



ADVOCATING PROGRESSIVE VALUES AND EQUALITY
FOR HUMANISTS, ATHEISTS, AND FREETHINKERS



Humanist Manifesto II

Preface

It is forty years since [Humanist Manifesto I](#) (1933) appeared. Events since then make that earlier statement seem far too optimistic. Nazism has shown the depths of brutality of which humanity is capable. Other totalitarian regimes have suppressed human rights without ending poverty. Science has sometimes brought evil as well as good. Recent decades have shown that inhuman wars can be made in the name of peace. The beginnings of police states, even in democratic societies, widespread government espionage, and other abuses of power by military, political, and industrial elites, and the continuance of unyielding racism, all present a different and difficult social outlook. In various societies, the demands of women and minority groups for equal rights effectively challenge our generation.

As we approach the twenty-first century, however, an affirmative and hopeful vision is needed. Faith, commensurate with advancing knowledge, is also necessary. In the choice between despair and hope, humanists respond in this Humanist Manifesto II with a positive declaration for times of uncertainty.

As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to live and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.

Those who sign Humanist Manifesto II disclaim that they are setting forth a binding credo; their individual views would be stated in widely varying ways. This statement is, however, reaching for vision in a time that needs direction. It is social analysis in an effort at consensus. New statements should be developed to supersede this, but for today it is our conviction that humanism offers an alternative that can serve present-day needs and guide humankind toward the future.

– Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson (1973)

The next century can be and should be the humanistic century. Dramatic scientific, technological, and ever-accelerating social and political changes crowd our awareness. We have virtually conquered the planet, explored the moon, overcome the natural limits of travel and communication; we stand at the dawn of a new age, ready to move farther into space and perhaps inhabit other planets. Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life-span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life.

The future is, however, filled with dangers. In learning to apply the scientific method to nature and human life, we have opened the door to ecological damage, overpopulation, dehumanizing institutions, totalitarian repression, and nuclear and biochemical disaster. Faced with apocalyptic prophecies and doomsday scenarios, many flee in despair from reason and embrace irrational cults and theologies of withdrawal and retreat.

Traditional moral codes and newer irrational cults both fail to meet the pressing needs of today and tomorrow. False “theologies of hope” and messianic ideologies, substituting new dogmas for old, cannot cope with existing world realities. They separate rather than unite peoples.

Humanity, to survive, requires bold and daring measures. We need to extend the uses of scientific method, not renounce them, to fuse reason with compassion in order to build constructive social and moral values. Confronted by many possible futures, we must decide which to pursue. The ultimate goal should be the fulfillment of the potential for growth in each human personality – not for the favored few, but for all of humankind. Only a shared world and global measures will suffice.

A humanist outlook will tap the creativity of each human being and provide the vision and courage for us to work together. This outlook emphasizes the role human beings can play in their own spheres of action. The decades ahead call for dedicated, clear-minded men and women able to marshal the will, intelligence, and cooperative skills for shaping a desirable future. Humanism can provide the purpose and inspiration that so many seek; it can give personal meaning and significance to human life.

Many kinds of humanism exist in the contemporary world. The varieties and emphases of naturalistic humanism include “scientific,” “ethical,” “democratic,” “religious,” and “Marxist” humanism. Free thought, atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, deism, rationalism, ethical culture, and liberal religion all claim to be heir to the humanist tradition. Humanism traces its roots from ancient China, classical Greece and Rome, through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to the scientific revolution of the modern world. But views that merely reject theism are not equivalent to humanism. They lack commitment to the positive belief in the possibilities of human progress and to the values central to it. Many within religious groups, believing in the future of humanism, now claim humanist credentials. Humanism is an ethical process through which we all can move, above and beyond the divisive particulars, heroic personalities, dogmatic creeds, and ritual customs of past religions or their mere negation.

We affirm a set of common principles that can serve as a basis for united action – positive principles relevant to the present human condition. They are a design for a secular society on a planetary scale.

For these reasons, we submit this new Humanist Manifesto for the future of humankind; for us, it is a vision of hope, a direction for satisfying survival.

Religion

FIRST: In the best sense, religion may inspire dedication to the highest ethical ideals. The cultivation of moral devotion and creative imagination is an expression of genuine “spiritual” experience and aspiration. We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so. Even at this late date in human history, certain elementary facts based upon the critical use of scientific reason have to be restated. We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfillment of the human race. As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. Nature may indeed be broader and deeper than we now know; any new discoveries, however, will but enlarge our knowledge of the natural.

Some humanists believe we should reinterpret traditional religions and reinvest them with meanings appropriate to the current situation. Such redefinitions, however, often perpetuate old dependencies and escapisms; they easily become obscurantist, impeding the free use of the intellect. We need, instead, radically new human purposes and goals.

We appreciate the need to preserve the best ethical teachings in the religious traditions of humankind, many of which we share in common. But we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities. Traditional religions often offer solace to humans, but, as often, they inhibit humans from helping themselves or experiencing their full potentialities. Such institutions, creeds, and rituals often impede the will to serve others. Too often traditional faiths encourage dependence rather than independence, obedience rather than affirmation, fear rather than courage. More recently they have generated concerned social action, with many signs of relevance appearing in the wake of the “God Is Dead” theologies. But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.

SECOND: Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices. Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the “ghost in the machine” and the “separable soul.” Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. We continue to exist in our progeny and in the way that our lives have influenced others in our culture.

Traditional religions are surely not the only obstacles to human progress. Other ideologies also impede human advance. Some forms of political doctrine, for instance, function religiously, reflecting the worst features of orthodoxy and authoritarianism, especially when they sacrifice individuals on the altar of Utopian promises. Purely economic and political viewpoints, whether capitalist or communist, often function as religious and ideological dogma. Although humans undoubtedly need economic and political goals, they also need creative values by which to live.

Ethics

THIRD: We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction.

Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces of vulgarization, commercialization, and dehumanization.

FOURTH: Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself. The controlled use of scientific methods, which have transformed the natural and social sciences since the Renaissance, must be extended further in the solution of human problems. But reason must be tempered by humility, since no group has a monopoly of wisdom or virtue. Nor is there any guarantee that all problems can be solved or all questions answered. Yet critical intelligence, infused by a sense of human caring, is the best method that humanity has for resolving problems. Reason should be balanced with compassion and empathy and the whole person fulfilled. Thus, we are not advocating the use of scientific intelligence independent of or in opposition to emotion, for we believe in the cultivation of feeling and love. As science pushes back the boundary of the known, humankind's sense of wonder is continually renewed, and art, poetry, and music find their places, along with religion and ethics.

The Individual

FIFTH: The preciousness and dignity of the individual person is a central humanist value. Individuals should be encouraged to realize their own creative talents and desires. We reject all religious, ideological, or moral codes that denigrate the individual, suppress freedom, dull intellect, dehumanize personality. We believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility. Although science can account for the causes of behavior, the possibilities of individual freedom of choice exist in human life and should be increased.

SIXTH: In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered "evil." Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a tolerant one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire. We wish to cultivate the development of a responsible attitude toward sexuality, in which humans are not exploited as sexual objects, and in which intimacy, sensitivity, respect, and honesty

in interpersonal relations are encouraged. Moral education for children and adults is an important way of developing awareness and sexual maturity.

Democratic Society

SEVENTH: To enhance freedom and dignity the individual must experience a full range of civil liberties in all societies. This includes freedom of speech and the press, political democracy, the legal right of opposition to governmental policies, fair judicial process, religious liberty, freedom of association, and artistic, scientific, and cultural freedom. It also includes a recognition of an individual's right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide. We oppose the increasing invasion of privacy, by whatever means, in both totalitarian and democratic societies. We would safeguard, extend, and implement the principles of human freedom evolved from the Magna Carta to the Bill of Rights, the Rights of Man, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

EIGHTH: We are committed to an open and democratic society. We must extend participatory democracy in its true sense to the economy, the school, the family, the workplace, and voluntary associations. Decision-making must be decentralized to include widespread involvement of people at all levels – social, political, and economic. All persons should have a voice in developing the values and goals that determine their lives. Institutions should be responsive to expressed desires and needs. The conditions of work, education, devotion, and play should be humanized. Alienating forces should be modified or eradicated and bureaucratic structures should be held to a minimum. People are more important than decalogues, rules, proscriptions, or regulations.

NINTH: The separation of church and state and the separation of ideology and state are imperatives. The state should encourage maximum freedom for different moral, political, religious, and social values in society. It should not favor any particular religious bodies through the use of public monies, nor espouse a single ideology and function thereby as an instrument of propaganda or oppression, particularly against dissenters.

TENTH: Humane societies should evaluate economic systems not by rhetoric or ideology, but by whether or not they increase economic well-being for all individuals and groups, minimize poverty and hardship, increase the sum of human satisfaction, and enhance the quality of life. Hence the door is open to alternative economic systems. We need to democratize the economy and judge it by its responsiveness to human needs, testing results in terms of the common good.

ELEVENTH: The principle of moral equality must be furthered through elimination of all discrimination based upon race, religion, sex, age, or national origin. This means equality of opportunity and recognition of talent and merit. Individuals should

be encouraged to contribute to their own betterment. If unable, then society should provide means to satisfy their basic economic, health, and cultural needs, including, wherever resources make possible, a minimum guaranteed annual income. We are concerned for the welfare of the aged, the infirm, the disadvantaged, and also for the outcasts – the mentally retarded, abandoned, or abused children, the handicapped, prisoners, and addicts – for all who are neglected or ignored by society. Practicing humanists should make it their vocation to humanize personal relations.

We believe in the right to universal education. Everyone has a right to the cultural opportunity to fulfill his or her unique capacities and talents. The schools should foster satisfying and productive living. They should be open at all levels to any and all; the achievement of excellence should be encouraged. Innovative and experimental forms of education are to be welcomed. The energy and idealism of the young deserve to be appreciated and channeled to constructive purposes.

We deplore racial, religious, ethnic, or class antagonisms. Although we believe in cultural diversity and encourage racial and ethnic pride, we reject separations which promote alienation and set people and groups against each other; we envision an integrated community where people have a maximum opportunity for free and voluntary association.

We are critical of sexism or sexual chauvinism – male or female. We believe in equal rights for both women and men to fulfill their unique careers and potentialities as they see fit, free of invidious discrimination.

World Community

TWELFTH: We deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds. We have reached a turning point in human history where the best option is to transcend the limits of national sovereignty and to move toward the building of a world community in which all sectors of the human family can participate. Thus we look to the development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government. This would appreciate cultural pluralism and diversity. It would not exclude pride in national origins and accomplishments nor the handling of regional problems on a regional basis. Human progress, however, can no longer be achieved by focusing on one section of the world, Western or Eastern, developed or underdeveloped. For the first time in human history, no part of humankind can be isolated from any other. Each person's future is in some way linked to all. We thus reaffirm a commitment to the building of world community, at the same time recognizing that this commits us to some hard choices.

THIRTEENTH: This world community must renounce the resort to violence and force as a method of solving international disputes. We believe in the peaceful

adjudication of differences by international courts and by the development of the arts of negotiation and compromise. War is obsolete. So is the use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. It is a planetary imperative to reduce the level of military expenditures and turn these savings to peaceful and people-oriented uses.

FOURTEENTH: The world community must engage in cooperative planning concerning the use of rapidly depleting resources. The planet earth must be considered a single ecosystem. Ecological damage, resource depletion, and excessive population growth must be checked by international concord. The cultivation and conservation of nature is a moral value; we should perceive ourselves as integral to the sources of our being in nature. We must free our world from needless pollution and waste, responsibly guarding and creating wealth, both natural and human. Exploitation of natural resources, uncurbed by social conscience, must end.

FIFTEENTH: The problems of economic growth and development can no longer be resolved by one nation alone; they are worldwide in scope. It is the moral obligation of the developed nations to provide – through an international authority that safeguards human rights – massive technical, agricultural, medical, and economic assistance, including birth control techniques, to the developing portions of the globe. World poverty must cease. Hence extreme disproportions in wealth, income, and economic growth should be reduced on a worldwide basis.

SIXTEENTH: Technology is a vital key to human progress and development. We deplore any neo-romantic efforts to condemn indiscriminately all technology and science or to counsel retreat from its further extension and use for the good of humankind. We would resist any moves to censor basic scientific research on moral, political, or social grounds. Technology must, however, be carefully judged by the consequences of its use; harmful and destructive changes should be avoided. We are particularly disturbed when technology and bureaucracy control, manipulate, or modify human beings without their consent. Technological feasibility does not imply social or cultural desirability.

SEVENTEENTH: We must expand communication and transportation across frontiers. Travel restrictions must cease. The world must be open to diverse political, ideological, and moral viewpoints and evolve a worldwide system of television and radio for information and education. We thus call for full international cooperation in culture, science, the arts, and technology across ideological borders. We must learn to live openly together or we shall perish together.

Humanity As a Whole

IN CLOSING: The world cannot wait for a reconciliation of competing political or economic systems to solve its problems. These are the times for men and women

of goodwill to further the building of a peaceful and prosperous world. We urge that parochial loyalties and inflexible moral and religious ideologies be transcended. We urge recognition of the common humanity of all people. We further urge the use of reason and compassion to produce the kind of world we want – a world in which peace, prosperity, freedom, and happiness are widely shared. Let us not abandon that vision in despair or cowardice. We are responsible for what we are or will be. Let us work together for a humane world by means commensurate with humane ends. Destructive ideological differences among communism, capitalism, socialism, conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism should be overcome. Let us call for an end to terror and hatred. We will survive and prosper only in a world of shared humane values. We can initiate new directions for humankind; ancient rivalries can be superseded by broad-based cooperative efforts. The commitment to tolerance, understanding, and peaceful negotiation does not necessitate acquiescence to the status quo nor the damming up of dynamic and revolutionary forces. The true revolution is occurring and can continue in countless nonviolent adjustments. But this entails the willingness to step forward onto new and expanding plateaus. At the present juncture of history, commitment to all humankind is the highest commitment of which we are capable; it transcends the narrow allegiances of church, state, party, class, or race in moving toward a wider vision of human potentiality. What more daring a goal for humankind than for each person to become, in ideal as well as practice, a citizen of a world community. It is a classical vision; we can now give it new vitality. Humanism thus interpreted is a moral force that has time on its side. We believe that humankind has the potential, intelligence, goodwill, and cooperative skill to implement this commitment in the decades ahead.

We, the undersigned, while not necessarily endorsing every detail of the above, pledge our general support to Humanist Manifesto II for the future of humankind. These affirmations are not a final credo or dogma but an expression of a living and growing faith. We invite others in all lands to join us in further developing and working for these goals.

Lionel Able, Prof. of English, State Univ. of New York at Buffalo

Khoren Arisian, Board of Leaders, NY Soc. for Ethical Culture

Isaac Asimov, author

George Axtelle, Prof. Emeritus, Southern Illinois Univ.

Archie J. Bahm, Prof. of Philosophy Emeritus, Univ. of N.M.

Pual H. Beattie, Pres., Fellowship of Religious Humanists

Keith Beggs, Exec. Dir., American Humanist Association

Malcolm Bissell, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Southern California

H. J. Blackham, Chm., Social Morality Council, Great Britain

Brand Blanshard, Prof. Emeritus, Yale University

Paul Blanshard, author

Joseph L. Blau, Prof. of Religion, Columbia University

Sir Hermann Bondi, Prof. of Math., King's Coll., Univ. of London

Howard Box, Leader, Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture

Raymond B. Bragg, Minister Emer., Unitarian Ch., Kansas City

Theodore Brameld, Visiting Prof., C.U.N.Y.

Brigid Brophy, author, Great Britain

Lester R. Brown, Senior Fellow, Overseas Development Council

Bette Chambers, Pres., American Humanist Association

John Ciardi, poet

Francis Crick, M.D., Great Britain

Arthur Danto, Prof. of Philosophy, Columbia University

Lucien de Coninck, Prof., University of Gand, Belgium

Miriam Allen deFord, author

Edd Doerr, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Peter Draper, M.D., Guy's Hospital Medical School, London

Paul Edwards, Prof. of Philosophy, Brooklyn College

Albert Ellis, Exec. Dir., Inst. Adv. Study Rational Psychotherapy

Edward L. Ericson, Board of Leaders, NY Soc. of Ethical Culture

H. J. Eysenck, Prof. of Psychology, Univ. of London

Roy P. Fairfield, Coordinator, Union Graduate School

Herbert Feigl, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Minnesota

Raymond Firth, Prof. Emeritus of Anthropology, Univ. of London

Antony Flew, Prof. of Philosophy, The Univ., Reading, England

Kenneth Furness, Exec. Secy., British Humanist Association

Erwin Gaede, Minister, Unitarian Church, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Richard S. Gilbert, Minister, First Unitarian Ch., Rochester, N.Y.

Charles Wesley Grady, Minister, Unit. Univ. Ch., Arlington, Ma.

Maxine Greene, Prof., Teachers College, Columbia University

Thomas C. Greening, Editor, Journal of Humanistic Psychology

Alan F. Guttmacher, Pres., Planned Parenthood Fed. of America

J. Harold Hadley, Min., Unit. Univ. Ch., Pt. Washington, N.Y.

Hector Hawton, Editor, Questions, Great Britain

Eustace Haydon, Prof. Emeritus of History of Religions

James Hemming, Psychologist, Great Britain
Palmer A. Hilty, Adm. Secy., Fellowship of Religious Humanists
Hudson Hoagland, Pres. Emeritus, Worcester Fdn. for Exper. Bio
Robert S. Hoagland, Editor, Religious Humanism
Sidney Hook, Prof. Emeritus of Philosophy, New York University
James F. Hornback, Leader, Ethical Society of St Louis
James M Hutchinson, Minister Emer., First Unit. Ch., Cincinnati
Mordecai M. Kaplan, Rabbi, Fndr. of Jewish Reconstr. Movement
John C. Kidneigh, Prof. of Social Work., Univ. of Minnesota
Lester A. Kirdendall, Prof. Emeritus, Oregon State Univ.
Margaret Knight, Univ. of Aberdeen, Scotland
Jean Kotkin, Exec. Secy., American Ethical Union
Richard Kostelanetz, poet
Paul Kurtz, Editor, The Humanist
Lawrence Lader, Chm., Natl. Assn. for Repeal of Abortion Laws
Edward Lamb, Pres., Lamb Communications, Inc.
Corliss Lamont, Chm., Natl. Emergency Civil Liberties Comm.
Chauncey D. Leake, Prof., Univ. of California, San Francisco
Alfred McC. Lee, Prof. Emeritus, Soc.-Anthropology, C.U.N.Y.
Elizabeth Briant Lee, author
Christopher Macy, Dir., Rationalist Press Assn., Great Britain
Clorinda Margolis, Jefferson Comm. Mental Health Cen., Phila.
Joseph Margolis, Prof. of Philosophy, Temple Univ.
Harold P. Marley, Ret. Unitarian Minister
Floyd W. Matson, Prof. of American Studies, Univ. of Hawaii
Lester Mondale, former Pres., Fellowship of Religious Humanists
Lloyd Morain, Pres., Illinois Gas Company
Mary Morain, Editorial Bd., Intl. Soc. of General Semantics
Charles Morris, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Florida
Henry Morgentaler, M.D., Past Pres., Humanist Assn. of Canada
Mary Mothersill, Prof. of Philosophy, Bernard College
Jerome Nathanson, Chm. Bd. of Leaders, NY Soc. Ethical Culture
Billy Joe Nichols, Minister, Richardson Unitarian Church, Texas
Kai Nielsen, Prof. of Philosophy, Univ. of Calgary, Canada

P. H. Nowell-Smith, Prof. of Philosophy, York Univ., Canada
Chaim Perelman, Prof. of Philosophy, Univ. of Brussels, Belgium
James W. Prescott, Natl. Inst. of Child Health and Human Dev.
Harold J. Quigley, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago
Howard Radest, Prof. of Philosophy, Ramapo College
John Herman Randall, Jr., Prof. Emeritus, Columbia Univ.
Oliver L. Reiser, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Pittsburgh
Robert G. Risk, Pres., Leadville Corp.
Lord Ritchie-Calder, formerly Univ. of Edinburgh, Scotland
B. T. Rocca, Jr., Consultant, Intl. Trade and Commodities
Andre H. Sakharov, Academy of Sciences, Moscow, U.S.S.R.
Sidney H. Scheuer, Chm., Natl. Comm. for an Effective Congress
Herbert W. Schneider, Prof. Emeritus, Claremont Grad. School
Clinton Lee Scott, Universalist Minister, St Petersburg, Fla.
Roy Wood Sellars, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Michigan
A. B. Shah, Pres., Indian Secular Society
B. F. Skinner, Prof. of Psychology, Harvard Univ.
Kenneth J. Smith, Leader, Philadelphia Ethical Society
Matthew les Spetter, Chm., Dept. Ethics, Ethical Culture Schools
Mark Starr, Chm., Esperanto Info. Center
Svetozar Stojanovic, Prof. Philosophy, Univ. Belgrade, Yugoslavia
Harold Taylor, Project Director, World University Student Project
V. T. Thayer, author
Herbert A. Tonne, Ed. Board, Journal of Business Education
Jack Tourin, Pres., American Ethical Union
E. C. Vanderlaan, lecturer
J. P. van Praag, Chm., Intl. Humanist and Ethical Union, Utrecht
Maurice B. Visscher, M.D., Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Minnesota
Goodwin Watson, Assn. Coordinator, Union Graduate School
Gerald Wendt, author
Henry N. Wieman, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Chicago
Sherwin Wine, Rabbi, Soc. for Humanistic Judaism
Edwin H. Wilson, Ex. Dir. Emeritus, American Humanist Assn.
Bertram D. Wolfe, Hoover Institution

Alexander S. Yesenin-Volpin, mathematician

Marvin Zimmerman, Prof. of Philosophy, State Univ. NY at Bflo.

Additional Signers

Gina Allen, author

John C. Anderson, Humanist Counselor

Peter O. Anderson, Assistant Professor, Ohio State University

William F. Anderson, Humanist Counselor

John Anton, Professor, Emory University

Sir Alfred Ayer, Professor, Oxford, Great Britain

Celia Baker

Ernest Baker, Associate Professor, University of the Pacific

Marjorie S. Baker, Ph.D., Pres., Humanist Community of San Francisco

Henry S. Basayne, Assoc. Exec. Off., Assn. for Humanistic Psych.

Walter Behrendt, Vice Pres., European Parliament, W. Germany

Robert O. Boothe, Prof. Emer., Cal. Polytechnic

W. Bonness, Pres. Bund Freirelgioser Gemeinden, Germany

Clement A. Bosch

Madeline L. Bosch

Bruni Boyd, Vice Pres., American Ethical Union

J. Lloyd Brereton, ed., Humanist in Canada

Nancy Brewer, Humanist Counselor

D. Bronder, Bund Freirelgioser Gemeinden, West Germany

Charles Brownfield, Asst. Prof., Queensborough Community College, CUNY

Costantia Brownfield, R. N.

Margaret Brown, Assoc. Prof., Oneonta State Univ. College

Beulah L. Bullard, Humanist Counselor

Joseph Chuman, Leader, Ethical Soc. of Essex Co.

Gordon Clanton, Asst. Prof., Trenton State College

Daniel S. Collins, Leader, Unitarian Fellowship of Jonesboro, Ark.

Wm Creque, Pres., Fellowship of Humanity, Oakland, Ca.

M. Benjamin Dell, Dir., Amer. Humanist Assn.

James Durant IV, Prof., Polk Comm. College Winter Haven, Fla.

Gerald A. Ehrenreich, Assoc. Prof., Univ. of Kansas School of Medicine
Marie Erdmann, Teacher, Campbell Elementary School
Robert L. Erdmann, Ph.D., IBM
Hans S. Falck, Disting. Professor, Menninger Foundation
James Farmer, Director, Public Policy Training Institute
Ed Farrar
Joe Felmet, Humanist Counselor
Thomas Ferrick, Leader, Ethical Society of Boston
Norman Fleishman, Exec. Vice Pres., Planned Parenthood World Population, Los Angeles
Joseph Fletcher, Visiting Prof., Sch. of Medicine, Univ. of Virginia
Douglas Frazier, Leader, American Ethical Union
Betty Friedan, Founder, N.O.W.
Harry M. Geduld, Professor, Indiana University
Roland Gibson, President, Art Foundation of Potsdam. N.Y.
Aron S. Gilmartin, Minister, Mt. Diablo Unitarian Church, Walnut Creek, Ca.
Anabelle Glasser, Director, American Ethical Union
Rebecca Goldblum, Director, American Ethical Union
Louis R. Gomberg, Humanist Counselor
Harold N. Gordon, Vice President, American Ethical Union
Sol Gordon, Professor, Syracuse University
Theresa Gould, American Ethical Union
Gregory O. Grant, Captain, USAF
Ronald Green, Asst. Professor, New York University
LeRue Grim, Secretary, American Humanist Association
S. Spencer Grin, Publisher, Saturday Review/World
Josephine R. Gurbarg, Secy., Humanist Society of Greater Philadelphia
Samuel J. Garbarg
Lewis M. Gubrud, Executive Director, Mediators Fellowship, Providence, R.I.
Frank A. Hall, Minister, Murray Univ. Church, Attleboro, Mass.
Harold Hansen, President, Space Coast Chapter, AHA
Abul Hasanat, Secretary, Bangladesh Humanist Society
Ethelbert Haskins, Director, American Humanist Association
Lester H. Hayes, Public Relations Director, American Income Life Insurance

Company

Donald E. Henshaw, Humanist Counselor

Alex Hershaft, Principal Scientist, Booz Allen Applied Research

Ronald E. Hestand, author and columnist

Irving Louis Horowitz, editor, Society

Warren S. Hoskins, Humanist Counselor

Mark W. Huber, Director, American Ethical Union

Harold J. Hutchinson, Humanist Counselor

Sir Julian Huxley, former head, UNESCO, Great Britain

Arthur M. Jackson, Exec. Dir., Humanist Community of San Jose; Treasurer, American Humanist Association

Linda R. Jackson, Director, American Humanist Association

Steven Jacobs, former President, American Ethical Union

Thomas B. Johnson, Jr., consulting psychologist

Robert Edward Jones, Exec. Dir., Joint Washington Office for Social Concern

Marion Kahn, Pres., Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York

Alec E. Kelley, Professor, University of Arizona

Marvin Kohl, Professor, SUNY at Fredonia

Frederick C. Kramer, Humanist Counselor

Eugene Kreves, Minister, DuPage Unit. Church, Naperville, Ill.

Pierre Lamarque, France

Helen B. Lamb, economist

Jerome D. Lang, Pres., Humanist Assoc. of Greater Miami, Fla.

Harvey Lebrun, Chairman, Chapter Assembly, AHA

Helen Leibson, President, Philadelphia Ethical Society

John F. MacEnulty, Jr., Pres., Humanist Soc. of Jacksonville, Fla.

James T. McCollum, Humanist Counselor

Vashti McCollum, former President of AHA

Russell L. McKnight, Pres., Humanist Association of Los Angeles

Ludlow P. Mahan, Jr., Pres., Humanist Chapter of Rhode Island

Andrew Malleson, M.D., psychiatrist

Clem Martin, M.D.

James R. Martin, Humanist Counselor

Stanley E. Mayabb, Co-Fndr.; Humanist Group of Vacaville and Men's Colony, San

Louis Obispo

Zhores Medvedev, scientist, U.S.S.R.

Abeldardo Mena, M.D., senior psychiatrist, V.A. Hospital, Miami, Fla.

Jacques Monod, Institut Pasteur, France

Herbert J. Muller, Professor, University of Indiana

Robert J. Myler, Title Officer, Title Insurance & Trust Company

Gunnar Myrdal, Professor, University of Stockholm, Sweden

H. Kyle Nagel, Minister, Unit. Univ. Church of Kinston, N.C.

Dorothy N. Naiman, Professor Emerita, Lehman College, CUNY

Muriel Neufeld, Executive Committee, American Ethical Union

Walter B. Neumann, Treasurer, American Ethical Union

G. D. Parikh, Indian Radical Humanist Association, India

Eleanor Wright Pelrine, author, Canada

Bernard Porter, President, Toronto Humanist Association

William Earl Proctor, Jr., President, Philadelphia area, AHA

Gonzalo Quiogue, Vice Pres., Humanist Assn. of the Philippines

James A. Rafferty, Lecturer, USIU School of Human Behavior

Anthony F. Rand, President, Humanist Society of Greater Detroit

Philip Randolph, President, A. Philip Randolph Institute

Ruth Dickinson Reams, President, Humanist Association National Capital Area

Jean-Francois Revel, journalist, France

Bernard L. Riback, Humanist Counselor

B. T. Rocca, Sr., President, United Secularists of America

M. L. Rosenthal, Professor, New York University

Jack C. Rubenstein, Executive Committee, AEU

Joseph R. Sanders, Professor, University of West Florida

William Schulz, Ph.D. cand., Meadville/Lombard, Univ. of Chicago

Walter G. Schwartz, Dir., Humanist Com. of San Francisco

John W. Sears, clinical psychologist

Naomi Shaw, Pres., National Women's Conference, AEU

R. L. Shuford, III, Instructor, Charlotte County Day School

Sidney Siller, Chm. Comm. for Fair Divorce and Alimony Laws

Joell Silverman, Chm., Religious Education Committee, AEU

Warren A. Smith, Pres., Variety Sound Corp.

A. Solomon, coordinator, Indian Secular Society

Robert Stone

Robert M. Stein, Co-Chairman, Public Affairs Committee, AEU

Stuart Stein, Director, American Ethical Union

Arnold E Sylvester

Emerson Symonds, Director, Sensory Awareness Center

Carolyn Symonds, marriage counselor

Ward Tabler, Visiting Professor, Starr King School

Barbara M. Tabler

V. M. Tarkunde, Pres., All Indian Radical Humanist Assn., India

Erwin Theobold, Instructor, Pasadena City College

Ernest N. Ukpaby, Dean, University of Nigeria

Renate Vambery, Ethical Soc. of St. Louis, President, AHA St Louis Chapter

Nick D. Vasileff, St. Louis Ethical Society

Robert J. Wellman, Humanist Chaplain, C. W. Post Center, Long Island University

May H. Weis, UN Representative for IHEU

Paul D. Weston, Leader, Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County

Georgia H. Wilson, retired, Political Sc. Dept., Brooklyn College

H. Van Rensselaer Wilson, Prof., Emer., Brooklyn College

James E. Woodrow, Exec. Dir., Asgard Enterprises, Inc

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