PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH · DISCIPLESHIP · CULTURE

A Weighted Average of Good

Can a machine learn right from wrong by averaging humanity? Athens, Babel, Elijah's question, and the One who alone is good

A discipleship article responding to Krysta Fauria, "To make AI morally good, tech companies are turning to religion. But some say it isn't that simple," Associated Press, October 25, 2026. Scripture: Septuagint (LXX) and Greek New Testament with the ESV.

The story

The companies building the most powerful artificial intelligence have run into a question they cannot code their way out of: how do you teach a chatbot right from wrong? More and more, they are asking clergy, philosophers and scholars of religion. At the Vatican's presentation of Pope Leo XIV's encyclical on AI, Anthropic co-founder Chris Olah said, "These are not questions a lab can answer. They are questions traditions like yours have carried for millennia." Anthropic says it has met with people from more than fifteen religious and cross-cultural groups, and that it wants its model to draw "from a full range of viewpoints — religious, secular, political — with equal depth and rigor." OpenAI's Sam Altman put the goal more bluntly: ChatGPT should reflect "that weighted average, or whatever, of humanity's moral view."

The AP report gathers the objections, and they come from scholars, not preachers. The anthropologist Webb Keane warns against treating religion as "a rule book" of extractable principles, cut off from the doctrine, worship and relationships in which people actually live it. Paolo Carozza, who studies Catholic social thought, worries that AI does not let traditions meet in an organic way but "just throws it all together, mixes it all up, and therefore makes sense of none of it."

A Christian can be glad these questions are being asked, and should be honest that the critics have put their finger on something real. But Scripture goes further than either side. It does not merely say that averaging religions is untidy. It says that goodness is not an average at all. Goodness has a name.

1. The right question, asked in Athens

The scene in the article is an old one. Intelligent, curious people gather the world's religious ideas, listen to all of them with respect, and hope to distil something wise. One participant described the meetings as "pretty nerdy … in a good way," like a good college campus. Paul stood in a room like that:

ACTS 17:22 · GREEK NT / ESV

Σταθεὶς δὲ Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου ἔφη· Ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ·

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

δεισιδαιμονεστέρους, "very religious," can also carry the sense "very superstitious." Paul chooses a word that is polite on the surface and leaves the question open.

ACTS 17:23 · GREEK NT / ESV

διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο· Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

The altar read Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ, "To an unknown god."

Notice what Paul does. He does not mock the Athenians for asking. He credits them with seeking, and then he does something no panel of fifteen traditions can do: he names the God they were reaching for and calls them to Him. The church's place in this conversation is the same. We are not one more input to be weighted. We are witnesses to a Person.

Olah is right that these are not questions a lab can answer. Scripture says where the answer begins:

PROV 9:10 · LXX / ESV

ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος κυρίου καὶ βουλὴ ἁγίων σύνεσις

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Where the texts differ: the Hebrew and the ESV have "the knowledge of the Holy One is insight"; the LXX reads "the counsel of the holy ones (saints) is understanding." Both begin with "the fear of the LORD."

1 COR 1:21 · GREEK NT / ESV

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

2. Can goodness be averaged?

Altman's phrase deserves to be taken seriously, because it is an honest statement of a whole worldview: if there is no God who has spoken, then the best available guide to right and wrong is what most people, weighted somehow, think. The Law of Moses addressed that idea directly:

EXOD 23:2 · LXX / ESV

οὐκ ἔσῃ μετὰ πλειόνων ἐπὶ κακίᾳ οὐ προστεθήσῃ μετὰ πλήθους ἐκκλῖναι μετὰ πλειόνων ὥστε ἐκκλῖναι κρίσιν

You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice,

The LXX's πλειόνων is literally "the more," that is, the majority: "You shall not be with the majority for evil." The verse warns against the crowd three times: twice "the more," once "the multitude."

A weighted average also raises a question it cannot answer: **who sets the weights?** Whoever decides that one moral view counts for more than another is already using a standard of good that did not come from the average. Israel knew what moral life looked like without that standard:

DEUT 12:8 · LXX / ESV

οὐ ποιήσετε πάντα ἃ ἡμεῖς ποιοῦμεν ὧδε σήμερον ἕκαστος τὸ ἀρεστὸν ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ

"You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes,

PROV 14:12 · LXX / ESV

ἔστιν ὁδὸς ἡ δοκεῖ ὀρθὴ εἶναι παρὰ ἀνθρώποις τὰ δὲ τελευταῖα αὐτῆς ἔρχεται εἰς πυθμένα ᾅδου

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Where the texts differ: the ESV's "the way to death" is the LXX's "the depths of Hades." The LXX also has "seems right among men" (plural) — a way that seems right to a crowd.

ISA 5:20 · LXX / ESV

οὐαὶ οἱ λέγοντες τὸ πονηρὸν καλὸν καὶ τὸ καλὸν πονηρόν οἱ τιθέντες τὸ σκότος φῶς καὶ τὸ φῶς σκότος οἱ τιθέντες τὸ πικρὸν γλυκὺ καὶ τὸ γλυκὺ πικρόν

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Scripture has already shown us the one time all humanity spoke with one voice and pooled its wisdom into one project:

GEN 11:4 · LXX / ESV

καὶ εἶπαν δεῦτε οἰκοδομήσωμεν ἑαυτοῖς πόλιν καὶ πύργον οὗ ἡ κεφαλὴ ἔσται ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ποιήσωμεν ἑαυτοῖς ὄνομα πρὸ τοῦ διασπαρῆναι ἐπὶ προσώπου πάσης τῆς γῆς

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

ποιήσωμεν ἑαυτοῖς ὄνομα: "let us make for ourselves a name."

GEN 11:6 · LXX / ESV

καὶ εἶπεν κύριος ἰδοὺ γένος ἓν καὶ χεῖλος ἓν πάντων καὶ τοῦτο ἤρξαντο ποιῆσαι καὶ νῦν οὐκ ἐκλείψει ἐξ αὐτῶν πάντα ὅσα ἂν ἐπιθῶνται ποιεῖν

And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

γένος ἓν και ` χεῖλος ἓν: “one race and one lip” — perfect consensus.

Babel was not a failure of cooperation. It was the most unified moment in human history, and God did not bless it, because a united humanity reaching for heaven on its own terms is still humanity on its own terms. Paul gathers the verdict of the Psalms on the human average:

ROM 3:10 · GREEK NT / ESV

καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι Οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς,

as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;

ROM 3:11 · GREEK NT / ESV

οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ συνίων, οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν·

no one understands; no one seeks for God.

Be fair to the average, though. Scripture does not say that the moral views of the nations are worthless. There is a reason almost every culture condemns murder, theft and betrayal:

ROM 2:15 · GREEK NT / ESV

οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων,

They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

συνειδήσεως: “conscience,” literally a knowing-with. Paul says the work of the law is written there — by God, not by vote.

That is why the average contains real light. But Paul says in the same breath that conscience both accuses and excuses, and in the chapter before that people “suppress the truth” (Rom 1:18). Averaging the light together with the suppression does not give you the light. It gives you something grey.

3. Not a rulebook: the scholars are right, and so is Jesus

Webb Keane objects that religion is treated as "a rule book" you can lift out of the life that holds it. On that point Scripture stands with him. A young man once came to Jesus wanting the right rule for eternal life. Jesus answered with a Person:

> **MARK 10:18 · GREEK NT / ESV**
>
> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός.
>
> And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.
>
> *οὐδει `ς ἀγαθο `ς ει μη ` εἷς ὁ θεός: "no one is good except one, God." Not the many, not the average: one.*

In the Bible, goodness is not first a list. It is the character of God, and a human being becomes good by knowing Him and walking with Him:

> **MIC 6:8 · LXX / ESV**
>
> εἰ ἀνηγγέλη σοι ἄνθρωπε τί καλόν ἢ τί κύριος ἐκζητεῖ παρὰ σοῦ ἀλλ' ἢ τοῦ ποιεῖν κρίμα καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἔλεον καὶ ἕτοιμον εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι μετὰ κυρίου θεοῦ σου
>
> He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
>
> *Where the texts differ: the ESV's "walk humbly with your God" is in the LXX "be ready to walk with the Lord your God." In both, the requirement ends in a relationship, not a rule.*

> **MATT 22:37 · GREEK NT / ESV**
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> ὁ δὲ ἔφη αὐτῷ· Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου·
>
> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

> **MATT 22:39 · GREEK NT / ESV**
>
> Δευτέρα δὲ ὁμοία αὐτῇ· Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.
>
> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

God's answer to rule-keeping that does not reach the heart was never a better rulebook. It was a new heart:

JER 31:33 · LXX JER 38:33 / ESV

ὅτι αὕτη ἡ διαθήκη ἣν διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ισραηλ μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκείνας φησὶν κύριος διδοὺς δώσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν γράψω αὐτούς καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονταί μοι εἰς λαόν

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Septuagint numbering: this verse is Jeremiah 38:33 in the LXX, which orders the chapters of Jeremiah differently. Where the texts differ: the Hebrew has "my law" (singular); the LXX has "my laws."

2 COR 3:6 · GREEK NT / ESV

ὃς καὶ ἱκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος, τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτέννει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζῳοποιεῖ.

who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." A machine can be given the letter. It can be given a great many letters. What it is being given is moral *text*, and the letter alone has never made anyone good.

4. "Mixes it all up": Samaria did this first

Carozza's worry is that AI will throw every tradition together until each loses what makes it itself. Scripture has a precise record of a people who did exactly that after the northern kingdom fell:

2 KGS 17:33 · LXX / ESV

τὸν κύριον ἐφοβοῦντο καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς αὐτῶν ἐλάτρευον κατὰ τὸ κρίμα τῶν ἐθνῶν ὅθεν ἀπῴκισεν αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖθεν

So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.

The LXX calls this book 4 Kingdoms.

"They feared the LORD but also served their own gods" is a weighted average. It was not tolerance. It was the end of knowing who God is. Elijah put the choice to Israel in the plainest words in the Old Testament:

1 KGS 18:21 · LXX / ESV

καὶ προσήγαγεν Ηλιου πρὸς πάντας καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ηλιου ἕως πότε ὑμεῖς χωλανεῖτε ἐπ' ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς ἰγνύαις εἰ ἔστιν κύριος ὁ θεός πορεύεσθε ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ εἰ δὲ ὁ Βααλ αὐτός πορεύεσθε ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη ὁ λαὸς λόγον

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.

The LXX calls this book 3 Kingdoms. Its χωλανεῖτε ἐπ' ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς ἰγνύαις pictures a man “limping on both knees.” The Hebrew word behind the ESV’s “opinions” is related to the word for “branches,” and some scholars render it “crutches.” Either way, Israel was hobbling between two.

A model trained to give every tradition “equal depth and rigor” on the question of what is good will always limp between opinions, because it has been told not to choose. Christians are free to be courteous about other faiths and must be honest about them, but we cannot pretend the question is open:

JOHN 14:6 · GREEK NT / ESV

λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή· οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι' ἐμοῦ.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

ACTS 4:12 · GREEK NT / ESV

καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἡ σωτηρία, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄνομά ἐστιν ἕτερον ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν τὸ δεδομένον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐν ᾧ δεῖ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

5. How good character actually forms

Anthropic’s blog post says what it is really after is “careful, accumulated thinking on how good character actually forms.” That is a good question, and the New Testament answers it directly. Character is not accumulated from opinions. It is formed in a person through suffering, the Spirit, and beholding Christ:

ROM 5:3 · GREEK NT / ESV

οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν, εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ θλῖψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται,

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

ROM 5:4 · GREEK NT / ESV

ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμήν, ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα.

and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

δοκιμήν, "character," is character that has been tested and proven — the way metal is proved in the fire.

GAL 5:22 · GREEK NT / ESV

Ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἀγάπη, χαρά, εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία, χρηστότης, ἀγαθωσύνη, πίστις,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

ROM 12:2 · GREEK NT / ESV

καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός, εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

συσχηματίζεσθε: "do not be conformed," pressed into the shape of the age. μεταμορφοῦσθε: "be transformed."

2 COR 3:18 · GREEK NT / ESV

ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

μεταμορφούμεθα: the same verb as Romans 12:2. We are transformed by beholding the glory of the Lord.

Fruit grows from a root. Paul calls these things the fruit "of the Spirit," not the fruit of good data. And Romans 12:2 names the very danger a weighted average poses: to be conformed to the age. An average of the age *is* the age. The Christian is told not to take its shape, but to be changed by beholding the Lord until we bear His image.

6. Where Scripture agrees and where it corrects

1. **Agree: this is not a question a lab can answer.** Right and wrong are not discovered by engineering. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10).
2. **Agree: religion is not a rulebook.** Keane is right. In Scripture goodness is the character of God, known in a relationship and written on the heart (Jer 31:33).
3. **Agree: throwing everything together destroys it.** Carozza is right. Samaria feared the LORD and served its own gods, and lost both (2 Kgs 17:33).

4. **Correct: goodness is not an average.** “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). A majority is not a moral authority (Exod 23:2), and a perfectly united humanity built Babel (Gen 11:6).
5. **Correct: “equal depth” is not neutral.** To treat every answer to “What is good?” as equally weighted is itself an answer: that no one has the truth. Scripture says Someone is the truth (John 14:6).
6. **Be honest about what Scripture does not say.** The Bible does not tell us how a computer program should be written or what an AI company ought to put in its training. It does tell us that a tool cannot be a moral authority over people, and that character is formed by the Spirit of God in a living person.

In one sentence

A machine can be taught an average of what people think is good, but only God is good, and goodness is not averaged into us; it is written on the heart by the Spirit and formed in us as we behold Christ.

A word for daily life

- **Do not outsource your conscience.** When a chatbot answers a moral question, it is giving you a blend. Test it: “but test everything; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thess 5:21).
- **Be a Berean, not an Athenian.** Athens collected every idea. Berea checked what it heard against the Scriptures: “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11).
- **Do not limp.** Where in your own life are you trying to keep everyone’s view at once? Elijah’s question is for you too: “If the LORD is God, follow him.”
- **Pray for the people building these tools.** They are asking real questions, and some of them are honestly seeking. Paul spoke to Athens with courtesy and with the gospel. So can we.

For reflection and discussion

1. Paul credited the Athenians for seeking (Acts 17:22–23) and then named the God they did not know. How can we speak to people who ask moral questions in a way that does both?

2. Exodus 23:2 says not to follow the majority into evil. Where does “what most people think” shape your sense of right and wrong more than Scripture does?

3. Jesus answered a question about the right rule by pointing to God Himself (Mark 10:18). Why is goodness a Person and not only a list?

4. “They feared the LORD but also served their own gods” (2 Kgs 17:33). What are the “own gods” that people in our church are tempted to keep alongside the Lord?

5. Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 say we are changed by what we behold. What are you beholding most hours of the week, and what shape is it pressing you into?

Lord God, You alone are good. We thank You that You have not left us to guess at right and wrong by counting votes, but have spoken, and have written Your law on the hearts of Your people. Forgive us when we follow the crowd, when we limp between two opinions, and when we keep other gods beside You. Give wisdom to the men and women who build these new tools, and give them hearts that seek You. Make us Bereans who search the Scriptures daily. Form in us the fruit of Your Spirit, and as we behold the glory of Your Son, change us into His image from one degree of glory to another. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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