Ultimate Morality Definition Challenge

(UMDC)

Abstract

The Ultimate Morality Definition Challenge (UMDC) demands a non-circular, non-regressive, non-arbitrary, non-constructed definition and foundation for objective goodness, evil, and obligation. This version tightens quantifiers, adds explicit epistemic and normative-force constraints, blocks common escape routes (primitivism, quietism, question-begging stipulations), and raises the success threshold. A proposed ultimate moral system M succeeds only if it simultaneously satisfies every listed condition.

1. Primitive Predicates and Operators

$\mathrm{G}(x)$	x is objectively good
$\mathrm{E}(x)$	x is objectively evil
$\mathrm{O}(x)$	x is objectively morally obligatory
M	an ultimate moral system
$\mathrm{D}(P)$	P possesses an adequate definition
$\mathrm{F}(P)$	P possesses an ultimate foundation
$\mathrm{C}(P)$	the definition or justification of P is circular
$\mathrm{R}(P)$	the justification of P generates an infinite regress
$\mathrm{A}(P)$	the foundation of P is arbitrary
$\mathrm{H}(P)$	P depends constitutively on human construction, preference, convention, psychology, or stipulation
$\mathrm{N}(P)$	P possesses genuine objective normative authority
$\mathrm{I}(P)$	P is independent of human construction or stipulation
$\mathrm{K}(P)$	there exists a non-circular epistemic route to knowledge of P
$\mathrm{V}(P)$	P possesses normative force that is not merely descriptive, predictive, or instrumental

2. Strict Definition Requirement

For any proposed definition of objective goodness the following biconditional must hold:

$$\forall x \left(\mathrm{G}(x) \leftrightarrow D_G(x)\right)$$

where $D_G(x)$ satisfies:

(a) $D_G(x)$ contains no occurrence of G, E, O, or any undefined synonymous normative predicate;

(b) $D_G(x)$ is finitely stateable in a language whose non-normative primitives are independently intelligible;

(c) $D_G(x)$ determines, for every x in the intended domain, whether $\mathrm{G}(x)$ or $\neg\mathrm{G}(x)$.

Analogous requirements hold for E and O:

$$\forall x \big(\mathrm{E}(x) \leftrightarrow D_E(x)\big),$$
$$\forall x \big(\mathrm{O}(x) \leftrightarrow D_{\mathrm{O}}(x)\big).$$

If evil is introduced relationally as $\mathrm{E}(x) \leftrightarrow \neg\mathrm{G}(x)$ (or as "serious compromise of the good"), the relational claim itself must be shown to inherit objectivity, independence, and non-arbitrariness.

3. Foundation and Authority Requirement

An ultimate moral system must satisfy:

$$M \rightarrow \mathrm{F}(M)$$

and the foundation must itself underwrite both normative authority and independence:

$$\mathrm{F}(M) \rightarrow \big(\mathrm{N}(M) \wedge \mathrm{I}(M) \wedge \mathrm{V}(M)\big).$$

Hence:

$$M \rightarrow \big(\mathrm{N}(M) \wedge \mathrm{I}(M) \wedge \mathrm{V}(M)\big).$$

Normative authority (N) is not satisfied by mere motivational force, evolutionary utility, or social enforcement. It requires that the system binds independently of whether any agent cares about it, endorses it, or is disposed to comply.

4. Anti-Circularity Constraint

$$\neg\mathrm{C}\big(\mathrm{F}(M)\big).$$

More precisely, the justification of the foundation may not take the form

$$\mathrm{N}\big(\mathrm{F}(M)\big) \leftarrow \mathrm{N}\big(\mathrm{F}(M)\big)$$

as its sole or ultimate ground. Defining a foundation as "that which is authoritative" does not establish authority.

5. Anti-Regress Constraint

If goodness is identified with a value V:

$$\mathrm{G}(x) \leftrightarrow V(x)$$

and the normative status of V is secured only by appeal to a further value V_2, and V_2 by V_3, etc., then

$$V \rightarrow V_2 \rightarrow V_3 \rightarrow \cdots$$

constitutes an infinite justificatory regress. By definition:

$$\mathrm{R}(M) \to \neg \mathrm{F}(M).$$

No infinite chain counts as an ultimate foundation under this challenge.

6. Anti-Arbitrariness and Anti-Primitivism Constraint

Suppose the justificatory chain terminates at a primitive P:

$$\mathrm{G}(x) \leftrightarrow P(x).$$

The defender must still discharge the burden:

$$\mathrm{N}(P) \wedge \mathrm{V}(P).$$

Mere assertion that "P is intrinsically normative" or "P is a brute moral fact" is insufficient. The challenge requires a non-circular explanation of *why* the primitive possesses genuine normative authority rather than being a stipulated or projected stopping point.

Formally:

$$\neg\, \mathrm{Just}\big(\mathrm{N}(P)\big) \to \mathrm{A}(P),$$

and

$$\mathrm{A}(P) \to \neg \mathrm{F}(M).$$

Primitivism that refuses further explanation fails the challenge.

7. Constructivist and Mind-Dependence Exclusion

$$\mathrm{H}(P) \to \neg \mathrm{I}(P).$$

Since M requires independence:

$$M \to \mathrm{I}(M),$$

it follows that

$$\mathrm{H}(M) \to \neg M$$

(where M is understood as *objective ultimate* morality). A system may exist as a constructed, pragmatic, or conventional morality without satisfying the conditions for objective ultimate morality.

8. Epistemic Accessibility Constraint

An ultimate moral system that is in principle unknowable, or knowable only by circular appeal to the system itself, fails to function as a usable foundation for moral judgment. Therefore:

$$M \to \mathrm{K}(M).$$

$\mathrm{K}(M)$ requires a non-circular route—rational, empirical, intuitive, or otherwise—by which agents can in principle come to know the content and authority of M without already presupposing M.

9. Normative Force versus Descriptive Success

A foundation may correctly describe psychological tendencies, evolutionary functions, or social regularities without thereby possessing normative authority. The challenge distinguishes:

Descriptive adequacy	(how agents in fact behave or feel)
Normative authority	(what agents genuinely ought to do, independently of those facts).

Success requires $\mathrm{V}(M)$: the system must supply reasons that are not reducible to instrumental, predictive, or purely descriptive considerations.

10. The Challenge Proper

The defender must exhibit some M such that:

$$\exists M \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{D}(M) \wedge \mathrm{F}(M) \wedge \neg\mathrm{C}(M) \wedge \neg\mathrm{R}(M) \\ \wedge \neg\mathrm{A}(M) \wedge \neg\mathrm{H}(M) \\ \wedge \mathrm{N}(M) \wedge \mathrm{I}(M) \wedge \mathrm{V}(M) \wedge \mathrm{K}(M) \end{bmatrix}$$

In expanded English:

> There exists an ultimate moral system that is adequately definable, non-circular, non-regressive, non-arbitrary, independent of human construction, genuinely normatively authoritative, possessed of non-instrumental normative force, and epistemically accessible without circular presupposition of itself.

11. Good and Evil Specifically

In addition to the existence claim for M, the defender must supply definitions

$$\exists D_G \, \forall x \big(\mathrm{G}(x) \leftrightarrow D_G(x)\big),$$
$$\exists D_E \, \forall x \big(\mathrm{E}(x) \leftrightarrow D_E(x)\big)$$

such that both D_G and D_E inherit the full set of properties:

$$\neg\mathrm{C} \wedge \neg\mathrm{R} \wedge \neg\mathrm{A} \wedge \mathrm{I} \wedge \mathrm{N} \wedge \mathrm{V}.$$

If $\mathrm{E}(x)$ is defined as intensified badness or as compromise of the good, the relational claim must itself be shown to be objectively grounded rather than stipulated.

12. Exhaustive Failure Conditions

A proposed M fails if any of the following holds:

$$\mathrm{C}(M) \vee \mathrm{R}(M) \vee \mathrm{A}(M) \vee \mathrm{H}(M)$$
$$\vee \neg\mathrm{N}(M) \vee \neg\mathrm{I}(M) \vee \neg\mathrm{V}(M) \vee \neg\mathrm{K}(M).$$

Success therefore requires the simultaneous negation of every failure mode:

$$\neg\mathrm{C}(M) \wedge \neg\mathrm{R}(M) \wedge \neg\mathrm{A}(M) \wedge \neg\mathrm{H}(M) \\ \wedge \mathrm{N}(M) \wedge \mathrm{I}(M) \wedge \mathrm{V}(M) \wedge \mathrm{K}(M).$$

13. Condensed Canonical Form

The entire challenge reduces to the existence claim:

$$\exists M \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{Def}(M) \wedge \mathrm{Obj}(M) \wedge \mathrm{Norm}(M) \\ \wedge \mathrm{Ind}(M) \wedge \mathrm{NonCirc}(M) \wedge \mathrm{NonReg}(M) \\ \wedge \mathrm{NonArb}(M) \wedge \mathrm{NonInst}(M) \wedge \mathrm{Epist}(M) \end{bmatrix}$$

where

$$\mathrm{Obj}(M) \equiv \mathrm{Norm}(M) \wedge \mathrm{Ind}(M)$$

and $\mathrm{NonInst}(M)$ abbreviates possession of non-instrumental normative force ($\mathrm{V}(M)$), while $\mathrm{Epist}(M)$ abbreviates $\mathrm{K}(M)$.

14. Meta-Constraint on Responses

Any attempt to dismiss the challenge itself as "just another construct" or as "begging the question against constructivism" must still confront the internal demand: either an M satisfying the boxed conditions is produced, or the claim that objective ultimate morality has been defined and grounded is withdrawn. The challenge does not assert that no such M exists; it asserts that the burden of exhibition has not been met until the conditions are discharged.

15. Success and Default

- If a defender produces an M meeting every condition, the challenge is answered.
- If no such M is produced, then—under the criteria of the challenge—objective ultimate morality has not been successfully defined and grounded, even if one continues to believe that such morality exists.

The burden of proof rests on the claimant of objective ultimate morality.