

# **ETHICAL REALISM**

**AN ALTERNATIVE TO BELIEF IN GOD  
THAT ELIMINATES RELIGIOUS CONFLICT**

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# **ETHICAL REALISM**

**ESTABLISHES ETHICS AND MORALS  
THAT ARE NOT BASED ON GOD**

**PREVENTS RELIGIOUS CONFLICT**

**ELIMINATES RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS**

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I do not pretend to be able to prove that there is no God. I equally cannot prove that Satan is a fiction. The Christian God may exist; so may the gods of Olympus, or of ancient Egypt, or of Babylon. But no one of these hypotheses is more probable than any other: they lie outside the region of even probable knowledge....

Bertrand Russell

But, finally, let us observe that the life which has gone out of God, has come back into Nature.

F. M. Cornford

It is good to maintain life and further life; it is bad to damage and destroy life. And this ethic, profound and universal, has the significance of a religion. It is religion.

Albert Schweitzer

Belief in God, or in many gods, prevented the free development of moral reasoning. Disbelief in God, openly admitted by a majority, is a recent event, not yet completed. Because this event is so recent, Non-Religious Ethics is at a very early stage.

Derek Parfit

## ABSTRACT

Whether God does or does not exist is unknown.  
It is therefore unknown whether ethics and morals come from God;  
and it is unknown whether good and bad behavior is determined by God.

This paper establishes that a non-religious basis of ethics and morals in fact exists.  
The basis for non-religious ethics and morals is a force of nature.  
It is a force of nature that can be demonstrated to exist in the physical world.  
It is a force of nature that affects every living being.  
It is the force of nature that causes living beings to strive to stay alive and thrive  
and to avoid suffering and death.  
It is the force of nature that determines behavior to be good or bad as a matter of fact,  
and that does so whether God does or does not exist.

The non-religious ethics and morals established by the force of nature described in this  
paper is Ethical Realism.

Ethical Realism establishes that it is evil for a person to harm another because they have  
different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist.

Based on the foregoing this paper establishes that religious conflicts and disputes are  
irrational and unfounded, and that a person who kills or causes harm to another living  
being on account of a religious dispute is evil.

PART I

**GOD IS AN UNKNOWN**

Whether God exists is not known.

Whether there is or is not a God is unknown.

Whether God does or does not exist is not a demonstrable fact.

God might exist; God might not exist; no one can prove either case.

The conflict between theists and atheists<sup>1</sup> is based on a belief that is an illusion – the illusion that anyone on either side of that conflict has established whether God does or does not exist, when in fact no one can and no one ever has.

God is an idea, a concept, a belief, not a fact.<sup>2</sup>

God cannot be proved to be anything other than a desire, wish, hope, idea, concept, belief or thought, a mental construct, a creation of human imagination.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated in this paper, references to “theists” mean theists, deists and any other persons who believe in the existence of God; and references to “atheists” mean atheists, agnostics and any other persons who do not have a believe that God exists.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that whether God exists is unknown, and that both belief in the existence of God and belief in the non-existence of God is each merely a belief not a fact, is often repeated in this paper. The repetition exists because individuals sometimes confuse belief and fact, and not infrequently become fixated on a belief as if it were an established demonstrable fact when in fact it is not (just as for thousands of years many individuals were fixated in their beliefs that the Earth was flat and that the Sun revolved around the Earth.) The repetition of the fact that whether God exists is unknown is, therefore, to overcome the fixation that some have on their belief that God exists, as well as to overcome the fixation that others have on their belief that God does not exist; when in fact no one knows and no one has ever known whether God does or does not exist.

Belief that God exists based on desire, wish, hope, idea, concept, thought, mental construct and human imagination, does not make that belief true and does not make it a fact.

Belief that there is a God is just that, a belief, not an established demonstrable fact.

Whether the belief that there is a God is true or false is unknown; and whether the belief that there is not a God is true or false is unknown.

God cannot in fact actually<sup>3</sup> be proved to exist; and God cannot in fact actually be proved not to exist.

It makes some people feel more secure to think that they know what they in fact do not know; so they create an idea of something that they give a name, and they make believe that that name explains what in fact they do not know – the word God is the name of one such idea.

Fear of the unknown, which includes, among other things, fear of that which is unforeseeable, uncontrollable and inexplicable in life, as well as the unknowns regarding chance, luck, accident and death, lead many to religion based on belief in God for comfort and to serve as an answer to and as an explanation for that which is in fact unknown.

Because God is a belief and not an established fact, ethics and morals that are believed to emanate from God, or to be commandments from God, are also merely beliefs that are not established facts.

Ethics, morals, commandments, and beliefs regarding good and bad behavior, that are based on belief in God or that are dependent on the existence of God, are not thereby established to be true or false. Their truth or falsity is unknown, because whether God does or does not exist is unknown.

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<sup>3</sup> The word "actually" is sometimes used in this paper (although some frown on its use) to emphasize that the statement to which it relates is true, can be established as a fact that exists in the physical world outside of the mind, and that it is not merely an idea, a concept, or a mental construct that exists as and is merely established with, language, thought and logic.

## PART II

### THE WILL TO LIVE

Ethical and moral behavior exists that is not based on belief in God or on the existence of God, that is not a commandment from God, and that is not merely a belief. Such behavior is ethically and morally good or bad<sup>4</sup> based on a force of nature; and the goodness or badness of that behavior is demonstrable, absolute, and not relative, and it can be proved to be so whether God does or does not exist.

The force of nature that is the absolute, non-relative, non-theistic basis for ethics and morals is the will to live; the “Will to Live” described below that is the source and the cause of the survival instinct that affects the behavior of every living being.

The Will to Live establishes behavior that is good, and behavior that is evil, as an absolute, non-relative, matter of fact.

The Will to Live establishes that behavior that preserves or benefits life is good, and that behavior that destroys or harms life is evil.

The Will to Live is the source, the ground, and the foundation, for absolute, non-relative ethics and morals that establish good and bad behavior<sup>5</sup>.

Ethics and morals based on the Will to Live establish good and bad behavior as a matter of demonstrable fact irrespective of whether God does or does not exist.

Whether behavior that is absolutely good or bad has anything to do with God is unknown, because whether God does or does not exist is unknown and will not be

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<sup>4</sup> Although references in this paper to behavior that is “bad” means behavior that is “evil” the word “bad” is often used in this paper, because “bad” is the commonly used antonym of “good”.

<sup>5</sup> References in the paper to “behavior” are, of course, references to the behavior of living beings, not to the behavior or to the mere existence of physical things such as atoms, molecules, and objects such as rocks, chairs and tables that are not commonly considered to be alive.



known until and unless that is hereafter proved one way or the other as a matter of demonstrable fact.

Some who believe in God will say that the Will to Live is caused by God, or that the Will to Live is a part of God, but whether that is so is unknown, because whether God does or does not exist is unknown. However, regardless of whether God does or does not exist, it is a demonstrable fact that the Will to Live exists – and therefore the Will to Live itself provides the basis for ethics and morals and for absolute good and bad behavior. And the existence or non-existence of God does not change or affect that fact.

Behavior that is absolutely good or bad as a matter of fact, that is established not by mankind but by the force of nature that manifests itself as the Will to Live exists whether or not God exists, exists without theistic or deistic religion,<sup>6</sup> without commandments from God, without customs, beliefs, philosophy<sup>7</sup> or man-made laws, and without man-made ethical or moral codes or rules of conduct.

Whether a person believes in God or does not believe in God does not determine whether a person's behavior is ethical or moral, good or bad. Whether a person behaves so as to benefit the Will to Live by preserving and improving life, or behaves so as to interfere with the Will to Live by destroying or damaging life determines whether a person's behavior is ethical or moral, good or bad; and it does so as an absolute, not relative, matter of fact.

The ethical and moral belief system and world view that is based on the Will to Live is "Ethical Realism".

Some of the best known and most widely accepted ideas regarding ethics and morals are essentially based on and statements of Ethical Realism which fosters surviving and thriving based on the Will to Live. Those ideas include, The Golden Rule, Do No Harm, Human Kindness, Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, and Live and Let

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<sup>6</sup> Subject to the exception described in the following sentence, the words "religion" and "religious" when used in this paper refer to religion based on theism, deism and any other belief system that includes belief in God. The exception is that a belief system without belief in God is being referred to when the word religion or religious is used with respect to any belief system such as Ethical Realism, Confucianism or Humanism which (as is described in this paper) is in fact a "religion" in its own right.

<sup>7</sup> There are many philosophical theories regarding ethics, such as consequentialism, contractualism, deontological ethics, hedonism, relativism, and utilitarianism, that are well developed and often useful, but they are mental constructs, creations of the human mind, not a force of nature as is the Will to Live.

Live.<sup>8</sup> For living beings, living matters, more precisely staying alive and thriving matters; and that is Ethical Realism based on the force of nature of the Will to Live.

The Will to Live is the basis for ethics and morals that can be demonstrated to exist in reality in the physical world; that is absolute and not relative; that exists as a matter of fact not merely as an idea or a belief;<sup>9</sup> that is a force of nature observed in the behavior of every living being.

Ethics and morals based on religion and God are based on belief, are subject to ethical and moral relativism, and establish behavior to be good or bad, permitted or forbidden, by man-made customs, traditions, manners, laws and other man-made rules of conduct, that vary from place to place and from time to time.

Ethics and morals based on the force of nature of the Will to Live, however, are absolute,<sup>10</sup> universal and unchanging; and exist without conscious or unconscious thought, desire, intention or belief.

The Will to Live is the natural, demonstrable basis for ethics and morals; not God or religion based on belief in God.

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<sup>8</sup> The generally accepted ideas that are essentially Ethical Realism also include, for example, the prohibitions of the Ten Commandments "Thou Shalt Not Kill" and "Thou Shalt Not Steal", and the maxim "Love thy Neighbor". It is, incidentally, important to note that behavior that evidences love is to a large degree nothing more than behavior motivated by the Will to Live, behavior by one living being to benefit the Will to Live of another living being. Much can be, and in a separate paper is, said about the Will to Live being the ground and the source of love. But, notwithstanding its importance, the fact that love is essentially kindness based on the Will to Live (and not some mystical, ecstatic, transcendent, ethereal, ineffable act or emotion,) that topic will not be addressed further in this paper, because not only is the word love so rarely thus properly understood, but because the mere mention of that word is for a great many people such a monumental distraction that it clouds and distorts any further thinking by them about any of the topics at hand.

<sup>9</sup> The Will to Live is not conscious thought, and it is not unconscious thought; it is a force of nature that affects all living beings whether they do or do not think. Therefore the Will to Live affects not only human beings and other sapient and highly developed animals, it also affects, for example, trees, shrubs and other plants, insects, worms, jelly-fish and single celled animals.

<sup>10</sup> The fact that some aspects of some behavior can be absolutely good, that other aspects of the same behavior can be absolutely bad, and that Ethical Realism is valid notwithstanding that fact, is addressed in Appendix 2.

The Will to Live is the foundation, the ground, and the basis for non-relative, non-religious morals and ethics. The Will to Live is the force of nature<sup>11</sup> that causes living beings to strive to stay alive and thrive. The Will to Live manifests itself as the survival instinct, the moving force of life, the cause of a struggle that living beings make to survive and thrive<sup>12</sup>.

Behavior that benefits the Will to Live is ethically and morally good. Behavior that harms the Will to Live is ethically and morally bad. Behavior that benefits life's struggle to survive and thrive is good. Behavior that harms life's struggle to survive and thrive is bad.

Behavior that prevents, avoids or minimizes death and suffering, benefits the force of the Will to Live and is good. Behavior that causes, promotes or increases death and suffering, interferes with the force of the Will to Live and is bad.

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<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note the reference, in 1642, to the Will to Live as a force of nature in *The Citizen*, by Thomas Hobbes:

For every man is desirous of what is good for him and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death; and this he doth by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward.

<sup>12</sup> Recognition of the Will to Live as the moving force of life, eloquently stated in 1844 by Arthur Schopenhauer, appears in his *Supplement to Second Book of The World as Will and Idea*:

Every glance at the world, to explain which is the task of the philosopher, confirms and proves that *will to live*, far from being an arbitrary hypostasis or an empty word, is the only true expression of its inmost nature. Everything presses and strives towards *existence*, if possible *organized existence*, i.e., *life*, and after that to the highest possible grade of it. In animal nature it then becomes apparent that *will to live* is the keynote of its being, its one unchangeable and unconditioned quality. Let anyone consider this universal desire for life, let him see the infinite willingness, facility, and exuberance with which the will to live presses impetuously into existence under a million forms everywhere and at every moment, . . . In such phenomena, then, it becomes visible that I am right in declaring that *the will to live* is that which cannot be further explained, but lies at the foundation of all explanations, and that this, far from being an empty word, like the absolute, the infinite, the idea, and similar expressions, is the most real thing we know, nay, the kernel of reality itself [emphasis in original].

Behavior that preserves and improves life is good; behavior that damages and destroys life is evil.

What ultimately matters for living beings? Surviving and thriving ultimately matters. And behavior that aids the force of nature of the Will to Live enables living beings to survive and thrive.

What is the ultimate purpose of life? Preserving and improving life is the ultimate purpose of life. And behavior that aids the force of nature of the Will to Live enables life to be preserved and improved. That is Ethical Realism.

## PART III

### THE NATURE OF THE WILL TO LIVE

A force of nature exists in the physical world that is the source and the cause of absolute, non-relative, ethics and morals. It is a force that determines what is absolutely, not relatively, good and bad behavior. It is a force of nature that affects every living being; every animal, every tree, everything that lives.<sup>13</sup> It is the force of nature that causes living beings to strive to stay alive. It is the force of nature that is described and named the “Will to Live” in this paper.

It is an observable, demonstrable fact that such force of nature exists. That is so even though it is not precisely known what that force actually is or why it does what it does. And that is not uncommon, that is also true of other forces of nature, such as gravity; because in fact no one knows what gravity actually is or why it does what it does. People merely observe, experience and measure what gravity causes to occur. But the fact that no one knows precisely what the force of nature called gravity is or why it does what it does, does not change the perfectly clear fact that gravity exists and that it is a force of nature that causes the effects that it is found to have on things in the world; and the same is true of the force of nature referred to as the Will to Live in this paper even though what that force actually is and why it does what it does is also unknown.

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<sup>13</sup> A few examples should suffice. As a result of the Will to Live, it is not only human beings, fish, birds and other animals that strive to stay alive and thrive and avoid death and suffering. Even one celled animals, sponges and roots of trees strive to stay alive and thrive and avoid suffering and death, as a result of the Will to Live. The fact that there is sometimes self-destructive behavior caused by the exercise of free will by a human being does not adversely affect or diminish the validity of the fact that the Will to Live is a universal, absolute source and basis for ethics and morals, and for good and bad behavior as described in this paper. The fact that a sentient (thinking) being can exercise free will to overcome and act contrary to the force of the Will to Live (for example, a fire fighter can heroically run into a burning building to save someone, and a person who is under duress or deranged may exercise free will in a manner that is harmful to or destructive of that person's life,) does not disprove the validity of the existence of the Will to Live or the effects caused by the Will to Live as described in this paper. When a sentient being exercises free will to take action so as to overcome a force of nature, doing so does not diminish the validity of or disprove the existence of that force of nature.

Forces of nature certainly do exist in the physical world despite the fact that it is not known what they are, and despite the fact that why they do what they do is unknown. So, those forces of nature are given names, to enable people to speak and to think about them, about their effects, about experiments that people perform to learn what they do, and to enable what is learned to be used to their advantage. The same is done in this paper with respect to the force of nature that is named the Will to Live. And since that simple sounding name has been given in this paper to the force of nature that causes living beings to strive to stay alive and thrive; a few moments are taken here to be clear about what that name means and what it refers to when it is used in this paper, and also to be clear about what it does not refer to or mean in this paper.

The first point to be made clear is that the force of nature named the Will to Live in this paper is the cause of behavior by living beings to survive and thrive. It is the cause of such behavior, not what the living beings affected by the Will to Live do or avoid doing as a result of their having been affected and motivated by the Will to Live. It is also important to keep in mind that the Will to Live is a force of nature that exists in the physical world; and that it is not merely a conscious or unconscious thought, or a belief, or an idea, or a concept, or a mental construct. It is also not magical, mystical, supernatural, metaphysical or psychological. And it is not any God or any supernatural person, being, entity or thing. It exists as a matter of fact whether God does or does not exist. It is a force of nature – a force of nature that exists and affects all living beings in the physical world. It is the force of nature that is the ground, the basis, the foundation, the source and the cause of behavior by living beings to stay alive and thrive.

To clearly identify and refer to the force of nature defined above when discussing it in this paper, it was, of course, necessary to assign a name to it. That has been done, and the name that has been assigned to it in this paper is the “Will to Live”. But it was not as simple to adopt that name as it might appear to be. And the difficulty in assigning that name existed even though the force of nature called the Will to Live in this paper has been referred to and discussed innumerable times, over thousands of years, by many different individuals. The difficulty existed because that force of nature has been given many different names; and to make matters worse, those names have sometimes been used by different individuals to mean different things. As one example, the force of nature that is called the “Will to Live” in this paper has for hundreds of years sometimes been called “conatus”. But the word conatus now means nothing to just about everyone; and only some of the people who used the word conatus used it to refer to the force of nature that is named the “Will to Live” in this paper. So, the name conatus was not adopted for use in this paper. Another possibility was to refer to the force of nature that is referred to as the “Will to Live” in this paper as the “Force of Life” or the “Life Force”. But despite those names appearing to be somewhat simple and appropriate references to the subject force of nature, for many people the meaning of those terms would be unclear and not strike a familiar chord. The French expressions “Force de Vie” and “Élan Vital” might have been appropriate, but they are likely to sound too cute or too

precious to many readers, and would have no meaning for many others who are unfamiliar with French. As a result, the expression “Will to Live” has been adopted in this paper as the name for (as the reference to) the force of nature that is the cause of the behavior of living beings to survive and thrive. And that has been done even though that name is less than perfect, in hopes that it will serve its purpose well and be clearly understood in the light of the explanation in this paper regarding what is and what is not meant by the term “Will to Live”. It would have been possible, of course, to have consistently and most clearly referred to the force of nature discussed in this paper as “The Force of Nature that Causes Living Beings to Strive to Survive and Thrive”; but that is a bit too much of a mouthful. So, for now, “Will to Live” will have to do.

A few additional points are appropriate here with respect to the explanation of the nature of the “Will to Live”. The morals and ethics established by the Will to Live are not merely beliefs, or concepts, or mental constructs, or theories, or ideas<sup>14</sup> as are the morals and ethics of religion, custom, law and philosophy.<sup>15</sup> The morals and ethics established by the Will to Live exist as the result of a force of nature that is a matter of fact. The morals and ethics of religion, custom, law and philosophy are just beliefs, concepts, mental constructs, theories and ideas that are man-made, that merely establish behavior that is relatively good or bad, that varies from place to place and from time to time. However, the Will to Live is a force of nature, a force that establishes good and bad behavior as an absolute matter of fact, everywhere in the physical world for every living being.

Religion, custom, law and philosophy are subjective, temporary, man-made, theoretical, mental constructs. The Will to Live is an objective, unchanging, absolute fact of the physical world that is the basis, ground, and foundation of absolute, universal, non-relative ethics and morals.

The Will to Live is a natural demonstrable force of nature that exists in the physical world; it is not merely learned, taught, thought, or written. It is not merely a belief. And it is not supernatural.

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<sup>14</sup> The Will to Live affects all living beings whether they can think or cannot think. Every animal, their newborn babies, even trees and bushes, ants and amoebas, are motivated by the Will to Live, resulting in their effort, their struggle, to behave in a manner that will enable them to survive and thrive.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 2 to this paper with respect to philosophies of ethics and morals, briefly addresses their relationship to Ethical Realism and the Will to Live.

The Will to Live is the foundation for ethics and morals as well as the foundation for evolution.<sup>16</sup> The Will to Live grounds evolution, because it is the basis that exists in nature that is the source, cause, foundation and moving force of the survival instinct. The Will to Live grounds ethics and morals because it is the basis that exists in nature that is the source, cause, foundation and moving force for what is absolutely, universally, good and bad behavior by living beings.

The answer to the question “Does anything absolutely matter for living beings?” is that “Living Matters: Surviving by staying alive and thriving matters.” The answer to the question “Is anything absolutely good or bad or is it all relative?” is that “For living beings surviving by staying alive and thriving is absolutely good, and death and suffering is absolutely bad.” That is Ethical Realism.

No person living in reality disbelieves or disregards the existence or the effects of the forces of nature.<sup>17</sup> Only a person living a fantasy contests the fact that the force of nature called “gravity” is the cause of objects falling down to the Earth, or that the force of nature called the Will to Live is the cause of the struggle that living beings make to stay alive and thrive.

The Will to Live is an objective, demonstrable force of nature, a fact of life; a fact that must become a part of the world view of the general public as are other forces of nature.

It is important to realize that forces of nature are accepted as actually existing in the physical world even when their physical nature, what they actually are, or why they do what they do, is not known. They are accepted as facts because they can be observed and demonstrated to exist as a matter of fact. The same is true of the Will to Live.

The general public must be informed of and learn to understand and accept the existence and the effects of the force of nature called the Will to Live as the basis of

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<sup>16</sup> A distinction must be kept in mind regarding the difference between the Will to Live and evolution. Evolution is a process that occurs; the Will to Live is the source of that process; that is, it is the force of nature that is a cause of the evolutionary process.

<sup>17</sup> With respect to nihilists, solipsists, and those individuals who believe that all distinctions (including distinctions such as good and bad) do not really exist, or who believe that cause and effect do not exist, or that nothing exists outside of the mind, or that nothing at all really exists, or that reality is entirely unknowable; as their concerns are outside of the mainstream they are not addressed here, and are the subject of a separate paper.



ethics and morals that is absolute and universal; just as the public has been informed of and has learned to understand and accept the existence and effects of other forces of nature even though members of the general public rarely understand the theories of those forces of nature, or what those forces physically are, why they do what they do, or the extent to which what they actually are is in fact unknown. In general the public merely learns about and accepts short, simple ideas regarding those forces of nature, the effects of which can be observed and demonstrated to actually exist in the physical world. In the same way, the public must now be enlightened to understand and accept the Will to Live as the basis of absolute, non-relative morals and ethics which establishes what is good and bad behavior for all living beings as a matter of fact irrespective of whether God does or does not exist. The world view based on the understanding and acceptance of that fact is Ethical Realism; and those who believe in Ethical Realism who are without belief in God are “Ethical Realists”.

## PART IV

### ESTABLISHING ETHICAL REALISM

It is now possible to establish Ethical Realism to prevent harm to mankind from religious conflict, and to eliminate religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics.<sup>18</sup>

Causing the truth of Ethical Realism to become known to the general public, and causing it to gain widespread approval and acceptance in the public consciousness, within a period of only a few years, can become a reality, if well-known atheists and agnostics, including philosophers, media personalities, professors, movie producers, writers, artists and others who are respected, eloquent, widely published, and covered by the media express their support for and use their voice to profess, spread and establish the world view of Ethical Realism. Their doing so can and will cause Ethical Realism:

- (a) To become known as a foundation for absolute, non-relative, ethics and morals;
- (b) To become known as the basis for non-religious ethics and morals;
- (c) To be accepted as an alternative to religion based on belief in God, as a basis for ethics and morals;
- (d) To cause the general public to understand and accept the fact that belief in God, belief in theistic and deistic religion, is a belief system and world view, a subjective idea, not an objective or demonstrable fact;
- (e) And, in the light of the fact that whether God does or does not exist is unknown, Ethical Realism will establish that it is unfounded, irrational<sup>19</sup> and

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<sup>18</sup> The role of Ethical Realism in bringing about the elimination of prejudice and discrimination against atheists and agnostics is addressed in Appendix 1 of this paper.

<sup>19</sup> Arguing about, and worse yet harming another, based on a disagreement about whether God does or does not exist, is as irrational as arguing or causing harm based on a disagreement about whether an all-powerful, all knowing, extraterrestrial from another galaxy now exist on Earth who can control all life on Earth as it sees fit. It would be even sillier for people who do

evil for any person to kill or to harm another living being because they have different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist.

Those who accept Ethical Realism, whether they are atheists, agnostics, or have any other world view that does not include belief in God, should avoid all attempts to prove that God does not exist. That is so because with respect to the question of whether God in fact exists it is not possible to prove a negative.<sup>20</sup> But it is also not possible to prove as a positive fact that God does exist. Neither proof is possible because whether God does or does not exist is unknown. It is, therefore, ill-conceived and ineffectual for Ethical Realists to make any attempts to prove that God does not exist. Any such attempts will have little or no positive effect in promoting public acceptance of Ethical Realism. What can be done is the following.

The public can be made aware of the fact that whether God does or does not exist is unknown, cannot actually<sup>21</sup> be proved and is merely a belief. The details of Ethical Realism must also be brought to the attention of the public. And it must be made perfectly clear that whether a person does or does not believe in God, it is evil for a person to harm anyone because they have different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist.

The efforts to establish Ethical Realism can be made as a non-aggressive, logical, philosophical, social and political matter. It must be taken into account that theists and deists are often fixed in their religious opinions and beliefs, that they have a great deal of social and political influence, and that their churches are powerful institutions. For thousands of years they have strongly resisted and opposed any efforts made to diminish their influence and control over society or to establish that their religious beliefs, including their beliefs in the existence of God, are just that, beliefs and not established demonstrable facts. For thousands of years they have developed sophisticated arguments to support their religious opinions and beliefs, and have waged

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believe that such extraterrestrial is on Earth to argue about or to harm one another over disagreements about which galaxy it came from or about whether it is invisible, or can be seen but hides by transforming itself into living things that are ordinarily found on Earth. That last far from perfect example is given in an effort to put into perspective the irrationality of conflicts between persons who do believe in God, but believe in different Gods or have different beliefs about God or religion.

<sup>20</sup> With respect to whether God does or does not exist it is not possible to prove a negative, just as it is not possible to prove that unicorns and mermaids do not exist.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 3 regarding the meaning of the word "actually" in this paper.

wars against others with different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist. Nonetheless, Ethical Realists can establish the validity of Ethical Realism despite any opposition by theists and deists, based on the fact that the existence or non-existence of God is unknown, and that the Will to Live of Ethical Realism is based on a demonstrable force of nature that exists as a matter of fact in the physical world.

A coordinated, unified effort to establish Ethical Realism can be made by well-known, highly respected individuals who now conceal the fact that they are atheists and agnostics. When they “come-out” to publicly voice the fact that they have accepted Ethical Realism as an alternative to belief in God, their doing so will not only support, but will greatly increase, the number of persons who adopt Ethical Realism as their world view and basis for absolute, non-relative, ethics and morals.

It is important to discourage and to avoid any practices by atheists and agnostics that are antagonistic to or critical of theists’ and deists’ beliefs in God. That antagonistic or critical behavior has sometimes been manifested as attempts to establish as a fact that God does not exist, despite the fact that it is unknown whether God does or does not exist and that all efforts to prove the case one way or the other are futile and fail. Any such antagonistic practices and criticism would clearly be counter-productive and ill conceived. They would be as offensive and unjustified as is the prejudice and the harm caused by theists and deists against atheists and agnostics. Prejudice against, and causing harm based on, another’s lack of belief in God is as unjust and unfounded as is prejudice against and causing harm based on another’s belief in God; as unjust and unfounded as is prejudice and causing harm based on race, sexual preference or gender.

For atheists and agnostics to be as inoffensive as is possible when establishing Ethical Realism as an alternative to theistic and deistic religion based on God, requires atheists and agnostics to explain Ethical Realism with clear, uncomplicated, well defined terms, so as to avoid confusion and unfounded objections based on misunderstandings of the terms used and of the points being made. It is important to have clarity in the expression of ideas by carefully defining the terms, the words, used to explain the meaning of Ethical Realism. It must be made clear that the “a” in the words atheist and agnostic in fact means “without;” it does not mean “against”. The prefix “anti” means against; the prefix “a” does not mean against. An atheist and an agnostic are persons who are without belief in God. The words atheist and agnostic do not mean a person who is against belief in God, it means a person who is without belief in God.

Atheism and agnosticism are not belief systems that deny that God exists; they are belief systems that do not include belief in God. That is a major difference; because not believing in God is different than believing that God does not exist. “Agnostic” means a person who neither believes in the existence of God nor in the nonexistence of God; who believes that whether God exists or does not exist is unknown. “Atheist” means a

person who is without belief in God, and that is all that it means; it does not mean that the person believes that God does not exist, and it does not mean that the person is against belief in God.<sup>22</sup> Being an atheist does not mean a person thinks anything positive about God, it does not mean that a person thinks anything negative about God, and it does not mean that a person thinks that whether God exists is unknown. It means that the person lacks belief about God. God is just not a part of an atheist's world view.

In any event, since whether there is or is not a God is unknown, atheists and agnostics who do not have a belief in God can and should accept and respect theists and deists having a belief in God; and theists and deists who do believe in God can and should accept and respect atheists and agnostics not having a belief in God.

To date, those who believe that there is a God, and those who do not have a belief that there is a God, have generally exerted, and wasted, most of their efforts in attempts to change the beliefs of the other side to that of their own; by causing believers to give up their belief in God, or causing non-believers to believe in God. They have wasted their efforts because that contest to prove which of those opinions is right or wrong does not make sense; because it is not possible to prove whether God does or does not exist. And since each of those points of view is a possibility, because each point of view is an alternative that may or may not be true or false, and because both points of view are now incapable of being proved to be true or false, neither side is justified in discriminating against or causing harm to the other based on any difference in their beliefs regarding whether there is or is not a God. What is justified, intelligent, and necessary in the circumstances, is for all of that conflict which results in inequality, discrimination and harmful action to be ended, by both sides coming to understand and accept the fact that the conflict is based on an argument about an unknown, about a question that does not now have an answer. Fighting about who has the right answer to a question the answer to which is unknown is irrational, and causing harm to another because of any disagreement about any such question is evil. Ethical Realism serves to eliminate that conflict and harm.

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<sup>22</sup> There are hundreds of millions of people, possibly billions, who do not have any belief about whether God does or does not exist; their world view does not include a belief about God (including, among others, many Humanists, Buddhists, Confucians, Stoics, and Naturalists.)

## CONCLUSION

Whether God exists or does not exist is unknown.

It is immoral, unethical and evil for a person to harm another because they have different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist.

For a person to discriminate against another because they have different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist is unjustified prejudice, and should be made illegal.

All sapient, sane, realistic human beings know that the Will to Live affects them. If they are unselfish and have empathy they know that it is affecting everyone else. If they are sensitive to all forms of life they know that it affects them as well. When they preserve and benefit life, and do not destroy or harm life, they are absolutely, not relatively, ethical and moral. When they destroy or harm life, they are absolutely evil.

Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live must and can become a *Zeitgeist*, that is, a spirit of the time, a general outlook, a fundamental idea and belief of the twenty-first century. Those who will believe in, act in accordance with, and educate others regarding Ethical Realism and the Will to Live are involved in a necessary, life saving cause.

It is vitally important for there to be public understanding and acceptance of Ethical Realism and the Will to Live. It is important as a practical matter, not merely as an intellectual, abstract or philosophical exercise. It is important now. That is so because if millions of individuals who currently believe that only their religion based on God is true, understood and accepted Ethical Realism, their behavior based on their acceptance of Ethical Realism would stop them, and empower them to prevent others, from in the name of religion, collectively killing and harming countless living beings and possibly destroying the Earth because they think that God is on their side, when in fact it is not possible to know or to prove whether that is or is not so.

Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live makes it perfectly clear as an absolute matter of fact that religious conflicts and disputes are irrational and unfounded, that it is evil for a person to discriminate against or to harm another because they have different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist, and that a person who kills or causes harm to another living being on account of a religious dispute is evil.

Life is sacred.

Whether there is or is not a God, reverence for life is the one true religion.

The ultimate purpose of life is to preserve, protect and benefit the life of every living being; to use one's life to support all living beings in their effort to survive and thrive. That is the nature of behavior that is absolutely, not merely relatively, ethical and moral; that is behavior based on a force of nature, the force of nature of the Will to Live – that is Ethical Realism.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **ON ATHEIST AND AGNOSTIC LIBERATION**

**THE ELIMINATION OF PREJUDICE AGAINST ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS**

**ETHICAL REALISM IS NOT ONLY A BASIS  
FOR ETHICS AND MORALS WITHOUT GOD  
ETHICAL REALISM IS A RELIGION WITHOUT GOD**

**RELIGION DOES NOT REQUIRE BELIEF IN GOD  
NOT ACCEPTING THAT FACT IS PREJUDICE  
ANY SUCH PREJUDICE IS RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION**

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION INCLUDES  
FREEDOM FROM PREJUDICE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE  
A RELIGION WITHOUT GOD**



It is now possible to eliminate religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics. It is possible if the effort to do so is based on an argument that can be won, rather than on an argument that cannot be won because it is about a question the answer to which is unknown.

It is possible to eliminate religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics because it cannot be proved whether God does or does not exist. The fact that it is not possible to prove whether God exists makes it unfounded discrimination to be prejudiced against atheists and agnostics.

In the United States and in many other parts of the world there is now widespread discrimination against atheists and agnostics. That discrimination exists in the social, business and political worlds. It is now practically impossible for anyone who is openly atheistic or agnostic in the United States to be elected to any Federal or State political office, or to avoid harmful, discriminatory treatment and inequality in employment and in social situations. However, since it is not possible to establish as a fact whether God does or does not exist, it is perfectly clear that such discrimination and inequality is unfounded, based on prejudice not on fact, and must now be established to be politically incorrect, socially unacceptable and illegal.

The public must come to understand and accept the fact that religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics is as unjustified and prejudicial as is discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation. And in the same manner as discrimination was made socially unacceptable, politically incorrect and illegal in those cases; that should now be done to eliminate discrimination against atheists and agnostics.<sup>23</sup>

It is possible to eliminate religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics based on Ethical Realism and the fact that whether God does or does not exist is unknown, by a coordinated effort being made by well-known atheist and agnostic philosophers, writers, media personalities, professors, movie producers, artists, and others who have a wide public audience; and by attorneys, social activists and others who are capable of making the case for freedom from religious discrimination. When a coordinated, unified effort to eliminate discrimination against atheists and agnostics is made on the clear, uncomplicated basis described in this paper, well known and highly respected individuals who now conceal that they are atheists and agnostics because of the

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<sup>23</sup> It can be done as a logical, philosophical, social and political matter. It can be done in ways that are not hostile or aggressive, but rather with respect for the beliefs of theists and deists, as was previously described in the forgoing paper in connection with the establishment of Ethical Realism.

discrimination that they would now suffer on that account, will “come-out” and publicly make known their absolute, not relative, ethics and morals and belief in protecting and bettering life, that is based on Ethical Realism, without belief in God. Their doing so will help to establish Ethical Realism as well as expedite the elimination of religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics.

The time has come to establish, and it can now be established, both in the public consciousness and as a matter of law, that the right of “Freedom of Religion” includes and protects not only the rights of theists and deists who believe in God, but that it also includes and protects the rights of atheists and agnostics against discrimination based on their lack of a belief in God.

“Freedom of Religion” includes freedom to have a belief system and a world view that does not include belief in God. Ethical Realism is in fact a belief system and a world view that is a religion; a religion without belief in God.

Ethical Realism is not the only religion without belief in God. Confucianism, Humanism, Daoism, Stoicism, Naturalism and Zen Buddhism are just a few of the religions other than Ethical Realism that do not include belief in God; all of whose adherents are entitled to protection against religious discrimination as are Ethical Realists.

Federal and State laws should now be passed expressly and unconditionally stating that it is illegal to discriminate against anyone because they do believe in God or because they do not believe in God. Supreme Court cases should now be brought and their decisions expressly and unconditionally hold that it is violative of the United States Constitution to discriminate against anyone because they do believe in God or because they do not believe in God.

It is clear that prejudice against atheists and agnostics is discrimination, and that discrimination against atheists and agnostics should, can, and must now be made politically incorrect, socially unacceptable and illegal.

## APPENDIX 2

### ON PHILOSOPHIES OF ETHICS AND MORALS

There will of course be objections and exceptions raised in opposition to the ideas presented in this paper with respect to Ethical Realism and the Will to Live. Intelligent individuals can find objections and exceptions to anything. There are objections and exceptions to everything.<sup>24</sup> And there are many theories of ethics and morals that are to one degree or another different than Ethical Realism and the Will to Live. Those other theories have been developed throughout recorded history by many outstanding intellectuals<sup>25</sup> who do not, of course, always agree with one another. The work on ethics and morals in which they have invested a good part of their lives has in general served mankind well, and will continue to do so. But all of that does not affect the validity of Ethical Realism based on the force of nature of the Will to Live which has most likely existed about as long as there has been life on Earth. Other theories may supplement Ethical Realism and the Will to Live, but they do not make Ethical Realism and the Will to Live any less valid.

It is important to note some of the insightful, deep and important knowledge that has been obtained by philosophical thought about ethics and morals. Theories such as utilitarianism, consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, contractualism, and ethical relativism, to name just a few, have provided much useful information and deep and insightful perspectives regarding ethics and morals. Nonetheless, those theories are often not merely complicated, laborious in their application, abstract and not infrequently metaphysical or supernatural; they are on the whole mental constructs, creations of human imagination, products of language, thought and logic, not things or forces of nature that exist in the physical world outside of the mind of sapient beings.

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<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the fact that probability and propensity are essentially the nature of things (possibly of all things) that in fact exist, many still fixate on exceptions, counter examples, and counterfactuals (call them what one will) however rare they may or may not be, as if truth and reality were comprised only of that which is universal, unconditional, unqualified and certain, when in fact essentially all that there is exists as, and can only be expressed as, generalities (some of which generalities are considered to be laws of nature.)

<sup>25</sup> Highly regarded ethicists include, for example, Confucius, Plato and Aristotle who addressed morals and ethics thousands of years ago, Hume, Kant and Mill who did so hundreds of years ago, Sidgwick during the twentieth century, and currently Derek Parfit and Peter Singer, to name just a few.

The Will to Live, however, is a force of nature that affects all living beings, a natural force that exists in fact as part of the physical world.

It is also important to note that with respect to the behavior of living beings there is often more than one factor that affects whether behavior is good or bad, and that a determination of whether the behavior is good or bad is often complicated. For example, just a few of the complex ethical and moral issues that now exist include abortion, self-defense, the death penalty, the use of drones, animal rights, the cloning of humans, and euthanasia. It is often the case that behavior is good to one degree or another in one or more respects, and bad to one degree or another in one or more other respects. Many questions therefore exist in those cases, and the answers will often be complicated, unclear, and not infrequently they will be incapable of being definitively decided, or be unknown or unknowable. Nonetheless, individual aspects of the behavior can often be considered alone and in combination with others, prioritized, weighted, and determined to be good or bad. Ethical Realism, knowledge and experience, ethical and moral theories, wisdom embodied in the words and writings of people alive today and of people who have lived in the past, as well as laws and customs can be considered and applied, when applicable, in a process to determine the answers to the questions that relate to the various aspects of the behavior; in an effort to reach the best possible decision in the circumstances. That is not a perfect solution, but it is the best that can be done. Of course, that will not make those who desire certainty and peace of mind happy, but they will rarely if ever be happy in that regard, because what they desire is most often unattainable. As Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. put it so well: "Certainty generally is illusion, and repose is not the destiny of man." Nonetheless, all is not lost; mankind is not entirely adrift in a world in which everything is uncertain, unknown, and relative regarding ethics and morals. Ethical Realism, experience, the wisdom of sages of the past and of the present, and the other matters referred to above in this paragraph may serve to determine whether behavior is good or bad. But, all told, in every case, everywhere and at all times, it is vitally important to keep in mind and to act in accordance with the fact that:

Whether God does or does not exist is unknown;

Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live is the ground, basis and foundation of ethics and morals that determines whether behavior by living beings is good or evil; and

Religious conflicts and disputes are irrational and unfounded, and a person who kills or causes harm to another living being on account of a religious dispute is evil.