 213
62. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 307
63. Ibid., 316
64. Kurtz, *Eupraxophy*, 76
65. Ibid., 137

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Paranormal Beliefs

Preamble

One of the basic characteristics of Eupraxophy is a full commitment to free inquiry into every field of human endeavor.¹ There is no-go-area for a humanist eupraxopher. This explains why Paul Kurtz turned his critical mind not only on religion but also on the paranormals. It is the view of Kurtz that for a human person to live freely and rationally, he/she has to be eupraxophic in interpreting the things of the world.² This is a basic fact that has eluded the paranormalists. Paul Kurtz remarked that the growth of paranormal beliefs especially in the contemporary society is quite astonishing. Paranormal beliefs, as we have stated earlier, have gone as far as to include belief in extrasensory perception (ESP) – precognition, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, telepathy, psychic healing, astral projection, UFO abductions, immortality of the soul, etc.³ These paranormal beliefs, according to Kurtz, have neither rational basis nor supporting evidence.

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Extrasensory Perception

Extrasensory perception (ESP) has to do with the awareness of something beyond the five senses of sight, taste, hearing, touch and smell.⁶⁹ One pertinent question now borders on the authenticity and veracity of the claims of ESP. Kurtz observed:

The very notion of extrasensory perception seems to fly in the face of our standard modes of perceiving and understanding the world. Our knowledge of external objects and events depends on sensory input. We perceive qualities and properties, interpret sense-data, and make inferences from them. The colours, sounds, tastes, smells, and our tactile qualities we perceive come through our sensory receptors. Our

perception is also related to motor behavior, as we intervene in the world of objects and seek to use or modify them to suit our purpose.⁵

The point Paul Kurtz is trying to establish here is that paranormal belief is antithetical to reason; it is against our normal way of acquiring knowledge. The paranormals go beyond the common channels of acquiring knowledge. This is why, in the view of Kurtz, a eupraxopher has fundamental epistemic problem with paranormal beliefs. Kurtz argued that “precognition violates both common sense and scientific concepts of time because it implies that one can know about a future event before it occurs.”⁶ But one thing that is certain is that our knowledge of the world and the things around us is highly dependent on the memory both past and present perceptions. It is on the basis of past events that we can infer future events. If John is known for speaking the truth in the past on several occasions, one can infer that John will also speak the truth tomorrow. This is on the basis of the principle of induction; that the future event will be like the past events. This form of reasoning, according to Kurtz, is natural and it follows the principle of cause and effect. However, the paranormlists claim the contrary. Kurtz noted that paranormalists go beyond normal means of acquiring knowledge and claim that “it is possible to have a prevision of future events, without reference to causal explanation, prediction, or inference. The future literally can be known before it happens.”⁷ This aspect of paranormal belief – precognition – cannot be verified empirically and is thus rejected by the humanist eupraxopher.

Kurtz also pointed out that there is another aspect of ESP that equally does violence to our scientific and common-sense view of the world, namely, psychokinesis or telekinesis.⁸ This has to do with the belief that an individual has the ability to cause physical objects to

move without any form of physical intervention. This, for Kurtz, is contrary to the laws of physics. C. D. Broad observed that there are general categories by which we interpret and understand reality. He called them basic limiting principles.⁹ These basic principles can be summed up as follows: (1) Our knowledge of the world depends upon sensory observation and inferences from them and presuppose physical causes in the material world; (2) the human mind presupposes a brain and nervous system (3) events in the future cannot cause changes in the present and past to occur. It is the view of Kurtz that the claims of the paranormalists go beyond the basic limiting principles as stipulated by Broad.

However, it is good to note that Kurtz is not rejecting paranormal claims simply on the ground that they contradict the existing body of knowledge; rather he argues that the truth or falsity of paranormal claims should be established by evidence.¹⁰ This, for Kurtz, is one of the criteria for accepting a truth-claim. For him, extra-ordinary claims, like claims of the paranormals, need extra-ordinary evidence.

Where a body of hypotheses, concepts, and theories are well established on the basis of abundant evidence and have been tested repeatedly and found to apply to broad bodies of data, and where these hypotheses and theories have an internal coherence, a wide range of application, and explanatory power, then we may radically alter or abandon these theories only if the evidence for the anomalist data is so strong that we require a considerable amount of evidence based on trustworthy testimony and experimental data, which is inexplicable by known concepts. At some point new schematic explanations may eventually be introduced. But extraordinary claims that violate our basic limiting principles demand extraordinary amounts of evidence.¹¹

The position of Kurtz is that for a humanist eupraxopher to accept a particular truth-claim that violates general knowledge there must be enough evidence to support such claim. It is not enough for someone to say that for the fact that a bird crew last night and a man dies in the morning that the bird is the cause of the death of the man. For one to accept such claim there must be enough evidence that must be corroborated. There has to be evidence to show the connection between the crying of the bird at night and the death of the man in the morning. Anything short of this, in the view of Kurtz is not acceptable. Kurtz argued that “the amount of data establishing the presence of paranormal phenomena is at best weak and inconclusive.”¹² He further observed that the criteria for testing truth-claims as discussed in the previous chapter, namely, evidence, logical coherence and pragmatic consequences, are lacking in the paranormal claims. This for him calls to question the belief in the paranormals.

Kurtz noted the efforts of some parapsychologists to establish the grounds for paranormal claims. Despite all their efforts in this regard, Kurtz observed that all their findings are “as inconclusive as they were at the inception of the Society for Psychical Research more than a century ago.”⁷¹³ The effort of J. B. Rhine¹⁴, a parapsychologist, to establish a case for extrasensory perception met with strong scientific argumentations. C. E. M. Hansel¹⁵ and J. G. Pratt¹⁶ in their separate investigations have noted the unsuccessful attempts of parapsychologist to establish their belief in the paranormals. Kurtz recorded that the Pearce-Pratt test conducted in 1933 – 1934 under the supervision of J. G. Pratt to establish the veracity of ESP proved negative.¹⁷ It was discovered by Pratt that the claim of ESP is characterized with fraud and deception. Kurtz relates:

Skeptics have pointed out that this is all too infrequently the case and that experimenter after experimenter – sheep as well as goats – have tried to get positive results only to have them end in abysmal failure; further, where there is any success, some fatal flaw is usually found in the experiment, or outright fraud is discovered. Several other tests have been cited in the parapsychological literature as evidence of ESP, but in each instances, skeptics have raised some objections to the tests and have insisted that before they can accept the reality of ESP as proven fact, there must be some replicable experiment to which they can refer.¹⁸

One thing to note is that paranormal claims cannot be replicated and as such have no supporting evidence. Paul Kurtz further related the effort of Samuel G. Soal to investigate paranormal claims. Soal carried out an investigation on a great number of people who considered themselves as spiritualists, mediums, or psychics. He used Zener cards to carry out this investigation from 1934 to 1939. Kurtz noted that after many years of investigations, Soal, who was first a believer in the paranormals, confessed that it was virtually impossible to find anyone who could demonstrate that he/she possessed extrasensory perception with the use of zener cards.¹⁹ All those tested for telepathy, clairvoyance or precognition proved negative. Also C. D. Broad affirmed a widely view of those who were involved in Soal's tests. He declared: "The precautions taken to prevent deliberate fraud or the unwitting conveyance of information by normal means are ... seen to be absolutely water-tight."²⁰ It was these water-tight precautions that made it possible for the investigation to be adequately controlled. It follows that the supposed extrasensory perception is characterized by fraud and deception. This goes to show that there is no rational ground for the belief in the paranormals. Kurtz further reported that many scientists agreed with the experiments of Soal and therefore

“considered the Soal experiments to have been the most carefully conducted investigations ever carried out in this area.”²¹ George R. Price²², a notable scholar, was highly skeptical about the claims of the parapsychologists. Paul Kurtz relates Price's views thus: “We cannot accept the findings of parapsychology, until one test is devised where the opportunity for fraud or error is entirely absent. Until such an experiment is carried out, we should not accept any evidence for ESP that has thus far been adduced.”²³

The argument of Kurtz, we must note, is that ESP is characterized by fraud, deception and will-to-belief. For him, there is no strong supporting evidence to the claims of the paranormalists regarding extrasensory perception. More so, since ESP contradicts our normal ways of acquiring knowledge, it has to be rejected by a rational practical mind. The argument of Kurtz on ESP is also applicable to other aspects of the paranormal beliefs. Inasmuch as paranormal claims cannot be corroborated under strict observation by an unbiased investigator, they cannot be regarded as knowledge. They can simply be regarded as illusions. Kurtz maintains that unreliable and contradictory testimonies of believers are inadequate to substantiate paranormal claims. He strongly argues: “We need replication of the phenomena under strict condition of observation by dispassionate investigators.”²⁴

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Immortality

Another aspect of the paranormal that caught the critical mind of Paul Kurtz is the belief in immortality or reincarnation. The idea of immortality of the soul or reincarnation is embedded on the dualistic account of human nature; that is, that the human person is made of body

and soul. Kurtz noted that the earlier term used to depict this type of belief is metempsychosis. Metempsychosis refers to “the passing of the soul at death into another living thing, whether in human, animal or plant form.”²⁵ It is important to note that most primitive religions are characterized by this belief. In Hinduism, there is what is called transmigration of the soul. This is the entering of the soul into a new plane of existence depending on the way of life of the particular individual in his/her past lives. Kurtz relates that the doctrine of reincarnation states that the soul exists externally and it will continue to be reborn in new bodies. “The soul existed before the birth of the body, and upon the death of the physical body it persisted in some form until after an interval of time, it would occupy still another material body.”²⁶ Kurtz argued that the belief in immortality of the soul has no rational grounds. For him, there are at least three main skeptical objections to the doctrine of immortality of the soul: (1) logical objections, (2) evidential questions and (3) argument from value.

1. Logical Objections

The first skeptical objection to the belief in the immortality of the soul, according to Kurtz, is logical in nature. This means that “there is no clear meaning of the term soul.”²⁷ He observed that before we can talk of the existence of immortality of the soul, we must know what soul is. Therefore, some logical questions are pertinent at this point: what do we understand by the term soul? Does it make sense to talk of a separate or 'discarnate' self? Is such expression nonsensical? Kurtz noted that some analytic philosophers have argued that the idea of the immortality of the soul masks a basic kind of incoherence.²⁸ For him, it is a category mistake to talk of immortality of the soul. He argued:

Classical philosophers, from Aristotle to Hume and Kant, have raised serious doubts about the idea of a substantial soul separable from the body. Many contemporary philosophers have raised more fundamental issues. John Dewey and the behaviourists, for example, rejected 'mentalism' and the existence of a mind-body dualism as empirically unwarranted. Gilbert Ryle, Antony Flew, Peter Geach and other linguistic philosophers have found the concept of 'soul' logically unintelligible. Ryle thinks that we do not make any sense when we talk about the "ghost in the machine," and he indicts Descartes and all who hold a dualistic or Platonic view for committing a category mistake. The human being is an integrated unity; what we call the "soul" or "mind" is imply a functional aspect of the physical organism interacting in an environment. If this is the case, it is difficult to know what it means to say that something called the soul survives the dissolution of the body.²⁹

The argument of Kurtz is that the idea of the immortality of the soul is a misuse of language. The soul should simply be understood as a "functional concept related to forms of behavior."³⁰ It is really a serious conceptual problem to say that the soul survives death since the soul cannot function without the sense organs, a brain and a nervous system. Therefore, from the logical point of view, Kurtz maintains that the best position to be taken by a humanist eupraxopher is "Igsoulism". The understanding of Igsoulism is similar to Igtheism as discussed above. It simply states that "the concept of a separable soul is unintelligible."³¹

2. Evidential Questions

The second skeptical objection to the belief in the immortality of the soul is what Paul Kurtz referred to as the evidential questions. He questioned: Is there adequate evidence for the belief that soul exists separate from the body and has had prior existence? Do people who die reappear on earth at some time immediately after death in some form or

another, or in some remote future will be resurrected in some new guise? Can the dead actually communicate with the living? Are there objectively confirmable evidence of sightings of the dead? These are some of the pertinent questions that are calling for evidential answers. Kurtz observed that investigations revealed that there is no objective evidence to the existence of immortality of the soul. It is all about wishful thinking, self-deception and fraud.³² The idea of pre-existence of the soul or post-mortem survival of the soul has no corroborating evidence. For Kurtz, it lacks scientific credibility. The evidential questions raised above have not been satisfactorily answered. The appeals to the memory of past lives or apparitions have no convincing evidence. Kurtz argued that we do not have sufficiently good reason to believe in the immortality of the soul. It is simply a matter of faith than of empirical warrant. He concludes:

In the last analysis belief in immortality is only an article of faith, an inference from an unsubstantiated belief in a divine universe, not a scientifically demonstrated truth. It is an expression of a person's hope that a divine being will in some way enable us to survive death so that we can exist through eternity, and/or that the deity will resurrect the physical body and soul at some point in the future and reinstitute personal identity and memory.³³

3. Argument from Value

Kurtz noted that belief in immortality is central to belief in God. The belief in immortality is seen as a solution to the problem of death or as a means to provide psychological sustenance to the bereaved and the fearful. So, people are often asked to do good because they will be rewarded in eternity. Kurtz observed that the doctrine of immortality in this sense “is interpreted not as making a descriptive truth claim about

the world but as providing normative guidance.”³⁴ To argue for immortality on ethical grounds, in the view of Kurtz, is basically unrealistic and gruesome. This type of argument “grows out of both fear of and fascination with death.”³⁵ The immortalist suffers from lack of courage to face reality as it is; and this, for Kurtz, is an immature and unhealthy attitude towards reality. “This attitude,” for Kurtz, “has all signs of pathology, for a person holding it is out of cognitive touch with reality.”³⁶ It is a strong view of Kurtz that “immortality is a symbol of our agony before an unyielding universe and our hope of some future deliverance. It is the tenacious refusal to confront the brute finitude of our existence, the contingent and precarious, often tragic, character of human life ... Immortality offers therapeutic solace.”³⁷ But against the therapeutic solace that immortality offers to the human person, humanist Eupraxophy offers existential courage as a key humanist virtue. Courage is so essential to human life. This is why Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich remarked that without courage life will be difficult and unbearable.³⁸

Paul Kurtz is of the view that the doctrine of immortality from the ethical perspective does not encourage the human person to take his destiny into his hands. He argued that the human person is the architect of his life and can live a good moral life without belief in immortality. What should motivate our actions is not the hope for salvation or fear of damnation but genuine moral concern without regard for reward or punishment. This is what makes a humanist eupraxopher. Kurtz observed that many theists believe that without belief in immortality life would have no meaning. On the contrary, Kurtz exclaimed that it is the doctrine of immortality that has impoverished the meaning of life. “If one believes in immortality, then little counts here.”³⁹ This goes to

say that without belief in immortality, one will make every genuine effort to better one's existence on earth; to contribute to the future of mankind here on earth.

Humanist may indeed believe in "immortality" in a metaphorical sense: they are devoted to the good works that will outlast them. But they strive for them not in order to be rewarded or punished, but because while they live they find their goals worthwhile. They are moved now to do what they think will contribute to a better future for their children's children's children, even though they may never live to see it. They need nothing beyond that to support or sustain their moral dedication.⁴⁰

The very point Kurtz is trying to establish is that the good life is possible without the doctrine of immortality. The humanist eupraxopher does not need to believe in immortality in order to give meaning to life. It is the strong position of Kurtz that the doctrine of immortality is simply based upon the paranormal interpretation of human existence.⁴¹

Before the conclusion of this chapter, it is important to note the confession of Paul Kurtz regarding the methods of inquiry. He noted that there are some things we do not know presently and possibly may never know. This, notwithstanding, skeptical inquiry, for him, is the most reliable method of inquiry. He confessed:

I [Paul Kurtz] may be mistaken, perhaps persistent and careful inquiry into paranormal claims will uncover data that point to human psychic power and transcendental realities. should this be demonstrated on scientific grounds, it would not invalidate my thesis, which is that objective methods of inquiry, including skepticism, as part of the process, is still the most reliable way of establishing truth claims, no matter what the field.⁴²

Endnotes

1. Paul Kurtz, *Eupraxophy: Living Without Religion* (New York: Promethean Books, 1989), 26
2. Ibid., 29 – 30
3. Cf. Paul Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986), 358 – 359; Paul Kurtz, *The New Skepticism: Inquiry and Reliable Knowledge* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1992), 140 – 141.
4. Lynn Kelly, *The Skeptic Guide The Paranormal* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 123.
5. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 361
6. Ibid., 362
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. C. D. Broad, *Philosophy*, 24, (1949), pp. 291 – 309, cited in Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 365.
10. Cf. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, *Op. Cit.* p. 365.
11. Ibid., 365 – 366
12. Ibid., 366
13. Ibid.
14. Cf. J. B. Rhine, *Extrasensory Perception* (Boston : Bruce Humphries, 1934)
15. C. E. M. Hansel, *ESP: and Parapsychology : A Critical Re-evaluation* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1980), 91.
16. Joseph Geither Pratt, *Parapsychology: An Insider's View of ESP* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 55 - 61
17. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 369 – 373
18. Ibid. p. 373

19. Cf. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 373; S. G. Soal & F. Bateman, *Modern Experiments in Telepathy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954).
20. C. D. Broad, "The Relevance of Psychical Research to Philosophy" *Philosophy*, 24 (1949), 359–67
21. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 377
22. Cf. George R. Price, "Science and the Supernatural" *Science*, 122, no. 3165, (1955), 359–67
23. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 379
24. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 147
25. Ibid., 151
26. Ibid., 153
27. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 403
28. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 153
29. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 403–404
30. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 153
31. Ibid.
32. Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 405
33. Ibid., 414
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 415
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 416
40. Ibid., 417
41. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 170
42. Ibid., 191

A Critical Appraisal of Kurtzian Eupraxophy

So far, we have been able to discuss the humanist philosophy of Paul Kurtz in the previous chapters. We also stated in clear terms the Kurtzian position on religion and the paranormals. From our analysis, it is quite clear that Paul Kurtz rejected religion and the paranormals as sources of human knowledge. This rejection followed from his Theory of Eupraxophy. It can also be said that Paul Kurtz was a thorough-going Humanist. This can be seen from our discussion in the previous chapters. Kurtz made every effort to interpret everything from the point of view of natural light of reason alone. For him, anything outside the capacity of the human mind should not be accepted into the body of true knowledge.

The present chapter, therefore, tries to appraise Kurtzian humanist philosophy, with particular reference to his position on religion and the paranormals. More so, it is the interest of the researcher to examine the implications of religious and paranormal beliefs to our contemporary society. This chapter also tries to establish the degree of meaningfulness or meaninglessness of religious and paranormal beliefs. This is what will position us to know the extent to which we can either accept or reject the claims of religion and the paranormals. The hallmark of this chapter is the researcher's postulation of a New Humanist Theory. This postulation will be seen, among others, as one of the major contribution of this scholarly work.

It is no gainsaying the fact that the humanist Eupraxophy of Paul Kurtz meets with the displeasure of the religious person and the paranormalist. This is because of the simple fact that humanist Eupraxophy is viewed by believers¹ as being antithetical to religious

and paranormal beliefs. But we wish to note that no matter how believers frown at Kurtz's position, humanist Eupraxophy is worthy of commendation, though not without some critical observations. Again, one thing we must note is that no being is absolutely bad or good in this material world. One of the transcendental properties of being is goodness. This follows that whatever is insofar as it is, is good. Humanist Eupraxophy is good in its own kind and we must say that Kurtz made laudable contributions to philosophy in general and Humanism in particular.

It is a conspicuous fact that the humanist Eupraxophy of Paul Kurtz held human reason to high esteem. This is evidenced from our discussions in the previous chapters. Kurtz is of the view that since the human person is a rational being, he has to be rational in all his dealings. In fact, Paul Kurtz really extolled human rationality. This is why Louis Midgley observed that Paul Kurtz eulogized reason. For Midgley, Kurtz made every effort to promote human rationality and also to foster scientific and naturalistic interpretation of reality.² This singular act of Kurtz has to be highly commended. Paul Kurtz made every effort to move philosophy from the 'ivory towers' of abstract thinking to the 'base' where the common man dwells. Philosophy must have practical relevance in accordance with reason. This is why he maintained that the human person should sincerely seek to discover and practice wisdom. This, for him is the only thing that can liberate the human person from the dungeon of irrationalities. In the view of Karl Marx, religion, and by extension, the paranormals have alienated the human person and the only thing that can liberate the human person from their clutches is the proper application of human rationality. Kurtz strongly relied on science and reason as the only means for

interpreting and understanding the universe. While science and reason provide the human person with true knowledge, religion and the paranormals furnish the human person with illusion. This is because of the simple fact that the claims of religion and the paranormals are uncorroborated and unsubstantiated by an unbiased investigator or witness. Eupraxophy extols the rationality of the human person. In his book *The New Humanism*, Udo Etuk observed that the essential character of the human person is reason. This position is in agreement with the submission of Kurtz: "Man has been defined as a rational animal. That is to say, reason is his essence, while biologically he is classified as an animal. While some, including the humanist, may question whether or not there are other rational beings outside of man, it cannot be doubted that man is the only animal which is gifted with faculty of reason."³

Since the human person is the only animal endowed with reason, it follows that the actions of the human person should be in accordance with reason. Acting in accordance with reason simply means having rational justification for one's actions. This is the position of Kurtz and the researcher highly extols this rational stand. One thing we must know is that if the human person stops to act rationally, then there is no difference between him and brutes. So, "insofar as reason defines us essentially everything we do should be rational or in common language, make sense."⁴ This is where good practical wisdom of Paul Kurtz hinges. It is a fact that the human person shares other characteristics with animals, yet it is the power to reason that singles him out among animal family. Unfortunately, this pride of the human person – reason – is what religion and the paranormals make effort to suffocate by means of their incessant unsubstantiated claims.

One of the basic characteristics of Eupraxophy is the method of inquiry. This, for Kurtz, is the basic feature of Eupraxophy and it matters most to eupraxophers. This method as earlier discussed in chapter four is characterized by reason (critical intelligence) and scientific method. However, it has been observed that there are some limitations to the powers of reason and scientific method. In the history of philosophy, there existed a school of thought called irrationalism which maintained that it is fallacious to say that reason is the only sure way of acquiring knowledge. In the words of Etuk, “irrationalism was not a repudiation of reason. It was simply an assertion of the fact that reason has its limitations and weaknesses.”⁵ The arguments of the irrationalists state that human reason is inadequate to fathom everything.⁶ This simply means that there are at times when reason is overpowered by emotions and passions. More so, there are certain things which the human reason cannot comprehend. This boils down to the limited nature of human reason. The basic fact that stares everybody in the face is that the more we know, the more we realize how much we do not know. The argument here is that for the fact that the human person is a limited being, exalting reason as the only way for knowledge acquisition becomes problematic. Etuk related the view of Sorren Kierkegaard which states that attempting to explain or justify everything through reason alone is a fundamental error.⁷ This, as we can see, is an attack on Kurtzian Eupraxophy and it goes to say that there is more to reality than the human mind can conceive empirically. “Reason,” according to Kelly James Clark, “is a fallible human tool for discovering truth or grasping reality.”⁸

Before going further into the issue of limitation of human reason, it is pertinent to note that Eupraxophy extols scientific method as pointed

earlier. It has been observed that most of the claims of religion and the paranormals are contrary to scientific method. Scientific method we must recall is characterized by systematicity, universality, coherence, observation, verification, experimentations and objectivity.⁹ The relevance of scientific method is that it rules out superstitions, error, magical beliefs and unsubstantiated claims. Again scientific method can be applied to things everywhere given the same condition and specification. However, Udo Etuk is of the view that the power of scientific method is not limitless. He averred:

Thus, in many respects the advantages of the scientific methods of doing, learning and discovery over against other methods cannot be gainsaid. So far, we agree with the humanist that the acquisition of scientific method will enable us to dispel superstitions, to fight political demagogues and to claim our rights. But we do not agree that scientific method puts “infinite” power at our disposal, because, in fact, the powers of science and of scientific methods are limited.¹⁰

It has been observed that the methods of science can only be applied to physical universe. It cannot be used to explain realities that are beyond the material existence. Reality as it is, is more than the physical phenomena. This is an existential fact. So despite the fact that scientific method is very important, it does not negate the fact that it cannot be used to explain reality in its totality. The point being made here is that scientific method is inadequate as far as the interpretation and understanding of reality in its totality is concerned. In this regard, Etuk questioned: “If, then, the method of science is inadequate for a fuller study and understanding of man, would it not be foolish for man to reject other methods and means which have contributed immensely to our understanding of what is still basically a mystery?”¹¹ Etuk's argument is that the human person should look for meaning in life not

only on scientific method but also through other means, namely, religion. He maintains as against Kurtzian Eupraxophy that religion can provide the human person with some knowledge. He argued:

There is no religion worth its salt which does not have something to say about the origin, the purpose and the destiny of man, and of the relationships between man and his fellowman, on the one hand; and man and the sublime, on the other. And because religion is such an important element in the lives of millions of people the world over, the humanist cannot dismiss it with a wave of the hand, as though it did not matter.¹²

The argument here is that scientific method is not the only means of acquiring knowledge. James Bartha argued that Paul Kurtz “falls into difficulty by seeking only scientific knowledge that disallows the consideration of transcendental explanations.”¹³ Bartha pointed that Kurtz assumed inherent hostility between religion and science. This position is contrary to the view of Pearcey and Thaxton. For Pearcey and Thaxton, “If Christian belief were truly a barrier to science, it is difficult to explain why so many founders of modern science were believers. Paracelsius, Boyle, and Newton wrote extensively on theology as well as science.”¹⁴ The argument of Pearcey and Thaxton is that religious ideas of the de-deification of nature were central to the development of science.

The insistence of Kurtz that science has nothing to do with the transcendental brings about a clear-cut demarcation between science and religion. However, in the words of J. P. Moreland and William Land Craig, no one has ever been able to draw such a line between science and non-science or science and religion.¹⁵ The point here is that science and the transcendental are complementary in their functions.

If in Kurtz's view science is to verify knowledge, on what basis can he say that there is no God, which might explain natural phenomena? He can only do so after scientifically investigating the claims for God. Should Kurtz restrict science to natural explanations, then before starting his project he has already rejected the possibility of supernatural explanations. Science instead should pursue the best explanation of a phenomena and not artificially restrict the scope of its inquiry to material causes.¹⁶

The argument here is that there are lots of existential problems that reference to the transcendental may serve as enough justification. It has been observed that such existential problems as the mind-body problem cannot be solved through inquiry to material causes.¹⁷ Such problems must have ultimate explanation in the transcendental.

We must note that the major argument employed by Kurtz against religious and the paranormal beliefs is lack of verifiable evidence. Kurtz argued that for a particular claim to be accepted, it must be empirically verifiable. That is to say that it must have evidence to support its claim. Generally, belief in God is considered irrational for two reasons: lack of evidence and evidence to the contrary (the problem of evil). Kurtz is of the view that any rational belief in God must have a support of evidence. Some scholars such as Platinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Aston are of the view that belief in God does not necessarily require the support of evidence or argument in order for it to be rational.¹⁸ They actually rejected the position of the humanists concerning evidential proof for the existence of God. Brian Schwetley observed that God is a spiritual being and as such, does not have a physical body. He argued that one cannot prove the existence of God as one would prove the existence of Tansian University or the claim that Prof. Eugene Okoye Nwadiakor is the Vice Chancellor of

Tansian University. Schwetley therefore argued:

The existence of God is proved in a more indirect manner. Secular scientists and philosophers who reject belief in God because He cannot be known by empirical means are hypocrites, because they believe in hundreds, even thousands of things that cannot be observed or studied directly. No philosopher has ever observed a law of logic. No modern historian ever observed the battle of Waterloo. No astronomer has ever seen a black hole. No biologist has ever observed evolution take place. No physicist observed the big bang. Yet all these things are believed in the scientific community. The truth is that if God cannot be known, then knowledge itself is impossible.¹⁹

In the view of Schwertley, it is hypocritical for Paul Kurtz and secular humanists to demand empirical evidence before accepting the fact that God exist. So for the fact that God, who is the main object for religious beliefs, is an immaterial being, He cannot be known in the same way we claim to know material beings. More so, there are certain realities that the human mind cannot comprehend not to talk of proving. This goes to show that there is more to reality than can be perceived with the empirical senses or proven empirically. Thomas Nagel argued that human knowledge is dependent on facts that we cannot prove from scratch. For him “we can't prove the existence of the physical world, or the reality of the past, or the existence of logical and mathematical truth.”²⁰ More so, in his *Religious Epistemology*, Kelly James Clark argued that “there is also a limit to the things that human beings can prove. If we were required to prove everything, there would be an infinite regress of proving.”²¹ One thing that is clear in the arguments of Clark and Nagel is not that we should not prove our claim, but that there must be a limit to which we can demand prove. The human mind cannot and must not prove everything.²² There are certain truths we have to

accept without necessarily demanding for prove. This is what Platinga called basic beliefs. His argument states:

The kind of beliefs that we do and must reason to is a small subset of the kinds of beliefs that we do and must reason from. The latter must be accepted without the aid of proof. In most cases we must rely on our intellectual equipment to produce beliefs in the appropriate circumstances, without evidence or argument. For example, we simply find ourselves believing in other persons. A person is a center of self-conscious thoughts and feelings and first-person experience. While we can see a human face, we can't see another's thoughts or feelings.²³

Even though we cannot tell what is going on in the mind of a person, we still believe the person. A person may be smiling facially but very sad inwardly. But if we were to insist on proving what is going on in the mind of another person before believing him/her, it simply means that we cannot believe anybody and knowledge acquisition will be very difficult. It follows that there must be some basic beliefs – the beliefs that we must reason from. This type of belief is such that it does not need evidence or proof. Therefore, accepting the fact that some of our beliefs are non-inferential, is it possible for one to believe in God or the paranormals without evidence or support of arguments? Some theologians will find it easy to accept belief in God without the need of evidence but may find it very difficult to accept paranormal beliefs without evidence or support of arguments. But one thing we must know is that most religious beliefs fall under paranormals since they are claims beyond normal scientific explanation. Both belief in God and belief in paranormals are fundamentally the same. Be that as it may, some scholars maintain that belief in God is a basic belief. Clark relates that Reformed Epistemologists are of the view that one can reasonably believe in God – immediately and basically – without the support of an

argument. For them, one's properly functioning cognitive faculties can produce belief in God in the appropriate circumstances with or without argument or evidence.²⁴ Platinga is of the view that though belief in God does not require the support of evidence; he however argued that the belief in God is not groundless. For him, belief in God is characterized by religious experience.²⁵ But this is the problem humanist Eupraxophy has with religious belief. A Moslem has distinct religious experience, likewise a Christian or a Buddhist. The question now is on the authenticity of such experience.

We must note that humanist Eupraxophy is not only concerned about the method of inquiry and cosmic interpretation of the universe, it is also concerned about the individual and the society. It deals with some recommendations for the individual life's stance and social and political ideals. The humanist Eupraxophy states that a eupraxopher does not look to heaven for deliverance. He takes his destiny by his hands and defines his destiny by himself. The fact here is that the destiny of the human person is highly dependent on the particular individual and not on any transcendent being. This is a position of Kurtz that is so dear to the researcher. The question here is not whether God exists or not, but that the human person has a vital role to play in defining his existence. Some religious and paranormal believers hold that there is a being outside the human person that determines the future of the human person. Some people claim that someone's destiny can be manipulated by another person or a transcendental being. This is a claim that lacks any form of rational justification. Such beliefs are being propagated in our contemporary society through the influx of Pentecostalism. The point is that if human problems are blamed on forces external to the human person as claimed by the religious and

paranormal believers, it therefore follows that the human person is not responsible for his/her actions. This is quite very far from the truth.

Paul Kurtz made every effort to assert that the transcendent God or any other force outside the human person is not responsible for the moral life of the human person. This is a position that may sound very controversial but on a closer look, one will discover that moral life is not necessarily dependent on belief in any transcendent being. There are instances of people who do not believe in God but still lived moral life. One can still be virtuous without any belief in God. Some religious people do not agree to this Kurtzian position. They maintain that without belief in God, there is no morality. But experience has shown that there existed some people who lived moral lives without necessarily believing in God. The researcher is strongly in agreement with Kurtzian position that morality is not dependent on belief in God.

Indeed, many heroes and heroines of American history have rejected biblical morality and led ethical lives, such as Tom Paine, Robert Ingersoll, Mark Twain, Clarence Darrow, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Sanger, and Isaac Asimov ... The history of philosophy demonstrates the efforts of great thinkers – from Aristotle to Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and Sidney Hook – to develop a rational basis for ethical conduct. Ethics, they said, can be autonomous and needs no theological justification ... A good life is achievable by men and women without the need for divinity.²⁶

The above citation x-rays the possibility of morality without belief in God. It is also good to note that there are some ethical experiences we have heard without necessarily going through religious classes. It is true that religious experience may reinforce ethical behavior, but it does not follow that ethical behavior is dependent on religious or paranormal experiences.

The researcher affirms that Kurtzian Eupraxophy has really done a great service to humanity by his analysis of the three basic virtues of humanism. These virtues are central to our being human. It does not matter whether one is a theist or a non-theist. The fact is that the acquisition and proper application of these virtues lead to the good life. The virtue of courage emphasized creativity. Kurtz noted that it takes courage for one to be creative and innovative. More so, it is a historical fact that without creativity, the human society is doomed. Creativity gives room for change. It is only a courageous person that can move for change against all oppositions. Courage as a virtue is a mark of a person of strong will. So the view of Kurtz that the human history depends on what we resolve to undertake is quite proper. The human person cannot resolve to undertake any task without courage accompanied with hope. This is why this study agrees with Kurtz that courage is central to all humanist virtues.

The view of Kurtz that courage disposes us to face challenges is quite laudable. That human life is full of struggles and problems is a truism. So to solve these problems, the human person needs first of all to fall back to his rational power and not necessarily to rely on any supernatural being. Granted that the being of the human person is contingent upon the Being that is by necessity, it does not mean that the human person cannot do anything on his own with the aid of his rationality. Thus, the researcher agrees with Kurtz that it makes no sense for one to go into prayer when one is hungry without making any effort to work in order to earn a living. It is stupidity in the highest order for a student to go into the church praying all day with the hope of passing his examinations instead of making effort to study. This is purely a sign of cowardice and foolishness. This kind of attitude is what

Kurtz described as a collapse of courage. This is one of the problems engendered by religious people who claim to hope in God for everything.

We must note that the view of Kurtz on the proper use of human rationality deserve high applause. In fact, Kurtz really extolled the power of human reason. The human person will realize the truth by imbibing the virtue of cognition or critical thinking. It is the view of the researcher that if the submission of Kurtz on the virtue of cognition is taken seriously, many irrational and superstitious claims will be exposed and discarded. Many religious and paranormal claims have no rational foundations. The virtue of cognition provides the necessary ingredients for accepting any claim to knowledge. It helps to remove obscurity and clarify thoughts. There is need to suspend action when someone is in doubt. This is to enable the individual to have justifiable grounds for his decisions / actions. So the understanding and proper application of this virtue of cognition is basic to human co-existence especially in the contemporary society. This is because of the simple fact that it disposes the human person to make intelligent choices for the betterment of the individual in particular and the human society in general.

More so, since the goal of morality is the good life (for the individual and the society), there is need for the virtue of caring. This is the third basic virtue of humanism. In as much as the human person has to be courageous as he acts in accordance with the rules of reason, he also has to take into cognizance the interests of other human beings in his decisions. The implication of this virtue is that a person's action affects another either positively or negatively, directly or indirectly. As a rational being, the human person has to be compassionate and

benevolent towards others. There should be much emphasis on caring for the other person and less emphasis on selfish interest. It is true that human person acts on self-interest, but selfish interest is condemnable following our understanding of Kurtzian moral virtue of caring. The person that acts on selfish interest only centers everything on himself. This is highly not in agreement with moral caring. The virtue of caring is concerned with the wellbeing of others irrespective of the person's nationality, tribe, or religion. However, moral caring does not mean that people should be lazy. No. some people in our contemporary society have become parasitic under the guise that others will help them. Most streets and markets in Nigeria today are full of beggars. While some are genuine beggars that need humanitarian help, others are lazy people who do not want to do anything for a living. It is the view of the researcher that critical reasoning must be applied as we make effort to exercise this virtue of caring.

It is pertinent to recall that Kurtz made every effort to justify morality from the point of view of human needs and interests. But experience has shown that needs alone do not produce ethical claims. For Barta, a need alone does not establish a claim.²⁷ For instance, the fact that I need your car does not guarantee that I have a right over your car or even to possess your car. But it is quite clear that needs or interests do not justify one's claim over something. This is why John Warwick Montgomery argued that "if interest produces rights, then one must attribute rights to animals or artificial objects."²⁸ So, it is quite clear from the arguments of Barta and Montgomery that needs alone do not justify one's claim over something as Kurtz argued.

Furthermore, against Kurtz's argument that religion bases its ethical obedience on the fear of punishment which he considered to be

immoral, Barta argued that “even if Kurtz is right that obedience from fear is immoral, Christianity believes love is the true motivation for obedience.”²⁹ One can see that there is a good point in the argument of Barta. This is because of the fact that if it is true that religion bases its morality on fear of punishment, one can even not bother about the punishment especially when one thinks that one would have sufficient gain. This goes to amplify the submission of Christianity that it is love and not fear the justifies ethical theories.³⁰

We must also recall that Kurtz denied the existence of soul and the reality of immortality of the soul. The first objection he made is that there is no clear meaning of the concept soul. Secondly, the existence of soul has no evidential prove. He is of the view that the immortality of the soul is a misuse of language. So, he sees the human soul as a “functional concept related to forms of behavior.”³¹ This position of Kurtz is related to the argument of David Hume. Hume actually denied the existence of the soul on the ground that he could not perceive it. But one thing we must know is that the concept of soul is not a misuse of language. It depicts a reality that really is. Omoregbe argues that there must be something called soul which is the seat of consciousness in the human person.³² The fact that Kurtz could not perceive the soul empirically does not mean that it cannot be perceived at all. It only points to the reality of metaphysics as a complement source of human knowledge. The soul is an immaterial substance which is the subject of psychological experiences of perception, thinking or consciousness.³³ It is this reality that thinks and perceives that we call soul or mind.

However, Kurtzian concept of immortality needs applause. This is what the researcher calls the cosmic interpretation of immortality. This has to do with the idea of doing something to be remembered for by

posterity. This understanding of immortality is commendable. People should be made to understand the importance of building the earth; contributing to their immediate environment and not only hoping for the world beyond. However, this is not all about immortality. The issue of immortality of the soul points to the fact that there is more to reality than can be perceived with the empirical senses.

Endnotes

1. The word 'believer' is used here to refer to those who believe in God and/or the paranormals; unless otherwise stated.
2. Louis Midgley, "George Dempster Smith, Jr., on the Book of Mormon" in <http://mazwellinstitute/byu.edu/publication/review/?reviewed-author> (Accessed: 4/5/13).
3. Udo Etuk, *The New Humanism*, (Uyo: Afahaide & Bros Printing & Publishing Company, 1999), 78.
4. Ibid., 80
5. Ibid., 85
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 86.
8. Kelly James Clark, "Religious Epistemology" in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/religep/> (Accessed: 9/7/13)
9. Cf. T. U. Nwala (ed.), *History and Philosophy of Science*, (Nsukka: Niger Books and Publishing Co. Ltd., 2011), 50.
10. Etuk, *The New Humanism*, 91.
11. Ibid., 92 – 93.
12. Ibid., 93.

13. James Barta, "Bound to Earth: The Secular Humanism of Paul Kurtz, in www.phc.edu/userFiles/vol10no3.pdf (Accessed: 20/5/13).
14. Nancy R. Pearcey & Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 41.
15. J. P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 359
16. John C. Eccles, *How the Self Controls Its Brain* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1994), 179 – 182, as cited in James Barta, "Bound to Earth: The Secular Humanism of Paul Kurtz, in www.phc.edu/userFiles/vol10no3.pdf (Accessed: 20/5/13), 9.
17. John Warwick Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*, (Bonn: Verlag fur Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2005), 182.
18. Alvin Plantinga & Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) as cited in K. J. Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).
19. Cf. Brian Schwertley, "Secular Humanism" in <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/secular.htm> (Accessed: 4/6/13)
20. Thomas Nagel, "A Philosopher Defends Religion" <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/sep/27/philosopher-defends-religion/?pagination=false> (Accessed: 4/6/13)
21. K. J. Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

22. Thomas Nagel, "A Philosopher Defends Religion"
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/sep/27/philosopher-defends-religion/?pagination=false> (Accessed: 4/6/13)
23. K. J. Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).
24. Ibid.
25. Platinga, as cited in K. J. Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).
26. Paul Kurtz, "The Common Moral Decencies Don't Depend on Faith", *Free Inquiry*, (1996), vol. 16, No. 2, 5
27. James Barta, "Bound to Earth: The Secular Humanism of Paul Kurtz, in www.phc.edu/userFiles/vol10no3.pdf (Accessed: 20/5/13), 9.
28. John Warwick Montgomery, *Situation Ethics* (Edmonton AB: Canadian Institute of Law, Theology and Public Policy Inc., 1999), 74–76.
29. James Barta, "Bound to Earth: The Secular Humanism of Paul Kurtz, in www.phc.edu/userFiles/vol10no3.pdf (Accessed: 20/5/13), 14.
30. Montgomery, Op. Cit. p. 39.
31. Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 153
32. Joseph Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology* (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 2006), 57
33. Joseph Omoregbe, *Metaphysics without Tears: A Systematic and Historic Study* (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 1996), 26

Kurtzian Eupraxophy and the Implications of Religious and Paranormal Beliefs

While putting on eupraxophic lens, a eupraxopher will certainly observe that there are some implications of religious and paranormal beliefs. The ways and manners religious and paranormal believers practice their beliefs have some social, economic, political and health implications. Let us take a very brief look at them below:

Social Implications

Many Nigerians today have strong confidence in the information they get from religious people (pastors, seers, diviners, prophets, priests, etc.) and witch doctors. It is a historical fact that many families, marriages, villages, etc. have been in disarray because of the irrational activities of some religious and paranormal believers. Emeka M. Onwuama reports that “In Nigeria today, many families have been thrown into crisis, a lot of intended marriages aborted, numerous people wrongly killed and many communities thrown into confusion, all in the name of information sourced from a diviner or prophet.”¹ In Nigeria today, many people move from one church to the other or from one *Dibia* (diviner) to another in search of answers to their problems. Some religious people, who claim to speak for God, force some men to marry ladies whom they do not have any affection for. Marriage is no longer built on love but is now based on what a certain pastor, priest or prophet said. What a slap on human rationality! This type of attitude seriously affects social relationship.

There are instances when members of a family are tagged witches or wizards by the so-called men of God. When a person is tagged a witch in a family or community, that person is more or less isolated

from others; and as such the normal human relationship is impeded. In extreme cases, some have lost their lives in this regard. In his *Occult Powers and Socio-economic Dynamics in Nigeria*, J. Obi Oguejiofor explains that this type of belief and practices has some telling effects on the life of the individual in particular and the society at large.² The main point we wish to emphasize here is that the social life of the human person has been seriously damaged by this system of irrational belief system.

Economic Implications

Simply put, economy has to do with a system of production and distribution of goods and services. By this simple definition, it follows that for there to be economic growth and development, there has to be production of goods and services which must be distributed in order to maximize profit. But the reverse is the case following the belief system in religion and the paranormals. There are instances when a businessman would leave his shop and would move from one pastor to another in search of miracle without practically doing anything to improve his business. Some pastors and prophets have used this medium to deceive gullible Nigerians. Some people go as far as engaging in ritual killings in order to get rich without working for it. This is a practice that is rampant in our contemporary society. The resultant effect is that hard work is slaughtered at the altar of religious and paranormal beliefs and practices. Oguejiofor strongly argued that this type of belief system “affects work ethic negatively as hard work, discipline and consistency are no longer taken to be the surest avenue of success in human undertakings.”³ Our argument here is that this system of belief has negatively affected the economic development of our society. The idea of consistently blaming failure in business on evil

spirits or witches should be critically reappraised. This is why this study maintains that the human person has to be eupraxophic in his/her attitude to life.

Political Implications

The effects of religious and paranormal belief system move beyond the social and economic aspects of our society. It is also made manifest in the political field. Onwuama observed: “Just as many Nigerians believe that the use of juju could make one's business prosper, many also believe that the use of charms could make a political aspirant to win an election even when he is the least qualified.”⁴ This type of practice is seriously affecting the politics of Nigeria.

It is believed that every Nigerian politician has a pastor, prophet, diviner, *Dibia* or *Babalawo* that supports him/her. The politicians are made to believe that they are untouchable and indestructible. This practically leads to their reckless and inhuman attitudes. This is because they are made to believe that they are super humans. History has it of some Nigerian politicians who are made to swear an oath before a shrine in order to hold political offices.⁵ This is the resultant effect of paranormal beliefs. Some politicians go as far as receiving instructions from their spiritual masters on how to run the affairs of the government. It is quite pathetic to note that some of these so-called spiritual masters are illiterates and even the literate ones lack the basic knowledge on how to run a government. The eupraxophic question is: Can a person give what he/she does not have? The answer is obvious – no. In the view of Onwuama, this type of practice subverts administrative process and prevents the emergence of good governance.⁶

Health Implications

Religious and paranormal beliefs have some negative effects on the health matters. Most people in our contemporary society believe that sicknesses or diseases are caused by evil spirits and evil men and as such have no natural cure except through religious or paranormal means. There are instances of sick people who 'sleep' in the church or move from one prayer house to another in search of healing without seeking for proper medical diagnosis and treatment. The argument of these believers is that since evil spirits are the causes of sickness, it is needless therefore, to go to the hospital to seek for medical attention. This type of belief system is seriously affecting the good health of our contemporary society. We must recall the story of Duru who heeded to the instructions of his pastors instead of seeking medical care from the hospital. Obviously (as stated in Chapter One), his condition deteriorated. It was only when he was rushed to the hospital that his condition was remedied.

There is a story of a young man who has HIV and his pastor told him that it was the evil spirit that gave him the disease. Instead of going to seek for medical attention in order to manage the condition, he kept on moving from one church to another. His condition got worsened and could not be managed. The truth is that many people, both literate and illiterate, have lost their precious lives in the name of sticking to religious or paranormal beliefs. The idea of 'miracle centers', 'miracle houses' or 'miracle pastors and priests' is causing more harm than good to the good health of our people.

It is the strong conviction of the researcher that religious and paranormal beliefs have seriously affected the sense of responsibility of the human person. Believers no longer accept responsibility for their

actions or inactions; they always shift blame to the external force – evil spirits, evil men, witches and wizards, etc. People now seek religious or paranormal interpretation for everything. There is nothing that happens naturally. Death, failures, miscarriages, sickness, diseases, economic problems, etc are given religious or paranormal interpretations. This type of attitude seriously undermines human rationality.

Endnotes

1. Emeka M. Onwuama, “The Epistemological Basis of the Belief in the Occult and Paranormal and the Implications of this Belief System in Nigeria” in Charles A. Eblelebe (ed.), *Spirits: Occultism, Principalities and Powers* (Enugu: SAN Press Ltd., 2012), p. 81.
2. J. O. Oguejiofor, “Occult Powers and Socio-economic Dynamics in Nigeria” in *Bigard Theological Studies* (2006) vol. 26. No. 2. Pp. 20 – 22.
3. Ibid. p. 21.
4. Onwuama, “The Epistemological Basis of the Belief ..”, 81 – 82.
5. Cf. Lanre Issa-Onihu and Charles Onyekammuo, “How Ngige, Uba visited Okija Shrine”, *Thisday Online*, www.thisday.com/new/20040808onesol/html (Accessed: 21/4/11).
6. Onwuama, “The Epistemological Basis of the Belief ..”

Towards a New Humanist Theory

It is an undeniable fact that the human person desires to know. There is no age in human history that did not manifest this innate desire. It is this quest for knowledge that gave rise to different theories of knowledge as we know them in philosophical tradition. These theories of knowledge are different ways or approaches towards knowledge acquisition. But our concern is not just on knowledge acquisition but more on the justification of knowledge claims. In Kurtzian Eupraxophy, every knowledge claim must be justified empirically for it to be accepted as a true knowledge.

One thing we must know is that there is need to demand for justification for any claim to knowledge. This is the basis for any rational inquiry. However, justification must not necessarily be empirically based since the totality of reality is not circumscribed to empirical world only. It is the view of the researcher that when religious person makes a claim or a paranormalist makes a claim; we have to seek for corroboration from another religious person or another paranormalist. This is because of the fact that it takes a scientist or someone who has the knowledge of science to practically evaluate scientific claims. More so, it takes only a religious person or a paranormalist to practically negate or affirm religious or paranormal claims. This position of the researcher does not in any way mean that we have to accept every claim as true. No. It means that each person should be able to work within his/her area of specialization. To say that every claim must have empirical justification is to limit human knowledge to the material world only. Also experience has shown that reality in its totality is more than just the material world. If this

observation is true, then human knowledge is not dependent on empirical justification alone as postulated by Kurtz. It also means that there is possibility of gaining knowledge through religious or paranormal means.

Another important point we must acknowledge is that the human person, by nature is not an exclusive matter; he is a composite of material and immaterial elements – body and soul. This explains why the human person cannot run away from 'transcendental temptation'. It is quite clear that Kurtzian critique on religion and the paranormals is basically a critique on metaphysics. But it is quite clear that no matter how one tries to deny the reality of metaphysics, the metaphysical character in man will continue to draw him back to metaphysics. There is always that tendency in the human person to go beyond sense perception. And so, for us to understand human nature very well, it must be through the instrumentality of metaphysics. Kant, though a critic of metaphysics, accepted the fact that human beings have irresistible tendency towards metaphysics. Pantaleon Iroegbu has this remark to make about metaphysics:

[Metaphysics] is a systematic study of being in its deepest aspects. It is an ordered investigation into the inner side of existence. It unravels the most fundamental contents of being as beings. It radically probes existence in so far as these are knowable ... [Metaphysics] involves the physical and the spiritual, the empirical and the super-empirical. It conceives each being, all of being and the being of all.¹

In the view of Izu M. Onyeocha, metaphysics is the “science of whatever is not sensible, of what lies beyond the reach of the senses as far as it is knowable by human reason.”² It follows therefore that Kurtzian critique on religion and the paranormals is invariably a

critique on metaphysics. But we know that metaphysics is a reality and a possibility. Metaphysicians are of the strong view that there is need to transcend the empirical in order to gain a unified knowledge of reality. That the sense perception alone cannot give us an objective knowledge of reality is a pointer to the fact that we have to go beyond the empirical in order to understand reality as it is in its totality.

Experience has shown that appearance is different from reality. The problem of appearance and reality is not just a problem that can be solved by mere sense perception. The truth is that there is more to reality than meets the eyes. This saying is an existential fact. The fact that we do not perceive the totality of reality as it is with our empirical senses is a pointer to the value of metaphysics. We should appreciate the role and importance of religion and the paranormal in their quest to find solutions to those questions that are beyond the domain of the empirical.

Inasmuch as we do not agree with Kurtz that every knowledge claim must be subjected to empirical verification for it to be accepted as true knowledge, we do not also agree with the religious and paranormal believers on all their knowledge claims. We must recognize the fact that the human person is a limited being and as such, is bound to make mistakes in his quest for certainty of knowledge. This is why this study postulates a theory of Critical-Inquiry-Before-Belief (CIBB). This study recommends a paradigm shift from the culture of Belief-Without-Inquiry (BWI) to the culture of Critical-Inquiry-Before-Belief (CIBB). Experience has shown that the contemporary Nigerian society is given to BWI. Most people are prone to believing everything a pastor, priest, prophet, diviner, etc. said without proper questioning. It is the strong position of the researcher that without inquiry, there can

be no genuine knowledge. We must not accept everything a priest, prophet, pastor or diviner said. There has to be some grounds to validate such claims. We must move from the culture of BWI to the culture of CIBB in order to experience true epistemic transformation in our contemporary society. Olusegun Oladipo has this to say in this regard:

The predominant intellectual orientation in Africa today is not the culture of inquiry, but the culture of belief. The culture of belief is the antithesis of the seeking spirit which animates the culture of inquiry. It is a culture of almost passive observation of things and processes in nature and society, one in which certain ways of knowing and doing – for instance, the tendency to see things, events and processes as emanations from some supernatural sources are taken for granted.³

We must say that the culture of BWI has existed for so long in our society and has yielded less result. BWI has really undermined the growth and development of our society. As rational beings, we must ask intelligent questions before we assent to any belief system. If we imbibe the culture of CIBB, it will go a long way towards reducing some of the irrational claims of some religious and paranormal believers. For sure, reality is not all about the empirical world. However, we must make attempt to question any knowledge claim before accepting it as true knowledge.

We need also to know that this world is a world of opposites. We have up and down; tall and short; physical and metaphysical; empirical and meta-empirical. These are complement to each other. The transcendent / metaphysical should not be seen as against the empirical. It is the view of the researcher that when we employ empirical and metaphysical investigations in our quest for knowledge, we cannot but get to the truth or nearer to the truth of the particular

reality in question. The fact that there are some abuses recorded in the fields of religion and the paranormals should not negate the possibility of knowledge acquisition through such means. Raymond C. Arazu is of the view that the paranormal can furnish the human person with some knowledge.⁴ The question now is on the how; but as we have stated earlier, we must not necessarily explain everything from the scratch before accepting it as true. If we do, it therefore means that knowledge acquisition will be very difficult. The basic thing is that we should make effort to develop the culture of CIBB.

The theory of CIBB accepts the fact that the human person is a limited being. And so, it posits that we should make every effort to question any claim to knowledge before accepting it as a true knowledge. The theory does not hold that empirical verification is all there is. No. There could be the application of transcendental means. The method of inquiry should therefore depend on the object of inquiry. But the basic thing is asking intelligent and relevant questions before accepting any claim to knowledge.

Kurtz actually denied the possibility of knowledge acquisition by means of religion and the paranormals on the ground that they lack empirical justification. But as we have discovered, there are certain things that we cannot prove from scratch: “we can't prove the existence of the physical world, or the reality of the past, or the existence of logical and mathematical truth: but if our faculties do in fact connect with these aspects of reality, then we can know about them.”⁵ The main argument here is that there is a limit to the things the human mind can prove. If we insist on proving everything before we believe, it therefore means that knowledge will never get started.

Therefore, we maintain that the scientific method of inquiry recommended by Kurtzian Eupraxophy, though not the only method of inquiry, has some merits as a reliable method of objective inquiry. I strongly wish to observe that while it may be appropriate to have a cosmic view of the universe as posited by Kurtzian Eupraxophy, human knowledge does not begin and end in cosmic or naturalistic interpretation of the universe. The New Humanist Theory as postulated in this book is for the good of the human person as a being that is composed of material and immaterial elements. The human person is a being that is intrinsically connected to the transcendent. And so, a holistic understanding of the human person should not ignore the immaterial aspect of the human person.

Finally, I wish to say that this study is an open-ended one. Though it has made effort to appraise the humanist Eupraxophy of Kurtz, it is important to note that other interested researchers can further deepen the investigation. This notwithstanding, we must say that since Humanism in general is all about the good of the human person, accepting and practicing the culture of Critical-Inquiry-Before-Belief will certainly help to bring about growth and development very close to our society. This, in the final analysis, is for the good of the human person which is the goal of Humanism in general.

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THE BOOK

Detailed in twelve chapters, philosopher Ejikemeuwa Ndubisi has explored in this book, *[Eupraxophic Perspectives on Religion and the Paranormals: Towards a New Humanist Theory]* a new approach to understanding the fundamental challenging questions of life namely, in the absence of religion, how do thoughtful contemporary individuals find meaning in a secular world? ... The argued position of the author here is that, since humanism in general is all about the good of the human person, accepting and practicing the culture of critical-inquiry-before-belief will certainly help to bring about growth and development very close to our society ... We at the Association of Philosophy Professionals of Nigeria are excited with this novel area of philosophical research and studies. It is therefore highly recommended to philosophers and non-philosophers alike.

Professor Alloy S. Ihuah

President, Association of Philosophy Professionals of Nigeria (APPON).

This book *[Eupraxophic Perspectives on Religion and the Paranormals: Towards a New Humanist Theory]*, changes the conversations and lights the path to a fresh perspective in philosophy. It is a must read for all.

Professor Nkeonye Otafor

Professor of Philosophy, University of Benin – Nigeria

Eupraxophic Perspectives on Religion and Paranormals makes a difficult synthesis of originality with insightful imagination, and manifests Prof. Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi as a Bohemian thinker who is not only technically competent but an interesting academic masquerade to be admired wholeheartedly and enthusiastically. It is a coherent, systematic, encyclopedic, monumental, learned, lucid and comprehensive piece.

Professor KANU, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA

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