

# **ETHICAL REALISM**

**THE BASIS OF ETHICS AND MORALS THAT EXISTS  
AS A DEMONSTRABLE MATTER OF FACT  
WHETHER OR NOT GOD EXISTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Whether God does or does not exist is unknown.  
Therefore it is unknown whether ethics and morals come from God  
and it is unknown whether good and evil behavior is determined by God.

This paper establishes that a non-religious basis of ethics and morals in fact exists;  
a basis of ethics and morals that can be demonstrated to exist in the physical world,  
an objective basis of ethics and morals that is absolute, not relative or arbitrary,  
that affects every living being,  
that determines behavior to be good or evil as a matter of fact,  
and that does so whether God does or does not exist.

The non-religious basis of ethics and morals that is described in this paper is referred to  
as “Ethical Realism”.

Overall, this paper establishes that Ethical Realism is the basis, ground and foundation  
of all morals and ethics.

And in particular, with respect to religious conflicts and disputes,  
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,  
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 conflict or dispute is evil.

## **PART I**

### **GOD IS AN UNKNOWN**

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, and therefore there is no reason to consider any of them.

Bertrand Russell

## PART I

### GOD IS AN UNKNOWN

Whether God exists is not known.

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 an established demonstrable fact.

God cannot in fact be proved to exist; and God cannot in fact be proved not to exist.

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.

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

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

## **PART II**

### **THE WILL TO LIVE**

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.

Thomas Hobbes

## PART II

### THE WILL TO LIVE

Ethical and moral behavior exists as a matter of fact in the physical world that is not based on belief in God or on the existence of God, that is not based on any Bible or commandments from God, and that is not merely a belief. Such behavior is ethically and morally good or bad<sup>2</sup> based on a force of nature – and the goodness or badness of that behavior is objectively<sup>3</sup> 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 objectively demonstrable, non-relative, non-theistic basis of 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<sup>4</sup> and behavior that is evil as an absolute, not 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.

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper references to behavior as “bad” and references to behavior as “evil” are used interchangeably; on account of the fact that with respect to behavior the words “bad” and “evil” are both commonly used antonyms of “good”.

<sup>3</sup> The issue in philosophy referred to as the “is/ought objection” or “is/ought problem,” as it relates to Ethical Realism’s claim that what objectively *is* can in fact provide an objective basis for rationally determining what *ought* to be done, is addressed in Appendix 1.

<sup>4</sup> As used in this paper with respect to behavior the word “good” has its most basic meaning of: “Having in adequate degree those properties which a thing of the kind ought to have.” (The Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1933.) And the ultimate, most essential properties which a living being ought to have, are for it to live and to thrive.

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>.

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

Ethics and morals based on the Will to Live, however, establish good and bad behavior irrespective of whether God does or does not exist.

Regardless of whether God does or does not exist, it is a demonstrable matter of fact that the Will to Live exists – and therefore the Will to Live itself provides the basis, ground and foundation for ethics and morals and for absolute good and bad behavior. The existence or non-existence of God does not change or affect that fact.

Behavior that is established to be good or bad based on the force of nature that manifests itself as the Will to Live is thereby established to be good or bad without theistic or deistic religion,<sup>6</sup> without commandments from God, without man-made laws, customs or philosophies,<sup>7</sup> and without man-made ethical or moral codes or rules of conduct.

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Schweitzer clearly stated the fact that: "Ethics is nothing other than Reverence for Life. Reverence for Life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil." (Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics* (A. & C. Black, Ltd., London 1923.)

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

<sup>7</sup> There are many philosophical theories regarding ethics and morals, 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.

Whether a person does or does not believe in God or abides by what are believed to be God's commandments, does not determine as a matter of fact whether a person's behavior is ethical or moral, good or bad. Whether a person behaves so as to benefit the Will to Live of a living being by preserving or improving its life, or behaves so as to interfere with the Will to Live by destroying or damaging its 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 world view based on the Will to Live is named and referred to in this paper as "Ethical Realism".

Some of the best known and widely accepted ideas regarding ethics and morals are consistent with and essentially based on Ethical Realism. Those ideas include, prohibitions of the Ten Commandments such as "Thou Shalt Not Kill" and "Thou Shalt Not Steal", and the ethical and moral maxims "Do No Harm", "Live and Let Live", "Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness", "Human Kindness", "The Golden Rule", "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good", and "Love thy Neighbor".

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 a basis of ethics and morals that can be demonstrated to exist in reality in the physical world. It is a fixed, unchanging, objective "constant"<sup>9</sup> that is absolute and not relative, that exists as a matter of fact not merely as an idea or a belief,<sup>10</sup> and that has been observed in the behavior of living beings everywhere throughout history.

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<sup>8</sup> 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; that is, behavior by a living being (which may or may not benefit its own Will to Live) but that does in fact benefit the Will to Live of another living being. Much can be, and in a separate paper may hereafter be, 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 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 nature of Ethical Realism as a "constant" that is the foundation of ethical reasoning and decision making is described in Appendix 1.

<sup>10</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

Ethics and morals based on religion with God, are ideas 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.

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

Behavior that benefits the Will to Live is ethically and morally good. Behavior that interferes with the Will to Live is ethically and morally bad. Behavior that reduces a living being's struggle to survive or thrive is good. Behavior that increases a living being's struggle to survive or thrive is bad.

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

Behavior that preserves or improves life is good; behavior that damages or 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.

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not think. Accordingly, the Will to Live affects not only human beings and other sapient and highly developed animals, it also affects, as just a few examples, trees, shrubs and other plants, insects, worms, jelly-fish and single celled animals.

**PART III**

**THE NATURE OF THE WILL TO LIVE**

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

F. M. Cornford

# **PART III**

## **THE NATURE OF THE WILL TO LIVE**

A force of nature exists in the physical world that is the basis, source and cause of absolute, non-relative, ethics and morals. It is a force of nature that affects every living being, every animal, every tree, everything that lives,<sup>11</sup> that causes living beings to strive to stay alive and thrive. That force of nature 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, measure and act in accordance with 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>11</sup> A few examples should suffice. As a result of the Will to Live, it is not only human beings, fish, birds, insects and other animals that strive to stay alive and thrive and avoid death and suffering. Even trees and weeds and other plants 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 or other living 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 sentient and thinking beings 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 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 living 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<sup>12</sup> 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, to perform experiments 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 having been affected and motivated by the Will to Live. It is also important to note that the Will to Live is a force of nature that exists in the physical world as a demonstrable matter of fact; and that it is not merely a belief, or an idea, or a concept, or a mental construct. It is also not magical, supernatural or metaphysical. And it is not, and is not caused by, any supernatural person, being, entity or thing. It exists as a matter of fact that affects all living beings in the physical world, and does so whether God does or does not exist. It 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

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<sup>12</sup> For those with a scientific or philosophical background, it is noted that when references are made in this paper to a "force" of nature which is a "cause" of behavior (particularly with respect to the Will to Live), the words *force* and *cause* are used in their ordinary, non-technical sense so as to state ideas in words and phrases that are commonly used and understood. Accordingly, the Will to Live is described as a "force of nature" in the same general sense in which gravity is commonly described as a force of nature: to emphasize that it is an inherent or invariant characteristic of living beings and of the natural world. However, in a highly technical philosophical or scientific account, no separate physical force or causal agency need be posited; but because such matters are not commonly understood or described in those terms, that distinction is not pursued further here.

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 to some, 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.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to stress the following. Ethical Realism, based on the Will to Live as a constant of living nature, provides the factual foundation and fixed starting point of ethical judgment. However, as described in more detail in Appendix 2, Ethical Realism does not claim to replace, and does not in fact replace, all ethical and moral reasoning, nor does it always by itself resolve complex moral dilemmas or trade-offs. In some cases, Ethical Realism is itself sufficient to determine whether an act is, overall, good or evil. In other cases, when the facts and circumstances result in competing considerations or difficult trade-offs, the basis of ethical judgment is first established by Ethical Realism, and then experience, other ethical frameworks, and practical wisdom can, when applicable, be taken into consideration and weighed on the basis established by Ethical Realism to reach an appropriate determination. Accordingly, Ethical Realism does not discard those other forms of moral reasoning; rather, it gives them a factual foundation and fixed reference point from which the determination is made. Moral reasoning therefore begins with reality and a demonstrable fact rather than solely with belief or abstract principles. Ethical Realism thereby provides a constant that prevents morality from becoming purely relative. In that respect, it should be noted that an evil act is an

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<sup>13</sup> The force of nature of the Will to Live has been addressed by numerous luminaries, possibly most notably by Arthur Schopenhauer in his *The World as Will and Idea*, 3 vols. Trans. R.B. Haldane and J Kemp. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1883-1886.)

evil act; no number of worse alternatives makes that act good. Likewise, no number of better alternatives makes a good act bad. That too is the function of a constant.

A few additional points are appropriate here with respect to the explanation of the nature of the “Will to Live”. The morals and ethics that are based on and established by the Will to Live are not merely abstract beliefs, concepts, mental constructs, 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 exists in the physical world as a matter of fact. Whereas the morals and ethics of religion, custom, law and philosophy are merely analytic, abstract beliefs, concepts, mental constructs, theories and ideas that are subjective and man-made, that merely establish good and bad behavior which varies from place to place and from time to time. Accordingly, the objective, unchanging force of nature of the Will to Live is the basis of good and bad behavior as a matter of fact, everywhere in the physical world, for every living being; and is a factor in the process of natural selection of evolution<sup>16</sup> as a source, cause and moving force of the survival instinct – a force of nature that is a cause of the struggle that living beings make to stay alive and thrive.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Will to Live affects all living beings whether they can think or cannot think. Every shrub, flower and weed, every animal and their newborn babies, even flies, 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.

<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 a source and a cause of that process; that is, it is a force of nature that is a cause of the evolutionary process.

<sup>17</sup> Recognition of the Will to Live as a 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* (supra note 10):

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

In the light of the foregoing 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>18</sup> Only a person living a fantasy contests the fact that the force of nature called “gravity” exists and is a cause of objects falling down to the Earth, or that the force of nature called the Will to Live exists and is a cause of the struggle that living beings make to stay alive and thrive.

The existence of the Will to Live as an objective, demonstrable force of nature is 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, and 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 ethics and morals, just as the public has been informed of and has learned to understand and accept the existence and the effects of other forces of nature even though members of the general public rarely understand the theories of those forces of nature, and do not know what

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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].

<sup>18</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 may hereafter be the subject of a separate paper.

those forces physically are, or 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 ethical and moral world view based on the understanding and acceptance of that fact is Ethical Realism; and those who believe in Ethical Realism are “Ethical Realists”.

**PART IV**

**ESTABLISHING ETHICAL REALISM**

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

## PART IV

### ESTABLISHING ETHICAL REALISM

It is now possible to establish Ethical Realism to prevent harm to mankind from religious conflict, to eliminate religious discrimination against atheists and agnostics<sup>19</sup> and, overall, to prevent human behavior that causes death and suffering.

To cause the truth of Ethical Realism to become known to the general public and gain widespread approval and acceptance in the public consciousness within only a few years can become a reality, if well-known atheists and agnostics, including for example those who are writers, artists, philosophers, professors and media personalities, explain and express their support for the world view of Ethical Realism. Their doing so will:

- (a) Cause Ethical Realism to become known as a foundation for absolute, non-relative ethics and morals;
- (b) Cause Ethical Realism to become known as a basis for non-theistic ethics and morals;
- (c) Cause the general public to understand that belief in God and in theistic and deistic religion is a mental construct, a subjective idea, not an objective, demonstrable fact as is Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live; and
- (d) Cause Ethical Realism to be accepted as an alternative to religion based on belief in God, as a basis of ethics and morals.

And when that is done, Ethical Realism will cause lives to be saved, preserved and improved, by reducing death and suffering; and Ethical Realism will have established that

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<sup>19</sup> Note that Ethical Realism is not only a basis of ethics and morals without God; Ethical Realism is a religion without 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 other religions that do not include belief in God, all of whose adherents are entitled to protection against religious discrimination as are Ethical Realists.

it is unfounded, irrational,<sup>20</sup> and evil for a person to kill or to harm another because they have different religious beliefs or different beliefs about whether God does or does not exist.

It is important that those who accept Ethical Realism, whether they are atheists, agnostics, or have any other world view that does not include belief in God, avoid all attempts to prove that God does not exist. That is so because it is not possible to prove as a demonstrable matter of fact whether God does exist or does not exist;<sup>21</sup> because whether God exists is unknown. It is therefore ill-conceived and ineffectual for Ethical Realists to make 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, and are likely to be counter-productive.

However, what can be done is the following. Efforts to establish Ethical Realism should be made in a non-aggressive manner. 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. Throughout history, they have resisted 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, subjective beliefs and not established demonstrable facts. For thousands of years they have developed sophisticated (although unsubstantiated<sup>22</sup>) arguments to support their religious opinions and beliefs, and have strongly opposed and all too often harmed those who have different religious opinions and beliefs and those who do not believe in the existence of God. Nonetheless, Ethical Realists can establish the validity of Ethical Realism despite 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 whether God does or does not exist.

When a coordinated, unified effort to establish Ethical Realism is made by well-known, highly respected individuals (including those who now conceal the fact that they are

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<sup>20</sup> As no one has established as a demonstrable matter of fact whether God does or does not exist, arguing about, and worse yet harming another based on a disagreement about, whether God does or does not exist is irrational.

<sup>21</sup> With respect to whether God does not exist it is not possible to prove a negative, just as it is not possible to prove as a demonstrable matter of fact that unicorns and mermaids do not exist.

<sup>22</sup> A sophisticated analysis of historical theories on both sides of the question of whether God does or does not exist appears in J.C.A. Gaskin, *The Quest for Eternity*. (Penguin Books Ltd., 1984.)

atheists or agnostics) and they 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.

For atheists and agnostics to be as inoffensive as is possible when establishing Ethical Realism as an alternative to theistic and deistic religion requires atheists and agnostics to explain Ethical Realism with clear, uncomplicated, well-defined terms, so as to avoid confusion, unfounded objections and misunderstandings. First, to avoid conflicts, 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. Accordingly, the fact that a person is an atheist or an agnostic means that the person is without belief in God, not against 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>23</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 do not have a belief that there is a God, and those who do believe that there is a God, have generally exerted, and wasted, much 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

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<sup>23</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.)

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 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. Arguing 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, discrimination and harm.

## **PART V**

### **CONCLUSION**

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

## **CONCLUSION**

All sane, sapient, realistic human beings know that the Will to Live affects them. If they are unselfish and have empathy they know that it affects everyone else. And if they are sensitive to all living beings they know that it affects them as well.

When a person aids the Will to Live by preserving or benefiting the life of a living being that behavior is good. When a person interferes with the Will to Live by destroying or harming a living being that behavior is evil.

The ultimate purpose of life is to preserve, protect and benefit the life of living beings; to support living beings' efforts to survive and thrive. That is the nature of behavior that is ethically and morally good. That is behavior based on a force of nature; the force of nature of the Will to Live. That is Ethical Realism.

Life is sacred.

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

# **APPENDIX 1**

## **ON THE NECESSITY OF AN ETHICAL CONSTANT**

Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live establishes that an objective ethical basis that is a universal standard of good behavior (a fixed, unchanging “constant”) that is not theistic, and that is not relative, exists as a demonstrable matter of fact in the physical world.

Without Ethical Realism as a part of their world view, people who are not true believers of a religion with God are unable to accurately and with consistency establish a meaningful determination of whether a particular act constitutes good or evil behavior. That is so, because without belief in Ethical Realism, for non-theistic persons to determine accurately and with consistency whether an act is absolutely, not merely relatively, good or evil would require them to perform the insurmountable task of taking into account the nature and effects of all of the act’s surrounding facts and circumstances, as well their relative and pre-existing ethical and moral standards that are dependent on individual and cultural perspectives. However, with belief in Ethical Realism atheists, agnostics, secular humanists and other non-theists have a basis for determining whether an act constitutes good or evil behavior as an absolute and not relative, demonstrable matter of fact.

For readers with a philosophical background in ethics, the following issue concerning the objective nature of Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live is briefly addressed as follows. Those familiar with the philosophical issue commonly referred to as the “is/ought objection” or “is/ought problem” are aware of the long-standing objection that a fact about what *is* (that is, what exists or is the case in reality—including facts concerning the nature or condition of living beings) cannot provide an objective basis for determining what *ought* to be done. Ethical Realism, to the contrary, establishes that what *is* can serve as an objective basis for ethics and morality, and that the supposed absolute barrier between the factual reality of what *is* and rational evaluative judgment concerning what *ought* to be done is a conceptual construct rather than a boundary in reality. A conceptual distinction between *is* and *ought* does not establish that objective facts concerning living beings cannot themselves provide a basis for rational ethical and moral determinations. In some cases, the objective basis established by Ethical Realism is itself sufficient to determine whether an act is, overall, good or evil. In other cases, when the facts and circumstances result in competing considerations or difficult trade-offs, Ethical Realism first establishes the objective basis for ethical judgment; experience, other ethical frameworks, and practical wisdom can then, when applicable, be taken into consideration

in determining what *ought* to be done. To treat what *is* and what *ought* to be done as inherently incapable of operating together in ethical determination is therefore to mistake a conceptual distinction for a boundary in reality that does not in fact exist.

Note that Ethical Realism does not address and does not claim to establish whether a particular act is better or worse than any other act when all of their respective surrounding facts and circumstances are taken into account. What Ethical Realism does establish is an ethical starting point, a basis, ground and foundation, that is an objective constant for determining whether an act is, in and of itself, good or evil.<sup>24</sup>

The necessity of having a constant when making judgments regarding what exists and occurs in the physical world is illustrated by the following examples. For a person to know what direction point A is from point B there must be a constant such as the direction of magnetic north, or the direction of the north star. To know how far it is from point A to point B there must be a constant standard of distance such as a so-called foot or meter based on the size of something that physically exists which is used to create that standard. To know the duration of something requires some standard such as a so-called day based on the duration of one rotation of the Earth around its axis, or a so-called hour based on a constant fractional part of a day. And to know how fast something is moving from point A to point B there must be a constant such as the number of feet or meters that something transverses in one hour.

Note that as is the case in the examples above, the constant of the Will to Live that forms the basis of Ethical Realism is based on a physical reality, on something that exists as a demonstrable matter of fact in the physical world.

Ethical Realism thereby establishes and provides the constant that is the fundamental building block, the stable, unchanging basis, ground and foundation for ethical reasoning and decision making.

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<sup>24</sup> It must be kept in mind that pursuant to Ethical Realism, an “evil” act continues to be evil and is not made “good” if it is determined to be (more precisely, if it is believed to be) preferable to and/or better than any number of alternative evil acts. Similarly, an act that is “good” continues to be good and is not made “evil” if it is determined to be less desirable and/or not as good as any number of alternative good acts.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **ON PHILOSOPHIES OF ETHICS AND MORALS**

There will of course be objections and exceptions raised in opposition to 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 may be objections and exceptions to everything.<sup>25</sup> And there are many theories of ethics and morals that are to one degree or another different from Ethical Realism and the Will to Live. Those other theories have been developed throughout recorded history by many intellectuals<sup>26</sup> who do not, of course, always agree with one another. Their work on ethics and morals in which many of them have invested a good part of their life has for many centuries often served mankind well. But that does not diminish or adversely affect the validity of Ethical Realism based on the force of nature of the Will to Live which has most likely existed 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 and theistic thought about ethics and morals. Theories such as utilitarianism, consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, contractualism, and ethical relativism, as well as theistic religions, have provided much useful information and deep and insightful perspectives regarding ethics and morals. Nonetheless, those theories and world views 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. 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.

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<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the fact that probability and invariance is generally the nature of things, many still fixate on exceptions, counter examples, and counterfactuals (call them what one will) however rare they may or may not be; as if for something to be true it must be universal, unconditional, unqualified and absolute, when in fact most everything that there is exists as, and can only be expressed as, generalities.

<sup>2626</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, Henry Sidgwick during the nineteenth century, and recently Derek Parfit and Peter Singer, to name just a few.

It is also important to note that although Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live establishes whether behavior is, in and of itself, good or bad as an absolute matter of fact, there is often, if not always, more than one factor that affects whether behavior is better or worse than some other behavior when their surrounding facts and circumstances are taken into account. And behavior that is good with respect to how it affects one living being may be bad with respect to how it affects another. Accordingly, deciding what is better or worse to do is often at best complex. For example, just a few of the difficult 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. Many questions exist in those and most likely in all other cases; and depending on the facts and circumstances existing in each particular case the answer will often be complicated, unclear, and not infrequently it will be incapable of being definitively decided, or be unknown or unknowable. Nonetheless, aspects of the behavior and of the surrounding facts can often be considered alone and in combination with others, prioritized, weighted, and determined to be good or bad, or better or worse than some other behavior, in the circumstances. Ethical Realism, knowledge and experience, ethical and moral theories, wisdom embodied in the words and writings of people alive today and of those 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 simple or perfect solution, but it is often 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 present, and other matters such as those referred to above in this paragraph may serve to determine whether a particular behavior is good or bad, better or worse, in the circumstances. 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;

Overall, as a demonstrable matter of fact, Ethical Realism based on the Will to Live is the basis, ground and foundation of ethics and morals;

And in particular, with respect to religious conflicts and disputes, Ethical Realism establishes that they are irrational and unfounded, and that it is evil for a person to kill or cause harm to another living being on account of a religious conflict or dispute.

## THE END

The tendency of man's nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downward.  
There are nought but have this tendency to good, just as all water flows downward.  
Mencius (372 -289 BCE)

