



# HUMANIST MANIFESTO 2000

*A Call For A New  
Planetary Humanism*

Drafted by Paul Kurtz

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**Drafted by PAUL KURTZ**



**Prometheus Books**

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59 John Glenn Drive  
Amherst, New York 14228-2119

Published 2000 by Prometheus Books

*Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*. Copyright © 1999 by the International Academy of Humanism first appeared in *Free Inquiry* in the fall of 1999. Editorial Committee: Paul Kurtz (chairman), Norm Allen, Joseph E. Barnhart, Roy W. Brown, Diana Brown, Vern L. Bullough, Matthew Cherry, Jan Loeb Eisler, Roy P. Fairfield, Thomas W. Flynn, James Haught, Valerii Kuvakin, Molleen Matsumura, Jean-Claude Pecker, Ranjit Sandhu, Svetozar Stojanović, Lewis Vaughn.

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*Humanist Manifesto I* and *II* (with a new preface by Paul Kurtz) were published by Prometheus Books in 1973. This edition was copyrighted by Prometheus Books.

*A Secular Humanist Declaration* was published in *Free Inquiry* in 1980 and is copyrighted by the Council for Secular Humanism. A Prometheus Books edition was published in 1980.

*A Declaration of Global Interdependence* was published in *Free Inquiry* in 1988 and was endorsed by the International Academy of Humanism and the International Humanist and Ethical Union. It is copyrighted by the Council for Secular Humanism.

*Humanist Manifesto II*, *A Secular Humanist Declaration*, and *A Declaration of Global Interdependence* were drafted by Paul Kurtz.

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WWW.PROMETHEUSBOOKS.COM

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10 9 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Humanist manifesto 2000 : a call for a new planetary humanism / drafted by Paul Kurtz.

p. cm.

ISBN 13: 978-1-57392-783-3

ISBN 10: 1-57392-783-X

1. Humanism. I. Kurtz, Paul, 1925- . II. Title.

99-050116  
CIP

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

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# HUMANIST MANIFESTO 2000

## A Call for a New Planetary Humanism

### I PREAMBLE

**H**umanism is an ethical, scientific, and philosophical outlook that has changed the world. Its heritage traces back to the philosophers and poets of ancient Greece and Rome, Confucian China, and the Carvaka movement in classical India. Humanist artists, writers, scientists, and thinkers have been shaping the modern era for over half a millennium. Indeed, humanism and modernism have often seemed synonymous; for humanist ideas and values express a renewed confidence in the power of human beings to solve their own problems and conquer uncharted frontiers.

Modern humanism came to fruition during the Renaissance. It led to the development of modern science. During the Enlightenment it germinated new ideals of social justice and inspired the democratic revolutions of our time. Humanism has helped frame a new ethical outlook emphasizing the values of freedom and happiness and the virtues of universal human rights.

The signers of this *Manifesto* believe that humanism has



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much to offer humanity as we face the problems of the twenty-first century and the new millennium beyond. Many of the old ideas and traditions that humankind has inherited are no longer relevant to current realities and future opportunities. We need fresh thinking if we are to cope with the global society that is now emerging, and fresh thinking is the hallmark of humanism. Therefore we present *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*.

The following recommendations are offered in modesty but with the conviction that they can contribute to a dialogue among the different cultural, political, economic, and religious viewpoints in the world. Although we who endorse this document share common principles and values, we are prepared to modify our views in the light of new knowledge, altered circumstances, and unforeseen problems that may arise. It is not possible to create a permanent Manifesto, but it is useful and wise to devise a working document, open to revision.

## Prologue to the Present

**F**our major *Humanist Manifestos* and *Declarations* have already been issued in the twentieth century: *Humanist Manifesto I*, *Humanist Manifesto II*, *A Secular Humanist Declaration*, and *A Declaration of Interdependence*.

*Humanist Manifesto I* appeared in 1933 at the height of the world depression. Endorsed by thirty-four American humanists (including philosopher John Dewey), it reflected the concerns of that time, recommending first a form of nonthe-

istic religious humanism as an alternative to the religions of the age, and, second, national economic and social planning.

*Humanist Manifesto II* was released in 1973 to deal with the issues that had emerged on the world scene since then: the rise of fascism and its defeat in the Second World War, the growth in influence and power of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism, the Cold War, the postwar economic recovery of Europe and America, the decolonialization of large sectors of the world, the creation of the United Nations, the sexual revolution, the growth of the women's movement, the demand of minorities for equal rights, and the emergence of student power on the campuses.

That *Manifesto* stimulated widespread debate. It was signed by many leaders of thought and action throughout the world: Andreï Sakharov, noted Soviet dissident; Julian Huxley, former President of UNESCO; Sidney Hook; Betty Friedan; Gunnar Myrdal; Jacques Monod; Francis Crick; Margaret Knight; Allan Guttmacher; James Farmer; Ritchie Calder; and A. Philip Randolph, among others. It defended human rights on a global scale, arguing for the right to travel beyond national frontiers at a time when people behind the Iron Curtain were prohibited from doing so. Many Marxist humanists in Eastern Europe had attacked totalitarian statism and welcomed a defense of democracy and human rights.

*Humanist Manifesto II* no longer defended a planned economy, but left the question open to alternative economic systems. Thus, it was endorsed by both liberals and economic libertarians, who defended a free market, as well as by social democrats and democratic socialists, who believed

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that the government should have a substantial role to play in a welfare society. It sought to democratize economic systems and test them by whether or not they increased economic well-being for all individuals and groups.

*Humanist Manifesto II* was written when a new moral revolution seemed upon us: it defended the right to birth control, abortion, divorce, sexual freedom between consenting adults, and euthanasia. It sought to protect the rights of minorities, women, the elderly, abused children, and the disadvantaged. It advocated tolerance of alternative lifestyles and the peaceful negotiation of differences, and it deplored racial, religious, and class antagonisms. It called for an end to terror and hatred. It was written in the wake of Vatican II, which had attempted to liberalize Roman Catholicism. *Humanist Manifesto II* left room for both naturalistic humanism and liberal religious humanism. The *Manifesto* was optimistic about the prospects for humankind. It pointed to the benefits of science and technology for human good. It predicted that the twenty-first century could become the humanist century.

*A Secular Humanist Declaration* was issued in 1980 because humanism, and especially *Humanist Manifesto II*, had come under heavy attack, particularly from fundamentalist religious and right-wing political forces in the United States. Many of these critics maintained that secular humanism was a *religion*. The teaching of secular humanism in the schools, they claimed, violated the principle of the separation of church and state and established a new religion. The *Declaration* responded that secular humanism expressed a set of moral values and a nontheistic philo-

sophical and scientific viewpoint that could not be equated with religious faith. The teaching of the secular humanist outlook in no way was a violation of the separation principle. It defended the democratic idea that the secular state should be neutral, neither for nor against religion.

In 1988, the International Academy of Humanism offered still a fourth document, *A Declaration of Interdependence*, calling for a new global ethics and the building of a world community, which were increasingly necessary in view of the global institutions that were rapidly evolving.

### Why Planetary Humanism?

**W**hile most of the provisions of these earlier *Manifestos* and *Declarations* are still viable, it is apparent that as the world enters a new millennium a new *Manifesto* is necessary. Since the earlier *Manifestos*, while much progress has been made, new circumstances have emerged to challenge us: Totalitarian communism has collapsed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the two-power Cold War blocs have largely dissipated. New sectors of the globe have attempted to become more democratic, though many countries still lack effective democratic institutions. Moreover, the world economy has become even more globalized. International conglomerates have merged and become transnational and, in a sense, more powerful than many nations in the world. Russia, China, and other countries have sought to enter the world market. No one country is able to master its eco-

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conomic destiny independent of world trade and commerce. These fundamental changes have occurred largely because of the accelerated growth of science and technology, and especially the information revolution, which has led to a worldwide economic and cultural communications network. Arguably the changes wrought in the world since *Humanist Manifesto II* are as great or greater than those of the Industrial Revolution two centuries ago, or the invention by Gutenberg of moveable type and the printing press. The repercussions to our global existence will continue to be enormous.

Yet, as the world becomes a global family, ethnic-religious rivalries have sought to divide territories into contending factions. Fundamentalist religions have rekindled, contesting the principles of humanism and secularism and demanding a return to the religiosity of a premodern era. So-called New Age paranormal beliefs likewise have emerged, abetted by the mass media touting a spiritual/paranormal view of reality. The media have been globalized. TV, films, radio, and book and magazine publishers are dominated by media conglomerates, concerned almost solely with advertising and selling products to the world market. In addition, postmodernism has appeared in many universities, questioning the basic premises of modernity and humanism, attacking science and technology, and questioning humanist ideals and values. Many current visions of the future are pessimistic, even apocalyptic. But we object for we believe that it is possible to create a better world. The realities of the global society are such that only a new Planetary Humanism can provide meaningful directions for the future.

## II PROSPECTS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

**F**or the first time in human history we possess the means—provided by science and technology—to ameliorate the human condition, advance happiness and freedom, and enhance human life for *all* people on the planet. Many people who talk about the new millennium are fearful about what will ensue. Many make doomsday forecasts about coming calamities—whether religious or secular. Pessimists point to the brutal wars of the twentieth century and warn that new forms of terrorism and unrest may engulf humanity in the coming century.

We think that a more positive and realistic appraisal of the human prospect in the twenty-first century is in order. We wish to point out that in spite of political, military, and social unrest, the twentieth century has witnessed a great number of beneficent achievements. However disappointing to naysayers, prosperity, peace, better health, and rising standards of living are a reality—and likely to continue. These great technological, scientific, and social achievements have often been overlooked. Although they apply largely to the developed world, their benefits are now being felt virtually everywhere. We need to list some of them:

- Scientific medicine has improved health enormously. It has reduced pain and suffering, and it has increased

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longevity. The discovery of antibiotics and the development of vaccines, modern techniques of surgery, anesthesia, pharmacology, and biogenetic engineering have all contributed to these advances in health care.

- Farsighted public health measures and improved water supplies and sewage disposal have greatly reduced the incidence of infectious disease. Therapeutic remedies, widely applied, have dramatically reduced child mortality.
- The Green Revolution has transformed food production and increased crop yields, reduced hunger, and raised the levels of nutrition for large portions of the globe.
- Modern methods of mass production have increased productivity, liberated workers from many forms of physical drudgery, and made possible the benefits and luxuries of consumer goods and services.
- New modes of transportation have reduced distances and transformed societies. The automobile and airplane have enabled people to traverse continents and overcome geographical isolation. Astronautical research has opened the human species to the exciting adventure of space exploration.
- Technological discoveries have vastly accelerated new modes of communication on a worldwide basis. In addition to the benefits of telephone, fax, radio, TV, and satellite transmission, computer technology has radically

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transformed all aspects of socioeconomic life. No office or home in the developed world is untouched by the information revolution. The Internet and the World Wide Web have made possible instant communication almost everywhere on the globe.

- Scientific research has expanded our knowledge of the universe and the place of the human species within it. Human inquiry is now able to advance and to have its findings confirmed by science and reason, while the metaphysical and theological speculations of the past have made little or no progress. The discoveries of astronomy, physics, relativity theory, and quantum mechanics have increased our understanding of the universe—from the scale of microparticles to that of galaxies. Biology and genetics have contributed to our knowledge of the biosphere. Darwin's nineteenth-century theory of natural selection has enabled us to understand how life evolved. The discoveries of DNA and molecular biology continue to reveal the mechanisms of evolution and of life itself. The behavioral and social sciences have deepened our knowledge of social and political institutions, the economy, and culture.

Many positive social and political developments have also occurred in the twentieth century and these bode well for the future:

- The colonial empires of the nineteenth century have all but disappeared.



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- The threat of totalitarianism has abated.
- *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is now accepted by most nations of the world (in word if not in deed).
- The ideals of democracy, freedom, and the open society have spread widely to Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa.
- Women in many countries now enjoy personal autonomy and legal and social rights, and have taken their place in many areas of human enterprise.
- As national economies have become globalized, economic prosperity has been carried from Europe and North America to other parts of the world. Free markets and entrepreneurial methods have opened underdeveloped regions to capital investment and development.
- The problem of population growth has been resolved in the affluent countries of Europe and North America. In many areas the population grows not because of the birth rate but because of the decline of the death rate and the increase of longevity—a positive development.
- Increased education, literacy, and cultural enrichment are now available to more and more children in the world—though there is still much more that needs to be done.