



The Inspiring and the Purple, and the Worthy and the Dull

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Abstract

In this critical discussion I summarize Sophie-Grace Chappell's excellent *Epiphanies*. Doing so leads me to ask a question. She is clearly against 'moral theory' and puts forward her preferred account of 'epiphanic reflection'. But does she seek to wholly replace moral theory with epiphanic reflection or is she seeking to achieve a form of accommodation where both are given their due in our everyday moral lives? After voicing this issue I consider what options there might be in order to help us understand the question better and then to answer it.

Keywords Epiphanies · Ethics · Moral · Reflection · Theory

1 Introduction

Sophie Grace Chappell has done us all a service. In her new book, *Epiphanies: an Ethics of Experience*, she has meticulously laid out the importance, indeed *centrality*, of epiphanies to our lives.¹ We get a range of epiphanies described with their philosophical significance brought to the fore. Throughout her book Chappell makes a strong and persuasive case for modern moral philosophy needing to see epiphanies as central and foundational to what it does and is. At present, modern philosophy treats epiphanies as peripheral at best, and in fact many philosophers ignore them completely. This is a striking and terrible fact, since many of the events Chappell classes as epiphanies are actually part and parcel of people's lives and thinking. Epiphanies,

¹ All page numbers to Sophie Grace Chappell *Epiphanies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) unless otherwise stated.

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grand and everyday, can occur in many different situations, and they help to shape and dictate people's ethical outlook. They surely need to be discussed in academic philosophy more than they are. We cannot leave everything to the poets and the playwrights. It is therefore tempting to label *Epiphanies* as a 'much-needed corrective'. It is that, of course. But that phrase suggests some form of tweak or minor alteration. Instead, *Epiphanies* is a glorious, spirited, tub-thumping humdinger of a corrective. It is fabulous.

I count myself a fellow traveller at least in this regard: I agree that we need to do more to make epiphanies central to our philosophical, ethical thinking. As Chappell shows, epiphanies can be life-altering, being those touchstone experiences when everything makes sense or when prior assumptions are undermined and thrown into sharp relief. Epiphanies can also be small yet still life-affirming. They can be positive and negative, expressions of the joyous and the bittersweet, make us glad and profoundly disquiet us. They are all these things and more. I share with Chappell a concern that too much of modern academic moral philosophy - specifically moral *theory* - is worryingly indifferent to much of the vibrancy and force of our actual ethical lives, and the neglect of the epiphanic borders on the intellectually criminal. Her alternative vision of what ethical thought can and should be is, therefore, welcome. However, Chappell's general thinking and the detail of her presentation, especially that in Chap. 2, raise for me a question. If one assumes there are different ways of doing moral philosophy, in part I would add *because* life is complex and requires different approaches at different times, is it possible to find accommodation for these different ways together? If not, why not? If so, how might such an accommodation or integration work? What would be *its* contours? *Why* should we try to create such an accommodation? And so on.

I detail the question below and offer some possible responses to it. I present this in the spirit of someone who feels the need for a form of accommodation, messy as it may be, since I value different ways of doing philosophy as it seeks to make sense of our individual and shared experiences.

2 A Question

I take it as given that epiphanies and the broad continuum of our experiences are (obviously) central to our lives and so should be far more central to our philosophy. My focus instead is on how we then respond to this as philosophers and what this means for the main and central way many pursue academic, analytic moral philosophy.

First, what is that current 'main and central way' in which some modern philosophers go about their subject? Here is a summary inspired by Chappell's criticism of moral theory. Modern moral philosophy is often systematic and has universal ambition. It will confidently seek to explain what one should do in all, or most, sets of circumstances by indicating what is right and wrong, permissible, impermissible and obligatory, and why. It will have a lofty, general, universal style of theorizing which will power its account of why one should act in certain ways, with a focus on one or more types of morally significant feature (e.g. consequences, certain types of act)

and assume a standard, universal view of human psychology. It may use illustrations from real-life, or more likely idealized short form fictions, thumbnail sketches and toy examples. Experiences may be used but only insofar as they illustrate points of the theory or the general motivations powering it. It may make exception for certain individual features of some people's lives, but that is what they will be: (unwanted, awkward) exceptions from the universally agreed norm. Often such experiences may be downplayed or 'explained away'. The theory has ambition to ensure we all understand and agree what has to happen in each and every case. Everything is to be explained by and from within the theory. Indeed, the theory and its worldview are designed to be exhaustive of what the moral or ethical *is*. The style of such theorizing is routinely impersonal in keeping with its universal and general ambition. The manner of discussion is detached with a sparse clarity. It may be worthwhile but it is also frequently *worthy* and often *dull*. For want of an alternative, call this 'moral theory'.

Chappell's alternative is a style of ethical philosophy that begins with epiphanies and the broad experiences of which they are part and treats them as touchstone points of references throughout. We go from the 'inside out' to draw what conclusions we can, for us and others. Those conclusions may well be universal, but they need not be, and there may be some systematising, but only very little. (See 64.) As well as the experiences themselves, we also reflect in our thinking on the insights that come in their wake, be they big or small, life-changing or otherwise. What proofs there are for ethical ideas need not come in premise and conclusion form, as sometimes happens in moral theory. Instead, we may see insights and ideas as striking us in certain ways as simply being right or applicable. It is not detached as the other style of theorizing is; this alternative is instead engaged with the very idea of being alive and living a life from the inside. It is not dull, and may well be full of juicy description. (Its critics, however, may think it borders too often on *purple prose*.) It is worthwhile, rather than (pejoratively) *worthy*. For want of an alternative, call this 'epiphanic reflection'.

Both of these descriptions are incomplete and are parodies, but I hope they are on the right lines in indicating the crucial differences with which Chappell is engaged. If what I say is broadly correct, it is important to note that we do not simply have a difference between a style of theorizing where experiences are taken seriously and one where they are not. The difference is more how those experiences are fundamentally treated, and the manner and ambition of the philosophical reflection. Or in other words, it is not simply that we have one style of theorizing where experience is ignored and one where it is embraced. We have a (fundamental) difference of worldview and orientation: one where experiences may be attended to but where they are grist to a theoretical mill, and another where if general ideas are formed they have to be rooted in real, lived experiences, and where such experiences are always at the forefront of our minds.

So what? This gives us a challenge. To build to it, consider the following. At time of writing the Russian regime of President Putin has invaded Ukraine, waging war on its people with a general aim of bringing it and its people under Russian control.² Like many others I have thought much about this conflict. I have discussed the horrific situation with fellow philosophers, including some who work on war and peace.

² The first draft of this paper was written during March 2022.

One discussion I had concerned the point at which it becomes morally impermissible to carry on fighting and resisting an invader since by doing so one could or will contribute to the lengthening of a conflict which in turn will probably lead to an increase in suffering and brutality. Is such a point ever reached, and if so when and why? My fellow philosopher indicated that such a point is sometimes reached in a conflict, and (at the time we were talking) may be reached soon after Ukraine was invaded, and that this was part of the moral horror of a conflict: a vast state could bludgeon another country and then credibly threaten to escalate such that resisting became impermissible because doing so would only increase suffering dramatically. This discussion was had against a backdrop of 'just war' theory, rooted in and expressive of moral theory.

Whilst acknowledging the power of my friend's point, there is plenty to be said against it in order to show that personal defence is still permissible even if the odds are hopeless and even if escalation is likely to occur as a result. Much of this can be said within the style of moral theory as expressed above. Ideas can be given and arguments mounted around consequences and suffering, about various established just war principles, and by providing relevant analogies. Such ideas and arguments will, of course, still stem from an ambition to be able to universalise across a set of examples, where one abstracts the relevant features in order to justify all and any relevant course of action.

However, we can question this line of thinking and the underlying methodology by reflecting on the real-life circumstances faced by people in Ukraine, some of whom stayed behind to defend others and their country. Imagine now being one of the few defenders in a remote village as one sees Russian soldiers approaching. Up to this point perhaps you have been highly anxious but this is the first moment you are in a (very likely) conflict situation. Your heart races and the adrenalin starts to pump. This could be your final day, your final hour, or your final few minutes. Yet, oddly, the worries die away. You have a moment of clear realisation: you have to defend the people, the village and yourself. Perhaps you think this even if there has been growing escalation recently. You have to do it because it is simply right to do so: all other concerns melt away. Perhaps as this realisation comes, you are focused on a familiar tree or a family photograph.

Such an experience and a realisation would indeed be powerful; it might easily be the sort of thing Chappell calls an epiphany. It obviously has great ethical importance. One could argue that no matter what one said from within a certain style of theorizing, whether one said of a particular conflict that resistance was no longer permissible or whether it was, an experience such as that just sketched might be or would be more powerful and would undercut such theorizing.

However, someone might counter, we need the ambitions and resources of a moral theory and its style of theorizing. As painful or insightful as epiphanic experiences are, we need to understand and then abstract from such experiences to think about many possible and actual situations: understanding why and when resistance is right, if it is, and why it might be wrong and/or unjustified even if it might be understandable from an individual's point of view. After all, think of the suffering that will have to be endured by many if the fighting escalates. We need to do this to understand what guidance needs to be given overall. A certain amount of abstraction is necessary to see what sort of situation is similar to which, to try to reach conclusions about what

is right and wrong and what we should do. Indeed, recourse to such abstract reasoning can offer not only guidance but a type of comfort, knowing that there is a store of (admittedly ongoing, contentious) knowledge and ideas which can help us resolve difficult issues justifiably. From such abstraction comes a certain amount of idealisation and generality, but that is no bad thing. We are trying to replace the idiosyncratic with the justifiable and universally applicable.

There is a further point. Chappell criticizes moral theory as trying to ape the courtroom and the law (68–69). There is some merit in this point. But, the role of law and the ideas of a courtroom are fundamental parts of life. Indeed, war crimes tribunals hold strong significance for the above example. Parts of our life need abstract reasoning and cool, detached reflection, no matter what principles are generated in order to rise above particular examples. This is so fair, justified principles can then be thought about and applied to particular and difficult cases.

This idea shows up not only in the law. In many areas of life we are thinking about how to distribute resources fairly and justly: in healthcare, in education, in transportation, and so on. Whilst it is true that we need the power and insight of individual stories and experiences – we need to understand why education or care of others matters - we also need the abstract thinking of economists and policy experts, say, as we seek to decide what can and should be done with limited time, energy and resources.

The question, therefore, is this. As I have indicated, life is complicated and messy. It seems we need different treatments and ways of thinking at different times: sometimes it is imperative to understand lived experiences of individuals in order to grasp what the moral life is and to make some sense of it. We need to go from particular experiences to think about others. Such experiences – such as the one described above or more routine, everyday experiences - offer insights that shape who we are and how we interact with others. But we also need universal, abstract reasoning to, again, try to make sense of our lives. Such reasoning will, if successful, provide clear guidance on what should be done next. So when we have both moral theory and epiphanic reflection on offer, what should we do? Are we looking for some combination or *accommodation* between these two philosophies albeit with the currently dominant moral theory dropping its ambition to capture the whole of moral reflection and thinking? Or are we talking about epiphanic thinking *replacing* the other? Can ‘the inspiring’ and ‘the worthy’ go together, however uneasily? Or are ‘the purple’ and ‘the dull’ fundamentally opposed?

What does Chappell herself say? There is no stark posing of this question. We do get a sense of what she thinks, but that points in two directions.

On the one hand it seems that she is open to some accommodation. For example, she talks throughout Chap. 2 of achieving a balance between detachment and engagement, especially from 56 onwards. Also, Chappell begins her discussion of moral theory with thoughts about how theorists often start not with principles and theories but with experiences. She considers how Peter Singer became interested in animal rights, where his ideas were awakened by conversations with others as they were eating together:

Singer himself, being an arch-theorist, is naturally keen to dispel the impression that we might reasonably take from [his] narrative, that the development

of his views about animal rights involved (in any essential way) an emotionally charged experience or series of experiences. Elsewhere in the early pages of his book, he insists that his argument ‘is an appeal to basic moral principles which we all accept, and the application of these principles to the victims [of speciesism] is demanded by reason, not emotion’. But why couldn’t it be—at the very least— both? (51–52)³

That final claim, “at the very least – both?”, is important. With the final word perhaps Chappell is allowing for inclusion of experiences and epiphanies in the philosophical foundations but not making those foundations *exclusively* based on epiphanies. Arguments (and theories) trail in the wake of experience, rather than being completely elbowed aside.

Also, Chappell often acknowledges that we need several styles and methods, even in moral philosophy. In her wise criticism of philosophical journal practices and the writing that is thereby encouraged she says:

It does, however, threaten to hobble their enquiries fatally to insist that moral philosophers should all write in the same style and form, where that form is certainly usable in philosophy but by no means custom-made for it, and where that style is naturally and originally the style of quite other and quite different enquiries. It is a real possibility that the writing of technical and impersonal journal articles may in the end prove inadequate as a way of doing ethical philosophy. Not because it does not capture anything worth capturing—for sure, it captures some things very well indeed—but because there are other things worth capturing that it never will: it simply isn’t built to. (104)

The key phrase for me is, “for sure, it captures some things very well indeed”. That is different from saying, “it doesn’t capture anything well at all”.

So we might have some form of accommodation. However, on the other hand we get a clear sense that an accommodation is *not* possible. For example, straight after the discussion of Singer we are confronted with reflections from Wittgenstein who is characterized as showing us what is illusory through reflections on one’s life as one puts significant experiences centre stage. What sort of illusions? “[T]he illusion, for example, of quasi-scientific generality, and the philosopher’s craving for it.” (54)⁴ We also have this striking passage from Chappell herself:

Alongside the negative programme of rejecting and moving away from systematic moral theory, we need a positive programme: some notion of what we are affirming, and moving *towards*; some idea of what we are going to do in ethical philosophy *instead of* systematising moral theory. This is the question of this chapter’s title: if not moral theory, then what? (63)

³ Referencing Peter Singer (1975) *Animal Liberation* (London: Bodley Head), p. iii.

⁴ Quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) *The Blue and the Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 46.

This passage, which I think summarizes Chap. 2 well, suggests that we are moving towards something which will act as a replacement for what we are leaving behind following rejection. Indeed, as she reminds us, Chap. 2's title asks what we shall have if not moral theory. It looks like moral theory is being replaced.

Further to this she quotes this exchange between R. M. Hare and Bernard Williams:

Richard Hare: You pull everything down, but what do you put it its place?
 Bernard Williams: Well, in that place, I don't put anything. That isn't a place anything should be.
 (80)⁵

She then says:

What Williams does say is that Hare's demand that the anti-theorist show what he wants to put 'in the place of systematising moral theory' is out of order, because the whole point of rejecting systematising moral theory is to make available for ethical philosophy *a different shape of landscape*—with different 'places' in it— from the landscapes in which such theories can seem to fill a need. (80)

The dispute between Hare and Williams is often seen as an all-or-nothing affair. By phrasing things as she does it is clear Chappell agrees and also clear that she sides with Williams. The idea of a form of accommodation is fading. If we give up on the universal ambitions of moral theory, there seems no way of theorizing in this way in part because what generates so much of its point *are* its universal ambitions. Such ambitions cannot just be treated as disposable aspects of the moral theory Chappell criticizes. This is fundamental. Indeed, she says:

Insofar as I find it a useful metaphor to say that philosophical ethics has *foundations* at all, that is roughly what I am going to argue in this chapter. First I argue against an approach to philosophical ethics that is based on theory-building of the usual kind; then I argue in favour of an approach based, instead, on experience. (50)

And also:

To see the importance of philosophy's sounding right, specifically and perhaps particularly in the case of our subjective experience, including our epiphanies, all we need to do is recall my main thesis in this book—that ethics is about shaping and exploring the contours, not of a theory, but of our lived experience—and look a little more closely at some examples of lived experience. (95)

So, my question to Chappell is: where are you on this question? Is it possible to imagine some form of accommodation of two different styles and ways of doing moral

⁵ Quoting Alex Voorhoeve (2009) *Conversations in Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 196

philosophy, or is such an accommodation an impossibility, in part because one of them, moral theory, is in essence a universalist, abstract way of looking at the world that has no room to accommodate other orientations? Once we begin to abstract to reach universally applicable principles, we will likely bleed out the insights and the point of epiphanies and reflection about them.

This question is really a challenge to us all about how we do moral philosophy. We have a dilemma. If there is no accommodation, then what happens when we get into the courtroom and other venues where decisions have to be made and we find we need the universal ambitions of moral theory based on abstraction from individual experiences? Or if there is some accommodation and even integration, how is that possible if the starting points and orientations are so radically different as Chappell suggests? In the next section I offer some responses.

3 Some Options for a Resolution

(a) The first option responds by saying there is no possibility of accommodation. Let me restate why this might be correct.

Moral theory's ambition is to abstract from a range of situations, sum them and through that or similar process universalize so as to capture what can be said about any relevant situation that is seen as falling under the derived principle. This strongly threatens to squeeze out the idiosyncratic and the individual, which I understand is part of the point of epiphanies and the attention they are given. Of course, one can take general lessons from such epiphanies, and no one is against the idea of people having epiphanies *about* the importance of general moral ideas: some blinding light about the importance of universal abstraction and the sort of comfort it can give. But the danger is that in abstracting as much as moral theory wants and does, one loses the power, urgency and character of the insights of individual experience.

But that is only a threat, albeit one which is regularly realized. Why 'no possibility'? Recall something else I have said. It is part of the practice of moral theory, I think Chappell thinks, that generating a justified and correct system of moral principles and rules exhausts what the moral and ethical are. Once we work out what one should do – and that will be a large task, no doubt – then our work will be done. Even accepting that that task cannot ever be completed, why think this is what one should aim for by assuming that this is what a credible ethic requires? This is the point of the dialogue between Hare and Williams.

Whilst the first idea strongly justifies this first option, I think the second idea fatally adds to the suspicion that we have no possibility of accommodation. To diagnose the situation in a brief, suggestive way: whilst moral theory is aiming to understand so as to pursue its main, defining goal of guiding action, epiphanic reflection focuses more on understanding our lives and acknowledging not just that there is mess and tension that escapes full systemisation beyond that, but that a credible ethical outlook should probably live with some degree of mess and tension ('mess', that is, from the point of view of moral theory) and not fully systematise. Indeed, working out just what amount of mess can be tolerated by individuals and groups, and why, is *itself* part of the outlook.

(b) What of the complete contrary? Perhaps an accommodation is *easily* achievable. Epiphanic experiences are an important starting point for understanding our ethical lives and showing us which features are important about situations and why. After that we need moral theory to help us decide what one should do in similar situations. Talk of moral theory ‘bleeding out the insights of epiphanies’ is pessimistic rhetoric. We retain what is insightful – and there is no reason why one cannot return to the example to shore up one’s thinking – and what will be genuinely insightful will find its way into our more abstract thought and universal principles. What’s the problem?

I suspect some people will have had this reaction when reading my summary and the question I posed. The problem is that the two fundamental ideas of what ethics or morality should be still conflict, perhaps fatally. Moral theory, at least as characterized above and by Chappell, assumes that understanding the moral life is exhausted by some gathering of examples which then support a set of principles and ideas that capture in all and every situation what one should and should not do, and why. There is no need or room for anything else. For Chappell there may well be a need at times for some generalizing ideas that reach beyond one’s own experience (and, again, that may be the point of some epiphanies); or at least she thinks this in some moments in Chap. 2. But to assume that moral understanding is exhausted by the provenances of a set of principles as indicated is fundamentally to misunderstand philosophy’s point. We need at least a balance between constant understanding and guidance. This is revealed by another thought from above, which I suspect Chappell will be sympathetic to. Moral theory does not like mess, uneasy compromise and loose ends. Whilst it may be difficult to achieve, the aim is to have a set of principles that guide us smoothly in all circumstances. Chappell is not only happy to live with a moral philosophy that is less tidy than this, she thinks both that it is inevitable that one will have to and also, I suspect, that it is a good thing for a philosophy to build in and embrace untidiness, ambiguity, tension and other such features. This is an essential part of moral life. Far from a full set of moral principles giving us comfort, as I said above, it can make one uneasy. Perhaps a decision is reached in a courtroom so we can all move on, but sometimes the decisions will be reached but leave as many questions unanswered as are answered. ‘Final’ in one sense, but not in another. Epiphanic reflection will be necessary all the way through a moral outlook and philosophy, and not merely function as a starting point from which moral theory then takes over.

(c) Option (a) may still loom, but let us try to see if anything else is possible. Option (b) is highly problematic, but perhaps a line in my discussion offers a third option. I said that one can return to epiphanic reflection if one wants, but did not make much of that. This third option does so. Perhaps one begins with reflection on our various experiences and our epiphanies, and insights they offer, with a vague sense that one needs to be using such insights and experiences to inform what one should do in many or all situations. One then adopts some method – some form of reflective equilibrium comes to mind – in which one moves from experiences to one’s in-progress moral theory and then back again sharpening, refining and questioning both one’s reflections and the theory on the basis of the other. This process may reach a settled point, but may well not do. One’s thinking may constantly evolve in the

messy way indicated previously but there will always be some positive interaction and the best of both types of philosophy is accommodated, if uneasily.

I think this option has merits, and not just because one can have both ways of thinking. Some moral theorists may read *Epiphanies* or read my discussion and think that Chappell's ideas are too inward-looking, too self-centred, to count as proper moral philosophy. After all, it seems to be part of moral philosophy, in its many guises, that it aspires to the general, the universal, and the abstract. Similarly, some people such as Chappell feel they need something else in their lives and thought than moral theory.

However, there are further questions. I say blithely that one can go back and forth. But what does that look and feel like as a philosopher? When one abstracts from experiences to draw out some more universal ideas, what is being left behind and how does one decide what is and is not crucial? Also, when we compare those principles with a variety of experiences so that the latter informs the former, how much are the fundamentally characteristic universal ambitions of moral theory fatally threatened? It seems they are. Are we simply back to a version of (a), but with nicer dressing and vain hopes? In short, is this too unstable a process, even if we acknowledge that any accommodation will be uneasy? In order to pursue something like option (c), one will need to understand the 'contours', mentioned above, in far more detail.

(d) Despite these questions, there might be something to (c); it is not hopeless. Let us continue with a further option; in effect (c)+. The difference here is that whereas (c) assumed there might be some settled point or that practically there would be one even if moral philosophy is constantly evolving because the two orientations and worldviews are interacting positively, this version of accommodation says that sometimes one could have either of these two outcomes, but not in all circumstances. In some instances (or a few instances, or many instances, or very often, or....) there will be an *unbridgeable* gap, some fundamental tension such that the insights of one's epiphanic experience simply cannot be reconciled with the trend in one's moral theory and, further, one cannot just explain or explain away the epiphany *or* the theory. There is, on some occasion, not just some unease, but some fundamental moral disquiet. The contours of this accommodation allow for some non-accommodation.

I have mentioned moral theory and the law a couple of times. Consider what Chappell in fact says:

It is a wonder to behold the sheer determination of philosophers to press on with systematising projects that are in this sense monomaniac, even when they seem quite obviously hopeless: when the project *can* be pursued in some logical or psychological sense of possibility, even though it has entirely lost touch with any kind of social or personal reality or realism. The quest can seem to involve a kind of loss of interest in reality; reality is too *complicated*, so we stop attending to its ins and outs, and focus on the comforting clarity of our favourite theory instead...

I think there are interesting questions about why philosophers are prone to this flight from reality, which at its worst can include flagrant ignoring of patently obvious data, dialectical obstinacy, and accompanying smaller-scale pathologies: over-generalisation, the fetishisation of the universal quantifier, what in

Chappell (2014) I called ‘the curse of the definite article’ (i.e. the illusion that we’re always searching for *the* explanation or *the* reason for this that or the other—as if there always had to be exactly one), and related symptoms. Part of the reason, I think, comes as already noted (at the beginning of this section) from the (subconsciously?) felt analogy between ethics and law. Law really does have to be a system, and to have a determinate and decisive answer to every question that is put to the courts. It is part of the institution of law that an answer will always be found. Even when the court’s judgement expressing that answer is agreed on all sides to be a spatchcocked compromise, still a decision is, quite literally, what the law is *for*. But in life in general, which is what ethics is about, various kinds of abstention, deferrals of decision, and refusal to accept the question as posed are very often not only possible but correct. There is simply no reason to insist that ethics has to be like law in always having to find a decision. (68–69)⁶

The final sentence inspires the idea behind this option. Ethical thinking can sometimes find a decision: it might be a good one and it might be informed, in this option, by the reflective equilibrium method from (c) combining some form of moral theory and experience. But need it always? No. And part of the reason for that, expressed by this fourth option, is that we have two overarching worldviews that simply do not see eye-to-eye when it comes to working out how one works out what one should think and do. Of course, some of the interesting philosophical work in this option lies not only in arguing for it, but in demarcating what is meant by a philosophical area or aspect of our life, a phrase I sneaked in earlier, and how our two worldviews interact in any particular area or circumstance. (Some examples: resource distribution in healthcare; deciding who to save in a warzone; working out how much fridge space people get in a shared house; buying seasonal gifts for one’s nearest and dearest.) Devilish hard work and detail may then follow.

(e) This fifth and final option extends (d) for completeness. Is it possible that there is some truth in each of (a)–(d)?

Option (d) evolved from (c). Whereas (c) adopted a method of reflective equilibrium to produce some positive interaction between our two worldviews, option (d) said that sometimes such a method will result in a settled answer, sometimes it will not, and in the latter case sometimes there will be some positive interaction but sometimes not. Which result one arrives at will depend on the area of life or set of examples one is considering. Option (e) goes one step further and embraces those interactions and results but adds that (i) in some areas of life (a) will be correct (there is no interaction to be had at all, and that is *obvious* at the start); and sometimes (b) will be correct (accommodation will be *straightforwardly easy*, with little need for any reflective equilibrium back-and-forth).

This option has the attraction of adopting all the positive ideas of each of the other options. It also embraces the mess and unease of our moral life in a fundamental way.

⁶ Referencing Timothy Chappell / Sophie Grace Chappell (2014) *Knowing What to Do* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). See also Sophie Grace Chappell (forthcoming) ‘Inwardness in Ethics’ in *The Murdochian Mind* (eds.) Mark Hopwood and Silvia Panizza (London: Routledge).

What is messy is not only the range of responses we get, but also states that the way in which we reach those answers is itself fundamentally and radically varied.

However, this last option has drawbacks. It may be too unstable, certainly. One will also still have the devilish task of demarcating different areas of life as one goes through thinking what to do and which situation is similar to which others. Fundamentally, though, I return to (a). Is (a) just one option amongst others? Or is it itself expressing something universal and basic: one either has a universal worldview that encompasses what we do and how we go about deciding for all cases, or one does not. Options (c), (d) and (e) are not just complicated, they are fatally incoherent, and (b) is a non-starter.

4 Concluding Thoughts

I said at the end of my introductory comments that any sort of accommodation between the two ways of thinking will likely be messy and uneasy. If true, this is an ironic truth in the spirit of what Chappell herself embraces. We want our moral thinking to embrace and express life in all its glory. Well, part of its glory lies in the systematic, the uniform and the universal, as expressed by moral theory. Trying to shoehorn *that* style of theorizing into a different sort of vision of moral life and thought will *itself* be messy and uneasy.

My previous section ended on a pessimistic note. A more positive take is this. Our moral life is messy so why think our thinking will sort out the mess, or sort out all of it? Perhaps we need to live with some mess and incoherence, even when it comes to working out what our worldview looks like. That is where the interesting philosophical action might be, after all: constantly evolving, never settled, with different voices debating and always seeing new things. In our buzzing, fertile garden, let many flowers bloom: the straight and tall, the reliable and standard, the glorious and surprising, and the excessive and purple.⁷ Perhaps, in the end, this is what Chappell's magnificent book teaches us.

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⁷ Thanks to Sophie Grace Chappell for comments on an earlier draft.