

# Morality: Fact or Fiction?\*

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## § I INTRODUCTION

I am very grateful for this opportunity to talk to you today about *Moral Fictionalism*. The epigram of that book was the following quotation from Kant:

One cannot give too many or too frequent warnings against this laxity, or even mean cast of mind, which seeks its principle among empirical motives and laws; for, human reason in its weariness gladly rests on this pillow and in a dream of sweet illusions (which allow it to embrace a cloud instead of Juno) it substitutes for a morality a bastard patched up from limbs of quite diverse ancestry, which looks like whatever one wants to see in it but not like virtue for him who has once seen virtue in her true form.

One of my aims today is to make plain the significance of this passage .

I was initially prompted to write *Moral Fictionalism* by my dissatisfaction with the state of public moral discourse as it was in the United States just prior to Bush's initial election. The country was remarkably divided, though these divisions were subsequently obscured by the national grief and outrage following 9/11. I say these divisions were obscured, not obliterated, for they have subsequently reemerged. These divisions had, to my mind, a disastrous effect on public moral discourse—both in its content and how it was conducted. I was particularly alarmed given the important role public moral discourse plays, not only in civil society, but in modern democratic societies such as the United States. It is an unquestionable prerequisite for the flourishing of a liberal democracy that a frank and respectful moral exchange

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be possible among its citizens—even among those who disagree about fundamental matters. All the more so given the challenges presently facing liberal democracy throughout the world (both from without and within).

Let me begin with, what I hope is, a fairly uncontroversial example of an obstacle to reasonable moral discussion. The obstacle is not necessarily the most important, but it is a real obstacle whose force is easy to appreciate if only in our calmer and more reflective moments.

A familiar, if disquieting, feature of public moral disagreement is the tendency to assume, without evidence, that the judgment of one's disputant is subject to a *debunking explanation*. A debunking explanation is an explanation for a person's judgment in terms unconnected with reasons for accepting that judgment. So, for example, one might explain a person's opposition to a policy of equitable redistribution, not in terms of reasons relevant to determining what justice requires, but, rather, in terms of self- or class-interest. Let me make a couple of comments to clarify. First, despite the nature of the example, I do not mean to suggest that debunking explanations are the sole province of the Left. The Right offers debunking explanations as well. Thus, at least in the United States, it has been claimed that certain environmentalists are motivated less by the value and requirements of stewardship, if such a thing is indeed of value and a source of requirements, than by the class-interests of middle class homeowners who reasonably believe that property prices will fall with the erosion of the green belt. Second, my objection has less to do with debunking explanations *per se*, than with advancing debunking explanations on the basis of no evidence, from the mere fact of disagreement. After all, debunking explanations have a distinguished history, having been advanced by Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Foucault . . . and Hume!—at least with respect to the motives of clerics and other religious enthusiasts. Moreover, a debunking explanation of the judgments we make may in fact be true, if the evidence is adequate. What is objectionable is the tendency to offer a debunking explanation of one's disputant's judgment, without evidence, solely on the basis of disagreement. For if you accept that explanation, you cut yourself off from whatever reasons they may have for their differing moral judgement. Debunking explanations mark the end of discussion and not the beginning of mutual understanding and respect.

Today, I will talk about, not debunking explanations, but a different, if related, obstacle to reasonable moral discussion, one that threatens not just reasonable moral discussion, but its very cognitive aspirations. What I mean by this last remark will be clear as I proceed.

## § 2 INTRANSIGENCE

The obstacle to reasonable moral discussion that was at the heart of the argument of *Moral Fictionalism* was what I called *intransigence*. To get a sense of moral in-

transigence, consider Hilary Putnam's admirable description of the deep political disagreement between Robert Nozick and himself:

But what of the fundamentals on which one cannot agree? It would be dishonest to pretend that one thinks that there are no better and worse views here. I don't think that it is just a matter of taste whether one thinks that the obligation of the community to treat its members with compassion takes precedence over property rights; nor does my co-disputant. Each of us regards the other as lacking, at this level, a certain kind of sensitivity and perception. To be perfectly honest, there is in each of us something akin to contempt, not for the other's mind—for we each have the highest regard for each other's minds—nor for the other as a person—, for I have more respect for my colleague's honesty, integrity, kindness, etc., than I do for that of many people who agree with my 'liberal' political views—but for a certain complex of emotions and judgments in the other. (Putnam, 1981, p. 165)

Putnam should be commended for his candor here. What Putnam holds in something akin to contempt is Nozick's moral sensibility ('a certain complex of emotions and judgments in the other')—a moral sensibility that privileges property rights over what Putnam regards as the compassionate treatment of the less well off.

Putnam is right at least to this extent—judgments about what justice require are unlike judgments of taste. Taste is, of course, a source of reasons. If I have a taste for the music of Eliot Carter, that is a reason for me to listen to such music. But reasons of taste differ importantly from moral reasons. Reasons of taste are contingent upon one's having that taste. If I lacked a taste for Carter's brand of modernist music I would lack a reason to listen to it. But moral reasons are not contingent in this way. Moral reasons are reasons for us whether or not we judge them to be reasons. So Putnam is right in emphasizing the difference. However, this makes Putnam's reaction all the more puzzling. By Putnam's own admission, Nozick is a reasonable and informed person who is interested in determining what justice requires. Moreover, Nozick takes himself to know, or at least be reasonable certain, what justice requires. Moreover, he takes himself to know, or be reasonably certain, what justice requires on the basis of reasons—indeed the reasons he developed over the course of his book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. If Nozick's reasons are genuine, then they would undermine Putnam's own judgment about what justice requires—for unlike reasons of taste, they would apply to Putnam whether or not Putnam judges that they apply. Normally, if only about less heated matters, when a reasonable and informed person, interested in determining the truth about some matter, disagrees with you on a reasoned basis, and so possesses reasons which, if genuine, would undermine your own judgment, then there is a natural tendency to reconsider the matter. After all, your disputant may be onto something that you

have so far overlooked. But if Putnam holds Nozick's moral sensibility in something akin to contempt, what motivation would *Nozick's* accepting undermining reasons provide *Putnam* for reconsidering his moral judgment? None. Thus, the reaction that Putnam carefully describes is a manifestation of moral intransigence. It is a kind of intransigence since it is an unwillingness to reconsider his moral judgment in the light of reasoned disagreement.

I will return to why I think this motive to reconsider is a fundamental component of reasonable moral discussion and its cognitive aspirations. But for now, let's consider what evidence there might be for thinking that public moral discourse is intransigent in this way.

There is, of course, the anecdotal (or anecdotal depending on your credulousness or skepticism about the significance of anecdote) provided by the Putnam quote. But even if it provides *some* evidence, what evidence it would provide would be extremely *weak*—a single instance of intransigence in a discourse of whom every human being is a participant.

What would be better would be systematic empirical evidence about the actual extent of moral intransigence. Unfortunately, that would require a sensitive interpretation of a moral sociology that has yet to be written. I am a philosopher, not a sociologist, so I am unlikely to produce the relevant moral sociology, nor would it likely be reliable should I undertake such an endeavor.

Fortunately, there is a kind of evidence available to me as a philosopher, not so much about the extent of moral intransigence, but, more importantly, about the intelligibility of intransigence given the norms that govern public moral discourse. Indeed I believe that the intelligibility of moral intransigence might be established by thought-experiment. How might a thought-experiment establish a claim about the norms that *actually* govern moral discourse? That's a good question. Hopefully the following is a good answer, at least to a first approximation.

There is no such thing as moral science fiction. While we may be able to imagine societies with moral codes different from our own, we cannot imagine morality requiring something other than what we know it to require. We can imagine people's *moral judgments* differing systematically from our own, but we cannot coherently imagine the *moral facts* differing systematically. Moral norms constrain what we can intelligibly imagine. That's why there is no such thing as moral science fiction. It is just not possible to vary the moral norms that we accept in imagination the way that writers of science fiction can vary the facts in the tales they tell. So if we can conceive of cases where such intransigence is intelligible, then it must be so at least by the norms govern moral discourse that we actually accept and tacitly appeal to in so conceiving.

Consider, then, the following thought-experiment and what it might reveal about the norms that actually govern public moral discourse. Edgar and Bernice disagree

about the moral status of abortion. Whereas Bernice accepts the wrongness of abortion, Edgar is a complacent liberal moralist and accepts that abortion is permissible. Edgar reasons as follows (Edgar and Bernice's arguments are quoted verbatim from MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*):

Everyone has a right over their own person and their own body. Given the nature of these rights, when an embryo is essentially part of the mother's body, the mother has the right to make her own uncoerced decision on whether she will have an abortion or not. Therefore, abortion is morally permissible. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 6–7)

So Edgar, implicitly at least, accepts a principle that counts a certain feature of the circumstance, the embryo being essentially part of the mother's body, as a reason to accept the permissibility of abortion. Bernice, however, rejects this principle. Bernice reasons instead as follows:

I cannot will that my mother should have had an abortion when she was pregnant with me, except perhaps if it had been certain that the embryo was dead or gravely damaged. But if I cannot will this in my own case, how can I consistently deny to others the right to life I claim for myself? I would break the so-called Golden Rule unless I denied that a mother has in general a right to an abortion. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 6–7)

In uttering 'Abortion is permissible' Edgar demands, implicitly at least, that his audience accept that sentence. So Edgar must accept that sentence on behalf of others if his utterance is sincere. Indeed, Edgar is sincere. He accepts 'Abortion is permissible' on behalf of others for he takes himself to have access to reason that is a reason to accept that claim not only for himself, but for everyone else as well. This is a mark of the authority of morality. Hume puts the point this way:

When a man denominates another his enemy, his rival, his antagonist, his adversary, he is understood to speak the language of self-love, and to express sentiments, peculiar to himself, and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of vicious or odious or depraved, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which, he expects, all his audience are to concur with him. He must here, therefore, depart from his private and particular situation, and must chuse a point of view, common to him and others. (Hume, 1740/2003, §9)

Bernice, like Edgar, is motivated to accept on behalf of others a claim about the moral status of abortion. Supposing that she is an intelligent and articulate spokesperson, Bernice might strike Edgar as an otherwise reasonable, informed human being who

coherently accepts a reason that, if genuine, would undermine his acceptance of the permissibility of abortion. Nevertheless, Edgar feels no embarrassment about this. His persistence in his liberal morality is unflinching. Edgar is intransigent in the sense that he lacks a motivation to reconsider his moral judgment no matter how tentatively. Nor is Edgar alone in this. I suspect that we too would be unmoved by such a disagreement. Our own persistence in liberal morality would be unflinching as well. We too would be intransigent in the sense of lacking a motivation to inquire further into the grounds of moral judgment. In normal circumstances, we are under no obligation to re-examine the foundations of moral claims that we accept as unproblematic even if they are disputed by otherwise reasonable, informed, and interested people who coherently accept reasons that, if genuine, would undermine them.

Again, I am not making an empirical claim about the actual extent of moral intransigence; rather, I am making a conceptual claim about the norms that actually govern moral discourse. Given the norms that we actually accept, it is intelligible to fail to be motivated to inquire further. If we can conceive of cases where such intransigence is intelligible, then it must be so at least by the norms governing moral discourse that we actually accept and tacitly appeal to in so conceiving. Not only is it intelligible that one, as a matter of fact, takes no positive steps towards re-examining the grounds of moral judgment—after all, one might reasonably have more pressing immediate concerns; but it is intelligible as well that one should lack this motivation altogether. And if the failure to adopt the end of further inquiry is intelligible, then we are under no rational obligation to adopt this end, at least by the norms of moral discourse that we actually, if implicitly, accept.

Let's now consider, why moral intransigence poses a problem for reasonable moral discussion, a problem that potentially undermines the cognitive aspirations of public moral discourse.

### § 3 NONCOMPLACENCY AND COGNITION

First, what do I mean by the cognitive aspirations of moral discourse? To say of a given region of discourse that it has cognitive aspirations is to make a claim about the linguistic actions performed by uttering sentences of that discourse and the attitudes involved in accepting the claims of that discourse.

If a region of discourse is cognitive, then the utterance of a sentence from that discourse performs a certain kind of action. Specifically, to utter a sentence of a cognitive discourse is to make an *assertion*. Historical discourse is typically taken to be assertoric. So if I utter the sentence 'Locke, along with Halifax and Isaac Newton, presided over "great recoinage" of 1694' I have asserted that claim, an assertion that can be evaluated as true or false, depending, of course, upon the historical facts. Moreover, if I am sincere, then my assertion that Locke presided over the 'great

recoinage' expresses my belief that he did. In general, sincere assertions express the beliefs of the speaker, because in accepting the claim that I assert I believe it. That's what it means to describe a discourse as cognitive—the linguistic action performed by uttering a sentence of that discourse is *assertion* and the attitude involved in accepting the asserted claim is *belief*.

In order for a region of discourse to live up to its cognitive aspirations it must be disciplined in a certain way—it must be subject to the appropriate norms if it is to articulate our beliefs about the given subject matter. The problem posed by moral intransigence—a problem that threatens the cognitive aspirations of moral discourse—is that intransigence is inconsistent with a norm necessary for moral discourse to be genuinely cognitive. Or so I contend.

To bring the relevant norm into focus, I want to first consider a particular kind of disagreement, and then consider what the rational response to this kind of disagreement would be if the relevant discourse is genuinely cognitive.

Suppose that Edgar and Bernice disagree about some claim, *S*. While Edgar accepts *S*, Bernice rejects *S*. Though she rejects *S*, Bernice strikes Edgar as an otherwise reasonable human being. The mere fact of disagreement need not bother Edgar, for he might plausibly think that their disagreement derives from Bernice's ignorance of the relevant evidence. Suppose, however, that Edgar engages Bernice in discussion and rules out this possibility: Edgar and Bernice share a common body of evidence. Not only is Bernice fully informed about the evidence that Edgar accepts, but she is also internally coherent in taking that evidence as a reason for rejecting *S*—just as Edgar is internally coherent in taking that evidence as a reason for accepting *S*. While they share a common body of evidence, they nonetheless disagree about its epistemic significance and are internally coherent in doing so. So both are otherwise reasonable, informed, and can offer what the other would regard as a question-begging argument for their acceptance or rejection of the target claim.

Edgar and Bernice's positions conflict: they disagree about whether to accept or reject *S*. However, if we focus solely on the fact of conflict, we will miss something important about their disagreement. For Edgar and Bernice disagree not only about which claim to accept in the given circumstance, they apparently disagree about what would count as a reason for accepting that claim in the given circumstance. Since Edgar and Bernice disagree not only about *S* but also what would count as a reason for accepting or rejecting *S*, their disagreement is a *disagreement about reasons*.

To get a better sense of this, let's consider a few quick examples. So, for example, otherwise reasonable palaeontologists can agree about the fossil record and yet disagree about what that record establishes. If they do, they are engaged in a disagreement about reasons: each implicitly accepts distinct principles that count potentially distinct aspects of the fossil record as reasons for the acceptance or rejection of the target claim. Similarly, constructivists and classical mathematicians

disagree about what counts as a reason for accepting a mathematical sentence. Constructivists maintain that the reasons for accepting a mathematical claim could only take the form of a constructive proof whereas classical mathematicians allow that nonconstructive proof procedures also provide reasons for accepting mathematical claims. Not only are methodological disputes in the special sciences disagreements about reasons, but so are disagreements that result from different styles of inductive reasoning. Some of us are hasty inductive reasoners and some are more conservative—some accept generalizations on the basis of fewer observations than others. Disagreements about reasons may be theoretical, but they can be practical as well. Thus, Thomas Scanlon writes:

[Disagreement about reasons] is surely possible and perhaps even common. I think that it is plausible to suggest that we have an example of it in the contemporary disagreement between secular liberals like me, who see nothing morally objectionable about homosexuality, and conservative Christians who believe that it is a serious wrong. (Scanlon, 1998, p. xx)

What is the rational response to a disagreement about reasons?

If we confine ourselves to what can be described in terms of rational permissibility, then not only is it rationally permissible for Edgar to persist in his acceptance of *S*, but it is also rationally permissible for Edgar to revise—to reject or suspend judgment concerning *S*.

Edgar's persistence in his acceptance of *S* might be rationally permissible on a number of grounds. Suppose belief is conservative in the sense that we accept the policy of persisting in our beliefs unless presented with a positive reason to change our minds. Since the evidence's having a different normative appearance for Bernice is not a positive reason for Edgar to change his mind, if conservatism is a genuine epistemic norm, then it is rationally permissible for Edgar to persist in his belief that *S*. Conservatism is not the only grounds for the rational permissibility of persistence. Suppose, owing to some psychological necessity, Edgar simply cannot give up his acceptance of *S*. Since he must accept *S*, and is not self-contradictory or otherwise internally incoherent in so doing, it might be rationally permissible for him to persist in his acceptance of *S*. Just as it is rationally permissible for Edgar to persist in his acceptance of *S*, it is rationally permissible for him to revise—to reject or suspend judgment concerning *S*.

Revision might be rationally permissible on a number of grounds. So, for example, it might be rationally permissible for Edgar to revise if, upon reflection, he came to accept a debunking explanation for the disagreement between himself and Bernice, that is, if he came to explain their disagreement in terms accidentally connected to reasons for acceptance. Coming to accept a debunking explanation is not the only grounds for the rational permissibility of revision. Suppose that Edgar came

to believe that there is a perfect symmetry between his epistemic position and Bernice's. Edgar could not coherently be a cognitivist and persist in accepting S, and in accepting that Bernice is wrong in rejecting S, while maintaining that they are in equally good positions to know whether or not that S. If reflection on the disagreement about reasons prompts Edgar to accept a debunking explanation of their disagreement, or to accept that there is a perfect epistemic symmetry between himself and Bernice, then it would be rationally permissible for Edgar to revise—to reject or suspend judgment concerning S.

If we confine ourselves to what can be described in terms of rational permissibility, then it would seem that persistence and revision are both rationally permissible. However, there is an important aspect of the rational response to a disagreement about reasons that has so far been left out of account. While, in the context of a disagreement about reasons, persistence and revision are both rationally permissible, sometimes at least, if acceptance is cognitive, there is something epistemically admirable about at least considering revising. After all, retaining belief on the grounds of conservatism, psychological necessity, and the like can seem like a reluctant capitulation to epistemic necessity. At any rate, acquiescing on such grounds is hardly a cognitive achievement. In contrast, a decision to reconsider manifests a responsiveness to reasons that is itself manifestly reasonable. Upon determining that his disagreement with Bernice is, at bottom, a disagreement about reasons, Edgar might be motivated to re-examine his reasons for accepting S. Edgar might inquire further into the grounds of his acceptance to determine whether, in light of his discussion with Bernice, his reasons for acceptance are good reasons. He might also inquire further to determine, in light of his discussion with Bernice, what, if anything, there is to Bernice's reasons for rejection. After all, Bernice might be onto something that so far eludes Edgar. While Edgar is not rationally required to inquire further into the grounds of acceptance, in the sense that his failure to do so would not be epistemically blameworthy, there would be something epistemically admirable about his inquiring further. There is something cognitively virtuous about being motivated to inquire further into the grounds of acceptance in the face of a disagreement about reasons. If that is right, then there is a normative aspect of belief that is not describable in deontic vocabulary. Belief involves a cognitive virtue not describable in terms of rational permissibility.

In *Moral Fictionalism*, I suggested that this cognitive virtue can be understood as a rational obligation, not to adopt a given belief, but to adopt and end in determining what to believe—an end internal to inquiry. What end could this be? Upon determining that his disagreement with Bernice is, at bottom, a disagreement about reasons, Edgar is under a rational obligation to inquire further into the grounds of acceptance. More precisely, given that he is interested in the truth of S, Edgar, in the context of a disagreement about reasons, has a reason to re-examine his reasons for

accepting S, at least if his disputant is otherwise reasonable, informed, and similarly interested in inquiring about S.

Let me explain. Even in the context of a disagreement about reasons, whether a person has a reason to inquire further depends on his interest in the truth of S. After all, ‘The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ has never been a reasonable norm of inquiry. Absent some special interest, there is no reason to know whether Genghis Khan ever suffered from a hangnail, say. However, given his interest in the truth of S, in the context of a disagreement about reasons, Edgar would have a motive to inquire further into the grounds of acceptance—or, at least, he would be so motivated if Bernice were otherwise reasonable, informed, and similarly interested in inquiring about S. Obviously, Edgar would lack this motive if Bernice were unreasonable, or ignorant, or were moved by ulterior motives unconnected with reasons for acceptance. But if she is none of these, Edgar would have a motive to inquire further into his grounds for acceptance to determine whether, in light of his discussion with Bernice, his reasons for acceptance are good reasons. Edgar would also have a motive to inquire further to determine, in light of his discussion with Bernice, what, if anything, there is to Bernice’s reasons for rejection. After all, Bernice might be onto something that so far eludes Edgar. To inquire further is to strive to be responsive to what reasons there are. This would involve seriously considering the alternatives and so questioning the evidential status of initial appearances. While persistence is rationally permissible, Edgar must be prepared to bracket his full acceptance of S when re-examining his reasons for acceptance. Of course, there is latitude in the fulfillment of this end. Further inquiry is one end among many, and a person’s ends must be rationally ordered—perhaps Edgar has more compelling immediate concerns. If, however, Edgar were to fulfill this end, he might satisfy himself with his acceptance of S, or he might suspend judgment concerning S, or might even reject S. Whatever the outcome, Edgar’s noncomplacency in inquiring further would be epistemically admirable. Moreover, a failure to act towards the fulfillment of this end, to become responsive to what reasons there are, would merely lack epistemic merit and would be neither an instance of irrationality nor in any way epistemically blameworthy. Striving to be responsive to what reasons there are is, in this sense, a manifestation of cognitive virtue.

#### §4 MORAL FICTIONALISM

Thanks for your patience in persisting through this detour through some fairly abstract epistemology. We are now in a position to see how moral intransigence threatens the cognitive status of moral discourse.

Suppose, then, that noncomplacency is a genuine norm of cognitive discourse. Specifically, suppose that *if* a region of discourse is cognitive, then when faced with

a disagreement about reasons with an interlocutor who is reasonable, informed, and interested in determining the truth of the matter, one is rationally required to adopt the end of further inquiry. The problem is that noncomplacency is straightforwardly inconsistent with intransigence. For moral acceptance to be intransigent is for it to be intelligible to lack this motive altogether—to be unmoved to inquire further into the grounds of acceptance. Not only would it be intelligible that one, as a matter of fact, take no positive steps towards re-examining the grounds of moral judgment; but it would be intelligible as well that one should lack this motivation altogether. And if the failure to adopt the end of further inquiry is intelligible, then we are under no rational obligation to adopt this end, at least by the norms of moral discourse that we actually, if implicitly, accept. But if noncomplacency is a necessary condition for a discourse to be cognitive, then moral discourse fails to be. If intransigence is intelligible given the norms that actually govern moral discourse, then the cognitive aspirations of moral discourse are necessarily frustrated.

If moral discourse is noncognitive, then what are we doing when we accept a moral claim? Moral judgment could not be belief, for it lacks a cognitive virtue partly constitutive of belief. So what are we doing when we make moral judgments if not registering our beliefs about what morality requires?

The moral judgments we make, if they are not genuine beliefs about what morality requires, can seem more like the expression of our nonmoral concerns. Far from articulating the impartial demands of morality, our moral judgments would be a self-portrait of our partial concerns, the emotional attitudes we bear to ourselves and to others. These concerns may be abiding and important, but they would also be peculiar to ourselves, at least potentially.

This is the situation that MacIntyre (1981, ch. 2) describes the Bloomsbury group as being in in accepting Moore's moral philosophy. According to MacIntyre, there was a radical discrepancy between meaning and use in the moral discourse of the Bloomsbury group. Given the meaning of moral vocabulary, the acceptance of a moral sentence seemed to involve the acceptance of a reason with the requisite authority. However, given the use of moral vocabulary, the acceptance of a moral sentence actually involved the acceptance of a nonmoral reason that lacked this authority. Specifically, their acceptance of a moral claim was not governed by norms appropriate to believing that claim; rather, their acceptance of a moral claim was governed by their *desires*.

According to Moore (1903), moral properties are nonnatural properties that can be intuited by persons with the appropriate moral sensibilities. Not only was Moore a nonnaturalist and intuitionist, but he was a consequentialist as well: An action is right in a given circumstances just in case it produces more good consequences than any alternative action that is open in that circumstance. Moreover, Moore held a specific conception of the good: Those things that instantiate nonnatural goodness

to the greatest degree are personal intercourse and the beautiful.

According to MacIntyre, the Bloomsbury group embraced Moore's moral philosophy not on the strength of Moore's arguments, but rather because Moore's moral philosophy reflected the values they antecedently accepted. Their preferred form of life privileged the values of personal intercourse and the beautiful, just as Moore prescribed. Not only did the Bloomsbury group share Moore's conception of the good, but they were also disposed towards consequentialist forms of moral reasoning. Keynes reports that discussions of value involved the explicit ranking of states of affairs. He cites the following questions put forward for discussion:

If *A* was in love with *B* and believed that *B* reciprocated his feelings, whereas in fact *B* did not, but was in love with *C*, the state of affairs was certainly not as good as it would have been if *A* had been right, but was it worse or better than it would become if *A* discovered his mistake?

If *A* was in love with *B* under a misapprehension as to *B*'s qualities, was this better or worse than *A*'s not being in love at all? (MacIntyre, 1981, pp. 16-7)

Moreover, such questions were resolved by appeal to intuition. The Bloomsbury group would focus on the target state of affairs and attempt to discern as best they could the presence and degree of nonnatural goodness instantiated in the target state of affairs. If there was disagreement, then the disputants were either focusing on different subject matters or the moral sensibility of one was better placed to discern the presence and degree of nonnatural goodness than the other.

So it would seem that the moral practice of the Bloomsbury group was thus explicitly intuitionist—at least on the surface:

But, of course, as Keynes tells us, what was really happening was something quite other: 'In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility' and Keynes goes on to describe the effectiveness of Moore's gasps of incredulity and head-shaking, or Strachey's grim silences and Lowes Dickenson's shrugs. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 17)

If Keynes is to be believed, this is plainly the kind of manipulative noncognitivism for which Moore's student, Stevenson, has been criticized. On this view, the Bloomsbury group, in accepting an attribution of goodness, was not in fact tracking the presence and degree of nonnatural goodness. Rather they were engaged in an unwitting pretense in which things have, in addition to their natural properties, certain nonnatural properties that supervene on them and that can be intuited by persons with the appropriate moral sensibilities.

Suppose that Edgar was a minor member of the Bloomsbury group. Being a faithful student of the *Principia*, Edgar understands the sentence:

*A*'s being in love with *B* under a misapprehension of *B*'s qualities would be a better state of affairs than *A*'s never being in love.

as Moore does—as representing a difference in the degree of nonnatural goodness instantiated by two potential states of affairs. Moreover, Edgar accepts this sentence. In what does Edgar's acceptance of this sentence consist? From within, Edgar's coming to accept this sentence occurred just as Moore describes: Edgar contemplates *A*'s being in love under a misapprehension and *A*'s never being in love and intuits that the former state of affairs instantiates nonnatural goodness to a degree greater than the latter. However, Edgar's intuition can be explained independently of the actual intuition of any nonnatural properties. Edgar accepts that *A*'s being in love under a misapprehension is better than *A*'s never being in love because, given his sensibility, Edgar approves of the former state of affairs more than he does the latter.

So there were two complementary principles governing this pretense. First, Moore's *Principia*, regardless of the truth of its doctrines, functioned as the master fiction of the moral pretense. In accepting and uttering moral sentences the Bloomsbury group were acting as if the *Principia* doctrines correctly described the moral facts. If we confine our attention to attributions of nonnatural goodness, a rough statement of one principle governing the moral fiction would be:

It is fictionally true that *x* instantiates nonnatural goodness iff according to the *Principia*, *x* instantiates nonnatural goodness.

Not only did the *Principia* prescribe, at least in general outline, which attributions of nonnatural goodness were fictionally true, it also prescribed an independent procedure for determining which individual attributions were fictionally true. According to the *Principia*, attributions of nonnatural goodness are accepted on the basis of intuition. What makes it fictionally true that a person is intuiting instances of nonnatural goodness is that, given their sensibility (a sensibility shaped by Moorean doctrine), they approve of that thing. Within the moral fiction, while nonnatural properties are distinct from natural properties, they nevertheless, supervene on them. If a thing instantiates the (fictionally subvenient) natural properties thus endowing it with the tendency to elicit approval from persons with the appropriate sensibility, then it is fictionally true that it instantiates nonnatural goodness:

It is fictionally true that *x* instantiates nonnatural goodness iff *x* instantiates natural properties that would elicit the relevant emotional attitude in a person with the appropriate sensibility.

Putting these principles together we get a principle connecting the emotional attitudes of the Bloomsbury group with the content of the *Principia*:

*x* instantiates natural properties that would elicit the relevant emotional attitude in a person with the appropriate sensibility iff according to the *Principia*, *x* instantiates nonnatural goodness

In this way, the *Principia* both controlled and gave expression to the emotional attitudes of the Bloomsbury group.

But why did the Bloomsbury group express their amorous and aesthetic ends in the language of morality? Why this masquerade? MacIntyre suggests that in rejecting the moral culture of the late nineteenth century in favor of a form of life that privileged the values of personal intercourse and the beautiful, what the Bloomsbury group lacked was a means justifying their preferences to others. Given the practical conflict between Victorian morality and their preferred form of life, the Bloomsbury group needed a means of rejecting at least those claims of Victorian morality that were incompatible with their ends. In order to justify their rejection of Victorian morality and so pursue their preferred form of life, the Bloomsbury group needed to endow their ends with the authority of morality. Moore's moral philosophy seemingly allowed them to do just that. The acceptance of Moore's moral philosophy was a means of reconceiving the nonmoral reasons provided by their desires as moral reasons with the requisite authority. So doing seemingly allowed the Bloomsbury group to justify their form of life to their Victorian critics. Far from being at odds with morality, the privileging of the aesthetic and the amorous was precisely what morality required—at least from the perspective of the Moorean fiction that they accepted. However, insofar as these amorous and aesthetic ends provided reasons for acting in a given circumstance, what reason they actually provided lacked the authority of morality. Apparent instances of nonnatural goodness were merely shadows cast by amorous and aesthetic ends held independently of morality.

Of course, things with us needn't be as they were with the Bloomsbury group (or at least as they are represented by MacIntyre and Keynes). There is a distinguished philosophical tradition of regarding moral judgment as a noncognitive attitude. There may be nothing disreputable about this. However, if the grounds for regarding moral judgment as noncognitive is our moral intransigence, then there's reason to regard this as a real form of moral debility.

An interpretation of Kant's Formula of Humanity:

So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. (G 4:429; 4:436)

makes vivid the problem. Consider again Putnam's reaction to fundamental disagreement. What Putnam holds in something akin to contempt is Nozick's moral

sensibility—a moral sensibility that privileges property rights over what Putnam regards as the compassionate treatment of the less well off. The question is whether something akin to contempt is the right attitude to adopt towards someone who in your view is lacking ‘in a certain kind of sensitivity and perception’. Even if someone were lacking in this way, to treat him as an end is to treat him as capable, at least in principle, of acquiring the requisite sensitivity and perception. Moreover, to treat someone as an end is to allow for the possibility, however remote, that you yourself are lacking in this way. The difficulty of course is that contemptuousness is inconsistent with both these attitudes.

Treating someone as an end involves offering them reasons and treating them as capable of assessing those reasons. Conversely, it is to treat the reasons they offer as potentially genuine reasons that they are in a position to assess. It is this latter aspect of the Formula of Humanity that is presently relevant. What would it be, in the context of a disagreement about reasons, for Edgar to treat the reasons that Bernice offers as potentially genuine reasons that she is in a position to assess? It would involve, at a minimum, an openness to reflective doubt about his own grounds for the permissibility of abortion. This in conjunction with an interest in accepting on behalf of others a claim about the moral status of abortion is sufficient to motivate further inquiry into the grounds of moral acceptance. Edgar would have a motive to inquire further into the grounds of moral acceptance to determine whether, in light of his discussion with Bernice, his reasons for acceptance are good reasons. Edgar would also have a motive to inquire further to determine, in light of his discussion with Bernice, what, if anything, there is to Bernice’s reasons for rejection. Bernice, after all, might be onto something that so far eludes Edgar. Adopting the end of further inquiry is not only to strive to be responsive to what reasons there are, but to treat Bernice as an end and not merely as a means.

Of course, there is latitude in the fulfillment of this end. Further inquiry is one end among many and a person’s ends must be rationally ordered—perhaps Edgar has more compelling immediate concerns. Particular actions taken to fulfill this end are epistemically meritorious while particular failures to fulfill this end merely lack epistemic merit and are not in any way epistemically blameworthy. There is an additional reason why adopting the end of further inquiry should display this normative structure. In this context, striving to be responsive to what reasons there are is to strive for moral perfection, to better respond to authoritative reasons. So, not only are actions taken to fulfill this end epistemically meritorious but such actions are morally meritorious as well. Similarly, not only do particular failures to fulfill this end lack epistemic merit, such failures lack moral merit as well. Moreover, just as particular failures are not epistemically blameworthy, such failures are not morally blameworthy. It is not surprising, then, that striving to be responsive to what reasons there are should display this normative structure, a normative structure

plausibly assigned to perfectionist duties.

Edgar, of course, need not revise his moral opinion. Treating Bernice as an end need not involve Edgar abandoning the claim that abortion is morally permissible only that he be prepared to bracket his full acceptance of that claim when inquiring further. Nor need it involve a partial normative accommodation of Bernice's position—perhaps on due reflection Bernice's position on abortion has nothing to recommend. What it does require is that Edgar adopt the end of further inquiry. In this context, striving to be responsive to what reasons there are is a manifestation of moral virtue. The requirements of morality and the requirements of what it takes to believe them here, at least, coalesce.

## § 5 CONCLUSION

Let's return, again, to the case for moral intransigence. You can be forgiven if you are unmoved by the thought-experiment I offered you. Moral science fiction may not be possible, but you may still doubt whether the thought-experiment established that moral acceptance is in fact intransigent. To be honest, all I care about is whether you are persuaded by the conditional claim—that if moral acceptance is intransigent, then it is noncognitive. For, if, in addition, you are persuaded that noncomplacency is a cognitive and moral virtue, you will have good reason not to be intransigent in your dealings with others, even with those who disagree about fundamental matters of morals.

As I said, I am a philosopher, not a sociologist. Alarmed by the growing intransigence of public moral discussion, I undertook to describe in *Moral Fictionalism* what moral practice would become if such intransigence became entrenched in the norms governing public moral discourse. *Moral Fictionalism*, then, is a dystopian metaphysics, a metaphysical parable about the debilitating effects of moral intransigence. It is an account of what moral practice would become if we lack sufficient respect to try to understand one another. Our moral judgments would be a self-portrait of our partial concerns, the expression of our emotional attitudes—what Kant calls empirical motives. And as Kant long ago warned: 'human reason in its weariness gladly rests on this pillow and in a dream of sweet illusions (which allow it to embrace a cloud instead of Juno) it substitutes for a morality a bastard patched up from limbs of quite diverse ancestry, which looks like whatever one wants to see in it but not like virtue for him who has seen virtue in her true form'.

Thanks very much.

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