Moral Fictionalism

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue for a fictionalist conception of morality. The inquiry will be conducted by first examining two different assumptions on which moral fictionalism relies; anti-realism and cognitivism. Next, I will examine what exactly makes a theory fictionalist and survey some popular formulations of such theories. Lastly, I will look at what the consequences of a moral fictionalist revolution might be and conclude that fictionalism provides promising answers to many of the questions which we would typically ascribe to morality.

Introduction

In this paper, I will try to answer the question: Should[1] we adopt a fictionalist stance in metaethics, why, and what would be the metaethical result of a fictionalist revolution? To answer this question, in the first part of this paper, I will explore *anti-realism* and *cognitivism*, which are underlying assumptions of fictionalism and explain why I think this leads us through error theory to a dilemma. In the second part, I will describe the theory of revolutionary moral fictionalism and give a naturalistic account of our current moral practices. In the last part of the paper, I will consider what might be the consequences of a fictionalist revolution and argue that it might help us find better solutions to what we typically would call moral problems, if we adopted a fictionalist stance in metaethics.

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[1] "Should" is only to be understood in a practical sense here. Were it to be understood morally, it would be self-defeating, as will become clear later in the paper.

The Path to Fictionalism

There is more than one way to become a fictionalist in metaethics, but no matter which path one takes, it starts with a suspicion towards *moral realism.* When we say: 'It is wrong to torture other people', we seem to assert it as a fact. We are ready to defend this belief, and should we be so unlucky as to actually witness torturing we might also feel an immediate physical reaction. Most of our ordinary moral language seems to lead us to moral realism. In Andrew Fishers *Metaethics: An Introduction* (2011), moral realism is defined as a view, where moral properties or facts exist independently of anyone's judgements about such entities, (Fisher 2011: 5), although there are disputes about whether moral realism covers an even broader group of theories (Lewis 2005: 315). But moral realism becomes suspicious when we think about these moral properties or facts.

The error of moral realism is expressed by David Lewis in "Quasi-Realism is Fictionalism" (2005):

> The distinctive error of 'moral realism' says that there are properties, perhaps non-natural properties, such that we can somehow detect them; and such that when we do detect them, that inevitably evokes in us pro- or con-attitudes towards the things that we have detected to have these properties. ('Inevitably' might mean 'necessarily' or it might mean 'as a matter of exceptionless psychological law'.) (Lewis 2005: 315)

The feeling of uneasiness about moral properties or facts is what leads us to anti-realism. Anti-realism can now be defined as the view that there are no moral properties or facts (Fisher 2011: 6). But why should we be uneasy about moral properties or facts, when most of us readily accept, for example, physical properties and facts? John Mackie brings forth three challenges to moral realism in his book *Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977). The first is the challenge from relativity. This challenge relies on the fact that people disagree about morality and have widely different

moral codes. The relativity of moral codes is not just found between different cultures, but also amongst equally well-informed and similarly rational individuals (Fisher 2011: 41). This disagreement is a challenge, which leads us to uncover an oddness about the moral facts of the realists. They do not seem to be like the scientific or historical facts, about which we expect to agree if we are equally rational and well-informed.

This oddness leads us to Mackie's second challenge, the queerness challenge. Mackie invites the realist to explain what kinds of entities moral values are, implying, that if they were to exist, they would have to be very queer. Fisher mentions three conditions moral values would have to live up to on most realist accounts: they would have to be independent from our beliefs, they would need to be accessible to us, and lastly, they would have to give us reasons to act (ibid.: 42). Problems arise when we realize, that the reasons moral values can provide us with, are independent of our desires. What would motivate us to pursue moral values, when they are independent from our desires? Mackie believes that there would have to be a to-be-pursuedness built into the moral values themselves (ibid.: 42).

Mackie's third challenge is an epistemological version of the challenge from queerness. He argues that if moral values are different from anything we know about in the universe, if they are queer, then we would need a special way of accessing them, perhaps even through a kind of moral intuition, this being needed if we cannot observe them or their effects (Mackie 1977: 38).

Whether or not the challenge from queerness is effective, is highly dependent on which ontological view one subscribes to. When Mackie challenges the realist in this particular way, one of his presuppositions must be naturalism. This limits the kinds of entities Mackie wants to allow for in his ontology to be the ones dealt with by science and psychology

(ibid.: 48). But naturalism itself is a contended position. In this paper, I will assume that some sort of naturalism is correct.[2]

After shortly explaining Mackie's error theory, I will now turn to discussing the anti-realism the theory leads to.

Anti-realism

The anti-realist metaethics that this leads to is a broad category spanning over everything from expressivism to error-theory. To limit our scope, we must first ask ourselves whether or not we think that our moral judgements are truth-apt (can be either true or false). We typically think that a sentence is only truth-apt, when some feature of the world makes it true or false. The fact works as a truth-maker for the sentence (ibid.: 58). Not all sentences are truth-apt. 'Boo torture!', is an example of a sentence which is not so. Expressivism uses this fact to argue that our moral judgements are actually not assertions or beliefs at all, but rather expressions. They do not think our moral judgements are truth-apt and thus become non-cognitivists. Non-cognitivists generally believe that moral judgements are not beliefs but something else, which is not truth-apt (ibid.: 92). Non-cognitivism, however, faces a problem that becomes pertinent when we use moral terms in both asserted and unasserted contexts. It is called the Frege-Geach problem and arises because of the fact, that the meaning of moral terms differs in different contexts for the non-cognitivist (ibid.: 92). For, for example, the emotivist this means that when I utter the sentence 'It is wrong to torture animals', what I am really expressing is the non-cognitive 'Buh torturing animals!'. However, if I were to say 'It is wrong to torture animals, or it is permissible to eat meat', neither proposition is asserted, and the sentence is truth-apt. We do not generally allow meaning to fluctuate according to whether something is

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[2] Naturalism is not thought by all philosophers to be inconsistent with moral realism. Consideration of this particular form of moral realism is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

asserted or unasserted. Non-cognitivism becomes even more problematic, when we use moral terms in for example modus ponens arguments, as can be illustrated via this example:

1. Torturing animals is wrong
2. If torturing animals is wrong, then we shouldn't torture animals in industrialized farming
3. We shouldn't torture animals in industrialized farming

This argument is not valid due to the fact that 'torturing animals is wrong' has a different meaning in (1) and (2). If the non-cognitivist is correct, we will have committed the fallacy of equivocation (ibid.: 95).

The easiest way to avoid the Frege-Geach problem is to acknowledge that our moral language is actually cognitivist in nature. We do express beliefs that are truth-apt when we talk about morality. Cognitivism makes our moral disputes and phenomenological experience of our moral language relevant again and not just stubborn expressions of prescriptions or taste.

Yet the endorsement of cognitivism in combination with anti-realism, must lead us to the conclusion that, because there are no moral properties or facts that can make moral judgements true, all our moral judgements are false. This is the central tenant of John Mackie's error theory (ibid.: 39). The endorsement of cognitivism however, also leads to an apparent problem for the error-theorist. Mackie's starting point is the ordinary language of morality, and the use of this language implies cognitivism, but also realism and truth. So how is Mackie justified in dismissing realism and truth if he purports to take moral language seriously (ibid.: 47)? Although I believe the best defense for choosing cognitivism is to point to the Frege-Geach problem, I will try to show that there is nothing inconsistent about being both an anti-realist and a cognitivist, by comparing this way of thinking about morality with the way in which

historians think about other discourses, where we would all agree that there are no facts to make the beliefs of the people participating in it true.

Analogy

In Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* (2006) he introduces the idea of an outsider investigating a phenomenon on Earth (Dennett 2006: 74). But we might as well imagine a historian investigating the phenomenon of phlogiston. Such a historian would surely come to the conclusion, that most of our scientists at one point spoke *as if* phlogiston existed. They had beliefs about phlogiston and they used the name in sentences which they believed, and we still believe, to be truth-apt, for example 'Phlogiston exists'. Now as a scientist himself, we would want the historian to live up to certain scientific standards. We would especially like the historian to withhold judgement about the existence of phlogiston. It would simply be bad science if the historian concluded that phlogiston existed, but it would not seem odd to us if the historian acted as though sentences involving phlogiston were truth-apt. From this example we can see that it is better to be more reluctant in a critical setting like science to admit to the existence of mind-independent facts, than admitting to cognitivism.

Lewis, however, makes us aware of distinctions between different kinds of errors. He takes the example of the phlogiston theory, an erroneous theory which could not survive the correction of its errors, and then an example of an ancient theory of the motion of the sun across the heavens, from which certain sentences can be deduced, in which we still believe, although the theory as a whole turned out to be erroneous (Lewis 2005: 317). Lewis believes the error-theorists has chosen the former interpretation of the error of moral realism, whereas he agrees with the latter interpretation of the error of moral realism. In addition to this, Lewis believes that morality as it is, is too ill-defined for us to be able to show that morality itself contains errors and not just that some moralists

are in error (ibid.: 318). I believe, as Lewis, that given both the vagueness but also the relativity of morality, it might be hard even to limit what is and is not morality in certain contexts, and therefore we should probably only cautiously accept the error theory. Even if error theory is not fully accepted, this will not hinder us in accepting fictionalism, from a perspective like Lewis's.

After drawing this analogy to phlogiston, I will now try to explain out current moral practices from a fictionalist standpoint.

Explaining Morality

At this point we might ask ourselves: How did we come to have this false belief in moral realism? To give a naturalist account of our current morality it might be suggested that, if morality has a pragmatic advantage, it might have been a tool which made certain types of problem-solving easier. This does not mean that there needs to be just one origin of morality. It might have been, akin to what Dennett suggests with religion (Dennett 2006: 67), that it was a useful interpretation of certain situations, which in general tends to make certain kinds of problems easier for people (perhaps psychologically) to handle. It should be made clear, that this is not a subscription to the naturalism of some moral realists, but a naturalist explanation of our current moral practices.

Joyce and Lewis also characterize their views as forms of naturalism. Joyce characterizes his position as one in which moral belief function as expedients "[...] supplementing and reinforcing the outputs of prudential reasoning" (Joyce 2005: 301). Lewis sees his own view as a form of analytic naturalism. He believes that value is connected to desire and that empirical psychologists in the distant future will be able to define value as "[...] those properties that we are, under certain ideal circumstances, disposed to value" (Lewis 2005: 320). Lewis suggests that there are certain properties which we are disposed to value, connected with our desires. His

naturalism is not aimed at explaining our current moral practices but to direct our future ones. He also, however, hints at a possible explanation of our current realist practices, as us not being in total error concerning our moral practices but an "[...] intermediate alternative: you might describe us – some or all of us – as being in a state of confusion such that fictionalism or quasi-realism would be the minimal unconfused revision of our present state." (ibid.: 319). This also makes especially Lewis's theory closer related to modern naturalist realist theories of morality, for example Kim Sterelny and Ben Fraser's evolutionary moral realism, as seen in their paper "Evolution and Moral Realism" (2016). Lewis's fictionalism thus seems closer related to a realism about morality, and this point is also discussed by Lewis, who admits that his theory might be categorized both as realism and anti-realism, depending on how realism is interpreted.

If we accept Mackie's error theory or at least, like Lewis, that there is some central error in moral realism, we are left with a problem: if morality is fraught, what should we then do? At first sight even this question seems impossible to ask if we adopt an error theory. As error theorists we must interpret the 'should' exclusively as a pragmatic 'should' (Joyce 2005: 288). There are two typical reactions to Mackie's conclusion: we can become eliminativists, and abolish morality altogether, or we can make-believe morality. The best option will have to be decided on practical grounds, therefore if we want to make-believe morality, be moral fictionalists, we will have to show that it is a pragmatically better solution than eliminativism. This means that the metaethical question of why we should undertake ethical questions at all, is prominent within fictionalism. Before looking into these pragmatic reasons for choosing fictionalism, we will have to take a closer look at moral fictionalism itself.

In this section, I have explained the theoretical background for moral fictionalism and the considerations that lead to the theory. In the

following, I will present the theory of moral fictionalism and different objections against it.

Moral Fictionalism

In "Moral fictionalism versus the Rest" (2006) Daniel Nolan, Greg Restall, and Caroline West presents moral fictionalism as follows:

> The only requirement we make for a moral fictionalism is that morally evaluative claims are given in the combination of the base discourse with the fiction and the bridge laws. (Nolan, Restall & West 2006: 310)

This means that if we are to express any evaluative moral claim, we have three requirements; a base discourse, bridge laws, and a fiction. The base discourse can contain no moral ontology, no objective prescriptive claims, and no positive moral claims. This means we are still allowed to use moral terms in claims like "[...] literally speaking, it is not the case that causing suffering is morally wrong" (ibid.: 309), but we cannot use moral terms in any positive claims, for example, "x is morally right/x is morally evil" (ibid.: 309).

The bridge laws give us the relations between the non-moral base discourse and the moral discourse of the fiction: "[...] bridge laws connect moral discourse to non-moral discourse by way of biconditionals or conditionals of the usual kind, and the fiction will be a moral theory couched in these moral terms." (ibid.: 310)

An example of what might be such a bridge law could be *supervenience* of the moral on the non-moral. This would guarantee the appearance of supervenience in our moral language, making sure that we cannot have a change in the moral without a change in the non-moral (ibid.: 317). The fiction itself can have moral properties and moral ontology of any kind, it can contain a lot of claims or nearly none.

A modal form of moral fictionalism is suggested by both Nolan, Restall and West, and Lewis. In this version of moral fictionalism you imagine the world which is closest to yours in which the fiction is told as, and is, an actual fact. Blackburn recites Lewis as defining the theory:

> A sentence of the form 'in fiction f, F' is non-vacuously true iff, whenever w is one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin of f, then some world where f is told and known fact and F is true differs less from the world w, on balance, than does any world where f is told as known fact and F is not true (Blackburn 2005: 325)

In Nolan, Restall and West's modal version of moral fictionalism they draw an analogy to religion. We could "[...] suppose, for example, that there might be a divine command theory combined with atheism. Then there are no instantiated moral properties, but there would be if there were a God." (Nolan, Restall & West 2006: 309). Whether or not any form of modal fiction is actually true in a given world, and thus not a fiction, depends entirely on the ontology of that world, and our ability to discover whether or not our beliefs are true in a modal moral fictionalist scenario would depend on our ability to uncover this ontology.

Richard Joyce distinguishes between two kinds of moral factionalism, that each has a different understanding of the fictionalist's use of ordinary moral language in his "Moral Fictionalism" (2005), namely whether the fictionalist is making an assertion about a fiction or a fictional assertion (Joyce 2005: 292). If the fictionalist chooses the former, she might end up with a predicament similar to the Frege-Geach problem. If we make assertions about fictions, this fails to account for the use of moral claims in certain arguments. Joyce explains this in an argument where he makes use of a broader kind of fictionalism about different discourses. In Joyce's argument we imagine a color fictionalist giving the following argument:

P1: Fresh grass is green.

P2: My lawn is made of fresh grass.

C: Therefore, my lawn is green.[3]

The problem arises when the we make assertions about the color fiction, so we have to rewrite the first premise, adding the prefix "According to the fiction of a colored world […]" (Joyce 2005: 292). In adding the prefix, the fictionalist makes the argument valid, but she also makes it an actual assertion. If we are to interpret the prefix as something along the lines of "it is true in the fiction of…" (ibid.: 293), then this leads to a new problem. The sentence would still be an assertion and since we can take any color assertion and use it as a premise in any other argument, this would mean that the prefix would have to be applied to every assertion the fictionalist might make as long as the assertion can be combined in an argument with the color claim (ibid.: 293). The account also fails to explain the contexts in which the fictionalist would deny her former claim, "What I said earlier was, strictly speaking, false" (ibid.: 292). These contexts are what Joyce calls critical contexts. An example might be the philosophy class. This is the context in which the individual is at her most critical, reflective and undistracted. "Critical thinking investigates and challenges the presuppositions of ordinary thinking in a way that ordinary thinking does not investigate and challenge the presuppositions of critical thinking." (ibid.: 290).

These problems do not arise if the fictionalist is making a fictional or make-believe assertion instead. When we make-believe an assertion the content of the assertion does not change, what changes according to Joyce is "[…] the 'force' with which it is uttered." (ibid.: 293). Joyce appeals to the fact that there are different ways to 'express' something and that this way of expressing oneself would, following a fictionalist revolution, be one

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[3] Joyce 2005: 292

established by a linguistic convention (ibid.: 297). This becomes more obvious if we imagine that a group or society of people decide to become fictionalists, or if we think about how our own group conventions like sarcasm and storytelling work.

Lewis believes that we can achieve the goal of only making fictional assertions or what he calls quasi-assertions if we endorse projectivism: "*Projectivism* is the view that this [the before mentioned error of realism] is indeed an error; our pro- and con-attitudes actually originate within us as a result of our psychology and upbringing." (Lewis 2005: 316)

He believes that projectivism is not only held by error theorists but also by quasi-realists, a position that the quasi-realist Simon Blackburn contends. The quasi-realism of Blackburn is an anti-realist non-cognitive explanatory position; Blackburn seeks to explain our realist moral language given that anti-realism is correct (Fisher 2011: 97). Quasi-realists seek to imitate the realist, and to argue that we can build up a realist moral language from our sentiments (Nolan, Restall & West 2006: 315). Most quasi-realists contract to a form of minimal truth in which "[...] once we have assertion conditions with a fairly stable set of conditions about what is appropriate to assert and what is not appropriate to assert then we have truth conditions." (ibid.: 315). The prescriptions about what is assertible cannot be explained in moral language, but in terms of attitudes and variance in these. To Lewis, once one has subscribed to projectivism (for example by deciding what can be asserted and what cannot and projected this into the world) every moral claim is proceed by a "disowing preface" (Lewis 2005: 315), therefore every moral 'assertion' becomes a quasi-assertion, and to Lewis this is moral fictionalism "Blackburn's quasi-realism *is* just this kind of moral fictionalism. For Blackburn's quasi-realism does not come out of thin air. (If it did, perfected quasi-realism might indeed be indistinguishable from realism.) It is motivated by the previous discussion of projectivism." (ibid.: 319).

Fictionalism vs Quasi-realism

In his reply to Lewis, "Quasi-Realism no Fictionalism" (2005), Blackburn argues, that fictionalism contains central flaws which is not found in quasi-realism and even declares that "Fiction is not part of the solution – it is the central core of the problem." (Blackburn 2005: 331). Blackburn believes that the solution of quasi-realism is one without pretense, as we will have come to agreement about our construction of minimal truth conditions, following which we are free to act in a moral realist manner. I agree with Blackburn that quasi-realism is not fictionalism, but I also agree with Lewis in that were quasi-realism to succeed in their project of building a system of morality on minimal truth conditions, they would be indistinguishable from the realists. What would make them uncannily like the realists, would be their adherence to minimal truth conditions.

Blackburn also present arguments against Lewis's moral fictionalism. He worries that a modal formulation of fictionalism which Lewis proposes, presuppose that we "[...] understand the idea of the fiction being told as known fact." (Blackburn 2005: 325). This happens because any kind of fiction requires us to imagine a place where something, that we know not to be true in our world, is told as a known fact. We need to know what it is that we are pretending. As Blackburn himself points out, this is no problem when we discuss what we might call *literally* fiction, for example when we start a story with the preface[4] 'Once upon a time...', but it becomes a problem, when we want to discuss a fiction, which we do not generally see as a fiction, for example:

> Now we ask: is it true in the color fiction, that canaries are yellow? To answer we need to understand what it is for 'canaries are yellow' to be fact, and to be known as such, although in our world it is not. (ibid.: 325)

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[4] The distinction between prefix and preface is explored in Lewis 2005.

From the case of color fictionalism, we can draw an analogy to morality. The question then becomes whether morality is closer to the unproblematic cases of fiction that we have or to the case of a color fiction. Another problem arises if we look to fictions where impossible things happen. This however this problem can easily be avoided if we adopt very liberal bridge laws to connect our fiction to the base discourse.

Blackburn likewise believes that our phenomenological experience raises a problem for the fictionalist and asserts that to adopt fictionalism would be unsatisfactory to a person who has fought against a moral system. It would be like we were to "[…] continue as before only with our fingers crossed." (ibid.: 331). I, however, believe that fictionalism can easily avoid this problem. I will elaborate on this later in the paper.

In fictionalism it seems to be assumed that we know the difference between a fact and a fiction, but this boundary seems vague (ibid.: 335). My appeal in this case will be to the truth-maker theory. Blackburn admits that a conversation where "[…] there is a set or words, some of which sound to be telling a story, some of which sound to make claims on what exists […]" (ibid.: 336), where the story is told with conviction, but does not admit of any of enquiry, this will indeed be an odd conversation.

A last problem arises when we ask if people truly are motivated by fictional stories in the same manner they are motivated by belief. The fictionalist need not argue that it makes no difference to motivation that we are motivated by a story rather than a belief. The fictionalist has already cast aside all *belief* in moral realism, the fictionalist need only show that there are some advantages of motivation in keeping morality (Joyce 2005: 302). Joyce points out that: "A quick argument to show that a positive answer is within reach begins by noting that engagement with fiction can affect our emotional states." (ibid.: 302).

To this he adds the premise that emotional states can affect motivations, and thus behavior (ibid.: 302). The connection is obvious if

we think about how literature, television, commercials and social media impacts us, and how entire industries have been built up around selling us products around which fictions of health or popularity etc. are built up, fictions we know to be false, but that does not keep us from buying into them anyway. These industries could not exist if people were not motivated by their fictional assertions. We surround ourselves with fictions, which we acknowledge to be fictions, but we still act as if some of these fictions were real.

Whether we arrive at fictionalism through presupposing error theory as Joyce, Nolan, Restall and West does, or through recognition of an error in realism as Lewis does, we still need to show that fictionalism is the pragmatically superior solution to eliminativism, in the wake of adopting anti-realism.

In this section I defended moral fictionalism as a metaethical position. I will now explain which pragmatic reasons there are for choosing fictionalism rather than eliminativism.

A Fictionalist Revolution

There are several pragmatic reasons as to why we should not give up on morality altogether. The first and most serious would be that:

> Eliminativism about moral discourse would force great and wide-ranging changes to our patterns of speech and thought on much the same scale as would eliminativism about folk psychological concepts. (Nolan, Restall & West 2006: 311)

If eliminating our moral language would be tantamount to eliminating our folk psychological concepts, then one clear advantage of keeping fictionalism becomes the convenience it represents. It would certainly be very difficult to give up on folk psychological concepts, and even though I do not myself think that giving up morality would represent a challenge of

the same magnitude, such a consequence should be taken seriously. Our moral discourse is an intricate part of much of our social behavior. It regulates personal relations and enable us to coordinate different practical problems and attitudes (ibid.: 307). In short, we should (pragmatically should, due to effectiveness[5]) keep using a moral fiction because it is useful to us in many different contexts.

A second advantage of fictionalism over eliminativism is its expressive power (ibid.: 311). With a moral fiction we have easy access to expressing more than we had without one. Analogously the moral color fictionalist is allowed to talk about color whereas the color eliminativist is not, there is no need for the fictionalist to 'translate' or rewrite any sentences to avoid using color vocabulary. The extra expressive power is important, as it allows us to be more effective when solving pragmatic problems or problems of cooperation. This advantage points us to a third one. With a greater expressive power, fictionalism has more potential to help in many disputes and practical problems without having to revolutionize our ordinary language, as soon we want to discuss something that remotely relates to the topic of morality (ibid.: 311).

It is the withdrawal from ordinary moral language in critical contexts, which make the fictionalist exactly that. This is what accounts for the fact that she is not suffering from self-deception. We already know of situations where people engage in fictions like role-playing, but hopefully would retreat from the role-playing discourse if we were to press them on the subject matter of whether elves really existed. One could be worried that this might mean that the fictionalist is lying to the rest of the world when engaging in ordinary moral talk (Joyce 2005: 297), this would first of all be solved if we were to have a collective fictionalist revolution, even though

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[5] It might be objected here that effectiveness will be a new value, when used in this way. Yet this is contested because effectiveness of often closely tied up with rationality. We might have a case where we can choose between two different scenarios, one more effective than the other. If all other things besides effectiveness are equal in the two scenarios, would it not be irrational to choose the less effective scenario?

this still might be a problem depending on how large this group is in comparison with the rest of the societies with which they are in contact. Second, I would argue, that whether the fictionalist is lying depends on the context and her willingness to be open about her metaethical position. Such an openness about a fictionalist metaethics need not be a disadvantage. This could help transform our current moral practices simply by casting them into doubt. Recent studies have suggested that most of the violence committed in different cultures have moral motifs, especially if the parties are deeply convinced that their moral is the correct one[6]. These studies cast into doubt whether it actually helps the moralist achieve her moral goal to be a devout moralist. This is not to say of course, that some people are not making the world a better place by their standards by behaving morally, but we cannot neglect the dangers of morality either. To draw an analogy to religion we might say as Dennett: "Religion [morality] does all this good and more, no doubt, but something else we could devise might do it as well or better."[7] (Dennett 2006: 55). The pitfalls of morality are part of the reason Richard Garner gives in his "Abolishing Morality" (2007) for suggesting that we should give it up:

> [...] the death of moralizing might be good for the individual and for society, and that moral abolitionism may be more useful than moral fictionalism in helping us reach the goals that most compassionate moralists seek. (Garner 2009: 218)

Garner argues for eliminativism partly on the grounds that morality often seems to only reinforce already existing opinions and escalate conflicts as both parties invoke the 'right' to be on their side (ibid.: 221). But he also

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[6] To see a survey of different studies conducted in the field of motivations for violence, I recommend *Virtuous Violence* by Alan Page Fiske & Tage Shakti Rai.
[7] Brackets added.

argues that morality would not in fact, be as hard as many people imagine to remove from our language (ibid.: 223).

I would argue, that as a moral fictionalist you should not mindlessly adopt as fiction the already existing moral codes. In fact, I will claim that, in a world where at least a group of people have decided that moral realism is wrong, have gone through a fictionalist revolution, and then decided to keep morality as make-believe after careful practical deliberation, these people are not likely to forget this, at least in critical contexts. It is not at all certain that such a group of people would choose to adopt our current moral practices unaltered. In the light of arguments and empirical studies suggesting that blindly following moral systems might make you more likely to invoke morality as a means to escalate conflicts, the revolutionary moral fictionalists should take this and all other available related studies and arguments into account (I will assume that the participants in a fictionalist moral revolution possess the best available information), before deciding which fiction to tell. Some of the downsides of morality, which casts doubts on the entire enterprise for the eliminativist, could perhaps be avoided, if the fictionalist gives metaethics a more prominent role in her ordinary considerations. This is of course an attempt at finding a middle ground, and it might be hard to navigate in such murky waters. But in defense of the position it might be said that we manage to *actually* do this in many known fictions and following a fictionalist revolution people would, at least in critical contexts, be aware of their fictionalist convictions.

In this section I have examined different reasons why moral fictionalism is pragmatically superior to eliminativism and put forth a version of moral fictionalism, which I hope might help some typical 'moral' problems.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to answer the question "Should [practical] we adopt a fictionalist stance in metaethics, why, and what would be the metaethical result of a fictionalist revolution?" by first showing what different courses one might take to reach the metaethical position of moral fictionalism, and by examining the arguments in favor of anti-realism over realism and cognitivism over non-cognitivism. From this, I have led us on to both Mackie's error theory, and Lewis's attempt at equating Blackburn's quasi-realism with fictionalism. These approaches have led us to a revolutionary moral fictionalism.

Then I have defined the fictionalist position subscribed to by this paper, as having the requirements of a base discourse, bridge laws and a fiction. Following the definition and clarification of the position, arguments against moral fictionalism has been assessed and answers have been attempted. I have explained why fictionalism is pragmatically superior to eliminativism and advocated a form of fictionalist revolution after which metaethics is to be given a more prominent position in people's ordinary moral discourse.

From this, I can conclude, that moral fictionalism is an attainable and attractive position in metaethics and that a **revolutionary** moral fictionalism, might actually realize what moral realists often describe as moral goals.

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