

Progressivism is Hostile to Humanism

by Patrick Frank (March 2016)

Abstract: Ethical Humanism honors the individual and is the basis of classical liberalism, modern libertarianism. Progressives advertise their program as humanely compassionate, asserting compatibility with Humanism. However, Progressives allied themselves to every single totalitarian state of the 20th century, including Nazi Germany. They have moralized mass murder on the grounds of utopian necessity. Progressive intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn have falsified history and assassinated character to compose politically expedient morality tales. Progressivism's social justice has censored speech and its educational justice has produced uneducated children and a nation-wide scandal of cheating teachers. Progressive law imposes secular purity, and its economic justice is enforced egalitarianism. These programs are no more than disguised attacks on individual freedom, the eradication of which is primary and necessary to Progressive communal ideology. Its polemics lubricate the slide into tyranny by making unfreedom seem normal and desirable. The belief that Progressivism is compatible with Humanism is a conceptual aberration that grants a soothing delusion of personal virtue while enabling a murderous ideology. Progressivism is mortally hostile to Humanism.

In recent issues of *Free Inquiry* magazine, Ms. Greta Christina argued that atheism necessarily entails "social justice." [1, 2] She defined "social justice" in terms of high-minded goals that only a greedy autocratic bigot could reject: "*an end to extreme poverty, political disempowerment, government corruption, gross inequality in economic opportunity, misogyny, racism, homophobia, and so on.*"

But if no one except a money-grubbing brute could possibly object to these goals, then what's the point of linking them specifically to atheists? The point is to color the Humanist context of *Free Inquiry* with the politics of Ms. Christina. "Social justice" is a code-word for the progressivist program. Ms. Christina wants to equate Progressivism with Humanism. I will argue they are

mortally opposed. What follows is not a critique of Ms. Christina's values, but to illustrate a widespread ethical mindlessness that leads well-meaning people to pave the way into totalitarianism.

Enlightenment Humanism is the philosophical outcome of the inherent right to personal freedom. [3, 4] Corliss Lamont provides perhaps the most accessible definition of Humanism as, *"a human-centered theory of life."* [5] It is informed by inquiry *"into the major branches of the natural sciences, such as chemistry, astronomy, and biology, and likewise of the social sciences, such as history, economics, and politics."* Humanism requires free thought. It is open to new knowledge, accepts reasoned debate, and is prescriptively modest in the face of ignorance. Humanism necessarily honors the individual and abjures ideology.

In direct contrast Progressivism represents the anti-Enlightenment, insisting the community is supreme over the individual. [6] The central principle of Progressivism is that individuals do not have rights, but are privileged from their adherence to shared social goals. [7] The good society follows from a consensus communal morality made immanent through law. Subjection of the individual to common social goals is a progressive value that persists right up to the present through a century of tumultuous history. [7-12] To oppose the prescribed common social goals is to risk ostracism and, in an organized polity, to invite judicial attention. The principled contradiction with Humanism could not be greater.

As a corporate social-political philosophy, the progressivist vehicle for reform is necessarily government action. Plainly stated, social beneficence is produced by legislated doctrinal imposition. In the US, the early 20th century progressive movement pushed for harm reduction such as women's suffrage, child labor laws, and the right to strike. The capacity to even recognize these goals as ethically worthy requires the humane political philosophy of the Enlightenment. [4] Therefore, the force of early progressive social arguments was carried by the same humanistic philosophy that undergirds the US Constitution. [13] Progressives called for Americans to live up to their principles.

However, things changed. Frustrated by democratic inefficiency, the Progressive program adopted centralized power as the road to social goodness. [14] Modern Progressivism is no longer about removing specific harms, but about legislating social, economic, and environmental justice. [15] No humanist accepts injustice,

but words can be slippery. Progressivism says that equality, democracy, and justice are best achieved by communal regulation and ownership. [8-10, 16]

Progressive societies decide their normative morality by reference to axiomatic communal ideals. In contrast, a rational individualistic society finds normative morality by open debate and negotiation. Individualistic Humanism therefore represents a mortal challenge to Progressivism. They cannot coexist.

The evolutionary drive to self-preservation makes every organism (including plants [17]) viscerally individual; everything recognizes its own life and fights to defend it against all others. [18] Innate self-defense coupled with self-consciousness makes humans constitutive individuals. We value our own opinions above others, and revise them only reluctantly. Self-valuation is therefore the ethical ground-substance of individual human beings. Willing cooperation among individuals is the defining trait of human societies, [19] making practical humanism apparently inherent.

The Progressive counter-offensive against our innate individualism cleverly focuses on economics. The Progressive charge is that economic individualism nurtures greed, corrupts societies and people, rapes resources, is inexorably imperialistic, and produces endless violent conflict. [20-22] In their words, *"Injustice and repression are inherent in capitalism, and evil policies are structural and systematic, not accidental and episodic."* [20] To eliminate capitalism, therefore, is to eliminate evil. This demonology has no factual basis, but nevertheless has become the ideological outlook of modern Progressivism.

Both Humanism and capitalism require and reward individual initiative. [23] The Progressive claim that economic and social justice require the destruction of capitalism, necessarily requires the destruction of individualism. Individualism is the target. Capitalism is the stalking-horse.

Progressives look to government intervention to cure the brutal individuals produced by capitalist societies. "Social justice," means social and economic equality imposed by a government of progressive moralists; leveling social inequities through control of industry, employment, wealth, and, if recent history is any guide, speech.[24, 25] It ends individual and civic freedom. Progressivism has become the vehicle of the radical left in a free society and,

couched in soothing banalities like “social justice,” strictly subordinates the individual to a moralizing communalism. [10, 26] Astute readers will notice that legislated communalism is indistinguishable from tyranny of the majority – the dark side implicit in progressivist notions of equality and justice.

Capitalism as original sin leads to a useful analogy between Progressivism and religious creationism. Creationist dishonesty is well-documented. [27-30] And creationism is not just a radical Christian phenomenon. Harun Yahya’s Islam-inspired tracts are a monument to deceit. [31-33] (Ironically, secular progressives have become creationist bed-fellows. [34, 35]) Absolutist believers yearn for a Manichaeist world because without evil black hats, white-hat-ism has no cachet. So, religious ideology entails a corrosive morality that invents and then demonizes enemies. The polarization stokes inner certainty, provides satisfying slanders, and usefully coerces and inflames the partisan faithful.

Completing the analogy, the Progressive faithful are rallied to belief by their own secular priesthood, such as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, who use the same tried-and-true play-book. In 1979, NY Times correspondent Paul Robinson called Mr. Chomsky “*arguably the most important intellectual alive today*,” [36] and many still defend that grant. [37] However, Mr. Chomsky’s work evidences a program of character assassination. [24, 38, 39] His targets are perfectly depicted capitalist heavies as seen through the lens of Progressive ideology: irremediably imperialistic, racist, hard-hearted, and callous to suffering and death.

Two examples suffice to illustrate the manufacture of calumny. [40] On page 31 of “*The Washington Connection and Third-World Fascism*,” Mr. Chomsky imputed USIA official John Mecklin to be a racist, writing that Mr. Mecklin derided the Vietnamese as having the mentality of mumbling six-year olds and a vocabulary of a few hundred words. [41]

But to look up the quote is to find Mr. Mecklin agonizing over the harsh life that illiteracy has imposed on Vietnamese peasants. He wrote that illiteracy is “*human degradation*” and denies the Vietnamese their “*birthright access to thousands of years of human civilization*.” He anguishes about the difficulty of transmitting even simple concepts such as that it is unhygienic to urinate down the well or that mosquitoes bring malaria and so should be killed. [42] Mr. Mecklin everywhere expressed compassionate sympathy for Vietnamese and nowhere

expressed a racist disdain. Mr. Chomsky defamed a good man but manufactured the capitalist bogeyman to charm his receptive audience.

Second example: in *"Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs,"* Mr. Chomsky turned his guns on Mr. George Shultz, then US Secretary of State. According to Mr. Chomsky, *"[W]hen the World Court was considering Nicaragua's charges against the US[,] Secretary of State George Shultz derided those who advocate 'utopian, legalistic means like outside mediation, the United Nations, and the World Court, while ignoring the power element of the equation.'"* [43]

The quote is from Mr. Shultz' 1986 Landon Address at Kansas State University. His full thought ended this way, *"...while ignoring the power element of the equation – **even when faced with a Communist regime whose essence is a monopoly of power and the forcible repression of all opposition.**"* The bolded section is missing from Mr. Chomsky's rendering. The vile murderous history of Communism was well known by 1986, [44-47] making Mr. Shultz' qualified ending accurate and very reasonable. But Mr. Chomsky truncated his words, and then falsely construed Mr. Shultz to be an international scofflaw and a political brute. Mr. Chomsky is a professional linguist. His rephrasings in these two examples cannot be accidental. [40]

Mr. Howard Zinn apparently followed the same programmatic vein by constructing defamatory tales in his *A People's History of the United States*. [48] Mr. Zinn purported that there was no important distinction between Nazi fascism and Anglo-American democratic principles, that African Americans were largely hostile or indifferent toward helping the American effort during World War II, and that the American use of atomic weapons against Japan was mass murder driven by cynical Cold War calculations.

However, each charge is evidently a studied misrepresentation. [49-52] On assessing the case, historian Sam Wineburg observed, *"The form of reasoning that Zinn relies on here is known as asking 'yes-type' questions[, which] send the historian into the past armed with a wish list. Because a hallmark of modernity is to save everything ..., those who ask yes-type questions always end up getting what they want."* He points out that, *"the data the historian omits must not be essential to the understanding of the data included."* Given his studied omissions, Mr. Zinn apparently chose to mislead.

The rationale for his choices is disclosed in a 1994 interview with Ms. Barbara Miner. Mr. Zinn said that, "*Objectivity [in History] is neither possible nor desirable.*" [53] His reasoning was that prejudicial factology is acceptable because historians choose the facts they like anyway, and in any case objectivity itself is undesirable if one wishes to "*have an effect on the world.*" Evidently for Mr. Zinn, professional integrity combines the adolescent ethic '*they all do it, so I can too*' with the slightly more mature and ever seductive, '*ends justify means.*' [24] Progressive historians should speciously misconstrue the past in order to tendentiously misinform the present.

Most relevant to our subject, Ms. Miner then asked, "*How can a Progressive teacher promote a radical perspective within a bureaucratic, conservative institution?*" Progressivism apparently instructs the teacher to be a political propagandist. Rather than correct this view, Mr. Zinn answered sympathetically.

This all reveals a congruence of mentality between the creationists and the progressives: falsehood in service to ideology. Willful blindness, cherry-picked data, or outright lies, the conclusion-mongering of Mr. Chomsky and Mr. Zinn (and of Edward Said [54]), display all the best banalities of the creationist intellectual, and Ms. Miner of the creationist teacher.

Apparently Ms. Miner's progressive "*radical perspective*" for education is rooted in the, "*Neo-marxist, Marxist, critical theory, radical democracy, foucauldian, post-structuralist, pragmatist, and anarchist traditions.*" [55] This attractive philosophy of childhood education is the modern decoction of a long-standing recipe for Progressive social engineering, [56] increasingly applied in public schools over the last 40 years. [57, 58] It exactly analogizes the creationist program of propagandized education, but has been far more successful and far more corrosive. Progressive educational justice requires strict social promotion of student cohorts, which has necessitated abandoning academic standards and prerequisites. This is the osmotic pressure behind the huge high-school cheating scandal lately emergent in Atlanta, Georgia. [59]

No matter what one thinks of it, subject-matter testing has revealed that educational justice produces scholastic bankruptcy. [58] To conceal this, teachers have been coerced to falsify test results. [60] An *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* investigative team found a nation-wide plague of falsified scores. [61] Their map of suspect school districts is available

(<http://www.multivu.com/assets/55353/documents/55353-Suspect-Scores-Map-original.pdf>)