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ABSTRACT

This paper is a contribution to the emerging field of comparative metaethics, which aims to analyse the metaethical views of philosophical traditions outside the Western mainstream. It argues that the metaethical views implicit in the mediaeval Chinese school of Tiantai Buddhism can be reconstructed in contemporary terms in order to develop two novel views. These views are *moral dialetheism* and *moral trivialism*. The taxonomy of contemporary metaethical views, in epistemic terms, is exhausted by either partial success, or complete error, theories. They claim, respectively, either that some moral judgments are true (and some false) or that all moral judgments are false. There are also *noncognitivist* and *nonfactualist* views, claiming that all moral judgments are technically neither true nor false. In opposition to this moral truth *gap*, moral dialetheism and moral trivialism offer a moral truth *glut*. These views say, respectively, that *some* moral judgments and their negations are true and that *all* moral judgments and their negations are true. The upshot of this metaethical reconstruction of Tiantai Buddhism is that it allows us to complete the contemporary metaethical taxonomy, and to contribute to the therapeutic goal of finding ways to utilize metaethical reflection for the sake of release from the pathologies of morality.

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1. Tiantai Buddhism

In 1016, the Song monk and Tiantai Buddhist patriarch, Siming Zhili (960–1028), decided that he was going to chop off his fingers and set himself and some of his fellow monks on fire. His aim in doing this was apparently twofold. He wanted to show the public that they had long since given up on the Buddhist path. He also wanted to provide his burnt corpse as an offering to the Buddha in the hope of continuing his Buddhist practice at a higher level by being reborn into the Pure Land. A state official tried to argue Zhili out of it by claiming that self-immolation was a sin and was the teaching of Mara, the king of devils, hence that such an act would not be very Buddhist. Zhili, in reply, did not deny that what he intended to do was evil and the teaching of the king of devils. Such fanatical piety obviously would take any good Buddhist off the ‘middle path’, with its extreme asceticism and myopic obsessiveness betraying immense desire and attachment. However, Zhili responded to the

state official by asserting that the Buddha and the king of devils, or just ‘the devil’, are actually the same person, the same phenomenon. The Buddha and the devil are really one [Liu 2007].¹ Zhili wrote, in a letter to the official, ‘*Other than the devil there is no Buddha; other than the Buddha there is no devil*’ (*mo wai wu Fo; Fo wai wu mo*) [Ziporyn 2000: 13]. What could Zhili have meant by this? If one wanted to reconstruct this claim in contemporary metaethical terms, what views would it produce? And why would anyone bother developing or accepting these views? These are the questions that this paper aims to answer.

To answer the first question about the meaning of Zhili’s claim, we need to establish a few basics about Tiantai Buddhism. As a form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and development of the Indian Madhyamaka tradition co-founded by Nāgārjuna, Tiantai was focused on overcoming the suffering that stems from belief in and desire for permanence and essential, substantial identity. In service of this goal, Tiantai offered an additional truth to the Madhyamaka conception of two truths or realities. The first truth is that all that humans perceive, think, and utter is merely conventional and provisionally posited. The second truth is that all that is conventional, which is everything, is ultimately empty, lacking in any substantial or self-identity. This is because all things are so impermanent and interdependent that they are empty of any identity or substance of their own.² Things are the causes and conditions that constitute them, a truth that no convention could capture, but that is the nature of all that is conventional. This is the insight that Mādhyamikas aim to experience through an overcoming of all belief, desire, and attachment. Such an insightful experience, such enlightenment, would be the ticket to that *nirvāṇa*, that liberation or release from suffering, that all Buddhists seek.

An interesting wrinkle added to the nature of *nirvāṇa* by Mādhyamikas is that it is no different from a complete absorption into *saṃsāra*, the karmic cycle of life, death, and rebirth [Garfield 1995: 75]. This makes sense, considering that *saṃsāra* can be viewed as another name for the conventional, which as we have seen is ultimately empty and is that which one experiences and identifies with in *nirvāṇa*. It could be argued that the entire Tiantai tradition is a meditation upon, and, in the end, a full explication of, the consequences of this Madhyamaka identification of *nirvāṇa* with *saṃsāra*, of emptiness with interdependence, of the ultimate with the conventional. While there are certain criticisms of his work that cannot be dealt with thoroughly here [Loy 2004: 99–103; Liu 2007; Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2013: 353–8], I will follow Brook Ziporyn’s reading of Tiantai Buddhism, so that I can fully apply the Tiantai view on the nature of moral properties to contemporary metaethics, and can thus develop novel metaethical views that provide certain therapeutic benefits. This paper will thus be an example of the emerging field of comparative metaethics [Marshall 2019]. For Ziporyn, Tiantai Buddhism performs a totally explosive application of Madhyamaka’s two truths, thus leading to its Integrated Teaching and its offering of a third truth [Ziporyn 2000, 2004, 2016, 2018].

The Tiantai third truth is simply the identification of the conventional with the ultimate, to such an extreme extent that every single thing ends up being the centre in which, or mean by which, all things are both provisionally real and ultimately empty, both a piece of *saṃsāra* and a gate into *nirvāṇa*. To better understand this third truth, it is important to first note the primary importance of the concept of *xing-ju*, or ‘inherent entailment’ (sometimes also translated as ‘inherent containment’).

¹ For a very helpful overview of Tiantai, also see Liu [2006: 277–303].

² For this point discussed in the contemporary language of vagueness or indeterminacy, see Ho [2020: 419–33].

For the founder of Tiantai, Zhiyi, reality was divided into ‘ten dharma realms’, from a Buddha realm to a realm of bodhisattvas (or Buddhas-to-be) to an animal realm to a realm of hungry ghosts, all the way down to a realm of demons and devils and evil thoughts like desires and other forms of attachment [Liu 2007: 339; Ziporyn 2018]. There are thirty worlds in each realm, thus totalling a reality composed of 3,000 worlds. The numbers themselves are a touch arbitrary. The number 3,000 means basically ‘everything’. Zhiyi further emphasized that if things are, as Mādhyamikas claim, so interdependent that they constitute each other, then there is no non-arbitrary way to distinguish one thing, world, or realm from another. Each dharma must be contained in, or entailed by, every other dharma. The nature (*xing*) of any one thing must also be entailed by, or contained (*ju*) within, the nature of any other, and every other, thing. This is what was meant by the concept of inherent entailment or containment, *xing-ju*.

Along with claiming that ‘Ten [dharma] realms are mutually contained’, Zhiyi emphasizes that ‘one instant of thought contains three thousand worlds’ [Liu 2007: 339]. It is not even only thoughts or perspectives that contain all worlds. It is rather that any event, phenomenon, or thing whatsoever contains within itself everything else. The specifically Tiantai insight is the full reversibility of the thought and reality of inherent containment. It is here as well that one approaches closer to Ziporyn’s reading of the Tiantai tradition [2000: 112–98]. For him, an entailment of the inherent entailment of all things by all things is the fact that things must not merely entail each other; they must also simply *be* each other—yet without ceasing to remain themselves. If any one thing contains and entails everything else because there is nothing to it other than the total interdependence of causes and conditions that compose it, and if such causes and conditions are simply everything else, then there is no way to say of any one thing that it is not anything else, indeed, that one thing is not everything else.

For Ziporyn’s rendering of Tiantai, what inherent entailment actually means is that one thing is all things and each thing is that one thing. In other words, the total interdependence of things entailing their emptiness—in so far as nothing enjoys a substantial identity of its own—itself entails that all things are the emptiness of everything. Each interdependent thing is what it is dependent upon—namely, everything else—thus leaving everything empty of its own identity, which is precisely what each and every distinct thing is—a way in which everything is empty. Everything is the centre or mean, the ‘middle way’ which is the meaning of the term ‘Madhyamaka’. This point is what constitutes the third truth that follows the two truths of provisional positing and ultimate emptiness. Each thing is the absolute totality of things, which is best captured in the Tiantai slogan, ‘The absolute totality encounters the absolute totality, and the result is the arising of the absolute totality’ [Ziporyn 2018].³

³ To further clarify this paragraph, it might be helpful to describe Tiantai metaphysics and mereology in contemporary terms. The Tiantai view of reality resembles Megan Wallace’s [2011], and at times Donald Baxter’s [1988], strong composition as, or many-one, identity view, which says that the parts of a whole are, taken together, identical to the whole that they compose. With Tiantai, however, what we have is something closer to perhaps a strongest conceivable composition as, or many-one, identity view, in so far as it is not merely the parts taken collectively that are identical to the whole, but is instead each and every part taken individually that is identical to the whole. There is only one concrete particular, the whole, and each individual concrete particular of the absolute infinity of them that composes that one concrete particular *is* that one concrete particular, the whole. This could be called ‘one-all identity’, instead of merely ‘many-one’ identity. In terms of the recent debate over metaphysical monism, Tiantai offers another intensified and modified view. In opposition to both Jonathan Schaffer’s [2010] priority monism, where the whole universe is metaphysically prior to its parts that irreflexively and asymmetrically depend on it, and Terry Horgan and Matjaž Portič’s [2008] existence monism,

Now, in terms of value, how does Tiantai's total explication of the consequences of interdependence, emptiness, and inherent entailment affect its view of the nature of moral facts or properties? If the Buddha realm is characterized by the compassionate bliss and pure goodness of enlightenment and *nirvāṇa*, but the Buddha realm entails and contains—and, if Ziporyn is right, is distinctly identical to—all of the other realms and worlds that constitute *samsāra*, including the realms of hungry ghosts and demons and devils with all of their attendant evil and vice, then Zhili's claim that the Buddha and the devil are the same begins to make much more sense. Buddhist goodness and devilish evil are both necessary aspects of reality. Reality could not exist without them and they could not exist without each other. This is not a mere contextualist, relativist, or contrastivist point. It is not merely that good and evil form a necessary metaphysical, conceptual, or semantic pairing. For Tiantai, instead, the interdependence of good and evil entails their mutual constitution and their ultimate identity. Good is evil. Evil is good. The Buddha is the devil. The devil is the Buddha. In the end, if one can say that the preceding reading is the right view of the Tiantai tradition, then good and evil are two ways that everything is.

It seems that it is precisely here where things become quite metaethically unique. It is also at least implicit in Zhili's explanation of why he claims that the Buddha and the devil are the same. What Zhili meant is now much clearer, especially if we read around his assertion of the identity of the Buddha and the devil. In the full quote, Zhili asks this [Ziporyn 2000: 13–14],

What difference is there between the Buddha and the devil? What inequality is there between the correct and incorrect? Truly, it is because from the beginning the perfect principle possesses the natures of both the Buddha and the devil that they are not two and yet two, [two] and yet not two. According to different karmic conditions, [this principle] manifests itself either as the Buddha or as the devil: since the original natures of the two are merged together from the beginning, *how could their manifestations be any different from one another?* This is the ultimate Integrated teaching, if we speak in accordance with nature of things, the quiddity of the demonic realm and the quiddity of the Buddha realm are said to be one quiddity, not two quiddities. Hence we are able to assert that *other than the devil there is no Buddha, and other than the Buddha there is no devil*. This is also to say that as long as there is one who is a devil, all are devils, and as long as there is one who is a Buddha, all are Buddhas; all these manifestations may be called the entire dharma-realm, each pervades and permeates everywhere as one body.

Tiantai Buddhism, then, sees good and evil, the Buddha and the devil, as two distinct yet identical ways in which everything exists, as two identical yet distinct ways in which reality is constituted.

2. Contemporary Metaethics

The question that I would like to ask now is twofold. On the one hand, how can one make sense of this Tiantai view of moral properties in contemporary metaethical terms? On the other hand, why would anyone bother with either reaching these conclusions or taking them seriously? To start to answer the first question, I have to do something rather unseemly, adding to the already-bloated metaethical taxonomy. Even worse, I have to do so by defending views that many will regard as incredible.

where only the whole exists without any parts, a Tiantai monism would have to be called something like 'one-all monism', where the whole universe is one thing that is reflexively and symmetrically identical to each one of its parts. Each part of the universe, whatever it may be, is the whole universe and vice versa.

This paper, then, can only have the modest goal of showing that these views might be credible and coherent, even might be true, and that they might produce therapeutic benefits for those of a certain temperament. Metaethical views are usually disambiguated by answering three questions [Miller 2013: 46]. First, which mental state is one primarily in when expressing a moral judgment? Second, is moral discourse in the business of aiming to report moral facts? Third, do moral facts exist, and, if so, how? These are psychological, semantic, and ontological questions, respectively.

If one answers the first question by claiming that one is primarily expressing a belief when uttering a moral judgment, then one is a moral cognitivist. If not, if one claims that we are primarily expressing emotions or desires, say, then one is a moral noncognitivist. If one answers the second question regarding moral semantics in the affirmative, saying that moral discourse is in the business of aiming to report moral facts, then one is a moral factualist. If not, then one is a moral nonfactualist. Often moral cognitivism and factualism, and moral noncognitivism and nonfactualism, come as package deals, although there are some hybrid views that mix and match. For example, there are views like moral quasi-realism and hermeneutic moral fictionalism that combine moral noncognitivism with a kind of factualism [Blackburn 1993; Kalderon 2005]. If one answers the third question regarding the existence of moral facts in the affirmative, then one is a moral realist. If not, if one denies the existence of moral facts, then one is a moral anti-realist.

One could be a robust or minimal moral realist or anti-realist. If one is a robust moral realist, then one believes that moral facts exist truly objectively and mind-independently, either in nature (moral naturalism) or in some irreducibly non-natural sense (moral non-naturalism). If one claims that moral facts exist, but are reducible to the preferences of some agent—whether that agent be a god (moral supernaturalism), a society or culture (moral relativism), a rational agent (moral constructivism), or a mere individual (moral subjectivism)—then one can be regarded as a minimal moral realist or anti-realist, depending on whether one already leans more toward robust realism or instead anti-realism. If one denies that moral facts exist at all, then one is a robust moral anti-realist. One could be a robust moral anti-realist and be either a moral noncognitivist and nonfactualist, or a cognitivist and factualist.

An example of the former view would be moral emotivism, which says that a moral judgment is a technically meaningless projection of an emotion corresponding to nothing existing in the world [Ayer 1952]. An example of the latter view would be moral error theory, which says a moral judgment is an expression of a moral belief that is aiming to meaningfully correspond with some moral fact of the matter existing in the world, but which always fails to do so because no such fact exists, leaving morality as a systematically false discourse. For the error theorist, morality is systematically false because moral facts are categorical reasons—reasons to act that are objectively prescriptive, non-negotiable, and absolutely practically authoritative—and such reasons are too metaphysically ‘queer’ or weird to exist [Mackie 1977]. There are no categorical reasons, and so any atomic judgments that use them will be false.

In reviewing these metaethical options, one can notice two shared features: a metaethical view claims either that a moral judgment can *possibly succeed* in corresponding to the world or that it *necessarily fails* to correspond to the world. As far as I can tell, robust and minimal moral realist views are partial success theories. They say that a moral judgment is in the business of possibly being true and that some actually are true. One can presume that most moral realists would say that ‘Hitler was a bad man’ is a true moral judgment and that ‘Hitler was a good man’ is

a false moral judgment. A robust moral anti-realist would say, on the other hand, that moral judgments necessarily fail to be true, either because the judgments are technically meaningless (if one is of a more noncognitivist and nonfactualist bent) or because all moral judgments are false, again because moral facts are either empirically undetectable or metaphysically impossible, hence non-existent.

To emphasize this point, neither robust moral anti-realist view would say that 'Hitler was a bad man' fails to correspond to the world, because 'Hitler was a good man' is in fact a true judgment. Rather, for a moral emotivist, both judgments are technically meaningless projections of emotions and so are not even in the business of being possibly true, while for the moral error theorist both judgments necessarily fail to be true because they involve trying to accurately describe moral facts of the matter that simply do not exist. Robust moral anti-realists thus say that all moral judgments, all applied and normative ethical views, are either meaningless or false. Again, robust and minimal moral realists say that most, if not all, moral judgments are meaningful, and some indeed are true.

Before discussing Tiantai metaethical views in contemporary terms, I would like to ask why one comes to hold a particular metaethical view in the first place. It seems that the usual motivation of epistemic hygiene inspires the average metaethicist. Many metaethicists simply want to know the right answers to the three questions mentioned above. Sometimes, metaethicists who already hold certain applied and normative ethical views wish to vindicate these views by securing solid psychological, semantic, and ontological bases for their expression. One can moralize with more confidence if a moral judgment is a meaningful expression of some belief about a moral fact of the matter that either robustly or at least minimally exists. An established robust or minimal moral realist view provides a safe foundation from which one can engage in moral discourse and find out which moral judgments are true or false. Occasionally hitting the mark and discovering some moral truth is possible only if one has already established that morality is meaningful and truth-apt.

On the other hand, the same epistemic motivation can lead to robustly anti-realist conclusions. One could become sceptical or negatively dogmatic about moral facts. After all, the interminable intractability of moral disagreements seems to betray either the meaninglessness or pervasive error of all moral talk. Moreover, if one is even slightly naturalistic in one's worldview and does not mind science mostly leading the way in determining which entities exist in the world, then one would take it to heart that no hard or soft science uses moral facts to explain anything. So, one can engage in metaethical reflection in order to debunk a discourse like morality that contributes nothing to knowledge. This conclusion is as driven by a desire for a specifically epistemic upshot to metaethical reflection as moral realist conclusions are. It is just that, while the former debunks, the latter vindicates.

For some robust moral anti-realists, such debunking can have more than epistemic benefits. Often, expunging nonsense and falsehood from one's life has therapeutic benefits. That is, one lives better by not using a discourse infected with nonsense or error. Only one metaethical view, assertive moral abolitionism, has proposed debunking morality not only for its epistemic failure, but also its for negative impact on one's life. The assertive abolitionist recommends abolishing its use entirely. An assertive moral abolitionist is an error theorist who sees no reason to keep on using morality, and so encourages abolishing it. Morality should be abolished not only because it is completely false, but because it generates many detrimental consequences for its

users. For example, it renders disagreements intractable, leads to elitism and authoritarianism through ideological delusion, and justifies international wars [Mackie 1980; Hinckfuss 1987; Garner 2007; Marks 2013]. Morality also often either results from or induces emotional turmoil. For abolitionists, morality is a pathological phenomenon involving the expression of predominantly negative emotions like sadness, anxiety, fear, pity, anger, resentment, indignation, disgust, condemnation, outrage, and contempt [Marks 2013: 83]. One rarely moralizes joyfully or peacefully. Abolishing morality might bring joy and peace, however.

An upshot of abolishing morality, beyond epistemic hygiene, is the hopeful elimination of the many negative feelings and experiences that attend participation in moral belief and discourse. Of course, most error theorists are not abolitionists, and I know of no noncognitivist and nonfactualist who recommend abolition. Most robust moral anti-realists aim to redeem morality from its ontological nullity. We have already seen how some hybrid views like quasi-realism and hermeneutic fictionalism compensate for noncognitivism by viewing moral semantics in a factualist manner. Moral conservationists, moral substitutionists, revolutionary moral expressivists, revolutionary moral fictionalists, and moral reformists all aim to redeem morality from its systematic falsity [Olson 2014; Lutz 2014; Husi 2014; Svoboda 2015; Joyce 2016]. They think that morality is too useful in generating social cooperation to be jettisoned. They wish to insulate their metaethical conclusions from possible practical side-effects in much the same way as some think that Pyrrhonian sceptics would have to insulate themselves from their scepticism in order to live [Burnyeat and Frede 1997]. They think that morality is worth whatever social or psychological costs it might also generate. Only abolitionists find morality not as useful. They see the benefits of abolition as outweighing the costs. I am usually a moral abolitionist. I agree that morality is pathological and that it generates more social and psychological problems than it solves. The epistemic and therapeutic benefits of abolition far outweigh, for me at least, the supposed benefits of morality. But I wonder if there might be a way to obtain the same results of moral abolitionism without first being a robust moral anti-realist.

To return to the features that all metaethical views share, the overall metaethical taxonomy seems incomplete. There are other possible metaethical views that, while seemingly incredible, appear actually coherent and even seemingly true. And it is these views that I think will deliver the same epistemic and therapeutic benefits of error-theoretic abolitionism, perhaps even more so. Recall that all metaethical views that treat morality as at least truth-apt are either partial success or full error theories. What about a full success theory? What if there were metaethical views that said that some moral contradictions are true and, moreover, that all moral contradictions are true? The truth glut of such views would be the polar opposite of the truth gap of robust anti-realist views. I will call such views *moral dialetheism* and *moral trivialism*. I will claim that moral dialetheism necessarily explodes into moral trivialism, and that moral dialetheism and moral trivialism are the contemporary metaethical renditions of the Tiantai insights regarding moral properties. These views will then be defended for the therapeutic benefits that they offer.

3. Explosive Metaethics

The statement that ‘*other than the devil there is no Buddha, and other than the Buddha there is no devil*’ sounds like a dialetheia—that is, a true contradiction [Priest 2002,

2006a; Berto, Priest, and Weber 2018]. The Buddha, and all that Buddhahood entails (enlightenment, *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate, and so on), is good. The devil, and all that devilry entails (delusion, *saṃsāra*, the conventional, and so on), is evil. If the Buddha and the devil are the same, then good is the same as evil, and vice versa. But to claim that the Buddha is the devil, and that good is evil, is to utter a contradiction. If Buddhahood is to be anything, it should not be devilish and evil. But again, as we have seen, for Tiantai Buddhism, the claim that the Buddha and good are the same as the devil and evil is true because of the nature of inherent entailment and the ultimate identity *qua* ultimate difference of all of the things, worlds, and realms that compose reality. Therefore, to say that the Buddha is the devil and the devil the Buddha, and that good is evil and evil good, is to utter a true contradiction—that is, a dialetheia and, moreover, a moral dialetheia. A moral dialetheia would be a moral judgment such that it and its negation are both true. It is true the Buddha is the Buddha, and thus good. It is also true the Buddha is the devil, and thus evil. The same goes for the devil and evil. The Buddha *is* the devil, good *is* evil, without thereby collapsing the distinction. In this Tiantai case, a moral contradiction is true.

To broaden it out, moral dialetheism would be the metaethical view that some moral contradictions are true. Like robust and minimal moral realist views, moral dialetheism would be cognitivist, factualist, and realist. However, instead of saying that only some moral judgments are true and some others false, it would say that some moral judgments are both true and false along with other moral judgments being either true or false. Moral dialetheism would be the kind of moral realism that would say that both some moral judgments and their negations succeed at capturing some moral fact of the matter, and some moral facts and their opposites are co-instantiated by some states of affairs or actions or persons. Whether a moral fact or property is a value or a reason is not important here. We can reduce one to the other, and still have moral dialetheism. One's axiological or metanormative preferences are orthogonal to the issue of moral truth here. The precise nature of moral truthmakers can be determined after the fact, and, most likely, such a normative ethical and metaethical debate about the nature of moral facts or properties and how to best capture them would be just as intractable as the applied ethical, or atomically ethical, debate. For instance, Buddhist scholars are still debating whether Buddhism should be viewed as a kind of consequentialism or instead a virtue ethics, and whether a Buddhist should support, say, abortion [Keown 1992; Harvey 2000; Goodman 2009].

The main propagator of dialetheism, Graham Priest, has claimed, along with Yasuo Deguchi and Jay Garfield [2008: 395–402], that it is best to view Madhyamaka Buddhism as dialetheical. For Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest (DGP), the relation of ultimate truth or reality to conventional truth or reality is one of a true contradiction: 'since the things claimed about ultimate reality are often contradictory to things claimed about conventional reality, if these two things are ultimately the same reality it is a contradictory one' [ibid.: 400]. For DGP, the contradictions that one finds in Mahāyāna and Madhyamaka texts are to be accepted as unambiguous and literal, and not to be explained away by some kind of contextualism, relativism, or fictionalism. While they do not say so explicitly, I think that we can assume that, for them, the dialetheical nature of the ultimate and conventional extends to Madhyamaka ethical claims, such that we can safely say that they would accept a reading of Nāgārjuna, for example, as being a moral dialetheist.

Now, one may wonder at this point, if the nature of the relation between the ultimate and conventional is one of true contradiction, how is this still only a dialetheical point? That is, if the ultimate is ultimate and conventional, and vice versa, how does that not include everything? How have we not slipped from some contradictions being true to all contradictions being true? How have we not slipped into trivialism, the view that all, not just some, contradictions are true? Implied by this question, and relevant for this paper, is the question of how can one say that only some moral contradictions are true and others not. How is it, then, that moral dialetheism does not necessarily explode into moral trivialism? Indeed, these questions are pressing if we accept the classical logical law of the principle of explosion, which says that if any contradiction, moral or not, is true, then every contradiction, and so every proposition, is true (*ex contradictione quodlibet*). For Priest, a major motivation for dialetheism is that it is meant to prevent explosion into trivialism through the development of a non-classical or paraconsistent logic.

Ziporyn [2013] has raised these questions about trivialism by offering a Tiantai-inspired response to DGP. On the one hand, he is willing to admit that DGP might be right that a figure like Nāgārjuna did at least try to prevent his dialetheism from slipping into trivialism by only applying his *reductios* to a limited set of cases or contexts, so that only some contradictions ended being up true, rational, or acceptable. Ziporyn also notes that Nāgārjuna did seemingly leave out of conventional truth the merely false statements of other religious and non-Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions, rendering only good and common-sense and Madhyamaka Buddhist rhetoric, but not thereby *all* conventional statements, as conventionally true. On the other hand, it was Nāgārjuna himself who identified *nirvāṇa* with *saṃsāra* in the first place, which, as we have seen, seems to include absolutely everything. Ziporyn thus says that we need to look to Tiantai to fully explicate the implications of this Madhyamaka identification of the ultimate with the conventional, and so to explode into full trivialism because that is what is necessarily entailed by Madhyamaka's own premises. In other words, for Ziporyn, Tiantai is honest enough to bite the trivialist bullet, to perfect the Madhyamaka tendency to identify the ultimate and conventional, and so to view all contradictions, and thus statements, as true.

Priest has long resisted any explosion of dialetheism into trivialism. DGP also resisted Ziporyn's Tiantai-inspired trivialist reading, with its emphasis on Tiantai's addition of a third truth to the two truths doctrine, which says that absolutely every conventional statement is ultimately true. In Priest's attempt to resist trivialism, he confessed the difficulty, if not impossibility, of such resistance in so far as the trivialist always already agrees with any classical and dialetheical attempt to prevent trivialism, since he already believes that every judgment is true, including the classical and dialetheical judgments that trivialism is false [Priest 2006b: 56–71]. There is no disagreeing with a trivialist because he already agrees with you. Denying trivialism seems impossible since the denial of trivialism would be just another trivially true judgment affirmed by trivialism. Still, Priest tried to offer a series of objections to trivialism that seem to amount to the claim that trivialism is either impossible or meaningless or contrary to experience and action, criticisms that are reminiscent of charges levied against absolute sceptics like Pyrrhonians and certain Mādhyamikas like Candrakīrti over the centuries, charges with which they have more than effectively dealt, I would say.

In response to Ziporyn, DGP did not bother with arguing against trivialism, but rather flatly denied what Ziporyn asserted, by claiming that they do not think that

Zhiyi and other Tiantai thinkers meant ‘absolute identity’ by ‘inherent entailment’ [Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008: 356]. Interestingly, this is Liu’s [2007: 405–9] disagreement with Ziporyn as well. While I will avoid deep and sophisticated exegetical textual debates that are probably best left to Buddhologists, I will claim that the problem with such criticisms of Ziporyn is that they are one-sided, missing the point that Ziporyn had already said that, by ‘absolute identity’, he did not mean the erasure of the simultaneous absolute difference of all things from all things. *Xing-ju* means ‘absolute identity *as* absolute difference, and vice versa’. Nowhere does Ziporyn say that Tiantai involves the abolition of difference. Rather, he constantly champions the fact that, according to him, Tiantai perfects difference by making it absolute.

Anyway, it seems that I have said enough to establish that, if Ziporyn is right that Tiantai makes explicit what is implied in the Madhyamaka tradition, and so the true contradiction obtains as to the absolute identity *qua* absolute difference of the ultimate with the conventional, then not only is Tiantai Buddhism offering us a full-blown trivialism, but it must also, as an example of that trivialism, be offering us the novel metaethical views of both moral dialetheism *and* moral trivialism. Moral trivialism would perfect moral dialetheism and say, not just that some, but that every, moral judgment and its negation is true, every moral contradiction is true, or, in other words, every moral judgment is true. Again, this is because the Buddha is the devil, good is evil, and what follows from Buddhahood and devilry are also identical—and everything that *is* (namely, everything) is both the Buddha and the devil, good and evil—leaving it to be the case that any moral judgment whatsoever would be true because any moral judgment whatsoever would have its truthmaker, the moral fact or property of goodness or evil that makes it true, instantiated by all states of affairs, persons, actions, and so on. ‘All is good’ is true. ‘All is evil’ is true. ‘Hitler was a bad man’ is true. ‘Hitler was a good man’ is true. And so on.

To further delineate moral trivialism, I would like to note a few different aspects of the view that seem to follow from both its plausibility and the explosive consequences of admitting at least one true moral contradiction. On the one hand, moral trivialism will be a metaethical view that claims that all atomic moral judgments, all applied ethical views, are true. On the other hand, it will be a metaethical view that claims that all normative ethical views, views about how applied ethical views are best constructed and expressed, are true. We can call this ‘metaethical moral trivialism’. If all moral facts obtain, there is no applied or normative ethical view that fails to succeed in saying something morally true. The moral judgment ‘abortion is wrong and impermissible’ is true, but so are the moral judgments ‘abortion is permissible’ and ‘abortion is right and obligatory.’ Pick any applied ethical issue (euthanasia, charity, vegetarianism, recycling, and so on), and every moral judgment about something’s being right or wrong, something’s being prohibited or permissible or obligatory, is true. All atomic moral judgments about what one should do, and how one should be, in any applied context are true.

But also pick any normative ethical view (natural law theory, deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics, and so on), and its prescriptions regarding how to conceive of and express moral judgments is true. It is true that one ought to follow the Natural Law and affirm the Categorical Imperative. It is true that one should act in such a way that they maximize morally preferable consequences. It is true that one should be a good person. It is true that one of these approaches is the correct approach. It is

true that each of them is the wrong approach. It is true that each of them is the right approach. It is also true that one should ignore the Natural Law, violate the Categorical Imperative, always maximize morally objectionable consequences, and be a bad person. It is true there is a correct normative ethical view. It is just that each one of them is correct. According to metaethical moral trivialism, a moral judgment cannot be false, and neither can a view about how to be moral be false. All moral judgments about how one should act or be, *and* all judgments about how one should go about being moral, are true.

But, on a third hand, moral trivialism would seem to entail, again because of the principle of explosion, that all metaethical views are also true. Moral trivialism is also a ‘metametaethical’ view. It says not only that all applied and normative ethical views are true, but also that all metaethical views are true. So, it says not only that moral cognitivism, factualism, and realism are true, but also that moral noncognitivism, nonfactualism, and anti-realism are true. And it says that any hybrid combination of these views is also true. Moral trivialism as a metametaethical view says that metaethical moral trivialism is true, but it also says that all other metaethical views are true as well. All forms of moral realism, voluntarism, and anti-realism are true. Metametaethical moral trivialism says that all applied, normative, and metaethical views are true. Every view about what and how one should do what they do and be the way they are, and what serves as the psychological, semantic, and ontological basis for what and how they should do what they do and be the way they are, is true.

Metametaethical moral trivialism says that all partial success metaethical theories are true. But it says that total error theory is true as well. And obviously it says that total success theory, metaethical moral trivialism, is true. It even says that all noncognitivist, nonfactualist, and anti-realist views are true, although those views themselves deny the cognitivism, factualism, and realism that are essential to metaethical moral trivialism. For metametaethical moral trivialism, every metaethical view is true, even the metaethical views that deny metaethical moral trivialism. What each of applied ethical, normative ethical, metaethical and metametaethical moral trivialism entails is that all moral contradictions, all moral judgments at all levels of abstraction, are true. Moral trivialism is fully morally explosive. This is, I think, the implicit Tiantai metaethical view—not merely moral dialetheism, but full-blown moral trivialism. And these two views are novel for us today, and serve to complete the contemporary metaethical taxonomy in terms of epistemic options.

4. Therapeutic Metaethics

Two questions might emerge at this point. How could one possibly argue for moral dialetheism, moral trivialism, or trivialism in general? And why would anyone bother developing such extreme views?

To answer the first question, it is important to note again that denying trivialism, and so moral trivialism in particular, is impossible because trivialism already says that its denial is true. But if one wanted a more positive case for trivialism, one could look to the work of one of the few other living defenders of trivialism, Paul Kabay [2010]. He provides many very sophisticated positive arguments for trivialism, and by implication for moral trivialism, even though he does not argue in metaethical terms.

Kabay argues for trivialism by offering valid arguments based on, for example, possibilism, the Curry Paradox, the Characterization Principle, and an unrestricted application of the Principle of Sufficient Reason [ibid.: 50–68]. To turn any of these arguments for trivialism into arguments for moral trivialism, all that one would have to do is to add the word ‘moral’ to the premises. While I fail to find any problems with them, I will leave it to the intrepid reader to check Kabay’s arguments to see if they think that the arguments succeed. We have already seen how Tiantai Buddhism argues for moral trivialism. If one finds neither the arguments from Tiantai nor those from Kabay convincing or at least plausible, then there is not much else that one can do. I will instead conclude by offering the therapeutic motivation for these Tiantai-inspired novel metaethical views.

If moral trivialism is true, then we necessarily have global trivialism. I have developed moral dialetheism, and then moral trivialism, as merely one of an infinity of ways to obtain global trivialism. I could have just started with any generic contradiction and said that it was true, and then received the epistemic and therapeutic benefits of global trivialism, but I wanted to develop the specific kind of moral trivialism found in Tiantai Buddhism because I think that there are specific therapeutic benefits that accrue from ‘going trivialist’ in the realm of morality and moral reflection, benefits that at present are offered only by moral abolitionists. But that should not detract from the fact that if moral trivialism works then so must global trivialism, and we would gain all of the epistemic and therapeutic benefits of global trivialism as a consequence, regardless of how anyone felt about the arguments coming from Tiantai Buddhists.

Few things betray a person’s sadness and anger more than their moral intuitions and judgments. Considering the near-ubiquity of negativity bias, morality is a predominately negative phenomenon. This is to say, again, that morality is basically pathological. We have seen how assertive moral abolitionism imagines the upshot of abolishing morality as being the hopeful overcoming of the false beliefs and negative emotions that determine, and follow from, moral discourse. There are therapeutic benefits to abolishing morality, it is claimed. Now, hopefully, we can start to see how there might be therapeutic benefits to trivializing morality as well.

There is a trend in philosophy to be talking about an area with the title ‘*Taking X Seriously*’. David Enoch’s *Taking Morality Seriously* [2013], which defends one of the most robustly realist views on the market, is the metaethical version of this approach. This paper has tried the opposite approach. It recommends seeing what happens by taking morality trivially. Perhaps we could also call it ‘taking morality frivolously’. What is the outcome of taking morality trivially? I say that it is liberation from moral anxiety, emancipation from moral sadness, detachment from moral anger. Kabay himself explains how anxiety is overcome by global trivialism. He notes how trivialism would fit in well with the Hellenistic schools in the West—like Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism, and Pyrrhonian Scepticism—and their attempt to achieve *ataraxia*, or freedom from disturbance and anxiety, or simply tranquillity. He even describes global trivialism in explicitly moral terms: ‘if trivialism were true, then every state of affairs obtains—good or bad’ [Kabay 2010: 138]. This is precisely the point of moral trivialism, and it is exactly what Tiantai Buddhism offers. All things good and bad, right and wrong, obtain. Every applied, normative, metaethical, and metametaethical view is true. Kabay gives the moral trivialist some comforting words to offer the morally anxious [ibid.]:

Why be worried? Because of the misfortune that befalls you? You regret not having taken a different course of action? But necessarily all things obtain—including everything that is bad for you. There is nothing you could have done to prevent this. So why regret your past actions? Instead, be happy and relaxed. And besides, everything good obtains too—you have missed out on nothing. The conditions for a peaceful, tranquil, and meaningful life are here to enjoy. And there is nothing you need to do in order to ensure that this remains so. Stop your worry, and be happy—and do whatever pleases you.

It could be objected that moral trivialism also entails that one remains in a state of moral anxiety, with there being nothing that one could do about it. So be it. As usual, such a point does not really count as an objection to moral trivialism. Moral trivialism says that we can be in a state of imperturbable tranquillity and also remain morally anxious. This should make all moral nontrivialists happy, as they can continue holding their particular moral views and indulging their moral outrage. Being a calm and happy moral trivialist does not entail that one is not also a commonly and deeply disturbed rabid moralizer. This should be a relief to all ethicists and metaethicists. They can be moral trivialists and continue with business as usual. On the other hand, it could be that realizing that one is fated to moral anxiety leads one to liberate oneself further from such moral anxiety, for why should one be anxious about their inescapable anxiety? Why not be accepting and peaceful and joyous about it? This could release one entirely from moral anxiety. Moral trivialism can deliver our desired goal of freedom from moral anxiety even if we are consigned to moral anxiety.

The superabundance of moral truth entailed by moral trivialism can free us as much, if not more, from the pathology of morality as the superabundance of moral falsity entailed by assertive moral abolitionism supposedly can. Indeed, moral trivialism beats assertive moral abolitionism at its own game by not needing to win converts to the cause of abolishing morality. The moral trivialist leaves everything exactly as it is, and obtains the desired deliverance. Often the best way to defeat something is not to fight and destroy it, to abolish it, but rather to perfect it. And absolutely any moral thought or judgment whatsoever, or anything at all really, can be used to obtain liberation from moral attachment and concern, and thereby perfect morality. This is what Ziporyn says that Tiantai Buddhism accomplishes with respect to morality, with its ubiquitous application of *upāya*, or skillful means, to any moral judgment whatsoever [2000: 344–84]. Every moral judgment provides access to the trivial truth of everything's simultaneous Buddhahood and devilry, its goodness and evil, its instantiation of all moral facts. For example, we find Zhili summarizing the point of cutting off his fingers and setting himself on fire in this way [ibid.: 21]:

my present project, of burning the body and cutting off fingers, is helpful and in accordance with my practice, so that 'the sacrifice of body, life, and wealth' [which the *Lotus* calls the true support of the dharma] will be beneficial to both our wealth and to the dharma. So 'all phenomena are reducible to and converge in asceticism'; it is the entire dharma-realm [just like any other possible practice or fact]. Thus, since the Buddha and the devil are one in essence, proper and improper dharma-gates [i.e., methods of practice] are originally melded together; this is called 'perfect morality' (keeping of the precepts), what is called the 'skillful means' that are inherent in the body of the truth. How could this not be so of the devil's preaching? In this way, not to be afraid or surprised while hearing the devil's preaching and overcoming one's attachment to the Buddha are good ways to start practicing the three contemplations.

Luckily, perfecting morality through moral trivialism does not require that we engage in acts of self-immolation. Indeed, it requires no great effort at all, because morality is

already intrinsically perfect. Moral trivialism merely involves morality becoming what it is. ‘Going moral trivialist’ is just the making perfect of morality’s perfection. As Ziporyn argues, perfecting morality, fully trivializing morality by affirming the identity of good and evil, is what Tiantai Buddhism meant by ‘enlightenment’ [ibid.: 301]:

Enlightenment means not the overcoming of evil so as to manifest good but the full manifestation and realization of both good and evil. This manifestation consists in a realization of their mutual identity and the immutability of both. Neither can ever be eliminated, both have been there from the beginning, and neither obstructs the other. Indeed, to fully be one necessarily implies also being the other.

Regardless of whether anyone is convinced of the plausibility of moral dialetheism and trivialism, or the epistemic and therapeutic benefits of ‘going moral trivialist’, we can at least appreciate how the views complete the metaethical taxonomy in epistemic terms. We now know what a complete moral success theory would look like.

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