

## Editorial

Since I've become editor of *Humanist Perspectives* I've experienced a growing sense of the active, hostile bigotry that is at work against secular humanists up to and including not only psychological but also physical violence. I've also become more acutely aware of the good-humoured determination of secularists to fight and win against those who would impose a narrow view of life on the majority.

In this issue we have a report by humanist **Dagmar Gontard-Zelinkova** and her successful battle to free three Ontario municipalities from the imposition of the Lord's Prayer at the opening of council meetings.

We have American **Greta Christina** on how two shocking attacks by religious bigots on atheists were met and overcome by successful counterattacks.

**Sheryl Jarvis** brings her street savvy and theoretical experience to focus on Stephen Harper's plan to Cage Canadians with Bill C10, which is before the Senate as we go to press. Sheryl's analysis is supported by a disturbing report on

how Harper's US model of privatized prisons promotes slavery in our new century.

Corporate lawyer **Mel Massey** provides a powerful, insightful review of the latest book on the trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, two hapless Italian immigrants, a tailor and a fishmonger, who were railroaded to the electric chair by a corrupt judicial system riding the wave of red terror following World War 1.

**Henry Beissel** takes time from his world-renowned, brilliant poetry, with an opening column of a new series called *Counterattack*. But not to forget Henry's poetry we also have a review by Gary Geddes of Henry's recently published, epic *Seasons of Blood*.

There's a piece by **Salman Rushdie** on the last days of **Christopher Hitchens**, and the poetic prose of **John K. Nixon** in *The River of Life*.

We welcome you to a treasure-chest of reading that will further excite your imagination.

Meanwhile, take it easy, but take it.

Looking forward,

– *Carl Dow*

## Letters

### **J. Michael Watts says Madeline Weld writes 'nonsense' about population growth**

I was terribly disappointed to see Madeline Weld (HP178, p 10) repeat the mindless mantra that "A 2.1 fertility rate is below replacement level." What nonsense.

Suppose we have 200 young people (below age 25, or any multiple thereof). They will normally form 100 couples. At 2.0 children per couple, the population will be stable. Right?

Nonsense. The population has now doubled to 400 people. (Parents don't die at their children's birth.) The 200 offspring (of the original 100 couples) will in turn (over the next 25 years) produce, at 2.0 children per couple, a further 200 people. So the population is stable. Right?

Nonsense. the population has now trebled to 600 people. (Grandparents don't die at their grandchildren's

birth.)

Over the next 25 years, the original 200 people (now aged 75 - avg) will die off, and finally, yes, the population will stabilize – but only at 3 times the present level.

Ah! you might say, but the world's population is not under 25 years old, and coming up to reproductive activity. Well actually, it is. According to UNESCO (who should know) the average age of human beings on this planet is 14.7 years, given a life expectancy of 70 years, when usually most people are indeed coming up to reproductive age. (In any case, do we *want* to stabilize the world population at an unsustainable 7 billion?)

If this scenario is true, then developing countries should double their population every 50 years or so. Developed countries – with an over population – should be doubling every 80-100 years. This is exactly

what is happening – see the Encyclopedia Britannica’s yearbook or equivalent.

The second mindless mantra is that reducing fertility rates reduces population. This again is nonsense. Ten couples with a high fertility rate of 10 children per couple, will increase the population by 100 people. One million couples with a very low fertility rate of 1 child per couple will increase the population by one million.

I despair at even our educated population understanding elementary mathematics.

—*J. Michael Watts*

### **Madeline Weld says J. Michael Watts misread what she wrote**

I honestly don’t know what Michael Watts is on about.

In his first objection concerning replacement fertility, he appears to have misread what I wrote. I did not write “A 2.1 fertility rate is below replacement level.” I wrote, “For several decades, Canada has had a total fertility rate (TFR) below the replacement level of 2.1.” That statement is factually correct. As in many other developed countries, Canada’s TFR fell below 2.1 during the early 1970s. So (while not specified in my article) it’s been almost 4 decades that Canada has had a below-replacement fertility rate – enough time to have had a major impact on population. Obviously I’m aware that populations won’t shrink the second the TFR reaches 2.1. In a replacement fertility situation, the population will stabilize when the last generation to have had more than an average of 2.1 children dies off. That populations will shrink in the long-term with below-replacement TFRs is evident from the UNFPA’s State of the World Population 2011, which shows negative annual growth rates (i.e., shrinkage) for Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and the Ukraine. And compare the situation of Thailand and the Philippines: in 1970, both had a population of about 36 million and a high proportion of young people. But Thailand embarked on a TFR far below that of the Philippines and now has a population of 70 million, projected to increase to under 74 million by 2050, compared to a population of 95 million in the Philippines, with a projection of 146 million by 2050 (UNFPA data). Therefore, my juxtaposition of a TFR below 2.1 for “several decades” (4, as it happens) and a

persistent annual growth rate of about 1% in Canada is completely reasonable.

Although he doesn’t use the term, Mr. Watts also seems to think that I am unaware of the phenomenon of “demographic momentum,” the impact of the age structure on population growth. It is the demographic momentum of the large baby boom cohort that kept the populations of developed countries like Canada growing even though the boomers themselves were having fewer than 2.1 children on average. A population with a high proportion of young people will of course take longer to stabilize than a population of similar size with a high proportion of post-reproductive people, if both reach a replacement TFR at the same time. But it will eventually stabilize (barring increases or decreases through migration, war, famine etc.). I have written elsewhere about the impact of demographic momentum in developing countries. In an article posted online earlier this year <<http://candobetter.net/node/2373>>, I criticized the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) for failing to actively promote small families when its participants were clearly aware of the implications of demographic momentum in poor countries with a large number of people about to enter their reproductive years.

Mr. Watts then asks if we even want to stabilize the world population at “an unsustainable 7 billion,” suggesting that is my ultimate goal. My statement, “Our species is in severe overshoot, a plague on our planet devastating the very resources and biodiversity it depends on,” might have tipped him off that I don’t think 7 billion is a sustainable number.

Finally Mr. Watts writes that it is a “mindless mantra” to say that reducing fertility rates reduces population. Again, for reasons unknown, he seems to assume that I think that the moment the fertility rate falls, the population will instantaneously decrease. As the example of Thailand shows, the demographic momentum of a population with many young people ensures that growth will continue rapidly in the immediate future. But as the comparison of Thailand with the Philippines shows, the long-term impact of a reduced fertility rate is substantial.

Populations in countries with high fertility rates can be reduced with no change in fertility, but only by increasing death rates through famine, disease, warfare, genocide, and reduced life expectancy. While I consider those developments as very probable (and in

fact occurring right now in parts of the world), they are not the means by which I or the Population Institute of Canada promote population reduction.

If Mr. Watts knows of some way to reduce population other than by reducing fertility rates without invoking the help of the four horsemen, I invite him to share that information.

—*Madeline Weld, Ottawa, ON*

### Reader contends Hitler and Stalin can't be equated

I just perused the Winter 2011-12 issue of Humanist Perspectives. A very interesting read. However, I am troubled by a comment in Editor Carl Dow's article Humanitarian Bombing? in which he perpetuates the view that Hitler and Stalin can be equated. It has long been my feeling that the Western view of Stalin has been distorted by the lens of the Cold War, and to repeat this mistake at this time is disappointing.

This is especially true in light of new scholarly research as revealed in Stalin: A New History, edited by Sarah Davies and James Harris, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 293 pp. Or earlier, Stephen Kotkin,

Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), 639 pp.

These works have benefited from access to previously closed archives in Moscow as well as from a slightly less hysterical geopolitical atmosphere. I am sure that by now there are even more books that can help to open our eyes to some of the critical historical truths that were buried in the panic created by Joseph McCarthy and the avalanche of the Cold War – offensives that have set the tone for all subsequent discussion about socialism in the ever-expanding NATO-led part of the world.

I'm tempted to shout, "God help us!" as men like Harper march us to Armageddon, but we must be made of sterner stuff and fortunately, as the poet Wordsworth once observed, we can rejoice in the findings of scientific observation to anchor our minds and guide our moral being to a better way that lies beneath the sound and fury. I'm convinced that it is that way about China too, and Cuba, and Venezuela. And perhaps other places where the socialist project is still on the defensive.

—*Stephen Endicott, Toronto, ON*

## No COMPROMISE.

# FREE INQUIRY

**Subscribe today!**  
The world's largest-circulation humanist publication, FREE INQUIRY covers the world of secular humanism as no other magazine can.

Read CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, ARTHUR CAPLAN, WENDY KAMINER, PETER SINGER, SHADIA DRURY, and other provocative thinkers.

Founded by Paul Kurtz | Edited by Tom Flynn

**1 year (6 bimonthly issues) US \$45.00** (incl. intl. postage).

MASTER CARD VISA DISCOVER AMERICAN EXPRESS ONLY

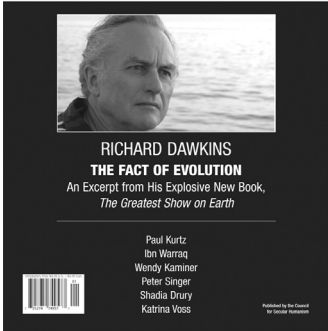
**SUBSCRIBE ONLINE FOR BIG SAVINGS!**

<http://secularhumanism.myshopify.com/products/free-inquiry-subscription>

LISA BAUER: Subjection and Escape, Part II

### FREE INQUIRY


SECTULAR HUMANISM AND HUMANITY



RICHARD DAWKINS  
**THE FACT OF EVOLUTION**  
An Excerpt from His Explosive New Book,  
*The Greatest Show on Earth*

Paul Kurtz  
Ibn Warraq  
Wendy Kaminer  
Peter Singer  
Shadia Drury  
Katrina Vova

Published by the Council  
for Secular Humanism



TOLL-FREE 1-800-458-1366

Surface Mail: FREE INQUIRY, P. O. Box 664,  
Amherst NY 14226-0664 USA  
*Sorry, no Canadian cheques.*