[Final version to appear in the *Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, S. Shapshay (ed.). Comments welcome!]

Schopenhauer and Contemporary Metaethics

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Metaethics, the investigation of the ultimate nature of morality, is one of the most historically-oriented areas of contemporary philosophy. Plato, Hume, and Kant all make regular appearances in the literature, and continue to provide inspiration for metaethicists. Schopenhauer, however, is almost completely absent from recent metaethics, even though much of his work was devoted to examining the foundations of morality. My aim in this chapter is to show that Schopenhauer deserves much more attention, even by metaethicists who do not care about the history of philosophy for its own sake. His views provide important challenges to several widely-held assumptions about metaethics, and there are grounds for thinking that some modified version of his views could be plausible even by contemporary lights.

I proceed as follows. In §1, I describe five tenets of contemporary metaethics – tenets which few recent philosophers have even thought of questioning. In §2, I describe Schopenhauer's core metaethical views, along with his (less central) views on moral judgment. In §3, I argue that Schopenhauer's views pose important challenges for each of the five tenets. Finally, in §4, I explore the prospects for neo-Schopenhauerian views, which retain Schopenhauer's distinctive attitude towards compassion without appealing to his radical metaphysical monism.

1. Five tenets of contemporary metaethics

There is little consensus in contemporary metaethics. Some philosophers hold that morality is a mere illusion, while others hold that it is just as real as scientific reality. Some hold that moral language merely expresses motivational states, and so can no more be true or false than cheers or boos, while others hold that moral language describes the world just truly or falsely as any 'objective' language does. Finally, some hold that scientific knowledge sets limits on how we should understand morality, while others hold that morality itself proves that reality includes more than the objects of science.

Despite those disagreements, most metaethicists do agree about the *boundaries* that are supposed to define the range of possible views. In this section, I describe five widely-accepted tenets of contemporary metaethics that describe some of these boundaries. Though there are some recent philosophers who would reject one or more of these tenets, each is explicitly or implicitly accepted by the vast majority of metaethicists.

1.1. First tenet: Moral realism requires true moral claims or moral facts

Arguably, the central question of metaethics is whether *moral realism* is defensible. Loosely speaking, a moral realist view is one that "vindicates morality if correct," and so "justif[ies] morality's apparent importance," while a moral anti-realist view is one that denies morality can be so vindicated or justified. [1] This distinction is meant to be intuitive, and is often illustrated with historical examples. Plato's view is a canonical example of moral realism. In the *Republic*, Plato claims that there is a certain metaphysically deep entity, the Form of the Good, which only virtuous people perceive and which guides their action.[2] By contrast, David Hume's view is a canonical example of moral anti-realism. Hume claims that moral distinctions are based merely in contingent emotions, not in reason.[3] However, some anti-realists (including Hume[4]) offer a *sort* of vindication or justification of morality. For this and other reasons, recent metaethicists have tried to find a more precise way of drawing the intuitive distinction between moral realism from anti-realism.

Two more precise characterizations of moral realism are prominent in the recent literature. According to one characterization, moral realism should be understood as the view that some morals claims, like "torture is wrong," are literally true.[5] According to another characterization, moral realism should be understood as the view that there are some moral facts, like the fact that torture is wrong, that hold independently of anyone's attitudes (i.e., desires or evaluative beliefs).[6] These characterizations are logically distinct, but related. After all, there is clearly some connection between the truth of moral claims and the existence of moral facts. Regardless of how tight that connection is, though, advocates of either characterization would agree to the following: for a view to qualify as moral realism, it is essential that it *either* show that some moral claims are true *or* show that there are some moral facts. This is the first tenet of contemporary metaethics.

Before moving on, I want to note a third way of characterizing moral realism. This characterization has received relatively little attention because, I suspect, most philosophers have held that it is equivalent to one of the other two. According to this third characterization, moral realism should be understood as the view that there is an epistemic asymmetry between paradigmatically good and paradigmatically bad agents, such that the latter, but not the former, are "making a mistake … [or] missing something" (Street 2008, 223).[7] One way this asymmetry might hold is if there are some true moral

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[1] These characterizations are from Street 2008, 223 and Sayre-McCord 1988, 2, respectively

[2] See Republic 517b in particular for the perceptual language.

[3] See *Treatise* 3.1.1.26.

[4] See *Treatise* 3.3.6.3.

[5] The most influential defense of this characterization is Sayre-McCord 1988. This characterization should also be restricted to something like *positive* moral claims, since some moral anti-realists could allow that "rocks are not virtuous" is literally true.

[6] Shafer-Landau 2003 offers one influential defense of this approach (see below for some relevant complications). For a helpful overview of the debate about moral realism, see Finlay 2007.

[7] For related thoughts about realism and epistemic asymmetry, see Wright 1992 and Adams 2014.

claims that only paradigmatically good agents accept. Another way it might hold is if there are some moral *facts* that only paradigmatically good agents recognize. However, if there were some other way of establishing that asymmetry, then this third characterization would come apart from the others. We would then be faced with a question of which characterization better captured the intuitive distinction between moral realism and anti-realism.

1.2. Second tenet: Sentimentalism implies moral anti-realism

David Hume's view is not only a canonical example of moral anti-realism, it is also a canonical example of moral sentimentalism. In contemporary philosophy, "moral sentimentalism" refers to the view that sentiments (i.e., emotions and desires) are central to morality. Sentimentalists are typically skeptical of views that give rational thought any essential role in morality. Instead, they hold that all moral thought and action is ultimately grounded on sentiments.

Most sentimentalists are moral anti-realists, and so deny that morality can be vindicated or justified in any deep sense. Consider the first two characterizations of moral realism from above. If moral thought and action is ultimately grounded on sentiments, then it might seem that there is no room for true moral claims or attitude-independent moral facts, since our sentiments are (the thought goes) not concerned with truth or facts. At most, moral language might make claims about our own sentiments, but those would not be the right sort of claims needed for moral realism. This view appears to be widely-accepted.[8] The second tenet of contemporary metaethics is therefore: moral sentimentalism implies moral anti-realism.

1.3. Third tenet: At best, moral insight goes as deep as scientific or mathematical insight

We can use the phrase "moral insight" to refer to the mental states that distinguish paradigmatically good people from paradigmatically bad people, whatever those mental states might be. According to some moral realists, moral insight is the acceptance of true moral claims or the belief in moral facts. According to some moral anti-realists, moral insight is merely a matter of emotion, such as the feeling of pity.

Some recent metaethical discussions have been framed in terms of how moral insight compares to scientific or mathematical insight. For instance, in one influential anti-realist argument, Gilbert Harman tries to show that morality compares unfavorably to science.[9] Harman argues that the explanation of scientific beliefs (e.g., the belief that a particle just passed through the cloud chamber) requires an appeal to scientific facts (e.g., the fact that a particle that passed through a cloud chamber, generating visible light), while the parallel does not hold with moral beliefs. Moral beliefs, Harman claims, can be explained without any reference to moral facts. Richard Joyce has made a similar argument using a comparison with mathematics, claiming that while any evolutionary

[8] Slote 2011 is a potential exception. However, Slote's claim to realism hinges on his using a Kripkean semantics for moral terms. For (to my mind, convincing) reasons to doubt that this sort of approach yields a genuine form of realism, see Street 2008.

[9] Harman 1977.

account of our mathematical beliefs requires assuming some mathematical truths, nothing similar is true for moral beliefs.[10] In response to such arguments, moral realists have defended accounts of moral insight that are modeled on scientific and mathematical insight.[11]

In all these discussions, the following assumption is at play: at *best*, moral insight goes as deep into reality as scientific or mathematical insight. This is the third tenet of contemporary metaethics.

1.4. Fourth tenet: Moral realism requires some substantive, necessary moral truths

The next tenet concerns the relation between morality and modality. For the sake of simplicity, we can use the phrase "moral truth" to describe both true moral claims and moral facts. The moral truths that are most relevant to moral realism are *substantive* truths. I have in mind a broadly Kantian contrast here, where a *non*-substantive truth is one that merely defines or unpacks one of our concepts. For example, it would seem to be a conceptual, non-substantive truth that it is wrong to perform an impermissible action. Conceptual truths like that might be necessarily true, but they are relatively unimportant for metaethics. Anti-realists can grant that there are any number non-substantive moral truths, but then deny that (e.g.) any action is ever impermissible. A realist, by contrast, would also affirm the substantive truth that mass killing is impermissible.

Say that we allow that there are some substantive moral truths, thereby setting aside some forms of anti-realism. Intuitively, that does not seem like enough for moral realism, however, until we have settled the modal status of those truths. Intuitively, at least some moral truths are necessary. It is not merely that mass killing *happens* to be wrong – rather, it seems to be *necessarily* wrong. The necessity in question appears to be unconditional or absolute. That is, mass killing is not wrong conditional on something else (such as society's disapproval), but rather is necessary full stop. Given these intuitions, it would seem that a genuine vindication or justification of morality would require showing that at least some substantive moral truths are (unconditionally) necessary. The comparison with science and mathematics is relevant again here, for, insofar as we are realists about the objects of these disciplines, we think that science and mathematics concern necessary truths (at least in part). This presumed necessity is why some anti-realists have thought that evolutionary considerations pose a threat to moral realism. That is, some anti-realists ask, since our moral beliefs were the result of highly contingent forces, how could they possibly have latched on to necessary truths?[12] Behind this line of argument is the assumption that if there are any substantive moral truths, at least some must be necessary.

The fourth tenet of contemporary metaethics is thus: moral realism requires that there be some substantive, necessary moral truths.

1.5. Fifth tenet: No moral concept can be deduced from a non-moral concept

[10] Joyce 2006, 182.

[11] See., e.g., Boyd 1988 and Scanlon 2014.

[12] See Street 2006. For an argument that the necessity of moral truths in fact undermines this anti-realist argument, see Clarke-Doane 2012.

The final tenet does not concern moral realism and anti-realism directly, but rather the nature of moral concepts. For the most part, moral concepts are fairly easy to recognize. The concepts of right, wrong, permissibility, good, bad, virtue, and vice seem all obviously moral, while the concepts of pain, desire, belief, action, and life are all not, even though the latter concepts are often morally-relevant.[13] There appears to therefore be a divide between moral and non-moral concepts. Nearly all contemporary metaethicists think that this conceptual divide goes quite deep such that, borrowing a phrase from Hume, no "ought" can be deduced from an "is." The most influential argument for accepting such a divide is G. E. Moore's open question argument, which claims that, for any moral term M and any non-moral term N, the question, "if something is N, is it M?" can always be meaningfully asked. At least some instances of that question would not be meaningful, the thought goes, unless there were a gap between moral and non-moral concepts.[14] This is meant to stand in contrast to questions like "if something is a cat, is it feline?" This latter question, it seems, could not be meaningfully asked by someone who understood the relevant concepts, and this is supposed to show that there is no deep conceptual divide between the concepts *cat* and *feline*.

The fifth and final tenet of contemporary metaethics is: no moral concept can be deduced from a non-moral concept.

2. Schopenhauer's metaethics

Metaethicists are not the only people who accept the five tenets listed above. Many historians of philosophy seem to accept them as well, and to think that these tenets define what makes a given interpretation charitable. However, I hold that there is a natural reading of Schopenhauer's views that not only goes against all five tenets, but also gives us good reasons for doubting them. At the same time, I want to acknowledge that the reading I present below is not the only possible one. Space limitations keep me from properly discussing other readings here.

In this section, I set aside issues of contemporary philosophy and describe Schopenhauer's metaethical views. In the next section, I return to the five tenets.

2.1. Paradigmatically good vs. paradigmatically bad people

Schopenhauer's metaethics is built around a claim about the psychological origin of virtue and virtuous action, namely, that these are based in compassion:

> the everyday phenomenon of compassion [*Mitleid*], i.e., the wholly immediate sympathy [*Theilnahme*], independent of any other consideration, in the first place towards another's suffering… This compassion alone is the real basis of all free justice and all genuine loving

[13] This is a simplification. Strictly speaking, the former set of concepts is normative/evaluative, and so extends beyond the moral (including, for instance, norms about what beliefs are permissible given evidence). The present point arguably applies to normativity generally, however.

[14] Moore 1966/1903, §10-14. Moore's argument was originally made to show the distinctness of moral *properties* from non-moral properties. Since distinct concepts can refer to the same property, most philosophers today think it succeeds only for concepts.

> kindness. Only in so far as an action has sprung from it does that action have moral worth. (OBM 200)
>
> the good character… feels himself akin to all beings inside, immediately participates with sympathy in their well-being and woe. (OBM 254-55)

Schopenhauer does not think these claims are novel. He asserts that "all ages and lands have recognized [this] source of morality perfectly well" (OBM 235).

The term "compassion" (like the related terms "empathy" and "sympathy") might be understood as referring to a variety of familiar mental phenomena: feeling upset by someone's situation, judging that someone's situation is bad, being disposed to help someone else, or imagining what someone's inner situation is like. Those familiar phenomena all seem amenable to straightforward psychological explanations. Schopenhauer, however, uses "compassion" to refer to something that he thinks is more mysterious:

> I must also rebuke the error… [according to which] compassion comes about through a momentary deception of fantasy, as we ourselves substitute ourselves in place of the sufferer and then, in our imagination, take ourselves to be suffering *his* pains in *our* person. It is not like that at all… We suffer *with* him, thus *in* him: we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine that it is ours… the explanation… of his highly important phenomenon is not… to be obtained by the purely psychological route (OBM 203)

Later, Schopenhauer states that what is essential to the character of a good human is "his making less of a distinction than everyone else between himself and others" (OBM 249).

According to our normal way of thinking about the world, it is impossible for one person to literally feel another's pain as his, precisely because we think that each person's mind is metaphysically isolated. Yet Schopenhauer holds that morally good people do not experience things that way – rather, they feel as though they are not distinct from others, and so do literally feel others' pains. Schopenhauer thinks that this raises a metaphysical question: is such a compassionate experience of non-distinctness "an erroneous one… rest[ing] on an illusion" (OBM 249), or is it instead the normal appearance of distinctness that is erroneous? Schopenhauer thus thinks that locating compassion as the motivational source of morally worthy actions leads to a crucial question about the ultimate status of morality. His answer to this question constitutes the core of his metaethical view.

2.2. The core view

Schopenhauer holds that compassion, in his particular sense, is not an illusion at all:

> the plurality and distinctness of individuals is… mere appearance, i.e. is present only in my *representation*. My true, inner essence exists in every living thing as immediately as it reveals itself in my self-consciousness to myself alone… [T]his knowledge… erupts as *compassion*, upon which, therefore, rests all genuine, i.e. all disinterested virtue, and whose real expression is every good deed. (OBM 253-54)

Hence, the "morally noble" person "displays through his actions the deepest knowledge, the highest wisdom" (OBM 253). Moral virtue therefore, for Schopenhauer, is founded

on a deep metaphysical insight. Nothing similar is true for morally vicious agents – they are instead caught up in an illusion of distinctness.[15]

In OBM, Schopenhauer seems to suggest that this insight can be expressed linguistically. He says that its "standing expression in Sanskrit is the formula *tat-twam asi*" (OBM 254), a phrase which he suggests can be translated as "I once more." Likewise, Schopenhauer states that the wisdom of the good person can also be reached through "the theoretical philosopher's greatest profundity and most painstaking study" (OBM 253). This all suggests that even non-moral people can understand the moral insight. However, when pressed on this point in his correspondence, Schopenhauer denies that the phrase "I once more" literally captures the insight saying that it "is just a figurative turn of expression. For 'I' in the proper sense of the term refers exclusively to the individual and not the metaphysical thing in itself which appears in individuals."[16]

Schopenhauer has systematic reasons for denying that the insight involved in compassion can be adequately expressed linguistically, whether by a philosopher or by anyone else. For he thinks that language is, in the first place, the expression of *concepts* (see WWR I, 60-61), and that "the whole essence of concepts… consists of nothing other than the relation the principle of sufficient reason expresses in them" (WWR I 63-64).[17] Yet the principle of sufficient reason is essentially about *individuation*, which is why Schopenhauer sometimes calls it the "*principium individuationis*."[18] Hence, the principle "has a merely relative and conditional validity within appearances alone" (WWR I 55), and "governs only the *appearance* of the will, not the will itself" (WWR I, 131). This is why Schopenhauer thinks even the basic words like "I" cannot literally capture the insight involved in compassion, for language is essentially a tool for describing the relation between individuals, while the compassionate person sees deeper than the world of individuals. Not even the philosopher can work around this, since, at best, "philosophy will be a complete recapitulation, a reflection, as it were, of the world, in abstract concepts" (WWR I 109, see also 297-98).

The limitation of the principle of individuation to appearances has further implications here. For Schopenhauer holds that spatiotemporal and causal relations are all governed and so limited by the principle (see FR, WWR I, 34). The compassionate insight, therefore, has neither spatiotemporal nor causal content. Similarly, Schopenhauer thinks that all modal concepts arise from the principle of sufficient reason (WWR I, 492). In fact, he holds that "the notion of necessity and that of consequence from a given ground [i.e. a sufficient reason] are… completely identical" (WWR I, 492). This has two important implications. First, it means that all necessity is *conditional*, that is, necessity in light of some condition. Hence, "absolute necessity is a contradiction" (WWR I, 492,

[15] For an interesting precedent, see Kant's description, in the pre-critical "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer," of the possibility that the altruistic tendency arises from the action of others' wills on ours, on analogy with gravitation influence (Kant 1992, 321-22).

[16] Schopenhauer, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 220–21, translation from Cartwright, *Schopenhauer*, 510.

[17] Though language is essentially conceptual, it is also able to refer to intuitions.

[18] Sometimes S seems to identify the principle of sufficient reason with the principle of individuation (WWR I, 191-92, 301). At other times, though, he suggests there is some distinction between them, though both have similar scope (WWR I 137-38). In my view, it is best to see the principle of individuation as one form of the principle of sufficient reason, since the latter governs relations that do not immediately concern individuals (such as logical relations between concepts).

see also FR 146). Second, it means that nothing can be necessary unless it is governed by the principle of sufficient reason, as are all natural, individuated objects (which Schopenhauer, following Kant, holds are all appearances (see WWR I 135, 301)). The same holds, according to Schopenhauer, for contingency and actuality (WWR I, 493).

Moral insight, for Schopenhauer, is an insight into a non-modal, non-causal, non-spatiotemporal, non-conceptualizable, but metaphysically deep fact: the non-distinctness of (apparent) individuals. This is the core of Schopenhauer's metaethical view.

2.3. Moral judgment

Given Schopenhauer's core view, it is not surprising that he devotes relatively little attention to moral judgment.[19] Judgment is conceptual, for Schopenhauer (see WWR I, 90), while moral insight is not. Moreover, there are places where Schopenhauer seems to imply that, strictly speaking, what we take to be moral principles are not judgments at all. For instance, he claims that "the principle, the basic proposition, over whose content all ethical theorists are really united," in its "purest" form is: "Harm no one; rather help everyone to the extent that you can" (OBM 139-40). This principle is an imperative, a command, not a description, however. Judgments, however, are typically thought to be descriptive. Yet if the *basic* moral principle is non-descriptive, it is hard to see how any moral principles are.

In a similar vein, Schopenhauer writes that

> although *principles* and abstract cognition in general are in no way the… prime basis for all morals, they are indispensable for a moral life, as the container, the reservoir in which the disposition that has risen out of the source of all morality, which does not flow at every moment, is stored (OBM 205)

Moral principles, on this view, are reservoirs of compassionate motivation. This seems to suggest that their role is not to describe how things are (which is, presumably, the role of judgment).[20]

Nonetheless, there are other places where Schopenhauer seems to countenance moral judgments in a straightforward sense. This is clearest when he explains the meanings of some central moral concepts. Here are two of his explanations:

> The concepts of *wrong* and *right,* as synonymous with injury and non-injury, the latter also including the prevention of injury, are obviously independent of all positive law-giving and prior to it (OBM 208, see also WWR I 360-61)

> Everything that is in accordance with the striving of any individual will is called, relative to it, good… the opposite is called *bad*, in living beings *evil*. (OBM 249)

Both explanations take certain moral concepts to be semantically equivalent to the concepts of the negating another's *will*. The will, "[r]egarded simply in itself, is just a

[19] Much of Schopenhauer concern with moral judgment is negative. He argues at length against Kant's views of morality stemming from rationality and rational judgment, and holds that Kant's central moral concepts are incoherent (see, e.g., OBM 127-30).

[20] For more detail about this non-cognitivist vein in Schopenhauer, see Marshall Forthcoming A.

blind and inexorable impulse" (WWR I, 301), though this impulse takes on more complex forms when attached to conscious cognition, and is then a willing for *life* (see WWR I, 301, 311). On creature negates another's will "either when the first individual destroys or harms the other body itself, or when it forces the energies of that other body to serve its *own* will" (WWR I, 360).

Schopenhauer is explicit that the relationship between the concepts of *wrong* and of the negation of the will are analytic ("[w]e have analyzed the concept of *wrong* in the most universal abstraction" (WWR I, 361), such that "This purely moral meaning [in terms of the negation of the will] is the only meaning that right and wrong have for human beings as human beings, rather than as citizens of a State" (WWRI 367). On this view, the judgment that someone has been wronged means the same thing as the judgment that someone's will has been negated, and the judgment that injuring someone (negating their will) is wrong is a conceptual truth.

3. Challenges the tenets

I now turn to explaining how Schopenhauer's metaethics, as described in the previous section, offers challenges to the five tenets of metaethics described in §1.

3.1. Against the first tenet

According to the first tenet of contemporary metaethics, moral realism requires true moral claims or moral facts. Now, the intuitive aim of moral realism, recall, is to vindicate or justify morality. One way to understand this is in terms of an epistemic asymmetry between paradigmatically good and paradigmatically bad agents. By this standard, Schopenhauer is a moral realist. He thinks good people are compassionate people, and that compassionate people have a sort of insight into reality that bad (i.e., egoistic and malicious) people lack. He even states that bad people are caught in an illusion, whereas good people are free from illusion.[21]

Contrary to the first tenet, Schopenhauer is able to offer this vindication of morality without relying on anything about moral claims or moral facts.[22] The crucial insight he attributes to compassionate people does not any moral (or, indeed conceptual) content at all. To be sure, Schopenhauer does claim that compassion is the source of virtue and actions of genuine moral worth, but all that his core view requires is the empirical claim that we *attribute* virtue and moral worth only to compassionate people (and Schopenhauer does claim that his approach here is empirical – see OBM 189). This

[21] The most important complication here is Schopenhauer's view that the "moral virtues are not really the ultimate end, but only a step towards it" (WWR II, 608), where the ultimate end is the quieting of the will. Someone who has quieted his will would not be egoistic nor malicious, but would also not perform actions of moral worth: "He gazes back calmly and smiles at the phantasm of this world that was once able to move and torment his mind as well, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess pieces after the game is over" (WWR I, 417). Though Schopenhauer denies his philosophy is prescriptive (WWR I, 297), his talk of an ultimate end sounds like a fundamental prescription. There is therefore room for a realist reading according to which the fundamental norm is "quiet the will."

[22] At the same time, the non-distinctness of individuals might be a moral fact in an indirect sense, insofar as it is the fact the grasp of which defines the relevant epistemic asymmetry.

is a semantic claim, not a moral one. In addition, as we saw, Schopenhauer does hold that good people need moral principles as reservoirs of moral motivation. These principles need not be true, or concern facts, however, and the purest form of the basic principle is non-descriptive ("harm no one; rather help everyone to the extent that you can").

Schopenhauer's core metaethical view can be adequately stated without any positing any moral facts or properly moral claims at all, even if he does posit the existence of moral truths (a point I return to below). Whether his view is *plausible*, all things considered, is an important question. The view is, however, recognizably realist, and this suggests that the first tenet has drawn the boundary between moral realism and anti-realist in the wrong place.

3.2. Against the second tenet

According to the second tenet, sentimentalism implies moral anti-realism. In placing compassion at the center of his moral system, Schopenhauer puts himself squarely in the sentimentalist tradition. In fact, many of the best-known sentimentalists have privileged the closely related sentiments of compassion, sympathy, and empathy. This is true of Hume, as well of Adam Smith and the contemporary sentimentalist Michael Slote.

Like Hume, Schopenhauer draws a sharp line between moral sentiments and judgments. Unlike Hume, however, Schopenhauer takes the relevant sentiment to be a form of deep insight into reality. It is because of this that he is able to establish the epistemic asymmetry that distinguishes good agents from bad agents, and amounts to a vindication of morality. Moral sentiment is therefore central to Schopenhauer's core, realist metaethical view in a way that moral judgment is not. He therefore shows us that, contrary to the second tenet of contemporary metaethics, sentimentalism does not imply moral anti-realism.

3.3. Against the third tenet

The third tenet states that, at best, moral insight goes as deep as scientific or mathematical insight. Now, according to Schopenhauer, science and mathematics are essentially conceptual and essentially concerned with the spatiotemporal world of individuals, which is governed by the principle of sufficient reason (see WWR I, 51). This however, is merely the world of appearance. If appearances exhausted reality, then the world "would have to pass over us like an insubstantial dream or a ghostly phantasm" (WWR I, 123). Mathematical and scientific insight are therefore relatively shallow for Schopenhauer.

By contrast, moral insight, the "deepest knowledge" (OBM 253), goes beneath appearances. Schopenhauer would therefore deny that we should try to understand moral insight on the model of mathematical or scientific insight. Contrary to the third tenet of contemporary metaethics, he holds that moral insight goes deeper.

3.4. Against the fourth tenet

According to the fourth tenet, moral realism requires at least some substantive, necessary moral truths. For Schopenhauer, modal notions like necessary have meaning only within the realm of individuals. The non-distinctness of individuals, which holds outside of that realm, is therefore neither necessary, actual, nor contingent. Whether or not we classify that metaphysically deep truth as moral or not, it is not necessary. Because of this, the content of compassionate moral insight is likewise not modal. The virtuous person does not grasp the non-distinctness of apparent individuals as actual, contingent, or necessary.

Of course, there could still *be* substantive, necessary moral truths, even if moral insight lacks modal content and the deep facts that insight concerns are non-modal. Given his claims about the meaning of moral concepts, it is safe to say that Schopenhauer accepts some moral truths, such as that injury is wrong. However, Schopenhauer would count that truth as non-substantive, since he holds that the concepts of wrongness and injury (the negation of the will) are synonymous (OBM 208).[23] If we grant that (a topic I return to below), then a substantive moral truth about wrongness would have to involve a concept that did not analytically involve the negation of the will. An example would be the truth that Schopenhauer did something wrong on 21 August, 1821 (the date of his notorious conflict with a neighbor). This truth, however, is not unconditionally necessary. Like any event in the empirical world, this event has its grounds (previous events, Schopenhauer's motives and character), but those grounds give it only conditional necessity.

It is therefore hard to see where substantive, unconditionally necessary moral truths could fit in Schopenhauer's system. Yet this does not in any obvious way threaten his being a moral realist, contrary to the fourth tenet of contemporary metaethics. If anything, it is *because* he thinks moral insight goes deeper than anything modal that his claim to vindicate morality is as strong as it is.

3.5. Against the fifth tenet

According to the fifth tenet, no moral concept can be deduced from a non-moral concept. Schopenhauer does not give any argument in support of his claims that the concepts *bad* and *wrong* are equivalent to the concept *negation of the will*. This suggests that he takes these claims to be knowable through reflection on our concepts, as Kant thought was the case with all analytic truths. That does not imply that the conceptual truth must be immediately obvious to anyone who considered it,[24] but it does suggest that careful reflection should support Schopenhauer's claim.

Schopenhauer's claim is more plausible for the concept expressed by the English "bad" than for the concept expressed by "wrong" (wrongness seems to imply the possibility of non-wrong alternatives, but there can be situations in which one has no alternative but to injure someone or other). It is also more plausible if the badness in question is badness *to some extent*, as opposed to badness *all things considered* (since

[23] Schopenhauer would deny that even conceptual truths like this are absolutely necessary. Instead, he thinks they rest on, and so are conditioned by, the metalogical principles of identity (a=a) and contradiction (a≠not-a). The metalogical principles presumably have no modal status (see FR 101-04).

[24] For reasons to think Kant believed there were non-obvious analytic truths concerning normative concepts, see Marshall Forthcoming B.

something with some bad aspects might still be good all things considered). We can therefore understand Schopenhauer's claim as saying that "bad to some extent" and "negates the will" are synonymous. If it holds, this synonymy would go against the fifth tenet of contemporary metaethics, since the concept of negating the will does not appear to be a moral concept.[25] To see whether Schopenhauer's claim is plausible, however, we should apply Moore's open question argument. In this case, that leads us to ask whether the question "if something is negation of another's will, is it bad to some extent?" can be meaningfully asked, in comparison with questions like "if something is a cat, is it feline?"

Of course, someone who only partly understands "feline" might find the latter question meaningful. Similarly, someone who only partly understands "negation of another's will" might find any question involving that phrase meaningful. So we should consider whether the relevant question could be meaningfully asked by someone who understood the relevant terms. A full discussion of this issue would occupy more space than we have here, but my intuition, at least, is that that question *cannot* be meaningfully asked in the relevant sense. If someone sincerely asked that question, it would make me doubt whether they really understood the relevant concepts – just as I would have parallel doubts about someone who sincerely asked whether cats were felines. Putting things more colloquially, the question "sure I'm inhibiting what someone is striving for, but am I doing anything at all bad?" seems like a sign of conceptual confusion. If my intuition here is not idiosyncratic, then Moore's argument does not provide a knock-down objection to Schopenhauer's claim about the conceptual equivalence of the concepts *bad* and *negation of the will*. Schopenhauer's views would then pose an interesting challenge to the fifth tenet of contemporary metaethics.

4. Prospects for neo-Schopenhauerian metaethics

If the above arguments are right, then Schopenhauer's metaethical views offer important challenges to some central tenets of contemporary metaethics. A further question, though, is whether Schopenhauer offers an attractive alternative view. There is one part of Schopenhauer's view that few contemporary philosophers would take seriously: his radical monism. Though Schopenhauer is right that radical monism has been accepted by a surprising number of people across a range of cultures (OBM 251-52), that fact is unlikely to move any scientifically-minded readers today. My topic in this final section, therefore, is whether there might be defensible, recognizably Schopenhauerian views without radical monism.

As Schopenhauer emphasizes, he is hardly alone in giving compassion a central place in morality (OBM 232-35). What is more distinctive about his view, however, and which makes it qualify as a form of moral realism, is his claim that compassion involves a non-rational *insight* or *grasp* of reality, as opposed to being a mere emotion. While Schopenhauer understands the content of this insight in terms of radical monism, a neo-Schopenhauerian view, could take compassion to be a form of insight, but then understood its content in some other (more plausible) way. This could go two ways:

[25] A harder question is whether it is a naturalistic concept, since the will, for Schopenhauer, lies beyond the reach of natural science. That said, I suspect many contemporary naturalists would be comfortable with *some* notion of infringing on another's will.

either ascribing (irreducibly) *moral* or *normative* content to the insight or not. I consider each approach in turn.

4.1. Moral content approaches

Perhaps the most straightforward neo-Schopenhauerian view would take compassion to be insight into certain *moral* or *normative facts*. Those moral facts, in turn, could be understood in terms of moral realism: attitude-independent facts, especially ones that cannot be reduced to natural facts.[26] For such a view to be defensible, however, there should be some sort of natural *fit* between the relevant facts and the experience of compassion. After all, perhaps it is a moral fact that even victimless crimes should be punished, but it is hard to see how that could be the content of compassionate insight.

What sorts of moral facts fit with the experience of compassion? There are at least two candidates. First, compassion might be insight into the fact that someone else's suffering *is bad* or (perhaps equivalently) the fact that we have a *reason* to alleviate someone else's suffering. Second, compassion might be insight into the fact that other creatures themselves *have value*, perhaps value of the same sort we take ourselves to have. The first candidate is somewhat in line with traditional utilitarianism, which locates moral value in states of pleasure and pain. The second candidate is more in line with traditional Kantianism, which locates moral value in the subjects themselves.[27] Both these candidates fit with the experience of compassion because they concern the sort of things we take compassion to be *directed at*.

If our aim is a plausible metaethical view, an obvious question for such an approach is how this view of compassion accords with our best scientific understanding of compassion. It does not seem that we need to appeal to moral facts of any sort in order to explain our compassionate experiences, and this may suggest that those experiences are not caused by moral facts. However, on some views of experiential content, an experience can represent some fact only if it is causally connected to that fact. This question might be addressed in a number of ways, of course, but addressing it will be one task for a neo-Schopenhauerian view focused on moral content.

4.2. Non-moral content approaches

A less straightforward way of filling out a Schopenhauerian view would be to ascribe non-moral content to compassionate insight. In principle, this approach could avoid the above question about scientific understandings of experiential content. At the

[26] There may be phenomenological reasons for thinking that emotional experience (including compassionate experience) puts us in touch with value. Michelle Montague, for example, writes that in emotional experience, "one seems to feel the very nature of value and disvalue" (Montague 2014, 46). See also Johnston 2001, 189 and, for a broader case for 'moral perception,' Blum 1991.

[27] Something like the first candidate is defended by Arne Vetlesen, who writes that emotions are "indispensable in disclosing to us that others' weal and woe is somehow at stake in a given situation" (Vetlesen 1994, 153). In forthcoming work, Sandra Shapshay defends the second candidate, based on a closer reading of Schopenhauer. One noteworthy feature of Shapshay's approach (which is also hinted at in Vetlesen) is her argument that morality requires rational reflection in addition to compassion. In effect, this puts less of a burden on compassion to deliver *all* the moral truths.

same time, the approach would face a challenge in explaining what the connection was between the non-moral content of compassion and morality. There should thus be a *fit* between the presumed content or effects of the insight and morality. For example, imagine that compassion provided immediate insight into specific types of genetic similarities. Genetic similarities themselves, however, are (on most views) morally irrelevant, however, so this view about compassion would hardly strike us as a form of moral realism.

It seems to me that there are at least three potentially promising candidate ways of pursuing this approach, though each would require significant development to be plausible. First, one could appeal to some more *moderate* form of monism than Schopenhauer's. For example, some contemporary metaphysicians have defended the view that, fundamentally, there is only one thing (the whole spatiotemporal universe), such that all distinction between individuals is metaphysically derivative.[28] Perhaps, then, compassion is our insight into the fact that we are fundamentally parts of the same thing as another creature. After all, as Schopenhauer recognized, compassion does involve something like a feeling of connection.

Second, perhaps compassion is insight into the fact that other beings are *as real* as we are, such that their suffering comes to strike us as being as real as our own. At an extreme, one might think that non-compassionate experience makes one feel as though one is somehow metaphysically special. The phenomenologist Max Scheler, for instance, thought that compassion freed us from the mistaken "the egocentric ascription to others of an ontological status of mere dependence on oneself."[29] Such a view would be quite similar to Schopenhauer's, since he also thought egoism was essentially tied to an illusion. Yet the idea that different subjects are equally real is far more plausible than radical monism.

Finally, we might turn away from grasp of *facts* and understand compassionate insight in terms of the perceptual *revelation* of others' suffering (a state or property, not a fact). Consider, for example, the early modern view that an idea reveals a property of its object if the idea resembles some quality of the object (Locke, for instance, held that this was true of ideas of shapes, but not of colors). Since compassionate suffering resembles non-compassionate suffering,[30] we might be able to say that compassion reveals a property of the creature it is directed at. This would give compassion the special, objective status that some early modern philosophers assigned to (say) spatial perception.[31] On such a view, non-compassionate people would fail to perceive one aspect of reality, even though they could know it was there.

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[28] See Schaffer 2010. Significantly, Descartes claims that, in loving something, "we consider ourselves… as joined with what we love, in such a way that we imagine of whole of which we think ourselves to be only one part and the thing loved another [part]" (*Passions*, Article 80).

[29] Scheler 2008, 59. Similarly, Nel Noddings claims that "[a]pprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring... [I]f I take on the other's reality as possibility and being to feel its reality… I am impelled to act as though in my own behalf, but in behalf of the other" (Noddings 1984, 16).

[30] Singer et al. 2004.

[31] In Marshall 2016, I discuss how such a view of compassion or empathy can be based in Locke's view. In Marshall Manuscript, I develop this line of thought into a neo-Schopenhauerian metaethics.

Before concluding, let me expand on this last point, since it bears on all forms of neo-Schopenhauerian metaethics I have considered. Contemporary epistemologists have tended to focus on propositional knowledge, and often seem to think that perceptual states have value only insofar as they contribute to such knowledge. That view is not obviously right, however. I think most of us would want to *perceive* the world even if we could have full knowledge without perception. Now, on any view of its content, compassionate insight is more like perception than like propositional knowledge (hence Schopenhauer's description of it as *intuitive* at OBM 232). We could grant that a non-compassionate person could *know* whatever the compassionate person has insight into, yet this would not deprive compassion of its value. My suggestion, then, is that if a neo-Schopenhauerianian wants to locate an epistemic asymmetry between good and bad agents (see §1.1 above), she does not need to find any such asymmetry at the level of propositional knowledge.

Conclusion

The above list of neo-Schopenhauerian views is not exhaustive, so there may be other defensible views beyond those I described. Even if no such view is defensible, however, Schopenhauer's own view offers a rich set of challenges for those who want to understand one of the central metaethical questions: can morality be vindicated?[32]

[32] [Acknowledgements]

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