

Three Humanist Manifestos - 1933 to 2003

(def. Manifesto - A public declaration of principles, policies, or intentions.)

Humanist Manifesto is the title of three manifestos laying out a Humanist worldview. They are the original *Humanist Manifesto* (1933, often referred to as Humanist Manifesto I), the *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), and *Humanism and Its Aspirations* (2003, a.k.a. *Humanist Manifesto III*). The Manifesto originally arose from religious Humanism, though secular Humanists also signed.

The central theme of all three *manifestos* is the elaboration of a philosophy and value system which does not necessarily include belief in any personal deity or "higher power", although the three differ considerably in their tone, form, and ambition. Each has been signed at its launch by various prominent members of academia and others who are in general agreement with its principles.

In addition, there is a similar document entitled *A Secular Humanist Declaration* published in 1980 by the Council for Secular Humanism.

Humanist Manifesto I

The first manifesto, entitled simply *A Humanist Manifesto*, was written in 1933 primarily by Roy Wood Sellars and Raymond Bragg and was published with thirty-four signatories including philosopher John Dewey. Unlike the later ones, the first Manifesto talked of a new "religion", and referred to Humanism as a religious movement to transcend and replace previous religions based on allegations of supernatural revelation. The document outlines a fifteen-point belief system, which, in addition to a secular outlook, opposes "acquisitive and profit-motivated society" and outlines a worldwide egalitarian society based on voluntary mutual cooperation, language which was considerably softened by the Humanists' board, owners of the document, twenty years later.

The title "A Humanist Manifesto" - rather than "The Humanist Manifesto" - was intentional, predictive of later Manifestos to follow, as indeed has been the case. Unlike the creeds of major organized religions, the setting out of Humanist ideals in these Manifestos is an ongoing process. Indeed, in some communities of Humanists the compilation of personal Manifestos is actively encouraged, and throughout the Humanist movement it is accepted that the Humanist Manifestos are not permanent or authoritative dogmas but are to be subject to ongoing critique.

Humanist Manifesto II

The second Manifesto was written in 1973 by Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson, and was intended to update and replace the previous one. It begins with a statement that the excesses of Nazism and World War II had made the first seem "far too optimistic", and indicated a more hardheaded and realistic approach in its seventeen-point statement, which was much longer and more elaborate than the previous version. Nevertheless, much of the unbridled optimism of the first remained, with hopes stated that war would become obsolete and poverty would be eliminated.

Many of the proposals in the document, such as opposition to racism and weapons of mass destruction and support of strong human rights, are fairly uncontroversial, and its prescriptions that divorce and birth control should be legal and that technology can improve life are widely accepted today in much of the Western world. Furthermore, its proposal of an international court has since been implemented. However, in addition to its rejection of supernaturalism, various controversial stances are strongly supported, notably the right to abortion. The general tone of the second Manifesto has been perceived as moving away from sympathy with libertarian socialism toward a more economically neutral stance.

Initially published with a small number of signatures, the document was circulated and gained thousands more, and indeed the AHA website encourages visitors to add their own name. A provision at the end noted that signatories do "not necessarily endorse every detail" of the document.

Among the oft-quoted lines from this 1973 Manifesto are, "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves," and "We are responsible for what we are and for what we will be," both of which may present difficulties for members of certain Christian, Jewish, and Muslim sects, or other believers in doctrines of submission to the will of an all-powerful God.

Expanding upon the role the public education establishment should play to bring about the goals described in the Humanist Manifesto II, John Dunphy wrote "the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being." and "Utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey humanist values in whatever subject they teach, regardless of the educational level - preschool day care or large state university."^[1]

Humanist Manifesto III

Humanism and Its Aspirations, subtitled *Humanist Manifesto III*, a successor to the *Humanist Manifesto of 1933*, was published in 2003 by the AHA, which apparently wrote it by committee .

The new document is the successor to the previous ones, and the name "Humanist Manifesto" is the property of the American Humanist Association.

The newest one is deliberately much shorter, listing six primary beliefs, which echo themes from its predecessors:

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. (See empiricism.)
- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.
- Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. (See ethical naturalism.)
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

Signatories included 21 Nobel laureates.

Other Manifestos for Humanism

Aside from the official Humanist Manifestos of the American Humanist Association, there have been other similar documents. "Humanist Manifesto" is a trademark of the AHA. Formulation of new statements in emulation of the three Humanist Manifestoes is encouraged, and examples follow.

A Secular Humanist Declaration

In 1980, the Council for Secular Humanism, founded by Paul Kurtz, which is typically more detailed in its discussions regarding the function of Humanism than the AHA, published what is in effect its manifesto, entitled *A Secular Humanist Declaration*. It has as its main points:

1. Free Inquiry
2. Separation of Church and State
3. The Ideal of Freedom
4. Ethics Based on Critical Intelligence
5. Moral Education
6. Religious Skepticism
7. Reason
8. Science and Technology
9. Evolution
10. Education

Humanist Manifesto 2000

Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for New Planetary Humanism is a book by Paul Kurtz published in 2000. It differs from the other three in that it is a full-length book rather than essay-length, and was published not by the American Humanist Association but by the Council for Secular Humanism. In it, Kurtz argues for many of the points already formulated in Humanist Manifesto 2, of which he had been co-author in 1973.

And now ...

Neohumanist Statement of Secular Principles and Values (2010). Drafted by Paul Kurtz