

## NY philosopher, popular skeptic Kurtz dies at 86

October 22 2012, by Carolyn Thompson

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In a July 20, 2004 file photo, Paul Kurtz, Chairman of the Center for Inquiry, responds to a question during an interview in his office in Amherst, N.Y. Kurtz, the secular humanist philosopher died Saturday, Oct. 20, 2012 at his home in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst, N.Y. His death was announced Monday, Oct. 22, by the Center for Inquiry, which he founded. (AP Photo/Don Heupel, File)

(AP)—Paul Kurtz, who founded an international center devoted to

debunking psychics and UFOs and promoting science and reason over what he viewed as religious myths, has died. He was 86.

The secular humanist philosopher died Saturday at his home in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst. His death was announced Monday by the Center for Inquiry, which was founded by Kurtz in 1991 and has more than three dozen branches worldwide.

A prolific author and organizer, Kurtz also founded the not-for-profit Committee for Skeptical Inquiry and Council for Secular Humanism, as well as the secular humanist magazine Free Inquiry and Skeptical Inquirer magazine, which takes on such topics as alien sightings, paranormal claims and [homeopathic remedies](#). Most recently, he formed the Institute for Science and Human Values.

"He was without question a remarkable visionary and the scope of his accomplishments is truly staggering," said Nathan Bupp, who was mentored by Kurtz before going on to work for him, currently at the ISHV. "His lasting legacy will be as a builder of institutions and a purveyor of ideas. ... He had an intense interest in the power of ideas and how ideas came to permeate and influence the culture at large."

He died of natural causes, Amherst police said.

A compilation of Kurtz essays published by Bupp in June describes Kurtz's theory of eupraxsophy, which he first envisioned in 1988 as a secular moral alternative to religion that met some of the social needs served by religions without the supernaturalism or authoritarianism of traditional faiths.

At a January UNESCO conference in Paris, Kurtz spoke on "neo-humanism" and the positives of unbelief. Kurtz wasn't anti-religious, Bupp said, but nonreligious.

"Neo-humanists do not believe in God, yet they wish to do good. But if this moral outlook is to prevail, then neo-humanisms need to concentrate on improving the things of this world rather than simply combating the illusions of supernaturalism," Kurtz said at the conference.

In 2008, Kurtz, then 82, was succeeded by Ronald Lindsay as president and chief executive of the Center for Inquiry and the other centers and replaced as board chairman the following year. When philosophical differences led him to step down from all remaining positions in May 2010, he wrote, "it is merely a formality to divest myself of any pretensions that I have anything any longer to say within the organizations or magazines that I founded."

The Institute for Science and Human Values launched two months later.

A World War II veteran, Kurtz fought in the Battle of the Bulge and served in a unit that liberated the Dachau concentration camp, according to a biography provided by the Center for Inquiry. He earned a doctorate in philosophy at Columbia University in 1952 and taught philosophy at several colleges, arriving at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1965 and remaining there until his retirement from teaching in 1991.

All the while, he was active in the humanist movement. He served from 1967-1978 as editor of *The Humanist*, published by the American Humanist Association. He joined the board of directors of the International Humanist and Ethical Union in 1969 and served as co-chairman of that organization from 1986 to 1994. He founded what would become the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry in 1976 and Council for Secular Humanism in 1980.

Kurtz is survived by his wife and son.

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