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FROM MORAL REALISM TO MORAL RELATIVISM IN ONE EASY STEP*

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The one easy step we have in mind is for the moral realist to embrace what we call *new wave moral semantics*, which construes the semantic workings of moral terms like ‘good’ and ‘right’ as akin to the semantic workings of natural-kind terms in science, and also takes inspiration from functionalist themes in the philosophy of mind. This sort of semantic view which we find lurking, if not explicit, in the metaethical views of David Brink (1984, 1989), Richard Boyd (1988), and Peter Railton (1993) is the crucial semantic underpinning of a naturalistic brand of moral realism these philosophers favor —a view that promises to deliver a robust notion of moral objectivity, while avoiding the problems besetting previous versions of moral realism. We argue that if the plausibility of this new brand of moral realism rests with the sort of moral semantics just mentioned, then (ironically) the would-be moral realist is led down the garden path and into the camp of the moral relativist. And this is not what the moral realists want since the sort of

* This paper is a collaborative effort; order of authors is alphabetical.

robust moral objectivity that their view attempts to capture is incompatible with moral relativism.¹

We are not the first ones to argue for our main conclusion; R.M. Hare² has developed an argument with the same conclusion. Our method of argument differs from Hare's, but we intend our work to reinforce his. Our plan is to begin with a primer on new wave moral semantics and then show how it leads, one way or another, to moral relativism.

1. *Moral Realism and New Wave Moral Semantics*

Moral realism is, at bottom, a metaphysical view about the nature and existence of moral facts, properties, and relations, according to which (roughly): (1) there are moral facts (properties, relations) (2) whose existence and nature is largely independent of human attitudes, agreements, and conventions. What makes the new strain of moral realism particularly interesting is that the moral facts, properties and relations in question are supposed to be naturalistically kosher —such facts, properties and relations are supposed to be part of the natural world that science investigates— and yet the view does not commit the ‘naturalist fallacy’. The end metaethical result is quite attractive: with the new strain of moral realism we are promised an extremely robust notion of moral objectivity (ethics is in the same boat as is science) that comports perfectly well with many philosophers’ naturalistic metaphysical scruples and which

¹ Elsewhere we have argued against this recent strain of moral realism in ways that do not explicitly charge the view with being a form of relativism; see Horgan and Timmons (1991, 1992a, 1992b) and Timmons (forthcoming, ch. 2).

² See Hare (1995) in which the relativistic implications of moral realism are mentioned. Hare discusses the route from realism to relativism in more detail in his unpublished Hågerstrom Lectures, Uppsala, 1991, Lecture 2, “Naturalism”.

does not suffer from the ills that beset older versions of ethical naturalism.

To make this metaphysical view work, the new wave moral realist needs some sort of semantic construal of moral terms and expressions to undergird her metaphysical commitments. In the days of High Church Analytic Philosophy, those out to defend ethical naturalism attempted to ‘reduce’ putative moral facts, properties, and relations to natural facts, etc., by providing analytic definitions of moral terms in naturalistic vocabulary. But Moore’s ‘Open Question Argument’ seemed decisive against all such attempts at analytic meaning reductions. But in these post-analytic days, the moral realist with naturalist scruples need not worry about providing analytic definitions of moral terms. In science we are familiar with property identities—for example, the (sortal) property *being water* is identical with the property *being composed of H_2O molecules*, heat is identical with molecular motion, and so on—but no one supposes that ‘being water’ can be analytically defined by ‘being composed of H_2O molecules’ or that ‘temperature’ means the same as ‘mean molecular kinetic energy’, and so forth for many scientific identities. So, in principle, one can hold out for property identities between the moral and the natural despite the fact that moral terms cannot be analytically defined at all. Enter: new wave moral semantics.

What we are calling ‘new wave moral semantics’ (NWMS, for short) represents a certain semantic construal of moral terms and expressions that exploits relatively recent work in the philosophy of language by philosophers like Kripke (1970), Putnam (1973, 1975), and Lewis (1970). In one version of NWMS, moral terms (and the concepts they express) are construed on analogy with natural kind terms like ‘water’ and are taken to rigidly designate certain higher-order, functional, properties. In another version, such

terms and concepts are construed as functionally definable nonrigid designators of certain first-order natural properties. In what follows, we take each of these versions of NWMS in turn and explain why they lead to moral relativism.

2. *Brink and Boyd's Version of NWMS*

Brink and Boyd, whose views are at the forefront of the new wave moral realism, are not as explicit as one might like about the proper semantic construal of moral discourse, but they say enough to ground a natural-looking interpretation. Brink (1984, 1989) proposes to construe moral properties as functional properties whose functional essence is captured by whatever normative moral theory emerges from a process of wide reflective equilibrium, but says rather little about the semantics of moral terms. Boyd, on the other hand, says rather little about the nature of moral properties, but does suggest a semantics of moral terms that would construe them as semantically analogous to natural kind terms.

Brink's conception of moral properties is largely inspired by a version of functionalism in the philosophy of mind: so-called *psychofunctionalism*. On this view, mental properties are multiply-realizable functional properties whose relational essence is fully capturable not by the generalizations of common-sense mentalistic psychology ("folk psychology"), but instead by the generalizations of the (ideally complete) *empirical* psychological theory T that happens to be true of humans.³ Determinate functional properties are implicitly defined by T, presumably, because within the

³ On psychofunctionalism, see Fodor (1968), Field (1978), Block (1980), and Lycan (1981). The other main species of functionalism, sometimes called *common-sense functionalism*, asserts that the mental properties countenanced by common-sense belief/desire psychology (i.e., folk psychology) are functional properties whose relational essence

generalizations comprising T, mental terms are interconnected in rich and numerous ways with non-mental terms describing sensory inputs and behavioral outputs. These rich interconnections provide the basis for ‘pinning down’, as it were, unique functional properties. According to psychofunctionalism, mental terms refer to these functional properties implicitly defined by the empirical theory T. Block (1980), adapting a format originally described by Lewis (1972), describes as follows a procedure for using T to construct explicit definitions of the functional properties which, according to psychofunctionalism, are identical to mental properties:

Reformulate T so that it is a single conjunctive sentence with all mental-state terms as singular terms. E.g., ‘is angry’ becomes ‘has anger’. Suppose that T, so reformulated can be written as

$$T(s_1 \dots s_n, i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m)$$

where s_i , i_i , o_i designate respectively, a mental state, input, and output. T may contain generalizations of the form: being in such and such states, and receiving such and such inputs produces such and such outputs and transitions to such and such states. To get the Ramsey sentence of T, replace the state terms $s_1 \dots s_n$, (but *not* $i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m$) by variables, and prefix an existential quantifier for each variable. A singular term designating the Ramsey functional correlate of pain (with respect to T) can be formulated using a property abstraction operator. Let an expression of the form ‘ λxFx ’ be a singular term meaning the same as an expression of the form ‘the property (or attribute) of being an x such that x is F’, i.e., ‘being F’. If x_i is the variable that replaced ‘pain’, the Ramsey functional correlate of pain (with respect to T) is

is capturable by the generalizations of folk psychology itself; cfr. Block (1980).

$\lambda y \exists x_1 \dots \exists x_n [T(x_1 \dots x_n, i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m) \& y \text{ is in } x_i]$.

Notice that this expression contains input and output terms ($i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m$) but no mental terms (since they were replaced by variables). Every mental state mentioned in theory T [...] has a Ramsey functional correlate. Ramsey functional correlates for psychological theories, it should be noted, are defined in terms of inputs and outputs (plus logical terms) alone.⁴

Psychofunctionalism says that the term ‘pain’, for example, designates its Ramsey functional correlate (with respect to T), and hence that pain *is* this functional property. Likewise for every mental state-type.

Psychofunctionalism figures centrally for Brink as a model for metaethics. Brink suggests that moral properties are functional properties of a certain kind:

[T]he moral realist might claim that moral properties are functional properties. He might claim that what is essential to moral properties is the causal role which they play in the characteristic activities of human organisms. In particular, the realist might claim that moral properties are those which bear upon the maintenance and flourishing of human organisms. Maintenance and flourishing presumably consist in necessary conditions for survival, other needs associated

⁴ Block (1980), pp. 272–273, with the symbols ‘%’ and ‘E’ replaced by ‘λ’ and ‘∃’ respectively. The latter symbols were employed in the 1978 version, but the quoted passage is from the revised version. The original format in Lewis (1972) was for defining theoretical terms as putative *nonrigid* designators of *first-order* properties. Peter Railton appeals to this format in his own version of NWMS; see sections 6 and 7 below. In Horgan (1984), a problem is raised with Block’s attempt to modify Lewis’ approach for purposes of giving explicit definitions of functional properties, and a way of avoiding the problem is proposed; but these matters need not concern us here.

with basic well-being, wants of various sorts, and distinctively human capacities. People, actions, policies, states of affairs, etc., will bear good-making properties just insofar as they contribute to the satisfaction of these needs, wants, and capacities [... and] will bear bad-making moral properties just insofar as they fail to promote or interfere with the satisfaction of these needs, wants, and capacities. The physical states which contribute to or interfere with these needs, wants, and capacities are the physical states upon which, on this functionalist theory, moral properties ultimately supervene. (1984, pp. 121–122)

Brink also maintains that moral inquiry is a matter of seeking a normative theory that *coheres* best with both moral and nonmoral beliefs. This coherentist methodology, usually called “reflective equilibrium”, rejects any appeal to *a priori* moral truths or *a priori* constraints on moral inquiry: in ethics, as in science, our methods of knowledge-gathering are radically contingent. For Brink, moral properties are functional properties whose relational essence is captured by whatever specific normative moral theory T would emerge, for humans, as the outcome of correctly applied coherentist methodology. That is, moral properties are the Ramsey functional correlates of moral terms, as determined by T. (The normative moral theory T presumably would indeed implicitly define T’s moral vocabulary, and thus would yield a determinate Ramsey functional correlate for each moral term, because the generalizations of T would link moral terms to non-moral terms in rich and numerous ways.) Since moral properties are second-order functional properties, they supervene on whatever first-order natural properties are the ones whose instantiation is the basis for these functional properties to be instantiated:

The details of the way in which moral properties supervene upon other natural properties are worked out differently by different moral theories. Determination of which account of

moral supervenience is best will depend upon determination of which moral theory provided the best account of all our beliefs, both moral and non-moral. (1984, p. 121, cfr. 1989, p. 175)

One finds the clearest statement of the *semantic* component of new wave moral realism in the writings of Richard Boyd, whose position has three key ingredients. First, Boyd proposes to construe moral terms like ‘good’ and ‘right’ (and the concepts they express) as being semantically like natural kind (and other scientific) terms, in having natural, “synthetic” definitions that reveal the essence of the property that term expresses. This means, of course, that moral terms need not have analytic definitions of the sort that were central to more traditional versions of ethical naturalism. Second, the claim that moral terms function this way evidently requires that they are rigid. Like natural kind terms, moral terms allegedly rigidly designate the properties to which they refer. Third, Boyd maintains that for moral terms, just as for names and natural kind terms, reference is a matter of there being certain causal connections between people’s uses of such terms and the relevant natural properties.

According to Boyd’s own version of the causal theory of reference, the relevant causal relations constituting reference are just those causal connections involved in knowledge gathering activities:

Roughly, and for nondegenerate cases, a term *t* refers to a kind (property, relation, etc.) *k* just in case there exist causal mechanisms whose tendency is to bring it about, over time, that what is predicated of the term *t* will be approximately true of *k* (excuse the blurring of the use-mention distinction). Such mechanisms will typically include the existence of procedures which are approximately accurate for recognizing members or instances of *k* (at least for easy cases) and which relevantly govern the use of *t*, the social transmission

of certain relevantly approximately true beliefs regarding k , formulated as claims about t (again excuse the slight to the use-mention distinction), a pattern of deference to experts on k with respect to the use of t , etc. [...] When relations of this sort obtain, we may think of the properties of k as *regulating* the use of t (via such causal relations)... (1988, p. 195)

Extending this version of the causal theory to moral terms, as Boyd proposes to do, commits him to what we will call the *causal regulation thesis*:

CRT For each moral term t (e.g., ‘good’), there is a natural property N such that N alone, and no other property, causally regulates the use of t by humans.

On Boyd’s view, because moral terms are regulated in the way described by CRT, one can construe terms like ‘good’ as behaving semantically like natural kind terms: they rigidly refer to certain natural properties. Thus, the key idea behind Boyd’s approach is the thesis of *causal semantic naturalism*:

CSN Each moral term t rigidly designates the natural property N that uniquely causally regulates the use of t by humans.

The views of Boyd and Brink nicely complement one another. Boyd claims that moral terms work like natural kind terms in science and that they designate natural properties, though he says little about the sort of properties to which moral terms refer. Brink, on the other hand, is explicit about moral properties being functional properties whose essence is captured by some normative moral theory. If we put these views together, then the idea is that a moral term like ‘good’ rigidly refers to some unique functional property whose essence is revealed by some normative moral

theory. We call this combination of views *causal semantic functionalism*:

CSF Each moral term t is causally regulated (for human beings generally) by a unique functional property, and rigidly designates that property.

Let the three main theses just articulated be definitive of Brink/Boyd moral semantics.⁵

3. *Standard Relativism, Conceptual Relativism, and Chauvinism*

As we said initially, naturalistic moral realists like Brink and Boyd seek to secure a robust form of moral objectivity, incompatible with moral relativism. We turn now to a brief discussion of relativism, as a prelude to arguing that

⁵ Also an integral part of the Brink/Boyd view is their holistic moral epistemology, involving a coherentist methodology of moral inquiry. In light of CSF, this commitment to epistemological coherentism in ethics is evidently quite compatible with Brink's and Boyd's moral realism. For, if indeed the normative theory T that best coheres with humankind's moral and non-moral beliefs is true, then T will qualify as true not *by virtue* of this coherence—that would be a non-realist, “constructivist”, conception of moral truth—but rather because coherentist methodology is likely, as a matter of *contingent fact*, to converge upon the very normative theory whose generalizations capture the essence of the functional properties that causally regulate the uses of moral terms by humankind, properties that are thus (according to CSF) the referents of moral terms.

Even if Boyd does not intend his rather sketchy remarks about moral semantics to be taken in exactly the way we have reconstructed them (because, for example, he intends to construe moral terms as *nonrigidly* designating whatever natural properties they designate), still the view we have described in this section is certainly worthy of serious consideration, given the use the new strain of moral realists like to make of the analogy between the workings of moral terms and the concepts they express and natural kind and other scientific terms and the concepts they express. Also, we consider another version of NWMS below which ought to capture Boyd's view if the present characterization does not.

advocates of NWMS are committed to moral relativism in spite of themselves.

Two kinds of relativism are worth distinguishing. According to the first kind, which we will call *standard* relativism, there is some kind of relativization parameter at work in a given form of discourse (e.g., moral discourse), perhaps implicitly, so that in certain cases where two people make statements that appear directly contradictory, there is no direct conflict; rather, both statements—as asserted by those two people respectively—can be true. In one way there is commonality of meaning and concepts: the two persons can be using the same concepts, and their statements can be made in a common language (or, if made in different languages, can be directly intertranslatable). But in a more fine-grained way, there is a lack of common meaning: there is some kind of relativity (perhaps covert) in what is meant, and this is what sometimes prevents two people from directly disagreeing with each other in certain cases where they might appear to disagree. Relativist positions in ethics are usually versions of standard relativism. Such positions typically claim that the truth of a moral statement is relative to the moral norms of some group, and hence that apparently incompatible moral statements made by different persons can both be true.⁶

There is also another kind of relativism, associated for instance with certain readings of Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions, and associated specifically with the idea of "radical incommensurability". This can be called *conceptual* relativism. If one held, for instance, that earlier and later claims about the nature of electrons are conceptually incommensurable and hence are not directly at odds with one another, one would be espousing a strong conceptual

⁶ David Wong (1984) is one recent defender of standard relativism for moral discourse.

relativism about the meaning of ‘electron’. The mark of conceptual relativism is the claim that terms used by different groups are sufficiently different in meaning as to be not intertranslatable. Thus, a conceptual relativist position with respect to ethical discourse would hold, for instance, that for certain cases where groups of people appear to have radically different and incompatible moral views, there is actually semantic and conceptual incommensurability at work —so that their respective, apparently contradictory, claims actually are so different in meaning as to be effectively parts of different, non-intertranslatable, languages.⁷

Moral language aside, there do appear to be examples of terms and concepts for which one or the other of these kinds of relativism is appropriate. For instance, definite descriptions often work semantically in the way described by standard relativism: the referent of a definite description, from among the pool of eligible referents, often is partly determined by implicit discourse-parameters that involve some kind of relativization. Thus, if Jones says “The national president is a crook” and Smith says “The national president is not a crook”, they may both be right because contextual parameters may determine that Jones and Smith are referring, respectively, to the presidents of two different nations.

For a plausible example where a kind of conceptual relativism is appropriate, consider the Putnam/Kripke approach to natural-kind terms. Speakers of English and Twin English, on Earth and Twin Earth respectively, each

⁷ MacIntyre (1981) invokes the language of Kuhnian incommensurability in discussing different ethical traditions, but emphasizes different sets of concepts expressed in different terminology (e.g., rights terminology, the terminology of utility and so forth), rather than incommensurable uses of the same terms. R.L. Arrington (1989), however, does defend a version of cognitive relativism which has the implication that terms like ‘right’, ‘wrong’, and so forth, have different meanings when embedded within different normative “moral” outlooks.

use the term ‘water’ in a way that is tied semantically to certain water-like stuff in their own respective environments. On Earth the term refers to H_2O , whereas on Twin Earth it refers to the chemically distinct substance XYZ. The term has different meanings in English and Twin English, and statements employing this term are not directly translatable from one language into the other.

Often, however, a relativistic position concerning certain terms and concepts will be inappropriate, because it entails lack of genuine disagreement in cases where two speakers utter apparently contradictory statements which really *are* contradictory. Let a version of relativism, for a certain class of terms and concepts, be called *chauvinistic* if it has this feature; the point of the label is that such a position tethers its account of meaning and reference too tightly to the way a particular individual or group happens to use the term. Typically, one important source of evidence that some version of relativism is chauvinistic will be a mismatch between what the theory says about certain cases on one hand, and what pre-theoretic common sense says on the other hand: common sense says there is commonality of meaning and genuine disagreement, whereas the theory says there is lack of genuine disagreement (and perhaps even lack of intertranslatability).⁸

Relativistic treatments of moral discourse appear to be chauvinistic, precisely because they typically entail a lack of genuine disagreement in certain instances where two people make statements using moral language that ap-

⁸ In our view, the dictates of pre-theoretic semantic/conceptual intuitions are best viewed as *empirical* evidence for hypotheses about meanings and concepts (just as the dictates of pre-theoretic grammaticality intuitions, for instance, are empirical evidence within linguistics for hypotheses about natural-language syntax). Although the evidence provided by semantic/conceptual intuitions is defeasible, often it is very powerful. See Horgan and Graham (1994).

pear to be contradictory. Moral realism is adamantly anti-relativist, and one of the putative advantages of NWMS is that it supposedly allows the repudiation of moral relativism. Apparent cases of disagreement are genuine cases of disagreement. Just as one is referring to electrons provided that one's use of 'electron' is causally regulated by these entities, and just as there is commonality of meaning in uses of the term 'electron' even in cases where the disputants have radically different views about the nature of electrons, so likewise with moral talk. Disputing parties can have very different *conceptions* of goodness or rightness, leading them to very different moral judgments and moral beliefs, but still have the same *concept* of goodness and rightness —provided that their respective uses of these terms are causally regulated by the same natural (functional) properties. Apparent instances of radical moral disagreement are just what they seem: genuine disagreements. Contrary to standard moral relativism, opposed moral claims in such cases are not implicitly relativized to different sets of moral standards. And contrary to conceptual relativism, such claims are not conceptually incommensurable. Rather, the opposed claims really do conflict with one another, and they reflect genuine differences in moral *belief*.

Of course, since NWMS treats moral terms as analogous to natural-kind terms like 'water' and 'gold', there is a certain kind of conceptual relativism in this account, just as there is for these other terms: the account entails that moral terms refer to whatever natural properties causally regulate the use of such terms by humans, and that these terms would have had different referents and different meanings had they been causally regulated by different properties. But the new wavers presumably would claim that this kind of conceptual relativism is not chauvinistic (just as the corresponding kind of conceptual relativism vis-à-vis terms

like ‘water’ and ‘gold’ is not chauvinistic), and hence is not objectionable.

So *prima facie*, it appears that NWMS underwrites a robust moral objectivism, and effectively eschews moral relativism. But we will argue that NWMS is actually guilty of a chauvinistic form of conceptual relativism, in spite of itself.

4. Psychofunctionalism as Chauvinistic Conceptual Relativism

We pointed out above that the Brink/Boyd version of naturalist moral realism is importantly similar to psychofunctionalism in philosophy of mind. Psychofunctionalism, however, is itself guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism. We will now explain why. NWMS too will turn out to be guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism, for similar reasons.

Consider first the psycho-physical type-type identity theory. Advocates of functionalism in philosophy of mind have traditionally argued the virtues of functionalism vis-à-vis the identity theory, in part by arguing that the latter is guilty of chauvinism (in effect, chauvinistic conceptual relativism). The line of thought is familiar: Imagine a race of Martians who are just like humans at the level of cognitive-functional organization, but who are physically very different from ourselves. (Perhaps, for instance, they are composed of silicon rather than organic molecules; or perhaps they have elaborate computers in their heads, rather than brains composed of neurons.) By supposition, the Martians are sufficiently different physically from humans that Martians do not instantiate the physico-chemical state-types that are identical, according to the identity theory, with mental state-types. So, since Martians lack the relevant kinds of brain-states, the identity theory entails

that these creatures do not undergo beliefs, desires, intentions, or any other folk-psychological states. But this goes contrary to our linguistic/conceptual intuitions about how to describe the Martians. Pre-theoretic common sense says this: We would naturally, and rightly, apply mentalistic vocabulary to them; and we would naturally, and rightly, translate their “mentalistic” vocabulary into our own mentalistic vocabulary. Thus, the identity theory is guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism. Even if each of our mental terms is coextensive with the presence or absence of a given neurobiological state-type, insofar as the creatures to which we are attributing mental states are *humans*, the relation between mental terms and these state-types is not reference (and is not causal regulation). Our mental terms would apply to certain other actual or physically possible creatures, like the Martians, even though they lack the relevant kinds of brain states.

This familiar argument is employed against the type-type identity theory by both common-sense functionalists and psychofunctionalists. Ironically, however, the same sort of argument can be used against psychofunctionalism (although not against common-sense functionalism).⁹ Here is the relevant thought experiment. Consider the correct, ideally complete, total empirical psychological theory true of humans, a theory comprising various psychological laws; call it T^h . Assume that the generalizations of common-sense folk psychology are embedded in T^h . Suppose there is a race of Martians who differ from humans in the following ways. First, Martians too instantiate beliefs, desires, and other folk-psychological state-types; the generalizations of folk psychology are true of Martians. Second, these gen-

⁹ Another irony is that one common version of the type-type identity theory can readily accommodate trans-species multiple realizability anyway. See Lewis (1980), and note 16 below.

eralizations are embedded in the ideally complete, total empirical psychological theory true of Martians, T^m . But third, in certain other respects, Martians are psychologically different from humans; that is, the laws comprising T^m differ somewhat from those comprising T^h , even though the laws of folk psychology are contained within both T^h and T^m .

According to pre-theoretic common sense, the scenario just described is perfectly cogent, and is a genuine conceptual possibility. A psychofunctionalist, however, is forced to deny this. Psychofunctionalism entails that human folk-psychological mental terms do not apply to the Martians; that their corresponding terms do not apply to us; and that our terms and theirs are not intertranslatable. For, psychofunctionalism is committed to claiming that human folk-psychological terms rigidly designate the Ramsey functional correlates of these terms that are definable via the theory T^h ; that the corresponding Martian terms rigidly designate distinct functional properties, viz., the Ramsey functional correlates of those terms that are definable via the theory T^m ; and thus that the human terms differ in meaning from the Martian ones in the same way that the term ‘water’ differs in meaning on earth and on Putnam’s original Twin Earth. Thus, psychofunctionalism is guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism.

The moral of this thought experiment is clear: although our folk-psychological terms do coincide extensionally with their T^h Ramsey functional correlates, insofar as our folk-psychological ascriptions are confined to human beings, our folk-psychological terms do not *refer* to these psychofunctional properties, and are not causally regulated by them. Our folk-psychological terms would apply to certain other actual or physically possible creatures, like the Martians, even though these creatures lack the relevant kinds of T^h psychofunctional properties. The problem with psy-

chofunctionalism is that it chauvinistically incorporates aspects of the causal roles of folk-psychological states that are overly *fine-grained*, overly tied to the specific ways these states function within the cognitive economy of creatures describable by the specific empirical psychological theory T^h . The Martians have a causal economy that includes state-types with the right kinds of coarse-grained causal roles for these states to qualify as genuine beliefs and desires, even though the Martian folk-psychological states differ from the human ones in certain fine-grained aspects that are revealed in the differences between T^h and T^m .¹⁰

Common-sense functionalism evidently is not vulnerable to this argument, because this view rightly entails that the Martians have beliefs and desires, and that their folk-psychological terminology is intertranslatable with our own. Common-sense functionalism characterizes folk-psychological state-types as suitably course-grained functional properties, shared in common by humans and by the Martians who make trouble for psychofunctionalism.

5. Boyd/Brink NWMS as Chauvinistic Conceptual Relativism

As we remarked in section 2, the Boyd/Brink version of new wave moral semantics is largely modeled on psychofunctionalism in philosophy of mind. NWMS treats moral terms as rigid designators of functional properties that are definable via the normative theory to which humans allegedly would converge if they did wide reflective equilibrium ideally well. These terms allegedly are causally regulated by, and thus allegedly refer to, those functional properties.

¹⁰ Block (1980) also charges psychofunctionalism with chauvinism. But he argues for this claim somewhat differently than we have done here.

It is fairly straightforward to argue that this construal of moral terminology and moral concepts is guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism. The argument is similar to the one lately given showing that psychofunctionalism is guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism. There will not be exact parallels, but the similarities will prove instructive. In both cases, conceptual chauvinism results from the mistaken attempt to tether the meaning and reference of the relevant terms too tightly to a theory that has some special connection to human beings —the specific empirical psychological theory true of humans (in the case of mental terms), and the specific normative moral theory to which humans allegedly would converge under reflective equilibrium (in the case of moral terms).

The argument goes as follows. Suppose there is indeed some single normative moral theory T^h to which humans in general would converge, were they to perform wide reflective equilibrium ideally well.¹¹ For concreteness, suppose it is some consequentialist theory; call it T^c . Suppose too that the generalizations of T^c link moral terms to non-moral terms in sufficiently rich and sufficiently numerous ways that each moral term has a determinate Ramsey functional correlate with respect to T^c . Imagine a race of Martians who differ from humans in the following ways. First, being much like humans in their level of sophistication and their social institutions, Martians too employ moral terms and concepts; their moral vocabulary is intertranslatable with our own. Second, if Martians were to perform wide reflective equilibrium ideally well, they too would converge on some single moral theory —but a different one

¹¹ We do not for a moment believe this. But our dialectical strategy is to grant the new wavers such extremely optimistic beliefs, and then argue that their view fails anyway.

than T^c . For concreteness, suppose it is some deontological theory; call it T^d . Third, T^d links moral terms to non-moral terms in such a way that each moral term has a well-defined Ramsey functional correlate with respect to T^d .¹²

According to pre-theoretic common sense, the scenario just described is perfectly cogent, and is a genuine conceptual possibility. An advocate of Boyd/Brink NWMS, however, is forced to deny this. For, the Boyd/Brink view is committed to claiming that human moral terms rigidly designate the Ramsey functional correlates of these terms with respect to T^c ; that the corresponding Martian terms rigidly designate distinct functional properties, viz., the Ramsey functional correlates of those terms with respect to T^d ; and thus that the human terms differ in meaning from the Martian ones in the same way that the term ‘water’ differs in meaning on earth and on Putnam’s original Twin

¹² Officially, let us add a fourth feature too (one that is very natural, given these first three stipulations): viz., that the uses of moral terms by Martians are not causally regulated by the Ramsey functional correlates of these terms with respect to T^c ; and likewise, the uses of moral terms by humans are not causally regulated by the Ramsey functional correlates of these terms with respect to T^d . I.e., Martian uses are not causally regulated by functional properties definable from the normative theory to which *humans* would converge; and likewise, human uses are not causally regulated by functional properties definable from the normative theory to which *Martians* would converge. The point of this fourth supposition is to rule out, by stipulation, the following sort of construal of the scenario described in the text: (i) human uses of moral terms and Martian uses are both causally regulated by the Ramsey functional correlates of these terms with respect to T^c , but (ii) even if Martians were to do wide reflective equilibrium ideally well, they still would fail to zero in on the real functional essence of these causally-regulating properties (because they would converge on T^d , rather than on T^c).

Earth.¹³ Thus, NWMS is guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism.

The moral of this thought experiment is clear: even if each moral term t , as used by humans under conditions of ideal information and ideal reflective equilibrium, is co-extensive with the corresponding expression that explicitly defines the Ramsey functional correlate of t (with respect to T^c), our moral terms do not *refer* to these functional properties.¹⁴ The Martians too employ moral concepts, and they employ moral terms that are intertranslatable with our own,

¹³ Strictly speaking, an advocate of Boyd/Brink NWMS is not officially required to say that the Martian terms rigidly designate their Ramsey functional correlates with respect to T^d . He could say that these terms might fail to be causally regulated by those particular functional properties, and thus could fail to designate them, because the real causal regulators of Martian uses of the terms might be certain *other* properties —ones that the Martians would fail to zero in on, even under conditions of ideal reflective equilibrium. But this way of constructing the scenario would not help. For, given the stipulation in note 12, the fan of Brink/Boyd NWMS still would be forced to say that the Martian terms rigidly designate different properties than do the corresponding human terms —and thus that the human terms differ in meaning from the Martian ones.

¹⁴ For someone who is strongly wedded to the idea that reference is causal regulation, the scenario just described would be taken to show, not only that human moral terms do not *refer* to their Ramsey functional correlates (with respect to T^c), but also that human uses of moral terms are not *causally regulated* by these functional properties. We ourselves would claim, however, that a slightly different human/Martian scenario can actually be used to prise apart the notions of reference and causal regulation, at least insofar as moral terms are concerned. We would maintain that even if one supposes (for argument's sake) that human uses of moral terms are causally regulated by the associated Ramsey functional correlates of these terms, and one stipulates that Martian uses of “moral” terms are causally regulated by the Ramsey functional correlates of *those* terms, it still would be chauvinistic to claim that human moral terms and Martian “moral” terms differ in reference and are not intertranslatable. But even if you are so strongly in the grip of the idea that reference is causal regulation that your intuitions differ from ours about the case just described, the

even though the Martians would not converge to T^c under ideal reflective equilibrium and their uses of moral terms are not causally regulated by the T^c Ramsey functional correlates of those terms. The problem with NWMS is that it chauvinistically incorporates the (putatively unique) moral standards of *humans* directly into the semantics of moral terms. Just as it is chauvinistic to build the empirical psychological theory that happens to be true of humans into an account of the reference and meaning of folk-psychological terms, it is also chauvinistic to build the normative theory that happens to be the one to which humans (allegedly) would reflectively converge into an account of semantics of moral terms and concepts. (The point becomes especially vivid if one imagines humans and Martians coming together, beginning to learn each other's languages, and interacting socially, economically, and culturally with one another. Surely they would regard one another as having moral concepts, would translate each other's moral terminology, and would debate morally with one another.)

The conceptual chauvinism of NWMS can be further underscored by observing that it is entirely possible —indeed *likely*— that human beings differ among themselves in the sorts of ways described in the preceding scenario. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Hilary Putnam,

human/Martian scenario described in the text still should convince you that NWMS is guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism.

In earlier writings (Horgan and Timmons 1991, 1992a, 1992b, and Timmons forthcoming) we describe a scenario we call Moral Twin Earth, which is much like the Martian scenario in the present paper. For the Moral Twin Earth scenario, however, it is stipulated that on earth the terms 'morally good', 'morally right', etc., are *causally regulated* by their Ramsey functional correlates with respect to T^c , and likewise that on Moral Twin Earth the orthographically identical terms are causally regulated by *their* Ramsey functional correlates with respect to T^d .

in which he describes a deep moral/political disagreement between himself and Robert Nozick:

One of my colleagues is a well-known advocate of the view that all government spending on 'welfare' is morally impermissible. On his view, even the public school system is morally wrong. If the public school system were abolished, along with the compulsory education law (which, I believe, he also regards as an impermissible government interference with individual liberty), then the poorer families could not afford to send their children to school and would opt for letting the children grow up illiterate; but this, on his view, is a problem to be solved by private charity. If people would not be charitable enough to prevent mass illiteracy (or mass starvation of old people, etc.) that is very bad, but it does not legitimize government action.

In *my* view, *his* fundamental premisses —the absoluteness of the right to property, for example— are counter-intuitive and not supported by sufficient argument. On *his* view I am in the grip of a 'paternalistic' philosophy which he regards as insensitive to individual rights. This is an extreme disagreement, and it is a disagreement in 'political philosophy' rather than merely a 'political disagreement'. (Putnam 1981, p. 164)

Here we have two philosophers who have apparently thought through the implications of their own moral outlooks, have gotten clear about relevant (available) factual information, aiming at unity and coherence among their respective desires and attitudes, and are at loggerheads over the issue of welfare spending. Of course it would be hard to show decisively that Putnam and Nozick have both reached a state of reflective equilibrium; perhaps they don't have all relevant information (if one includes 'information' that is not available for whatever reason). Nevertheless, when one reflects on this sort of case, involving a very high level of philosophical sophistication and moral sensibility, it just looks very unlikely that any movement in the direction of

yet greater unity and coherence will bring the two together on this issue. Although one could always *insist* that one or both parties have not yet achieved equilibrium and that they would converge if they ever were to reach equilibrium, this looks like a particularly desperate thing to say here. Rather, it seems much more plausible to attribute their differences to significantly different moral standards —so different that, insofar as each philosopher’s standards are systematizable, Putnam’s standards conform to a different normative moral theory than do Nozick’s (as in the imaginary human/Martian scenario). This diagnosis is basically the one Putnam himself gives of the situation.

Suppose that this natural-looking diagnosis is indeed correct. Suppose too, as seems overwhelmingly plausible given this diagnosis, that Putnam’s uses of moral terms are *not* causally regulated by the Ramsey functional correlates of these terms with respect to the normative theory that best systematizes *Nozick’s* considered moral judgments; and conversely for Nozick’s uses of moral vocabulary, vis-à-vis Putnam. Then NWMS evidently must say of Putnam and Nozick that they are employing moral terminology in conceptually incommensurable ways: that their respective uses of these terms have different referents, have different meanings, and are not intertranslatable. This, of course, is conceptual relativism with a vengeance! So much the worse for NWMS.

One fallback that new-wavers might contemplate at this juncture would be to try taking common-sense functionalism in philosophy of mind, rather than psychofunctionalism, as a model for the semantics of moral discourse. As we noted at the end of section 4, common-sense functionalism evidently gives the correct, non-chauvinist, verdict in the human/Martian scenario there described. Well then, why not embrace an analogous version of moral functionalism?

Although this fallback approach evidently avoids the chauvinism problem, it immediately faces a new problem of its own. The trouble is that the kinds of platitudinous, non-tendentious, generalizations that clearly count as constitutive of our common sense understanding of moral terms and concepts are simply not sufficient to pin down determinate referents for moral terms and concepts. We can distinguish between *formal* and *substantive* moral platitudes. Formal moral platitudes would include those generalizations that link moral terms and concepts to one another and thus express definitional connections among such terms and concepts as, for instance, in generalizations like “If an action is wrong, all things considered, then one ought not, all things considered, perform that action” and “If an action is morally permissible, all things considered, then it is not morally wrong, all things considered, to perform that action”. There are also those formal moral platitudes that represent features of the so-called ‘logic of moral discourse’, like the principle of universalizability: “If an action is right (or wrong) for one agent to perform in certain circumstances, then it is right (or wrong) for any similar agent in similar circumstances.” But clearly, these sorts of formal considerations alone are not enough to secure determinate referents for moral terms and concepts; in general, such a priori constraints are compatible with any of a great variety of theories about the extensions of moral terms and concepts. Nor will appeal to substantive moral platitudes (even together with all of the formal ones) suffice to produce referential determinacy. Many moral philosophers have claimed that there are substantive moral platitudes, including claims like, “Right actions are concerned to promote or sustain or contribute in some way to human flourishing” and “Right acts are expressive of equal concern and respect”. But these platitudes, taken together, are not sufficient to generate referential determinacy for, as Michael

Smith remarks, “These platitudes need not and should not be thought of as fixing a unique content or substance for moral reasons all by themselves, rather they simply serve to tell us when we are in the ballpark of moral reasons, as opposed to the ballpark of non-moral reasons”.¹⁵ Thus, the fallback retreat is not viable because it immediately encounters—with a vengeance—the problem of radical indeterminacy for moral statements. Out of the frying pan, into the fire!

6. Railton’s Version of NWMS

Whereas Brink/Boyd moral semantics construes moral terms as rigidly referring to functional properties that allegedly causally regulate a population’s use of moral discourse, one need not construe them in this way. It is open to the moral realist to construe them as *nonrigid* designators of certain first-order natural properties, and to claim that moral terms are definable via definite descriptions that pick out the relevant properties on the basis of their distinctive functional roles. The analogous position in philosophy of mind is the version of the type/type psychophysical identity theory espoused by D.M. Armstrong and David Lewis, who treat mental terms as functionally definable nonrigid designators of certain neurophysical properties. The following passage, from Lewis (1980), expresses the core aspects of the Armstrong-Lewis version of type physicalism:

Our view is that the concept of pain, or indeed any other experience or mental state, is the concept of a state that occupies a certain causal role, a state with certain typical causes and effects [...] It is the concept of a member of a system of states that together more or less realize the pattern of causal generalizations set forth in commonsense

¹⁵ Michael Smith (1984), p. 184. For further substantiation of this claim, see Smith’s own discussion.

psychology. (That system may be characterized as a whole and its members characterized afterward by reference to their place in it.) If the concept of pain is the concept of a state that occupies a certain causal role, then whatever state does occupy that role is pain. If the state of having neurons hooked up in a certain way and firing in a certain pattern is the state properly apt for causing and being caused, as we materialists think, then that neural state is pain. But the concept of pain is not the concept of that neural state. (“The concept of. . .” is an intensional functor.) The concept of pain, unlike the concept of that neural state which in fact is pain, would have applied to some different state if the relevant causal relations had been different [. . .] In short, the concept of pain as Armstrong and I understand it is a *nonrigid* concept. Likewise, the word “pain” is a nonrigid designator. It is a contingent matter what state the concept and the word apply to. It depends on what causes what. The same goes for the rest of our concepts and ordinary names of mental states.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lewis (1980), p. 218. What about the phenomenon of trans-species multiple realizability, so often cited by functionalists against the type-type identity theory? Well, if mental concepts and mental terms are nonrigid, then this phenomenon too can be accommodated easily and naturally. Lewis says:

Nonrigidity might begin at home [. . .] Though some possibilities are thoroughly otherworldly, others may be found on planets within range of our telescopes. On such planet is Mars [. . .] If the word “pain” designates one state at our actual world and another at a possible world where our counterparts have different internal structure, then also it may designate one state on Earth and another on Mars. Or better, since Martians may come here and we may go to Mars, it may designate one state for Earthlings and another for Martians [. . .] Human pain is the state that occupies the role of pain for humans. Martian pain is the state that occupies the same role for Martians. (1980, pp. 218–219)

In short, so-called multiple realization is just multiple *reference* by nonrigid concepts and terms.

A natural name for this view is *first-order functionalism*; for, although the view asserts that mental terms refer to first-order neurophysical properties rather than to second-order, functional, properties, it also asserts that mental *concepts* are functional concepts and that mental terms are therefore functionally definable. (The position commonly known as functionalism, asserting that mental properties are multiply-realizable functional properties rather than first-order properties, can be called *second-order functionalism*.) Lewis and Armstrong advocate first-order common-sense functionalism, since they propose to define mental terms by means of (the Ramsey sentence of) folk psychology. An alternative version, first-order *psychofunctionalism*, would instead appeal to (the Ramsey sentence of) the ideally complete and correct theoretical psychological theory that is true of human beings.¹⁷

A version of new wave moral semantics analogous to first-order functionalism in philosophy of mind has been tentatively explored by Peter Railton (1993). Since he is proposing an alternative to the expressivist account of the

¹⁷ The procedure for explicitly defining mental terms as nonrigid designators of first-order natural properties is as follows (Lewis 1970, 1972). Let T be the relevant psychological theory — either common-sense psychology or the complete theoretical psychology true of humans. Reformulate T so that it is a single conjunctive sentence with all mental-state terms as singular terms. E.g., ‘is angry’ becomes ‘has anger’.

Suppose that T, so reformulated can be written as

$$T(s_1 \dots s_n, i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m)$$

where s_i, i_i, o_i designate respectively, a mental state, input, and output. Replace the state terms $s_1 \dots s_n$ (but not $i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m$) by variables. Now define the mental terms simultaneously, this way:

$$\langle s_1 \dots s_n \rangle = \text{the } n\text{-tuple } \langle x_1 \dots x_n \rangle \text{ such that} \\ T(x_1 \dots x_n, i_1 \dots i_k, o_1 \dots o_m).$$

term ‘rational’ of Allan Gibbard (1990), Railton’s discussion is about that term, though the suggestion is that all normative, including moral, terms get the same basic semantic treatment. Here is Railton’s description of the proposal:

For any term, normative or non-normative, develop a “job description” corresponding to the many roles —some inferential, some not— a term plays in discourse, deliberation, and the regulation of affect and action [. . .] Many terms will turn out to have normative elements somewhere in their job description [. . .] Nonetheless, work of Ramsey, Carnap, and Lewis on the definition of theoretical terms in science suggests how one might proceed to develop a natural-factual job description from our “mixed job description”. Let us suppose that the job description for ‘rational’ is generated by taking our going theory of the world as a whole, including the roles, action-guiding and explanatory, we ask rationality to play, and all the theoretical and nontheoretical, normative and non-normative, notions with which rationality is hooked up, everything that is hooked with those notions in turn, and so on. Make all this into one big, conjunctive sentence. This sentence will include empirical generalizations, theoretical and practical truisms, and paradigm cases. Ramsify this sentence by replacing all normative predicates with second-order variables, bound by existential quantifiers. Then make a Russellian definite description out of the Ramsey sentence by replacing the inverted iota operator before the second-order variables that uniformly replaced occurrences of ‘rational’, bringing it out in front. The resulting job description for ‘rational’ would thus contain only naturalistic predicate constants, and would function, as a meaning should, to pick out the property, if there is a unique such, which fills the bill for rationality. (1993, pp. 46–47)

Railton suggests various modifications of the basic idea to avoid certain obvious initial problems with this proposal which need not detain us here. One question he raises about

the proposal, though, does bear directly on our concerns. Again, Railton:

Would the Ramsey-Lewis definite description involve rigidification in the manner of the job description one might write for water? It seems likely in the case of rational that the functional rather than substantival features will predominate, so that the definite description will not rigidify by fixing upon whatever neurophysiological phenomena *actually* fill the bill as the essence of the matter. (Ibid., p. 49)

So Railton's proposal for understanding the term 'rational', extended to terms like 'right' and 'good' in their moral uses, is to construe each such term as a functionally definable nonrigid designator of some first-order natural property—the unique natural property (if there is one) that satisfies the “natural-factual” job description that articulates the meaning of the given moral term. In the terminology we introduced above, Railton is embracing first-order functionalism for moral terms.

7. Railton's Dilemma: The Frying Pan or the Fire

Railton presents his proposal in a way that leaves it unclear whether or not the “mixed job description” associated with a given moral term would incorporate the generalizations of some specific normative ethical theory. So in effect there are two versions of the proposal. The *strong* version, as we will call it, is the analog of first-order psychofunctionalism in the philosophy of mind. On this account, a moral term's mixed job description would indeed incorporate the principles comprising some particular normative-ethical theory—presumably, whichever one (allegedly) would be converged upon by all humans under ideal wide reflective equilibrium. The *weak* version, on the other hand, is the analog of first-order common-sense functionalism in the philosophy of mind. On this alternative account, although

the mixed job description associated with a given moral term would include formal and substantive *platitudes* in which that term figures, it would not incorporate any specific normative-ethical theory.

The problems we raised in Section 5 for Boyd/Brink second-order moral functionalism arise all over again for first-order moral functionalism, *mutatis mutandis*. Consider strong first-order moral functionalism, and what it is committed to saying about the human/Martian scenario described in Section 5. The mixed job description associated with the human term ‘good’ is importantly different from the mixed job description associated with the corresponding Martian term, since the former incorporates the normative moral theory T^c whereas the latter incorporates the distinct theory T^d . Hence, the natural-factual job description for the human term ‘good’ (obtained from the mixed job description by Ramsification) likewise is importantly different from natural-factual job description for the corresponding Martian term. But the natural-factual job description for a normative term specifies its *meaning*, according to Railton’s proposal. Hence, strong first-order moral functionalism entails that the human term ‘good’ differs in meaning from the corresponding Martian term—and thus entails that the respective concepts these terms express are incommensurable, and that apparent moral conflicts between humans and Martians are not genuine conflicts at all. Strong first-order moral functionalism is therefore guilty of chauvinistic conceptual relativism; this first-order version of NWMS, like the second-order Boyd/Brink view, chauvinistically incorporates the (putatively unique) moral standards of *humans* directly into the semantics of moral terms.¹⁸

¹⁸ Does the nonrigidity of moral terms, under Railton’s version of NWMS, help to avoid chauvinism? No. Although nonrigidity means

Now consider weak first-order moral functionalism, the analog of common-sense first-order functionalism in philosophy of mind. Our remarks in the final paragraph of Section 5, about the corresponding second-order view, extend quite directly to this position too. As we said, the kinds of platitudinous, non-tendentious, formal and substantive generalizations that clearly count as constitutive of the common sense understanding of moral terms and concepts are nowhere near sufficient to pin down determinate reference. Nor does it help to pack lots of additional non-normative information into the mixed job descriptions for moral terms.¹⁹ The problem of indeterminacy for moral terms persists anyway, because of the limited reference-constraining capacity of formal and substantive moral platitudes.

Railton's dilemma, then, is this. First-order functionalism can be construed either strongly or weakly. Construed strongly, it is guilty of chauvinistic moral relativism. Construed weakly, it leads to radical moral indeterminacy. Either the frying pan or the fire.

that a given moral term can designate different first-order properties in different situations (or for different populations), the properties designated by moral terms must always conform collectively to the specific normative theory T^c . This specific normative theory is chauvinistically built right into the meaning of moral terms, according to the view in question. (Likewise, first-order psychofunctionalism is just as chauvinistic as the second-order version. Although a given mental term nonrigidly designates different first-order properties for different kinds of creatures, according to first-order psychofunctionalism, the properties designated by mental terms must always conform collectively to the empirical psychological theory true of *humans*.)

¹⁹ The thought that this *does* help is perhaps intimated by Railton's remark, in the first of the two passages quoted in Section 6 above, that the job description for 'rational' is generated on the basis of "our going theory of the world".

8. *Conclusion*

The dilemma lately noted arises for both first-order and second-order versions of moral functionalism. Either way, the meta-ethical analog of psychofunctionalism in philosophy of mind leads to chauvinistic conceptual relativism, whereas the meta-ethical analog of common sense functionalism in philosophy of mind leads to radical indeterminacy.

One lesson, for those philosophers seeking a version of moral realism that identifies moral properties with natural properties of some kind, is that functionalism in philosophy of mind is not a promising model. But in addition, the above discussion also provides grounds for doubting that there can be any viable version of naturalist moral realism at all. For, those pursuing such a route will need to steer safely between the Scylla of chauvinistic conceptual relativism and the Charybdis of radical moral indeterminacy. Shipwreck is probably inevitable, on one shore or the other.^{20 21}

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²⁰ In our view one's metaethical efforts should instead at developing some version or other of moral irrealism, including, of course, a semantic story about the workings of moral language. Of course, there are certain obstacles to be faced in the attempt to develop a plausible version of moral irrealism, but we believe they can be overcome. See Horgan and Timmons (forthcoming), Timmons (forthcoming).

²¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mountain-Plains Philosophy Conference, Santa Fe, NM, October, 1995, and the Illinois Philosophical Association Meeting, Urbana, IL, November, 1995. We wish to thank our commentators Jann Benson (Mountain-Plains) and Ted McNair (Illinois), as well as the audiences at these conferences for helpful comments on our paper.

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RESUMEN

En años recientes, las defensas del realismo moral han adoptado lo que llamamos la “semántica moral de la nueva ola”, la cual analiza las formas semánticas de funcionar de los términos morales tales como “bueno” y “correcto” semejantes a las formas semánticas de funcionar de los términos para clases naturales en la ciencia, y se inspira también en temas funcionalistas de la filosofía de la mente. Este tipo de perspectiva semántica que encontramos en las perspectivas metaéticas de David Brink, Richard Boyd, Peter Railton y otros, es el cimiento semántico crucial de una clase naturalística de realismo moral que estos filósofos apoyan —una perspectiva que promete dar una forma fuerte de realismo moral. Nosotros sostenemos que la semántica moral de la nueva ola nos conduce, de una u otra forma, al relativismo moral —una perspectiva que no es compatible con el tipo de realismo moral que estos filósofos pretenden defender. Es así que nuestra discusión muestra que si la semántica moral de la nueva ola es la mejor esperanza para defender el realismo moral naturalístico, entonces este tipo de perspectiva es insostenible.

Nuestro trabajo está dividido en 7 secciones además de una conclusión. En la sección 1, explicamos la motivación que hay detrás de la semántica moral de la nueva ola. En la sección 2, pasamos al trabajo de Brink y Boyd cuyas perspectivas combinadas producen una perspectiva metaética, según la cual los términos morales como “bueno” y “correcto” quieren referir rígidamente a las propiedades funcionales de segundo orden cuya esencia funcional la revela cualquier teoría moral que surge de la aplicación correcta de la metodología coherentista. La perspectiva Brink-Boyd toma como modelo al psicofuncionalismo de la filosofía de la mente para entender las propiedades morales. En la sección 3, diferenciamos las diferentes formas del relativismo, arguyendo que ciertas formas son culpables de chauvinismo, y luego, en la sección 4, sostenemos que el psicofuncionalismo de la filosofía de la mente es culpable de una forma chauvinista de relativismo conceptual. En la sección 5, mostramos entonces cómo la versión Brink-Boyd de la semántica moral de la nueva ola también es culpable de un relativismo conceptual chauvinista en la ética. En la sección 6, pasamos a la propuesta de Railton (inspirada

por la versión de la teoría de identidad psicofísica defendida por D.M. Armstrong y David Lewis) de que hay que comprender los términos morales en tanto que refieren no-rígidamente a las propiedades naturales. En la sección 7, sostenemos que en una interpretación de la propuesta de Railton, su perspectiva es culpable de un relativismo conceptual chauvinista, y en una interpretación alternativa, su perspectiva es culpable de una indeterminación moral radical. Ambos modos, tanto la perspectiva de Railton como la perspectiva de Brink-Boyd, no ayudan en la defensa de una forma fuerte de realismo moral: irónicamente, la semántica moral de la nueva ola nos conduce a un relativismo moral.

[Traducción: Claudia Chávez A.]