CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Nonassertive moral abolitionism
Authors	Dockstader, Jason
Publication date	2019-07-04
Original Citation	Dockstader, J. (2019) 'Nonassertive moral abolitionism', Metaphilosophy, 50(4), pp. 481-502. doi: 10.1111/meta.12368
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/meta.12368 - 10.1111/meta.12368
Rights	© 2019, Metaphilosophy LLC and John Wiley & Sons Ltd. This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Dockstader, J. (2019) 'Nonassertive moral abolitionism', Metaphilosophy, 50(4), pp. 481-502. doi: 10.1111/meta.12368, which has been published in final form at https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12368. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.
Download date	2026-10-30 12:01:24
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/8196



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Nonassertive Moral Abolitionism

Jason Dockstader

Abstract Proponents of moral abolitionism, like Richard Garner, qualify their view as an 'assertive' version of the position. They counsel moral realists and anti-realists alike to accept moral error theory, abolish morality, and encourage others to abolish morality. In response, I argue moral error theorists should abolish morality, but go quiet about such abolition. I offer a quietist or nonassertive version of moral abolitionism. I do so by first clarifying and addressing the arguments for and against assertive moral abolitionism. Second, I develop novel criticisms of assertive moral abolitionism and offer nonassertive moral abolitionism in response. Third, I discuss how various metaethical views might respond to nonassertive moral abolitionism. My basic claim is that nonassertive moral abolitionism provides superior *therapeutic* benefits over assertive moral abolitionism and other conserving and reforming approaches to moral discourse.

Keywords Metaethics – Moral Abolitionism – Moral Anti-Realism – Moral Error Theory – Moral Nihilism

1 Assertive Moral Abolitionism

Nonassertive moral abolitionism (NMA) is a kind of moral abolitionism, which is a kind of moral nihilism. Assertive moral abolitionism (AMA) is the other kind of moral abolitionism. Moral nihilism is the denial of the existence of moral facts and the annihilation, elimination, or abolition of moral belief and discourse. Both NMA and AMA deny the existence of moral facts and annihilate moral belief and discourse. Moral nihilism is usually only an option for moral anti-realists, in particular moral error theorists, who deny the existence of moral facts. Moral error theory is the combination of three metaethical views, one semantic, one psychological, and one ontological. Error theory is factualist, cognitivist, and anti-realist. It regards moral discourse as meaningful, and so in the business of aiming to report moral facts. It claims we are primarily expressing beliefs when we utter moral judgments. And it claims these judgments fail to correspond to any objectively existing, mind-independent moral facts. There are no such facts because they are too 'queer' or weird to be real (Mackie 1977). This is because moral facts are by definition mind-independent, non-negotiable, practically authoritative, obligations or imperatives to behave in certain ways. Moral facts are more than mere hypothetical reasons, pieces of prudence or practical advice. They are categorical reasons, reasons which cannot be reduced, contextualized, or suspended in anyway. The error theorist, being a thoroughgoing naturalist, thinks there is no evidence whatsoever for categorical reasons. They might even be conceptually impossible (Kalf 2015).

The question that arises for the error theorist at this point is, now what (Lutz 2014)? What should an error theorist do with a false discourse like morality? There are three main options: conserve it, reform it by treating it as a useful fiction, or annihilate it. Moral conservationism (Olson 2014) says we should conserve genuine belief in and really assert the existence of moral facts even if we are also convinced of the error theory. Revolutionary moral fictionalism (Joyce 2016) says we should make-believe in and quasi-assert the existence of moral facts we know not to really exist. (Quasi-assertion is a way of uttering a sentence while reducing assertive force from it, like how actors utter lines from a play). Moral nihilism, and hence AMA (Garner 2007), says we should annihilate morality. Obviously, the 'should' in each of these views is not categorical, but only hypothetical. Conservationism and fictionalism think it would be wise and useful to retain moral discourse, while AMA thinks it would be wise and useful to annihilate it. AMA involves accepting moral error theory, annihilating or abolishing morality, and advising others to do the same. What abolishing morality amounts to is the denial of the existence of moral facts and the suspension of the belief in and expression of moral judgments. What is assertive about AMA is that it urges others to accept the error theory and suspend believing in and expressing moral judgments as well. Garner summarizes the view: "Assertive moral abolitionists construe moral judgments as false assertions, but they urge us to stop making them because they believe that any benefits that come from pretending that moral realism is true are outweighed by the harm that comes from having to promote and defend a series of easily questioned falsehoods" (Garner 2007, 506). Joel Marks, another proponent of AMA, describes how the revelation of moral nihilism affected him:

> 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)

AMA is thus nonassertive about atomic moral judgments, but assertive about both metaethical and metametaethical claims. It says we should abolish believing in and uttering atomic moral judgments (like 'stealing is wrong'), but we should encourage others to do the same by believing the error theory and encouraging others to abolish morality. AMA asserts the truth of the error theory and the wisdom of abolition. Conservationism, on the other hand, continues to assert moral judgments, while asserting the truth of the error theory and the wisdom of conserving moral discourse. Revolutionary fictionalism differs by only quasi-asserting moral judgments, while asserting the truth of the error theory and the wisdom of treating morality as a useful fiction.

NMA disagrees with each of these views. It comes in weaker and stronger forms. Weak NMA claims one should go quiet or nonassertive about moral judgments, but assert the metaethical truth of the error theory while also not asserting the metametaethical point that those who accept the error theory should encourage others to abolish morality. Strong NMA, on the other hand, suggests we not only abolish uttering atomic moral judgments, but we should abolish asserting the truth of the error theory and the wisdom of abolition. Strong NMA believes annihilation is best completed in silence. All levels of ethical reflection and talk should be abolished. I will argue strong NMA is the wiser and more prudent option of what one can do with ethical and metaethical discourse if one is convinced of error theory. Obviously, by doing so I render this paper too assertive to be a version of NMA. I don't take this to be a problem, however, as I regard this paper itself as possibly the last rung on the metaethical ladder I can kick away after completion. I will address this further, but the main reason for the strong NMA approach is to obtain something like Pyrrhonian impassivity with respect to morality, a therapeutic release from belief in and concern with as much normativity as possible. But before I present the case for NMA, let's ask why would one want to abolish morality in the first place, especially if most error theorists want to conserve or reform moral discourse?

Beyond the basic point concerning the epistemic hygiene of abolishing false ways of believing and speaking, Garner develops three reasons for AMA first offered by Mackie (1980). The first reason to abolish morality is that it renders disagreements deep and intractable. If a disagreement is over a certain fact of the matter, the fact can be noted and the disagreement resolved. If a disagreement is a clash of interests, then the side with superior force, however construed, will win and the disagreement will be resolved. But if a disagreement is a conflict between two competing categorical reasons, there is no room for resolution. Value conflicts are irreconcilable. Moral principles cannot be compromised. Not only are moral disagreements intractable, anybody can engage in them since there is no fact of the matter. Deep, intractable moral disagreements are rooted in the fruitless intransigence and obstinacy that a belief in categorical reasons often entails. There is also some evidence that the more a moral belief is thought to be objective, the less comfortable people are with other's disagreeing with it, the less they view those who disagree with it as moral, and the less they are open to changing their mind with respect to the belief. In other words, "greater objectivity is associated with more 'closed' rather than more 'open' responses in the face of moral disagreement" (Goodwin & Darley 2012, 254). Marks argues that morality is not nearly as useful as conservationists and fictionalists (and realists) claim. In fact, he claims morality is useless, imprudent, arbitrary, and silly (Marks 2013, 88-93). AMA recommends

abolishing morality so to avoid these problems stemming from the basic heavy-handedness of moral judgment and the intractability of moral disagreement.

The second reason to abolish morality 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, acquiescence, and delusion regarding the vested interests that benefit from the present structure of society and the belief in its legitimacy. Ian Hinckfuss has argued that a 'moral society' is one permeated not only by an irrational acceptance of inequality and injustice, but by an elitism and authoritarianism that seeks their justification (1987: 3.2). What Hinckfuss means by elitism is the belief that some members of society are morally better than others and that they thus deserve more power and influence than the morally inferior. Elitism also leads to authoritarianism, which is the belief that those in the moral elite should be authorities in the sense of possessing both expertise and sovereignty. The idea here is that adopting AMA would perhaps lead to the achievement of a more just and equal, or at least less ideologically deluded, society. The abolition of morality could coincide with material and epistemic emancipation.

The third reason for abolishing morality is that it is often used to motivate and justify violence, especially great power wars. Civil wars or wars against neighbors are usually rooted in specific grievances stemming from long histories of mutual irritation, but morality is often needed to provide motivation to fight strangers halfway around the world. While on the face of it, it is rather historically absurd to say international wars have been caused solely by morality, AMA might be onto something in emphasizing the role morality plays in motivating and justifying violence. 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). There is some evidence that belief in moral objectivity encourages violent behavior (Ginges & Atran 2009, 2011; Greene 2002). In tying together his views on the 'moral society' being elitist and authoritarian with it being more violent, Hinkfuss writes, "the more that people are motivated by moral concerns, the more likely it is that their society will be elitist, authoritarian and dishonest, that they will have scant respect for most of its members, that they will be relatively inefficient in engendering human happiness, self-esteem or satisfaction, that they will be relatively inefficient in the resolution of conflicts, and that their moralizing will exacerbate conflicts, often with physical violence or even war as a result" (Hinkfuss 1987: Introduction).

Abolitionists thus offer three reasons to abolish morality that amounts to the basic claim that, contrary to conservationists and fictionalists, 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 Garner points out that such an approach rarely works as it depends on those in power in the 'moral society' 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 problems morality presents. Only by abolishing morality, and encouraging others to abolish morality, would its problems be solved.

2 Nonassertive Moral Abolitionism

There is another set of reasons for abolishing morality. These reasons have less to do with social matters than psychological ones. They are reasons that are of much more concern for NMA than AMA. They reflect Hinckfuss's concern that morality is often the cause and effect of psychological distress. Morality seems emotionally fraught. If expressivists are correct that moral judgments are primarily the expression of noncognitive states like emotions, we might wonder which emotions are most commonly expressed through moral judgments. The answer seems to be negative emotions. Negativity bias and negativity dominance 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 and laced with such blinding biases, it might make sense to view morality as pathological. Few express moral judgments from a condition of general mental stability or well-being. Morality is mostly a vehicle for the discharging of sadness and anxiety. Some work has shown that "higher anxiety [is] associated with stronger moral concerns about harm, unfairness, and impurity" (Koleva, Selterman, Iyer, Ditto, & Graham 2014, 185). Morality is rarely a means for the expression of joy. NMA is more interested in abolishing morality because it would be better for our mental health.

The reasons given for abolishing morality as a pathological phenomenon are correlated with the specific negative emotions that drive its expression. For example, Marks notes the many emotions that usually accompany morality include pity, compassion, shame, and guilt. But the one emotion that predominates most moral expression is anger. Morality is laced with anger and its many variants: "indignation, disgust, condemnation, outrage, contempt, and resentment" (Marks 2013, 83). Nietzsche famously showed how feelings of impotent wrath and unfulfilled vengeance motivate much moralizing (Nietzsche 1998). An aspect of the anger driving morality not yet mentioned by abolitionists is the passive aggression with which moral judgments are often expressed. Morality is what people use

when they do not have the power to make others do what they wish. It is an attempted remote coercion that depends on its ability to make others feel similarly negative emotions. Those who can digest or discharge their anger through action mostly do not need morality. Rarely does one hear much non-purely rhetorical moralizing from agents with the means to actually affect their situations. So, not only should one abolish morality because of its status as a kind of pathological seething, festering, impotent rage, but also because it is an ineffective means for achieving the outcomes one desires. If morality was abolished perhaps those infected with such anger would finally discover the mechanisms through which they could fulfill their wishes, or realize they simply will never be able to realize that towards which their anger inclines them.

Marks emphasizes other aspects of morality that makes it worthy of abolition. For one, morality is often used hypocritically (Marks 2013, 85). Moral hypocrisy is a universal phenomenon that involves not only inconsistency between one's moral judgments (and between one's moral judgments and actions), but self-delusion regarding the actual motivations for their expression. Moral hypocrisy is so common because it is basic to morality that it involve the use of an objectivist and robustly realist language while remaining a wholly parochial means of registering concern for local and contingent matters (Fessler DMT *et al* 2015). NMA is a way of avoiding such hypocrisy. One cannot be a hypocrite if one is not uttering moral judgments or encouraging others to do the same. If the cost of not being a hypocrite is not using moral discourse, such an exchange does not seem too pricey to an abolitionist. Obviously, the realist will recommend we instead use morality in a non-hypocritical way, but one may doubt the feasibility of this strategy. Indeed, a non-hypocritical morality, at least for those who are not moral saints, might be unrealizable. Perhaps occasional hypocrisy is a bullet worth biting for a moralist, as long as the other supposed benefits of morality remain. For an abolitionist, such just seems unnecessary and imprudent.

What makes the employment of morality seem so hypocritical is the arrogance with which it is often used. Arrogance is another reason to abolish morality. Marks argues that morality is egotistical in the sense that most moralizing is a way to signal one's own supposed virtues and grandstand on key issues (Marks 2013, 86; Tosi and Warmke 2016). Moralizing is often a way to engage in self-flattery and self-aggrandizement, which is why it seems so smug, sanctimonious, and self-righteous. From an evolutionary perspective, the arrogance of moralizing is most likely an attempt to hide just how difficult and costly it is to actually be consistently, say, generous or honest or brave (Miller 2008). Excessive virtue signaling and moral grandstanding is so common to moral discourse because it is worth the risk of at least appearing morally astute for sexual selection and cooperative reasons even if people have a

tendency to become rather upset and impose steep social costs when they discover the marked discrepancy between one's excessive moral presentations and their real behavior (Barranti, Carlson, and Furr 2016). Perhaps by abolishing morality one would not risk getting caught and incurring such costs. At least by adopting NMA one could appear less hypocritical and arrogant, and so let their probable cooperative behavior speak for itself. Obviously, there is nothing about NMA that says one becomes 'immoral' by abolishing morality. Rather, one is moved by and speaks only in terms of what is instrumentally sufficient.

I would like to add two others reasons to abolish morality not yet discussed in the literature. While it may not be important or even relevant to many, something that follows from morality's pathological status that makes it an undesirable way of believing and speaking is that it is fundamentally unfunny. Morality is humorless. It does not seem an atomic moral judgment could be even remotely funny. The semantic form of a moral judgment might simply bar humor. Again, any moralist could respond that it is neither the point nor the job or morality to be funny. Fair enough. But they must admit that moralizing is usually permeated by an overwhelming gravity that itself borders on the comical. Morality is almost always characterized by an awful, dreadful solemnity. If having more humor in one's life is a particular goal one has, then abolishing morality may be a way that could be achieved. Also, I would say philosophy, historically, in its best and most aesthetically pleasing moments, has been both funny and flirted with amorality. Look to figures like Heraclitus, Diogenes the Cynic, Pyrrho, Zhuangzi, Linji, Nietzsche, Cioran, and others. Plato, Confucius, and Kant, just to name a few rabid moralists, are not especially known for their comedic stylings.

Speaking of aesthetic pleasure, the other reason for abolishing morality not yet mentioned is that there seems to be something unmistakably ugly about moralizing. It is hard to find the sick, sad, and stupid being smug, sanctimonious, and self-righteous particularly appealing. Aesthetic experience might require the suspension of moral impulses and expressions, both moral reactions in general and moral reactions in response to artworks in particular. This approach would at least be consistent with the robust moral anti-realism presupposed by abolitionism. After all, both Ayer (1952, 113) and Mackie (1977, 43) were as much aesthetic anti-realists as they were moral anti-realists. But the point here is that expressing moral judgments might itself be aesthetically repellent and might get in the way of experiencing aesthetic pleasure. This point is echoed in discussions of Japanese aesthetics. Comments in the *Zencharoku* 禅茶録, or *Zen Tea Record*, address the way morality interrupts one's experience of *wabi*, or simple, austere beauty:

> *Wabi* means that even in straitened circumstances no thought of hardship arises. Even amid insufficiency, one is moved by no feeling of want. Even when faced with failure, one does not brood over injustice. If you find being in straitened circumstances to be confining, if you lament insufficiency as privation, if you complain that things have been ill-disposed—this is not *wabi*. (Hirota 2002, 275)

One might wish to abolish morality in order to enhance one's aesthetic experiences.

Morality stands condemned. For AMA, to summarize, morality is false, generates intractable disagreements, leads to elitism, authoritarianism, and ideological delusion regarding inequality and injustice, and inspires violence and international war. Moreover, for NMA, what is more of concern is that morality is imprudent, useless, irrational, pathological, negative, guilt-ridden, sad, anxious, angry, resentful, passive-aggressive, hypocritical, arrogant, immature, unfunny, and ugly. According to Marks, moral abolitionism, on the other hand, is guilt-free, tolerant, interesting, explanatory, simple, compassionate, and true (Marks 2013, 94-104). I would add that NMA is joyful, wise, self-composed, empowering, disciplined, light-hearted, and aesthetically pleasant. Now, most will disagree. They will argue that amorality and 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. One response is that the criticisms leveled by AMA 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.

The most common complaint, however, is that AMA is extreme in the sense that it would be too difficult for us to ever consistently adopt. Nolan, Restall, & West write, "Giving up moral talk would force large-scale changes to the way we talk, think, and feel that would be extremely difficult to make" (2005, 307). It would be too socially and psychology difficult to act in accordance with AMA. Socially, if we abolished morality we would perhaps lose the 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. Emotionally, moral intuitions, impulses, and reactions 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 suspend believing in and uttering moral judgments.

There are a few ways to respond to the accusation that AMA is extreme. There is Garner's response, which is to simply deny the assertion and request that doubters try out abolitionism for a little while and see how it goes. The

hunch is that not much would change for the worse, but rather much would change for the better (Garner 2007, 511). Another response is to admit that AMA is extreme, but claim sometimes extremity is required because the solution AMA represents is preferable to the problems generated by morality. Just as with atheism, perhaps deluded believers need to be confronted in order to save them from their own irrationality and to save society from the negative effects of their false beliefs. This approach need not deny that certain benefits accrue from belief in God or moral facts, but it argues for the greater benefits for rationality and cooperation resulting from disbelief and abolition. The problems caused by morality and religion are extreme, so only the extremity of their abolition would solve them.

A third way to respond to the charge of extremism against AMA is to simply agree and stop being assertive about one's annihilation of morality. Yet, instead of backsliding into conservationism or fictionalism, one just goes quiet about one's abolitionism. This is my proposal: NMA. But why would one prefer NMA to AMA? What is so unwise about AMA? By combining two recent sets of findings in moral and political psychology, the imprudence of AMA, and just about any 'loud' ethical or metaethical view, becomes apparent. The first set of findings deal with the backfire effect, the second set with moral essentialism about personal identity. With respect to the backfire effect, there is evidence that not only do people engage in the usual motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990) and exhibit the expected confirmation bias (Nickerson 1998) when it comes to their political and moral beliefs, they also have a tendency to cling even harder and believe even more fervently in a supposed piece of information or ideological belief if it is shown to be false or confused. Confronting people with evidence or argument that their strongly held political and moral beliefs are misperceptions or delusions leads them to hold them with even greater strength. Showing people the facts about climate change or vaccination or raw milk, if their beliefs about these issues are firmly held, merely leads them to dismiss the facts and hold their beliefs even firmer (Konnikova 2014). People thus have a tendency to "counterargue preference-incongruent information and bolster their pre-existing view" (Nyhan & Reifler 2010, 308). From a neuroscientific perspective, some work has shown the neural mechanisms governing the backfire effect involve areas associated with negative emotion, areas that are activated when people read stories dealing with "values that are perceived as strongly held and non-negotiable (i.e. 'protected values')" (Kaplan *et al* 2016a, 6; Kaplan *et al* 2016b) and when people feel anxious and threatened (Kaplan *et al* 2016a, 8).

The set of findings dealing with moral essentialism about personal identity show that people tend to view their widely shared moral beliefs as essential to their personal identity. One's moral beliefs are so important that if they were to change one would cease to be the same person. Researchers have found that other aspects of one's

physical and mental life are less important in determining personal identity (Strohminger & Nichols 2014; Heiphetz, Strohminger, & Young 2016). One could lose or gain body parts, lower-level perceptions, preferences, and memories and still roughly remain the same person, but if one were to lose one's moral beliefs and behaviors one would tend to be regarded as a different person. What is essential to one's personal identity is their moral beliefs and how they determine their social relationships. After all, the whole point of morality is to monitor, evaluate, and reward and punish others in terms of their probable trustworthiness for cooperation and reproduction. Nothing is more important, from an evolutionary perspective, than one's perceived moral character and behavior. Distinct from other physical or psychological changes, if a person's moral character changes, their entire evolutionary and social relevance is altered. Thus, "the self is not so much the sum of cognitive faculties as it is an expression of moral sensibility; remove its foothold on that world, and watch the person disappear with it" (Strohminger & Nichols 2014, 169).

It seems safe to infer that what mostly explains the backfire effect is that people feel their deepest sense of self attacked when confronted with contrary moral beliefs or threating information. What makes ethical (and perhaps metaethical) disagreement so deep and intractable is that one would literally have to give themselves up, all that matters to them socially and morally, in order to change their minds. Now, a few philosophers, and probably only philosophers, might not be too troubled by the prospect of losing a version of themselves in order to obtain a new, more rational self, but such cannot be said for the vast majority of philosophers and people more generally. Besides, if philosophers show similar degrees of recalcitrance about belief change as non-philosophers, as they seem to, and exhibit roughly the same behaviors as non-philosophers (Schwitzgebel & Rust 2016; Schwitzgebel & Cushman 2015), what hope is there that ethical and metaethical disagreements could ever obtain definitive resolution?

AMA might seem doubly unwise at this point: not only does it argue for a minority view in metaethics by defending a kind of moral anti-realism (Bourget & Chalmers 2014), it tries to convince other anti-realists to give up believing in, conserving, or reforming morality. We have evidence that directly confronting people's moral beliefs is counter-productive. It is probably equally unwise for moral anti-realists to try to convince realists to switch sides considering realists are motivated to hold their views so they can moralize with greater confidence and vindication. It is probably just as unwise for moral nihilists to try to convince others anti-realists to give up conserving or reforming morality. Indeed, what could explain the tendencies of nearly all anti-realists to aim to conserve or reform morality in the first place is the threatening sense of loss of self they must feel as they accept anti-realism. Error theorists tend toward their view because they feel that truth matters, but it does not seem to matter so much that they will not bend

over backwards to save morality from its falsity. Moral conservationists and fictionalists want to redeem not just morality, but their very selves they have threatened with extinction by accepting error theory.

Now, just imagine an assertive abolitionist telling someone expressing sincere moral judgments that they should not talk that way because there are no moral facts and morality causes more problems than it solves. Most likely they will be dismissed instantly and their interlocutor will believe in the veracity of their moral judgments with even more relish. Now imagine an assertive abolitionist telling moral realists to become anti-realists, to accept the error theory. An intractable metaethical debate will commence and the moral realist will probably have an even greater faith in their realism. Finally, imagine an abolitionist trying to convince other error theorists to stop redeeming morality. This will fail as well since if accepting the threatening belief in error theory was not enough to get them to give up the practice of moralizing, then surely nothing will. These error theorists have already endured the tumultuous process of coming to accept their minority view. They have probably reached the limits of their daring. Moral nihilism is a step too far for just about everyone engaged in ethical and metaethical reflection. It is most likely imprudent to try to peddle the view to anyone, no matter how susceptible to it they might appear. Moral nihilism is something perhaps only a very small minority could endure. Morality, true or false, means too much to many.

Asserting moral abolitionism is unwise. I recommend not asserting moral abolitionism. NMA is not only wise for avoiding the imprudence of AMA, but is specifically wise for the therapeutic benefits that accrue from going quiet. NMA accepts all the reasons for abolishing morality offered by AMA, but it does not think it would make sense to engage in much metaethical debate or recommend abolition. The key difference between AMA and NMA is that the former is primary motivated by epistemic concerns while the latter is by therapeutic concerns. Of course, as we have seen, morality is more than false for AMA. It does recognize that morality is pathological, a source of psychological distress. As Hinckfuss mentioned, morality blocks happiness and satisfaction. The problem is that AMA, by openly confronting moral realists and error theoretic redeemers, intensifies the very emotional and behavioral turmoil that causes and is caused by morality. This is especially the case since some of their criticisms sound moral. Openly confronting morality with normative failure can smack of its own kind of inconsistency and hypocrisy. Not asserting one's moral abolitionism would be a way to avoid this appearance. This is how NMA solves the problem of AMA sounding too moral in its critique of morality.

NMA is a more therapeutic approach in the sense that its primary aim is to overcome the agitation and anguish of moralizing through de-escalation, detachment, and quietude. The disquietude of morality is confronted by

the quietude of nonassertive abolition. That morality is false is less important than its role in occasioning emotional and behavioral disturbance. And the best way to overcome disturbance is to snuff out its cause. Morality is best abolished by being disregarded and ignored, not confronted. And the best way to disregard and ignore morality is not just to deny its truth, but to overcome and avoid the disturbance of ethical and metaethical reflection and debate in the first place. After avoiding morality, avoiding metaethical reflection and debate would be even more effective in achieving the desired freedom from disturbance. For strong NMA, abolishing metaethics would be a necessary step to obtaining the full therapeutic benefits of moral nihilism. Now, we might wonder at this point, what exactly is meant by 'therapeutic?'

Historically, philosophy often had a therapeutic or consolatory function. Some treat philosophy as a kind of therapy today. Konrad Banicki argues there are seven elements that constitute a therapeutic model of philosophy. There needs to be a disease or illness and its symptoms, an ideal of health, a process of treatment, a therapeutic theory, a physician, a patient, and a physician-patient relationship (Banicki 2014, 20-21). Banicki notes how it is specific to philosophy that it can be a kind of self-therapy whereby the physician and patient are the same person. Applying the model to our topic, we can say the disease and its symptoms is morality and all its noted negative effects; the ideal of health a persistent state of detachment, equanimity, or tranquility that results from quietly abolishing morality; the process of treatment the experience of learning value theory, normative ethics, metaethics, and moral psychology; the therapeutic theory the approach that treats metaethics and moral psychology as a means for overcoming the turbulence of moral belief and expression; and the physician-patient relationship the self-therapeutic way one treats one's learning about metaethics and moral psychology as a means for curing one's own disturbed state resulting from infection with morality.

Eugen Fischer (2011) also considers the possibility of philosophy serving a primarily therapeutic function. He claims philosophy-as-therapy can come in two forms: a *philosophical therapy* intending to use philosophy as a means for solving emotional and behavioral problems that emerge in everyday life prior to studying philosophy and a *therapeutic philosophy* intending to use philosophy as a means for solving emotional and behavioral problems that emerge from studying philosophy. NMA as a kind of metaethical therapy can be both a philosophical therapy and therapeutic philosophy. The emotional and behavioral problems that lead to or result from moralizing in everyday life can be solved by studying metaethics and adopting NMA as a kind of therapy. The emotional and behavioral problems that lead to or result from studying metaethics can be also solved by NMA as the main point of the position is to

overcome the disturbance of ethical and metaethical reflection and debate. Of course, as stated, NMA itself, and moral nihilism more generally, might be too much for many people and cause a further set of emotional and behavioral problems as it abolishes what is often regarded as essential to one's self. But it all depends on one's particular constitution. The argument here is not that everyone would be better off affirming NMA, but that if one finds morality false and a source of turmoil in their life, they might want to consider it. At least that is how I have gotten here. Morality was a source of great discomfort in my life, so I wanted to figure out why and studied value theory, normative ethics, moral psychology and metaethics and realized moral nihilists were right in their delineation of all of morality's problems. I realized then the approach of AMA was a little too assertive and came with its own problems. I figured the best possible cure for myself was NMA. I suspect others might be dealing with similar issues.

3 Responses to NMA

How might error theorists respond to NMA? On the one hand, they would not like it very much. Conservationists and fictionalists think the truth of the error theory is no reason to abolish expressing not only atomic moral judgments, but also metaethical and metametaethical views. These redeemers of debunked morality recommend we should still argue for the error theory while continuing to assert or quasi-assert moral judgments. They think other error theorists should do the same. So, they would argue against NMA. They would probably regard it as still too extreme. What about AMA? These abolitionists might be susceptible to the argument for NMA, but they too might feel that fighting the good fight against realists, conservationists, and fictionalists is too important to give up. Assertive abolitionists might see the therapeutic upshot of NMA and yet still feel too compelled to pitch abolition in the face of the detrimental effect of moralizing.

To look deeper into these differences between AMA and NMA, let us add some conditions to NMA that could make it more appealing. The assertive abolitionist might find the nonassertive abolitionist to be extreme in a different way. For AMA, NMA can come off as too categorical and seeming to require some sort of self-imposed social seclusion, a withdrawing into physical, emotional, or intellectual solitude that might not be desirable or even possible. Of course, this is fair point. The nonassertive abolitionist can seem like someone taking his ball and going home. And yet the nonassertive abolitionist does not want it to be a necessary condition for the effective employment of NMA that it require total exile from all forms of human community or interaction. I have argued elsewhere (Dockstader 2018) that it is both theoretically and practically possible for error theorists to coherently combine different answers to the 'now what' question in different contexts. In some contexts, say in some very specific

moments with friends or family, it might make sense to assert the wisdom of moral abolition instead of remaining silent. In other, more moralized and momentarily inescapable, contexts with those who are not friends or family it might be more prudent to employ a conservationist or fictionalist response instead of either the louder policy of AMA or the relative quietism of NMA. Also, along with fictionalism and conservationism, another error theoretic metametaethical option could be to substitute moral discourse with a normative language more determined by hypothetical reasons or practical desires (Lutz 2014; Marks 2013, 2018). Since the goal of NMA is to obtain the maximal therapeutic upshot of accepting the error theory, it would be rather self-defeating for quietist abolitionists to employ nonassertion in some rigidly universalist manner and thereby bring attention or disapprobation to themselves by being noticeably and oddly quiet in contexts that usually demand a moral response or the use of ethical discourse.

What are some of these contexts? For one, many of us probably have to teach ethics for our jobs as university lecturers and professors. I had to teach deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics just last term. Ethics is one of the most common courses offered by philosophy departments. Most of us will have to teach it at one time or another. Obviously, I could not have stood in silence in front of my class, nor could have I launched into a highly complex metaethical discussion without having first taught the basics of normative ethics. I had to do my job, and I did. What was I doing then when I did this? I prefer to think I was employing ethical discourse in a fictionalist manner. I never asserted anything I really believed, but rather only quasi-asserted moral make-beliefs. I merely described a sub-field of philosophy, delineated its various views, and uttered the various preferred answers to the question of what one ought to do. It was like being in a play. I learned my lines and gave my best performance, ventriloquizing the various ethical positions. In other educational contexts as well, where not using ethical discourse would have been personally detrimental, I have employed this approach, which I have called elsewhere ‘reactionary moral fictionalism’ (Dockstader 2018). To be a reactionary moral fictionalist is not to try to reform morality like the revolutionary moral fictionalist, but to respond to contexts where moral discourse is expected with enough minimally moral sounding utterances that would most effectively guarantee one’s not being noticed as a moral nihilist. Likewise, when I have had to teach metaethics I have also presented the field in a more fictionalist manner, asserting little to no genuine beliefs about the various views on offer. From the perspective of NMA, a possible solution to these pedagogical situations is to simultaneously employ a reactionary fictionalist approach while also aiming to change one’s teaching schedule so to teach fewer classes on ethical and metaethical topics.

Along with classrooms where ethics and metaethics are being taught, other contexts where it would be imprudent to practice AMA or NMA include, for example, dealing with and talking to recalcitrant children, old or dying religious relatives, or just the many mostly irrational people one encounters on a daily basis. There are certain contexts that, and certain people who, need to be dealt with in moral terms for practical reasons, if only to suspend the interactions as quickly as possible. In these contexts, since it would be self-defeating and troublesome to remain quiet, not to say to openly pitch moral abolition, I recommend error theorists employ another answer to the 'now what' question, but only in a very passive manner, only as a mere reaction to the context so that one can go unnoticed and leave that context with as much ease as is plausible. I prefer a passive and reactive fictionalist approach, but others could speak in terms of their mere desires or preferences. What is most important to keep in mind is that the main approach of NMA is to reduce overall moralizing by ignoring and avoiding morality as much as possible. This involves minimizing one's ethical, metaethical, and metametaethical utterances as much as one can while being sensitive to the fact that one will simply find themselves in any number of contexts were it is neither practical nor prudent to remain quiet. NMA will be most effective if it is relativized to contexts where it will draw the least amount of notice and resistance.

This combinatory approach could be utilized by non-philosophers as well. I have noticed that many normal people (people who aren't professional philosophers) employ a latent and at times unconscious moral skepticism that leads them to avoid having many moral beliefs or partaking in many moral conversations. They seem to doubt there are really any answers to moral questions and so try to avoid getting sucked into moral exchanges. For example, my father is a bus driver and rarely if ever uses religious or moral language. He seems to think, insofar as he has thought about the issue at all, that such ways of speaking are fruitless, boring, and ugly. Now, of course, if he finds himself stuck talking to some religious fanatic or rabid moralizer, at the bar say, he will indulge them momentarily but not actively participate in the conversation. Instead, he will try to change the subject as quickly as possible to something worth talking about, like the weather or sports or sex or movies. He will do this by saying things like 'perhaps' or 'maybe' or 'you're probably right' and then try to change the subject. He need not be a professional metaethicist to be effectively employing a combination of NMA and reactionary moral fictionalism. Those approaches are simply already his tendencies. Really, how one answers the 'now what' question depends a lot on personal temperament, but there still seems to be better or worse ways of being an error theorist. The argument here is that NMA, occasionally modified with a passive and reactionary approach dependent on context, might be the best, the most practically and

therapeutically beneficial, approach, and some might even be already unconsciously employing it. NMA mixed with occasional pretense, conservation, or substitution might be a better way of employing and exhibiting one's latent or achieved moral skepticism than the open confrontation implied by AMA.

An assertive abolitionist could reply that this combinatory approach is fine as far as it goes, but it is still missing out on the larger institutional issue of all the social damage morality brings. This might simply be an irreconcilable difference between AMA and NMA. The assertive abolitionist wants to openly confront the sources of all the harm morality causes while NMA would much rather avoid any sort of abolitionist activism, thinking instead that such an approach would merely exacerbate morality's ill effects on society and block the hoped-for therapeutic upshot of believing the error theory in the first place. In fact, NMA could argue that it is precisely by going as quiet as possible that one can help bring about the positive social effects that could follow from abolishing morality. This seems to be the approach found in the Daoist classic, the *Laozi*, or *Daodejing*. In this text we find both a proto-moral error theory and a recommendation to employ a nonassertive and nonactive approach in response to the hyperactivity of moralists, especially Confucians. After declaring that "heaven and earth are not humane" (Moeller 2007, 15)—which means that nothing in nature or the world (the Dao) instantiates the chief Confucian virtue of humaneness, benevolence, or goodness—the *Laozi* tells us the best way to go about living in accordance with the Dao's amorality is to go quiet, practice stillness, withdraw from intentional or deliberate activity, let events unfold spontaneously, accept nature's fated transformations, and not judge the Dao's amoral indifference: "the sage resides with the task of nonaction, practices the teaching of nonspeaking" (Moeller 2007, 7); "to withdraw oneself when the work proceeds—that is the Dao of Heaven" (Moeller 2007, 23); and "One who knows does not speak. One who speaks does not know" (Moeller 2007, 131). The *Laozi* mentions certain benefits that come from going quiet and adopting a nonassertive approach. Silently abolishing moral discourse, quelling the affective and conative turmoil that causes and results from moralizing, is a way to experience tranquility. By embodying a kind of calm self-control and equanimity, the Daoists empty their heart-minds of the beliefs, desires, and emotions that drive and result from moral projection, thus freeing them from the agitation of anxiety and contentiousness: "To reach emptiness—this is the utmost. To keep stillness—this is control" (Moeller 2007, 41).

The *Laozi* emphasizes that such an approach will result in the very provision of social order Confucians and other moralists so heavy-handedly try to impose. The quiet abolition of moral discourse actually allows people to spontaneously coordinate their interactions and even display what Confucians would regard as virtuous behavior:

"Abandon sageliness and discard knowledge, and the people will benefit a hundredfold. Abandon humanity and discard righteousness, and the people will return to filial piety and care" (Moeller 2007, 49). The silent example of the sage's suspension of moral judgment and overall theoretical contention seems to leave dormant in people the emotional turmoil and false beliefs that drives such judgments and provides them instead with a light-hearted joy and affirmation, enabling them to simply get along: "The ordinary people are in a good mood—as if enjoying a great sacrifice or climbing the terraces in the spring" (Moeller 2007, 51). Perhaps the example of NMA as exhibited by the Daoism of the *Laozi* could convince assertive abolitionists that the very social and institutional goals they hope to achieve by asserting abolition could be better achieved by employing a more quietist approach. NMA could in the end achieve what AMA wanted all along by focusing on the social ills caused by morality. Overall, the point is that NMA can be viewed as the preferable option when contrasted with AMA because it seems capable of exhibiting many of AMA's benefits while avoiding many of its costs.

Now, to return to how other error theorists might respond to NMA, we can ask why they should even care all that much if nonassertive abolitionists are not pitching abolition. After all, all the parties involved agree error theory is the true metaethical view, and weak NMA will say as much, but nonassertive abolitionists will not try to convince them to abolish morality. Rather, they will express no view about what to do with morality once it is known to be systematically false. Weak NMA will express the truth of error theory, but then check out as much as possible from the metametaethical debate, going quiet about what to do next. Strong NMA will going even further, neither arguing for a specific metaethical view (though they are convinced of error theory) nor arguing for an abolitionist answer to the 'now what?' question. Error theorists of all stripes should not mind either way. NMA is not trying to contend with them. Nonassertive abolitionists want no part in the metametaethical debate. They are too busy enjoying the nonexistence of moral facts in silence, avoiding as many forms of ethical debate as they can. How would other error theorists even know? They probably would not, and they probably should not mind if they would not know. As a metaphilosophical point, philosophers should not get upset that some use philosophy as a means for overcoming philosophy, especially if those now tranquil and silent agree with their initial arguments. They merely want to reap the benefits of having completed their task. So, neither conservationists nor fictionalists nor assertive abolitionists need confront NMA, for nonassertive abolitionists are not their disputants. They are likely not even practicing metaethicists anymore.

How might moral realists respond to NMA? On the one hand, they would obviously find it objectionable. They think there are moral facts and that we should express judgments about them. Also, they think we should develop metaethical views that vindicate their expression. On the other hand, there are tendencies amongst certain moral realists toward going quiet about metaethical issues. There are also other realists who recommend even abolishing expressing moral judgments altogether. Thus, there are realist quietists and realist abolitionists. Let's look first at realist quietists to see how they might respond to the anti-realist quietism of NMA. What do realist quietists recommend we go quiet about? Moral metaphysics, it seems. Some realists are non-naturalists. They think moral facts cannot be reduced to anything in the world. Moral facts exist in their own realm or dimension or in their own inexplicable way or as expressible only through their own distinct discourse. Some of these non-naturalists (Dworkin 1996; Parfit 2011; Scanlon 2014) do not think any other metaphysical questions about irreducibly *sui generis* non-natural moral facts could or should be asked. They think they could not be asked because non-natural moral facts are brute facts that require no further explanation. They think they should not be asked because metaphysical questions about moral facts beyond queries concerning their non-natural status are moral questions that are themselves morally wrong. That is, to ask further metaphysical questions about moral facts after learning of their non-natural status is to do something morally wrong. Either way, quietest realists counsel moral realists to go quiet about moral metaphysical matters and focus instead on expressing correct moral views, one of which is non-naturalist moral realism itself .

Quietist realism is probably the view most opposed to error theory and moral nihilism. While quietist realists want us to believe in non-natural moral facts, but not be concerned with the seeming metaphysical mystery of their existence, error theorists want us to positively disbelieve in these moral facts by rather vocally emphasizing the metaphysical absurdity of their existence. Quietist realism and AMA seem to be diametrically opposed. The quietist realist wants silence about metaethics, but the abolitionist wants silence about ethics. Assertive abolitionism is triply immoral for the quietist realist: not only does it do too much moral metaphysics, it lands on the wrong moral metaphysical view, and then peddles it to others, recommending we all accept the error theory and abolish morality. However, the quietist might find nonassertive abolitionism—in particular, strong NMA—to not be so completely reprehensible. Strong NMA will join quietist realism in going silent about metaethical and ultimately metametaethical issues. Of course, this will be so for extremely different reasons, but the quietist realist and the strong nonassertive abolitionist will never openly disagree as neither will be caught doing much moral metaphysics or offering prudential metametaethical views. Though quietist realists will be upset the nonassertive abolitionist is not expressing moral

judgments, at least they will never have to endure metaethical disagreement with such a figure. They should appreciate not having to deal with a kind of error theorist who aims to utterly avoid all levels of ethical debate. Even if the nonassertive abolitionist avoids them because of their rank moralism, quietist realists will probably never know that.

There is another kind of curious moral realist, one who thinks there might be something immoral about openly expressing moral judgments themselves. This realist thinks there are moral facts, but there is something either impractical or plainly wrong about expressing moral judgments or engaging in moral debate. This is the realist abolitionist (Ingram 2015). This figure finds the arguments offered for AMA to be correct, but does not believe that makes moral facts unreal. Rather, the existence of moral facts does not entail morality will always be practiced wisely. For realist abolitionists, most moralists are moral grandstanders who utter moral judgments that defeat their very purpose as declarations of concern for and belief about what should or should not be done in a full categorical sense. They believe the assertive abolitionist is right that morality leads to intractable disagreement, inequality and injustice, and a defense of international war. They think there is either a practical or categorical reason to abolish morality. So, on the one hand, realist and anti-realist abolitionists agree morality should be annihilated because it is impractical and unwise. Yet, on the other hand, the realist abolitionist thinks morality itself might be immoral, that is, there might be a moral fact that believing in moral facts and using moral discourse is immoral and so should not be done.

AMA thus seems to have a realist partner in crime here. They both openly pitch abolishing morality because it is imprudent. But there is a problem insofar as AMA requires first a belief in the error theory which the realist abolitionist does not hold. Should this matter? If the outcome is the same and morality is getting abolished, does it concern the assertive abolitionist their new abolitionist friend is a realist? Practically, no, it should not matter. Even if there is metaethical disagreement, there is metametaethical agreement that trumps it. Realist and anti-realist abolitionists would not avoid abolition just because they cannot agree on the metaphysical status of moral facts. However, on the other hand, the assertive abolitionist might wonder if the realist abolitionist is actually right there is a moral fact that morality itself, expressing genuine moral judgments, is immoral. It seems the opposite would more likely be the case, that if there are moral facts there would be a moral fact that morality is moral, that moral realists have a moral obligation to express, not abolish, moral judgments. This would appear to take us back closer to the quietist view that the correct metaethical view is itself morally correct and that the quicker we give up on metaethical and metametaethical debate and return to moralizing the better. In other words, the realist abolitionist, according to the quietist, is doing something immoral by arguing for a moral fact that morality is immoral. The assertive abolitionist

will be torn here because the quietist will probably appear right about whether, if there are moral facts, morality is moral or immoral, but at the same time would like the realist abolitionist to remain an abolitionist because it is also wiser to abolish morality. Really, it will be up to the realist abolitionist at this point to decide if they are convinced by the quietist that there is a moral fact for morality, and not against it, and that engaging in too much metaethical and metametaethical speculation is itself immoral. Likely, the realist abolitionist will stay abolitionist even if the assertive abolitionist will have to admit they think the quietist is right that, if there are moral facts, there is probably a moral fact that abolishing morality is wrong, not right.

What will the nonassertive abolitionist be doing during all this? Not much, like usual. They might appreciate that with the emergence of realist abolitionists there are more total abolitionists now, thus leading to less moral discourse to endure or evade. But, for NMA, realist abolitionism has the same problem as AMA: it is openly pitching abolition, which it finds mostly imprudent. Whether or not the realist quietist or realist abolitionist is right about moral facts is irrelevant, as the strong nonassertive abolitionist will have given up on metaethical debate already after having accepted the error theoretical point there are simply no moral facts whatsoever. At this point, the nonassertive abolitionist will let the quietist realists and the realist and anti-realist abolitionists have their metaethical and metaemetaethical debate. The purgatory of all forms of ethical reflection have been left behind. All that remains is the joy of a tranquil and amoral life. NMA is the ticket to deliverance from all levels of ethical agitation. To repeat, the other metaethical and metametaethical approaches really should not mind all that much. They would have one less competitor. There is no need to care that much about the impassive and silent. This lesson has larger implications. Disagreements, in most areas of life, rarely get resolved. Instead, they are usually ignored through separation and detachment. And in such situations, a cessation of interaction is best for all concerned.

University College Cork, Ireland
Department of Philosophy
4 Elderwood
College Road
Cork
Ireland
j.dockstader@ucc.ie

References

Ayer, A.J. (1952). *Language, Truth and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications.
Banicki, K. (2014). Philosophy as Therapy: Towards a Conceptual Model. *Philosophical Papers*, 43, 7-31.
Barranti, M., Carlson E., & R.M. Furr. (2016). Disagreement about Moral Character is Linked to Interpersonal Costs. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(8), 806-817.
Bourget, D., & David Chalmers. (2014). What do Philosophers Believe? *Philosophical Studies*, 170 (3), 465-500.
Dockstader, J. (2018). Daoist Metaethics. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 52 (4), 1-16.

Dworkin, R. (1996). Objectivity and Truth: You Better Believe It. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 25(2), 87-139.
Fessler, D.M.T. et al. (2015). Moral Parochialism and Contextual Contingency Across Seven Societies. *Proceedings of Royal Society B*, 282 (1813), 20150907.
Fischer, E. (2011). How to Practice Philosophy as Therapy: Philosophical Therapy and Therapeutic Philosophy. *Metaphilosophy*, 42, 49-82.
Garner, R. (2007). Abolishing Morality. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 10 (5), 499-513.
Ginges, J. & Scott Altran. (2009). What Motivates Participation in Violent Political Action. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1167 (1), 115-123.
Ginges, J. & Scott Altran. (2011). War as a moral imperative (not just practical politics by other means). *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 278 (1720), 2930-2938.
Goodwin, G. & John M. Darley. (2012). Why are some moral beliefs perceived to be moral objective than others? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 250-256.
Heiphetz, L., Strohminger N., & Liane Young. (2017). The Role of Moral Beliefs, Memories, and Preferences in Representations of Identity. *Cognitive Science*, 41 (3), 744-767.
Hinckfuss, I. (1987). *The Moral Society: Its Structure and Effects*. Discussion papers in environmental philosophy. Australian National University, Canberra.
Hirota, D. (2002). *Wind in the Pines: Classical Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path*. Ryukoku: Asian Humanities Press.
Ingram, S. (2015). After Moral Error Theory, After Moral Realism. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 53 (2), 227-248.
Janoff-Bulman, R., Sheikh, S., & Sebastian Hepp. (2009). Proscriptive versus prescriptive morality: Two faces of moral regulation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96 (3), 521-537.
Joyce, R. (2016). *Essays in Moral Skepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kaplan, J.T. et al (2016a). Neural Correlates of Maintaining One's Political Beliefs in the Face of Counterevidence. *Scientific Reports*, 6, 39589.
Kaplan, J.T. et al. (2016b). Processing Narratives Concerning Protected Values: A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Neural Correlates. *Cerebral Cortex*, 27 (2), 1428-1438.
Koleva, S., Selterman, D., Iyer, R., Ditto, P., & Jesse Graham. (2014). The Moral Compass of Insecurity: Anxious and Avoidant Attachment Predict Moral Judgment. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(2), 185-194.
Konnikova, M. (2014). I Don't Want to be Right. The New Yorker, May 16th 2014.
Kunda, Z. (1990). The Case for Motivated Reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108 (3), 480-498.
Lutz, M. (2014). The 'Now What' Problem for Error Theory. *Philosophical Studies*, 171 (2), 351-371.
Mackie, J.L. (1977). *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin.
Mackie, J.L. (1980) *Hume's Moral Theory*. Routledge: London.
Marks, J. (2013). *Ethics Without Morals: In Defense of Amorality*. New York: Routledge.
Marks, J. (2018) *Hard Atheism and the Ethics of Desire: An Alternative to Morality*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.
Miller, G. (2008). Kindness, Fidelity, and Other Sexually Selected Virtues. In Sinnot-Armstrong, W. (Ed.), *Moral Psychology: Volume 1: The Evolution of Morality: Adaptations and Innateness*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
Moeller H-G (2007) *Daodejing (Laozi): A Complete Translation and Commentary*. Open Court: Chicago.
Moeller, H-G. (2009). *The Moral Fool: A Case for Amorality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Nickerson, R. (1998). Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2 (2), 175-220.
Nietzsche, F. (1998). *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Trans. Maudemarie Clark & Alan Swensen. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
Nolan, D., Restall, G., & Caroline West. (2005). Moral fictionalism versus the rest. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 83 (3), 307-330.
Nyhan, B. & Jason Reifler. (2010). When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions. *Political Behaviour* 32 (2), 303-330.
Olson, J. (2014). *Moral Error Theory: History, Critique, Defence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Parfit, D. (2011). *On What Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rozin, P. & Royzman, Edward B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5 (4), 296-320.
Scanlon, T. (2014). *Being Realistic About Reasons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schwitzgebel, E. & Fiery Cushman. (2015). Philosophers' Biased Judgments Persist Despite Training, Expertise,

and Reflection. *Cognition*, 141, 127-137.
Schwitzgebel, E. & Joshua Rust. (2016). The Moral Behavior of Ethicists. In J. Sytsma & Wesley Buchwalter (Eds.), *Companion to Experimental Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
Strohminger, N. & Shaun Nichols. (2014). The Essential Moral Self. *Cognition* 131, 159-171.
Tossi, J. & Brandon Warmke. (2016). Moral Grandstanding. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 44 (3), 197-217.