

SCHIFFER'S UNHAPPY FACE SOLUTION TO
A PUZZLE ABOUT MORAL JUDGEMENT*

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In the first two chapters of The Things We Mean Stephen Schiffer defends the following claims.¹

- (i) The things that we believe to be true are the very same things as the things that we mean when we state (say/assert) things.
- (ii) The things we mean when we state (say/assert) things are propositions.
- (iii) The concept of a proposition is a pleonastic concept,

where, according to Schiffer, the concept of an F is pleonastic just in case the concept itself licenses entailments of the form: $S \Rightarrow \exists xFx$. These are what he calls "something-from-nothing" entailments and the various practices in which such entailments are made are what he calls "hypostatizing practices" (p.57). The concept of a proposition is pleonastic, according to this definition, because it licenses the move from a claim like 'Fido is a dog,' a claim containing only the singular term 'Fido' referring to Fido, to the claim 'It is true that Fido is a dog,' which is a claim that contains the singular term 'that Fido is a dog' referring to the proposition that Fido is a dog.

- (iv) Propositions are pleonastic entities,

as anything that falls under a pleonastic concept is, by definition, a pleonastic entity. And

- (v) The nature of propositions, as pleonastic entities, is fully determined by the hypostatizing practices that are constitutive of the concept of a proposition together with those necessary a priori truths that are applicable to things of any kind.

Schiffer's idea is thus that propositions are entities, but that they are entities of a particularly insubstantial kind, as they have no hidden nature waiting to be discovered by

a theory (p.63). Everything there is to know about propositions is right there on the surface, deducible from the hypostatizing practices constitutive of the concept—moves like that from 'Fido is a dog' to 'It is true that Fido is a dog'—and from the other necessary a priori truths that apply to things of all kinds.

As Schiffer points out, the theory of pleonastic propositions looks to have far-reaching consequences both in the theory of meaning and elsewhere in philosophy, consequences he explores more fully in subsequent chapters of The Things We Mean. One of these concerns a familiar puzzle in the theory of meaning that is confronted more often by meta-ethicists than by specialist philosophers of language. The puzzle is prompted by the Janus-faced nature of moral judgements, for while certain features of such judgements point in one direction, suggesting that they are expressions of cognitive states, other features point in the opposite direction, suggesting that they are expressions of non-cognitive states.² The puzzle in the theory of meaning is to give an account of what we mean when we make moral judgements that somehow makes sense of their Janus-faced nature.

Schiffer's solution to this puzzle comes in three parts. The first part consists of an argument in favour of cognitivism based on the theory of pleonastic propositions; the second part consists of a supplementary suggestion about the content of moral judgement that, as he sees things, explains why theorists have been tempted by non-cognitivism; and the third part consists of a consequence Schiffer draws about the truth-value of moral judgements, a consequence that he believes to be forced upon us by what he says in the second part: the consequence is that moral claims are indeterminate in truth value, which is why he dubs his an "unhappy face" solution to the puzzle. In what follows I will present and examine all three parts of Schiffer's solution. My hope is to prompt him to say more about the nature of both pleonastic propositions and moral judgement.

1. The first part of Schiffer's solution to the puzzle: the argument for cognitivism

According to Schiffer, the theory of pleonastic propositions tells decisively in favour of cognitivism rather than non-cognitivism. Here is the relevant passage:

The two sentences

(a) Eating animals is a source of protein

(b) Eating animals is wrong

appear to be semantically on a par, and the cognitivist is the theorist who says they really are on a par. The non-cognitivist agrees that (a) and (b) appear to be on a par but adds that in this case appearances are misleading. Normative sentences like (b) are masqueraders; the kind of meaning they actually have is different from the kind they appear to have—namely, the kind of meaning (a) in fact has. Now, whatever kind of meaning sentences like (a) have, it is what defines cognitivism. So what kind of meaning do sentences like (a) have? The...meaning of a sentence is determined by two things: the kind of speech act the literal speaker must perform in uttering the sentence on its own, and the kind of propositional content those speech acts must have. If we assume, as I have been assuming, that stating and believing are relations to propositions, then, as regards (a), the literal speaker who utters it on its own must be stating (saying/asserting) that eating animals is a source of protein, where the proposition that eating animals is a source of protein is both truth-evaluable and something one might believe. It is truth-evaluable in that it is true iff eating animals is a source of protein, and false iff eating animals isn't a source of protein. By the criterion this implies, cognitivism is true if the meaning of (b) is determined by its being the case that the literal speaker uttering it on its own must be stating (saying/asserting) that eating animals is wrong, where the proposition that eating animals is wrong is both truth-evaluable and something one might believe (and believe in exactly the same sense in which one believes that eating animals is a source of protein). The doctrine of pleonastic propositions clearly entails cognitivism. (pp.241-242)

The argument goes by very quickly at the end, so let's make the premises fully explicit.

The overarching question is whether 'Eating animals is wrong' has the same kind of meaning as 'Eating animals is a source of protein.' Schiffer points out that if it does, then cognitivism is true, for the kind of meaning that 'Eating animals is a source of protein' has is the kind of meaning that guarantees that the states of mind expressed by sincere utterances of such sentences are beliefs. Earlier on in the book, however, Schiffer has argued that the meaning of a sentence is fixed by the kind of speech act performed by those who utter such a sentence on its own plus the kind of propositional content that such a speech act has. So the question whether 'Eating animals is wrong' and 'Eating animals is a source of protein' have the same kind of meaning reduces to the question whether these are similar in each case.

Schiffer's answer to this question is that they are. When people use the sentence 'Eating animals is wrong' on its own, much as when they use the sentence 'Eating animals is a source of protein' on its own, they make a statement: in the one case they state that eating animals is a source of protein, in the other they state that eating animals is wrong. It therefore follows that the meaning enjoyed by the two sentences is given by the very same kind of thing, namely, a pleonastic proposition, for a pleonastic proposition is both what people state when they state things and what they mean by their statements. This follows more or less immediately because there is no distinction to be made in the kinds of hypostatizing practices that are in play in the two cases, where these hypostatizing practices are some among the many such practices that are constitutive of the concept of a proposition as a pleonastic entity. Just as there is a practice of saying things like 'I believe that eating animals is a source of protein,' 'It is true that eating animals is a source of protein,' 'Let me state quite categorically that eating animals is a source of protein,' and so on, so there is equally a practice of saying things like 'I believe that eating animals is wrong,' 'It is true that eating animals is wrong,' 'Let me state quite categorically that eating animals is wrong,' and so on. The kind of meaning enjoyed by the sentence 'Eating animals is wrong,' a meaning supplied by a pleonastic proposition, is thus on all fours with the kind of meaning enjoyed by the sentence 'Eating animals is a source of protein.' This is why Schiffer concludes that the doctrine of pleonastic propositions "clearly entails cognitivism." Since I want to refer back to this conclusion later—that

cognitivism follows from the theory of pleonastic propositions—I will call it 'Schiffer's Conclusion.'

Schiffer does, however, more or less immediately go on to admit that the argument he gives for Schiffer's Conclusion would fail if 'statement' was being used ambiguously. Consider those who use the sentence 'Eating animals is a source of protein' on its own. Suppose that, when we say that they use the sentence to state that eating animals is a source of protein, we mean one thing by 'state,' the sense in play in (i) above—this is the sense that plays a defining role in the concept of a pleonastic proposition—but when we say that the sentence 'Eating animals is wrong' is used on its own use to state that eating animals is wrong, we use 'state' in a different sense. In that case, though the meaning of 'Eating animals is a source of protein' would turn out to be a pleonastic proposition, the meaning of 'Eating animals is wrong' would not. So an important question is ask is whether there is such an ambiguity, and, unsurprisingly, non-cognitivists famously argue that there is. The argument is, in effect, that though statements in the first sense—the sense which is in play in the definition of a proposition—are indeed expressions of beliefs (look again at (i)), statements in the other sense are not, but are rather expressions of wants (or, as Schiffer calls them, "conations").

The argument non-cognitivists give for this conclusion is the argument Schiffer calls the 'Argument from Internalism.' He formulates the argument thus:

- (1) Necessarily, one who accepts the judgement that she morally ought not to X has some conation against her X-ing.
- (2) If there are moral propositions, then for a person to accept that she morally ought not to X is for her to believe the proposition that she morally ought not to X is true.
- (3) But such a belief is consistent with a person's not having any conation against her X-ing.
- (4) ∴ There are no moral propositions. (p.240)

I will have more to say about this argument presently, but, in anticipation, note that at the end of his discussion of this argument Schiffer says that he "rejects the conclusion of this valid argument" (p.243). The issue, as he sees it, is thus to identify the faulty premiss. He cannot reject (2), for that follows directly from the theory of pleonastic propositions (again, see (i) above). Moreover he tells us that premiss (1) "seems right" (p.243). So this leaves him with (3), the motivation for which he explains thus:

Premiss (3) derives its plausibility from the cogency of a familiar Humean worry. If there are moral propositions, as the cognitivist claims, then to believe that acts of a certain kind are wrong is just to believe that acts of that kind have a certain objective property, and, the worry goes, such a belief would be consistent with one's feeling any way at all about whether anything has that property. A belief that a certain fact obtains, Hume held, may cause a certain conation, but having the belief can never entail that conation. (pp.242-243)

Though he doesn't explain why, Schiffer plainly doesn't share Hume's worry, so he rejects (3). The non-cognitivist's crucial argument therefore fails. So, at any rate, Schiffer concludes.

Schiffer's discussion of the Argument from Internalism is revealing in the light of Schiffer's Conclusion which, to repeat, is that cognitivism follows from the theory of pleonastic propositions. For, as is I hope already clear, his own discussion of the Argument from Internalism suggests that we should reject Schiffer's Conclusion. This is because, according to that discussion, the theory of pleonastic propositions is itself neutral on the issue of cognitivism versus non-cognitivism. This might not be immediately evident, so it might be helpful if we slightly reformulate the Argument from Internalism so as to make its bearing on both the issue of ambiguity of 'state' and the theory of pleonastic propositions more vivid (I will call this the 'Argument*'):

(1*) Necessarily, one who states that she morally ought not to X wants to refrain from X-ing.

(2*) If there were moral propositions, then a person who states that she morally ought not to X would be expressing her belief that the proposition that she morally ought not to X is true.

(3*) There are no propositions p and q such that, when someone believes that p, she wants that q.

(4*) ∴ There are no moral propositions.

Though the Argument* does not differ in any substantive way from the version of the Argument from Internalism that Schiffer originally spelled out, it serves to make it clear both why the theory of pleonastic propositions is itself neutral on the issue of cognitivism versus non-cognitivism and why we should suppose that 'state' is ambiguous.

According to (i), when we state things, the things that we state are things that we believe. But what we learn from the Argument* is that there is a sense of 'state' in which we can state that someone morally ought to act in a certain way where the thing stated is not something that we believe. There is, after all, as the Argument* brings out, no moral proposition to be either believed or stated in the sense in play in (i). The premises of the Argument* and (i) are therefore inconsistent, and the obvious way to make them consistent is to suppose that 'state' is ambiguous: (i) must use 'state' in a sense quite different from the way in which 'state' is used in (1*). Moreover this would seem to be a reasonable conclusion to draw despite the fact that none of the premises make any assumptions about the nature of propositions. In other words, reflection on the Argument* in the light of (i) seems to show that there are no moral propositions whatever our theory of propositions.

The crucial premiss in the Argument*, much as in Schiffer's original presentation of the Argument from Internalism, is (3*). (3*) purports to state a necessary a priori truth about the relationship between the ways things are on the one hand, and our beliefs and wants on the other. It says that no matter how any particular person believes things to be and no matter how they want things to be, there is always the possibility that someone could have exactly the same beliefs but different wants. Since, according to (3*), this is

supposed to be both necessary and knowable a priori, it purports to serve as a constraint on what propositions there can be. Moreover, since (3*) would seem to make no assumptions about the nature of propositions, it purports to serve as such a constraint on any theory of propositions, including the theory of propositions as pleonastic entities.

Nor is Schiffer in a position to balk at this. For remember that, as he himself tells us (see (v) above), the nature of propositions, as pleonastic entities, is fully determined by the hypostatizing practices that are constitutive of the concept of a proposition together with those necessary a priori truths that are applicable to things of any kind. To be sure, what Schiffer had in mind when he said this were necessary a priori truths such as that, if $x = y$, then whatever property x has, y has, and vice versa (p.63). But it is difficult to see how he could plausibly resist admitting that a necessary a priori truth like (3*), assuming for a moment that it is indeed a necessary a priori truth, similarly partially determines the concept of a proposition as well.

If this right, however, then, far from being inconsistent with the theory of pleonastic propositions, the Argument from Internalism itself turns out to be a potentially crucial element in a full spelling out of that theory. For, assuming for a moment that (3*) really is a necessary a priori truth, the Argument*, in conjunction with (i)—the platitude that when we state things what we state is the same sort of thing as what we believe—enables us to identify the crucial ambiguity in what it is to state things, and hence enables us to uncover the way in which the crucial necessary a priori truth, (3*), further constrains what pleonastic propositions there can be. This version of the theory of pleonastic propositions, however, the version that is constrained by (3*), is a version according to which we should be non-cognitivists about moral judgements. So Schiffer's Conclusion—his claim that the theory of pleonastic propositions entails cognitivism—is false. What entails cognitivism about moral judgement is, at best, a particular version of the pleonastic theory of propositions: the version that we get by denying that (3*) does state a necessary a priori truth.

So far I have been concerned to show that Schiffer's Conclusion is false. But I want now to turn to the more substantive issue. Suppose, for a moment, that we should

accept some version of the pleonastic theory of propositions. Should we accept the version that we get by denying (3*)—this is Schiffer's preferred version of the theory, the version that entails cognitivism about moral judgement—or should we instead accept the version that we get by constraining our pleonastic theory of propositions by (3*)? If we should accept the latter version, then, if Schiffer is correct that the other premises in the Argument* should be accepted, we thereby commit ourselves to non-cognitivism about moral judgement. I want now to argue that, if we were to accept any version of the pleonastic theory of propositions at all, we should accept the version that is constrained by (3*). So not only is Schiffer's Conclusion false, but Schiffer himself should be a non-cognitivist about moral judgement, not a cognitivist.

The reason we should accept the version of the pleonastic theory that is constrained by (3*) is—surprise, surprise—because (3*) is itself so plausible: there really is no belief whose possession entails the possession of a want. To be sure, some theorists deny not only the plausibility of this claim, but insist that it is motivated by a dubious metaphysical prejudice. This seems to be John McDowell's view, for example, when he complains that it amounts to an imposition of the view that the world is "motivationally inert." (p.17)³ Schiffer also seems to think that Hume's worry is similarly metaphysically motivated, for he describes him as worried about how, if "to believe that acts of a certain kind are wrong is just to believe that acts of that kind have a certain objective property" (my emphasis), such a belief could entail a want. But the complaint is plainly wrong, as (3*) is a claim about the relationship between the things that we can believe about the world and the things that we can want about the world no matter what those things are, not a claim about the relationship between what we can believe about the world and what we can want about the world given some controversial assumptions about the metaphysical status of certain of the things that we can believe and want.

In terms familiar from Hume, the idea behind (3*) is that, since our beliefs and wants are distinct existences, so we can always separate them, at least modally. But if we can separate them, modally, then our beliefs cannot entail our wants (or, more cautiously, no particular belief can entail any particular want). Moreover note that we can explain this idea in much less abstract and more commonsensical terms. For suppose that there

were moral propositions and that possession of the belief that one morally ought to ϕ did entail that one wants to ϕ . In that case, someone who at a certain time has this belief and want, but then over time loses that want—perhaps he becomes depressed and simply loses all interest in doing what he believes he morally ought to do—must thereby lose the belief as well. If possession of the belief entails possession of the want, then simply by losing the want the agent must, somehow, lose the belief. But why would no longer wanting to ϕ , under these circumstances, entail that he no longer believes that he morally ought to ϕ ?

Loss of the want means that the agent is no longer in a state with the functional role of a want: that is, that he is no longer disposed to ψ when he believes that ψ -ing affords him an opportunity to ϕ , and the like. Loss of the belief, by contrast, like loss of any belief, means that he is no longer in a state with the functional role of belief: that is, in this case, that he is no longer disposed to infer the proposition that he morally ought to ϕ —and, remember, we are simply assuming for the sake of argument that there is such a proposition for the time being—from the propositions from which it follows, and no longer disposed to infer from it to the propositions it entails, and the like. But these two states of mind—being in a state with the functional role of that belief but not in a state with the functional role of that want—look to be quite independent of each other. Someone could be in the one but not the other, or be in both, or be in neither.

To be sure, some belief and desire might contingently covary. As a matter of fact, loss of some desire might come along with or even cause loss of some belief. One way in which this could be so is if possession of the desire made salient certain features of something, features whose salience would be lost if the desire were to go and whose salience is crucial to belief. But it seems at least possible that such patterns of salience could survive loss of the desire—the connection imagined is, after all, causal, not logical—and hence it seems at least possible that one could be in the belief state but not the desire state. So the upshot would appear to be that if there were moral propositions then we would have no alternative but to give up premiss (1*) of the Argument*: no alternative but to give up the claim that someone who states that she morally ought not to X wants to refrain from X-ing.⁴

But now suppose that there are no moral propositions and that what someone who states that she morally ought not to X is doing is expressing her desire to refrain from X-ing. In that case there would be no problem at all in understanding how (1*) could be true. For the reason why someone who states that she morally ought not to X wants to refrain from X-ing is because wanting to refrain from X-ing is the very psychological state that she expresses when she states that she morally ought not to X. In that case it would hardly be surprising that someone loses her want to refrain from X-ing is no longer in the psychological state that she expresses when she states that she morally ought to X. For, to repeat, that want is the psychological state that she expresses.

The upshot is that non-cognitivists have a ready response to Schiffer's initial argument for cognitivism. They should say that although he lays out some reasons for thinking that the literal speaker who says 'Eating animals is wrong' states that eating animals is wrong in exactly the same sense of 'states' as the literal speaker states that eating animals is a source of protein when he says 'Eating animals is a source of protein'—and hence though he lays out some reasons for thinking that both express their beliefs that some pleonastic proposition is true— further reflection prompted by the Argument from Internalism reveals that, by contrast with the latter case, there is no pleonastic proposition for the literal speaker who says 'Eating animals is wrong' to state or believe. Though the hypostatizing practices constitutive of the concept of being wrong are a lot like the hypostatizing practices constitutive of the concept of being a source of protein, the practices are in fact subtly different. This is what we learn by attending to (3*). The Argument from Internalism therefore reveals that 'state' is ambiguous. It suggests a crucial constraint on what pleonastic propositions there can be.⁵

2. The second part of Schiffer's solution to the puzzle: the suggestion about content

Schiffer might justly complain that the argument given at the end of the preceding section fails to take into account a suggestion he makes about the content of our moral judgements. If this suggestion is correct, he might say, then far from it being plausible to suppose that there are no propositions p and q such that, when someone believes that p,

she wants that q, he in effect provides examples of such propositions. So let's consider this hypothetical complaint.

At a certain point, Schiffer provides an account of two conditions governing a concept of his own invention: the concept W. Though he admits that there are some differences between the concept W and our moral concepts, he insists that the conditions governing the two are very similar. If he is right about this then the concept W, so defined, suffices to give the lie to what was said in the preceding section. For the concept W must be fit to figure in the contents of an agent's beliefs and, in virtue of figuring in those contents, it must thereby guarantee that those beliefs have a connection with an agent's wants like that specified in premiss (1) of the Argument from Internalism. Propositions specified using the concept W must therefore be counterexamples to (3*), the claim that there are no propositions p and q such that, when someone believes that p, she wants that q. We therefore need to examine Schiffer's somewhat oblique suggestion about the content of our moral beliefs with some care.

Here is his Schiffer suggestion:

In Bob's conceptual scheme, the concept W is governed by the following two conditions.

- (a) W, by its very nature, is a concept that Bob applies to some things and withholds from others, but in order for Bob to believe that α is W, there must be some non-normative concept N such that Bob also believes both that α is N and that being N entails being W.
- (b) It isn't required that N be any particular concept; N can be anything, provided certain conditions are met. These conditions pertain to what Bob wants; for example, Bob should want not to live in a world in which people do anything that is N.

(p.256)

Once we appreciate that there can be a concept governed by these two conditions, Schiffer claims, we see, among other things, "how internalism is compatible with cognitivism" (p.258).

I am not completely sure that I understand the concept W. The problem I have lies in understanding in what way, exactly, a concept might be governed by condition (b). Imagine that there is a slightly different concept, W*, which is governed by condition (a), just like the concept W, but which instead of being governed by (b), is governed by the slightly different condition (b*):

It isn't required that N be any particular concept; N can be anything, provided certain conditions are met. These conditions pertain to what Bob's wife wants; for example, Bob's wife should want not to live in a world in which people do anything that is N.

When Bob applies a concept that meets conditions (a) and (b*) to α, he must be thinking that α has a property that he conceptualizes, inter alia, in terms of his wife's wants. That is to say, at least roughly, he must be thinking that α has N where N is a property of the actions that are performed by people in those possible worlds in which his wife does not want to live. The reason for this is simply stated: there is no way for facts about what Bob's wife's wants to fix the conceptual role of Bob's concept W* except by way of being represented as such. The upshot is thus that, even though the truth of the claim that α is W* requires simply that α bears a certain relation to things that his wife wants, for Bob to believe that α is W*, he must believe that α bears that relation to the things his wife wants, where this is read de dicto.

But now suppose that we understand condition (b) in exactly the same way as we've just understood condition (b*). In that case, when Bob applies W to α, he must be thinking that α has a property that he conceptualizes, inter alia, in terms of his own wants. That is to say, again very roughly speaking, that Bob must be thinking that α has N where N is a property of the actions performed by people in those possible worlds in which he does not want to live. As before, though the truth of the claim that α is W

requires simply that α bears a certain relation to the things he wants, for Bob to believe that α is W he must believe that α bears that relation to the things he wants.

Unfortunately, however, if this is the right way of thinking about the concept W—if Bob's wants partially fix the conceptual role of the concept W by being represented as such—then Schiffer's oblique suggestion about the content of our moral judgements evidently fails to deliver the goods.

To repeat, Schiffer claims that reflection on the concept W shows us that cognitivism is compatible with internalism. But note that Bob's belief that α has N where N is a property that bears a certain relation to things he wants—this, remember, is what we must suppose Bob to believe when he applies W to α —could be false in virtue of Bob's having misrepresented his own wants. He might believe that N is a property that bears a certain relation to things he wants but be mistaken about what it is that he does want. It is, after all, a contingent matter that we want what we want and our beliefs about such things, though usually very reliable, are fallible. Consider the possible worlds in which Bob's belief is false because he is mistaken about what he wants. In those possible worlds Bob believes that α has N, where N is a property that bears a certain relation to things he wants, but he does not have those wants. Yet if there are possible worlds in which Bob has the belief but doesn't have the wants, then it follows that Bob's having that belief doesn't entail that he has those wants. So, contrary to what Schiffer tells us, his suggestion about the content of our moral judgments—his suggestion that our moral concepts are a lot like the concept W, and hence that what goes for W judgements goes for moral judgements too—does not show how cognitivism could be compatible with internalism. On the contrary, his suggestion provides a vivid illustration of the problem that a cognitivist faces when he tries to make his view square with the truth of internalism.

I said that I am not completely sure that I understand the concept W. This is because there is an alternative way of understanding that concept. By contrast to the interpretation just suggested, when Bob deploys the concept W, on the alternative way of understanding the concept, he is not be representing his own wants. Rather, his wants themselves partially control his deployment of that very concept. Of course, this presents

us with a puzzle, for how are we to suppose that his wants manage to do that? Here what we need is some crucial difference between the role that Bob's wants can play, as regards Bob's deployment of a concept, and the role that Bob's wife's wants can play, as regards Bob's deployment of a concept. The natural suggestion, of course, is that, when Bob applies W to α , he can simultaneously express his belief that α has N and express his wants regarding N. Bob's wife's wants, by contrast, cannot similarly be expressed by Bob when he deploys his concept. On the alternative way of understanding the concept, then, Bob's wants partially control his deployment of the concept W in virtue of the fact that his deployment of that concept is, inter alia, an expression of his wants regarding N.

At a certain point Schiffer hints that this might in fact be his view. He says, for example, that although the account he gives entails a kind of cognitivism, it follows from his account that cognitivism isn't "true in an entirely full-blooded sense" (p.257). The reason, he tells us, is that, according to his view,

...one's conative attitudes enter into the determinants of the non-normative notions on which the application of one's moral concepts will be taken to supervene. Since these conative attitudes are essential to one's having moral concepts, it further follows that the meaning of 'wrong' in one's lingua mentis (as it were) is unlike that of predicates which express non-normative concepts in that the former partly supervenes on conative facts. (pp.258-259)

The initial idea in this passage—that "conative attitudes enter into the determinants of the non-normative notions on which the application of one's moral concepts will be taken to supervene"—sounds like the claim that facts about one's conative attitudes enter into the truth conditions of the moral claims one makes. This is the idea behind the first interpretation of the concept W, the interpretation we considered earlier. This is a version of cognitivism, indeed it is a full-blooded version, but as we have seen it doesn't entail internalism. But as the passage goes on the idea seems to be quite different. For Schiffer tells us that "conative attitudes are essential to one's having moral concepts"—in other words, that conative attitudes enter into an account of the possession conditions of moral concepts, not their application conditions—and the natural way to interpret this claim is

by taking deployment of those concepts in thought to amount to manifestations or expressions of those conative attitudes themselves. This is indeed to give up on a full-blooded version of cognitivism.

However, if this is the right way of thinking about the concept W—if Bob's application of the concept W to α is a matter of his both believing that α has N and his expressing his wants regarding N—then Schiffer's suggestion once again fails to deliver the goods. This time, however, the suggestion fails to deliver the goods because, even though his view is, *inter alia*, a version of cognitivism, the respect in which his view is a version of cognitivism is irrelevant to the demonstration of the compatibility of his view with internalism. What he offers, according to this interpretation, is a hybrid theory according to which an agent's judgement that α has W is the expression of both a belief—the belief that α has N—and also the expression of his wants concerning N. This view is compatible with internalism alright: Bob's believing that α has N and his wanting what he wants about N entails that he has those wants concerning N. But it is compatible with internalism in virtue of the fact that one element in the hybrid theory is simply equivalent to non-cognitivism. The cognitivist element in the hybrid theory is irrelevant to the explanation of compatibility. The explanation derives entirely from the non-cognitivist element.

3. The third part of Schiffer's solution to the puzzle: a consequence about the truth-value of moral judgements

Schiffer draws a further conclusion about the truth-value of moral judgements from his discussion of the similarity between our ordinary moral concepts and the concept W. The conclusion is that our moral beliefs are subject to two kinds of indeterminacy. This is why he dubs his an "unhappy face" solution to the puzzle. It is an unhappy face solution because it runs contrary to the expectation we have that the best solution to the puzzle will make it turn out that at least some of our moral beliefs are determinately true, an expectation we have because we ordinarily believe that there are at least some determinately true moral propositions.

In order to appreciate the two kinds of indeterminacy Schiffer has in mind, we need to remind ourselves of the difference between what he calls "standard partial belief" (SPB) and "vagueness-related partial belief" (VPB). To use Schiffer's own examples, suppose Sally believes that Beetlebomb will win the Kentucky Derby to degree .5 and that she also believes that Lithuania will win the World Cup to degree .5. The explanation of these partial beliefs is that there is a "gap between the partially believed proposition and her evidence for it" (p.204). Putting her in more ideal epistemic circumstances for forming such beliefs would result in a change in her credence levels. As a consequence, the rational degree of belief for Sally to have in the conjunction—that Beetlebomb will win the Kentucky Derby and Lithuania will win the World Cup—is .25. Strengthening the proposition widens the gap. These partial beliefs are SPBs and it is the characteristic mark of such SPBs that they rationally combine in this fashion.

But now suppose that Sally watches someone plucking hair from Tom Cruise's head (for those who are culturally challenged: Tom Cruise has a lot of hair). At the very point at which he has lost so much hair that he is a paradigm borderline case of someone who is bald, Sally believes to degree .5 that he is bald. But, Schiffer tells us, this degree of belief has nothing to do with a gap between the partially believed proposition and the evidence possessed for it, for the degree of belief would remain unchanged even if we put Sally in ideal circumstances for forming such beliefs, equipping her with all of the evidence she could possibly require. The degree of this partial belief—this VPB—has nothing to do with uncertainty, but has rather to do with ambivalence. As a result, Schiffer tells us, one difference between such VPBs and SPBs is the way in which they rationally combine. Suppose that Tom is simultaneously losing weight and that, at the very moment at which he is paradigm borderline case of someone who is bald, he is also a paradigm borderline case of someone who is thin, and so Sally believes to degree .5 that Tom is thin too. Schiffer tells us that the rational degree of belief for Sally to have in the conjunction—that Tom is bald and thin—is .5, not .25.

With this distinction between SPBs and VPBs in mind, let's now consider the two kinds of indeterminacy to which Schiffer thinks our moral beliefs are subject. As we will see, the indeterminacy is of the kind characteristic of VPBs.

The first kind of indeterminacy is simply the sort of indeterminacy manifested in borderline vague propositions. Thus, suppose the value of 'N' Bob settles on entails the property of being a lie. Then the proposition that Jane's calling Bob a Republican was *W* may be indeterminate simply because Jane's utterance was a borderline case of a lie and thus, by Bob's lights, a borderline case of a *W* act.

The second kind of indeterminacy is that, for any given relevant non-normative concept *N*, it may be indeterminate whether being *N* entails being *W*, where this isn't a matter of the vagueness of *N* or *W*. Indeed, independently of any account of indeterminacy it ought to be intuitively clear given the set-up that, for any *N*, the proposition that being *N* entails being *W* must be indeterminate. For suppose that the operative non-normative concept for Bob is *N**, whereas for Carla, whose concept *W* is also governed by (a) and (b), the operative non-normative concept requires her to believe that being *N** does not entail being *W*. Given the conditions governing the role of *W*, it is patently absurd to suppose that either Bob or Carla has the determinately true belief in their dispute about whether being *N** entails being *W*. And this is just the verdict my VPB-account of indeterminacy yields. For any non-normative concept *N*, Bob may, even under epistemically ideal conditions, believe to any degree that being *N* entails being *W*, and these beliefs will perforce be VPBs. Thus, for any non-normative concept *N*, someone can *v**-believe [MS: in other words, someone can have vagueness-related partial belief formed under ideal epistemic circumstances] to any positive degree less than 1 that being *N* entails being *W*, and therefore the proposition that being *N* entails being *W* is indeterminate. (p.257)

Though the argument given pertains to propositions about which acts are *W*, given that Schiffer claims our moral concepts are similar to the concept *W*, the conclusion he draws about propositions about which acts are *W* is a conclusion he draws about moral propositions too. The conclusion is that propositions about which acts are *W*, and so by analogy moral propositions, are subject to two kinds of indeterminacy. But it is plainly the second kind of indeterminacy that is the more striking.

The first kind of indeterminacy depends on the vagueness of the propositions which Bob takes to entail W, and perhaps also on the vagueness associated with whether any particular psychological state is one of Bob's wants. This kind of indeterminacy, by its nature, will affect only some propositions about W acts. By analogy, this kind of indeterminacy will affect only some, but not all, moral propositions. The second kind of indeterminacy is, however, different, because it looks bound to infect every W proposition, even those where there is no vagueness associated with the features which are supposed to entail W, and even when there is no vagueness associated with whether or not the relevant psychological state is one of Bob's wants. The second kind of indeterminacy results simply from the fact that there may be disagreements among people all of whom possess the concept W about which features entail W, disagreements which will remain even under ideal epistemic conditions. Likewise, then, by analogy, the second kind of indeterminacy will infect every moral proposition.

This really is a striking conclusion if it follows. For it means that, contrary to ordinary belief, there are no determinately true moral propositions. But does it follow? As we saw in the previous section, there are at least two ways to understand the concept W. According to one, W is best understood as a hybrid concept, one whose application gives rise to judgements that are in part cognitive (the part which amounts to the ascription of N) and in part non-cognitive (the part which amounts to an expression of the ascriber's want not to live in a world in which people perform actions which are N). But part of the attraction of such a non-cognitivist analysis of W judgements is precisely that it enables us to avoid concluding, on the basis of the existence of disagreements in ideal epistemic circumstances about matters such as whether N entails W, that there is some sort of indeterminacy involved. They enable us to avoid this conclusion because since, strictly speaking, there are no W propositions, it follows that W judgements are not truth apt, and it also follows that claims such as that N entails W are not truth-apt either. Such judgements and claims are rather best understood, inter alia, in non-cognitive terms: as expressions of the wants of those who make such judgements and claims. The mere fact that two people, in epistemically ideal circumstances, refuse to express their wants about

similar matters puts no pressure on them to be ambivalent. It rather underscores the differences in the wants that they express.

The other alternative is to understand W claims as, in effect, claims a speaker makes about the relationship in which acts stand to his own wants. But if this is the right way to understand the concept W, then it seems simply wrong for Schiffer to insist that "it is patently absurd to suppose that either Bob or Carla has the determinately true belief in their dispute about whether being N* entails being W." If the truth of what Bob says requires N* to stand in a certain relationship to his wants, and if the truth of what Carla says requires N* to stand in a certain relationship to her wants, then, since the truth conditions of their two claims are different, they might both be making claims that are determinately false, or both be making claims that are determinately true, notwithstanding the fact that they wouldn't make the same claims under ideal epistemic circumstances. Let me explain.

Suppose that when Bob ascribes W to an act the truth of his ascription requires that there is some non-normative feature possessed by that act, where that non-normative feature is possessed by the acts performed by people in those possible worlds in which he, Bob, actually wants not to live. The supposition, in other words, is that when Schiffer spelled out condition (b) governing W—the condition that states that N must be some feature that bears a certain relation to Bob's wants—he meant us to read this condition as containing an implicit 'actually.' The supposition doesn't seem unwarranted, given that Schiffer presumably meant to spell out a concept which Bob would happily apply to acts which have N*, even if those acts are performed in possible worlds in which he, Bob, just so happens to be indifferent to acts that have N*. The idea is that W would still apply to such N* acts in such worlds because N* still bears the right kind of relation to Bob's actual wants, never mind about whether it bears the right kind of relation to the wants he has in those worlds.⁶

With this supposition in place, it may well be determinately true that N* entails W. N* is, after all, by hypothesis a non-normative feature of those acts that are performed in the possible worlds in which Bob actually wants not to live. It may

therefore be determinately true that some act has that feature, and, if it is, then it is determinately true that every possible world in which people perform acts that are N^* is a possible world in which he, Bob, actually wants not to live. Bob's claim that N^* entails W may therefore itself be determinately true. The mere fact that Carla's contrary claim may also be determinately true is neither here nor there. It presents us with no more of a puzzle than the fact that 'I want that p ' may be determinately true when said under ideal epistemic conditions by Bob and determinately false when said under such conditions by Carla. So understood Schiffer's turns out to be a happy face solution to the puzzle.

Schiffer might, of course, object to the supposition that his account of the two conditions governing the conceptual role of W implicitly takes the wants in question to be actual wants. But now suppose that that supposition is false. In that case the best way of understanding W is by supposing that, when Bob and Carla ascribe W to acts, they each implicitly assume that the wants on which their W ascriptions depend are wants that are possessed necessarily by anyone who is so much as capable of forming wants about features of acts. This, after all, would explain why they have different views about whether or not N^* entails W ; for each of them would mistakenly be taking their own contingently possessed wants to be guides to the wants that are necessarily possessed by everyone. This assumption, though it also goes beyond anything that Schiffer explicitly says in spelling out (a) and (b), would therefore seem to provide a fairly natural explanation of a concept's being governed by those two conditions if they are to be read as making no mention of actual wants.

But of course, if we understand Bob's and Carla's W ascriptions in this way, it turns out that both of their W ascriptions are determinately false. Indeed, all W ascriptions are determinately false for the simple reason that they all presuppose something false, namely, that there are wants that are possessed necessarily. Schiffer's argument for the indeterminacy of W propositions, and his argument for the indeterminacy of all moral propositions by analogy, thus fails on this interpretation as well. This time, however, it turns out that the criticism of his argument doesn't support the conclusion that he is in fact in a position to offer an alternative happy face solution to the puzzle. The criticism suggests instead that the solution to the puzzle to which he is

committed is an even more unhappy face solution than he imagines. Not only is he committed to denying that there are at least some determinately true moral propositions, he is committed to the claim that all moral propositions are determinately false.

To sum up: Schiffer draws a further conclusion about the truth-value of moral judgements from his discussion of the similarity between our ordinary moral concepts and the concept W. The conclusion is that moral judgements are subject to two kinds of indeterminacy. But we saw in the previous section that there are at least two different ways in which we might interpret what Schiffer tells us about W concepts. In this section we have seen that, no matter in which of these ways we interpret what he tells us about W concepts, Schiffer's argument for the indeterminacy of moral judgements fails.

Conclusion

As I said at the outset, Schiffer claims that his theory of pleonastic propositions provides us with a novel solution to a familiar puzzle in meta-ethics about the status of moral judgements. The puzzle is whether we should interpret moral judgements as expressions of cognitive states or non-cognitive states. But, having now considered the bearing of the theory of pleonastic propositions on that puzzle, it seems to me that we should conclude that the theory leaves everything pretty much as it was. Perhaps this simply reveals the extent to which I, at any rate, have failed to grasp the crucial nature of pleonastic propositions or the metaethical lessons that we are supposed to learn from them. If so, then this essay will have served its purpose if it prompts Schiffer to clarify that crucial nature and the bearing of the fact that propositions have this nature on the puzzle about moral judgements that he discusses.

Notes

* Many thanks to Gary Ostertag for his very helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

¹ In what follows, otherwise unexplained page references are to Stephen Schiffer, The Things We Mean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

² For more on this see Michael Smith, The Moral Problem (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

³ John McDowell 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?' Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume, (52), 1978, pp.13-29.

⁴ Note that it wouldn't help to suggest that it is part of the functional role of the belief that one morally ought to ϕ to produce in the agent a want to ϕ . Indeed, far from supporting the conclusion that the belief that one morally ought to ϕ entails the desire to ϕ , this suggestion would entail that the two states are indeed distinct existences. For their coinstantiation would require that the agent possesses and exercises relevant rational capacities. This suggestion would thus also entail that (1*) is false. (Compare: when p and q are a priori connected, but unobviously so, it may be part of the functional role of the belief that p to produce in an agent the belief that q, but, this fact about the functional role of the belief that p notwithstanding, an agent could still believe that p without believing that q. The two beliefs would in that case still be distinct existences, for their coinstantiation would require that the agent possesses and exercises relevant rational capacities.) For more on this, see Michael Smith, 'The Possibility of Philosophy of Action' in Human Action, Deliberation and Causation edited by Jan Bransen and Stefaan Cuypers (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998) pp.17-41, reprinted in Michael Smith, Ethics and the A Priori: Selected Essays on Moral Psychology and Meta-Ethics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵ For more on this see Frank Jackson, Graham Oppy, and Michael Smith, 'Minimalism and Truth-Aptness,' Mind, (103), 1994, pp.287-302, reprinted in Frank Jackson, Philip

Pettit, and Michael Smith Mind, Morality and Explanation: Selected Collaborations (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

⁶ A similar line of thought might lead us to conclude that, when Schiffer spelled out condition (b), he meant us to read it as containing an implicit 'now.' After all, he presumably meant to spell out a concept which Bob would happily to apply to acts that have N*, even if those acts are performed at some time at which he, Bob, just so happens to be indifferent to acts that have N*. The idea is that W would still apply to such N* acts at such times because N* would still bear the right kind of relation to the wants Bob has now, never mind whether it bears the right kind of relation to the wants he has at those other times. However I will ignore this further complication in what follows.