Can Fictionalists Have Faith?[1]

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Abstract: According to non-doxastic theories of propositional faith, belief that p is not necessary for faith that p. Rather, propositional faith merely requires a 'positive cognitive attitude'. This broad condition, however, can be satisfied by several pragmatic approaches to a domain, including fictionalism. This paper shows precisely how fictionalists can have faith given non-doxastic theory, and explains why this is problematic. It then explores one means of separating the two theories, in virtue of the fact that the truth of the propositions in a discourse is of little consequence for fictionalists, whereas their truth matters deeply for the faithful. Although promising, this approach incurs several theoretical costs, hence providing a compelling reason to favour a purely doxastic account of faith.

Introduction

According to non-doxastic theories of faith (NDT), you don't have to believe *p* to have faith that *p*. Rather, the cognitive component to one's propositional faith may be satisfied by the "taking on" of a non-doxastic attitude. Typically, this attitude is adopted for pragmatic purposes – as a means to attain a particular goal. This can make it more appropriate to evaluate the rational status of faith on practical, rather than purely epistemic grounds, particularly if the proposition in question is not believed. These non-doxastic theories are also sometimes developed as general theories of propositional faith, rather than covering solely *religious* content. This enjoys the virtue of accounting for an important psychological attitude that has often been regarded distinctively religious in nature, but is actually held toward many different contents.

There are some interesting prima facie similarities between NDT and other pragmatic approaches to a particular domain and, as I have jointly argued in a recent article (Malcolm and Scott (2016)), this is especially true of what we may call "revolutionary fictionalism". The decision to adopt a cognitive attitude toward a proposition and to positively affirm it for pragmatic reasons, despite not believing it, is one also taken by the fictionalist. It seems as though at least some fictionalists meet the conditions often specified by NDT. This provides an interesting objection to the advocate of NDT: if you can't entirely distinguish the two positions, then surely NDT becomes untenable.[2] But why should this be the case? Why does fictionalism appear to be a counterexample to NDT? Even if NDT appears to grant faith to fictionalists, why should this "fictionalist-style counterexample" pose a problem for the advocate of NDT?

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[1] This is an uncorrected pre-print version. When citing please use the final journal published version.

[2] The discussion of this issue is covered at the end of the article (i.e. Malcolm and Scott (2016), 14-15). My statement of the objection here is paraphrased from the short introduction to this issue given in that paper.

The overall issue is only briefly introduced in the (2016) article, and it is the aim of this paper to take the problem further in two important respects: first, by showing precisely *how* fictionalists can have faith, and second, explaining *why* this is a problem for NDT. I then consider a promising response to this problem that was not addressed in the article, which is to distinguish NDT from fictionalism by the difference in importance that they each give to *truth*. Although the truth of the proposition in question is of no importance to the fictionalist, to the person with faith, it matters deeply whether the proposition is true. Whilst initially appealing, I will show how this response incurs a number of high theoretical costs for NDT. Given the problems raised by this issue of fictionalists having faith, I suggest we have a compelling reason to favour a doxastic account of faith over NDT. I will begin by summarising the conditions that are often specified for NDT, before directly addressing the issue of fictionalism.

Non-Doxastic Theories of Faith

What classifies as a "non-doxastic theory of faith"? There are many theories in the present literature that are unified in their rejection of belief as a necessary condition for faith. However, not all non-doxastic theories strictly concern *propositional* faith ('strictly' here in the sense that they solely aim to offer an account of faith *as* a propositional attitude).[3] Some theories also include non-propositional and behavioural components to faith. For instance, Kvanvig's (2013) account defines faith as an 'orientation' toward a 'goal' or 'ideal', and for Swinburne (2005), faith can be a matter of acting on certain 'assumptions', such as the proposition 'there is a God'.[4] Despite the fact that propositional faith is not the central component under analysis with all non-doxastic accounts, they don't clearly *exclude* such an attitude, and so it may yet be possible to determine what this attitude would be on the theory. If that is so, then these sorts of accounts will still be included under the conditions for propositional faith that will be outlined presently. However, the analysis will only be necessary for the propositional component to the account. Of course, even those theories that focus specifically on propositional faith appear to come in a great variety. Despite this we needn't interpret them as differing *in kind*, but rather *by emphasis*. Often, the accounts differ simply in terms of the preferred attitude specified to stand in place of belief, be it, for instance, imagination (Schellenberg (2014)), acceptance (Alston (1996)), acquiescence (Buchak (2012)), assumption (Howard-Snyder (2013)), etc. Provided the conditions for NDT are specified broadly enough, most, if not all of the existing accounts should meet those conditions. I propose, then, that we take a broad view as to which theories will come under an analysis of non-doxastic *propositional* faith, even if that analysis is not sufficient for the theory's full account of faith, which may include other components, particularly those that are behavioural or fiducial.

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[3] Perhaps the accounts that most straightforwardly deal with propositional faith are Howard-Snyder (2013; 2016), Buchak (2012; 2014), Schellenberg (2005; 2014), Alston (1996) and Audi (2011). However, this list is not exhaustive, and the proponents mentioned here also often provide accounts of other kinds of faith, or at least mention that there are other kinds.

[4] Also worthy of note are fiducial accounts such as Bishop (2007; 2014) and McKaughan (2013).

Let's begin, then, with the first condition, which has already been stated, in which faith that *p* requires "a positive cognitive attitude toward *p*". Those attitudes that will meet this description must be *cognitive*, i.e. representational and truth-conditional, and *positive*, meaning that they involve a positive orientation towards the object of the proposition. Various kinds of volitional mental state can meet these requirements, such as those noted in the foregoing, and others that will include supposition, assent, affirmation, etc. A typical way to characterise the nature of these states is that to accept (assume, assent to, etc.) *p* is to take *p* as a premise in one's practical reasoning. As such, one acts as if *p*, adopting a policy of going along with *p* in some or all of one's deliberations (see Cohen (1992), 4). One family-resemblance feature that these non-doxastic mental states all share is, therefore, that they can be adopted voluntarily, or *at will*. The mental state is "taken on" by the agent voluntarily. The family of non-doxastic attitudes offers a clear contrast with *belief*, which, of course, is also a positive cognitive attitude, but one that is not taken on voluntarily, but is formed without our (direct) volitional control.

It is often claimed that outright *disbelief* that *p* is incompatible with a positive cognitive attitude that *p* (Audi (2011), 73). It's uncontroversial that belief that *p* is *rationally* incompatible with disbelief that *p*. However, things are different when the attitude is non-doxastic. In that case, the incompatibility referred to here is pragmatic rather than rational or logical. The reasoning behind this is that these non-doxastic attitudes are adopted in order to accomplish your practical aims, but this is not possible if you disbelieve that your aims can be accomplished. However, when we consider certain examples, this claim seems dubious. For instance, imagine that a lawyer believes her client is so obviously guilty that he stands no chance of being found innocent. In order to put her doubts aside and make a compelling case for his innocence she accepts that he's innocent as a way of motivating herself to defend him passionately in court, and to pursue all the available avenues to find evidence proving his innocence. This looks both psychologically possible and prudentially advisable.[5]

It looks as though a non-doxastic cognitive attitude is, then, *compatible* in a practical sense with outright disbelief in the same proposition. One can accept, imagine, or assent to *p* as a means to achieve one's aims, even if one disbelieves *p*. It's an important component of NDT, though, that propositional faith *excludes* disbelief. Given that my aims here are to faithfully represent this class of theories, I suggest that this claim is stated as an explicit condition within the analysis, rather than being entailed by the first condition. So, the second condition advocates of NDT ought to state is that for propositional faith, a subject must have "no outright disbelief that *p*". Since I have rejected the argument in favour of this condition, it currently stands undefended, and I am aware of no further argument for it that exists in the NDT literature.[6] As we will explore further in the next section, whether the condition is defensible is crucial for determining who has faith.

The two conditions outlined thus far are distinctly cognitive in nature, but faith is often thought to involve various non-cognitive components as well. Arguments for these are

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[5] This objection is also raised in Malcolm and Scott (2016, 12-13).

[6] In fact, the recent article by Howard-Snyder (2016) reiterates his support for this condition, without offering argument in its favour. He does give some arguments for it in his (2013) though, which are similar to the argument addressed in this section.

often developed from language. For instance, it sounds incongruous to say I have 'faith that terrorism will succeed' or 'faith that we will lose the battle'. This is because our use of "faith" in these expressions typically conveys a positive evaluation if its object, and these are not propositions we tend to evaluate positively. We can elicit the same intuition for religious cases when considering instances of *negative* evaluation. For example, imagine someone who believes that God exists but despises this God, and dedicates her life to opposing those who are committed to God. While our character might rightly be described as a *theist* in virtue of her belief, it doesn't appear appropriate to attribute her with *faith*. Perhaps the reason for this is that faith has a positive valence. There is a difference between the hateful theist and someone who loves, trusts and is wholly committed to God, and that difference is partly in terms of attitudes. In the former case, the theist believes that God exists, but has a negative evaluation of God. In the latter, the subject believes that God exists, but has positive affection for God, entailing a positive evaluation. Both subjects are theists, but whilst the first merely *believes* that God exists, we might say that the second has *faith* that God exists.[7] Although this example suggests that one's affections are the grounds of the positive evaluation, one needn't have affection for the object of the proposition to evaluate it positively. For instance, I needn't have affection for politics to have faith that politics can be a force for good – I could simply regard politics as a good thing. Nevertheless, often the evaluation will be grounded in affection. Hence, our third condition on propositional faith is that a subject must have "a positive evaluative/affective attitude toward *p*".

I take the three conditions thus stated to be a fair representation of the propositional component in a broad range of non-doxastic theories. They are wide enough in scope to accommodate most or all of the various formulations, regardless of which component their advocate seeks to emphasise. According to NDT, then, a person S has faith that *p* iff S has:

(1) a positive cognitive attitude toward *p*;
(2) no outright disbelief that *p*;
(3) a positive evaluative/affective attitude toward *p*.

Note that this analysis accounts for propositional faith towards a content regardless of the domain, be it religious or not. So, one's faith that democracy will succeed, faith that the marriage will last, or faith that we will make it home safely are all extensions of the same kind of propositional attitude, whose intension is specified by this analysis. NDT is therefore theoretically parsimonious – something often regarded as a theoretical virtue.

When outlining (1) we saw that it can be satisfied either by non-volitional belief, or by a volitional non-doxastic state. In the former case, if we want to know why someone has come to have the belief, we might look to evidential considerations for an explanation. With a non-doxastic attitude, though, it's not evidential, or any other epistemic considerations that explain one's faith, but rather one's *practical* concerns. Why would someone choose to voluntarily adopt an attitude towards a proposition that she does not believe? One answer is

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[7] Sometimes this argument is stated in terms of the distinction between the believing demons and the faithful, taken from the biblical passage in James 2:19. For instance, Plantinga claims that 'The difference between believer and devil, therefore, lies in the area of *affections*: of love and hate, attraction and repulsion, desire and detestation' (2000, 292).

given in my earlier example of the lawyer. She accepts that her client is innocent as a *means* to achieving the *end* of effectively defending his innocence. It's widespread amongst accounts of NDT to draw analogies between examples of means-ends reasoning and propositional faith. For instance, Alston (2007, 133) famously draws comparison between his account of faith and an army general who, without having all the necessary information to hand to accurately disperse his troops, accepts the locations of the incoming enemy soldiers as a means to direct their movements. In the same way, Howard-Snyder (2013, 364) imagines a character, set out on a 2500 mile hike, who assumes that if he keeps going, he will eventually reach home, and does so as a means to motivate himself to get there. Both cases are distinctly pragmatist in nature, and are supposed to display examples of propositional faith. Richard Swinburne also endorses this approach, and articulates it for specifically religious cases:

> the faith needed for religion is basically a commitment to seek a goal…If you want the love of God for yourself and your fellows enough, you need to believe that there is quite a chance that there is a God and that it is more probable that you and your fellows will reach Him by following the Christian way (and *assuming*, not necessarily believing, the claims of the Creed) than by following any other way. (Swinburne (2001), 211-212)[8]

Although this view of faith involves a behavioural component, it's straightforward to see where the propositional attitude comes in. If your goal is to attain the love of God, part of reaching that end is by assuming propositions concerning God, and subsequently you will have the attitudinal component to this individual's faith.

This pragmatist aspect to NDT is not explicitly stated in any of (1)-(3), but is rather *in the background* to how faith is construed on these accounts: it is part of the *description* of propositional faith, rather than being a *prescription* on it. In the final section I will show how explicitly stating this pragmatist component in the correct way will overcome the problem of fictionalist faith. However, I will also argue that construing faith as pragmatic in this way presents a number of theoretical problems for NDT.

Revolutionary Fictionalism

To understand fully the point raised in Malcolm and Scott (2016) – that fictionalists can have faith according to NDT – we must first outline what fictionalism is, and then explicitly show why the fictionalist can meet the conditions set out above. There are two predominant kinds of fictionalism: "hermeneutic" and "revolutionary". The former is largely a *descriptive* thesis, which aims to tell us what our attitudes are towards a particular domain of discourse. The latter is *normative*, advising what stance one ought to adopt toward that discourse. The observation at hand only concerns revolutionary fictionalism (henceforth, "fictionalism").

As with propositional faith, one can be a fictionalist in many different domains. According to a typical view of fictionalism in some fields such as ethics (Nolan et al. (2005)) and mathematics (Leng (2005)), a fictionalist believes that the claims in a particular discourse

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[8] Note that by requiring you believe that there is 'quite a chance that there is a God', Swinburne's account is in agreement with (2).

are literally false, but considers them worth uttering for instrumental purposes. With moral fictionalism for instance, one comes to believe that, for whatever reason, moral claims posit moral entities that do not exist, and so judges moral claims to be false (Mackie (1977)). However, this person might think that it's nevertheless useful to continue to use moral discourse because of the positive impact it has on reinforcing one's resolve toward behaving morally. Given this, the moral fictionalist adopts an attitude of acceptance towards those claims and positively applies them in everyday discourse. In the case of mathematics, even if one thought that there are no such things as mathematical entities, one might wish to retain the use of mathematical language due to the indispensability of quantification over numbers to our scientific theories. A religious fictionalism, then, would take religious claims at face-value, but regard them as false. However, this would not prevent the practising fictionalist from ceasing to use religious language. Rather, she would see the benefits of continuing to use religious claims in her discourse, and may even find it beneficial to fully immerse herself in a religious tradition or set of practices in order to fully attain these religious benefits.[9] These benefits may be psychological, in the form of, say, existential comfort, or social, for instance, to retain one's personal identity within a religious community. Fictionalism is therefore both a *semantic* theory, accounting for the meaning of one's discourse, and a *practical* theory, advising on how one should engage with the discourse.

This description of the fictionalist does *not* have faith on NDT since she does not meet condition (2) (she believes claim *p* to be false). There are two ways to overcome this problem. First, we could attempt to reject (2). This may be fairly straightforward given the lack of arguments, to my knowledge anyway, that are offered in its defence. If we simply reject this condition, then disbelieving fictionalists would not be denied propositional faith on these grounds. However, in order to offer the strongest argument possible, I want to adopt a second approach, which shows how fictionalists can meet the conditions outlined by advocates of NDT *without* rejecting any of those conditions. To see this, we must simply note that not all fictionalist accounts are committed to disbelief,[10] and hence, not all *religious* fictionalists must be atheists. Some only prescribe that even though one *does not believe*, as opposed to *dis*believe, the claims within a discourse, one still ought to continue using those claims for instrumental gain. It's open to us to adopt the following broader definition:

> *Fictionalism*: a (revolutionary) fictionalist does not believe the claims from a particular discourse, but accepts and utters them for purely instrumental purposes.

It seems that the fictionalist who meets this definition can also meet condition (1) of NDT.

Despite this overlap between the two theories, not every fictionalist will have propositional faith. Importantly, the fictionalist must not disbelieve the propositions in question (given (2)), and must evaluate them positively (given (3)). Yet there's no reason to suppose that a fictionalist couldn't meet these two requirements, and hence we ought to attribute propositional faith to those fictionalists that do. In fact, it will be the case that *all*

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[9] For an early account see Le Poidevin (1996). A useful recent article that contrasts several different approaches is Deng (2015), and some current theoretical development on fictionalism is given in Jay (2014; 2016. The latter also addresses NDT).

[10] A version of *agnostic* revolutionary fictionalism about science is given by van Fraassen (1980).

fictionalists satisfy (3) since the *reason* they accept and utter claims from the domain is because they regard them as good or beneficial in some way – because they evaluate them positively. I suggest that where an individual falls into the space between the two theories that we have someone who meets the conditions for NDT *and* the definition of revolutionary fictionalism. In effect, we have a "fictionalist with faith". Had it been the case that I opted to reject (2), which I see no reason to retain, there will be an entire overlap between the two theories.

Let's consider an example of someone from the religious domain who I propose falls into this crossover space.

> Sam grew up in a Christian family who taught her all of the central claims of the Christian worldview, which she subsequently came to believe. She attended church services, prayer and worship events and bible studies. She grew a deep affection for God and found the Christian narrative of salvation to be definitive of her personal identity. At an older age, Sam began to engage critically with Christianity and believed she found some significant flaws with it as a consistent and logical system of ideas. Moreover, she started to recognise greater moral issues with God's commands, and increased hypocrisy from Christian's themselves. This coincided with issues of personal loss, and a heightened recognition of the weight of suffering and pain in the world. Although she retained her affection for the Christian story, she began to wonder if that is all that it is – a fictional narrative – and her love for it similar to those stories that she enjoys reading, but knows are not true. Feeling the pull of these considerations but unwilling to reject Christianity altogether as false she becomes agnostic, and determines that she will pursue her religion purely because it brings her great spiritual comfort. Leaving the religious community and ceasing to make religious claims could have a disastrous impact on her given that her identity is so bound up in these claims. She commits to continuing to make religious claims and affirmations in religious discourse, and accepts those claims despite not believing them. In order to get the most out of using her religious discourse, she decides to remain immersed in the religious community – practising alongside those who still profess belief. Even though her ends are now focussed on enjoying the benefits of religious engagement in this life, rather than on the worship of a God she once believed in, Sam's means remain the same as ever.

The character in this narrative appears, prima facie, to meet the generic definitions of both fictionalism and NDT. It isn't clear that either camp should stake the sole claim over Sam's practices and commitments.

Despite this appearance though, perhaps Sam will not count as having faith on some *particular* accounts of NDT. For instance, a non-doxastic faith theorist might wish to construe the kind of acceptance involved in her theory as context-relative in a way that takes into account the epistemic reasons for engaging in the domain.[11] This might appear to rule out fictionalists like Sam from having faith who only take into account practical concerns, and there may be other nuances that particular theorists have that work in a similar way.

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[11] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this objection, and raising the example of acceptance for epistemic reasons, which the reviewer attributes to Michael Bratman's (1992) version of acceptance.

However, even fairly nuanced accounts of NDT seem susceptible to the fictionalist challenge. For instance, in the present example of acceptance for epistemic reasons, it's likely that the kinds of fictionalists we are considering wouldn't engage in their acceptance, with all that it entails, without having some positive epistemic reasons for thinking that the propositions they accept are quite plausible (even though they're not strong enough to yield belief). The reason for this is because our fictionalists are agnostic, and this might be the case because they see the evidence as roughly balanced (although more on this presently). Moreover, it might be quite unattractive to accept propositions that we expect will be completely false, and this will be true for fictionalists too. Consider a scientific fictionalist who accepts the existence of quarks. If she had no epistemic reason for thinking that quarks might exist then she probably wouldn't do so. She needn't have conclusive evidence that quarks exist to make accepting their existence advisable, but if she believed outright they do not exist, perhaps we wouldn't recommend that she keeps using them in her discourse.

These epistemic considerations may also provide another point of contrast between NDT and fictionalism, when we bear in mind that some accounts of NDT claim that the reason the individual does not believe the proposition in question is because she regards the evidence for and against to be roughly equal. This is usually construed in terms of the claim that a person with faith can be *in doubt* about whether *p*, where 'to be *in* doubt about whether p is for one neither to believe nor disbelieve p as a result of one's grounds for p seeming to be roughly on a par with one's grounds for not-p' (Howard-Snyder (2013), 359). In that case, her doxastic attitude towards *p* simply tracks the available evidence she has for *p* and this is thought to result in suspension of judgment. The fictionalist, on the other hand, is perhaps less affected by evidential concerns, and so needs not take the evidence on either side to have such parity. But why not? Is it essential that the fictionalist's doxastic states are not properly evidence-responsive? Not in the way I understand it, nor have construed it. Granted the fictionalist need not see the evidence as equally balanced, but neither must the non-believing person with faith. It would seem far-fetched to insist that the person with non-doxastic faith *must* be in this state. Both the fictionalist and faithful could have credences that do not quite fit with the evidence, perhaps in virtue of their desires and affections. Where a fictionalist responds to evidence with disbelief, there I have admitted that she fails to have faith, on NDT, unless (2) is rejected. But a fictionalist may see the evidence as roughly equal, or she may not, and her doxastic states will rationally adjust as appropriate, or they may not. However, all of this seems just as true for the person with non-doxastic faith.

As for other kinds of nuanced accounts of NDT (whatever these may be), if the account is so particular that it really does exclude fictionalists then it will likely also specify necessary conditions that fall outside of even the broad-scope conditions given in the above generic analysis. This might then entail that the other theories that do not meet those conditions are false, and so would take some impressive arguments to be persuasive. If such a theory is constructed solely to deal with the fictionalist problem then it may appear *ad hoc*. Moreover, fictionalism is quite a broad and generic theory, and as we have seen with the prior example of acceptance for epistemic reasons, it is flexible enough to fit into many different specifications, regardless of the particular nuances on the theory that its author identifies.

Suppose we're content for now, then, that Sam is, or seems to be a "faithful fictionalist". Is there any real problem with this? Why not simply accept that some

fictionalists have faith? To see why this may be problematic, let's consider a remark recently made by Daniel Howard-Snyder, who is one advocate of NDT. At one point in his article, Howard-Snyder applauds Alvin Plantinga for distinguishing his account of belief *in* God – which he takes to offer an argument in favour of a doxastic account of faith – from various radical approaches to religion, *including* fictionalism:

> Plantinga writes these words in the context of a lament over the state of contemporary theology, which he finds steeped in the deplorable influence of religious non-cognitivists such as Richard Braithwaite and religious fictionalists like Gordon Kaufmann, John Hick, and Don Cupitt. I join him in that lament. However, non-cognitivism and fictionalism couldn't be further from our concerns. (Howard-Snyder (2016), 156)

As Howard-Snyder's remarks make clear, he does not consider fictionalists to be attributed with faith on his version of NDT. But if his version of NDT is encapsulated by (1)-(3), and the fictionalist appears, prima facie, to satisfy (1)-(3), then the fictionalist *does* meet Howard-Snyder's NDT. So, why think that fictionalists do not have faith? Let's consider a few reasons for why this might seem to be the case.

The first reason might be *theoretical*. After all, these are two quite different approaches to one's engagement within a particular domain. Fictionalism is primarily a theory about the meaning of our utterances within that domain (although, of course, built into this theory are claims about how the fictionalist uses discourse to express her attitudes and mental states concerning the domain's content). NDT, on the other hand, is concerned with our mental states towards various propositions. It would certainly be theoretically rewarding to determine what distinguishes the two positions. Given that, as Howard-Snyder claims, fictionalism *cannot be further from* the concerns of advocates of NDT, then, perhaps the appearance of a crossover between the two theories is no more than a *mere* appearance, and it would be nice to know how to fully pull them apart.

However, there is a more pressing, related issue at hand, which ought to motivate the advocate of NDT to ensure that the two theories are actually distinct. For, if the appearance is not simply a mere appearance, but an actual overlap between NDT and fictionalism, then what prevents the accusation that advocates of NDT are simply describing fictionalism by some alternate route? "Faith without belief" might just as well be called "fictionalism". Do we actually just have on our hands two ways of naming the same phenomena? If so, this threatens to make NDT redundant – to collapse into a kind of fictionalism – and the residue left of NDT would just be instances of doxastic faith. But this simply leaves us with a doxastic account on one hand, and fictionalism on the other. The threat of redundancy gives a reason to determine what makes NDT distinct from fictionalism.

Even if you are not convinced by this concern, it still seems as though fictionalists can satisfy (1)-(3) without seeming like cases of genuine faith. Why shouldn't they? What guides the intuition that fictionalists do not have faith? Well, for one thing, fictionalists are engaged in a pretence.[12] With her affirmation of claims from a discourse, the fictionalist is merely

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[12] For instance, Nolan et al. construes fictionalism about a discourse as that which 'takes certain claims in that discourse to be literally false, but nevertheless worth uttering in certain contexts, *since*

pretending in her attitudes towards such claims. A fictionalist with faith, then, would simply be pretending to have faith, and as such, would not have faith. If she did have faith, then she wouldn't need to pretend to have faith. According to NDT, though, the person who satisfies (1)-(3) is not pretending to have faith that *p*, but *actually has* faith that *p*. What we are left with is an incongruous result. The fictionalist both has faith and does not have faith. So, fictionalism as a pretence position shows that, whilst NDT may well be necessary, it isn't sufficient for faith since it cannot individuate pretence positions from those that are genuine.

There are also more *practical* concerns facing the advocate of NDT. For instance, you might not want your theory to grant faith to certain radical positions. Advocates of NDT may feel this gives faith too broad a scope. From the remarks quoted above, we can see that clearly Howard-Snyder does not think that fictionalism is a positive influence on theology. Unfortunately, the reasons for this are not stated. So, whilst we can only speculate as to why this is the case for Howard-Snyder, for some, faith in the religious domain at least carries certain soteriological implications. In Christianity, there is such a thing as "saving faith", and it might be thought that there is something both sincere and genuine about this kind of faith which, perhaps, is not equally to be found in radical approaches like fictionalism.

Of course, this problem of salvation is mostly restricted to the religious domain. But there are problems with fictionalism for non-religious faith too. Notably, if we grant that the fictionalists, who are engaged in a form of pretence, can actually concurrently have faith, then perhaps non-doxastic faith in general also involves pretence. After all, if you don't believe something but merely act as if you do, how can you avoid the claim that you are merely pretending? If advocates of NDT can show how their belief-*less* faith is different from the position of the fictionalist, they may be able to show how their faith is genuine and not merely a form of pretence. The issue of pretence highlights what is perhaps most objectionable about fictionalism for advocates of NDT: that fictionalism is pursued for the wrong kinds of reasons, reasons relating to one's own interests, rather than being properly guided towards a possible truth that one values highly – perhaps more highly than anything else. It is this issue that I will take up further in the final section.

These theoretical and practical concerns jointly motivate an attempt to overcome the situation at hand because if they cannot be overcome, then a purely doxastic account of faith might seem more favourable than a non-doxastic account. It's worth noting a third reason as well for distinguishing the two positions, though not one that favours one over the other. If the two positions do come together, then NDT imposes faith on the fictionalist who might not want to have faith. The fictionalist might *want to be* distinguished from those in the community of the faithful, and wouldn't be pleased with advocates of NDT who insist that she isn't, and that only *disbelief* (or *atheism* for religious cases) will properly set her apart. It might be objected here that simply not wanting to be considered a particular kind of person is not appropriate motivation for altering our concepts. For example, just because some people might not like to be considered racist, that shouldn't give them reason to alter how we define racism. We can grant this and still wonder whether, in fact, NDT *really* imposes faith on the

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the pretence that such claims are true is worthwhile for various theoretical purposes.' (2005, 308, emphasis added)

fictionalist. There might be something that we're missing – something already part of the general description of NDT that needs stating explicitly in the analysis.

Note that the earlier practical and theoretical concerns apply equally even if the fictionalists we claim have faith are only of the non-believing, rather than of the disbelieving variety.[13] In the first case, there is still a theoretical problem of NDT being assimilated under fictionalism, and in the second, pretence is still the position of the fictionalist. Mere lack of belief rather than disbelief does not change the fact that the fictionalist is pretending – only belief can do that. The fictionalist, whether or not she disbelieves or merely lacks belief, still maintains a commitment to affirming claims within a particular domain for what might be seen like the wrong kinds of reasons.

Now, with these motivations at hand, in the final section let's compare two possible solutions to the problem of distinguishing faith from fictionalism.

Distinguishing Faith From Fictionalism

There are at least two ways to overcome this problem. First, and quite simply, we can adopt a doxastic account of faith by rejecting (1). In that case, (1) would read: "a belief that p". Believing the propositions in the domain in question would categorically exclude all fictionalists. Second, we can add something to the analysis that holds for faith but not for fictionalism. One fairly plausible inclusion is that the truth of the proposition in question matters to the person with faith, whereas it does not for the fictionalist.[14] Presumably, only the second option will be of interest to the advocate of NDT.

How, then, does *truth* purportedly distinguish faith from fictionalism? Well, it's certainly part of the definition of fictionalism that the truth of the propositions the fictionalist accepts bears no consequence on whether she engages in the discourse. The value that the fictionalist sees in accepting and applying those propositions in her discourse in no way depends upon whether or not they are true. This same point might not hold for the person with faith. Suppose that someone badly wants to win in a race and has "non-doxastic faith" that she will win, despite not believing that she can win. So, she accepts that she can win the race in order to spur herself on to win it. If she was able to learn, say, by somehow seeing into the future, that she will not win the race no matter how hard she tries, this fact seems important to her, and it may well affect whether she continues to accept that she will win it. She may even cease to engage in the race altogether. In the religious domain, suppose someone is able to learn that the proposition "God exists" is categorically false.[15] Presumably, for the person of faith, this would radically alter her attitudes and behaviour, such that she would no longer adopt a positive cognitive attitude towards that proposition, and would cease to commit to acting as though it were true. The claim being made here is that if the person with faith discovered that what she has faith toward is false, this discovery would be critical

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[13] Thanks to an anonymous referee for querying this point.

[14] I am indebted to Daniel McKaughan for in-depth discussions of this option. He has argued for this point himself at *The Nature of Faith* conference, St. Louis (2014).

[15] We could see this as equivalent to asking someone the counterfactual: if it were the case that God does not exist would you continue with your commitments to God?

for whether she would continue with her cognitive commitment, whereas for the fictionalist, this would be of no real importance.[16]

Although the significance of truth does appear to mark a clear distinction between the two positions, it's hard to say for certain whether this claim is accurate because this is an empirical claim that we currently lack any evidence for. Who's to say, for example, that many people with faith in the religious domain wouldn't simply carry on as normal if they found out that God does not exist? The benefits of religious engagement for those people might outweigh disengagement, even upon discovering that the religion's major premises are in fact false. The same applies to the runner in the race. We can't say for sure whether she would cease her cognitive commitment. She may be motivated to retain it for other reasons, say, due to the support she has received from family and friends. In both cases, it's not necessary that one's cognitive commitments will turn on the truth or falsity of the propositions one has faith toward.

Perhaps what needs to be done to defend this claim is to determine *why* someone with faith would cease her cognitive commitments upon learning their falsity. One reason for this may be instrumental. So, if propositional faith involves a pragmatic component in which one adopts a cognitive attitude in order to attain certain goods, then we can see that the truth of the proposition is necessary for the faithful person's practical aims to be achieved. However, if someone then discovered that the proposition is false, the person who continues with a cognitive commitment toward the object of that proposition might not be aptly described as a person with faith. In fact, in that case, "fictionalism" may be one way to describe the position that the person has adopted, or indeed perhaps pretence. A restatement of the first condition would then be:

(1*) a positive cognitive attitude toward *p*, adopted as a means to attain certain goods.

The attainment of goods is the reason why the truth matters to the person with faith. If she knew the proposition were false, she wouldn't adopt the attitude because she would then know that by doing so she wouldn't be able to acquire the relevant goods. Moreover, this sort of definition appears to be in the background to many accounts of NDT, particularly in the examples given by Swinburne, Alston and Howard-Snyder. Each pragmatic example involved an individual who adopted the attitude in order to reach some goal or acquire some good.

Although promising, (1*) will not rule out fictionalists, who clearly also wish to adopt certain goods by their engagement with a particular discourse. The religious fictionalist, for instance, accepts and affirms religious claims for instrumental reasons – she wants to use the discourse as a means to retain a sense of spiritual comfort and personal identity. So, (1*) does not exclude fictionalists from faith. However, there is a response open to the advocate of NDT that resolves this concern, but only for instances of *religious* faith. At this point I will branch off from discussing faith regardless of the domain, to faith solely in religious content. The reason why will be made clear in the ensuing, and the costs of doing so will affect the overall account.

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[16] A similar claim is made by Lara Buchak: 'We do not attribute faith to a person unless the truth or falsity of the proposition involved makes a difference to that person' (2012, 226).

To see the religious response, let's begin by supposing that, according to (1*), the proposition "God exists" is necessary for the person with faiths practical aims to be achieved. Note that even though the fictionalist also aims to acquire certain goods, her ends are *temporal*, or "this-worldly". As such, if she discovered that God does not exist, she may feel a sense of disappointment, but it needn't stop her from actively engaging in her religious practice. This is because she doesn't need the proposition "God exists" to be true in order to attain her ends.

On some pragmatist accounts of faith, engagement with religion is *also* pursued for temporal ends, in a similar way to the fictionalist. For example, William James claimed that 'religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good.' (1919, 26). If we take these 'vital goods' that we can gain 'even now' to be the kinds of things the fictionalist wants to attain, then James' view looks largely indistinguishable from fictionalism. However, this is not all James has to say on the matter. He adds shortly after that '*if religion be untrue*, we lose the good'. But how could we lose temporal goods, such as engagement in a welcoming religious community, if it turned out that the central claim that God exists is false? Presumably, James means to say that faith involves not only engaging in religion to attain temporal goods, but to attain *eternal* goods as well, including eternal life, answers to prayer, and relationship with a divine being.[17] It is the attainment of eternal goods that *do* require the proposition "God exists" to be true, and if it's not true, then we cannot attain the eternal goods that our faith pursues.

So, according to the pragmatists, faith involves pursuing *both* temporal and eternal goods, the latter of which requires that God exist for their fulfilment. We can now say why a person of faith is affected by truth, whereas the fictionalist is not: because faith requires pursuing eternal, and not merely temporal goals, whose attainment requires certain propositions to be true. The modified condition thus reads:

(1**) a positive cognitive attitude toward *p*, adopted as a means to attain both temporal and eternal goods.

This condition is one that no fictionalist can meet since she does not pursue eternal goods through her engagement with a particular discourse. This is simply not the position the fictionalist takes. She is looking for a fall-back position from the fact that she does not believe certain claims to be true. This is one of using those claims to extract their temporary benefits. She is not engaging in the discourse in the hope that its claims are true, and that she might acquire something like eternal life. It is sometimes said that fictionalists treat the claims in a discourse as they merely would a fiction. Engaging in a discourse in the hope that God would grant eternal life or answer to prayer involves doing so in the hope that the claims of the discourse are true (rather than as you would a useful fiction), which stands in clear contrast to fictionalism.

So, it looks like we have one way around the problem at hand. However, endorsing this solution opens up several serious problems. First, the solution does not work for faith toward non-religious content. Presumably there are many propositions one has faith toward

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[17] This is also the main motivating feature in Pascal's Wager (see Jordan (2006), for an overview).

that do not have anything at all to do with pursuing eternal goods. Moreover, there are even some religions that do not seek eternal goods, but merely pursue temporal benefits. This may be of little consequence to those who consider religious faith to be distinct from non-religious faith, but we then lose the virtue of parsimony – of having a unified account of the propositional attitude. As such, faith in the religious domain will have different conditions from faith in other domains, and this will still be a faith of which fictionalists may be entitled. This issue is clearly not decisive if you think that faith is solely a religious attitude, but it certainly marks a drawback from using this solution for those who would like a parsimonious theory of our mental states.

A second issue is that, according to this new condition, someone can have absolute confidence and outright belief that God exists, and have a genuine and deep affection for God, yet not have faith. But this would seem absurd. Consider, for instance, the person who deeply loves God and believes that God exists with complete confidence. Nevertheless, she is temporarily unmotivated to pursue her religious commitments, perhaps due to depression or akrasia. Despite her temporary despondency, she retains both strong belief and passionate affection. We might think of her faith as dormant, for the time being at least, rather than lost. Yet, if we include a pragmatic condition in our analysis whereby faith requires the pursuit of *any kind* of good, be it temporal or eternal, then these kinds of people will be classified as faith*less*, where surely they should not be.

This latter problem can be overcome, though, by specifying the analysis in the correct way, to only impose a pragmatic constraint on those who adopt a cognitive attitude voluntarily. There will, then, be a disjunction between those who believe, and those who hold a positive cognitive attitude for pragmatic reasons. As such, condition (1**) splits into

> (1a) a belief that *p*; **or**
> (1b) a positive cognitive non-doxastic attitude towards *p*, adopted as a means to attain both temporal and eternal goods;

This final analysis overcomes the problem of the unmotivated believer, and shows how faith may be distinguished from fictionalism.

Despite the resolution the new analysis brings to the problems at hand, it represents a mere "Pyrrhic victory" for NDT. This is for two important reasons. First, it lacks the virtue of a unified account of propositional faith. We will need other solutions to overcome the fictionalism problem for faith toward non-religious content. Second, the need to disjoin the two kinds of cognitive attitude – doxastic from non-doxastic – draws out the stark phenomenological difference between doxastic and non-doxastic faith. The concern this may cause for advocates of NDT is that it appears as though we have two very different phenomena on our hands. Rather than having a cognitive condition that covers all kinds of cognitive attitude, we now have a doxastic condition, and a non-doxastic/pragmatic condition, which cover two very different sorts of attitude and religious response. In the former case, one's faith is sustained over long periods of time, many doubts and much wavering. Despite this, the agent will retain her faith in virtue of her belief and positive evaluation. This allows for cases like the unmotivated believer, who fluctuates in her practical commitment to the object of her faith in a way that is quite consistent with peoples' actual experiences. The difference this exposes when we consider faith from the non-doxastic

angle is that in those cases, when one must voluntarily adopt an attitude towards a proposition, she will be continually coming in and out of faith depending on her degree of commitment at a particular time. Given this, it seems as though these two approaches to our cognitive commitment look like entirely different things. The outstanding question, then, is this: if doxastic and non-doxastic faith are so different in terms of phenomenology, is one of them actually an imposter? Is one of them no faith at all? If the advocate of NDT wants to endorse (1a) and (1b) to distinguish faith from fictionalism, she incurs both of these costs.

Conclusion

What this essay has tried to make clear is that fictionalism presents itself as a counterexample to NDT when NDT does not specify *why* someone adopts a positive cognitive attitude. It is not entailed by the concept of such mental states that they be endorsed for any *particular* reason, other than to accomplish one's aims. The problem is that one's aims can vary. The fictionalist is concerned with usefulness – with yielding particular goods regardless of the probable or likely truth of the propositions accepted – whereas for faith, although utility is an important factor, so is the possible truth of the proposition

Following this approach, though, comes with theoretical costs. We can no longer offer a unified account of propositional faith across domains, and we are forced into separating the analysis in such a way that it appears as though we are dealing with two kinds of faith. Are there other ways to prevent the attribution of faith to some fictionalists? Possibly, but none of which are obvious at this stage, and they may well face similar problems to the solution discussed here. If we want to avoid legitimising fictionalist faith, then I suggest that the problems encountered by the approach discussed here provides us with a reason to favour a purely doxastic account of propositional faith over NDT. This account would certainly offer a simpler resolution to the fictionalist problem.[18]

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