

Scheffler's "The Afterlife"

"*The afterlife*" – the goings on of living beings (and particularly humans after we die

Doomsday Scenario – imagine that the earth will be completely destroyed thirty days after your death in a collision with an asteroid.

Scheffler's project is to reflect on what humans *in fact* value by considering our reactions to the scenario

Note 1: For Scheffler "valuing" is more than having a belief in something being valuable. It is a complex attitude with doxastic, motivational, emotional and deliberative components.

Note 2: In describing "our" attitudes Scheffler means to be describing his attitudes and those of whoever else shares them.

1. Reaction to DS Highlights Certain General Features of Human Valuing

Point 1: We won't react with "so what? It won't happen until after I die. Why should I care?" This suggests: a *nonexperientialist* interpretation of our values - things other than our own experiences matter to us.

Point 2: We would react with "profound dismay" even prior to determining whether the event on balance is a good or bad thing.

This suggests: there is a *nonconsequentialist* dimension to what matters to us. If our values were purely consequential, then whether we regard the Doomsday scenario positively or negatively would require a detailed calculation of the consequences of the scenario. But we react negatively without doing the sums. So our reaction reflects a nonconsequentialist feature of our values.

Point 3: The fact that our reaction is one of profound dismay, Scheffler thinks, is best explained by the idea that the phenomenon of human value is *conservative* in the sense that we want the things we value to be sustained and preserved over time.

2. Reaction to DS Shows that Much of We Value Depends on the Afterlife

How would the doomsday scenario affect our motivations to engage in various projects?

- Our reasons to engage in certain projects might seem less strong
- Our emotional investment might weaken
- Our belief that they are worthwhile activities might weaken

Vulnerable projects:

- (a) Projects whose ultimate success is something that may not be achieved until some time in the distant future

- (b) Projects whose value derives largely from the benefits it will provide to large numbers of people over a long period of time.

Examples: trying to find a cure for cancer (ultimate success may be a long way off + it seems less important if everybody will be dead in the not too distant future anyway), social and political activism, environmental activism, scientific research,

What about: creative and scholarly work, having children, certain aspects of raising and caring for children?

In sum: there are many projects and activities whose importance to us is not diminished by the prospect of our own death, but is diminished by the prospect of the earth's destruction shortly thereafter.

3. Reaction to DS Reveals An Impulse to “Personalize” our Relation to the Future

The premature death of people we love and care about strikes us a bad thing. But Scheffler thinks there's more to our dismay about the scenario than this. He notes that most people regard it as a bad thing if everyone they care about dies before they do. But why? Not just concerns about loneliness...

Scheffler thinks there is something that seems positive to us about the fact that our own death with involve certain relational disruptions – it “personalizes ones relation to the future.” The world after one's death becomes more like a party you had to leave early than a gathering of strangers.

One reason the doomsday scenario seems bad, says Scheffler – is that *we are not part of the future after our death.*

Our concern for conservation and our concern for personalizing our relation to the future, Scheffler thinks, can also be supported by the value we place in participating in traditions: This is a way of preserving what is valued beyond an individual life span or generation, and also allows us to think of ourselves as “custodians” of these values for the future.

4. The Infertility Scenario and Some Upshots

P.D. James's “The Children of Men” infertility scenario – people become disinterested in things, *even things meant to deliver immediate gratification* (food, sex, art, enjoyment of nature)– the world becomes full of “lassitude, depression, ill-defined malaise, readiness to give way to minor infections, a perpetual disabling headache” (James, p.9, quoted in Scheffler, p.41).

The Afterlife conjecture – In doomsday scenario worlds people would cease to value, engage in, and be emotionally attached to many activities and pursuits.

Consequence: We're not as egoistic as we think – we value our lives and activities in a way that relies on thinking of them as embedded in something larger than ourselves.

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