

COMMENT ON ERLER : SPEAKER RELATIVISM AND SEMANTIC INTUITIONS

RAGNAR FRANCÉN
UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Abstract

Metaethical relativists sometimes use an interesting analogy with relativism in physics to defend their view. In this article I comment on Erler's discussion of this analogy and take the discussion further into methodological matters that it raises. I argue that Erler misplaces the analogy in the dialectic between relativists and absolutists: the analogy cannot be dismissed by simply pointing to the fact that we have absolutist intuitions – this is exactly the kind of objection the analogy is supposed to be a defence against. To decide if the analogy works we need to answer the following two questions: (i) *Why* does it work to say that people refer to relative physical properties (like simultaneity, mass and motion) even though they intend to speak about absolute physical properties? And (ii) does the answer carry over to the moral case? I argue for a specific answer to (i), and argue that it gives us reason to answer (ii) in the negative – so the analogy does not hold. However, looking at the issue more closely also raises questions about a fundamental assumption in metaethical discussion: perhaps we cannot assume that one single analysis holds for everyone's moral judgments.

Introduction

Alexandre Erler's article in the first issue of Praxis focuses on an interesting analogy sometimes used by metaethical relativists, namely that between relativism in physics and relativism in the moral area. This is a welcome discussion, both because metaethical relativism is very often discarded much too quickly in the debate, and because the analogy used by relativists is little discussed and not very developed by the relativists themselves. Much of what Erler has to say on this matter is interesting. What I want to do here is to comment on some misunderstandings I think is contained in Erler's article and take the

discussion further into methodological matters that it raises. Doing this, I will necessarily leave out many of Erler's points, concentrating on what I find to be most central:

First, I think that Erler discusses and objects to the analogy in a way that misplaces it in the dialectic between relativists and absolutists. I take up this issue in the first section below, after shortly describing the form of relativism in question and the analogy with physics. In the second section below I argue that when the analogy is correctly understood, we need to go into theoretical semantic questions in order to determine whether it is a successful analogy. Trying to assess the plausibility of the analogy also brings up methodological issues, which, I argue in the final section, call into question fundamental assumptions in metaethical discussions as it is often pursued.¹

Relativism in metaethics and the analogy

According to *absolutist* cognitivism, moral judgments have their truth-values independently of who utters or believes in them. If two people both believe or assert, say, that it is morally wrong to eat meat, then it can't be that one of the assertions (or beliefs) is true and the other false. This is denied by the form of moral relativism in question here – sometimes called “speaker relativism” or “appraiser relativism”. According to speaker relativism the truth-value of a moral judgment depends on the morality (or “moral system”, “moral perspective” or “moral framework”) of the speaker or believer of the judgment. Most commonly, speaker relativists hold that having a certain morality consists in having certain affective states, motivational states, emotions, desires, intentions, or the like – that is, the kind of states non-cognitivists identify with moral judgments (Dreier, 1990; Harman, in Harman and Thomson, 1996; Wong, 1984, p. 75). So whether my belief in, or utterance of, “Self-defence is sometimes morally right” is true or not, depends on whether my morality approves of some instances of self-defence or not. To determine whether my judgment is true, it is not enough to consider the act or act-type in question (self-defence), but we also have to consider my moral likings and dislikings towards the act.²

To substantiate the idea of speaker relativism, let me shortly describe Jamie Dreier's (unusually clear) version of this view. Dreier's main motivation for speaker relativism is that it explains motivational internalism – that is, the view that moral judgments necessarily

1 For a longer discussion of many of the issues raised in this article, see my dissertation (Francén, 2007).

2 For a discussion of how to characterize speaker relativism, different variants of it, and some problems with the simple statement used here, see chapter 1 of my dissertation (Francén, 2007).

are accompanied by motivation. Dreier's idea is that this can be explained if moral terms function like indexical terms. Indexicals like 'I' and 'here' have different referents when they are used in different contexts, that is, depending on for example where, when and by whom the utterance is made. The (Kaplanian) characters of indexicals determine what it is they refer to given a certain context. When someone says, "it is cold here", the character of 'here' makes the term refer to the place or area where the speaker happens to be at the time of utterance. Similarly, according to Dreier, the characters of moral terms are such that their reference depends on the morality (moral motivations) of the speaker at the time of utterance. If you are motivated to act in accordance with a utilitarian morality, then when you say, "It is wrong to kill", 'wrong' refers to the property of not maximizing utility. What you say will be true if and only if killing does not maximize utility. When 'wrong' is used by people with different moralities, i.e. people who are motivated in accordance with other moral standards, it will refer to other properties.³ So when we make moral judgments we attribute properties to acts that motivate us to perform or refrain from the acts in question. Hence, the connection to motivation is explained.

Speaker relativism is often quickly dismissed as obviously contrary to how most of us apprehend our own moral judgments. When I utter a sentence containing an ordinary indexical, say, "my shoe size is 8", I know very well that the truth of my assertion depends on some property of me. But when we make moral judgments, we do not intend to say something about our own moralities or the relations they stand in to the acts, or something the truth of which depends on those moralities. We want to say something about the act in question, whether it is morally permissible or not, the truth of which depends solely on the properties of the act. So it seems that even if speaker relativists were correct in their ontological claim – that actions cannot be absolutely right or wrong since there are no such moral properties out there – we should rather conclude that an error-theory is correct. After all, the kind of moral properties we try to attribute to actions don't exist. Some speaker relativists have thought that this counterintuitivity of their view need not be a big problem, and have used the analogy with relativism in physics to illustrate why (Dreier, 2006, p. 261-62; Harman and Thomson, 1996, p. 4 & 18). I'll describe the analogy

3 Dreier handles that fact that we plausibly should acknowledge for special cases where people are not motivated in accordance with their moral views – e.g. when there are depressed – through the idea that the characters of moral terms (like the characters of most indexicals) are complex. When a depressed person uses a moral term, what determines the reference is the moral standard she is motivated to act in accordance with when she is not depressed.

in terms of simultaneity, but it could equally well be done in terms of mass or motion. Intuitively we think of simultaneity as a two-place relation between two events, and when we say that two events are simultaneous we mean to say that they stand in such a relation to each other. But it follows from Einstein's special theory of relativity that two events cannot be simultaneous absolutely, but only relative to a frame of reference (Einstein, 1960, p. 26). Differently put; what we think of as a two-place relation really is a three-place relation between the events and a frame of reference. However, we do not want to settle for an error-theory about simultaneity. That is, it seems wrong to say that all of our judgments that two events occur simultaneously are false just because we intend to attribute absolute simultaneity to the events. As long as the two events are simultaneous relative to a frame of reference salient to the speaker (the one she occupies), it seems that we should count her judgment that they are simultaneous as true. Dreier brings out this point nicely (though he speaks of durations of time rather than simultaneity):

A policeman on the witness stand testifies that while staking out the apartment, he saw the defendant enter and then leave one hour later. The defense cross-examines: When you say it was one hour later, can you provide an inertial frame? "A duration of one hour must, officer, be relative to one inertial frame or another, you know." The policeman denies that he meant any such thing. "Just one hour, is all I meant, not relative to any of your fancy frames." In a very straightforward sense, the policeman's *intention* was to name an absolute duration, of the sort that is simply not recognized in relativistic physics. Is the policeman's testimony thereby impeached? Has he said something false? We would not ordinarily say so. To put it briefly: the policeman's judgment had a false presupposition behind it. His own conception of the world, adequate and accurate enough for his own purposes, is not really correct. But the false presupposition, the incorrect *theory* that the policeman himself would give if carefully questioned, does not seem to infect the integrity or veracity of his ordinary, first-order judgments. What the policeman said, we believe, is true; only his background absolutist theory of it is mistaken. (Dreier, 2006, p. 261-262)

Even if the policeman and most of us have false intuitions and background beliefs about the nature of the relation between the events we think of as simultaneous (or being one hour apart), we don't want to say that our judgments about simultaneity are all false. We do not want to say that what Einstein discovered was that events cannot be simultaneous – rather we say that his discovery, that there is no absolute simultaneity, showed that we were wrong about what we were referring to all along – it is correct to say that two events are simultaneous as long as they stand in a certain relation to each other *relative to a frame of reference salient to the speaker*.

So, moral speaker relativists suggest, we should say the same thing about moral properties.

The fact that we are wrong about the nature of the properties had by the actions we think of as right and wrong, is no reason to dismiss our moral judgments as false. Rather we should say that they concern relations between our moralities and the actions in question – a judgment that an action is wrong is correct if the speaker’s morality disapproves of the action.

Erler’s objections and discussion

Erler argues that the analogy does not manage to make relativism plausible. In this section I will argue that his objections and discussion contains misunderstandings, some of them having to do with the role of the analogy, and that they, as they stand, fail to refute the analogy.

Speaker relativism is often discarded on the grounds that, since it gives moral terms different referents depending on who uses them, it makes genuine moral disagreement impossible (Brink, 1989, p. 29-35; Horgan and Timmons, 2000; Forthcoming; Kölbel, 2002; Moore, 1912, p. 63-6; Smith, 1994, p. 34-35; Streiffer, 1999; Timmons, 2003, p. 406-407; Wright, 2001, p. 51). Since on this view, different people refer to different properties by moral terms like ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, a discussion like,

A: It’s always wrong to lie

B: No, it’s not always wrong to lie

is not an expression of a genuine disagreement. Erler brings up this objection, but argues that it poses no big problem for relativism:

I think that the relativist should not have too much difficulty replying to that objection. He can agree that when we do mean to make moral judgments in an “absolute” manner, genuine moral disagreements are possible. However, this need not worry him, for the suggestion made by Harman and Dreier is a *reformative* one; they do not pretend to be merely describing the way we ordinarily use moral language. It is only once moral statements have been suitably relativized that people with different moral outlooks won’t be disagreeing with each other anymore. And neither need this be a problem for the relativist: he can remark that the same would happen if we and the astronaut, in the example given above, initially made our claims about the amount of time that had elapsed since G.W. Bush was first elected in absolute terms (thus disagreeing with one another), and then came to realize that Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity was true. We would then suitably modify our claims and the disagreement would disappear – but the fact that it leads to the removal of such disagreements is certainly not something we can hold against Einstein’s theory. And so it also goes, the relativist might say, for MMR [metaethical moral relativism]. (Erler, 2008, p. 57-58)

This reply on the relativist's behalf misconstrues the role of the analogy. The point of bringing in relativism in physics is that, in that case, it is plausible to say that even people who make false background assumptions – intending to speak about something that doesn't exist, namely absolute simultaneity – manage to speak about something that does exist – relative simultaneity – and can thus make true judgments about simultaneity. So even if we and the astronaut make our judgments (“7 years have elapsed since Bush was elected” and “4 years have elapsed since Bush was elected”) in absolute terms and with absolutist background assumptions, both of them should reasonably be understood as being about relative time and therefore not resulting in a genuine disagreement since the salient frame of reference is different for the two judgments (even though we would mistakenly think of it as a disagreement). The point, then, is that we do not have to “suitably modify our claims” for it to be reasonable to understand them as all along being about relative simultaneity. This is why this is a promising analogy for speaker relativists. Even though people make moral judgments in “an absolute manner”, intending to speak about the absolute moral properties which (according to the relativists) don't exist, it could nonetheless be that they actually do speak about the relative moral rightness and wrongness there is. Thus, according to speaker relativism, also moral disputes between people who intend to make absolutist moral judgments fail to be genuine disagreements.

In the quote above, Erler also suggests that Harman and Dreier put forward their theories as reformative claims, not as claims about “the way we actually use moral language”. This suggestion is problematic. Both Dreier and Harman support their view on aspects of the way we actually use moral terms – on the fact that moral judgments are connected to motivation, and on the fact that what we apply moral terms to differ between different speakers.

Furthermore, if speaker relativists intended their view only as a reformative analysis of moral judgments, then the analogy with relativism in physics would be superfluous. They could simply (i) agree with error-theorists that as we actually use moral expressions they are about absolute moral properties and are thus all false, since such properties don't exist; and (ii) say that we should reform our way of talking so that we speak about relative moral rightness and wrongness. In order to defend the reformative claim, there's no need to use the analogy. So the use of the analogy is an indication that this is not all they are after. As Dreier writes, it is reasonable to think of the policeman as managing to speak about relative simultaneity despite the fact that he fails to appreciate this himself. When relativists suggest that the corresponding reasoning is plausible in the moral case,

they suggest that we should interpret our actual moral judgments (with their absolutist background assumptions) as being about relative moral properties.

It is true that Harman is not quite as clear as Dreier (and Wong) that his version of speaker relativism is intended as a theory about what we actually speak about when we make moral judgments. In his most recent presentation of his ideas, for example, he emphasizes that his moral relativism is not to be understood as a claim about meaning:

[...] moral relativism is not by itself a claim about meaning. [...] Moral relativism is a thesis about how things are and a thesis about how things aren't! Moral relativism claims that there is no such thing as objectively absolute good, absolute right or absolute justice; there is only what is good, right or just in relation to this or that moral framework. What someone takes to be absolute rightness is only rightness in relation to (a system of moral coordinates determined by) that person's values. (Harman, in Harman and Thomson, 1996, p. 17)

According to Harman, relativism cannot be a theory about meaning, since absolutists intend their judgments to be about absolute rightness and wrongness. However, when he uses the analogy with relativism in physics to escape error-theory, he goes further than this strictly ontological thesis. Just like in physics, it is reasonable to understand absolutists' moral judgments as true, if the moral claim in question is true in relation to a moral framework salient to the speaker (in the moral case, one that is accepted by the speaker). The only way I can make sense of the idea that it is reasonable to count the absolutists' judgments as correct if the corresponding relative judgments are true, is through the idea that, even though absolutists do not intend to speak about relative wrongness, it is reasonable to think that in the absence of absolute wrongness they manage to do that. Otherwise it would not be reasonable to see the truth of their judgments as depending on relative wrongness.

This connects to another of Erler's objections to the analogy and speaker relativism. He cites a passage he finds problematic from one of Harman's early papers on relativism. Harman writes that his relativism involves the claim that two conflicting or non-relativist moral judgments – that is, judgments made by absolutists without any explicit relativizing clauses – can both be correct or true. To make sense of this idea, Erler writes that Harman must appeal to a special notion of truth. However, I see no evidence that Harman does this, nor that he needs to do it. Rather, it seems, we should focus on the notion of conflicting judgments. Harman's idea cannot be that the judgments are conflicting in the sense that the correctness of one excludes the correctness of the other – since they are both correct. So the idea must be that they conflict in some other sense. One interpretation is that there

is an *intended* conflict – if A and B in the conversation above are absolutists, they will intend their judgments to be in conflict. A second interpretation is that there is a conflict in an intuitive sense – intuitively we see both A and B as speaking about the same thing, viz. the wrongness of lying. A third alternative is that ‘conflict’ here is to be understood as a clash between interests.⁴

My aim here is not to find plausible interpretations in order to argue that everything Harman says about his form of relativism makes sense. Rather, what I want to stress is that, as long as Harman uses the analogy with physics to argue that his form of relativism holds for every speaker, absolutists as well as relativists, he is committed to the idea that two speakers (with relevantly different moralities) do not disagree in the sense that the truth of one judgment excludes the truth of the other judgment. Consequently, there is nothing strange in saying that both can be correct (or true).

Erler finds the idea of conflicting true judgments problematic in another way as well. He writes that it is not really the absolutist judgments that are both true, but their relativistic translations. So, one problem with the analogy is that it “seems that we won’t have salvaged the notion of truth for such judgments in any significant sense” (Erler, 2008, p. 65). However, if we take speaker relativism and the analogy with physics seriously, it is indeed the actual judgments made by absolutists that are true. We want to say that Dreier’s policeman manages to say something true: and likewise, speaker relativists want to say that absolutists can manage to say something true. It is true that the analogy cannot “salvage” the idea that the truth of moral judgments is independent of the judges’ moralities – but this is not the point of the analogy. After all, it is supposed to be part of a defence of speaker relativism.

Erler also brings up the interesting objection that speaker relativism fails to account for moral normativity. If speaker relativism is true, the facts that make moral judgments true are facts about the speaker’s morality – her desires or motivations. But then it seems that they are merely factual judgments about psychological states, and as such without any moral normativity. And if such judgments are not morally normative, then they cannot be moral judgments. Michael Smith has put this objection to speaker relativism very nicely.

4 Recently the issue of relativism and disagreement has been much discussed in relation to a new form of relativism (see e.g., Brogaard, 2008; Kölbel, 2002; 2003; 2005; MacFarlane, 2007). We cannot go into this issue here, but see chapter 4 of my dissertation (Francén, 2007) for a discussion.

According to speaker relativism of any kind, Smith observes, the truth of moral judgments depends on facts that are arbitrary in a certain sense, that is, facts that depend on the actual desires (the morality) of the speaker or believer of the judgment. Such arbitrary facts, Smith contends, cannot have any normative significance; the actual desires of someone are arbitrary from a normative perspective and, consequently, so are any fact or property that depend on these. (Smith, 1994, p. 172-173). I think that this is a quite common intuition – if some alleged moral judgment is true just in virtue of the fact that the speaker has certain desires, then it is hard to see how that judgment could really tell me that I have a moral reason to act in some way, and thus it is hard to see it as a moral judgment at all.

This is certainly an objection to take seriously for speaker relativists. But I'm surprised that Erler sees it as an objection to the analogy with relativism in physics. Rather, it would seem, this is exactly the kind of objection that the analogy is supposed to ward off. The objection is that many of us have absolutist moral intuitions, intuitions that moral judgments are about absolute moral properties rather than relative ones. But this is where the analogy comes to rescue. Most people have absolutist intuitions when it comes to simultaneity too – but we are willing to say that relativism about simultaneity can be true anyways, and can be true also about the judgments of those who have the absolutist intuition. Relative simultaneity was what people were talking about all along, even though they didn't know that, and perhaps even had intuitions going against it. So this can be true in the case of moral judgments too, speaker relativists suggest.

In this section I have made two main points regarding the analogy with relativism in physics. The first is that the analogy is meant to show that also judgments made by people with absolutist intuitions and made without explicit relativizing clauses or intentions, can manage to refer to relative moral properties and thus be true in virtue of these. The second is that the analogy cannot be simply dismissed by pointing to the fact that we have absolutist intuitions – this is exactly the kind of objection the analogy is supposed to be a defence against. This does not mean that the analogy really does put up a good defence of this sort. But it means that in arguing against it one cannot *assume* that it doesn't – that would be simply assuming that the analogy doesn't work. One has to *argue* to this effect. So let us turn to the central question:

Does the analogy work?

To decide if the analogy works we need to answer the following two questions: *Why* does

it work, if it does, to say that people refer to relative simultaneity (or mass or motion) even though they intend to speak about absolute simultaneity (or mass or motion)? And does the answer carry over to the moral case?

Harman and Dreier never try to give a theoretical explanation of how it works in the case of relativism in physics. But I think there is such an explanation, one that is suggested by what they write. ‘Simultaneity’ seems to work much like natural kind terms. Harman emphasizes that the discovery that physical properties like simultaneity are relative was a discovery about how the world is, an empirical discovery – just like, for example, the discovery that water is H_2O . Dreier’s policeman case is designed to show that we can refer to the property in question even though we have a misconception about it. In other words, the descriptions we associate with the term – that it stands for an absolute property – can turn out not to fit the referent. This is what we could expect if the reference of ‘simultaneity’ is fixed along the lines of a causal theory of reference: no matter what intuitions we have, if the property at the other side of the causal chain is a relational property, then that is the referent.

Indeed, the standard arguments used to show that a causal theory of reference is true for natural kind terms and names seem to carry over to ‘simultaneity’. In these arguments we are asked to imagine that, say, the stuff we think of as gold is not yellow (Kripke, 1980, p. 118), or that the man we know as Gödel was not the one to discover the incompleteness of arithmetic (Kripke, 1980, p. 83-84). The examples are supposed to tease out certain intuitions. Even if these are properties we strongly associate with gold and Gödel, we are ready to say that gold and Gödel could fail to have them: it would still be gold, even if it was discovered not to be yellow, and he would still be Gödel, even if it turned out that he had not discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic. So having these properties is not what makes something gold or Gödel; or differently put, the reference of ‘gold’ and ‘Gödel’ is not determined by our associating these terms with the properties. If it were, our reaction would have been that if there is no yellow goldish substance, then there is no gold whatsoever. But, it seems, we are ready to say that whatever the goldish substance we are causally acquainted with is made of, that is gold. So, gold is (and ‘gold’ refers to) whatever stands in a certain causal relation to us and our use of the term.

We seem to have the same kind of intuition, or disposition to react to new or surprising discoveries, when it comes to simultaneity (and other physical properties like mass or motion). Einstein discovered that events that we experience as simultaneous do not

stand in a two-place relation to each other absolutely, but only relative to a frame of reference salient to us: or, differently put, that there is a three-place relation between the two events and a frame of reference. When we hear that, we are ready to say that this shows that simultaneity is the three-place relation, rather than that it shows that there is no simultaneity. So, in the same way as it seems that it is not the descriptions we associate with ‘gold’ or ‘Gödel’ that determine the reference of these terms, it seems that the description or intuition of simultaneity as a two-place relation is not reference-fixing for ‘simultaneity’. Rather, simultaneity is whatever type of relation those events we experience as simultaneous stand in to each other.

So the idea that people refer to relative simultaneity even though they do not intend to do so makes sense if we understand our talk about simultaneity along the lines of a causal theory of reference. And, as I have just argued, such an understanding is plausible. The same kind of argument is applicable here as in the standard arguments for the idea that a causal theory of reference holds for natural kind terms: we are disposed to say that if what we think of as a two-place relation really is a three-place relation, then this counts as simultaneity.

Are we disposed to react in a corresponding manner in the case of moral terms? It seems that many people are not. They are not ready to say that, if what they think of as absolute moral rightness and wrongness just is a relation between their own moralities and the actions in question, then those relations are moral rightness and wrongness. Rather, they would say that, if there is no absolute rightness and wrongness, then there is no moral rightness or wrongness at all. Here, then, one of the objections brought up by Eler returns. At least one reason why many people are disposed to acknowledge nothing but *absolute* moral facts as moral facts is the idea that facts of the kind that make moral judgments true according to speaker relativism – that is, “mere” psychological facts, facts about our actual contingent desires (or facts dependent on such facts) – are normatively arbitrary facts. If it is morally right or wrong to do x, then this fact is independent of anyone’s actual attitudes towards x.

This means that regarding the issue in focus here, there is a crucial disanalogy between relativism in physics and moral speaker relativism. Even if we intuitively don’t think of simultaneity as a three-place relation, we are willing to disregard that intuition and acknowledge that simultaneity is such a relation *if* it turns out that this is the kind of

relation that is instantiated in cases where we experience events as simultaneous. But many people are not willing to disregard their intuition that nothing but absolute moral rightness and wrongness can count as moral rightness and wrongness. Consequently, the reason there is to think that relativism in physics can be true as a theory about how the world is constituted is lacking in the case of moral speaker relativism. So it seems that we should conclude that the analogy fails to save moral speaker relativism after all.

The methodological issue – metaethical variability

The matter is more complex than this, however. Even though it seems clear that many people are disposed not to recognize anything but *absolute* moral facts as moral facts, others seem disposed to think that, at least if there are no absolute moral facts, then the relations there are between people's subjective moralities and properties of actions count as moral properties. As we have seen, relativists like Dreier and Harman think that. And as a matter of fact, also some absolutists are prepared to say this. Frank Jackson defends an absolutist view (of roughly the same kind as Michael Smith), but he thinks that, *if* it turns out that there are no absolute moral facts of the kind he thinks there are (if people's moral views would not converge under certain ideal circumstances), then some form of speaker relativism is true (Jackson, 1998, p. 137). So, in contrast to Smith and other die-hard absolutists, Dreier, Harman and Jackson are disposed to use and reason around moral terms in a way that is, in crucial respects, relevantly similar to how people are disposed to use natural kind terms: they are willing to say that moral rightness and wrongness can turn out to be of a different nature than we have thought, namely relative rather than absolute.

So it seems that regarding the aspect that is relevant here, there is no uniform use of moral terms. What conclusion should we draw from this regarding the question of how to analyse moral expressions? This depends on what role we ascribe to people's intuitions or dispositions to use the terms in question. According to one common view the correct analysis is to capture such intuitions or dispositions. Conceptual analyses are to capture the ways in which we are disposed to use terms and concepts to classify things in the world – otherwise they don't capture our concepts. Our dispositions to classify constitute the basis of our concepts – so any analysis that conflicts with these dispositions is incorrect. If we are in no circumstances ready to say that *x* is *F* (say, a bachelor) unless *x* is *G* (unmarried), then being *G* (unmarried) is a necessary condition for being *F* (a bachelor). As we saw above, this is the kind of reasoning behind Kripke and Putnam's classic arguments that the meaning of some terms (names and natural kind terms) should be analysed through a causal theory of reference. They point to scenarios that we are disposed to classify in

a certain way with such terms – we are willing to say that the terms apply even if our associated descriptions do not

If we apply this common way of analysing concepts to moral judgments, the consequence of the fact that people's dispositions diverge in the way pointed to above, seems to be that we cannot find a uniform analysis. The diversity simply removes the grounds for any such analysis. This non-uniformity is actually one reason why some philosophers have abandoned the idea of giving an analysis of the actual meaning of moral judgments, instead opting to give analyses that are reformatory or revisionary with respect to our intuitions and dispositions (Brandt, 1979; Railton, 1989). This way, revisionism makes possible the defence of one uniform analysis of moral judgments without denying the diversity of people's intuitions.

But there is also another, less explored, possibility. Instead of opting for a uniform revisionary analysis one alternative is to stick to the aim of finding analyses that capture our intuitions or dispositions, but to reject what we might call *the single analysis assumption* – the view that everyone's moral judgments can be (correctly) analysed in the same way. If people have relevantly different dispositions to use moral terms, and such dispositions are what correct analyses are to capture, then it seems we have no choice but to say that people have different concepts. Die-hard absolutists like Smith are not ready to classify anything but absolute moral properties as moral properties – so their concept of, say, moral wrongness is such that if there are no absolute moral properties, nothing falls under the concept. Relativists like Harman and Dreier and more modest absolutists like Jackson on the other hand, are willing to say that, at least if there are no absolute moral properties, some relational properties count as moral properties – so their concept of wrongness would be instantiated even if there are no absolute moral properties. The result is analysis pluralism – different analyses are correct for different speakers' moral judgments, where the analysis of any individual speaker's judgments depends on her strong metaethical intuitions (manifested as dispositions to use moral terms). As for the analogy with relativism in physics, the conclusion would be that the analogy works given some people's concepts of moral wrongness, but not given others'.

As it stands, this is at best a sketch of an argument for analysis pluralism. It has to be complemented by a more developed account of the view on conceptual analysis it builds on and a fuller examination of the dispositions to use moral terms in question. Furthermore, something has to be said about how judgments that are to be analysed radically different

from one another can all count as moral judgments. I have started this work elsewhere (Francén, 2007). But the point I want to make here is that given that one wants an analysis that takes account of people's intuitions or dispositions to use moral terms and concepts in roughly the way sketched above, then one cannot simply start with one's own intuitions and assume that these are typical of people's intuitions in general. Rather, there is a real possibility that there is variation in dispositions that results in variation in concepts.⁵ And, more specifically, given the obvious apparent difference between die-hard absolutists on the one hand, and relativists and more modest absolutists on the other, there is at least a strong prima facie case that different people's moral judgments should be analysed differently in this aspect. If we want a non-revisionary analysis of moral judgments, we should say that some people refer to absolute moral properties while others refer to relative moral properties (at least if there are no absolute ones).

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⁵ For similar suggestions, see (Gill, 2008a; 2008b; Loeb, 2008)

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