

Mapping the Goodness Genome

Larry Moffitt
October 23, 2013

Can we sequence the DNA of goodness? Does the goodness gnome even exist?



The falling “Newton’s apple” that triggered this for me, was the onset of autumn.

Standing on the doorstep of winter’s sleep is strangely invigorating. Autumn is the season when everything does a lingering waltz toward dormancy and death. But even while prepping for our long nap, blazing displays of orange and red leaves set against skies of the deepest robin’s egg blue, thrill our souls to the rafters. Seasonally it’s bedtime, and yet we are jazzed, as though we had suddenly decided to drink coffee at 10 p.m. That’s the paradox of autumn.

If spring is a lime green Corvette with the top down, autumn is a bright yellow one of those.

Energy, happiness and goodness are cousins, each playing “can you top this” with the others. I’m not going to twirl around like Julie Andrews in a Bavarian mountain meadow, but the energy I get from walking under red and orange leaves stimulates me to consider how goodness operates. And how it is transmitted from one person to another.

Whatever else it is, goodness is a viral infection.

The search for the goodness gnome is a matter of sifting through clues. Sometimes the negative spaces, where goodness isn’t, help reveal where it is. In the way that shadows can show us what light is doing, what do the times when there is little or no goodness to be found, tell us about its adaptive powers? One of the darker parts of U.S. history was when the forefathers of some of us were committing genocide on the American Indians, and enslaving blacks.

It’s natural to wonder what God was thinking. If your worldview includes the notion that God loves all people...

What?! But not Democrats, right?



Ponder the enigma of a Democrat-loving God.

Let’s all remain calm. Let’s suppose for a minute we’re all in this together.

If we assume God cares, it is not a huge stretch to imagine that ninety-nine percent of human history must have been unspeakable torture for God to observe. There is so little goodness out there, even on the good days, it would be easy to conclude that we’re on our own. Or that God has attention deficit disorder, or is impotent or non-existent.

Is there even such a thing as a goodness genome? Good question.

Incredibly, and in the face of all the crap going on, intuition still says yes. It may just be that God is

insanely patient with everyone. If God were to smite humankind for the atrocities we commit, there would soon be nobody left, and we would all be stuck in the slime pits of hell. Then who would be left to comfort, and atone for, history’s shattered victims?

M. L. King said the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. I take that as an article of faith, for the sake of life’s victims.

It sickens my heart to think that Declaration-first-drafting Thomas Jefferson was a slave owner. It required a bloody, fratricidal war to atone for slavery, and some say the matter still isn’t settled. We came close to being permanently divided into two countries – north and south. Had that happened, I seriously doubt America would have been cohesive enough to defeat the Nazis 80 years later. I doubt we would

have been able to oversee the collapse of global communism, a scourge that owns all the records for mass murder.

But that was then, and the goodness genome mutates to accommodate the unique challenges of this age.



Goodness has always been in short supply, even on the good days.

We are frogs, who were put into a kettle of cold water in the 60s and placed over a low fire. Today we are immersed in a hypersexualized rolling boil. Community standards are in tatters. Christianity is on the ropes, utterly unable to control its collective, ecclesiastical penis.

If only there were an enemy race we could dehumanize on a recruiting poster. But there isn't. As Pogo said in the cartoons, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

At exactly the instant I am thinking of all this, I walk out of Barnes & Noble (where I saw the Pogo cartoon) and find myself directly in front of the large display window of Victoria's Secret. Right on cue, the culture shows up and I realize this essay is now writing itself.

The lingerie model in the high-resolution billboard photo, way bigger than life-size, is wearing a smile along with key lime green panties and a pushup bra worthy of Mauna Loa.

Her belly button is the size of Dead-Eye Dick's eye patch, and her other parts are to the same scale. And that's basically nothing compared to other things going on in public.

Goodness has to contain a chromosome for self-governance to offset the absence of external societal standards. A lack of standards puts people in the position of having to define goodness for themselves, unless they have a faith community or tradition to look to for guidance. Therefore, goodness has to be up to the task. It has to mutate to protect a child surrounded 24/7 by unrelenting internet porn, desensitizing graphic violence and classroom demos on how to put a condom on a cucumber. At least until the popular culture stops trying to outdo the fall of Rome.

The evolution of goodness may be manifesting in thinning the barriers between this world and the next, allowing for a person who exercises introspection, to get a clearer sense of right and wrong, and where they stand on what has been called the "Hitler-Gandhi scale of evil-to-good."

The way it was in the old days, when you died you would meet Mr. Death.

"Hello, Death Nim."

"Here you go, son," and he would hand you a big fortune cookie. You would open it and inside it would tell you whether to pack your bags for heaven or hell. And that would be it.



Today, with some introspection, I believe it is possible to be aware in advance, what will be your fate in the so-called "afterlife." I chalk it up to growing harmonization between the physical and the spiritual, and the evolution of goodness, caused partly by the continuing development of humanity's spiritual consciousness. This is something people of all different faiths, politics and sexual orientations are sensing – at least those willing to speak to me – and so I feel emboldened to suggest it as a positive mutation in the genome.

Many religious traditions believe that an anthropomorphic, sentient being God is firmly in the driver's seat. I recognize an engaged God, but I also

think goodness can function, grow and mutate very well in the hands of people and their consciences. I believe God gives us more responsibility than we think. Or want.

I personally find this scary because much of the responsibility is on the individual to clean up his or her act. It always has been, of course, but now it feels more like working without a net. Deep down in the dust bunnies of our soul, we know right from wrong. When I arrive at the Pearly Gates the excuse that I wasn't warned, won't hold up.

My conclusion, therefore...

Goodness exists. It's a force as dependable as toast falling jellyside down.

We were given a conscience in order to govern ourselves. That doesn't leave us a lot of wiggle room because its only rule is not that I look good, but in fact be good. Does this mean there is no fudge factor? Are we talking about the end of bullshit? Of course not. Not as long as an Irishman or Texan still draws breath. The fudge factor, the slack in the line, the wiggle room that still exists, is called forgiveness. It doesn't completely let us off the hook because we still have to want forgiveness for it to come into play, and we have to make a sincere grovel before those we have harmed. Forgiveness is a necessary marker in the goodness genome.

The end of politics? Hard to imagine, although who is to say how far goodness can evolve? Wouldn't it be interesting to elect a U.S. President by drawing straws among qualified candidates? Imagine a process presided over by people above reproach, who are guided by their fully involved conscience in unity with God himself... herself...