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Reactionary Moral Fictionalism

Abstract There is a debate among moral error theorists. It concerns what is to be done with moral discourse once it is believed to be systematically false or untrue. It has been called the 'now what' problem. Should error theorists abolish morality or insulate themselves in some way from this nihilistic consequence of belief in error theory? Assertive moral abolitionism aims to have error theorists avoid any insulation and abolish morality altogether. Revolutionary moral fictionalism aims for insulation by having error theorists start treating morality as a useful fiction. There are certain problems with assertive moral abolitionism and revolutionary moral fictionalism, however. This paper argues for a hybrid view that combines the best parts of both views. I call this position 'reactionary moral fictionalism.' It says it might be wise for certain individual error theorists to abolish morality in most cases, but remain quiet about their abolition. It also says that these error theorists should use morality as a fiction in those situations where it would be practically detrimental not to use moral discourse. In such situations, the error theorist should employ moral fictionalism. A fictionalist approach should thus be used only as a passive reaction to contexts where it cannot be avoided. The advice offered to certain individual error theorists by reactionary moral fictionalism is thus 'abolish morality when one can, but use morality as a fiction when one has to.' It is argued that this solution to the 'now what' problem offers superior therapeutic benefits for these individuals and could possibly serve as a compromise between assertive moral abolitionism and revolutionary moral fictionalism.

Keywords Metaethics – Moral Error Theory – Assertive Moral Abolitionism – Revolutionary Moral Fictionalism

1 The 'Now What' Problem and Moral Insulation

There is a debate among moral error theorists. It concerns what is to be done with moral discourse once it is believed to be systematically false or untrue (Mackie 1977; Joyce 2001; Kalf 2018). It has been called the 'now what' problem (Lutz 2014). Should error theorists abolish morality or insulate themselves in some way from this nihilistic consequences of belief in error theory? Most error theorists exhibit insulationist tendencies (Machuca 2018). This is a common response to entertaining skeptical conclusions today. Miles Burnyeat writes,

> Nowadays, if a philosopher finds he cannot answer the philosophical question 'What is time?' or 'Is time real?', he applies for a research grant to work on the problem during next year's sabbatical. He does not suppose that the arrival of next year is actually in doubt. Alternatively, he may agree that any puzzlement about the nature of time, or any argument for doubting the reality of time, is in fact a puzzlement about, or an argument for doubting, the truth of the proposition that next year's sabbatical will come, but contend that this is of course a strictly theoretical or philosophical worry, not a worry that needs to be reckoned with in the ordinary business of life. Either way he *insulates* his ordinary first order judgments from the effects of his philosophizing. (Burnyeat 1997: 92)

Let's call the group of error theorists who insulate themselves from the consequences of believing error theory 'moral insulationists.' The main moral insulationist option is Richard Joyce's revolutionary moral fictionalism (RevMF). Other insulationist views include Jonas Olson's moral conservationism (Olson 2014), Toby Svoboda's revisionary moral expressivism (Svoboda 2015), Matt Lutz's moral substitutionism (Lutz 2014), and Stan Husi's deflationary reformism of errant moral discourse (Husi 2014). There is also another kind of revolutionary moral fictionalism, found mostly in Nolan, Restall, & West (2005). It differs from Joyce's variety by being a content instead of force fictionalism, with the main difference between content and force fictionalism being whether one sincerely asserts

belief or quasi-asserts make-belief in a moral fiction, respectively. Joyce's RevMF is a force fictionalism, recommending error theorists quasi-assert moral make-beliefs.

In what ways are these solutions to the 'now what' problem insulationist? Machuca (2018: 216) distinguishes between three kinds of insulation: logical, epistemic, and psychological. Logical insulation occurs if the truth value of error theory has no effect on whether one can logically infer the truth value of moral judgments. Epistemic insulation occurs if believing error theory has no effect on whether one should believe there are moral facts. Psychological insulation occurs if believing error theory has no effect on one's need or choice to continue believing in or accepting and expressing moral facts. Each of RevMF, moral conservationism, revisionary moral expressivism, moral substitutionism, and deflationary reformism are—if not examples of logical or epistemic insulation (except perhaps moral conservationism)—examples of psychological insulation insofar as they each recommend error theorists retain the use of morality in some way. These solutions recommend error theorists continue to accept and refer to either non-existent moral facts or some sufficiently normative surrogate that would be mostly indistinguishable from non-existent moral facts. It is important to note that these solutions are not psychologically insulationist insofar as they aim to insulate first-order moral judgments from error, but rather insofar as they aim to redeem moral judgments from error by retaining their use regardless of that error. Each solution modifies or reacts to morality's falsity in such a way as to retain morality for the sake of its supposed social utility regardless of its falsity. Error theorists remain *error* theorists after all. It is just that error-theoretic moral insulationists want morality's falsity to not threaten its use. Morality's utility should be insulated from its falsity. Now, compared to other skeptical conclusions in the history of philosophy and science, there is something a bit unique about the psychological insulation from morality's falsity displayed by most error theorists. Usually, when it is discovered a discourse is systematically false—say, phlogiston or witchcraft or bodily humors discourse—the tendency is to simply abolish that discourse. Such an abolitionist response is precisely what moral insulationists aim to insulate themselves and morality from. Most error theorists aim to retain the use of moral discourse and insulate it from the apparently obvious response of abolition to systematic falsity or untruth. All moral insulationist views thus share a rejection of assertive moral abolitionism (AMA) (Hinckfuss 1987; Garner 2007; Marks 2014; Garner & Joyce 2019).

Assertive moral abolitionists think we should abolish moral discourse instead of remaining insulated from the nihilistic consequence of belief in error theory. AMA seeks to display no traces of logical, epistemic, or psychological insulation. Assertive moral abolitionists are active and loud in their support of abolishing morality,

openly pitching it as a solution to the many problems moral discourse causes in society, hence the 'assertive' qualifier (Garner 2007: 506). Moral insulationist views place themselves in explicit opposition to AMA. Joyce developed RevMF as an attempt to defeat AMA. Abolitionists have sought to reject RevMF. A fascinating yet seemingly intractable debate has emerged between them. Such intractability probably results from the nature of trying to solve the 'now what' problem in the first place, which involves a rather intricate and counterfactual cost-benefit analysis. Regardless, error theorists are deeply concerned with what to do with morality after it is discovered to be infected with systematic error. While all moral insulationist views reject AMA, I will focus on the specific tension between RevMF and AMA. I will do so in order to develop a hybrid view that tries to retain the better aspects of RevMF and AMA. The hope is that AMA and RevMF, if they are willing to countenance my qualification of the criterion for a solution to the 'now what' problem, might view my offer, reactionary moral fictionalism (ReactMF), as a possible compromise position. What I am interested in is developing a solution to the 'now what' problem that is maximally non-insulationist and yet still prudent in the face of morality's ubiquity. As we will see, I think the ways moral abolitionists go about not being insulated from their belief in error theory generates its own problems, and so while my view may seem closer to AMA, it does recommend a kind of fictionalism that assertive abolitionists would probably find problematic.

Before starting with AMA, however, let's take a step back and address just what might constitute an effective solution to the 'now what' problem. Thus far, solutions to the 'now what' problem have been discussed in mostly social, public, or collective terms. They take the perspective of either a group of extant error theorists trying to figure out what to do with morality or a larger social group that may be open to error theory in the future and in need of deciding what to do with morality if they accept it is false or untrue. Lutz has argued that any solution to the 'now what' problem must serve two important functions: it must serve as good practical advice for error theorists and it must pay heed to "what we care about, our deepest commitments" (Lutz 2014: 361). He claims that while error theorists should try not to fall back into genuinely believing in moral facts (as with the case of moral conservationism), any acceptable solution "must allow us to continue acting morally when appropriate and using moral language" (Lutz 2014: 362). Lutz is most concerned with filling the apparent hole left in our collective normative lives by coming to belief the error theory. According to Lutz's criterion, his own moral substitutionism is the best solution to the 'now what' problem. Substitutionism says error theorists should substitute the robust realism of moral discourse with a less normatively demanding discourse, one more reflective of our desires and preferences. On this basis, Lutz says RevMF

pays insufficient heed to our deepest commitments by rendering morality the mere performance of a pretense, while AMA does not allow us to continue acting or speaking morally when appropriate because it abolishes morality altogether.

While I will address other problems with RevMF and AMA below, I want to emphasize that Lutz's criterion is not the only one for solving the 'now what' problem. Before asking what we present or future error theorists should do with morality collectively, it could be asked what each one of us as individual error theorists might wish to do with the realization of error theory's likely truth. The 'now what' problem perhaps should be solved first from the perspective of the individual error theorist before it becomes a matter for us as a group of actual or potential error theorists. It could be that an individual error theorist is not primarily concerned with, and perhaps even finds slightly absurd the notion of, 'what we care about, our deepest commitments.' This brings up the issue of metaethical motivation. Why would one be susceptible to error theory in the first place? The answer most often given is epistemic: one cares if moral judgments are ever true. But why would one care about that? Here we can note that a skepticism can have both an epistemic and therapeutic motivation. An error theorist could come to doubt morality's truth not merely out of an epistemic concern, but because morality involves the experience of certain cognitive and emotional disturbances that cause and result from holding and expressing genuine moral beliefs. I will return to this when discussing motivations for AMA, but the point here is that an error theorist's proposed solution to the 'now what' problem could be more an attempt to remedy the pathological effects morality has on an individual than any specific concern with morality's supposed collective necessity or utility.

From the perspective of an individual error theorist, the question about what to do with morality's falsity could be more a question about how well-off coming to accept error theory leaves one. I've argued elsewhere (xxx) that the fact that almost all the solutions to the 'now what' problem are insulationist seems to reflect that, for most error theorists, the discovery of morality's falsity is something troublesome or problematic, if not downright painful. But that need not be the only response an individual error theorist could have to error theory. Discovering the bankruptcy of morality and how it engenders mostly negative emotions could be a ticket to liberating oneself from these pathological effects. This is the exact motivation driving my offer of ReactMF in what follows. Just as, according to Burnyeat (1997: 227), no ancient Pyrrhonian skeptic practiced insulation, since their motivation for employing skepticism was the achievement of tranquility, I can claim today that an individual error theorist's motivation for holding error theory could be a similarly hoped-for tranquility, a release from the disturbing pathology of morality,

and this motivation could be prior to any question about what should be done collectively or socially about morality's falsity amongst some group of actual or potential error theorists when developing a solution to the 'now what' problem. In other words, the motivation for the view on offer here is an individual error theorist's possible increase in well-being as a result of coming to accept the error theory.

I want to offer a view I think maximizes the personal benefits of coming to accept the error theory. The collective consequences ReactMF might have for other present or potential error theorists, or society at large, is a secondary concern I mostly don't address here. What matters instead is whether an individual error theorist might wish to maximize the therapeutic benefits of fully integrating into their life the effects of the truth of error theory. Just as with Pyrrhonian skepticism, ReactMF will hopefully allow maximal non-insulation from the consequences of reaching the skeptical conclusion of error theory to amount to maximal therapeutic release from the pathology that is caused by and results from morality for certain individual error theorists. Therefore, for ReactMF to count as a possible compromise between AMA and RevMF, error theorists will need to be willing to consider this more individualist criterion for a solution to the 'now what' problem. Let's see what can be retained from AMA and RevMF if evaluated from this individualist perspective.

2 Assertive Moral Abolitionism

Why do assertive moral abolitionists want to abolish morality? Beyond the basic point concerning the epistemic hygiene of abolishing false ways of believing and speaking, AMA offers a number of reasons for abolishing morality. The main set of reasons they offer is concerned more with the social effects of morality. AMA notes how morality renders disagreements deep and intractable (Garner 2007: 502). For error theorists, moral facts either conceptually entail or pragmatically presuppose intrinsically prescriptive, inescapably authoritative, irreducibly normative, mind-independent, and objective categorical reasons for action. Error theorists think such facts are simply too 'queer' or weird to exist. Abolitionists emphasize that speaking in terms of moral facts leads to irreconcilable disagreements. Since moral principles, which express moral facts, cannot be compromised, deep and intractable moral disagreements follow. Abolishing morality dissolves these disagreements.

A second way morality has detrimental social effects is that it is often used to stabilize unequal distributions of power and wealth. This point is similar to the one often made by critical theorists. Morality is regarded as a propagandistic tool for generating obedience and delusion regarding the vested interests that benefit from the present structure of society and the belief in its legitimacy. Morality is a tool of elitism and authoritarianism (Hinckfuss 1987:

3.2). Related to this is the third reason to abolish morality for its adverse social effects: morality is often used to motivate and justify violence, especially great power wars. Civil wars are usually rooted in specific grievances stemming from long histories of mutual irritation, but morality is often needed to motivate fighting strangers halfway around the world. As Hans-Georg Moeller writes, "Hardly any political purge, religious war, or ethnic cleansing was not justified, embellished, or inspired by great moral values: justice, righteousness, freedom, liberty, equality, human rights" (Moeller 2009: 1). Abolishing morality might thus contribute to establishing greater equality and gradually eradicating international wars.

AMA thus offer three social reasons to abolish morality that amounts to the basic claim that, contrary to what moral insulationists claim, morality generates more conflict than cooperation (or at least only an unappealing kind of cooperation, based on force, delusion, and fear). Morality leads to intractable disagreements, injustice and inequality, and international war. Of course, morality is just as often used to criticize these phenomena, but abolitionists points out that such an approach rarely works as it depends on those in power being susceptible to moral correction, which is rarely the case (Garner 2007: 502). AMA does not believe more or better morality is the solution to the social problems morality presents, in opposition to recent attempts to remedy the misuses of morality instead of going full abolitionist (Isserow 2019). Only by abolishing morality would its problems be solved.

There is another set of reasons AMA offers for abolishing morality. These reasons are more psychological than social and reflect more my concern with an individualist criterion for solving the 'now what' problem. These reasons reflect Hinckfuss's sense that morality is often the cause and effect of psychological distress. Morality seems emotionally fraught. One need not be an expressivist to notice that moral judgments are usually vehicles for the expression of negative emotions. Negativity bias and dominance often determines the expression of moral judgments (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp 2009; Rozin & Royzman 2001). If the expression of moral judgments is so skewed to the negative, it might make sense to view morality as somewhat pathological. Niklas Luhmann made a similar point: "In normal everyday interaction, after all, morality is not needed anyway; it is always a symptom of the occurrence of pathologies" (Luhmann 2000: 79). Few express moral judgments from a condition of general mental stability or well-being. Morality is mostly a way of discharging sadness, anxiety, pity, shame, guilt, anger, indignation, disgust, condemnation, outrage, contempt, and resentment (Marks 2013: 83). Morality is also often used passive-aggressively, laden with hypocrisy, and as a means to grandstand on key issues (Marks 2013: 86; Tosi and Warmke 2016). Two other psychological aspects of moral discourse that might put it in need of elimination is that it usually

blocks humor and aesthetic pleasure. It might be impossible to be funny and moralize at the same time. Also, certain aesthetic traditions have noted that morality interrupts aesthetic experiences (Hirota 2002: 275). Of course, it might not be the point of morality to be funny or pleasant, but if one wants more humor and pleasure in one's life, then abolishing morality might assist in that pursuit.

Morality stands condemned. For AMA, to summarize, morality is false, generates intractable disagreements, leads to elitism, authoritarianism, and ideological delusion, and inspires international war. Moreover, morality is pathological, negative, guilt-ridden, sad, anxious, angry, resentful, passive-aggressive, hypocritical, arrogant, unfunny, and ugly. According to Joel Marks, moral abolitionism, on the other hand, would be guilt-free, tolerant, interesting, explanatory, simple, compassionate, and true (Marks 2013: 94-104). I would add that moral abolitionism could be seen as joyful, wise, self-composed, empowering, disciplined, light-hearted, and conducive to aesthetic pleasure. One could abolish morality for these therapeutic reasons. Now, most will disagree. They will argue that abolitionism will lead to, or already is, all the things abolitionists accuse morality of being. While this is a fairly safe inference, actual criticisms of AMA are rather scant. Let's now look at these criticisms and see how RevMF seeks to offer a better solution to the 'now what' problem, one that retains what is supposedly socially useful about morality.

3 Revolutionary Moral Fictionalism

One criticism leveled against AMA is that its complaints are moral in nature, that it sounds like it is condemning morality itself as immoral (Olson 2014: 179). I have sympathy with this criticism and will return to it below. The most common criticism, however, is that AMA is extreme in the sense that it would be too difficult for us to ever consistently adopt, that it asks too much of us. A non-insulationist error theory would be too difficult for us. Nolan, Restall, & West, writing in defense of fictionalism, claim "Giving up moral talk would force large-scale changes to the way we talk, think, and feel that would be extremely difficult to make" (Nolan, Restall, & West 2005: 307). The moral fictionalist claim is that it would be too socially and psychology difficult to act in accordance with AMA. Socially, if we abolished morality we would perhaps lose our most useful tool for coordinating and regulating interpersonal interactions. If we dropped moral discourse, how would we know who or what to trust? How could we cooperate with the merely instrumentally inclined? Just as with God, as the cliché goes, even if moral facts did not exist, we would have to invent them. Psychologically, moral intuitions might simply be too baked into our evolved and everyday psychology to be eradicated, at least not within one generation. It might amount to requesting the impossible to ask of people that they stop thinking and speaking in moral terms.

Such concerns drive Joyce's development of RevMF. Joyce thinks morality is too useful to be abolished. He thinks it would be wise to psychologically and socially insulate ourselves from the consequences of believing error theory because it would make instrumental sense to continue to use morality in some way. This is because humans happen to be weak, imperfectly rational, fallible creatures and morality can be used to remedy some of that (Joyce 2001: 230). Joyce argues we evolved to think and speak in terms of moral facts in order to overcome our shortcomings. The point of morality is to get us to do what is in our long-term best interest by imposing on us a sense of inescapable necessity to certain actions. Believing I cannot steal, for example, not merely because I might get caught and that would not be helpful for me in the long run, but because stealing is just something one simply must not do, is a thought that is more likely to get me to not steal. I can defeat bouts of weakness of will and limitations in practical reasoning by using a commitment device like a belief in moral facts. Believing in and sincerely asserting the existence of moral facts is thought to be an effective means for acting in ultimately beneficial ways.

Since humans are also gossiping conformists offended by open displays of selfishness and who police the weakness, irrationality, and fallibility of others more than their own, publicly using the language of moral facts is perhaps the most useful way of signaling to others one's commitment to achieving not merely self-control and long-term self-interest, but overall social cooperation. A group with the most effective use of moral discourse would most likely enjoy the most cooperative, and thus evolutionary, success. Employing moral discourse is as helpful in counteracting personal faults as it is in generating social order. Or, rather, morality works to generate social order precisely by working as an internal commitment device that also serves as an external signaling device. A society of mostly trustworthy non-stealing moralists will probably get along pretty well and find it relatively easier to coordinate their interactions. Morality is doubly useful then as a way of getting people to do what is in their best interest, individually and collectively.

Now, beliefs are usually most useful when they are believed. This is a problem for the error theorist, who positively disbelieves in the existence of moral facts. Joyce solves this problem by allowing error theorists to be disposed to disbelieving in moral facts while in more critical and reflective contexts, but make-believing in them in more everyday and immediate contexts. 'Make-believing' here means thinking or accepting, an attitude short of full-fledged belief. Likewise, when speaking in moral terms, instead of sincerely asserting one's moral beliefs, RevMF recommends one quasi-assert moral make-beliefs. Quasi-assertion is a way of speaking that subtracts the assertive force from an utterance. If I make-believe stealing is wrong, because I am momentarily accepting or thinking or

pretending it is an inescapable fact that it is wrong and so must not be done, thereby enhancing my ability not to steal by shutting down prudential calculations about the feasibility of getting away with it, I can thus also tell others about this and encourage them not to steal as well by quasi-asserting the judgment, 'stealing is wrong.'

Quasi-asserting is like uttering lines from a play. One does not believe what one is saying when they act, when they pretend on stage, and likewise no one takes the actor to be sincerely asserting anything about what they really believe. RevMF involves error theorists continuing to use, and getting the benefits from using, morality by having them quasi-assert moral make-beliefs. Joyce thinks revising and reforming moral thought and discourse so that we can treat morality like a useful fiction amounts to a revolution in our moral practice. RevMF is thus not hermeneutic moral fictionalism (Kalderon 2005). It is not a description of what we are already doing with morality. Rather, it is something we should probably start doing if we believe error theory and yet still want to continue accruing the supposed benefits of morality. Joyce thinks we should all become error theorists and then revise the way we approach morality so that we can quasi-assert moral make-beliefs. He wants to make revolutionaries of us.

4 Problems with RevMF

There are some serious problems with RevMF, however. For one, RevMF doesn't seem any easier than AMA. Revising moral practice in such a way that one believes error theory in one context and make-believes in moral facts in others seems just as demanding, psychologically and socially, of us as abolishing moral belief and discourse altogether. It's hard to see how knowing when and how to ignore or forget one's belief in error theory for the sake of the psychological and social utility of pretending morality is true is any easier than simply abolishing morality because one believes it's systematically false. Besides, the difficulty of being an adequate moral pretender can lead to other problems. If it is as difficult as it appears, a likely poor rendition of RevMF would leave one open to getting caught out as insincere and duplicitous (Kirchin 2012: 95). For Garner, if this happened enough, RevMF would "undermine our epistemology by promoting a culture of deception" (Garner 2007: 499).

Joyce saw this problem and adjusted accordingly. He said the accusation of insincerity or duplicity leveled against the fictionalist is misplaced. The fictionalist doesn't lie. That is, RevMF doesn't involve asserting what one doesn't believe, but only quasi-asserting it. Lying is closer to what moral conservationism or moral propagandism suggest insofar as both views recommend error theorists believe error theory while also believing in and asserting moral facts, with the difference between the two being the conservationist still wants to inform folks of error theory in more reflective settings while the propagandist wants to hide error theory from the masses. Like conservationism,

RevMF wants to inform as many people as possible about error theory. This is not only because Joyce doesn't want to hide error theory from the people, but because he thinks the only way to avoid the fictionalist being charged with insincerity is to have a group of error theorists perform moral fictionalism together (Joyce 2016: 228).

Adding a group condition to the performance of RevMF reflects Joyce's deeper concern with the conventions surrounding moral assertion. Usually, if one wants to reduce the assertive force from their utterances, they need to do something like wink or speak in a sarcastic tone. The problem for RevMF is that is not much of a real possibility insofar as it is employed for the sake of achieving the goals of employing a commitment device that requires at least momentary sincerity for its effectiveness. If one was being a ficitonalist and saying in an exaggerated, obviously sarcastic, voice 'stealing is wrong,' most people would not take the utterance very seriously. Joyce says as well there cannot be a 'lone fictionalist' because one cannot unilaterally reduce assertive force from one's utterances since it is not up to the speaker alone. This is a problem for RevMF. Others will take a fictionalist to be a sincere believer in what they quasi-assert precisely inasmuch as they are effective in pretending to be sincere. What's a fictionalist to do?

Joyce's solution is for RevMF to be a group effort. The idea is that a group of error theorists convinced of the falsity of morality but equally convinced of its utility would agree to pretend that moral judgments are not false and so express quasi-asserted moral make-beliefs with each other. This way everyone is disposed to knowing in more reflective moments that everyone in the group agreed with error theory but still wanted to use morality, so no one is actually asserting any moral judgments as they engage in moral speech with each other. No member of a group of pretenders will ever get accused of being insincere or really asserting what they are uttering and thus contradicting themselves. Not only is group RevMF meant to solve the problem of how to successfully subtract assertive force from one's moral utterances, it is also meant to solve the problem of propagandism by having fictionalists pretend with each other, other error theorists, that morality is true, but not with others who are presumably run-of-the-mill minimal or robust moral realists, whether they are aware of their realism or not.

The fictionalist will, however, if placed in a critical or reflective context, tell anyone about the truth of error theory, but then also try to convince them that it would be best if they joined their group of fictionalist error theorists and so continue with using moral thought and speech but without genuine belief or assertion while still dispositionally believing morality was false. Thus, Joyce recommends that RevMF be employed selectively in the sense that fictionalists should only quasi-assert moral make-beliefs with fellow pretending error theorists so that they can successfully reduce assertive force from their moral utterances but also avoid propagandizing moral realism to the

masses who are as yet uninitiated into the wonders of metaethics and the intricacies of error theory. How would the abolitionist feel about this proposal?

Garner finds the group condition of RevMF mostly preposterous (Garner 2007: 509-510). He thinks it is hard to believe anyone would have both the energy to study metaethics and the ability to understand it to the degree of being convinced of error theory, to then also so easily slip into occurrently forgetting what they learned and pretending that the atomic utterances of a discourse they really believe to be false are worth being treated as useful fictions. Could it really be the case that someone capable of reading, understanding, and agreeing with Mackie or Joyce would only be disposed to attending to that fact in their most reflective and critical moments? It seems not. Garner's point seems to be that forgetting or ignoring one's belief in error theory is highly unlikely, regardless of the setting. If one is an error theorist, one does not so easily forget it and so are most likely not going to find a group of other highly intelligent yet eminently forgetful error theorists with which to found a moral acting troupe. We can probably say with confidence we will never run into or find ourselves members of a RevMF playing company. For Garner, adding the group condition to RevMF likely wouldn't stop it from generating deep social mistrust.

On the other hand, as it sometimes seems implied, if Joyce only added the group condition to RevMF as a way of saying, not that error theorists in our actual world would behave this way, but that it is something possible error theorists could do with each other in some possible world if the total amount of error theorists reached some critical threshold where the majority would understand everyone is only pretending when they uttered moral judgments, then I don't see how group RevMF really should matter to any of us here in the actual world trying to figure out what to do with morality now it's known to be systematically false. If RevMF is some modal fantasy of what a world of error theorists would be like, then the view, while theoretically interesting like most things merely possible, would seem to be irrelevant to error theorists trying to solving the 'now what' problem in this world. Then again, it is hard to tell just how important Joyce takes the group condition to be. Perhaps it is a necessary condition for the successful employment of RevMF. Perhaps it's merely desirable.

Another problem with RevMF deals with issues stemming for using moral make-beliefs as pre-commitments against bouts of weakness of will. The question of the plausibility of such an approach again emerges. On the one hand, it seems plausible a certain error theorist could make-believe in moral facts in order to act in desirable ways. On the other hand, there is something perplexing about the idea of using moral make-beliefs in order to regulate behavior. Joyce gives the story of someone clever enough to read and understand Mackie's arguments, but who then decides to

continue on make-believing in categorical reasons as a device to trick themselves into not doing what is ultimately not in their long-term best interest. Again, the case of such a possible person strikes me as bizarre. How is it that one would have the ability to understand error theory but then need to employ fictions to get them to not, say, steal? This is not to claim philosophers are paragons of 'moral' behavior. In fact, we know they are no better or worse than the rest of us (Schwitzgebel & Rust 2016).

What it is to say is that it can strike one as highly unlikely that a full-blown error theorist would be so bad off with being tempted by opportunities to engage in hyperbolic discounting and slip into diachronic inconsistency that they would need to make-believe in illusory moral facts in order to behave like someone who doesn't steal candy bars from convenient stores. Besides the unlikeliness of adults capable of grasping metaethics, and also probably knowing the legal consequences of most behaviors, needing a mental device beyond mere instrumental reasoning in order to behave as expected, there is another problem with using RevMF as a means to silencing calculations by subscribing to fictional pre-commitments. This is that moral judgments work precisely by deflecting our attention away from the fact that we employ them as such devices in the first place.

Eric Campbell has argued that inherent to the very nature of moral judgments is the fact they work inasmuch as we remain ignorant of their nature as commitment devices meant to get us to avoid suffering from bouts of weakness of will (Campbell 2014). But if one becomes aware that that is exactly how morality works, by deflecting our attention away from the fact that moral judgments conceptually entail or pragmatically presuppose irreducibly normative categoricity only in order to overcompensate for our failures to be effective practically rational agents, then how could one go back to simply using such a device as if they did not really know what it was for? In other words, how does one put the metaethical cat back in the psychological bag? By learning about error theory and studying some moral psychology one learns what kind of heuristic morality is. But if morality works precisely by deflecting attention away from it working by deflecting our attention away from the fact that it is a mere commitment device, how is one to use it as a convenient fiction? How could our attention be deflected away from knowing there really are no categorical reasons by deciding to pretend there are? This seems quite psychologically difficult.

This also goes back to the other point about how it does not seem all that likely error theorists are going to suddenly forget they are error theorists just because they are tempted to, say, steal. Again, it is difficult to imagine an error theorist, assuming they really do believe error theory, could simply forget or ignore that there are no moral facts. But what about non-professional metaethicists? The same point applies: if one at least partially convinced of error

theory drifts into using the fiction of moral facts as commitment devices to defeat bouts of weakness of will, then one is either a wavering error theorist or actually something like a moral conservationist and merely believing what they don't really believe. Of course, the consequence of this is that one is then irrational. Now, it seems most people are irrational most of the time, so it is not surprising the suggestion would be that the supposed fictionalist cannot successfully perform their pretense either because their knowledge about the nature of moral facts will get in the way or because they are actually closer to being conservationists or, which is the same, just being irrational. Olson has also claimed that using make-beliefs for the sake of avoiding *akrasia* inevitably slips into genuine belief (Olson 2014: 22). Either way, the point is there's a problem with the idea RevMF would effectively encourage cooperation and self-control since we don't live in a world of error theorists and, as error theorists, we believe moral facts don't exist and it's not so easy to forget or ignore that.

5 Reactionary Moral Fictionalism

We've now addressed AMA and RevMF, and their respective problems. Solving these problems requires creating a new view that combines their best elements while jettisoning their worst.[1] To start with AMA, recall that its main problem is that it seems extreme, that it asks too much of us, that it apparently throws the baby of morality's utility out with the bathwater of morality's falsity. Also, AMA is accused of sounding moral, or at least strongly normative, in offering its social reasons for abolishing morality. In order to allay the fears of AMA being extreme, while responding to claims it appears to be criticizing morality as being immoral, I would recommend moral abolitionists stop being assertive about their view. The suggestion is that abolitionists should go quiet and just drop moral beliefs

[1] I would like to emphasize again that the solution of ReactMF offered below is based on an individualist criterion of a solution to the 'now what' problem, as presented in section 1. Insofar as AMA and RevMF are solutions to the 'now what' problem based on a more social or collectivist criterion, my claim is that the arguments offered above against AMA and RevMF are also arguments for taking an individualist criterion of a solution to the 'now what' problem more seriously. Since AMA and RevMF fail on their own terms as collectivist solutions, perhaps taking a step back and considering a different criterion for solving the 'now what' problem is in order on the part of abolitionists and fictionalists. While my personal motivation for believing the error theory and using the individualist criterion is confessedly primarily therapeutic, assertive abolitionists and revolutionary fictionalists might like to find out first what they, as individual error theorists, would like to get out of coming to believe the error theory before they start recommending certain behaviors to other error theorists, other metaethicists, or just other people in general. If whole-scale abolition or revolution proves to not be feasible, which seems to be the case, abolitionists and fictionalists might like to consider a different, more individualist, solution to the 'now what' problem. Indeed, they might like to discover that an individualist solution to the 'now what' problem is the only one that is feasible, and that the most feasible individualist solution is a relaxed and highly modified combination of both their views, which is precisely what ReactMF has to offer. So, not only do collectivist solutions likely fail, but their likely failure can serve to motivate a consideration amongst error theorists that only a individualist solution should be of interest to them, and, moreover, ReactMF should be of utmost interest to hopefully former assertive abolitionists and revolutionary fictionalists, for it might be the only way they can partially retain their views. Thank you to an anonymous referee for requesting greater clarity on this point.

and utterances without also recommending others do the same. This approach makes sense considering the zeal with which AMA is sometimes offered. Marks writes,

> Finally I reached a point where I felt that, far from needing to hide my amorality from the world, I should share it with the world. It would be a gift. At the very least, it was important—perhaps the most important thing in the world! I also saw the humor in my situation: it was not lost on me that I was becoming an unbelieving proselytizer. (Marks 2013: 14)

It can be argued the apparent extremity of AMA would be minimized if individual abolitionists stopped encouraging realists to become error theorists and error theorists to abolish morality. I recommend AMA become NMA, nonassertive moral abolitionism. NMA can come in weaker or stronger forms. Weak NMA involves being willing to discuss metaethics and argue for the truth of error theory while at the same time not really pushing the point and also not offering a solution to the 'now what' problem. Instead, weak NMA would simply have the moral abolitionist go quiet after discovering the truth of error theory. Strong NMA would also have the abolitionist go quiet after coming to believe error theory, but then ceasing even discussing or arguing for error theory at all. While weak NMA goes quiet about metametaethical questions like 'now what?,' strong NMA goes quiet about metaethical and metametaethical questions. Strong NMA asserts no support for error theory or abolitionism. Instead, all ethical and metaethical discourse, after becoming convinced of error theory, is abolished. Strong NMA involves the strongest kind of non-insulation, where all levels of ethical reflection are abolished, while weak NMA still permits general metaethical discussions.

NMA, in either degree, solves both problems that plague AMA. NMA will less likely get accused of extremity insofar the nonassertive abolitionist does not assert the wisdom of abolition, but rather avoids offering a public solution to the 'now what' problem and instead quietly suspends belief in and utterance of moral judgments. NMA will also less likely be accused of criticizing morality as immoral insofar as the nonassertive abolitionist will no longer offer social reasons to abolish morality, as AMA does, but rather focus on internally overcoming the pathological causes and effects of morality by crushing or controlling the negative emotions which cause and result from the employment of morality. By focusing on the therapeutic upshot of abolishing morality, NMA will not find itself accused of extremity or inconsistency. Instead, NMA will be a certain kind of self-therapy an error theorist performs internally and quietly. Also, consistent with NMA's more therapeutic motivation for believing error theory and abolishing morality is the recognition that pitching error theory to realists and abolition to error theorists would almost always lead to backfire, with realists and insulationists clinging even harder to morality than if they weren't threatened by the prospect of abolition (Nyhan & Reifler 2010). NMA can finally serve a taxonomical function as

well by being the robustly anti-realist version of the robustly realist quietism of non-naturalists like Dworkin, Parfit, and Scanlon.

Of course, on the other hand, NMA does not require that an error theorist seclude herself entirely from the world. Complete quietism is rarely achievable. We are a mutually dependent, ultrasocial species after all. Since error theorists can't stop being social creatures, NMA will need to be tempered to allow for the occasional use of moral discourse. Humans use moral language often and expect others to do the same. When the nonassertive abolitionist cannot avoid contexts of moral speech, they will have to participate in order not to incur avoidable social costs and burdens. The reputational hit alone of being labeled an amoralist is usually fairly steep. One would do best to avoid the charge of being cold or indifferent or, even worse, psychopathic. So, when not uttering ethical or metaethical judgments will be socially detrimental, the nonassertive abolitionist will utter the expected moral or strongly normative sounding judgments in order to avoid punishment. NMA will thus involve using moral discourse when one cannot get away with remaining quiet. The way moral discourse will be used, however, cannot be similar to conservationism or propagandism or any other non-insulationist solution to the 'now what' problem considering the nonassertive abolitionist will not find the epistemic and psychological gymnastics of essentially lying or reforming morality, not to say the seemingly rank irrationality and futility of such views, to be worth the effort. NMA will instead qualify itself with a fictionalist approach to moral speech, but only as a sort of defense mechanism.

When stuck in moralized communicative contexts, NMA will allow for the employment of the quasi-assertion of moral make-beliefs. NMA agrees with RevMF that moral pretense can be useful, but for very different reasons. NMA wants to navigate the world with the least possible amount of the falsity and emotional disturbance morality engenders. NMA finds RevMF much too active, loud, (quasi-)assertive, and, well, revolutionary. The problems facing RevMF seem insurmountable. The group condition is either infeasible or only relevant in a different possible world. Moral make-belief fails to work as an effective pre-commitment since one can't so easily forget or ignore the non-existence of moral facts. On the other hand, the force fictionalist approach can be effective in helping moral abolitionists avoid social detection and disapprobation for their internal nihilism if they were to employ the moral pretense with much greater passivity and only ever as a reaction to moralized contexts. This is the approach of reactionary moral fictionalism. The reactionary moral fictionalist merely acquiesces to inescapable moral contexts. ReactMF says the error theorist who wishes to obtain maximal therapeutic relief from morality should quietly abolish as much ethical and metaethical belief and discourse from their lives as they can while also employing the moral

pretense in contexts where it would be unwise not to. The main difference between RevMF and ReactMF is that the latter only ever employs the moral pretense passively, reactively, and extremely selectively, that is, only when remaining quiet is no longer an option. RevMF, on the other hand, is active and aggressive in its insistence to keep as much of moral thinking and speaking in our collective lives as possible. ReactMF is a maximally non-insulationist individualist solution to the 'now what' problem an error theorist can employ, while RevMF is an insulationist attempt to preserve morality purported social utility.

ReactMF finds RevMF unwise. It also doesn't suffer from RevMF's problems because it neither requires the group condition to make sure moral quasi-assertions aren't viewed insincerely nor uses moral make-beliefs to defeat bouts of weakness of will. ReactMF is knowingly used in social contexts where everyone will assume the moral pretender is genuine. This doesn't mean ReactMF recommends lying or propagandism. Reactionary fictionalists don't lie because they are only quasi-asserting moral make-beliefs. They also are not propagating morality because they are not propagating anything insofar as they have gone mostly quiet by employing NMA. They only very rarely speak in ethical, metaethical, or metametaethical terms. They have accepted error theory and now aim to avoid speaking in normative terms as much as possible. The main concern of the reactionary fictionalist is maximizing the enjoyment of private liberation from the pathology of morality while navigating the social world with minimal to no recognition for that private liberation. ReactMF resembles the motto found in the ancient Chinese Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi*: "Don't let the external compromise get inside you and don't let your inner harmony show itself externally" (Ziporyn 2009: 29).

But the question remains, won't the reactionary fictionalist end up getting caught as being insincere? Perhaps, but not if they are an effective pretender. Acting is a skill. It is a matter of being convincing. Besides, since ReactMF counsels using moral pretense only rarely and always only passively, as a mere reaction to a social expectation for at least minimal discursive moral participation, the reactionary fictionalist will have many fewer opportunities to get caught as being insincere. If they do get caught, they will just admit they are pretending because they don't believe there are any moral facts and so accept the social costs of holding such a view and getting caught as a pretender. But the point remains, since RevMF is unworkable, the only other way of being a force moral fictionalist will have to involve the pretender taking the risk of getting caught as insincere. Based on the individualist criterion of solving the 'now what' problem, being a 'lone fictionalist' is really the only option one has if one wants to occasionally use morality as a pretense.

Now, one could claim at this point that ReactMF will inevitably collapse back into RevMF considering the seeming pervasion of morality in our everyday interactions, thereby reactivating the pragmatic problem of trying to unilaterally reduce the assertive force from one's moral utterances. But this point seems debatable. I don't get the sense moral speech is really all that pervasive. In fact, I feel most communicative contexts lack any use of moral discourse. As mentioned in the Luhmann quote earlier, the emergence of moral speech is usually a sign of something abnormal or pathological going on, which means it's already a situation worth fleeing or aiming to avoid in the first place. The reactionary fictionalist will not find it exceedingly difficult to avoid most contexts where moral discourse will be used. It is often rather foreseeable when and where folks will be moralizing. And, again, if the reactionary fictionalist finds himself stuck in such a context, he can issue the minimally moral sounding quasi-assertions required to avoid social disapprobation and then dip out of the conversation probably unnoticed. Passive and reactive moral pretense seems like a much easier performance than anything supposedly revolutionary.

What might AMA and RevMF feel about ReactMF? On the one hand, they would probably find the view to be an unnecessary compromise. AMA would still think it is worth the risk of appearing extreme and exceedingly normative, if not moralistic, in its zeal to fight the 'good' fight and seek to convert as many realists to error theory and error theorists to moral abolition as possible. Ignoring the social reasons to abolish morality and giving up on helping others abolish morality would probably appear to AMA as unnecessarily defeatist or selfish. Likewise, RevMF would probably claim only employing the moral pretense passively and reactively would not be enough to retain the utility of morality as a device for encouraging cooperation and continence. Both AMA and RevMF want to do things with morality socially after the realization of the error theory, whether it be collective abolition or pretense. ReactMF, on the other hand, doesn't want to do anything with morality, especially with others, but avoid it as much as possible and use it only very rarely as a mere shield to deflect others' pathologies back onto them. It wants to maximize non-insulation for the sake of individual benefit and well-being.

On the other hand, why would AMA and RevMF care that much about such an approach? Reactionary fictionalists, because of their therapeutic motivation, have almost entirely checked out of all levels of ethical discourse. How could their near-silence mixed with rare passive acquiescence count as that much of a threat to their aims to abolish or retain morality? More than likely, AMA and RevMF wouldn't even notice the employment of ReactMF. The reactionary fictionalist, especially if enacted by an effective pretender, would probably slip by unnoticed in most contexts. AMA and RevMF should probably not mind that much. They still have other solutions to the 'now what'

problem to deal with, since they seem so inclined. ReactMF is not a genuine threat to them. Either way, in the end, if AMA and RevMF wanted to truly solve their problems they might gradually come to the realization ReactMF is the only workable way to employ their views anyway. But this is something they will need to realize for themselves. If AMA and RevMF were to consider the individualist criterion for the solution to the 'now what' problem, they might come to accept that the hybrid view of ReactMF combines what is worth retaining from their views and understand that the therapeutic benefits that come from going nonassertive about moral abolition and reactive about moral pretense are superior to any of the supposed social benefits they imagine might result from being assertive and revolutionary about morality's falsity.

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