Is There Morality Beyond Good and Evil? A Study of Meta-Ethical Concepts in Brazilian Amerindian languages Suruwahá and Kaingang

Braulia Ribeiro, Yale Divinity School, US

ABSTRACT

Every language in the world manifests a particular way to conceptualize the world through its semantic and syntactic structures. Words "embody" and organize concepts in distinct ways, creating meaning schemas, correspondences, and constraints that are translated to the life of the speakers in their daily quest to function in society. Western cultures developed these deep layers of meaning into what we commonly call "philosophy" and "theology." The conceptual notions that configure our semantic structures are hidden in language but nonetheless command our theoretical discussions. In Western languages, the notion of Good and Evil is presented through two opposing nouns. They are both abstract nouns which infer a binary system with opposing semantic fields. This lexical phenomenon reflects a particular mythological view, the Indo-European, of two gods of similar power, a Good and an Evil god.

Is there another way to frame the discussion, outside of this binary paradigm? What can we see beyond the opposition of Good and Evil if we use the conceptual paradigm reflected in languages that don't share the same dualistic heritage? This paper will propose an initial discussion of metaethics anchored in languages outside of the Proto-Indo-European spectrum. I will explore Reale's discussion on the difference between mythology and philosophy and Radin's exposé of indigenous philosophy to make a case for the validity of philosophical investigation using indigenous languages. Using languages outside of the Western philosophical tradition, Kaingang, and Suruwahá, spoken by small indigenous populations in Brazil, I will demonstrate a few interesting features of the use of a non-binary paradigm to dialogue about Good and Evil.

Keywords: Language, Philosophy, Indigenous Languages, Mythology, Philosophy, Ethics, Indigenous Languages Of Brazil, Kaingang, Suruwahá, Moral Philosophy, Linguistics

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores meta-ethical perceptions expressed by two indigenous languages of Brazil, Kaingang, and Suruwahá. Kaingang belongs to the Macro-Jê trunk and Suruwahá from the small isolated family Arawá. (Appendix 1). A group of 100 autonomous and isolated Indians speaks the Suruwahá language. Kaingang is spoken by a population of around 30,000 people, spread out over São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and the Rio Grande do Sul, the three states in the southern part of Brazil.

It is important in this introduction to raise the question about the relevance of the study of indigenous languages concepts and its possible contribution to the study of philosophy. Is it fair to elevate to the condition of philosophical thought, the beliefs, practices or intuitions embedded in

the languages of people that do not seem to have a philosophical concern and do not claim pure reason as a means of observing and making sense of the world? Can we identify as philosophy the non-systematized ideas that emerge from the life of a collective group instead of from the musings of a "lonely person" dedicated to the task of "thinking the world" as we tend to see in the West? This paper will begin by dealing with these questions. It would be pointless to present the indigenous language's perspectives on ethical philosophy without first making the case or its contribution to the discipline as a whole. I will look into Reale (1985) and Radin (1927), considering the pros and cons of the possible philosophical contribution of the universe opened by different languages. I will state the difference between this investigation that is strictly linguistic, concerned with the semantic trails, the conceptual implications of words, and investigations of other natures, for example, one of the Brazilian anthropologists. The main one being Amerindian Perspectivism proposed by Viveiros de Castro (2015), that is a philosophical system that emerges from the tribal beliefs, customs, and collective lifestyle, but it is framed and created by the researcher.

The second part will present a discussion on the origins and implications of the Good-Evil binomial for the study of metaethics. I briefly demonstrate the mythology of the Proto-Indo-European as a possible underlying influence in the vocabulary and semantic schema used by Western languages to frame their moral universe within the Good and Evil dualism.

In the third and fourth parts, I will present the different metaethics perspectives suggested by a few indigenous tribes of Brazil. There are several possible ways to investigate metaethical and ethical notions in these cultures. Detailed ethnographic work is the most common tool. Another consistent route of investigation, not so common, is the analysis of language clues, the semantic trails, and the metaphors used to represent virtue, Good and Evil, right and wrong. This is my method of choice in this paper, and it is coherent with my language-based criticism of the influence of Indo-European mythology in Western philosophy.

As I was trying to collect data from linguists currently working among these languages, I faced a challenge. Not all the linguists seemed to be taking into consideration the differences between the Good and Evil schema of English and Portuguese and the semantic schema of the language they are studying. Mistakes can easily happen. In the context of bilingual language learning correlations can mislead the student. Most of the linguists working or who have worked

in depth with Amerindian languages are also Bible translators. They use functional equivalencies to understand and translate to and from the native language. A detailed semantic portrait of the target language is not necessary. That is not a failure on the part of these linguists, but rather a characteristic of human communication. If I come across the word "beautiful" in a phrase like "it is beautiful to provide food for your baby son," my immediate reaction is to translate the word beautiful as "good."

Monolingual learning is different. In monolingual environments like the Suruwahá tribe, the intuition about the original meaning of the word is acquired not by a direct correlation, but through a gamut of different clues understood by the linguist in an osmotic process. I owe the language data used in this article to the linguists Marcia Suzuki and Kaegso Hery, who learned Suruwahá and Kaingang monolingually, and in doing so, were able to acquire an emic perception of the system. I extract my conclusions in this paper from her intuitions of both languages, but also my own experience learning the Suruwahá language monolingually, while living with them from 1984 to 1985, and later from 1989 to 1990. To confirm the notions found in the language, I have used chants (poetry) produced by the Suruwahá's philosophers collected by anthropologist Miguel Aparício, who also worked among the Suruwahá and learned the language in the same monolingual manner. He collected many narratives from the tribal storytellers, some mythological and some that might be considered oral history. The analysis of these narratives intersecting with the linguistic data helped me to make the semantic conclusions for the analysis of the metaethical system of the Suruwahá tribe. The Kaingang language data comes from the family of linguists Kaegso and Eipeen Hery. Kaegso has lived among the Kaingang since early childhood and learned the language in monolingual immersion. Eipeen provided me with word tables, phrases, and texts around the theme of morality.

Mythology and Philosophical Thought

A name we frequently give to the philosophical production of non-western minorities, past or present, is mythology. What separates mythology from philosophical thought? This discussion can be somewhat dated for some philosophers, but it is necessary when we are investigation the philosophical potential of languages outside the traditional western philosophical spectrum. What is the difference between Thales of Miletus' (624-546 BC) declaration that the world is constituted by water, the single substance that is in everything, and the Hebrew Scriptures declaring that in

the beginning there was water and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters with its creative power? The historian Giovanni Reale (1985, 1:5) attributes to the Greeks the creation of philosophy. He argues that the variety of beliefs, religious cults, artistic manifestations, knowledge, technical abilities, political institutions, and military organizations that appear in the civilizations in the East prior to the Greeks, and in the Greek's culture as well, did not constitute philosophy. Philosophy appears as a separate, unequivocal phenomenon within Greek society.

Reale takes on the task of demystifying any possibility of the paternity of philosophical thought by the ancient Egyptian or Hebrew traditions. He explains that it was the Greeks themselves who took on the quest for proving the relation between the previous Eastern tradition and Greek philosophy. However, he mentions that the Neopythagorean Numenious referred to Plato as a *Greekified* version of Moses, and the Neo-Platonists that defended the view that the teachings of the Greek philosophers were elaborations of doctrines of Eastern origin that were received by prophets as a revelation from Eastern gods. (Reale 1985, 1:6) Reale refutes these arguments, stating that these analogies were not taken seriously or even speculated by the first historians and philosophers but had only begun to gain a modicum of credibility when the Greek philosophical movement *per se* started to derail in its final stage into a mystical and ascetic doctrine. Modern works that insist on tracing the origins of Greek philosophy to ancient Eastern traditions are nothing more than "works of fiction," according to Reale (1985, 1:7).

Reale is adamant because he wants to state the categorical difference between scientific philosophy and poetic, allegoric mythology. He insists that even the communication of a general "philosophical doctrine" from other nations to the Greeks would be impossible or difficult due to linguistic differences. In this sense, Reale is correct. The ancient Egyptian language, an Afro-Asiatic language, was closer to the Semitic Hebrew than it was to Greek. If there were any linguistic interaction, it would have been limited to commercial relations, a superficial knowledge that does not open doors for deep philosophical exchanges. He argues that Philosophy in the moment of its birth represented a *new form of spiritual expression such that in the moment itself in which it acquired content as a fruit of other forms of spiritual life, it structurally transformed it* (1985, 1:8).

What is Reale's concern? He wants to assert that philosophy as a science has a cognitive mechanism of its own, different from the common knowledge that is generated by religious debates

or collective agreements of ontology and axiology. He believes that Greek thought separates itself from the other traditions not just in the quantity of systematic philosophy, the Greeks were capable of producing, but in the quality of it. "Quality" in Reale's perspective seems to be relative to the method. Without method, the quality of the thought produced by Pre-Socratic philosophers would present little difference from the tradition of the East before it. Mathematics, for example, was a clear heritage from the Egyptians but was transformed in high abstract system when adopted by the Greeks.

The Greek philosophical debate was not committed to State power and State religion. It was not informed by a majority agreement and did not necessarily reflect the lifestyle of society but had the direct mission to question it. It required individual freedom of thought and freedom for empirical experimentation. Philosophy is occupied in explaining the totality of reality. It searches for rational explanations and has a purely theoretical interest. Reale admits the rational nature of Theogony of Hesiod, for example, but only the fact that when the myth is presented within a religious system, mythological thinking is active (1985, 1:29–30). However, Reale himself finds difficulty separating neatly scientific thinking from mythological thinking, as he admits that even Plato, when he states the myth of the soul, and Aristotle, as he describes the love that all things have for the unmoved Mover, are found guilty of mythologizing.

What is this aseptic separation that the historian Giovanni Reale is searching for? In a way, his emphatic, yet ambiguous categorizing of rational and mythological represents the perspective that the West has had on "mythological" knowledge. We want rational thought to "feel" different from religion, from emotion, from daily life. Nevertheless, starting with linguistic differences themselves, it is too much to expect that rational debate in languages non-Indo-European languages will feel "rational" enough for speakers of Indo-European languages. Even between Greek and English, there is a familiarity derived from the same linguistic origin. This semantic familiarity underlies our sense of how to construct logic, how to dissect language itself to understand it, and it is reflected in a gamut of linguistic and para-linguistic phenomena. This underlying semantic bias confounds the possibility of objectivity when examining concepts presented in other language systems. For our study of possible philosophies emerging from non-scientific societies, we want these philosophies to be hygienic, bleached of their smell of "primitivism." I am afraid that this categorization is an exposé of our Darwinian prejudices,

stretched to present itself as the thin tissue defined as pure rationality, the superior tool of evolved humans.

Amerindian Perspectivism

Most of the current anthropology related to Amerindian cultures adhere to Amerindian Perspectivism (hereafter referred to as AP). Viveiros de Castro's ethnography of the Araweté Indians (1984) was one of the first of the genre. Viveiros suggested that the Tupi, in this case, more specifically the Araweté, understand identity as non-corporeal perception subjected to a continuous process of incorporation of the Other. It is an identity affirmed by the exteriority of it, constantly moving toward the external ideal, and the final operator of personhood is death. He claims that death in that culture affects what is seen as a positive transformation, and the concepts of life and death are not oppositional. Later he developed this model extensively, claiming that a centripetal notion of personhood is the main characteristic of these groups. Before Viveiros de Castro, other anthropologists had already had some fundamental influence developing the basic theoretical orientation of AP. Lévi-Strauss had hinted of a similar understanding in some of his work—*"le reciprocité de perspectives òu j'ai vu le caractère propre de la pensée mythique"* (Eduardo Viveiros de Castro 1998). The scholar Kaj Arhem (Correa and Correa 1990), further developed the theory when describing the Makuna cosmology.

Primitive Man as Philosopher

Radin, in his seminal work "Primitive Man as Philosopher," discusses the difference between the "description of the beliefs and customs of the non-intellectual class" (1927, 4–5) among indigenous peoples, as many ethnologists seem to see as the only dimension of tribal thought, and what he believes to be the genuine philosophical production of individuals among these tribal groups, bearers of as much free-thinking capacity as anyone in the West. As much as Radin's categorization is frowned upon today because the word "primitive" carries the notions of the infamous social Darwinism, in my view, he is fairer in understanding the humanity of indigenous groups than today's AP scholars.

Radin, however, marvels at the incapacity of the ethnologists of his time to recognize rational features in indigenous peoples. Differing from Lévi-Bruhel, who labels indigenous societies as pre-logical, Radin says that in guarding themselves against over-intellectualizing indigenous peoples, and making them into their own image, ethnologists frequently fall into the

opposite trap, reducing: *most of the spiritual values of primitive civilizations to those of mere delight in sensations, to simple, unintegrated responses to an uncontrollable environment* (1927, 11). Ethnologists of Radin's time hesitate in seeing the possibility for individualization in tribal contexts. This is one area of reluctance that has left a scar that can be felt in today's AP work and other approaches to cultural anthropology. Freedom of thought, agency, and a perception of self are essential elements of philosophical thought. Therefore, one of the goals of Radin' book is to prove that the people's space he studied cultivated and exercised this freedom. Philosophical thought requires a sense of self-interiorization that AP seems to deny the Amerindians. Therefore, in this paper, I will not engage with the assumptions of AP or any other view that denies indigenous people this capacity. I want to attempt to bring these people and their metaethics universe closer, to glean from their intelligence and linguistic paradigms and open a door for them to enter into dialogue with the western philosophical tradition.

INDO-EUROPEAN MYTHOLOGY AND WESTERN GOOD AND EVIL
I decided to investigate the perceptions of morality and ethics provided by indigenous languages after realizing that much of the discussion in the West related to moral ethics was framed within the context of western languages. Western languages, including Greek and Sanskrit, descend from ~~the~~ Proto-Indo-European, and as such, share a few common syntactic and semantic features. Some of the features are indeed so general and date from so far in the past that they are not perceived through the lay assessment of the modern languages. However, one could argue that some of the similarities are important enough to filter through the eras and influence philosophical thought and constrain it to a common rut. I suggest that this might be the case with the binary opposition between "Good and Evil" that for millennia have driven the philosophical discussion of moral ethics. The historic, linguistic construct that is called Proto-Indo-European is a reflex of what in the distant past[1] was a language spoken by a group that shared the same culture, religion, beliefs,

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[1] Mallory and Adams (Mallory, James P. 2006) discuss the possible dates for the existence of the Proto-Indo-European language:

"…what is the latest date that Proto-Indo-European could have existed? This question is partly answered by examining the earliest date that any of the Indo-European groups did exist. The three earliest are Anatolian at c. 2000 BC, Indo-Iranian at c .1400 BC (Mitanni treaty), and Greek at c .1300 BC or somewhat earlier... If we presume a Proto-Indo-European that includes Anatolian (rather than the Indo-Hittite hypothesis, which makes Anatolian a sister of Indo-European rather than a daughter), then Proto-Indo-European

and values. These shared concepts remained indelibly expressed in their descendent languages. One of the characteristics of Indo-European mythology was an opposition between two equally powerful gods, a god of Good, and a god of Evil. This opposition generated a conceptual polarity in the idea of Good and Evil that is now found in the Western languages descended from the Proto-Indo-European.

Languages are depositories of knowledge and collective experience. Different languages do not represent the knowledge of the whole of humanity but the knowledge of particular groups, specific societies. Languages, in the same way as cultures, develop in a group-specific way. They reflect the collective experience of a particular group and their environment. Languages collect in their lexicon and consequently in the semantic system, and one can even argue, in their syntax, residues of the historical processes that comprise who the members of that particular speech community are, the collective choices they made, the way in which, functional or not, they decided the world would make sense.

The Indo-European Paradigm

The Indo-European ethical paradigm was preserved within its original semantic trails in most of the descendant languages. The basic conceptual frame was preserved. English and Portuguese[2] represent two different branches of Indo-European, and in both, we see duality.[3] This dualistic worldview is implicit in the language categories. In these languages, Good and Evil are metaphysical entities, and grammatically they are what we call abstract nouns. They both occupy the privileged category of noun, a full form word, and according to the semanticist John Lyons, carry propositional or descriptive meaning (Lyons 1981, 33).

In English, both words, "good" and "evil," like many other nouns, can be used across grammatical classes. They function as nouns or adjectives. When searching for the origin of the

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must be set before 2000 BC when Anatolian is historically attested. How long before? Once we ask this question, we enter the slippery world of intuitive extrapolation. The more cautious will not venture far. For example, Stefan Zimmer urges linguists and archaeologists not to use the word Proto-Indo-European for anything 'linguistic or archaeological' older than c. 2500 BC, but such caution, which in any case may well be misplaced, is not shared by most linguists who venture into the area of time depth."

2 English descends from the Balto-Slavo-Germanic branch and Portuguese from the Italo-Celto-Tocharian.
3 I did write about this in a prior paper "Language and Thought"

nouns "*good*" and "*evil*" in English, the Oxford dictionary will say that etymologically they were derived from adjectives. That makes sense in the context of Indo-European mythology. The words were the qualification of the bad and the good god. They qualified the actions and the influence of the gods in the universe, the general disposition of the two opposing cosmological forces. We can hypothesize based on the language evidence that, within time, the words used to designate the disposition of the two opposing gods and the quality of their actions created the reference for the birth of the noun. The name for the disposition of the gods in reference to their actions toward humans stretched to designate the abstract thing that referred to them, the metaphysical reality that was their "ambiance." What we call an abstract noun is actually a reference to a metaphysical concept. In Portuguese, for example, a language that has well defined and closed grammatical classes, the difference between the noun and the adjective is clear. The word for "*good*" –"bem" has a different form than the adjective "*bom*." The Good Shepherd is the "Bom" Pastor, the pastor that acts in the semantic zone of the abstract noun "*bem*." The word "*bem*" defines the ultimate virtue. The word for "*evil*"- "*mal*" is also spelled differently from its counterpart adjective or adverb. "Mal" is the abstract noun and used as an adverb. "Mau" is the adjective. Regardless of the phonological difference, Portuguese keeps the same semantic categories from Proto-Indo-Europeans as does the English language. Why is this important to notice? In allowing for a noun that refers to a metaphysical concept of something disparaged, disapproved or harmful, the language creates the idea of metaphysical "*evil*." Differing from the concept of "*good*," the concept of metaphysical evil is not as common. We can see it clearly in the following table:

Table 1

	English		**Portuguese**	
Noun	Evil	Good	Mal	Bem
Adjective	Bad	Good	Mau	Bom
Adverb	Bad	Well	Mal	Bem
Verb	Do evil	Do Good	Fazer o mal	Fazer o bem

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT
The Indo-European word 'good' can be considered either a portmanteau concept that would encompass all virtues, or be used in daily conversation as the Joker of virtue in a card game with an elastic semantic field. The type of 'good' it represents can be anything. It can be an aesthetical

meaning, it can be used in the context of an affectionate response, and it can express moral virtue. I suggest that "good" in English and Portuguese, the two Indo-European languages we are using as a basis for this discussion, works as an empty slot, that together with the word "evil" offers a dualistic template to allow the speakers to develop their thinking and their dialogue on morality. To dissect the semantic properties of the word 'good' in English, I have to recognize its direct opposition to 'evil' and recognize the elasticity of its semantic field. I also have to recognize that it is a substance of some kind, a standalone idea.

Good = substance (noun)$\rightarrow$ + (- Evil)+ Y meanings

In the indigenous languages presented in this paper, I have found the moral dialogue does not use the duality between good and evil and is not to be unspecified. The Sateré-Mawé, another group of the Amazon region, for example, are always searching for truth, the highest virtue. Everything considered untruthful is despised and discarded. All the elements of their world from events to people must have the seal of "truth," also translated to authenticity when referring to humans, or "reality" when referring to events. All the moral virtues for the Sateré-Mawé emanate from what they consider to be their original self, and all "good" persons are made to enjoy what is good (truth). In Suruwahá, the words for moral virtue are all reduced to one single qualifier: "done well." These two languages do not have a portmanteau or generic definition of 'good,' and their semantic properties are well specified.

To reach a cross-cultural definition of moral virtues, one has to consider, in addition to the semantic properties attached to the definition of each possible notion, how these virtues work in a hierarchy within a given ethical system. Bible-translator missionaries have investigated many different paradigms and struggled with the notion of a universal criterion to define moral virtue and sin. The anthropologist and missionary Dwayne Dye (1976) describes how he was tempted to translate works condemning the mistreatment of animals before he was able to translate any biblical scriptures because he was appalled by the way the Bahinemo people of Papua New Guinea with whom he lived treated their dogs. He eventually understood that they were not deeply insensitive and cruel as he initially felt, but simply had a different hierarchy of virtues than he did. Even if they accepted the Christian religion, they would still cultivate a notion of sin that contrasted with the average Christian from the West. An investigation of the notion commonly correlated with "good" is a positive step in exploring the different meanings and classifications of virtue in

other languages because the word correlated with "good" is usually the one linguists see used with more frequency in a broader range of sentences.

I am going to begin with the language of the Kaingang group that is part of the Macro-Jê language trunk. Viveiros (1984) considers the Jê groups the radical reverse of the Tupi. The Jê, and among them the Kaingang, have a stable sense of self, opposing the Tupi centripetal self that he believes to be derived from their well-defined kinship and social relations.

The Kaingang

In the Kaingang language, it is impossible to talk about Good and Evil in abstract terms. There is no noun for either Good or Evil. The lexical entries that refer to good and evil are adjective or dependent nouns in the nomenclature chosen by linguist Ursula Wiesemann (Wiesemann 1978), In this paper, I am going to refer to them as adjectives. It is important to observe that Kaingang is a non-agglutinative language, meaning that almost every syllable is a separate word. Kaingang is also a language that has the ergative-absolutive syntactic system as opposed to the nominative-accusative languages we are used to. Ergative languages privilege the Object instead of the Subject to give it the syntactic preeminence.[4]

According to Nietzsche's understanding of language syntax, Kaingang and other ergative-absolutive languages would allow for pure human relations, free from the "domineering syntax" of the nominative-accusative languages. They would be languages that do not imply in their syntax any level of grammatical domination of the master (the one who executes the action) over the slave (the one or the thing that receives or suffers the action) (F. W. Nietzsche 2000, loc 294). Of course, Nietzsche cannot be taken seriously by linguists, and to give him credit, I think he is being ironic and not posing a real argument. But if we take this seriously, we can say there is no evidence thus far that syntax, morphology, or any structural aspect of language has any relation to the depth of meaning or influence on culture. Just for fun, however, we could speculate that if Nietzsche were correct in his naïve use of this grammatical argument, we would expect to find the societies that speak languages with ergative-absolutive syntactic structure free from the hassles of humans overpowering each other. The implication of domination by the Agent/Subject over the

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4 The linguist Stephen Anderson explains: "In Ergative languages the morphological category to which the subject NP (Noun Phrase) of an intransitive verb belongs is shared not with the NP we expect to be the subject of the transitive verb, but rather with the NP we expect to be the object of the verb." (1976) See figure:

Patient/Object would not be implicit in every sentence. So… Are the Kaingang free from the need to dominate each other? My first guess is no, obviously no. The absence of the nominative-accusative structure does not translate to an absence of hierarchy in the morphology of society. For now, I will leave Nietzsche to rest in peace and focus on the idea of Good and Evil in Kaingang. The next table presents the main lexical entries translated to us as Good and Evil, or more precisely, good and bad since the abstract nouns are absent in the language. In the first column is the grammatical category of the word. Its phonemic transcription, marked by /slash marks/ follows in the second column, and the English translation, marked by 'single quotes' is in the third column.

Table 2

	Kaingang	Translation
Noun + adjective	/nén kórég/	'thing bad'
	/nén há/	'thing good'
Adjective	'há tũ' 'kórég' /jagy/ /ũ /	'good not' 'bad' 'painful/difficult' 'not normal or other'
Adverb	/há/	'well'
	/há tu/	'well not'
Verb	/nén kórég han/ /nén jagy han/	'thing bad do' 'thing difficult/painful do'
	/nén há han/	'thing good do'

In the first row, we see that to express a concept correspondent to our abstract notion of Good, in Kaingang, we have to use the word for thing and add the adjective. A person cannot *be* good or bad. The person carries the quality of being good or bad in a specific moment of time or related to a specific action. You cannot talk about anything good without associating it to a concrete noun, in this case, a generic word for a thing. That means that the idea of goodness is purely qualitative (adjectival) and not substantial. Looking at the next table that brings examples of sentences and other words for the general meaning of Good, we get a better picture.

Table 3

Meanings related to "Good"	
/sér/ /fi mỹ tóg sér tĩ/	'happy, fun' 'she - for - it - happy/fun - is' 'For her it is fun.'
/mỹsér/ *mỹ sér /mỹ sér nỹtĩm nĩ/	'to be happy' 'happy - be - (you pl.)' 'Be happy.'
/sĩnvĩ/ /fi kur vỹ sĩnvĩ nĩ/	'beautiful' 'she - clothes - beautiful - are' 'Her clothes are beautiful.'
/ki króm/ /jagnẽ mré ag tóg ki króm tũ nĩ/	'to fit, to get right, to agree, to adjust' 'one another - with - they - fit - not' 'They did not agree with one another.'
/ki krov/ /inh mỹ tóg ki krov nỹ/	'right, correct, fits well' 'me - for - it - right - is' 'For me this is right.'
/krĩ há/ /krĩ kãnhvy/ /krĩ kuprã/ /krĩ kusa/ /krĩ kãnhvy isóg nĩ/	'head - good = intelligent' 'head - light = worry free' 'head – empty – tranquil' 'head - cold = calm' *head - light - i - am 'I am in a peaceful state of mind'

The expressions for internal peace are all physical metaphors, and the ones for correctness or doing it right, relate to mutuality and belonging. The word /há/ 'good' contrasts with words used to qualify oddness, difficulty, painfulness, or abnormality. This next table shows some of these contrasts:

Table 4

Words related to evil/bad	
/kónãn/	'in a wrong way, harmful way' /fi vóg kónãn ag tóg mũ/ 'they - touch – wrong way - they - are' 'They did harm to her.'

Words related to evil/bad	
/vẽnh mỹ/	'weird, strange, not normal, odd' adjective and adverb /inh mỹ tóg vẽnh mỹ nỹ/ 'i - for - it - strange - is' 'That is strange to me.'
/jũ/	'angry' adjective /inh prũ fi tóg iso jũ jẽ/ 'i - wife - she - i - toward - angry - is' 'My wife is angry with me.'
/krĩ rỹ/ /krĩ kufy/ /krĩ ũ/ /krĩ kaga/ /krĩ tũ/ /krĩ vẽnh mỹ/	'head - hot = hot tempered' 'head - heavy = preoccupied' 'head - not normal = dumb' 'head - sick/hurt = headache' 'head - missing/not = crazy' 'head - strange = preoccupied, sad' adjectives /ti to fi tóg krĩ kufy han mũ/ 'he - toward - she - head - heavy - do - is' 'She is worried about him.'
/mỹ'a/	'ashamed' adjective /inh mỹ'a tóg tĩ/ 'i - shame - am' 'I am ashamed.'

Observing the words used to point to virtue and the words or physical metaphors pointing to evil, or bad, we can see some general characteristics of Kaingang:

There are no abstract nouns such as beauty, goodness, justice, courage; are all expressed through noun phrases indicating concrete metaphors.

For example, integrity or good character:

/jykre kuryj/   'a way of being (character, behavior) that is right, correct'

/jykre há/   'a way of being that is good, normal, proper, or harmonious'

/jykre pir/   'a way of being without duplicity'

At first glance, it is not difficult to infer that the lexical entry translated as 'good' in English is closer in meaning to what we define as "proper," "correct" or "adequat." The adjectives that identify the qualities that oppose it are related to adequacy, (strange, weird, abnormal), shame, and out of the common norm. The contrast to good—what is not good—is also understood as crooked, painful, or difficult. For example, a house is /há/ 'good' if it fits the cultural norms for a shelter,

has walls and a roof, but it needs to be complete. It is only /há/ if it is good in form and use. For the native speaker, Kaegso who provided the data, /há/ is more than proper or normal, because it has, as part of its properties, a positive meaning and implies fullness or completion. So, what is normal is not proper because it is adequate to the social norms. It is normal because it is harmonious it has reached its full stage of completeness or fullness of purpose, form, and meaning. When food is /há/ it has been cooked and served. When a person is /há/, he or she is perceived as belonging and giving to society not lacking in their development as human beings.

We can say that 'good' in Kaingang is:

/há/ 'good' = a characteristic of substances → +adequate +proper + harmonious +complete

What is the adjective in English that encompasses these semantic properties, proper, harmonious, and complete? The best translation has to approach the meaning of harmonious, more than the meaning of proper as we understand it. However, something that is in harmony with the ideal, or with the group does not necessarily have to be complete. The notion of completion is a part of the semantic field. I want to suggest that a concept that in English which might embrace both harmony and fullness, is better translated as "optimal." The word optimal carries the notion of adequacy, and by implication, harmony with whatever it is optimal for and by definition carries the idea of fullness. It is possible that the adjective "optimal" fulfils all the requirements of the semantic domain of the Kaingang word /há/.

In Plato's Republic, we find the suggestion that the moral pursuit in humanity is, in itself, an act of faith. It is not just well-being; it is a project of transcendence. What we aspire to, when we want to find what is "Good," is the notion of ultimate excellence, a connection with divine transcendence. Robert Adams (1999, 14) suggests that the Good is a mirror of the notion of God, an "exemplar or standard of goodness that includes much more than moral virtue." The ultimate God is Beauty itself, Goodness itself. The experience of virtue is the experience of God. I am not advocating for an innate cognitive template that induces faith, but I suggest that the human experience will point to the connection between morality and ultimate transcendence, as Adams asserts. According to Veiga, an ethnographer of Kaingang's mythology (2000), it is possible to organize the Kaingang traditional rituals in a vertical axis that refer to three mythological eras. The initial creation time, where the foundation of the cosmos was established, the second period that includes a universal conflict and the reconstruction of the world into the ideal society by the founding mythic heroes, and the third period, the world of today. I suggest that the notion of "good"

in Kaingang is not just ethic, but metaphysical, deriving its deep meaning from a metaphysical need for harmony and return to the ideal world. When the Kaingang emphasize "normality" or "properness," they are not emphasizing conformity but belonging. The ultimate virtue, /há/, that for the Kaingang translates as a quality of a person engaged in it is the act of living in harmony with one another on the way to completion as individuals and as a group. I suggest that the idea of moral transcendence left its mark in the Kaingang language even though their culture developed far away from the Christian cultural umbrella.

Are there any noticeable social effects of this notion of virtue among the Kaingang? The Kaingang, when Lévi-Strauss first visited them and described in his book *Tristes Tropiques* of 1955 (1974, 199), were found to be less "Indian." They were the first Brazilian Indians seen by Strauss, and to him, it was a disappointment to find them wearing clothes similar to those in the surrounding Brazilian villages and carrying on with their lives as if they were part of the national society. Strauss was in search of the clear marks of otherness. He was after "savages." He misread the Kaingang as completely integrated, a people group that had lost their own identity. He was utterly wrong. In spite of living for more than two centuries close to Brazilian society—mainly in the state of Paraná, a well-developed agrarian state of southern Brazil— the Kaingang have courageously kept their cultural and linguistic integrity. Like many Jê groups of Brazil, they have a social structure divided into two exogamous moieties, originally Kaimé e Kairu. This structure has suffered many changes through the many decades of contact. The collective identity is based on kinship and presents the Kaingang as a cohesive structure to outsiders. (Creatini da Rocha, 2011) They have had through the years many internal sociopolitical disputes based on kinship divisions that can be easily made or unmade, broken or made strong. If anything, /há/ seems to be the underlying goal to be reached in such disputes.

The Suruwahá[5]

The words that define virtue in the Suruwahá language denote a close relation with agency. There

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5 The Suruwahá are a group of around 100 people living in the confluence of two small rivers, Riozinho e Cunhuá, of the Purus basin in the Southwest Amazon in Brazil. Up to the 1980s they lived in isolation except for sporadic contact with rubber gathers and woodcutters. Their own narrative of origin describes several wars that went on between them and other tribes, leaving a small number of survivors that finally amalgamated into one single tribe. The different phenotype of many of them might be a confirmation of their narrative, but the many genetic problems they have, and the homogenous and broad lexicon indicate that if the wars happened, it many generations ago. I lived among them for a few years and was the first

are not many words to describe virtue. The main word used to designate most of the virtues and/or positive qualities that we describe in our languages with many different words is /tijuwa/ 'well done.' Good, clean, pure, honest, wholesome, everything is /tijuwa/ and even perception adjectives like tasty, and beautiful. The word /tijuwa/ also can be understood as complete. Anything that is not complete, perfect, or fully grown cannot be /tijuwa/. Men can be tijuwa, women cannot because they bleed every month. The menstrual blood, indicates in the Suruwaha's perspective that something in women is not complete, needs fixing, that is why they bleed. The antithesis is not a different word, it is the negation of /tijuwa/, that is /tijuwa-siu/.

See the figures bellow:

/tijuwa/	/tijuwa-siu/
Well done, perfect, complete, aesthetically pleasing, emotionally pleasing, etc.	Not well done, imperfect, crooked, ugly, old, unpleasing in all accounts, wrong, bad, etc.

The word /tijuwa/ describes the positive qualities related to virtue but does not describe the state of being virtuous. The moral universe of the Suruwahá assumes two possible moral dimensions in which a person can choose to live:

/zamunda una/	/zawa/
In pursuit of the one holy thing, One choice, choice towards the other, peace, harmony, surrendering, abnegation	Anger, a state of inconformity, restlessness, incapacity to resign, rebellion

The two dimensions /zamunda/ or /zawa/ are not just manners of being, but two social spaces that can also be interpreted as different transcendent ambiences or worlds. What epitomizes virtue is the /zamunda/ attitude/world. In the world of /zamunda/, the person chooses to act or live as if he/she has something inside his/her heart, a thing /zama/. The heart is the center of life for the Suruwahá and is called /igan-zubuni/ – 'the seed of the breast.'(Suzuki 2005)

Example (a) describes the /zamunda/ person. The /zamunda/ person is not an empty-hearted person. He or she has made the choice to accommodate the others (/zama/- or the thing) in his/her heart. The opposite is an empty hearted person – /zama-nasiu/ 'thing-without.' The most celebrated

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outsider to collect data for the classification of the language. The data I am using here was provided by linguist Marcia Suzuki who has published a few articles describing the language, including a complete lexicon with a detailed description of the verb morphology.

virtue that best expresses the meaning of zamunda is generosity. The /zamunda/ shows his/her character sharing abundantly what he/she has.

> The search for the /zamunda/ is the search for a heart that has *one* thing on it:
> /igan-zubuni zama una dawa/
> The 3PS-breast-seed thing unique acquire-HAB[6]
> 'the heart that is working in the direction of having one thing inside of it.'

The words zama 'thing' and una 'one, unique, special' that can also be understood as holy or pure create the description of the model human being for the Suruwahá . The zamunda choice is not just choosing the one moral imperative to live by, but the resulting of an emotional harmony or peace with self and others. In many stories of Suruwhá mythology, the /zamunda/ is also aesthetically beautiful. In fact, many of the myths revolve around mythological animals or people/ancestors who lost their beauty or their /zamunda/ condition, and because of it, killed or were killed by others. The person who has made the one choice is able to live with a harmonious heart or a sense of stoic resignation, more or less like the Christian virtue of "stern-mindedness" described by Stump (2014, 341).

The opposite state of mind is /zawa/ 'anger.' Anger develops as a result of a bitter heart. The Suruwahá acknowledge their original moral state as a state of constant anger and bitterness. They describe the bitterness of the heart with strong sensorial metaphors. For example; "My heart is like a green (non-ripe) cashew." The cashew is a fruit rich in tannin that has a strong drying effect on the mouth when not ripe. (Aparicio 2014)

The Suruwahá is a stoic society. The idea of the /zama una dawa/ 'the pursuit of the one thing' seems to be similar to the idea of Kant's moral imperative, the good will, perfectly rational, destitute of any emotional stratagems. There is no luring with happiness; actually the language does not have a word for happiness. You choose the /zama una/ 'one thing' only because it is the right thing. This idea of one thing seems to mean not just one numerically, but to refer to the essentiality of it, the one principle of everything virtuous which is self-denial and the surrendering of your own interest to serve others.

The alternative to the /zamunda/ life is to live in a state of constant /zawa/ 'anger' and pain. Note that there is no illusion of any emotion that will replace anger. The Suruwahá do not conceive

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6 3PS is the possessive pronoun for the 3rd person, and HAB a suffix indicating habituality

a world in which good can be achieved with anything other than sheer will power. There is no sense of grace of any kind; it is a choice between misery or surrender. Victory against anger is achieved with a choice for good will. That makes me think that a better translation for /zawa/ 'anger' is actually 'rebellion.' The word /zawa/ is a description of an emotional state, but the language does not imply that this emotion is out of the control of the will. My first instinct was to correlate the word with our word for 'anger', but anger does not imply will power as much the word /zawa/ does.

The implications of the binomial /zamunda-zawa/ are not the description of two emotional states. It is inferred that the two states of mind are a result of choice. Because the word 'anger' for us implies a natural emotion that is not always chosen but can be simply "triggered," anger is not the best choice of translation. Quine is correct here to infer an "indeterminacy of translation" (2013, 23–72) when we try to bridge with two different moral worldviews. I suggest that the best translation for the /zamunda-zawa/ moral binomial would be stoicism, abnegation/rebellion.

> /zamunda/ 'ultimate good' → movement, agency +goodness+firm purpose +exclusiveness of purpose (non-duality or weakness of mind)
>
> /zawa/ 'rebellion'→ movement, agency+anger+bitterness+pain
>
> What are the philosophical inferences of the conceptual morality of the Suruwahá?

1. A clear perception of agency is an essential component of the Suruwahá moral universe. There is no metaphysical or earthly causality for moral behavior, other than agency.

2. The moral action or the moral life is understood as a process. The good person is on the way towards a unique desire of the heart, /zama una/- 'the one thing that matters,' which is the desire for peace and serving others.

3. The alternative to a moral life is a life of emotional suffering. The state of rebellion or /zawa/ 'anger' that is the opposite of the stern attitude of the /zamunda/ 'the pursuit of goodness' is a state of anger, dark bitterness, and emotional pain.

4. It is implicit that the walk towards a higher moral state is a journey of self-denial and of giving oneself to others. There is not a sense of implicit happiness except the capacity to avoid anger. The language does not have a word for emotional happiness. The noun phrase /zamunda una/ ('the search for the one thing, or the pursuit of goodness'), better translated as 'moral integrity,' is the closest thing to happiness for the Suruwahá.

In this aspect, the Suruwahá think in terms of a categorical imperative, similar to the Kantian concept (1960) (2002). The Suruwahá language implies that there is only one essential moral choice possible or required to make a moral character. This essential choice will shape a person's character and will guide their actions. They recognize a deontological morality, where the motive is essential, where moral choice is motivated by a sense of duty and does not imply an immediate physical or emotional reward. Like Kant and Augustine, the Suruwahá seem to recognize that the natural human inclination is towards evil /zawa/ 'anger,' but they do not think that there is a pre-defined metaphysical evil outside of human choices/emotions. The abstraction of Evil, if we can infer any, would have to be, in this case, a space in which the person is trapped inside his/her own individual universe of anger and dissatisfaction with life. In other words, your internal hell of pain and discomfort with life is both the cause and result of your choice. Nevertheless, their pantheon of spirits is irremediably connected to anger /zawa/. All the spirits seem to be failed beings, living in /zawa/ but they cannot cause humans to be /zawa/. The alternative is /zama una/ 'stoicism, abnegation,' to make peace with reality and find the strength to dedicate yourself to others.

Need for Further Research and Conclusion

"When we meet another person, however poor, lowly, diseased, or dumb, we stand before something which holds the divine…" Soskice (2007, 62) suggests that there are elements in nature, in the relational nature of life that incline us to divine. If a sense of a sort of superior task were to be perceived, collectively perceived, as an intrinsic part of human nature, it would be present in every human community, and maybe translated into their notion of Good. Theologians and missionaries always look for analogies with Christian notions in the tribal myths of creation or their religion. Much can be found, but sometimes creation myths are degenerated narratives of collective disappointments. The metaethical system is often neglected, and most of the time purely translated in terms of equivalence, that falsely direct the scholar to correlations with our dualistic Indo-European paradigm, and the beauty of what the indigenous languages suggest is lost. I want to propose that metaphysical footprints are heavily present in these ethical systems, and without a connection to the tribal fundamental religious beliefs, the meta-ethics dept of their moral terms is lost. The divine Good is the subliminal presence at the source and *raison d' être* for morality.

The Kaingang and the Suruwahá languages bring us rich moral metaphors. There is certainly a need for an investigation of oral narratives of both groups that would correspond to literary research, to be able to verify some of the assumptions about the semantic properties and domain of the words examined here and expand them. My analysis is not final in any way. Another universe to be explored in both languages are the metaphors that refer to the sacred/divine.

Some of the myths of the Suruwahá that I have access to seem to confirm my perception about the aesthetic implications of /tijuwá/, but I have not found more subsidies in their mythology of the origin of the stoic notion /zamunda/ and how it became the center of their moral universe. One of the Suruwahá myths of creation—they have more than one—includes two jaguars that eat a seed and in spitting them out give life to human kind. There is no virtue attached to the act of creation, or dignity imparted to creatures in this myth. However, a profound sense of self-dignity follows the notion of stoic sacrifice cultivated by the Suruwahá. The tribe practices a ritual of suicide that can be interpreted as a type of ritual atonement for the pain of the immediate family or the whole group. Where does it come from?

It is interesting to observe that both groups are isolated from Western notions of morality and Judeo-Christian influences, however, they seem to conceive a reality in which there is an epistemic and determined moral order that transcends social or individual limitations. This metaphysical order points to a life worth living. As Adams (1999) suggests, the sense of morality survives in the conception of transcendent goodness as a result of a moral life. For the Kaingan, it is a life of connection, belonging, and harmony with the community and fullness of personal purpose. It demands a connection to a higher notion of original virtue established in foundational times. For the deontological Suruwahá, it is a life of dedication to the common good, a deep sense of rational duty. Other anthropologists (Aparicio 2015) interpreted the Suruwaha according to the Amerindian Perspectivism paradigm. The notion of reality is fractured in set multiple perspectives, or dimensions on human life, where your current self is seen as transitory and in a state of migration to other elements of the cosmos. Even if that is a fair representation of the Suruwahá cosmology, this multiplicity of lenses does not avoid the acknowledgment of the value placed on a moral life that implies a notion of personal meaning and a sense of worthiness beyond the sensorial experience.

New studies on cognition and the origins of language ability do not point to innate templates, but as Locke (1841) and other empiricists suggested long ago, seem to indicate that language is the tool of culture and gets shaped by sense-perception, the accumulation of knowledge and repetition of human social experience. The notion of transcendence, the need for self-worth beyond mere approval of the group, moral beauty, and moral excellence is certainly part of the social-linguistic epistemology of these two ethnic groups. I suggest that these two moral accounts tend to affirm Adams' claims that it is not a straightforward religious conviction, or low moral compliance that sustains and preserves the beautiful but very rigid moral universes of both groups, but an underlying metaphysical connection to a higher Good.

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

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