

What is Secular Humanism?

Accurate definitions are difficult to come by. When one hears the word “humanism,” several different ideas may come to mind. For example, Mr. Webster would define humanism something like this:

"any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, or dignity predominate."[1]

Others may think of a liberal arts education. Both of these are well and good, but what we are seeking is a definition of the worldview known as Secular Humanism.

First, Secular Humanism is a *worldview*. That is, it is a set of beliefs through which one interprets all of reality—something like a pair of glasses. Second, Secular Humanism is a *religious* worldview.[2] Do not let the word “secular” mislead you. The Humanists themselves would agree that they adhere to a religious worldview. According to the *Humanist Manifestos I & II*: Humanism is "a philosophical, religious, and moral point of view." [3]

Not all humanists, though, want to be identified as “religious,” because they understand that religion is (supposedly) not allowed in American public education. To identify Secular Humanism as a religion would eliminate the Humanists' main vehicle for the propagation of their faith. And it *is* a faith, by their own admission. The *Humanist Manifestos* declare:

"These affirmations [in the *Manifestos*] are not a final credo or dogma but an expression of a living and growing *faith*."[4]

What are the basic beliefs of Secular Humanism? What do Secular Humanists believe?

Theologically, Secular Humanists are *atheists*. Humanist Paul Kurtz, publisher of Prometheus Books and editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, says that "Humanism cannot in any fair sense of the word apply to one who still believes in God as the source and creator of the universe." [5] Corliss Lamont agrees, saying that "Humanism contends that instead of the gods creating the cosmos, the cosmos, in the individualized form of human beings giving rein to their imagination, created the gods." [6]

Philosophically, Secular Humanists are *naturalists*. That is, they believe that nature is all that exists - the material world is all that exists. There is no God, no spiritual dimension, no afterlife. Carl Sagan said it best in the introduction to his *Cosmos* series: "The universe is all that is or ever was or ever will be." [7] Roy

Wood Sellars concurs. "Humanism is naturalistic," he says, "and rejects the supernaturalistic stance with its postulated Creator-God and cosmic Ruler." [8]

Secular Humanist beliefs in the area of biology are closely tied to both their atheistic theology and their naturalist philosophy. If there is no supernatural, then life, including human life, must be the result of a purely natural phenomenon. Hence, Secular Humanists must believe in *evolution*. Julian Huxley, for example, insists that "man ... his body, his mind and his soul were not supernaturally created but are all products of evolution." [9] Sagan, Lamont, Sellars, Kurtz—all Secular Humanists are in agreement on this.

Atheism leads most Secular Humanists to adopt *ethical relativism* - the belief that no absolute moral code exists, and therefore man must adjust his ethical standards in each situation according to his own judgment. [10] If God does not exist, then He cannot establish an absolute moral code. Humanist Max Hocutt says that human beings "may, and do, make up their own rules... Morality is not discovered; it is made." [11]

Secular Humanism, then, can be defined as *a religious worldview based on atheism, naturalism, evolution, and ethical relativism*. But this definition is merely the tip of the iceberg. A more complete discussion of the Secular Humanist worldview can be found in David Noebel's *Understanding the Times*, which discusses (in detail) humanism's approach to each of ten disciplines: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics and history.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1989), p. 691.
2. For detailed proof that Secular Humanism is a religion, see *Clergy in the Classroom: The Religion of Secular Humanism* by David A. Noebel, J.F. Baldwin and Kevin Bywater (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Press, 1995).
3. Paul Kurtz, in the preface to *Humanist Manifestos I & II* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1973), p. 3.
4. Kurtz, *Humanist Manifestos I & II*, p. 24. Italics added.
5. "Is Everyone a Humanist?" in *The Humanist Alternative*, ed. Paul Kurtz (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1973), p. 177.
6. Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1982), p. 145.
7. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 4.
8. Roy Wood Sellars, "The Humanist Outlook," in *The Humanist Alternative*, ed. Paul Kurtz (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1973), p. 135.
9. Julian Huxley, as cited in Roger E. Greely, ed., *The Best of Humanism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp. 194-5.
10. David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), p. 200.
11. Max Hocutt, "Toward an Ethic of Mutual Accommodation," in *Humanist Ethics*, ed. Morris B. Storer (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1980), p. 137.

Adapted from *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of our Day and the Search for Truth*, and *Clergy in the Classroom: The Religion of Secular Humanism* by David A. Noebel, J.F. Baldwin and Kevin Bywater of Summit Ministries