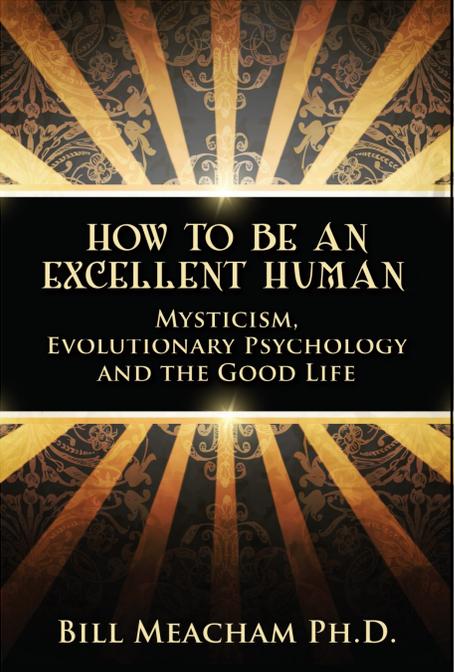


The Goodness Ethic

Bill Meacham, Ph.D.
 Ethical Society of Austin
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bmeacham.com



**HOW TO BE AN
EXCELLENT HUMAN**

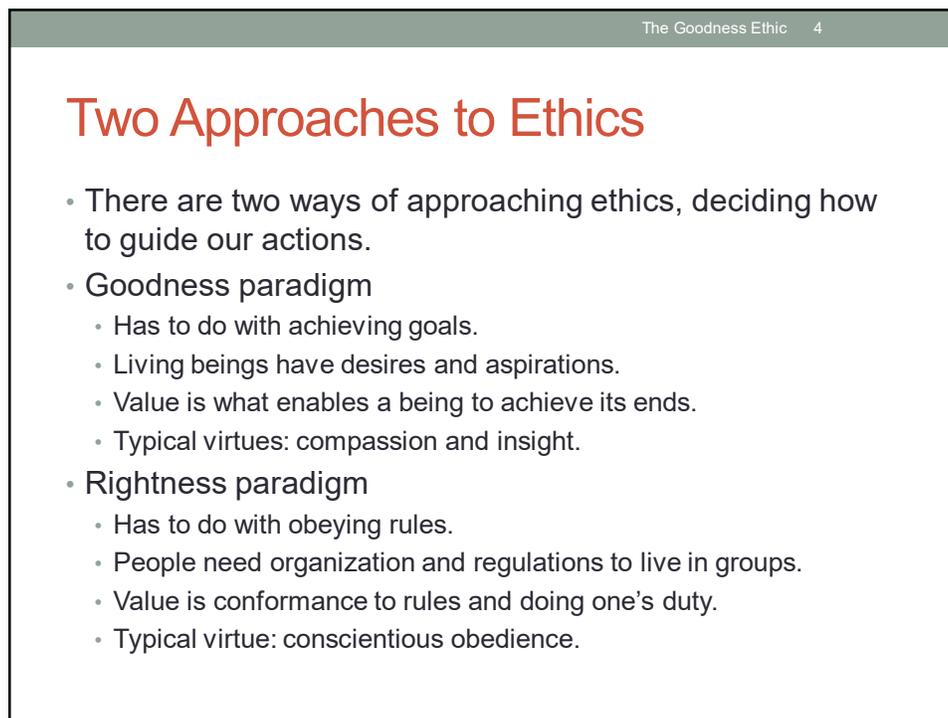
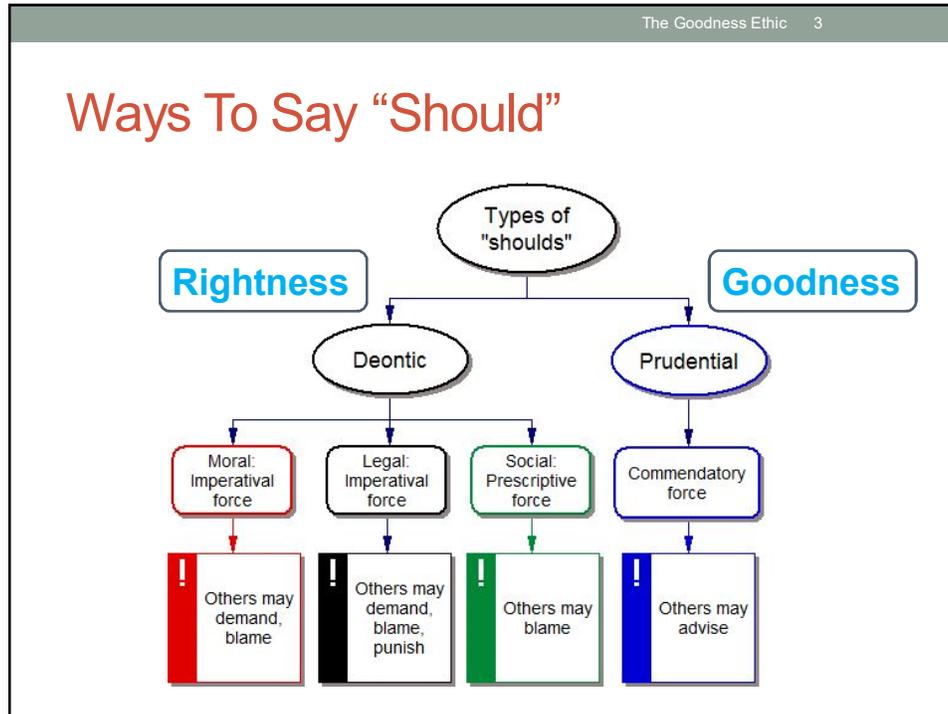
MYSTICISM,
EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY
AND THE GOOD LIFE

BILL MEACHAM PH.D.

The Goodness Ethic 2

Three Questions of Philosophy

- From the time of the Greeks, philosophers have been concerned with three fundamental questions:
- What's real? (Metaphysics)
- How do we know what's real? Epistemology)
- What shall we do about what's real? (Ethics)
 - How should we lead our lives? What is our duty? What virtues should we cultivate? How can we be happy?
- You can think of ethics as a way of doing things with words: getting other people (and yourself) to act in a certain way.
- There are different ways to tell people what they should do.



Two Uses of Language

- Goodness language
 - Good
 - Helpful, nourishing, beneficial, effective
 - Bad
 - Unhelpful, unhealthy, damaging, ineffective
- Rightness language
 - Right
 - Proper, legal, correct
 - Wrong
 - Improper, illegal, incorrect
- When someone makes an ethical judgment, what language do they use?

Ethics: Quandaries and Virtues

- Goodness and rightness apply to both.
- Quandary: focus on specific actions or types of actions
 - What should we do in a specific situation or type of situation?
 - Goodness
 - What are the anticipated benefits and harms of the possible choices?
 - Rightness
 - What do the moral rules say to do? What's the right choice?
- Virtue: focus on qualities of character
 - What kind of person should we be?
 - Goodness
 - What will be the effects of our habitual way of being?
 - Rightness
 - What ways of behaving will lead us to obey the rules despite temptation?

Good vs. Right

- Both concepts evaluate actions and tell us what to do.
- People often mix them, but that creates confusion.
- Pay attention to the language people use.
 - If someone says something is good, ask “good for what?”
 - If someone says something is right, ask “according to what rule?”
- Goodness is often called prudential.
- Rightness is often called moral.
- As I use the terms, “ethical” is broader than “moral.” Ethics refers to guidance for actions and character in either paradigm.

The Good

- Goodness language is about benefits and harms
 - What benefits something or someone is good for that thing or person.
- Teleological, from *telos*, end, purpose or goal
- Actions are justified by their consequences or effects.
- Goodness can be instrumental or biological.

Goodness as Instrumental

- What is good for a thing enables it to serve its purpose.
- Requires reference to a person's purpose or intention.
 - A hammer is good for pounding nails.
 - Nails are good for building things, such as furniture and housing.
 - Furniture and housing are good for us because they provide us utility and comfort.
- Some hammers are better than others for the purpose of pounding nails; they have better heft or balance.
- Some actions are good for the hammer: keeping it clean and free of rust.
- The good for a thing is what enables the thing to function well.

Goodness as Biological

- What is good for an organism promotes its health and well being.
- The good is what nourishes.
- Does not require reference to a purpose or intention.
- Some things are better than others.
 - Whole grains and a balanced diet are better than junk food.
 - Some plants need full sun, some need more shade.
- Goodness is not absolute. What is good for the hawk is not so good for the mouse.
- The good for an organism is what enables the organism to function well.
- What are the functions of human beings?

Premise: Everything is Connected

- Everything is connected to everything else.
- Nothing exists in isolation.
 - We all get nutrients from the same environment.
 - We are connected to the entire universe through gravitation.
- Humans are connected to other humans.
 - We could not live without other humans.
 - Language is essentially communal.
- Religious: God made us all in His/Her/Its image.
- Mystical: We are all expressions of the One Being.
- The book argues for this idea in many ways. For now, take it as a premise to see where the argument leads.

The Goodness Ethic

- **Work for the good in all things.**
- If you want to flourish, act for the benefit of yourself and your environment.
- Do the best you can to maximize goodness for all.
- We are all in it together, so let's make it good for everybody.
- Not altruism, and not selfishness. Go for win-win.
- Goal: For both you and your environment to thrive.
- If you do good for what is around you, it will nourish you.

Goodness Ethic: Enlightened Self-Interest

- Maximize the good in all situations because doing so will benefit you.
- As you promote the good of your environment you promote your own good as well.
 - Environment = people, animals, plants, non-living things, the earth, the atmosphere, the water, etc. Everything.
- By working for the good – that is, the healthy functioning – of the world around us, we nourish that which nourishes us, and we thrive.
- Selfishness is self-defeating.

Not Utilitarianism

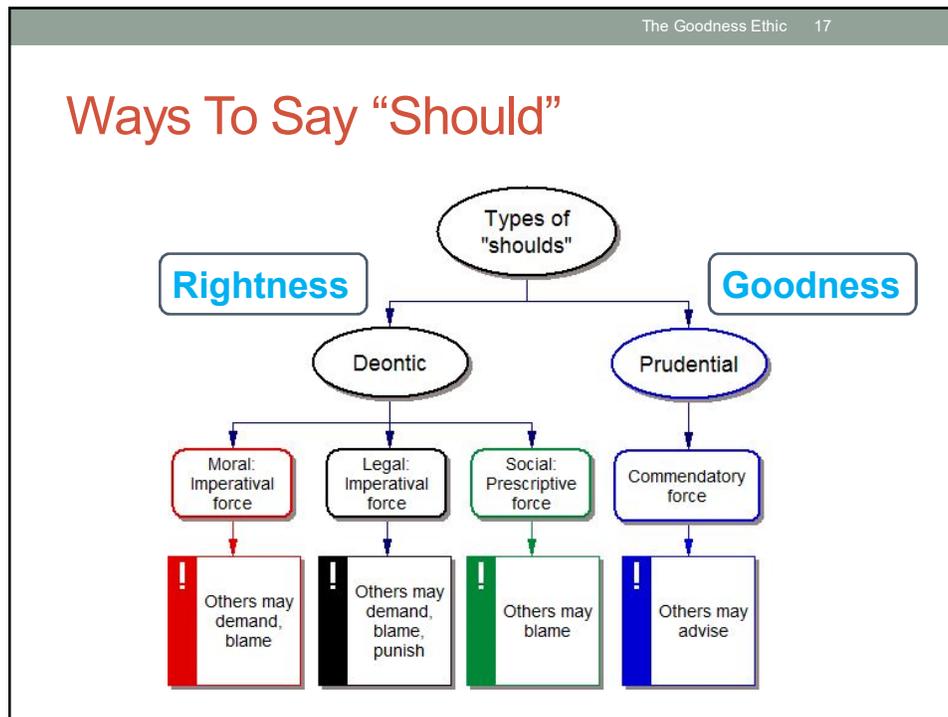
- Utilitarianism says we should maximize the pleasure and minimize the pain of all concerned.
- “The greatest good for the greatest number.”
- It looks at consequences but is actually in the Rightness paradigm. It says our moral duty is to maximize pleasure for all.
- Computing the greatest good is unworkable.
- Goodness Ethic: Maximize the good for all so far as you can determine at the time, without excessive deliberation.
- Do so not because it is your duty but because it will benefit you.

Goodness is Contextual

- What is good for an organism or a person or a tool at one time or place might not be good at another time or place.
- The context of human beings is that we are
 - In the world
 - With other people
 - Capable of self-knowledge
- We have a limited perspective, so just do the best you can to promote goodness in the situation you find yourself in.

The Right

- An act is justified on the basis of a quality or characteristic of the act itself regardless of its consequences.
- That quality is conformance to rules and regulations.
 - We apply a rule to determine what to do.
 - Non-ethical: the right answer to a math problem.
 - Ethical: the right answer to a moral problem.
- Deontological, from *deon*, duty.
- Central concerns: identifying the rules and obeying them.



The Goodness Ethic 18

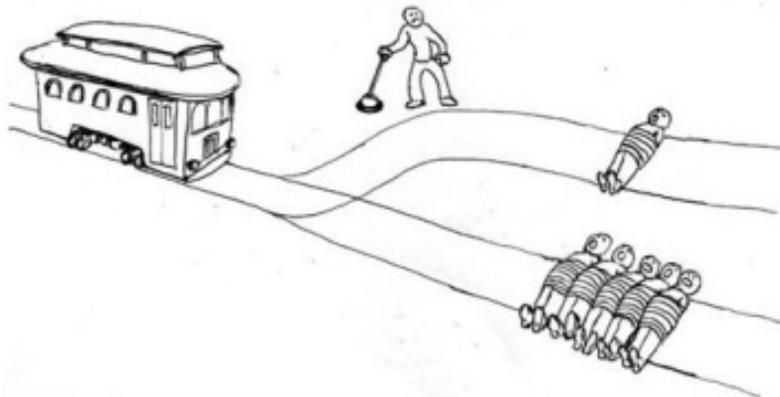
What Is Morality?

- Morality is a system of rules for how people are supposed to act.
- Under these rules some things are forbidden, others are allowed but not required, and others are mandatory.
- We have to have rules for getting along with each other.
- All cultures have moral codes, but the codes differ from culture to culture. Example: honor killing.
- Everyone has a sense of morality. The details can vary from culture to culture, but everyone has one. We all have intuitive judgments about whether something is right or wrong.

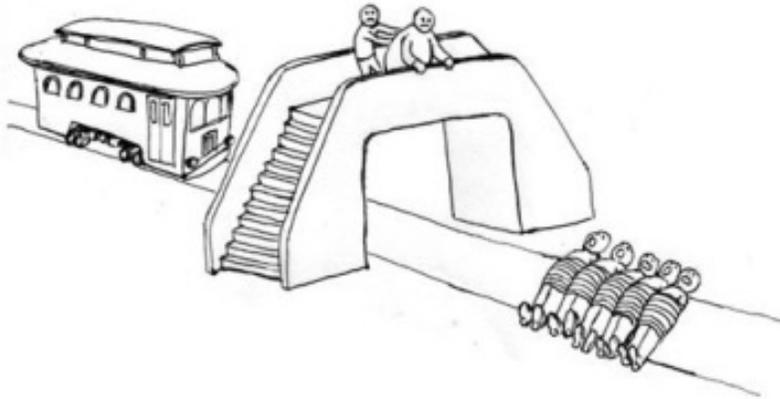
Characteristics of Moral Judgment

- **Cognitive:** Moral rules are taken to be universal and objective.
- **Behavioral:** We blame and praise people, punish and reward them, based on the moral rules.
- **Emotional:**
 - We feel righteous when we obey the rules and guilty when we don't.
 - We feel angry or resentful at those who don't obey them.
 - We feel a desire to recruit others to obey them.
- (This is a purely descriptive account.)

Trolley Problem – 1



Trolley Problem – 2



Moral Intuition

- The trolley problem was originally formulated by Phillipa Foot in 1967.
- Since then it has been posed to over 200,000 people of all walks of life from 100 countries.
- Most people say “Yes” to the first scenario and “No” to the second even though the consequences are the same.
- And they have trouble justifying their choice.
- People make a moral choice first and justify it afterwards.
- Most of our moral judgments are “hot cognition,” not thought out carefully.
- We have moral intuitions. Feelings of approval or disapproval pop into our minds without deliberate thought.

Six Domains of Moral Intuition

- From research by Jonathan Haidt and others
 - *The Righteous Mind* (2012)
 - *The Happiness Hypothesis* (2006)
- Caring and prevention of harm
- Fairness and reciprocity
- In-group loyalty
- Authority and respect
- Purity and sanctity
- Liberty and oppression

Evolutionary Roots

- Apes and monkeys show concern for caring and fairness.
- Survival depends on how animals fare within their group.
 - Cooperation: concerted action and information sharing.
 - Competition for resources: dominance strategies and deception.
- “It is in the social domain ... that one expects the highest cognitive achievements. Selection must have favored mechanisms to evaluate the emotional states of others and quickly respond to them.” – Frans deWaal
- The most potent force to bring a sense of community is enmity toward outsiders.

Functions of Moral Rules

- What are moral rules for?
- Between people: to promote and regulate social cooperation.
 - We need rules of behavior so we can get along with each other.
- Within each person: to promote and regulate personal motivation and psychology.
 - Morality helps us decide between competing motivations.
 - It enables us to be constructive participants in life with other people.

Ontology of Moral Rules

- *Ontology*: how things exist, their manner of being,
- *Moral Realism*: Moral rules really exist apart from our perception of them.
 - Evidence: Universality of certain moral intuitions. The rules certainly seem to exist.
- *Moral Anti-Realism*: No they don't.
 - Evidence: Culture-specificity. Honor killing is an example.
- *Social Construction*: Moral rules are realities that are socially constructed within a social group. Everybody agrees (more or less) on what they are, everybody treats them the same way and everybody acts as if they are real.

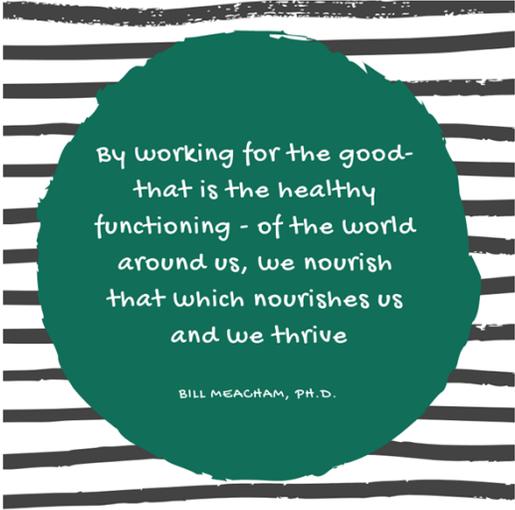
Meta-ethics

- How shall we decide which language game to play?
- If we ask which is better, we presuppose the Goodness paradigm.
 - We can say that people who adopt an ethic of goodness will be healthier and happier than those who adopt an ethic of rightness, but that assumes that goodness is paramount.
- If we ask which is right, we presuppose the Rightness paradigm.
 - We can say that people who adopt an ethic based on being right are morally superior to those who don't, but that assumes that rightness is paramount.
- Not just a theoretical question. Should you lie to protect a Jew from the Nazis?

What Shall We Do?

- Purely descriptive accounts of morality do not tell us how to act. “Is-ought” problem.
- If moral rules are just social constructs, why should we obey them?
- You can't avoid having moral intuitions, but you can choose what to attach them to.
- Look at the consequences of obedience or disregard.
- Think in terms of goodness, not rightness.
- Moral rules that promote well-being are worth following; moral rules that don't, aren't.

The Goodness Ethic



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