

# **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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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.  
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,  
a 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

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

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 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 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>3</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.

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>4</sup>.

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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> 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.

<sup>4</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 maintain, assisting and enhancing life,

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>5</sup> without commandments from God, without man-made laws, customs or philosophies,<sup>6</sup> and without man-made ethical or moral codes or rules of conduct.

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

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and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil." (Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics* (A. & C. Black, Ltd., London 1923.)

<sup>5</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>6</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.

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”, and “Love thy Neighbor<sup>7</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 a basis of 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>8</sup> and that has been observed in the behavior of living beings everywhere throughout history.

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

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<sup>7</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>8</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. 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.



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.

## 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>9</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>9</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 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 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>10</sup>

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>11</sup> as are the morals and ethics of religion, custom, law and philosophy.<sup>12</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. Whereas, the objective, unchanging force of nature of the Will to Live is the basis of good and bad behavior as 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>13</sup> as a source, cause and moving force of the

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<sup>10</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.)

<sup>11</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>12</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>13</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.

survival instinct – a force of nature<sup>14</sup> that is a cause of the struggle that living beings make to stay alive and thrive.<sup>15</sup>

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>16</sup> Only a person living a fantasy contests the fact that the force of nature

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<sup>14</sup> Note the reference in 1642, to the Will to Live as a force of nature in *De Cive (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>15</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 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>16</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

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 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”.

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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.

## 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>17</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-religious 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 non-theistic basis of ethics and morals.

And, overall, 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 it is unfounded, irrational,<sup>18</sup> and evil for a person to kill or to harm another because

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<sup>17</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>18</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.

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>19</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>20</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 who now conceal the fact that they are atheists or agnostics, and they “come-out” and 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.

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<sup>19</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>20</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.)



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>21</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 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

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<sup>21</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.)

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.

## **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 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. 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 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 that 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>22</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 atheists and agnostics such as those referred to in Part IV above, and by attorneys, social activists and others who are capable of making the case for freedom from religious discrimination.

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.

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<sup>22</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 described above in this paper in connection with the establishment of Ethical Realism.

“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, and decisions of federal and state courts should now be rendered, expressly and unconditionally stating that it is illegal to discriminate against anyone not only because they do believe in God but also 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 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>23</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>24</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

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<sup>23</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 absolutely certain, when in fact essentially all that there is exists as, and can only be expressed as, generalities.

<sup>24</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 recently Derek Parfit and Peter Singer, to name just a few.

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.

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 good or bad in a particular situation. Accordingly, behavior that is good with respect to how it affects one living being may be bad with respect to how it affects another. And 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 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 of the 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, that establishes whether a person's behavior is good or evil with respect to other living beings;

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 dispute.