



Ethics and Sustainable Peace with an Emphasis on the View of Hans Küng

Rezvan Najafi¹ 

Received: 2025/02/20 • Revised: 2025/04/30 • Accepted: 2025/06/10 • Available Online: 2025/07/10



Abstract

The imposed wars and current aggressions in the Middle East and the world increasingly necessitate the need for sustainable peace and ethics in society (Statement of the Problem) Kant, by creating the Copernican Revolution, completely changed the perspective in ethics and practical reason. By believing in the formulation of law and equality in society, he considers the establishment of a sustainable peace possible. In fact, according to his Copernican view, we should no longer wait for the ethical foundations and peace from the heavens; rather, it is necessary to reach a global agreement for establishing a lasting peace in the world, with an emphasis on the foundations of human rights and ethical and religious pluralism. Hans Küng, inspired by Kant's moral philosophy, and while adopting a critical approach to it, seeks to find the common

1. Department of Philosophy and Theology, Faculty of Humanities, Payam Noor University of Tehran South, Tehran, Iran.
najafirezvan70@gmail.com

* Najafi, R. (2025). Ethics and Sustainable Peace with an Emphasis on the View of Hans Küng. *Theosophia Islamica*, 5(2), pp. 148-181.
<https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.72422.1104>

Article Type: Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

© 2025

"authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights"



<http://jti.isca.ac.ir>

ethical frameworks among religions and thereby facilitate the possibility of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among religions (Research Findings) Therefore, this research has explained this important matter using a qualitative and analytical method (Objective and Method)

Keywords

Kant, Sustainable Peace, Hans Küng, Ethics, Religion.



Introduction

Today, humanity needs to discuss this topic more than ever, as the wars waged across the globe under the pretext of religious beliefs or excessive demands are the result of a misreading of ethical, legal, and ultimately religious principles. Hans Küng, inspired by Kant, is one of the contemporary theoreticians in the field of peace and global ethics. In fact, Küng's main goal in presenting the relationship between ethics and religion is to reach universal and comprehensive principles of global ethics so that a peaceful relationship among the followers of different religions can be established. Kant outlines conditions for guaranteeing the establishment of sustainable peace in his treatise. Upon examining these conditions, we must not forget that Kant's main prerequisite for establishing sustainable peace lies in the very characteristics he presented in his anthropology¹ and philosophy of law. In fact, if Kant can prove that rationality is equally distributed among human beings, and that this rationality leads humans to establish laws among themselves, only then can we hope for the creation of sustainable peace.

However, it does not seem that Kant holds such optimistic assumptions about man in his treatise "Perpetual Peace." Kant distinguishes between the reality of man and what he ought to be, and this is what led him to differentiate between the study of man in nature

-
1. Kant is clearly a **human-centered** thinker, and human-centeredness is an inseparable part of the Kantian movement. In Kant's anthropological view, **man is free** and the axis of all matters. Man is a free being, and freedom has no place in nature. According to Kant, this free being is created within nature, and he is not alien to it. In fact, in this work of Kant, man is neither considered pure nature nor a mere spirit. Therefore, he is a **spiritual nature** or a spirit within nature. Kant is one of the first thinkers to question and critique the **duality of mind and body** (Kant, 1367-1369, p. 37) (Not in the bibliography).

(in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) and the explanation of his supernatural and ideal aspect (in the *Critique of Practical Reason*). In fact, Kant's political theory, formulated in *Perpetual Peace*, is a continuation of his ethics and practical reason. In his view, if a law is to be established at the international level, this law must be moral.

What is meant here is not individual ethics, but juridical ethics (legal morality). For instance, it can be predicted that perpetual peace is established when every nation recognizes the other nation and treats it in the way it expects other nations to treat itself. This is the very Kantian Categorical Imperative at the level of global politics. If such an ethic is not dominant, the threat of war will always remain. Just as individual ethics and international law enable different nations to live peacefully side-by-side. The first statement in this regard is: "For Kant, peace in the international sphere requires the establishment of law as a basis for the rights of states".

States have rights and duties corresponding to these rights. In this way, an assembly of states, or the Global Federation, is equivalent to a society of individuals. And just as ethics are only applicable to free individuals, sustainable peace is only possible among free states. For this reason, Kant only endorses a republican government for the internal politics of countries, because in this form of government, the freedom of individuals is transferred to the freedom of the state. This is one of the fundamental conditions for perpetual peace. Therefore, if countries are not democratic, the prerequisite for establishing global sustainable peace is not met.

On the other hand, perpetual peace is only possible under the sovereignty of a comprehensive and accepted law, and the people who have accepted a law—that is, have formed a republican government—are the only people who can form a nation that accepts global law. For

law to govern the world, it must also govern within countries, and this means a republican government.

Therefore, a people who have accepted within their own borders that everyone is equal before the law can also accept on the global stage that all states are equal before the global law. In fact, sustainable peace is established between countries where the people within have agreed to live in peace by recognizing one another. If one of these countries experiences instability and civil war internally, one cannot expect perpetual peace in the world.

Research Background

Najafi, (2024 a) in an article titled "Practical Reason in the Thought System of the Ash'arites and Robert Adams with Emphasis on the Epistemological Foundations of Josiah Royce", points out that Robert Adams considers practical reason and ethics to be dependent on reason but ultimately tied to religion. This is because, on the one hand, he is influenced by the Divine Command Theory and the Ash'arite Theory of Acquisition (*Kasb*), and in the theory of the dependence of ethics on religion, he believes that ethics culminates in religion. On the other hand, he considers the foundation of his practical reason to be the rational goodness and badness (*Husn wa Qubh 'Aqli*). Josiah Royce believes in moral idealism and establishes a meaningful relationship between ontology, ethics, idealism, and monotheistic theology. Royce's moral idealism neither subordinates ethics to a specific religion (like Ghazali) nor considers religion and ethics independent of each other. Rather, he views man as a transcendental being possessing a priori knowledge of moral principles. Therefore, the concordance of religion and ethics will not have a posterior and historical aspect, but a metaphysical and ontological foundation. Adams, regardless of prioritizing reason and

free will, bases his beliefs on the principle of a "sense of duty" towards the commands of the Almighty and the experience of conscience. However, the Ash'arites, according to the "Divine Command" and "Theory of Acquisition", consider whatever the Almighty permits or forbids to be right and wrong, respectively, and whatever the Almighty commands is obligatory. Therefore, the criterion for the validation and truthfulness of any act must be measured according to the standards of Sharia, and man is only the acquirer (*kasib*) of the commands of the Almighty and the Divine Law. The common ground between Adams and the Ash'arites, however, is that they both consider happiness and all moral actions to be dependent on religion.

Najafi, (2024 b) addressed the important issue in an article titled "A Study of the Theory of Global Peace and Ethics in the Holy Quran". This research seeks to provide a new reading of the verses of the Quran to derive from it a concept of global peace and ethics. The theory of global peace and ethics was proposed by Hans Küng in response to global wars, sanctions, and existing problems. Küng believes that it is a mistake to consider Islam a religion of war and the sword and to ignore its essential religious core. He argues that there is no doubt that Arabs, through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), reached the level of a transcendent ethical religion founded on the belief in the One God and a fundamental human ethic that contained the clear requirements of justice and higher humanity. Islam was originally based more on ethics than on Sharia. In Islam, too, something akin to the Ten Commandments forms the basis of a common human ethic. There is no doubt that Muhammad (PBUH) was an authentic and credible prophet and, in some respects, similar to the prophets of the Israelites. Muslims attach great importance to the fact that Muhammad (PBUH) is not the center and core of Islam in the

way that Jesus Christ is the center and core of Christianity. In the view of Muslims, the Word of God was not transformed into a man, but into a book, and the Quran, which is the Word of God and attributed to God Himself, is the center and core of Islam. Furthermore, Islam is a religion with the unique book of the Quran that completes and replaces the Torah of the Jews and the Gospel of the Christians. In the view of Muslims, the Quran is an unparalleled, complete, and highly authoritative book, and experts, in particular, seriously learn it and recite it by heart. This research intends to examine the aspects of global peace materials from Küng's perspective within the Quran.

In an article by Najafi et al (2018) titled "A Study of the Relationship Between Religion and Ethics from the Perspective of Ghazali and Hans Küng and the Establishment of its Metaphysical Foundations based on Moral Idealism", the following important point is addressed: Based on the Divine Command Theory to which Ghazali subscribes, whatever God permits or forbids is correct or incorrect, respectively, and whatever God commands is obligatory. Therefore, the criterion for the correctness or incorrectness of any action must be measured according to the standards of Sharia (Islamic Law).

In contrast, some Western thinkers defend the independence and self-sufficiency of ethics and do not accept the grounding of ethics in religion. Hans Küng, as one of the contemporary theologians, inspired by Kant's moral philosophy and adopting a critical approach to it, seeks to find the common ethical frameworks among religions and thereby facilitate the possibility of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among religions.

One of the conclusions of this discussion is the impossibility of global ethics in Ghazali's theory, because he reduces ethics to historical religion and allows no room for universal ethical principles.

Likewise, Hans Küng, because he considers ethics to be independent of religion and does not attribute a heavenly origin to ethical principles, lacks a reliable metaphysical foundation for establishing an objective relationship between ethics and religion. "Josiah Royce's Moral Idealism" is an appropriate concept to justify global ethics in the thought of these two thinkers based on the metaphysical relationship between religion and ethics.

Research Innovations: As observed, no independent research has specifically addressed the explanation and investigation of Ethics and Sustainable Peace with an emphasis on the View of Hans Küng. This research is, therefore, unique and singular in its kind.

1. World Government

Kant mentioned the formation of a Global Federation as an essential condition for perpetual peace. We know that obstacles exist in the path of realizing this idea, but in any case, it is an idea that must be approached. Kant's idea aimed for all people to feel the entire world as their homeland. Does this not mean that, in Kant's view, the borders between countries must ultimately disappear and everyone live under a World Government? Does cosmopolitanism mean the world turning into a single state? Does Kant believe in a world government? Could such a government not be an idea for achieving justice and security? Can a world government be a way to achieve perpetual peace? To answer these questions, we must first see what a world government is. This is important in the context of perpetual peace because most critics of the perpetual peace theory have conflated it with the idea of a world government. Most criticisms directed at the perpetual peace viewpoint are, in fact, related to the theory of a world government.

Catherine Lu defined world government as follows:

World Government relates to the idea that all human beings should be united under a single common political authority. Such a thing has never existed in human history, and this is debatable and open to discussion, but proposals for a unified, global political authority have existed since antiquity—in the ambitions of kings, popes, emperors, and the dreams of poets and philosophers (Küng, 1998, p. 112).

In the context of world government, many arguments for and against it have been raised. Proponents have argued that if a benevolent government were to rule the entire world, all injustices and problems would be solved. From the perspective of these advocates, human nature tends toward war and encroachment on the rights of others, and if a powerful global authority does not exist, war will never be eliminated from the face of the earth.

Proponents of world government are usually unitarist and believe that the cosmic order is singular, and this plurality among countries is neither proportional nor aligned with the cosmic order. In fact, the ultimate goal of world government is an extreme part of cosmopolitanism in which all human beings are citizens of a single country called the World.

2. Perpetual Peace

This issue and the latter point connect law to ethics as well. In Kant's thought, ethics holds the same position as right (justice); in fact, ethics, like right, is the foundation of law. If we want to know which law is based on and conditioned by right, we must see which law expresses a moral command. Whether the law is municipal (within a city/state) or even international law, this is a condition that must be considered in any case.

Therefore, we arrive at the principle we stated earlier: perpetual peace is established when moral relations exist between citizens, compatriots, and states. If a law, under the pretext of establishing peace, protecting humans, creating security, or any other excuse, violates ethics, it possesses no genuine validity. Therefore, Kant has provided a clear touchstone for discerning a correct international law, against which it can be measured (Mosleh, 2017, p. 40).

A human relationship is moral when individuals, in their interactions with one another, take into account the other person's humanity. This is the condition for being a citizen and establishing a civil society. If human beings do not consider one another as human, they will enslave each other, and the world will turn into war, conflict, and revolution.

In fact, this establishes the basis for global citizenship rights. Individuals have the right, while being citizens of their own city and country, to also be citizens of the world, meaning that when they enter another territory, they must be treated as human beings. This is the meaning of the cosmopolitan right that Kant expresses in the treatise *Perpetual Peace* and which we discussed earlier.

The cosmopolitan right is a right, and every right indicates that a law must exist. This law should not obligate countries to give up their territory to a newly arrived foreigner, but it must obligate them to offer hospitality to foreigners, migrants, refugees, the homeless, and others, and to treat them as human beings (Mosleh, 2017, p. 42).

3. Kant's Perpetual Peace

Hans Küng was inspired by Kant, which is why Kant's intellectual foundations must also be addressed. Kant's goal is to steer the global community toward a World Republic. However, alternatives for the

future of the world can also be imagined, which Kant does not even address for the purpose of rejection. The only reason for proposing a Global Federation that Kant discusses is the idea of a World Government, which we previously examined.

But one could, for instance, point to regional federations and the creation of a parliament composed of regional representatives as a reason for Kant's proposal. If representatives of states were to raise their issues in regional parliaments, and then these issues were expressed at a higher level, the problems would find more practical solutions. Alternatively, one could speak of federations at different levels or on various subjects independently.

Kant only addressed the union of political representatives of states, but the creation of unions composed of non-political representatives of states has also been effective in establishing peace. For example, judicial, economic, cultural, and scientific unions, as well as non-governmental anti-war movements, youth organizations, global unions of various professions, and so on. These unions have been able to work toward securing the rights of these groups at the international level, while simultaneously fostering mutual understanding and peace in the world by expanding relations among the world's people, not just government officials (Kant, 1990, p. 123).

4. Incompatibility of Politics and Morality

A barrier Kant identifies for achieving perpetual peace is the conflict between morality and politics. To explain the necessity of overcoming this conflict, Kant authored appendices for the second edition of *Perpetual Peace*, titled "The Incompatibility between Morality and Politics in Relation to Perpetual Peace" and "Agreement between Politics and Morality According to the Transcendental Concept of Public Right".

Kant, in fact, critiques the views of Machiavelli, such as: "First act, then justify", or "If you do something unfavorable, deny it", or "Divide and conquer" (Kant, 1990, p. 123).

According to Kant, if the establishment of perpetual peace is the ultimate goal, then morality, politics, and honor must govern relations. In fact, the establishment of a legal system based on morality is an undeniable condition for the realization of perpetual peace. Ultimately, only genuine moral inclinations can lead to true union among people and the establishment of peace.

However, on the other hand, we all know that politics is not always equivalent to honesty. The prominent politician in the real world is not the most moral individual. In fact, it seems that Kant is very optimistic about world politics, while Machiavelli is highly realistic. The aim is not to suggest that Machiavelli's path is the correct one, but Kant should have considered the political realities of the world more, instead of deeming moral integrity sufficient for managing world politics.

Politics requires an intelligence that is not present in everyone. Kant, in his anthropology, approaches this concept of intelligence to some extent by stating the concept of prudence (*Klugheit*), but he does not use this concept in his political works, including *Perpetual Peace*. Of course, no one disagrees that peace necessitates the moral reform of nations themselves, and specifically, it primarily requires the reform of influential rulers and governors. This is also contingent upon a genuine union and unity among nations. Otherwise, the application of any other method will be classified as deception, and will be artificial and imposed. We fully agree with Kant on this point, but Kant needed to examine whether moral reform is sufficient for educating a politician. Therefore, Kant did not address political education in his political works (Kant, 1990, p. 148).

5. Postmodernism and Perpetual Peace

Other thinkers who have followed Kant's project in the modern world are the Postmodernists, who have paid special attention to world politics under the influence of modern developments in philosophy and social sciences. Most postmodern thinkers have referenced the topic of peace and the new world order in their works. However, among them, those who have systematically and extensively addressed the global structure of war and peace are the contemporary political thinkers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. They focused on these issues in their two books, *Empire* and *Multitude*, and we will discuss them in detail here. These thinkers are more of an inversion of Kant than they are Kantian; although they address the issues he raised, they can ultimately be considered critics of Kant's political and legal philosophy and his plan for perpetual peace.

5-1. Postmodern Perspectives on Global Instability: Hardt and Negri

According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, instability and insecurity are the most critical issues facing the world today. This lack of stability and security threatens our world in terms of both life and employment. Events like the US invasion of Iraq, under the pretext of nuclear weapons, and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, broadcast to the astonished eyes of people worldwide, signaled to Hardt and Negri the advent of a new era: the era of Empire. From their perspective, alongside the fear of war and terror, job insecurity is currently disturbing minds across the globe. The world we live in has become intensely violent, ruthless, unjust, and undemocratic. Hardt and Negri suggest that the world is sustained only by violence.

They name the power that generates insecurity in the world as

"Empire" and the force that challenges and overthrows it as the "Multitude" (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 50). Hardt and Negri's book, *Multitude*, is essentially the political-philosophical project for realizing the democracy that modernity promised but failed to deliver.

Multitude is written from a postmodern perspective and approaches global issues with its specific viewpoint. In comparison to Kant's plan, Hardt and Negri invert Kant; they strive to create an alliance from below among the masses. This approach brings them closer to the Marxists, whose slogan was "Workers of the world, unite!" and who championed the unity of the masses (Kant, 1990, p. 66).

Hardt and Negri argue that in today's world, war has become the fundamental and organizing principle of society, and politics is merely one of the means and manifestations of war. Therefore, "what appears to be domestic peace is simply the end of one form of war and opens the way for another war" (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 40). They also address the "Revolution in Military Affairs" and technological advancements in the production of weapons of mass destruction, highlighting the changes necessary for the pursuit of peace in such circumstances.

The concept of Empire is very close to Kant's idea of a Global Federation, but Hardt and Negri demonstrate the negative aspect of such an idea through the concept of Empire. In their view, Empire is not a territorial power center with distinct borders; rather, it is a decentralized and deterritorialized apparatus of rule that manages mixed identities, unstable hierarchies, and diverse exchanges through flexible networks of command and guidance.

In their book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri refer to four models of Empire, one of which is the Juridical Empire, which is very close to the current discussion. In the Juridical Empire, the national

sovereignty and jurisdiction of states have deteriorated, and global human rights norms, as transnational laws based on natural rights, are interpreted, promoted, and enforced by the powerful leaders of the imperial system. Consequently, states are forced to comply with imperial laws.

This type of Empire, envisioned by Hardt and Negri, is approximately equivalent to the legal order Kant intended to govern the world. However, Hardt and Negri pit Foucault against Kant. Empire operates based on Foucault's concept of biopower. Biopower is a form of power that internally regulates, monitors, interprets, and re-articulates the social life of human beings (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 50).

According to this power, Empire takes control and dominion over all aspects of human life, including their minds and bodies, and integrates the entirety of human existence as its intrinsic and internal components.

The domination of this global machine is so extensive that it controls the hidden individual dimensions of human lives, and even their eating and dressing habits and routines. The structure of the Empire is a pyramidal structure of domination where the US and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are at the highest level, followed by governments and multinational corporations, and at the lowest part are the United Nations General Assembly, the masses of people, and non-governmental organizations. This is precisely the Kantian blueprint for global peace that is being critiqued here.

Among other postmodern thinkers who followed Kant's path and addressed similar discussions, we can refer to the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard, who paid attention to international politics and contemporary wars, gave great importance to

the media and visual nature of these conflicts. From his perspective, in the world today, media factors create wars more than actual confrontations. Wars have become more like war films. In the contemporary world, wars are a pretext for American technological experiments.

News and television today significantly influence wars and international relations. Therefore, in comparison to Kant's plan, it must be said that a perpetual peace might only have a media dimension, and in any case, the media and propaganda aspects of peace unions and federations must also be considered (Kant, 1990, p. 18). Baudrillard considered the spread of modern mass media, especially electronic media like television, to cause a fundamental transformation in the nature and character of our lives. Television does not merely "represent" the world to us; it actually defines the reality of the world we truly live in.

According to Baudrillard's argument, in an age where mass media is ubiquitous, a new reality is created, consisting of a blend of people's behaviors and the media's images. The world of hyperreality is built with simulacra—images that derive their meaning from other images and, therefore, lack a basis in "external reality." As Baudrillard shows, our world today is vastly different from the world of Kant's time, and we face issues in the world that were not even conceivable in Kant's era. To achieve perpetual peace in the world, issues that Kant could not have considered, such as propaganda, the media, and the image on the television screen, must be taken into account (Kant, 1990, p. 198).

5-2. Relationship Between Ethics and Law

In this section, we examine the relationship between ethics and law, the proportion of religion and ethics, and the role that religion plays in securing humanity's moral rights.

Küng considers ethics to be broader and superior to law and also the foundation for the realization of rights. According to this understanding, human beings possess rights, as stated in the Declaration of Human Rights, and it is the duty of the state and individuals to respect them. Here, the law ensures the observance of these rights. At the same time, human beings have primary responsibilities placed upon them by virtue of their humanity and personhood, and these responsibilities do not originate from rights. These are moral responsibilities that cannot be established in society by law: "No fundamental ethic can result from mere human rights; this ethic must encompass human responsibility that precedes the law" (Küng, 2010, p. 199).

Due to his theological insight, Küng is entirely influenced by monotheistic religions in his definition of religion and God, and he has no affinity for theoretical philosophy discussions (Küng, 2009, pp. 59-60).¹ Based on his pluralistic perspective, Küng believes that if one can be truly human, they are religious and devout, regardless of whether they adhere to Christian, Islamic, or any other religious doctrines. An individual who believes in religious pluralism is a proponent of peace and an opponent of ideological and belief-based conflicts. He considers the ultimate goal of religion to be ethics, and he summarizes ethics in humanity (Küng, 2012, Introduction).

Küng considers the most important function of religion to be giving meaning to life, a function he reserves exclusively for religion. He identifies moral doctrines as the common core among religions.

1. Küng believes that God cannot be proven by rational arguments. In his view, the affirmation of God's existence is a **decision or choice**—a choice that presents itself as a necessity in human life, rather than something that can be reached through rational and logical arguments (Küng, 2009, pp. 59-60).

His main concern is to create a form of unity among different religions by finding shared ethical principles and norms among them, thereby ensuring that human rights are fully realized.

The result of all Küng's academic and practical efforts throughout his life is summarized in a few sentences:

There can be no peace among nations without peace among religions. There can be no peace among religions without dialogue between them. There can be no dialogue among religions without criteria for a global ethic. And there can be no survival for our planet without a global ethic (Küng, 2008, p. 13).

In Küng's view, the only way to establish peace among religions is through dialogue; however, dialogue must be based on shared elements. Therefore, the primary condition for the "Dialogue of Civilizations" is an emphasis on the commonality among religions and the avoidance of discord and exclusivism (Küng, 2005, pp. 179-180). From Küng's perspective, the most important commonalities among religions are the ethical principles and norms present in all of them. Thus, by highlighting these shared ethical principles and criteria, one can achieve a global ethic and advance this important agenda (Küng, 2008, pp. 220-221).

One of the obstacles in the path of peaceful dialogue among religions is the secularization of Western societies. Hans Küng does not consider the secularization of Western societies to be consistent with his main idea (globalization), because the secularization of Western societies runs counter to religiosity and respect for the religious and traditional beliefs of individuals, which is the exact opposite of the principles of a global ethic (Fenn, 1999, p. 25).

In Küng's view, at the heart of Christian principles and teachings, there is a certain tendency toward radical secularization.

This secularization occurs precisely within the sphere where Christianity involves itself in work and politics (i.e., everyday and ordinary affairs). Two secular states, such as France and England, which also possess civil religions, treat the transcendent as an ordinary matter and present it as worldly affairs.¹

6. The Origin of Ethics

Küng locates the origin of ethics in conscience and the inner being of human beings; in other words, ethics arises from inner insight and the call of human conscience (Küng, 2009, pp. 14-15).

From Küng's perspective, humanity's primary emphasis in the ethical domain is on the worship of God (God-centeredness). However, this God-centeredness does not mean that something is moral simply because God has determined it. He even believes that moral principles, such as the Ten Commandments of the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus, and the moral commands of the Quran, are not divine in that sense. Instead, these commands were present in human societies years before they appeared as the Ten Commandments, the Sermon of Jesus, or the Quranic commands.

1. Ethics, as the foundation of democracy, has been established and maintained based on the premise that life cannot continue without **individual liberty**. In a democratic state, there is a need for **moral and political consensus**; all social groups in the society, across all religions, support participation in all aspects of society. Everyone increasingly feels the need for a **fundamental agreement, consensus**, and the **avoidance of violence**. This is, in sum, what people call "**consensus in value subordination of conflicts**"—irrevocable criteria that are noteworthy and receive broader public attention. The emphasis is on **societal harmony and unity**, and failure to adhere to these principles will cause a religion or a nation to collapse (Küng, 2007, pp. 59-60).

They were subject to the trial and error of human experience and were ultimately accepted by these holy books.

Ethics has not descended from heaven, but like language, it is the product of development and evolution. When the needs, pressures, and necessities of life emerge, rules of action, preferably laws, customs, and, in short, norms are introduced. Human beings test them and finally establish them (Küng, 1976, pp. 531-542).

Therefore, from this standpoint, man is essentially self-centered in the ethical domain. That is, he acquires the principles, norms, and rules governing his own behavior through the long course of human experience. Thus, in his view, through the continuous experience of human life, ethical norms and principles are tested and experienced, and finally established and accepted. For this reason, one cannot speak of their absolute nature, meaning that acting upon them is absolute and unconditional in all spatio-temporal situations (Küng, 2009, pp. 197-210).

From Küng's perspective, "In a world where religion and politics have caused fragmentation and divisions, and where we witness bloody wars and conflicts every day and hour, it is only through ethics that one can achieve global peace" (Küng, 1998, p. 1). On this basis, Küng's plan for a global ethic has gained particular prominence. The foundation of Küng's ethical discussion is its culmination in global peace.

7. Religious Differences as the Main Cause of Conflicts and Wars

One of the prerequisites for Küng's Global Ethic project is his view that religion is the most significant factor in past and present conflicts and wars. Küng emphasizes in most of his works that it is rare to find

a war or conflict in history where religion was not the primary cause or, at least, did not exacerbate it. Furthermore, in the contemporary world, we are witnessing various religious-ethnic wars across the globe that threaten human life. Therefore, if the world wishes to eradicate the source of these wars and conflicts, it must take religion seriously and address religious disputes before anything else (Küng, 2009, p. 222).

7-1. Religiosity in the Modern Era

A question that has preoccupied the minds of thinkers and many intellectual individuals is: What does religiosity mean in the Modern Era? In other words, is it possible to be both religious and modern at this time, or are these two categories fundamentally incompatible? Naturally, the first question that arises is: What are the characteristics and features of the Modern Era that might conflict with religion and religiosity?

The Modern Era refers to the fundamental transformations that occurred in the Western world from the Renaissance onward in various philosophical and scientific fields, and eventually in Western society and culture. These transformations brought about an unconditional trust in science, technology, and human reason in general, and a turning away from what reason is incapable of understanding. Based on this trust, the main characteristics of the modern person are the avoidance of blind obedience, the demand for evidence, and the rejection of traditional authorities, which are clearly in opposition to traditional piety and religiosity. This issue may be observed from the viewpoint of a philosopher of religion in the Modern Era, who consistently sides with reason and asks religion to harmonize itself with reason (Küng, 2009, pp. 63-64).

8. The Role of Religion in Global Ethics

Religions play a very important role in K ung's Global Ethic project, and it can be said that religion is the most crucial, and indeed the main, factor in the realization of this plan. As previously discussed, from K ung's point of view, until peace and understanding are achieved among religions, the realization of global peace through a global ethic is not possible.

The role of religion can be viewed from two perspectives; in other words, religion is important in the Global Ethic project for two reasons:

First, as stated in the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, the Global Ethic project will be realized through inner transformation in human beings. That is, the Global Ethic project seeks a transformation in the global community that cannot be achieved through laws, moral recommendations, treaties, and covenants, but rather through a change in perspectives and values.

Therefore, it is by creating a transformation in the souls and minds of human beings that one can hope for a change in perspectives and values. But what force can bring about this transformation in the current crisis-ridden world? Here, K ung believes that no force other than the spiritual power of religions can effect this transformation. Thus, religion is the most important spiritual force for realizing this inner transformation.

As explicitly mentioned in the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, although religions themselves cannot solve the environmental, economic, and social problems of the world today, there is a vital element in religion that is not achievable through economic and social programs: namely, the change of attitudes, mentalities, and, in a word, the change of people's hearts and redirecting the wrong course of life

toward a new path. In fact, this transformation is a spiritual revival that the spiritual power of religions can actualize (Küng, 1998, p. 13).

Based on this, "Religions, despite significant differences regarding the values and standards governing human life, still possess the spiritual power that can transform the face of the current world" (Küng, 1998, p. 13).

Furthermore, religions play a vital role in offering hope to human beings. Throughout history, people have witnessed numerous conflicts, wars, and disputes among individuals and human groups. Today, in the modern world, these wars and conflicts have not only failed to subside but have become even more widespread. Consequently, despair, hopelessness, and a bleak outlook on humanity's future are almost natural. Keeping the spirit of hope alive and thus searching for solutions to problems requires a powerful force.

It appears that here too, religions, with their rich human and ethical content, can keep the hope of achieving global tranquility and perpetual peace alive in the hearts of peace-loving people. Evidence for this claim is the "immense efforts of countless women and men throughout the current crisis-ridden world who are still sparing no effort to achieve peace among nations. A clear example of this hope is the participation of hundreds of followers of different religions in the Parliament of the World's Religions conference in Chicago" (Küng, 1998, p. 13). Saying "yes to God" means a kind of trust in life that is permanent and has an ultimate foundation. This is a form of primary trust that is rooted in the ultimate depth of foundations and is directed toward goals, with God as the basis of support. This factor is considered to create a sense of certainty and knowledge for individuals.

Fundamental trust and trust in God demonstrate a similar basic structure; it is not merely a matter of human reason, but the matter of

the entire human existence, with body, soul, reason, and motivations. Trust in God is beyond reason, but it is not anti-rational. When faced with rational criticism, it can be justified, but not by resorting to a compelling proof; rather, by convincing reasons. This is why the Holy Scripture uses the important word faith: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Küng, 2012, pp. 160-161).

Second: In addition to being a spiritual force for initiating inner transformations, different religions also share common ethical principles and norms upon which dialogue can be established among them, ultimately leading to global peace and understanding. In most of his works, Küng attempts to illustrate these shared principles and norms across various religions. Küng analyzes and examines the world's great religions (primal religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, Chinese religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and highlights their common ethical principles.

Küng's intent regarding these common ethical principles and norms is that they are the same general ethical commands and rules found in the Ten Commandments of Judaism, the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus, the moral teachings of the Quran, and the ethical instructions of other world religions. Based on this, Küng believes that these ethical universals are not exclusive to a specific religion or culture; rather, they exist in all cultures and religions of the world, even in primal religions. Therefore, he strives to demonstrate the position of these principles in all religions and cultures.

From Küng's perspective, these principles exist in all cultures and religions of the world and all of them converge on more general principles such as "Treat people humanely" and "Love one another"—

the very principles that are stated in the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic.

Among these, all these general ethical principles and commands return to one important principle, known as the 'Golden Rule,' which appears in various forms and expressions across all great religious and ethical traditions. That is: 'Do not do to others what you would not want done to yourself' (Küng, 2009, pp. 238-239).

9. Global Ethic

The Global Ethic is Hans Küng's core project, essentially the culmination of all his scholarly and practical efforts throughout his life. He summarizes this project in a few sentences:

There can be no peace among nations without peace among religions. There can be no peace among religions without dialogue between them. There can be no dialogue among religions without criteria for a global ethic. And there can be no survival for our planet without a global ethic (Küng, 2008, p. 13).

Küng believes that he has traversed a very long path to achieve this goal, which he describes in his work *A Small Island* as: "The Long Road to a Global Ethic". By describing this path, he is essentially detailing his scholarly life, which is why he calls this project the fruit of his life's work. His main goal in this project is to achieve Global Peace—peace among different nations, civilizations, and cultures. The premise of this goal is, on the one hand, that humanity throughout history has been entangled in numerous bloody wars and conflicts for various reasons, in which the role of religion has been very fundamental. In the new world, the role of religions in creating and escalating wars and conflicts is also undeniable.

On the other hand, the positive role of religions in calming

these conflicts should not be overlooked. Every thoughtful and benevolent human being must feel a sense of responsibility toward this matter. Therefore, establishing peace among religions is one of the main pillars of this project, the neglect of which has prevented humanity from achieving perpetual peace so far. But how is peace among religions possible? (Küng, 2009, p. 220).

10. The Global Ethic Project of Hans Küng

Küng believes that the only way to establish peace among religions is through dialogue, but this dialogue must be based on shared principles. According to Küng, the world's various religions, despite their doctrinal differences, possess fundamental common ground that can serve as a basis for dialogue. In his view, the most important commonalities among religions are the ethical principles and norms present in all of them. Therefore, a Global Ethic can be achieved by highlighting these shared ethical principles and criteria, and this important project can be advanced.

Küng states that he has "lived with this project", meaning he has dedicated his entire scholarly life to its realization. To explain and examine this plan, it is necessary to first consider the foundations and preconditions that necessarily led him to it, then proceed to the principles and criteria of the Global Ethic and the role of religion within it, and finally, assess its current status and measure of success. Given the characteristics of Küng's theology, it can be said that these features are indeed based on the fundamental presuppositions of his theological thought, and it is on the basis of these presuppositions that he develops his Global Ethic project (Küng, 2009, pp. 220-221).

Whether the phenomenon of globalization is a threat or an opportunity depends on global initiatives, and the effort to achieve a Global Ethic is an example of such an initiative. In presenting the

Global Ethic project, Hans Küng has offered global declarations from a religious standpoint. These ethical declarations begin with a foundational rule (not an ultimate criterion) and then lead to basic and middle principles. The main topics discussed in these declarations are efficiency and effectiveness, internal consistency, applicability to religions, and adaptability to cultures and ethnicities.

Küng does not consider the Global Ethic to be based on naturalistic theories, nor does he view ethics as possessing inherent goodness or badness (*Husn wa Qubh Dhati*). He considers it a form of minimal absolutism that can be achieved based on the ultimate criterion of ethics—the unconditioned command (Qara Maleki, 2009, p. 79).

One of the important factors in Küng's Global Ethic project is the close relationship between ethics and politics. Küng is well aware that the management of world affairs has not been and is not in the hands of theologians or moral philosophers. Rather, throughout history, it has been politicians who have governed and made decisions about world administration. Consequently, Küng pays special attention to the moralization of politics. He discusses this topic in detail in his important book, *Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*. In this book, he rejects the view that advocates the separation of politics and ethics, believing that many of the new world's problems stem from this very viewpoint. Based on this, he emphasizes that politics must become moral. In this regard, he established contact with many political forums and major world politicians, sharing his Global Ethic project with them (Küng, 2009, p. 223).

Küng took action in 1991 by founding the Global Ethic Foundation in Tübingen. The goals of this institution are:

1. Encouraging and realizing inter-religious and inter-cultural research. This goal is precisely aimed at mutual

understanding and acquaintance between different religions and cultures to achieve one of the main pillars of the Global Ethic project: dialogue among religions and cultures.

2. Encouraging and realizing inter-religious and inter-cultural education aimed at acquaintance and resolving common misunderstandings between religions and cultures.
3. Providing the possibility for and supporting the confrontation (engagement) of religions and cultures with one another. This goal was pursued to achieve the other two goals, as interaction and confrontation are prerequisites for understanding and education.

With the help of his colleagues in this institute, Küng has been able to take important and effective steps toward the realization of the Global Ethic project. After the publication of the book *Global Responsibility* and the establishment of this institute, he was naturally the most suitable person to prepare the Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions with the orientation of Global Ethic and Peace (Küng, 2009, pp. 225-226).

10-1. Principles of Küng's Global Ethic

Hans Küng's Declaration was initially published in Tübingen (Tubingen) and was later announced from the perspective of the Parliament of the World's Religions with a preface by the Parliament, which included a summary of the declaration (Küng & Kuschel, 1994, p. 99).

The Declaration, recalling the terrifying face of the present age that threatens human civilization, emphasizes that "No New World Order Without a Global Ethic is possible". It then introduces four unchangeable guidelines for a Global Ethic under the heading

"Fundamental Requirement: Every Person Must Be Treated Humanely":

1. Commitment to a Culture of Non-Violence and Respect for Life.
2. Commitment to a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order.
3. Commitment to a Culture of Tolerance and a Life Lived in Truthfulness.
4. Commitment to a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women (Qara Maleki, 2003, pp. 82-83)

The following are the detailed principles of Hans Küng's Global Ethic:

1. Every human being, regardless of color, race, religion, etc., possesses dignity and worth.
2. Every human being has a duty to behave humanely toward others.
3. No individual, group, or organization is the criterion of good and bad. Do not do to others what you yourself would not want.
4. No one has the right to injure, terrorize, or kill another human being.
5. Disputes among states must be resolved in a peaceful manner.
6. The worth of every human being is infinite and must be respected unconditionally.
7. Every human being has a responsibility to act with uprightness, honesty, and fairness.

8. Everyone should make efforts to eliminate poverty, malnutrition, ignorance, and inequality.
9. Everyone should support the needy, the deprived, the disabled, and the victims of discrimination.
10. Property and wealth must be used responsibly and in accordance with justice and for the sake of human progress.
11. Every human being has a duty to speak and act truthfully and sincerely.
12. Politicians, business people, scientists, and other professionals are not exempt from general moral standards.
13. Mass media must be free to enlighten society and critique its structures and the actions of the government.
14. While religious freedom must be guaranteed, representatives of religions must avoid prejudices and discrimination against the beliefs of others.
15. All men and women have a responsibility to respect each other; no one has the right to exploit another sexually.
16. Marriage, in all its cultural and religious diversity, requires love, loyalty, and forgiveness, and its goal must be to ensure security and mutual respect between the spouses.
17. Each spouse is responsible for the reasonable planning of family affairs, and the relationship between parents and children should reflect affection, appreciation, mutual respect, and love (Küng, 2009, pp. 124-236). One of the most important ways to pave the path for global peace

and ethics is the Dialogue of Civilizations, which will be briefly addressed next.

10-2. Necessary Conditions for the Dialogue of Civilizations

In the West and the Islamic world, an exclusionary view still exists, and minority religions are deprived of many social benefits. Neither the West nor the Islamic world has yet been able to create a balanced situation for all individuals regardless of their religion. This situation can push individuals toward irreligion or, at times, toward violence and extreme exclusivism.

1-Some nations, at best, consider national dialogue a security problem and a ban on political and religious parties, because they view political association as a collective phenomenon and, in some cases, demand that ethnic groups avoid dialogue. Currently, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco are attempting to integrate Islamic forces in a democratic fashion, based on the approach that the spread of Islamism reduces the tendency toward violence. This is in contrast to the former Soviet republics—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—which are very weak, ruled by former communist autocrats, and have an unstable, dictatorial government with an uncertain future.

Therefore, the primary condition for the Dialogue of Civilizations is to emphasize the commonalities among religions and to avoid discord and exclusivism (Küng, 2005, pp. 179-180).

10-3. Final Analysis and Evaluation

In the view of Hans Küng, ethical principles do not have a heavenly origin but are the product of human lived experiences throughout history, which have gradually evolved into rules for action

and were later affirmed by divine religions. According to this perspective, religion and ethics are independent of each other, and ethical principles do not originate from religion; nevertheless, the moral consciousness of humanity has, coincidentally, been confirmed by religion.

What Hans Küng says about ethics suggests that he adopts a naturalistic approach to morality and attributes a biological origin to it. Undoubtedly, Hans Küng's approach to ethics is not of the same type as that of naturalists like Richard Dawkins (See: Dawkins, 2008, p. 249; See: Hick, 2017, pp. 5-7). This is because Hans Küng is, in any case, a Christian theologian and maintains a belief in the supernatural in the background of his thought.

However, since he does not posit a heavenly origin for ethics, traces of a naturalistic perspective may be inferred from the tenor of his speech. Therefore, to rectify the lacunae present in his thought, a metaphysical basis can be conceived for the Global Ethic. This would both achieve Hans Küng's objective of peace among religions and avoid the imputation of a naturalistic approach to ethics.

Conclusion

Küng does not intend to discard tradition and modernity; rather, through his interpretations and understandings, he seeks to somehow integrate tradition and modernity. He also reconciles the state of being religious and modern in the modern world.

With the proposal of the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, Hans Küng aims to establish peaceful relations among the followers of different religions. In his view, if religions set aside their historical and theological differences and focus solely on shared ethical doctrines, there is hope that perpetual peace can be achieved among all societies, regardless of their ideology or religious belief.

To achieve this goal, he does not attribute a heavenly origin to ethics; instead, he views the consensus of human beings on ethical principles as resulting from the accumulation of human experiences throughout history, which have incidentally been confirmed by divine religions. The implicit connotation of Hans Küng's assertion regarding the earthly origin of ethics is a naturalistic inference, which is comparable to the utilitarian view of thinkers like John Stuart Mill. Mill also rejects *a priori* knowledge, or knowledge preceding experience, and explains rational and ethical self-evident truths based on the accumulation of human experiences in the process of historical evolution.

In this context, to make the possibility of a Global Ethic viable, we referred to the theories of Josiah Royce—a moral idealist. Given that he establishes a meaningful relationship among ontology, ethics, idealism, and monotheistic theology, there is hope that by drawing inspiration from his thought, a metaphysical foundation can be provided for the Global Ethic. This would offer a model for ethics that is free from the philosophical shortcomings of the theories of both Ghazali and Hans Küng. Royce's moral idealism does not regard religion and ethics as independent of each other but views man as a transcendental being possessing *a priori* knowledge of ethical principles. Thus, the concordance of religion and ethics does not acquire a posterior and historical aspect but gains a metaphysical and ontological foundation.

References

* Holy Quran.

Qara Maleki, A. (2009). A Reflection on Global Ethics, with an Emphasis on the Declaration of Swidler and Hans Küng. *Research Journal of the Philosophy of Religion*, 1, pp. 79–88. <https://doi.org/10.30497/pr.2012.1223>. [In Persian]

Kant, I. (1990). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (H. Enayat, Trans.). Khwarazmi Publications. [In Persian]

Küng, H. (2005). *The Catholic Church: A Short History* (H. Ghanbari, Trans.). Qom: Adyan va Mazahab University Press. [In Persian]

Küng, H. (2008). *Spiritual Dimensions of the World's Religions* (H. Ghanbari, Trans.). Qom: Center for Study and Research of Adyan va Mazahab University. [In Persian]

Küng, H. (2009). *Religion and Ethics* (H. Ghanbari, Trans.). Qom: Adyan va Mazahab University Press. [In Persian]

Küng, H. (2010). *Women in Christianity* (T. Moqaddam & H. Bakhshadeh, Trans.). Qom: Adyan va Mazahab University Press. [In Persian]

Küng, H. (2012). *The Art of Living (A Reflection on the Meaningfulness of Life)* (H. Ghanbari, Trans.). Qom: Adyan va Mazahab University Press. [In Persian]

Najafi, R., Sanaei, A., & Hamzaeian, A. (2018). Investigation of the Relationship Between Religion and Ethics from the Perspective of Ghazali and Hans Küng and the Establishment of its Metaphysical Foundations based on Moral Idealism. *Scientific-Research Journal of Ethics Research*, 11(42), pp. 171–188. [In Persian]

Najafi, R. (2024 a). Practical Reason in the Thought System of the Ash'arites and Robert Adams with an Emphasis on the Epistemological Foundations of Josiah Royce. *Scientific-Research Journal of Rational Explorations*, 3(1), pp. 202–224. [In Persian]

- Najafi, R. (2024 b). A Study of the Theory of Global Peace and Ethics from the Perspective of the Holy Quran. *Biannual Journal of Interpretive Innovations*, 2(1), pp. 64–80. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijj.2024.711914>. [In Persian]
- Mosleh, M. (2017). *Citizenship Rights in Iranian Law and International Law*. Tehran: Human Sciences Publishing, Tehran. [In Persian]
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2005). *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Trans: R. Najafzadeh). Tehran: Ney Publication. [In Persian]
- Küng, H. (1976). *On Being a Christian*. New York: Image Books. Doubleday, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland.
- Küng, H. (1998). *A Global Ethic for a Global Politics and Global Economics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Küng, H. (2007). *Islam: Past, Present, and Future* (J. Bowden, Trans.). Oneworld (Original work published 2004).
- Küng, H., & Kuschel, Karl-Josef. (Eds.) (1994). *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*. Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Dawkins, R. (2008). *The God Delusion*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Fenn, R. K. (1999). Toward a Global Ethic: A Response to Hans Küng. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 13(1), pp. 139–170 (Fall).