Introduction

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The chapters in this volume offer a rich garden of ideas about the nature of morality that emerged on five continents across thousands of years. The topics range from grand views about the very fabric of the cosmos to nuanced suggestions about humans' layered moral experiences. Reflecting on these ideas promises to both challenge and enrich contemporary Euro-American metaethics.

Metaethics, broadly speaking, is the investigation of the underlying nature of morality.[2] While any more precise characterization of what this involves is risky, a few general statements will help clarify what this volume aims to accomplish.

One way to locate the field of metaethics is via certain "why?" questions. If a child asks why she shouldn't hit someone, the answer is pretty easy: it's wrong to hurt others. If she asks why it's wrong to hurt others, though, it's hard to find an easy answer (aside, perhaps, from "it just is"). Metaethics attempts to answer the most basic "why?" questions about ethics, that is, questions that would arise even if we had settled what we should do, which things are good, and what sort of people we should be. For example, even if we all affirm the sentence, "it's wrong to hurt others", we can still ask "why?" – where we are now asking (for example) what that sentence *means*, how we *know* that it's true, or what its truth *consists in*. Since every human society has some form of moral code, and the temptation to repeatedly ask "why?" seems deeply rooted in human psychology, it seems likely that humans across the globe have been discussing metaethics in one way or another since before the start of recorded history.

Contemporary metaethics, however, became established as a distinct subfield of philosophy only in the 20th century – largely in response to the writings of G.E. Moore, A.J. Ayer, and J.L. Mackie.[3] The first periodical dedicated to metaethics (*Oxford Studies in Metaethics*) appeared only in 2006. Despite this late start, metaethics is one of the most vibrant and quickly growing areas of Anglophone philosophy. Dissertations, articles, monographs, and conferences about metaethics are increasingly common.

The recent growth of metaethics is partly due to its philosophical inclusiveness. Ethics isn't the only area that's one question away from metaethics – in fact, every major subfield of philosophy has helped inform metaethics in important ways. Metaethics includes (but is not limited to):

- *logical* questions about the inferential relations involving moral claims
- *metaphysical* questions about moral properties and facts
- *epistemological* questions and questions in the *philosophy of mind* about our representation of and access to those properties and facts
- questions in the *philosophy of language* about the semantics of moral language
- *theological* questions about the relationship between morality and divinity
- questions in the *philosophy of science and mathematics* about how ethical thought and progress relate to scientific and mathematical thought and progress
- questions in *political philosophy* about the relationship between the moral and the political
- *historical* questions about the plausibility of earlier philosophers' answers to these questions.

(Plato, Aristotle, Hume, and Kant all loom large)

By that measure, metaethics may be the most inclusive subfield of 21st-century philosophy.[4]

By another measure, however, metaethics may be the least inclusive subfield. Other subfields of philosophy have well-developed literatures comparing approaches from different intellectual traditions. At the time of the workshop on which this volume was based (August 2018), online searches for "comparative logic", "comparative epistemology", "comparative metaphysics", "comparative aesthetics", "comparative political philosophy", and "comparative ethics" respectively yielded over 7,000, 13,000, 17,000, 39,000, 67,000, and 73,000 results. A search for "comparative metaethics" yielded only eight. Not 8,000. Just eight. And two of those were related to the workshop. To be sure, online search numbers are often misleading, and a significant amount of comparative metaethics has been done without that label.[5] Even so, it is striking how little work has been done in Anglophone philosophy on metaethical thought from outside the mainstream European tradition – especially since, as several of the following chapters reveal, thinkers from outside that tradition have responded to it and developed it in insightful ways. The chief aim of this volume is help show how much mainstream contemporary metaethics stands to gain by opening itself to a broader range of comparisons and inspirations.

The rest of this introduction proceeds as follows. I first offer a brief description of each of the chapters. With those descriptions

in place, I then propose two explanations for why so little work has been done on comparative metaethics. Next, I say more about how this volume hopes to contribute to contemporary metaethics while recognizing some important limitations and potential problems. I conclude with some acknowledgments.

1. Summaries of Chapters

This volume has two parts: I. Moral Metaphysics and II. Moral Experience. Broadly speaking, Part I concerns the nature of value, especially insofar as it fits into the larger universe, whereas Part II concerns humans' way of apprehending value. Most of the chapters touch on both themes, but I have divided them based on which theme takes center stage. Within each part I have organized the chapters based on philosophical connections. Hence, every chapter is meant to contrast productively with its neighbors. In this section, I offer a brief summary of each chapter.

1.1. Moral Metaphysics

In "The Metaethics of Maat", Kevin DeLapp describes the ancient Egyptian notion of *maat*, a notion that simultaneously concerned both justice and truth. A person who aspires toward *maat* is a *maaty*, and being a *maaty* is important to whether one is admitted to the afterlife. To be *maaty* requires speaking appropriately and being appropriately spoken about. Hence, the test for admission to the afterlife involved a person's true name being weighed against their words. For the ancient Egyptians, the universe was created through language, so tying the ethical notion of *maat* to language did not imply that ethics was less than fully real – they held that even the decay of physical things could be checked through proper ritual language. Ritual utterances get their power from reenacting the creation of the universe and their correspondence to things' true names. DeLapp argues that this view provides a deep challenge to the central distinction in contemporary metaethics, that between moral realism and anti-realism. On the one hand, *maat*-facts stem from the fundamental nature of the universe, and so they are independent of human minds and practices. On the other hand, *maat* is essentially linguistic. In fact, DeLapp argues, the ancient Egyptian view approaches contemporary quasi-realism in how it sees moral language as not simply descriptive while using moral language to explain morality. Hence, this view offers a striking challenge to some of the most widely accepted metaethical taxonomies.

Another challenge to common assumptions about the relation between language and morality is offered by Brian Yazzie Burkhart in "The Groundedness of Normativity or Indigenous Normativity through the Land". Burkhart's focus is what he (following Glen Sean Coulthard) calls

"grounded normativity". Grounded normativity concerns Indigenous ethical frameworks in which *physical place* plays a central role. For example, the traditional *Diné* (Navajo) view is that people gained the capacity to reason by receiving words that were spoken by four sacred mountains. These words, when used by humans, encode a complex of relationships to the land and the various beings who live on it. By contrast, most mainstream Euro-American ethical frameworks give no particular weight to place, so that our obligations and moral self-understanding has no essential connection to any particular area or geography. This contrast becomes pernicious when a settler society sees itself as a 'philosophical guardian' of Indigenous peoples. By imposing systems of thought that aren't grounded in the land and offering these as 'translations' for Indigenous words, settler societies threaten to corrupt Indigenous ethical systems on a fundamental level. Burkhart considers a particularly important example of this: a confusion of grounded normativity with what he calls "Fatherland normativity". Whereas grounded normativity hinges on non-dominating relations to land, Fatherland normativity involves a dominating, exclusionary relation to the land that (e.g.) manifests in a categorical opposition to immigration. Burkhart concludes by arguing that grounded normativity offers a form of moral realism without either general, abstract principles or (as realism is often conceived) moral statements whose abstract truth floats free of any connection to the land.

Metaphysically robust normative relationships are also a central concern in James Maffie's chapter, "The Nature of Mexica Ethics". Maffie locates Mexica (Aztec) views of value and obligation within the larger Mexica understanding of the cosmos. Central to the Mexica view, as Maffie understands it, is the notion of *macehua*, a process by which an agent brings about some result and thereby becomes deserving of something. One case of this is humans' cultivation of corn, which thereby makes them deserving of the sustenance that the corn then provides. The same normatively loaded relationship holds, for the Mexica, between the creator beings (such as Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca) and humans. The creator beings brought humans into existence through a *macehua* process, which thereby obligates human to provide sustenance to the creator beings – unlike familiar Abrahamic views on which an omnipotent divine being in no way depends on humans' activity. In fact, both humans and creator beings are constituted by *teotl*, a sort of sacred energy or life force (the metaphysics of which Maffie has described in detail in earlier work). Central to this view, then, are demanding creating/sustaining relationships that are intrinsically normative. Unlike most contemporary views that see normativity as inhering in relationships, however, the Mexica view is decidedly non-anthropocentric – humans are merely some nodes among others in a vast, normatively loaded cosmic fabric.

A similarly rich normative fabric is described in Joseph Len Miller's chapter, "Etemeyaske Vpokat (Living Together Peacefully)". Miller describes

the core normative concept in Muscogee (Creek) thought, for which he uses the term 'harmony'. Unlike, say, a Platonic or Moorean conception of goodness, the Muscogee conception of harmony is essentially relational, and the fundamental moral obligation is to promote harmony. This involves a balancing of energy. Moreover, unlike many other relation-focused ethical views (but like the views described in Maffie's and Burkhart's chapters), the Muscogee view includes relations to non-humans, including all of an agent's surroundings. Miller suggests that harmony has both moral and prudential value, though the prudential value of promoting harmony is not chiefly aimed at solitary agents as in, say, Thomas Hobbes's view. One surprising consequence of this view is that morally correct action requires a surprising amount of detailed non-moral knowledge concerning the structures of energies in the various entities that one interacts with. Miller offers the example of hunting. Proper hunting requires knowledge of how to use one's weapon and the hunted animal's anatomy (for the sake of reducing suffering) but also knowledge of which person in one's community should first receive the kill from the hunt. Hence, morally correct action requires detailed knowledge of the natural world and one's community, in stark contrast to, say, certain Kantian views.

While Burkhart's, Maffie's, and Miller's chapters draw on non-European traditions to challenge anthropocentric metaethical views, a similar challenge emerges in John Grey's chapter on a largely neglected European philosopher: "Species and the Good in Anne Conway's Metaethics". Grey spells out the surprising consequences of Anne Conway's essence monism, that is, her view that all created beings share the same essence. Essence monism was (and remains) a heterodox view – most European philosophers who considered the question maintained that humans have a different essence from (e.g.) horses, plants, and rocks. Grey looks at the details of Conway's argument for essence monism and proposes that she accepts this metaphysical view for distinctively moral reasons, in particular, that there should be no limits to any creature's potential to participate in goodness. As a theist, Conway held that the world was created by a benevolent, omnipotent God and inferred that God would not set limits to any creature's moral improvement. This provides a striking instance of ethics guiding metaphysics. Grey draws three further surprising metaethical implications from these views. The first is that, while some facts about what is good for an entity might appeal to its species (e.g., what is good for me qua human), other facts about its goodness will not (since, e.g., it is not essential to me that I am human). The second is what Grey calls the "universality of moral subjecthood", according to which all creatures are appropriate objects of rewards and punishment because all creatures are at least *capable* of moral deliberation. Grey concludes by pointing out that these views intersect in a surprising way with the view (defended by Michael Smith and others) that we have reason to do whatever an

epistemically perfected version of us would advise us to do. Conway's view implies that every creature (even inanimate ones) has such an epistemically perfected counterpart, which would mean that every creature has reasons to act. This final conclusion may seem absurd but is not easily avoided given essence monism. Hence, on Grey's interpretation, Conway shows how facts about humans' vs. nonhumans' essences can have a surprising impact on the scope of moral subjecthood.

While Conway was concerned with moral improvement that requires becoming a different species, Irene Liu, in "The Art of Convention: An Aesthetic Defense of Confucian Ritual", considers an approach to specifically *human* perfectibility, drawn from the Confucian philosopher Xunzi. Liu's starting point is the challenge of defending the emphasis on ritual in Confucian ethics. Many of the required rituals are extremely specific, such as ~~when~~ to bow when entering a staircase. Metaethically speaking, it is hard to see what could justify such specifics rituals. Some commentators have attempted to do so in an Aristotelian vein, looking at Mencius's account of how human nature can be fully realized. Liu objects, though, that such accounts cannot plausibly account for what she calls the "normative fineness" of rituals – the very specific requirements they involve. The same problem, Liu argues, faces attempts to justify rituals via their capacity for maintaining social order – a view suggested by Xunzi. However, elsewhere Xunzi claims that moral education resembles crafting raw materials into something useful and good, and ~~compares~~ rituals to the proper application of makeup to a face. This, Liu proposes, points to a more promising approach ~~to justifying ritual~~. Just as makeup accentuates some natural features while covering others, so too ritual accentuates and refines some emotions and desires while redirecting or suppressing others. This is an *aesthetic* justification, and Liu takes it to be an objective one. Aesthetic perfection, unlike development of humans' biological nature or supporting social order, does plausibly require very specific details and so is a much better fit for this case. The idea of grounding moral value in aesthetic value (especially in terms of beautifying human nature) is rarely encountered in Western philosophy. However, Liu suggests, it may offer a richer metaethical understanding of social convention in moral life than most metaethicists have thought possible.

Part I of this volume closes with Alex King and Nicolas Bommarito's chapter, "Matilal's Metaethics". Bimal Krishna Matilal was born in India, educated at Harvard, and taught at Oxford. He is well known for his work in logic, but his complex metaethical views have received little attention. Drawing on various classical Indian philosophical sources, Matilal defended a form of metaethical pluralism that offers a promising framework with which to consider comparative metaethics in general, not least since Matilal himself engaged in detail with mainstream Anglophone metaethicists, included Bernard Williams, Gilbert Harman, and R.M. Hare. King and Bommarito show how Matilal's pluralism is

positioned between moral relativism and traditional absolutism. Against views that relativize ethical frameworks to different cultures, Matilal denies that cultures can be neatly individuated. This line of criticism, King and Bommarito argue, is likely inspired by the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness, according to which nothing has a static, independent nature – a general metaphysical view that provides a ground for suspicion about the individuation of cultures. However, Matilal also denies that there is any single set of moral standards that all people should conform to. Instead he holds that there are various, potentially incommensurable moral standards. King and Bommarito argue that this opposition to 'singularism' was inspired by the Indian notion of *dharmas*, as exemplified in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Matilal used a case from the *Bhagavad Gītā* to defend the possibility of an individual facing a genuine moral dilemma because of a clash between such different standards. How, though, does this rejection of singularism fit with Matilal's rejection of relativism? King and Bommarito find an answer to this in Matilal's discussion of Jaina philosophy, in particular, of the concept of 'non-onesidedness'. The best-known exemplification of this concept is the image of several blind people feeling different parts of an elephant. To the person feeling its leg, it seems like a tree, while to the person feeling its tail, it feels like a broom. These people encounter something real, and so each can get something right (though none are guaranteed to). Carrying the analogy over, we might see different people as all trying to touch the same complex moral fabric (some succeeding in different ways, with others failing). Hence, King and Bommarito conclude, Matilal offers us a way of understanding and legitimizing some ethical differences without abandoning the realist's ability to simply reject some moral systems.

If something like Matilal's view is right, then the project of understanding morality in the fullest sense requires detailed attention to different forms of moral experience. This leads to the second part of the volume.

1.2. *Moral Experience*

In "Goblet Words and Moral Knack: Non-Cognitivist Moral Realism in the *Zhuangzi*?", Christopher C. Kirby proposes that the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi offers a form of moral realism according to which moral reality cannot be grasped through propositional belief or literally described, but only felt, intuited, and indirectly expressed. Relatedly, Kirby argues, Zhuangzi offers a picture of moral expertise that does not assume the possibility of communication – instead, moral expertise is distinguished by inarticulable 'knacks'. Kirby's argument focuses on the use of so-called 'goblet words' in the *Zhuangzi* (the text whose 'inner chapters' are attributed to Zhuangzi). The goblet words, which appear in metaphor and poetic phrases, are meant to indicate a sort of truth, but the truth in question is not so much a property of sentences as a dynamic

ultimate nature. Likewise, Zhuangzi saw thought and language as stand-
ing in a dynamic relationship with reality as opposed to merely trying to
mirror it. Zhuangzi presented his view in deliberate contrast to the intel-
lectualism of the Confucian and Mohist traditions. The ideal of agency,
for Zhuangzi, was found in skillful artisans, whose mastery of their craft
is shown by how they adapt their own bodies in responding to particular
situations. These artisans have tapped into the true dynamic nature that
guides their actions, but since that nature is dynamic, none of them have
completely grasped it. Hence, the moral grasp of even the best people at
most only 'tips toward' the ultimate truth. Moreover, in contrast to main-
stream Western accounts, Zhuangzi does not assume that good agents
will converge in their actions or beliefs. Kirby concludes by proposing,
however, that this is not an indication of moral conventionalism or rela-
tivism but rather of the richness of the moral reality that cannot be con-
clusively expressed.

The theme of moral development is likewise explored by Jing Hu and
Seth Robertson in "Constructing Morality with Mengzi". Hu and Rob-
ertson draw on the work of the Confucian philosopher Mengzi (some-
times called 'Mencius') to shed light on how people's moral views can
progress. Hu and Robertson direct their attention in particular to how a
moral anti-realist can explain such progress, given that anti-realists can-
not (or need not) appeal to the apprehension of real, mind-independent
moral facts. Menzgi, on their reading, has three lessons to offer contem-
porary anti-realists on this front. The common theme between these les-
sons is that moral progress involves more than just inferentially driven
changes to moral beliefs. Their first Mengzian lesson is that our moral
deliberation and development include important elements beyond beliefs
and inferences, elements that are also affective and motivational. The
second lesson is that, as Mengzi shows, analogical reasoning can play
a role in shifting agents' moral perspectives, even in the face of other-
wise unassailable, internally consistent sets of moral beliefs. The third
lesson is that moral progress is explained by the emergence of certain
emotions in engaged situations. While some contemporary philoso-
phers have appealed to related considerations, Hu and Robertson show
that Mengzi's approach benefits from his moderately complex view of
human nature, according to which it is comprised of four 'sprouts' that
can each develop into virtues. (As an aside, I will note that while Hu and
Robertson focus on how Mengzi's views can help anti-realist accounts, I
suspect that the considerations they raise deserve serious attention from
moral realists as well.)

In "Nishida Kitarō's *Kōiteki Chokkan*", Laura Specker Sullivan explores
the 20th-century Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō's concept of 'active
intuition'. Specker Sullivan argues that Nishida, a practicing Buddhist
who studied European philosophy extensively, offers a powerful alterna-
tive to contemporary views on which our moral knowledge arises from

non-inferential intuition or sentiment. Most contemporary intuitionist and sentimentalist views appeal to something receptive or passive, in which, say, an armchair philosopher has some moral fact strike her as true. By contrast, Nishida, on Specker Sullivan's reading, takes the relevant intuitions to arise only insofar as we are actively participating in our world, such as when we find ourselves reaching out to help someone who has tripped. Nishida thus offers what seems to be the opposite of the familiar view (defended by, e.g., Iris Murdoch and John McDowell) that moral perception is prior to action. Active intuition, on Nishida's view, provides us moral knowledge both of what, say, a situation requires and of ourselves as moral agents. All this knowledge, for Nishida, is deeply dependent on the historical development of subjects' interactions with their world. Hence, on Nishida's view, the armchair philosopher who attempts to understand ethics ahistorically is necessarily at a disadvantage compared to more engaged thinkers – a striking challenge to the widespread ideal of doing ethics (and philosophy generally) in the cool hour of deliberation.

A similar emphasis on activity in the experience of value is described in Clark Donley's "Augusto Salazar Bondy's Philosophy of Value". Augusto Salazar Bondy was a Peruvian philosopher who systematically engaged with all the major issues in metaethics: metaphysics, epistemology, language, mind, and the implications of metaethics for concrete political and ethical problems. Much of his work discussed the work of European philosophers, especially Kant and Wittgenstein. At the same time, however, in his discussions of political domination and oppression, he drew attention to the pernicious role that philosophy can play. Donley first describes Salazar Bondy's early metaphysics of value, which hinges on the idea of an entity fulfilling its being. Salazar Bondy later rejected this view, however, for broadly Moorean reasons. Instead, partly inspired by Wittgetstein's *Tractatus*, Salazar Bondy developed an understanding of value as a transcendental condition of rational action and interaction (and an accompanying view of ethical language as non-descriptive, on analogy with logical language). Yet truly understanding value, for Salazar Bondy, requires understanding valuative *experience*. Donley lays out the basic structure of Salazar Bondy's hierarchical account of valuative experience on which we attribute value to objects, realize those attributions through action, form preferences, and then make choices that realize objects based on those preferences. All of these aspects of valuative experience are guided by the idea of objective, universalizable value, and so they are distinct from mere likes and dislikes. Salazar Bondy indexes all valuative experience to 'patterns of valuation'. These patterns therefore play a fundamental role in all our actions as rational beings. Yet, Donley shows, Salazar Bondy does not think all patterns of valuation are on a par – some involve the imposition of alien values, and this means (in a broadly Kantian sense) that they fail to be universal. A key example of this, for Salazar Bondy, was the imposition of European philosophy and religion in Latin

America. Nevertheless, Salazar Bondy was optimistic about the potential for Latin American philosophy to achieve authenticity through critical revisions of the imposed patterns. Relative to contemporary metaethics, Donley argues that Salazar Bondy's views could be fruitfully engaged with on at least three fronts. First, Salazar Bondy describes how social practices depend on values, in contrast to the more familiar emphasis on how values depend on social practices. Second, Salazar Bondy carefully considers the difficult question of how socially encoded patterns of value can be assessed without appealing to moral properties or entities. Third, Salazar Bondy offers powerful examples of how metaethical thought can directly bear on very real social and political challenges.

A similar link between real social and political problems and broad metaethical concerns appears in Sean T. Murphy's chapter, "Sontag on Impertinent Sympathy and Photographs of Evil". Murphy draws out two ideas from Susan Sontag's discussions of sympathetic reactions to war photography in her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Both ideas challenge widely held views about moral perception and moral emotions. The first idea is that war photographs provide us with *general* moral knowledge, such as enlarging our sense of how much suffering human wickedness has caused. While a significant number of contemporary philosophers (such as Lawrence Blum) defend the view that we can acquire moral knowledge by perception, their focus is typically on knowledge of particulars. The second idea is that our sympathetic reactions to war photographs have a sort of content concerning not just the objects of sympathy but also ourselves (the sympathetic subject). Sontag claims that our sympathy declares that we are both innocent with respect to the suffering we see and unable to help, even when we are neither in fact innocent nor impotent. This poses a challenge to views that give sympathy a straightforwardly positive role in our moral lives. The view Murphy finds in Sontag also poses a concrete practical challenge to everyone who finds themselves reacting sympathetically to others: perhaps our sympathetic reactions obscures (or even denies) our own complacency in bringing about the problematic situation in question.

In my view, Sontag's challenge raises a question in relation to the specific theme of this volume: does mere sympathy for other intellectual traditions (a sympathy that, on a general level, many philosophers would profess) obscure the question of why those traditions are regarded as 'other', and why they have received comparatively little attention from contemporary philosophers? This brings us to the general topic of why, in contrast to other subfields of philosophy, metaethics has included so little comparative philosophy.

2. Why So Little Comparative Metaethics Before Now?

I hope you will ultimately agree that the chapters just described show that comparative metaethics offers an incredibly exciting range of philosophical

views and challenges to contemporary metaethics. Hence, I do not think that the relative rarity of comparative metaethics up until now is due to a lack of material or potential interest. In this section, I identify two other factors that I think do, at least in part, explain why this area is underexplored.

The first factor is relatively straightforward. As I noted earlier, metaethics intersects with all other subfields of philosophy. This makes it *really hard*. A complete defense of, say, the 'anti-realist' metaethical view that moral facts are just projections of our desires ends up requiring discussion of intersecting issues from metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, etc. Once such a view is on the table, defending an opposing realist view (on which, say, moral facts are robustly mind-independent) calls for addressing the anti-realist on each of these fronts. That is a lot to juggle – perhaps more so than for any other subfield of philosophy. In addition, comparative philosophical work on any topic is also really hard, but for different reasons. It involves trying to coordinate different linguistic and conceptual frameworks. Towering over that coordination task are profoundly difficult meta-philosophical questions about the possibility and meaning of comparative and interpretive work. Hence, I suggest, there is a fairly sanguine explanation for the rarity of comparative metaethics: pursuing it requires dealing with two mutually-amplifying sets of serious challenges. Since metaethics is relatively new as a distinct branch of philosophy, it may just be too early to expect many metaethicists to take on the challenges of comparative work or to expect many comparative philosophers to take on metaethical questions.

Difficulty cannot be the whole explanation, however, since many academics are drawn to their areas of specialization precisely because they enjoy difficult challenges. The other factor I'd like to propose, then, is less sanguine. While racism and sexism run throughout the history of philosophy, in the 18th and 19th centuries a number of prominent intellectuals (such as Christoph Meiners) deliberately set out to craft a story of philosophy centered on European men – downplaying the writings of women and earlier narratives that gave Egypt and India a central role.[6] Much of these efforts were connected to the work of Immanuel Kant[7] and helped shape the profoundly influential story of philosophy articulated by G.W.F. Hegel, according to which the highest forms of philosophical thought appeared only in Europe. It is likely that all of subsequent European philosophy was affected by this course of events in one way or other. Yet, I'd like to suggest, 20th-century metaethical inquiry was particularly vulnerable to it because metaethics has maintained an unusually close connection to Kant. While Kant's thought has impacted every area of contemporary philosophy to some degree, his framing of metaethical issues in the 1785 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* looms large in the most influential texts of 20th-century metaethics, such as G.E. *Principia Ethica*, C.L. Stevenson's 1944 *Ethics and Language*, R.M. Hare's 1952 *Language of Morals*, and J.L. Mackie's 1977 *Ethics: Inventing*

Right and Wrong.[8] By contrast, Kant's metaphysics, epistemology, and logic seemed to have dropped off more in their influence. This may have been because Kant's focus on *imperatives* in the *Groundwork* made his framing especially amenable to the 20th-century 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, whereas other parts of his philosophy were harder to adopt in linguistic terms. For example, Kant's ~~influential~~ distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments (central to his epistemology and metaphysics) requires more philosophical work to defend than his distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. The latter distinction seems supported by the surface grammar of statements, whereas the former does not. Hence, mid-20th-century Anglophone philosophers, most of whom gave language a central place in their approaches, were perhaps most likely to frame their discussions relative to Kant when discussing metaethics – which in turn helped sustain the sort of narrative and focus produced by Meiners and others.[9]

I am not suggesting that all metaethicists influenced by Kant inherited the hegemonic aims of people like Meiners, nor am I suggesting that Kant was their primary historical influence. I am also not suggesting that continuing to engage with Kant is necessarily wrong (at least, I sincerely hope not, since nearly all of my own work does!). But, insofar as we are looking for a historical understanding of why so little work has been done on comparative metaethics, one important possibility is that Kant's outsized influence brought with it an implicit assumption that metaethics is really found only in Kant and those white, male philosophers he conspicuously engaged with (such as Hume, Aristotle, and Plato). Ironically, then, it may be in part because metaethics has maintained *more* connection to its history than other subfields of contemporary philosophy that it has shown comparatively little interest in looking outside the mainstream European canon.

Let me emphasize that my proposal here is a hypothesis painted in broad strokes about a long and complex stretch of intellectual history. There are alternative explanations for the phenomenon in question that I have not argued against. As mentioned earlier, one potential explanation is that comparative metaethics just does not have anything philosophically significant to offer. This volume as whole, I believe, refutes any suggestion along such lines. However, there is another important potential explanation that should be considered: perhaps comparative metaethics is morally or politically inappropriate or dangerous. I consider this worrisome possibility in the next section.

Before I do so, though, I want to say something about why I am optimistic about the *future* of comparative philosophy. Regardless of why relatively little comparative metaethics has been done up to now, I have yet to find a metaethicist or student of metaethics who, when presented with it, was not interested in the prospects for comparative metaethics. I am more confident that comparative metaethics has a bright future than I am of any explanation for its limited past.

3. Hopes, Limitations, and Dangers

The primary hope of this volume is to introduce some exciting metaethical ideas into the contemporary metaethical literature, thereby inspiring others to join in doing comparative metaethics. Many of the chapters also aim to add to the literature on the non-canonical figure or tradition they focus on, but for most of this volume's authors, this is a secondary aim. For that reason, many of the authors explore a range of philosophically illuminating interpretive possibilities. This is similar, in fact, to how many 20th-century metaethicists have engaged with Kant. Their concern was not limited to getting Kant's own views exactly right; they also land on important ideas through ~~an~~ engagement with Kant's texts.[10] Even so, this volume has certain limitations and faces potential dangers. I consider some of these in this section.

As you may have noticed by the end of Section 1, the volume has at least one important limitation: the limited selection of figures and intellectual traditions discussed. Despite the considerable range of sources discussed, none of the chapters engage with metaethical thought from (for example) sub-Saharan Africa, the Islamic tradition, indigenous traditions in Australia and New Zealand, or Black feminist thinkers. The particular sources discussed here are a function of who responded to the preparatory workshop's call for papers and which of the invited contributors were ultimately able to contribute a chapter. Much more comparative metaethical work remains to be done in relation to many other thinkers and traditions.

In the last section I mentioned the possibility that comparative metaethics might be underexplored because some earlier scholars believed that it was morally or politically problematic. Since each chapter aims to draw connections between contemporary metaethics and non-canonical figures and thoughts, there are at least two (related) potential problems the authors here face: appropriation and domination. I'll briefly consider each.

One way to understand intellectual appropriation is in terms of epistemic injustice, more specifically, in terms of inappropriately *speaking for* another.[11] *Speaking for* another person or group can be an insult to their agency (implying they can't speak for themselves), a way of blocking them from participating in ongoing conversations, and a way of wrongly essentializing them. These problems are amplified when one speaks for another inaccurately – a risk that comes with all interpretive work. As Brian Burkhart's chapter explains, this risk is particularly important when language plays a central role in a people's ethical system. To be sure, worries about appropriation are most pressing when one speaks for living people, but almost all the figures and traditions discussed by the contributors have living descendants. Since many of the contributors to this volume do not have such an identity connection to the figures and traditions they discuss, the interpretations they offer are meant as proposals – proposals

which they hope others will correct as needed. By contrast, the most egregious examples of appropriation are presented as the final word on the matter, as conclusively speaking for others.

While appropriation is a problem of *taking*, domination is a problem of *imposing*. On this point, Clark Donley's chapter on Augusto Salazar Bondy is helpful. For Salazar Bondy, one of the key features of domination is how a foreign framework can stifle the authentic creativity of a people or a tradition. Applied here, one might worry that this volume's focus on contemporary metaethics might carry the suggestion that, say, an indigenous culture's views on value must be 'tidied up' using contemporary philosophy before they can be thought about seriously, so that members of indigenous groups cannot creatively engage in proper ethical thought without some Western philosophical 'training.'

Any such suggestion is rejected by the contributors to this volume. All of them believe there can be something useful about engaging with contemporary metaethics, but none believe that anyone must engage with that framework to do metaethics. Instead, the driving suspicion in these chapters is that there are defects or gaps in *contemporary metaethics*, not the alternative traditions the contributors examine. Some of the chapters (including Burkhart's and Liu's) attempt to recover metaethical ideas from Euro-American categorizations others have applied to them. This is the opposite, then, from the project of a philosopher like David Hume, who notoriously used an empiricist framework to dismiss large swaths of non-academic thought as sophistry and illusion.

All that said, there may still be politically important mistakes in this volume (including this introduction). We believe that the potential payoffs justify the risk of mistakes. Not only does contemporary metaethics stand to learn from more attention to non-canonical sources, but the chapters that follow also offer introductions to fascinating thinkers and intellectual traditions that many readers will not have encountered before.

4. Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. This introduction has benefited from comments and feedback from John Grey, David Kim, Jim Maffie, Joey Miller, Kyle O'Dwyer, and Mike Raven. Megan Wu provided not only helpful comments and discussion but also invaluable help with the background research.
2. In this introduction, I use 'ethics' and 'morality' interchangeably, though these terms are sometimes used in different ways. For example, it sounds more natural to talk a club's *ethical* code than about a club's *moral* code.
3. Moore (1903), Ayer (1946), Mackie (1977).
4. Logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language likewise intersect with most other subfields (hence their traditional designation as 'core' areas in analytic philosophy). However, a significant body of work in these areas is done in relative isolation from other subfields, hence, many canonical works of (e.g.) contemporary Anglophone metaphysics say nothing substantive about ~~(e.g.)~~ epistemology or language. By contrast, nearly all the canonical works of contemporary Anglophone metaethics include substantive claims about metaphysics, epistemology, language, and philosophy of mind.
5. See, for example, Wong (1984), The Cowherds (2015), and Flanagan et al. (2019). The term 'metaethics' came into common use only in the second half of the 20th century, so, insofar as earlier comparative metaethics had a 'comparative' label, it was probably often that of 'comparative ethics.'
6. See O'Neill (1997) and Park (2013).
7. In a 1784 letter to Friedrich Plessing, Kant writes: "For reasons already largely anticipated by Herr Meiners, I cannot agree with your judgment concerning the great wisdom and insight of the ancient Egyptians" (Kant 1999, 212).
8. To be sure, other 20th-century philosophers such as G.E.M. Anscombe and Philippa Foot argued, sometimes influentially, against the Kantian framing of metaethical issues (see Anscombe 1958; Foot 1972). However, while some philosophers took these arguments as inspiration for moving beyond the Kantian framing, others took them as occasions for defending it.
9. Megan Wu suggested to me that discussions of (non-meta-) ethics from this period had a similar Eurocentric focus and that this may have at times 'trickled up' to metaethical discussions. After all, it is still common for ethics courses to give texts from Aristotle, Mill, and Kant a foundational place, whereas 'standard' logic, metaphysics, and epistemology courses at most use a bit of Aristotle, Descartes, or Hume to prepare students for more recent literature. Another (compatible) explanation for the prominence of the Kantian framework, of course, is that Kant got something recognizably right.
10. As the recent history of Kant interpretation has shown, there can be a productive back-and-forth between those concerned with getting Kant's views exactly right and those looking for broadly Kantian inspiration (e.g., in the aftermath of P.F. Strawson's *Bounds of Sense*). Both projects can provide the other with incentives and insights.
11. For one useful discussion, see Matthes (2016), which draws on Fricker (2007), Maitra (2009), Dotson (2011), and others.

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