

Secular Humanism – Part 1

What can you say to secularists who want to banish all talk about God, intelligent design, and morals in our public schools?

Transcript of an interview with
Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. Paul Kurtz and Dr. Norman Geisler

John Ankerberg: Tonight we're talking about Secular Humanism. My guest is Dr. Paul Kurtz, the man who drafted the "Humanist Manifesto II" and "A Secular Humanist Declaration." He is also the editor of the main Secular Humanist magazine in America entitled "Free Inquiry." Also, Dr. Norman Geisler, an Orthodox Christian, who is the author of many books on philosophy and theology.

Is there evidence for the views that the Secular Humanists put out in terms of the Manifestos? In the Manifesto it says that, "The theory of Evolution is supported impressively by the findings of many sciences, and the evolution of the species is supported so strongly by the weight of evidence that it is difficult to reject it."

Paul and Norman, I'd like to come, tonight, and zero in on the second phase of this. I'd like to talk about the conflict between the Christian point of view and the Secular Humanist point of view concerning the origin of first life. After we have the universe here, we've got another problem—the origin of first life, and then the origin of new life forms, including man. Okay, Paul, let me start with you. What impressive scientific evidence—according to the Humanist Manifesto you've got all this—supports your Secular Humanistic point of view that first life came from non-life by accident, by chance. How did first life originate on earth?

Paul Kurtz: Well, you know, this is not simply a Secular Humanist viewpoint. The theory of Evolution is so well supported by various sciences—in fact, I think it's one of the key principles of the whole of modern science. Let alone biology, genetics, paleontology, anthropology, geology and astronomy presuppose it. We have the notion that the universe is changing and evolving over a long period of time, and we can see this everywhere. And this is confirmed by converging evidence from many sciences.

Ankerberg: How did first life—according to scientific evidence—originate here on earth? Give me the evidence that you have.

Kurtz: Well, there are different theories about that. Organic matter probably

exists in other parts of the universe, not only on this planet. And one hypothesis is that in certain conditions of hydrogen in the atmosphere—many years ago there was a primordial soup, and gradually organic matter evolved in the forms that it took on this planet. This is going back approximately three billion years.

Ankerberg: Is that the hypothesis you want to work with?

Kurtz: That's a hypothesis that seems, in the light of present evidence, to best fit the facts.

Ankerberg: How many hypotheses are out there, Paul?

Kurtz: Science has many hypotheses. The notion of science is that you have a hypothesis; you try to support it by the evidence. There may be new hypotheses introduced and you constantly revise it. The fact of Evolution seems to be very well supported by the sciences today. How it happened, precisely, is constantly changing, but we have a...

Ankerberg: How can you have a fact and you don't know how it happened?

Kurtz: There are many things that we don't know how happened. In science that's no problem. That's no problem.

Ankerberg: Well, why call it "fact"? I mean, Are Christians wrong when we say that.... You know, it sounds awfully impressive in the Manifestos. It's like you guys have got it wrapped up, and we just need to check you out here and you can let us in on the scoop of what the evidence really is. "It is nonetheless supported impressively...." Okay, I thought you have some "impressive" information there. "And it's supported so strongly by the weight of evidence, it's difficult to reject it." Now you've got a bunch of hypotheses.

Kurtz: Well, the evidence is that you find in the geological strata various fossils over a period of time. And you can see changes in species and the extinction of some species in the....

Ankerberg: You're talking about [that] the transitional forms ought to be there.

Kurtz: What did you say?

Ankerberg: You're saying that Darwin postulated from smaller to more complex. And we're going to have all these transitional forms there and the fossil record shows that conclusion. Is that correct?

Kurtz: The fossil record is not entirely complete, but what you find is...

Ankerberg: How complete is it, Paul?

Kurtz: It is complete enough to support the hypothesis that there is evolution and change going on over a period of time. And you can see, for example, the extinction of some species that have disappeared—that no longer exist—and the emergence of new species. Now, evolution occurs in two ways: one is "gradualism" and the other is "punctuated equilibria." In other words, there are sudden spurts in history at the same time.

Ankerberg: Okay, let's come to Norman. We've got those two on the board, Norman—first life, as well as the fact of the fossil record. And let me throw in here

that Dr. Paul LeMoine, a French scholar and editor of the French Encyclopedia, states, “Evolution is a fairytale for adults.” Why would he say that, Norman?

Norman Geisler: Well, I don’t know, but I’m tempted to say, “Because he just listened to what Paul Kurtz said.” I was listening for this “impressive evidence.” I didn’t hear a shred of evidence, let alone impressive evidence. I heard a couple of hypotheses suggested. Let me quote on Evolution. Haldane in his book said that, “This theory of ‘hot soup’ has been in the textbooks for over 30 years without a shred of geological evidence that it ever existed.” That’s an Evolutionist. I commend to your attention a recent book written by three scientists entitled, *The Mystery of Life’s Origin*, where they totally destroy the credibility of the “spontaneous generation” view. And, even Fred Hoyle—whom he knows very well—a former atheist who started to figure out, “What would the chances be of life evolving on earth by pure chance or coming from outer space?” And he concluded that the chances for a single-cell animal evolving on earth would be one in ten to the forty-thousandth power. That’s more atoms than there are in the whole universe. So the former atheist, Fred Hoyle, concluded there must have been an intelligent Creator of first life. And his colleague, Wickramasinghe, said, “Believing that life came by chance is like believing that a Boeing 747 resulted from a tornado going through a junkyard.” You have to have a lot of faith to believe that!

Kurtz: Well, the Boeing 747 evolved. We can go back and see the Wright Brothers—that first kind of airplane that they created. In a period of time there’s an evolution...

Geisler: “Created.”

Kurtz: Yes, that they invented, and in a period of time...

Ankerberg: By “intelligence” or by “chance.”

Kurtz: But there is a period of time in which these forms changed and modified.

Ankerberg: But didn’t they create those airplanes via intelligence, or did they just...

Kurtz: I was using the analogy that he was using, but...

Geisler: Well, you’re helping my argument. You should drop that one and find another one!

Kurtz: No. No, no. That’s a meaningful.... It seems to me the point I made is a good point, because there has been a change in airplanes from the simplest to the more complex.

Geisler: Always by intelligent invention.

Kurtz: But are you denying the existence—Norman Geisler, are you denying the existence of evolution? Is this what you’re saying?

Geisler: I’m saying there is not a shred of evidence of macroevolution. Not only is there no “impressive” evidence, there’s not a shred of evidence for macroevolution. How about that for a different view!

Kurtz: Well, then, what do you do with paleontology, geology, anthropology—all

the sciences—which have found different forms of life through different periods of time, and you can reconstruct a kind of line of development?

Ankerberg: But, Paul, I'm sure you are familiar with your buddies like Gould at Harvard and all these guys. I mean, why are they changing their theories? They don't buy that anymore.

Kurtz: The change of a theory is to the credit of science. Science is not absolute. It's not fixed. It's not final. It's an open method of investigation.

Ankerberg: But they went away from what you're talking about, is what I'm saying.

Kurtz: Well, you have both processes happening at the same time. You have chance mutations which occur in certain species—and these are adaptable. And then, by means of natural selection and by differential reproduction, this mutation, because it is adaptable, is passed down to other members of the same species. And so there is a change in the species that occurs.

Ankerberg: Paul, you're so lovable. I tell you, I could put my arms right around you. But I've got to say that in checking all your...

Kurtz: Well, John Ankerberg, you're lovable, too, but are you rejecting Evolution?

Ankerberg: In a "big-time way," because I'm reading your buddies!

Kurtz: Really!

Ankerberg: Yes, sir!

Kurtz: Well, I'll say. Well, let's leave "love" aside and let's deal with the evidence. Okay?

Geisler: Let's deal with the evidence.

Ankerberg: Let's go to the evidence.

Geisler: Gould at Harvard, for example, one of the head paleontologists in America—I met him at the Arkansas Trial. He says, "There is no evidence for the so-called 'missing links.' All you have really are the leaves on the tree." The tree is drawn by the Evolutionists, the tree doesn't exist out there in nature. The head paleontologist of British Museum, Dr. Colin Patterson gave a speech here in November, 1981 to the top scientists in America. He said, "Not only is Evolution no knowledge, it is anti-knowledge. I've worked on this stuff 18 years and know nothing from it." And he concluded that the "missing links" are not only missing, they never were there, and they will never be found. And he said, "If I knew of any, I would have put them in my book because I'm an Evolutionist." But he admits that they aren't there. Now, what the evidence shows is that new forms of life come into existence suddenly in complete functional form and disappear suddenly. That looks like Creation to me, not Evolution.

Ankerberg: Yeah, some of those things are what? —walruses, sea lions, bats... you know. Those are just a few. From what I've read in the paleontology books, [they] say, "All of a sudden, 'Voila!' They're there." And they go all the way back—and they're the same way, all the way back.

Kurtz: Are you suggesting that God intervenes in history and creates each species and then destroys them? Is this your point?

Geisler: No. My point is that God intervenes in history and creates them.

Kurtz: And destroys them, too?

Geisler: No. He doesn't destroy them.

Kurtz: Oh. Well, who destroyed the dinosaur?

Geisler: The dinosaurs were destroyed at the Flood. Did you ever hear about the book of Genesis, when Noah took all these animals in the ark and there was a flood...

Kurtz: I've heard about it, but I'm shocked that you believe in it, actually. But maybe I should know better....

Geisler: Well, you shouldn't be shocked to believe in it. The Bible...

Kurtz: The dinosaurs were destroyed 10,000 years ago.

Geisler: The dinosaurs...we didn't say that the universe was only 10,000 [years old]; you just said that.

Kurtz: Okay. When did the Flood occur?

Geisler: I don't know when the Flood occurred.

Kurtz: Well, I thought you were quoting the Bible.

Geisler: The Bible doesn't say when the Flood occurred.

Kurtz: Okay, can you give a suggestion of when it occurred?

Geisler: I most certainly can give a suggestion.

Kurtz: About how long ago?

Geisler: It occurred in the book of Genesis, Chapters 6, 7 and 8...

Kurtz: Okay. How long ago...

Geisler: ...and the record there is historical...

Kurtz: Well...

Geisler: And for that matter we know that because the Ebla tablets that have been recently discovered give us time periods back into the first eleven chapters of Genesis where these are historical events. They name city and places—this is not myth, this is history that is recorded in the early chapters [of Genesis].

Kurtz: It's a historical myth. But... a mythological history...

Geisler: Not a historical myth, either.

Kurtz: Okay. But did the Flood occur 10 million years ago?

Geisler: It doesn't matter when it occurred. The point...

Kurtz: Well, can you give me some time scale?

Geisler: The point is this: that God intervened in history. You asked me, "Did He intervene?" Yes, we know, because when things come into existence, they're fully formed. Yes, we know, because they're fully functioning. The first bird had feathers

and could fly—it didn't come with half feathers or scales on it. It was fully formed with feathers and could fly. That is Scientific Creationism.

Ankerberg: Can I jump in here? At the Evolution/Creation Trial there was a guy showed up from one of the laboratories and talked about polonium halos that has bearing on the Flood here. Maybe you could bring us up to date on what that was.

Geisler: Yes. They never answered that. Dr. Robert Gentry talked about polonium halos, which are half-life halos, and they exist in bedrock, granite and coal all over the world—they're daughter halos. And all of the basic granite would have had to come into existence in less than 3½ minutes because of their 3½ minute half-life. No one has ever even attempted to refute that. Can you refute that?

Kurtz: You know there are species that have been extinct within our own lifetime, and I just want to ask you, "Were all these species that are extinct... were they extinct at the time of the Flood?" What about the saber-toothed tiger, which is recent. But I'm interested in your...

Geisler: We're not talking about... Polonium halos... Can you refute the argument that Robert Gentry gave?

Kurtz: Which is? Which argument?

Geisler: The argument about the polonium halos which have a half-life of 3½ minutes and are on bedrock, granite and coal all over the world; and therefore it would have had to come into existence in less than 3½ minutes.

Kurtz: I've not investigated that question, so I will reserve judgment about it. But I'm surprised that you say that the dinosaur was not extinct 20 or 30 million years ago but more recently. Where all the scientific evidence suggests that there was a meteor shower... is one hypothesis, and that there was insufficient food on the planet and this was the reason for the extinction of the dinosaur. It had nothing to do with the Flood.

Geisler: "All the scientific evidence suggests...is one hypothesis." You contradict yourself in one sentence there. If all the scientific evidence suggests it, it's not one hypothesis.

Kurtz: Well, but to claim that the dinosaurs were killed by a flood is completely unsupported by any evidence at all.

Geisler: To claim they were killed by a meteor shower all over the world and everything else didn't die, too, is also completely unsupported.

Kurtz: It's not completely unsupported because at least you have a range of testable evidence in the sciences, where you're drawing simply upon the Bible which is based upon "faith." Now, if you maintain there was a...

Geisler: The Bible is not based on "faith"—it's based on fact.

Kurtz: If you maintain there was a Noachian Flood and if the Flood had to be as high as Mount Ararat, then it is estimated there would have had to have been three miles of water to cover the earth.

Geisler: You're assuming that the water had to be as deep all over the world,

number one. You're assuming that Mount Ararat is the same height, number two. And you're assuming that there isn't that much water available, number three. All of those are assumptions. Prove them.

Kurtz: But if, according to the Bible, the whole earth was covered by water, then you would have to cover the highest mountain peak. And you would have to have an awful lot of water to do so.

Geisler: Even the water in this glass "peaks." You can have water two miles deep here and just a little over there could be one mile deep, and it could still cover the whole earth.

Kurtz: But, well, take the highest peak...

Geisler: All it says is it "covered Mount Ararat" by that height. It didn't say that everywhere in the world every mountain that now exists at its present height was covered by that distance. You're adding to the Bible in order to refute the Bible. That's a straw man.

Kurtz: In order to kill all of life on the planet, you would have to cover all portions of the planet. You maintain that the Flood was not universal and did not cover the whole planet.

Geisler: No. I maintain the Flood was universal...

Kurtz: And "covered the whole planet."

Geisler: ...and killed everybody except eight people. And all of the animals that Noah brought into the ark were saved.

Kurtz: All of the million species that he brought into the ark.

Geisler: Not a million species that he brought into the ark.

Kurtz: There are a million species today.

Geisler: Yes, but "species" in an artificial category that scientists created. It's not a natural category. The "kinds" of Genesis are not to be equated with the species of science.

Kurtz: Well, you have a wide diversity of species on the earth at the present, and presumably they were saved in the ark. The ark would have to be awfully large in order to contain all the species.

Geisler: It's been proven that the ark is large enough to contain all the thousands of kinds of animals that there are.

Kurtz: Well, that is highly questionable—not only contained the animals but the food. Who would clean the manure, for example, in Noah's Ark?

Geisler: It's not highly questionable, it is mathematically provable. All you have to do is get your calculator out, figure the thousands of animals there were, figure the size of the ark, and there's plenty of room for all of them. Noah had a ventilating system in the ark—it even indicates it there in Genesis. And the manure was good fertilizer after he got out.

Ankerberg: All right. Let me... let me...

Kurtz: But he had trouble walking through it.

Ankerberg: Norman... I want to move on to another question. But we do want to talk about, "What do you have to say concerning first life here?" What's the scientific evidence, as far as you're concerned concerning first life?

Geisler: The scientific evidence for first life is very strong. Dr. Yockey in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology* in 1981 wrote an article where he showed that the new information theory discovered by Bell Laboratories proves that there is a mathematical identity between the specified complexity you find in the DNA and the kind of information you find in a dictionary or an encyclopedia. Now, the first living thing—a single-cell animal—has enough information that if spelled out in English would fill one volume of an encyclopedia. And to believe that that happened by "an explosion in a printing shop," say, is irrational. To believe that an intelligent Being can put that together is rational. Now, what I would like to suggest is that there are two alternatives: either non-intelligent force put all that specified complexity together, or an intelligent Being. I'd like to see a shred of evidence in the present from Dr. Kurtz, a shred of evidence to show that regularity, repeatedly—and science is built on regularity and repeatability—that non-intelligent forces can produce specified complexity as great as a dictionary.

Kurtz: Well, the notion... what the probabilities are, you said earlier that the probabilities were 10 to the 40 thousand. How you determine the baseline is pure conjecture. The point is that we find complexity in the universe, and to "read in" intelligence is merely an assumption. What you find: you find change, you find development throughout the universe. And I don't see that you need to postulate any existence of an intelligent design that ought to explain it.

Geisler: You didn't answer my question. Show me a regular, repeated process—science is built on regular, repeated process—whereby non-intelligent force can produce specified complexity.

Kurtz: Well, it's happening all the time. You have complexities in all forms of life. You have laws in the universe which are...

Geisler: That's the point we're talking about. Where did the first one come from?

Kurtz: Well, you're assuming that you need this in order to explain it.

Geisler: No, we're talking about first life.

Kurtz: I take nature as I find it. And nature, as I find it, is a nature of great complexity with law, and regularity, and evolution, and change. I don't see where you have to "read in." You say it's inexplicable unless you postulate intelligence, but the intelligence is inexplicable. It's merely a "leap of faith" that you're introducing.

Geisler: You didn't answer my question.

Kurtz: What you're refuting is the whole body of scientific evidence based on years of elaborate investigation, and you're introducing generalized theories—which you claim to be scientific, but they're merely biblical and involve faith.

Geisler: Now answer my question. Where did that first specified complexity come from—a non-intelligent force or an intelligent one—and what evidence you

have that non-intelligent force can produce something as complex as a volume of an encyclopedia?

Kurtz: Well, an encyclopedia is created by human beings, so the analogy doesn't follow. You have various forms of being in the universe with various degrees of complexity. I don't see where you have to invoke some mystical, hidden, occult, intelligent being in order to explain it.

Geisler: It's not "mystical," "hidden," or "occult."

Kurtz: I take nature as I find it. Take nature as you find it, with all of the complexities, and you describe it and account for it as best that you can, without reading in something beyond the evidence.

Geisler: I am taking nature as I find it, and then asking intelligent questions. "What caused this?" That's a perfectly intelligent...

Kurtz: Well, I don't have.... I said earlier that I was a skeptic. I don't know the causes of everything. If I don't know the cause of...

Geisler: Do you know the cause of anything?

Kurtz: Yes. But if I don't know the cause of something, I will suspend judgment. A "cause" is an effort at regularity, and... an explanation.

Geisler: Well, let me ask you this one. If you saw Mount Rushmore, would you assume, even if you'd never seen, that it had an intelligent cause?

Kurtz: Because I knew that people have used a chisel in order to chisel faces.

Geisler: But just like looking at Mount Rushmore and seeing those faces, would you assume an intelligent cause of that?

Kurtz: Of course. Because I've seen the intelligent being that created [it].

Geisler: Okay. There is more specified complexity and intelligent information in the first DNA than there is on Mount Rushmore. Why won't you assume an intelligent cause of that?

Kurtz: Because here's an analogy that you're reading into nature. Because I can see the sculptor create Mount Rushmore, but I have not seen any sculptor impart...

Geisler: But you didn't see the sculptor create Mount Rushmore. All you see is Mount Rushmore and you assume an intelligent cause.

Kurtz: Because... well, as a matter of fact, I did see it—so that's a bad analogy—and you did, too. But we know about human culture. And human beings create statues, all right. So this is something that we observe.

Geisler: But see, that's the whole point.

Kurtz: But you're going far beyond the observation, and you're not taking nature as you find it with all its complexity—of which we are a part.

Geisler: No, I am taking it exactly as I find it, and I'm observing that whenever you have specified complexity—complex information—it always had an intelligent cause.

Kurtz: No, that doesn't necessarily follow.

Geisler: Therefore...

Kurtz: That doesn't follow.

Geisler: Well, do you know of any...

Kurtz: It doesn't follow about nature.

Geisler: Let me finish. Do you know of any cases where you have a regular production of complex information, such as at Mount Rushmore, or DNA, where a non-intelligent force produces it?

Kurtz: Yes, throughout nature, constantly.

Geisler: Never! Never.

Kurtz: Yes.

Geisler: Give me one.

Kurtz: In physics, in biology and anthropology and all the data that we find...

Geisler: That already has a specified...

Kurtz: ...you have complexity. You have regularity. You have nature taking on order. You don't have to read in a designer. And we're part of nature...

Geisler: But the specified complexity is already there. And we're trying to get back to the beginning. "How did the first...?"

Kurtz: You don't have to trace it back to the beginning.

Geisler: But see, that's just reduplicating.

Kurtz: It's what you find.

Geisler: It's just a "Xerox" machine reduplicating...

Kurtz: You formulate causal hypotheses and you explain these. You make predictions...

Geisler: All you're saying is that, "Look, I have this page, and this page shows intelligent information, and I make a Xerox copy of it—a Xerox copy—and so that proves that there was no intelligence to produce the first page."

Kurtz: The page was produced by human beings. There's no problem here.

Geisler: By an intelligent being, right?

Kurtz: By human beings, okay. But you have degrees of complexity in other parts of nature, and there's no evidence that they were produced by human beings or by "God." You're reading in things.

Geisler: If every time you get specified complexity, there is always an intelligent being if over and over...

Kurtz: You're assuming what you set out to prove.

Geisler: Let me finish. David Hume said that, "Constant conjunction is the basis for rational conclusions." You see "cause and effect" connected over and over and you assume a connection. If over and over and over again, every time you blow a fan on alphabet soup you get a mess. If every time you drop a bomb in a printing shop you get a mess. But then you see a dictionary, or you see spelled out with alphabet

soup on the table, “I love you,” signed “Mary,” what do you always assume, rationally? —an intelligent cause.

Kurtz: I don’t assume that. You do. I find regularities...

Geisler: You don’t assume that?

Kurtz: I find regularities.... Yes. I find regularities...

Geisler: If you came to your breakfast table and it said, “I love you, Paul Kurtz, signed, your wife,” you wouldn’t assume an intelligent being did that?

Kurtz: Yes, in the human context...

Geisler: Oh, you would?

Kurtz: In the human context. But you’re going beyond that.

Geisler: Well, of course I’m going beyond that.

Kurtz: I find regularities in nature and one doesn’t necessarily mean there is an architect who conjures up order and...

Geisler: Now why would you assume an intelligent being did that, and not the...

Ankerberg: Okay, fellows, we’ve got to move on here. All right. We’re into the discussion, and next week we’re going to take this discussion into the public schools. So please join us.