

## Semantic Challenges to Normative Realism

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### **Abstract:**

Normative realists might be assumed to have few worries about semantics. After all, a realist might initially hope to simply adopt the best semantic theory about ordinary descriptive language. However, beginning with the non-cognitivist appropriation of the open question argument, a number of philosophers have posed serious objections to the realist's ability to offer a plausible semantic theory. This paper introduces the two most influential semantic challenges to normative realism: the open question argument, and the Moral Twin Earth argument. It explains the major replies to these challenges offered by realists, and locates these challenges within the broader debate over what sort of semantic theories might be plausible candidates for a normative realist to adopt.

## Introduction

*Normative realists* think that ordinary instances of normative thought and talk (e.g: “it is wrong to torture babies”, “the gambler’s fallacy is a striking example of irrationality”, etc.) purport to be about real features of the world.<sup>1</sup> Normative realism is often thought to face serious epistemic and metaphysical challenges. If there are normative facts, why is there no sign of scientists discovering them? Why is normative disagreement seemingly deeper and more prevalent than disagreement about other topics? Isn’t the existence of normative facts inconsistent with any acceptably naturalistic metaphysics?

Normative realists might seem to have a stronger hand with respect to broadly semantic issues.<sup>2</sup> After all, realists’ non-cognitivist opponents continue to be haunted by the Frege-Geach challenge: to explain how they can vindicate the logical validity of simple arguments involving normative terms. By contrast, a realist might hope to simply adopt the best semantic theory about ordinary descriptive language. However, things are not so clear. Beginning with the non-cognitivist appropriation of the open question argument, a number of philosophers have posed serious objections to the realist’s ability to articulate a plausible semantic theory.

This paper introduces the two most influential semantic challenges to normative realism:<sup>3</sup> the open question argument, and the Moral Twin Earth argument. It then locates these challenges within the broader debate over what sort of semantic theories might be plausible candidates for a normative realist to adopt.

### 1. Moore and conceptual analysis

The interpretation of G. E. Moore's open question argument is difficult and highly controversial.<sup>4</sup> On the interpretation that I favor, this argument aims to establish that we cannot analyze ethical concepts into non-ethical concepts.<sup>5</sup>

Moore considered and rejected two ways that one might seek to offer a naturalistic analysis of a normative concept like GOOD. (I use small caps to denote concepts, throughout). First, one could claim that 'good' is synonymous with a simple term that picks out a naturalistic property (for example: 'pleasant'). Second, one could claim that 'good' is synonymous with a complex naturalistic term (for example: 'the object of a desired desire'). Moore argued that both of these sorts of possibility are refuted by the availability of instances of the open question argument. Consider the question: "Is pleasure pleasant?" This question is closed: if you understand this question, you cannot doubt that the answer is 'yes.' By contrast, consider the question: "Is pleasure good?" Someone could understand this question perfectly well, and yet doubt whether the correct answer to it is 'yes'. One piece of evidence for this is that philosophers have disagreed about whether pleasure is always good. Moore called this sort of question 'open'. He argued that this openness shows that 'good' could not have the same meaning as 'pleasant': anyone who considers whether pleasure is good can see that they are not simply wondering whether pleasure is pleasant (1993 [1903], esp. §§12-14).

Moore took his argument to be extremely important, largely because he took the temptation to offer naturalistic analyses of ethical concepts to be ubiquitous, and a major barrier to progress in ethical

inquiry. It is worth explaining why such analyses might be tempting to philosophers in the first place. One reason is that such analyses promise to solve important philosophical problems that the normative realist faces: most strikingly, problems of semantic and epistemic access.

The problem of semantic access is to explain how our use of a term or concept enables us to think and talk about a certain feature of the world. For example, our concepts *CAT* and *OUGHT* seemingly permit us to think about certain animals, and obligations, respectively. In virtue of what do they do that? The problem of epistemic access is to explain how our use of a concept permits us to sometimes have knowledge about the feature of the world that it is about. For example: how do the investigative and reflective practices that deploy our concepts *OUGHT* and *CAT* sometimes provide us with knowledge about obligations and animals?

A successful conceptual analysis might solve these problems. For example, if the normative concept *RIGHT* were correctly analyzed into *PLEASURE MAXIMIZING*, and we had a plausible story about semantic and epistemic access for *PLEASURE*, we would be well on our way to solving these problems for a normative concept.

Moore took the failure of naturalistic analyses of ethical terms to support his non-naturalistic realism in ethics. However, he had little to say about the problems of semantic and epistemic access. Further, a *prima facie* plausible diagnosis of the distinctive openness of Moore's question is that ethical concepts have a distinctive and semantically important practical function. Because of points like these, many came to think that the open question argument was in fact an important piece of evidence for

non-cognitivism in ethics (compare the discussion in Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton 1997, 4-5).

## 2. Challenges to the open question argument

Alleged refutations of the open question argument are legion. We can helpfully distinguish three influential strategies.

The first strategy attacks Moore's conditions on successful analysis. The open question argument only works because these conditions are rather demanding. However, these conditions arguably generate the *paradox of analysis*, entailing that no analysis can be both true and informative (Langford 1942). One difficulty with this strategy is that, Moore's own conditions aside, his conclusion can seem to have been vindicated by history: convincing and informative analyses of philosophically important concepts are strikingly thin on the ground, and ethics is no exception in this respect.

The second and third strategies are both *metasemantic* in nature. Metasemantics asks: in virtue of what do sentences or thoughts have the semantic properties that they do? One way of noticing the need for a metasemantic theory is to consider an apparent limitation of conceptual analysis. On pain of circularity or regress, it seemingly cannot be that the meaning of every concept is determined by analyzing it into other concepts. The first metasemantic response to Moore aims to show how a naturalistic realist can accept his ban on analysis. The second seeks to offer a principled vindication of the possibility of non-obvious analyses of normative terms that explains the 'open feel' of Moore's questions. Consider these strategies in turn.

A normative realist that accepts Moore's ban on analysis needs to argue that normative terms or concepts can refer to kinds or properties *directly*, that is, not in virtue of a conceptual analysis. Richard Boyd developed a leading variant of this strategy. Simplifying greatly, Boyd's metasemantic thesis is that for a term  $t$  to refer to a natural kind  $K$  is just for there to be certain causal mechanisms that tend over time to bring it about that  $t$  is predicated of (approximately) the members of  $K$  (1997, 116-7). Boyd's metaethical thesis is that moral vocabulary is regulated by certain natural kinds in just this way. Together, these theses promise to explain our semantic and epistemic access to normative concepts. First, appropriate causal regulation by  $K$  constitutes semantic access to  $K$ , on this view. So, the metaethical thesis that our use of normative terms is appropriately causally regulated in this way by certain natural kinds explains how our use of those terms gives us semantic access to those kinds. Second, in virtue of the causal connections that constitute semantic access, we can also explain how users of normative terms will (in suitable circumstances) tend to have reasonable epistemic access to the normative kinds.

A second important metasemantic reply to Moore has been to offer an account that explains how the existence of analyses of moral concepts is compatible with the open questions that Moore emphasized. The most influential instance of this strategy is due to Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit. According to what they call *moral functionalism*, the content of a moral term is given holistically by the "network of content-relevant connections" that we find intuitively compelling (1995, 22). These connections include input clauses such as paradigm instances of moral

wrongness, internal role clauses that characterize relations between normative terms, and output clauses that indicate appropriate motivational responses to moral judgments (Jackson 1998, 130). Very roughly, on this view, the content of a term is given holistically, by the total assignment of referents to terms that best fits the conceptual system as a whole to the world. Because of the complex holistic nature of content-determination on this view, some conceptual truths will fail to be obvious to the possessor of the concept, even upon extended reflection. Thus, on this view, the Moorean 'open feel' of a question is at best very modest evidence against a proposed semantic analysis.

### 3. The Moral Twin Earth argument

Boyd's theory was the initial target for the second great semantic challenge to normative realism: Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons' 'Moral Twin Earth' argument.<sup>6</sup> Boyd's theory was in part inspired by the pathbreaking work of Saul Kripke (1980) and Hilary Putnam on the semantics of names and natural kind terms. Horgan and Timmons attacked Boyd's moral semantics by arguing that our judgments about moral terms are the opposite of those that Putnam elicited about 'water' in his influential 'Twin Earth' thought experiment.

Putnam's (1973, 1975) thought experiment has the following structure: imagine a Twin Earth that is identical to Earth except that the stuff in their lakes and showers and bodies is not H<sub>2</sub>O. Rather, it is a chemical which Putnam dubbed 'XYZ' which has very similar macro-qualities to H<sub>2</sub>O, but a radically different microstructure. On Earth, we typically apply the English word 'water' to samples of H<sub>2</sub>O. The Twin-

English word 'water' by contrast, is typically applied to samples of XYZ. My Twin Earth twin and I are very nearly qualitative duplicates: in particular, we have near-identical dispositions to token our respective words 'water' of the clear potable liquids in our environments. Putnam argued that despite this fact, it is intuitively plausible that I refer to H<sub>2</sub>O with my word 'water,' and my twin refers to XYZ with his. One way to bring this out is to imagine that I say "My glass is full of water", and my Twin replies "Your glass is not full of water". Putnam's account predicts that this is plausibly a case of *merely verbal* disagreement.

Horgan and Timmons create a Moral Twin Earth though experiment intended to be closely parallel to Putnam's. We are to imagine that the difference between Earth and Moral Twin Earth is that the property causally regulating (in Boyd's sense) the use of the term 'good' on Earth is a *consequentialist* property (e.g. the maximization of happiness). By contrast, the property regulating the use of 'good' on Twin Earth is a *deontological* property (e.g. the maximization of happiness constrained by some absolute prohibitions, such as on promise-breaking). Besides these differences, the use of 'good' on the two planets – in deliberation, interpersonal criticism, etc. – is stipulated to be as close as possible to being identical.

Horgan and Timmons claim that in these circumstances, it is intuitively plausible that when I claim that a given act (perhaps a case of happiness-maximizing promise-breaking) is 'good', and my twin claims that it is 'not good', we are engaged in real, not merely verbal, disagreement (1992a, 164-5). This is the opposite of the Putnam intuition about 'water', and it seems to show that we could not offer the same



broad sort of metasemantic theory for normative language that Putnam offered for natural kind terms.

Horgan and Timmons take this thought experiment to deal a mortal blow to Boyd's appropriation of Putnam-style 'direct reference' semantics. As they initially characterized their own accomplishment, they have generalized Moore's open question argument to the semantics that Boyd seeks to deploy (1992a, 166-7).<sup>7</sup>

Before considering replies to Horgan and Timmons' challenge, it is useful to make the generic structure of that challenge explicit. There are three crucial assumptions in the background. First, a realist about the normative needs to offer a theory of reference for normative concepts: a theory that predicts what properties such concepts will predicate in various possible scenarios.<sup>8</sup> Second, the (absolutist) realist needs normative concepts to be non-relativistic.<sup>9</sup> Non-relativistic concepts have the same referents in every context of use (contrast concepts like NOW or FASHIONABLE). Together, these assumptions entail that, for non-relativistic concepts, concept identity entails referential identity: two linguistic communities could not deploy the same non-relativistic realistic concept without referring to the same property with that concept. Third, suppose that I accept the concept  $C_A(x)$  and you accept  $\sim C_B(x)$ . We only count as disagreeing substantively rather than verbally, according to Horgan and Timmons, if  $C_A$  is the same concept as  $C_B$ .

Schematically, a Moral Twin Earth case has three elements. First, it introduces (for reductio) a non-relativistic theory of reference R for a normative concept. Second, it describes two linguistic communities such that R entails that a normative concept  $C_A$  possessed by linguistic

community A and  $C_B$  possessed by a linguistic community B refer to different properties. Third, it elicits the semantic intuition that if two people accept  $C_A(x)$  and  $\sim C_B(x)$  respectively, they disagree substantively and not merely verbally.

The reductio goes like this. The first two elements of the Moral Twin Earth case, together with the thesis that concept identity entails referential identity, entail that R predicts that concepts  $C_A$  and  $C_B$  are distinct concepts. However, the intuition of substantive disagreement, together with the assumption that substantive disagreement implies a shared concept, entail that they are not distinct. Thus, we seemingly ought to reject R.

Like the open question argument, Moral Twin Earth cases can only be levied against realist semantic proposals one at a time. However, as with that argument, the anti-realist can offer a *prima facie* plausible general diagnosis of the piecemeal failures. This is that shared deliberative and critical function is seemingly enough to elicit intuitions of substantive disagreement, but is not enough to fix a unique referent for normative concepts. If this were right, it would constitute a powerful reason to reject the semantic program of normative realism.

For illustration, consider how smoothly Horgan and Timmons (*ms.*) apply the same argument against Jackson and Pettit's moral functionalism (introduced in §2 above). Again we are to imagine the role of moral vocabulary – in criticism, deliberation, etc. – as identical on Earth and Twin Earth. The difference is that the best extensional fit for the input, internal role, and output clauses for 'wrong', e.g., on Earth is slightly different from that on Twin Earth. Horgan and Timmons suggest that in

this situation, moral functionalism predicts that Earthlings and Twins simply have different concepts and hence talk past each other, while intuitively we take them to share the same normative concepts.

#### 4. Challenging Moral Twin Earth

Horgan and Timmons' thought experiment has generated many attempted rebuttals. We can divide those rebuttals by how they attempt to undercut this generic argument. First, some rebuttals have focused on challenging the assumption that substantive disagreement requires concept identity. Second, some have challenged the intuitive evidence that Horgan and Timmons elicit. Third, some rebuttals have accepted the assumptions that generate the Moral Twin Earth cases against Boyd, and sought to construct alternative theories of reference for normative concepts that do not generate such intuitions. In this section I briefly discuss the first two strategies, postponing the third until the next section.

First, some have challenged the assumption that substantive disagreement requires concept identity. On the one hand, David Plunkett and Timothy Sundell (ms.) show that it is generally possible to elicit intuitions of substantive disagreement in the absence of shared concepts. On the other, some have suggested a specific objection to using this assumption in Moral Twin Earth cases. Suppose that the concepts picked out by the Earth and Twin Earth words 'good' are just different. Nonetheless, disagreement over whether performing an action is 'good' might be relevantly substantive because in our use of 'good' we are disagreeing with the Twins about *what to do* (Copp 2000, Merli 2002).

This strategy faces at least two substantial questions. Is ‘what to do’ to be given a cognitivist or non-cognitivist reading? Is the substantive disagreement semantic or pragmatic? Depending on the answers to these questions, this strategy may concede important normative concepts to the non-cognitivist, or amount to some sort of ‘hybrid expressivism’.<sup>10</sup>

The second common strategy in reply to Moral Twin Earth cases has been to challenge Horgan and Timmons’ intuitive evidence. There are at least three important variants of this strategy.

The first variant argues that Moral Twin Earth, if properly understood, would appear radically alien. For example, Stephen Laurance, Eric Margolis, and Angus Dawson point out that in order to be strictly analogous to Putnam’s thought experiment, the kind that regulates our use of ‘good’ would have to be largely *absent* from Moral Twin Earth (as H<sub>2</sub>O is from Twin Earth). However, given the stipulated similarity of Moral Twin Earth to Earth, there must be moral properties on it (1999, 160-1). Insisting on the strict parallel to Putnam would thus require Moral Twin Earth to be radically alien. This is important, because it is controversial how reliable our intuitions are about radically alien cases. Horgan and Timmons, however, can cheerfully abandon the strict analogy to Putnam. On this way of understanding their case, the kind that regulates our use of ‘good’ *is* present on Moral Twin Earth; it is just not the kind that causally regulates the Twins’ use of their term ‘good’.

The second variant argues that more fully describing the Moral Twin Earth case will invert the intuition predicted by Horgan and Timmons. Perhaps the most promising development of this strategy is offered by David Merli (2002, 225-231; see also Laurance, Margolis, and

Dawson 1999 and Levy's 2011 for similar sentiments). Horgan and Timmons grant Boyd a robust causal regulation thesis, according to which the causal regulation of normative thought by certain natural properties is as robust as the sort of causal regulation that connects us to biological properties (say). But such a robust causal connection may seem to suggest that it is likely that at the limit of enquiry, we would converge on a final moral theory (just as we might expect to converge on a final biological theory).

Suppose then that we had arrived at the end of our normative enquiry and converged on the consequentialist theory. Suppose further that we confronted the Twin Earthlings, who had analogously converged on the deontological theory. If we had really reached the limit of enquiry, we would have a stock of what we would take to be decisive objections to deontology. The Twins would likewise have what they would take to be decisive replies to these objections. We and the Twins would be entirely unable to get a dialectical grip on each other. In this case, Merli suggests, we might doubt whether we and the Twins are really talking about the same subject-matter.

One concern about Merli's strategy stems from an ambiguity in the idea of the 'end of enquiry'. One way of thinking of this is purely historical. On this reading, a group of enquirers might reach the end of enquiry because of especially effective propaganda. However, if that is the explanation of our disagreement, it seems compatible with us and our Twins still sharing concepts: Lysenkoists were still talking about HERITABILITY, after all. Suppose instead that the 'end of enquiry' is understood normatively. Here the problem is that we and our Twins

would presumably appear to disagree about what constitutes 'ideal normative enquiry' as well. This in turn invites a new Moral Twin Earth case concerning this term, and little progress has been made against Horgan and Timmons' challenge.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, one could simply deny that intuitions about Twin Earth cases are probative. This strategy is uncommon. However, it is worth noting that the naturalistic credentials of intuitive evidence are extremely controversial. This strategy should thus be attractive on general grounds to some methodologically radical naturalistic normative realist.

### 5. **Alternative realist metasemantic proposals**

Horgan and Timmons' early expositions of the Twin Earth challenge sometimes seemed to suggest that conceptual analysis and something much like Boyd's brand of causal regulation theory exhausted the naturalistic realist's semantic alternatives. However, a number of normative realists have felt the force of the Moral Twin Earth challenge against Boyd, and have sought to offer alternative semantic theories that purport to escape the challenge. Here I briefly consider a number of important proposals.

Geoff Sayre-McCord (1995) argues that a *metaphysical* change in Boyd's theory is needed: on his view, our use of 'good' is causally regulated not by some natural kind identified by the methods of the natural sciences, but rather a *moral kind*, identified by substantive moral enquiry. Sayre-McCord's exposition invites a number of pressing questions, the keenest of which is a dilemma parallel to that facing Merli's 'end of enquiry' objection. Consider 'substantive moral enquiry'. On a

non-normative gloss, this is perhaps roughly just what moral philosophers are now doing. It seems possible that such enquiry could be causally regulated by different properties at different places. On a *normative* gloss on 'moral enquiry', however, the naturalist faces a renewed challenge to provide a non-Twin-Earthable naturalistic theory of reference for that concept.

Mark van Roojen (2006) argues for the importance of *reference magnets* for addressing the Moral Twin Earth argument. According to the reference magnet theory, (i) there are metaphysically real 'joints of nature', and (ii) the joints are 'reference magnets': latching on to such joints is an independent ingredient in the explanation of the reference of our words and concepts. The reference magnet theory can help to explain Moral Twin Earth in this way: suppose that the referent that would be determined by the various other reference-determining features for earth use of 'right' is the consequentialist property, while the referent that would be similarly determined by the Twin Earth use of 'right' is the deontological property. These properties famously have substantial extensional overlap. If there is only one reference magnet in the vicinity of the consequentialist and deontological properties, both Earth and Twin Earth uses of 'right' would refer to that property, on the reference magnet theory. Reference magnetism thus potentially explains how co-reference is possible in the standard Moral Twin Earth cases.

One difficulty with this (and other 'externalist' strategies) is brought out by considering a variant Twin Earth case (compare Dreier 2006, 257-8). Suppose that our Twins have two concepts: the first is just as Horgan and Timmons suggest: it matches the deliberative and critical role

of our concept, but is causally sensitive to a different property. The second matches the extension of the property that causally regulates our concept, but lacks any of the deliberative and critical roles. Arguably, the first concept is intuitively a better candidate for synonymy with ours than the second concept is. This (and a related case offered by Wedgwood 2007, 63-4), may in turn suggest that purely 'externalist' relations like causal regulation, reliable tracking, or reference magnetism are insufficient to capture the nature of normative concepts (see McPherson (*ms.*) for discussion of this and other objections to the reference magnet strategy).

Some philosophers (e.g. Copp 2000, Brink 2001) have attempted to construct hybrid semantic theories which include both 'descriptive' and 'directly referential' features. (Compare here contemporary descriptivists quite generally, who have sought to accommodate Putnam's Twin Earth intuitions by proposing that the reference of 'water' is rigidly fixed by a description like *the actual watery stuff around here.*) Such hybrid theorists perhaps understand the fundamental semantic challenge to normative realism this way: posit too substantive a reference-fixing description as essential for normative concept possession (à la Jackson and Pettit), and one's theory will be vulnerable to an open question argument (compare Zangwill 2000). Posit too little description as essential (à la Boyd), and one's theory will be vulnerable to the Moral Twin Earth problem. It is unclear, however, how easy it is to navigate between the horns of this dilemma. The risk is that any theory whose hybrid elements are individually weak enough to avoid the horns will fail to fix determinate referents for normative concepts (compare Horgan and Timmons 2000).



One can extract an important kind of *constitutivist* reply to Moral Twin Earth from recent work by Ralph Wedgwood (2007, Ch. 4). Wedgwood accepts several commitments that I do not discuss here; I focus on one central element of his metasemantic theory. Wedgwood argues that a certain inferential role is constitutive of the concept OUGHT. This idea of an inferential role is most easily introduced by analogy: suppose that someone possesses a concept  $C(x,y)$ , such that correct use of  $C$  obeys the introduction and elimination rules for AND. This stipulation is close to permitting us to identify  $C$  with AND. Thus, what it is for a concept to be AND is for it to have the right inferential role. Notice further that a concept's having this inferential role is sufficient to determine its contribution to truth conditions as those possessed by AND.

Wedgwood argues that a variant of the thesis of normative judgment internalism reflects the constitutive role of the concept OUGHT: belief that I ought to A commits me to intend to A. Wedgwood argues that this conceptual role is capable of determining the contribution of 'ought' to the truth-conditions of sentences. He does this in large part by arguing for the non-semantic claim that the constitutive aim of intention is choiceworthy action. If Wedgwood is correct about this, it permits an elegant reply to the Moral Twin Earth challenge.

We can ask: does the constitutive role of the concept predicated by the Twin word 'ought' include normative judgment internalism? If it does, then the theory predicts that no extensional difference is possible. This is because normative judgment internalism, together with the constitutive aim of intention, allegedly suffices to determine the reference of OUGHT. If the role of the Twin concept does not respect normative judgment

internalism, then there is reason to believe that disagreement between us and the Twin Earthlings is merely verbal. In this case, they have a profoundly different concept from us, since their concept does not bear normatively on action in the same way as ours.

Wedgwood's proposal raises many questions. Perhaps the central question is whether the constitutive claim about intention can be defended, both against more modest accounts of the constitutive aim, and against skepticism that intention has a constitutive aim. (See Schroeter and Schroeter 2003 for further important critical discussion of Wedgwood's view).

Finally, an important reply to the semantic challenges sketched is anti-theory about the reference of normative concepts. This anti-theory might be motivated in a number of ways. First, open question and Moral Twin Earth arguments can also be posed against the realists' non-cognitivist opponents (see Smith 2004, 195-6 and Merli 2008, respectively). Second, one might, with some plausibility, note that all informative theories of reference face grave difficulties. One might thus argue that Moral Twin Earth does not suggest a distinct problem for normative realism, so much as reinforce the difficulty of generating an informative and correct account of meaning or reference.

## **6. The future of the semantics of normative realism**

There is a pair of general lessons to be drawn from the history sketched here. On the one hand, normative realism faces a persistent challenge: we seem robustly confident that individuals and linguistic communities with substantively different views about what to do can nonetheless all be

deploying the same normative concepts. One now-famous suite of strategies for explaining this phenomenon with respect to scientific vocabulary appeals to ostention and causal regulation. For example, Kripke and Putnam seem to offer an attractive account of how astronomers with radically different theories can nonetheless succeed in meaning the same thing by 'water', or 'planet'. Arguably, the initial Moral Twin Earth challenge taught us that these tools are insufficient in the moral case. Further, normative realists should not assume that the challenges sketched above are exhaustive. To take one example, Schroeter and Schroeter (ms.) argue that another central challenge is that it is possible for an individual to retain her normative concepts despite radical doubt about *either* the extension *or* the deliberative significance of those concepts. If true, this raises the question: what theory of normative concepts could account for this fact?

However, the history surveyed here also suggests that philosophers have repeatedly underestimated the (meta-)semantic options available to normative realists in their quest to meet these challenges. Despite the range of replies mentioned in the previous section, there remain otherwise salient metasemantic theories and theories of mental content that simply have not been cleanly applied to normative concepts. Until this range of options is more rigorously explored, we will lack a robust sense of the prospects of the semantic project of normative realism.

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<sup>1</sup> Notice that this is a claim that normative realists share with most *error theorists* about the normative (e.g. Mackie 1977, Streumer *forthcoming*). A challenge to the semantic program of realism is thus, ipso facto, a challenge to error theory too. I intend a non-deflated sense of 'purport' here. Thus, quasi-realists about the normative (e.g. Blackburn 1993) may claim to 'earn the right' to talk of a deflated sort of worldly

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purport for normative discourse, but their views are radically different from those I discuss here.

- <sup>2</sup> In talking of semantics here, I abstract away from the fact that the relevant issues cut across the distinction between metasemantic theories and theories of mental content. Some will favor a 'language-first' approach to these questions, while some will favor a 'psychology-first' approach. I will generally talk about normative concepts rather than terms, but this should not be understood to presuppose that we should adopt a psychology-first approach to these questions.
- <sup>3</sup> Note that many of the authors I discuss frame the issue in terms of moral or ethical discourse, rather than in the broader terms of the normative.
- <sup>4</sup> The papers in Wellman (ed) 2003 are a good place to start to orient yourself to these debates. The papers by Rosati and Sturgeon, for example, suggest substantially different understandings of the open question phenomena.
- <sup>5</sup> Moore himself thought that you could analyze ethical concepts into other ethical concepts. Most saliently, he took a consequentialist theory of the relationship between goodness and rightness to be a conceptual truth. However, it is easy to see that Moore's open-question-style challenge can be turned against this sort of analysis as well.
- <sup>6</sup> Hare 1952, 148-9 is an important predecessor of Horgan and Timmons' basic strategy.
- <sup>7</sup> For criticism of this construal of the thought experiment, see van Roojen 2006, 175n14.
- <sup>8</sup> Realists will typically want to offer a metasemantic theory that *explains* why normative concepts refer in certain ways (Boyd and Jackson and Pettit, for example offer such explanatory theories). Strictly speaking, however, Horgan and Timmons' argument requires only that the realist offers a theory that makes *predictions* about the reference of concepts in counterfactual scenarios.
- <sup>9</sup> Notice that Twin Earth intuitions will count against semantic relativism about the normative, too, unless the relativist can explain away the intuitions of substantive disagreement.
- <sup>10</sup> See Schroeder 2009 for a helpful critical survey of hybrid expressivisms. Note that one might seek to address Normative Twin Earth by adopting certain forms of hybrid expressivism, and arguing that the relevant disagreement is real but pragmatic.
- <sup>11</sup> See Merli 2007 for an additional important objection to his earlier idealized convergence argument.

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