**Boyd and Horgan & Timmons Lead-off**

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**Boyd - “How to be a Moral Realist” (1988) 2-5-4-6 vague – 7 motivation**

1. Boyd notes that an important motivation for anti-realist metaethical views has been an apparent sharp distinction between the methods of scientific (or, more broadly, empirical) inquiry and those of moral inquiry. Scientific inquiry appears to have features of “objectivity, value-neutrality, [and] empirical testability” (309) lacked by our methods for forming moral beliefs. Many philosophers have thought that moral anti-realism is the best explanation of apparently different status of moral inquiry. To defend his moral realism, Boyd wants to do away with this distinction, claiming that we ought to think of moral inquiry as more “objective”, “external”, “empirical”, and “intersubjective” than we usually do. However, one might wonder whether Boyd is forgetting the original datum, that moral inquiry *does* seem to be significantly different from scientific inquiry.   
     
   **Question 1**: Is Boyd proposing a revisionary theory of how we *should* go about moral inquiry? Or is he proposing merely to describe our current practices?

If the latter: has Boyd given a satisfying account of why it so strongly seems to us that moral inquiry is significantly different from science? Would our practices of moral inquiry change were we to all become convinced of Boyd’s view?

1. Boyd thinks that scientists, like moral reasoners, employ intuitions. Scientific intuitions are for him “features of scientific practice that are intermediate between noninferential perception and explicit inference” (318). His paradigmatic example of scientific intuition is scientists' noninferential capacity to apply theories in which they have been trained to new cases (318-9). Particularly fascinating are those “tacit judgments [that] reflect a deeper understanding than that currently captured in explicit theory” (319). (Perhaps Boyd is thinking of something like [Einstein’s famous thought experiments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Einstein%27s_thought_experiments).)

**Question 2:** We might very well go along with Boyd in calling certain moral and scientific thought processes by the same word, but are they of the same nature? And do what Boyd calls “intuitions” really play the same role in both moral and scientific inquiry?

One line of thought: it seems that scientists either employ intuitions to discover predictions of a theory or to formulate new theories. Either case leads to the experimental testing of the prediction or theory. In the moral case, however, it would seem that intuitions are themselves the data against which moral theories are tested. (Consider, e.g., counterintuitive results of hedonistic utilitarianism as evidence against the theory.)

1. A crucial notion in Boyd’s account is that of a *homeostatic cluster property* (HCP). Among the 11 features of an HCP *F* listed on pp. 323-4 are:  
     
   (1) *F* is a family “of properties which are “contingently clustered” in nature in the sense that they co-occur in an important number of cases.”  
   (2) “The presence of some of the properties in *F* tends (under appropriate conditions) to favor the presence of the others, or there are underlying mechanisms or processes which tend to maintain the presence of the properties in *F*, or both.”  
     
   One of Boyd’s examples of an HCP (perhaps the more convincing one) is the property of being a member of a given biological species, a property consisting of a family of biological traits. HCPs figure into Boyd’s account of moral realism when he claims that moral goodness is an HCP consisting of (it appears) the properties of *satisfying human need N*, for each human need N (329).   
     
   **Question 3**: Is moral goodness plausibly an HCP? In most cases of cluster concepts, or HCPs, there are paradigm cases in which all properties are instantiated, and by which the property is identified. (There are paradigm instances of members of a species, and paradigm instances of healthy organs or tissues or—perhaps—individuals.) Do the actions we identify as paradigm good actions instantiate all the properties in the HCP? Do paradigm good character traits? Are human needs’ satisfactions mutually supporting to the degree required for an HCP? (Consider money spent towards intellectual and cultural achievements that could have been spent satisfying basic human needs in underdeveloped countries.)
2. Here is Boyd’s theory of the determination of reference for natural kind terms (including, for him, ‘good’): “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*” (321). These “causal mechanisms” include, most notably, widely used procedures for recognizing members or instances of *k* by predicating *t* of them.   
     
   Now consider a variant of a case Boyd discusses on p. 337: Suppose that in 5,000 B.C. animals (at least of certain species) were usually considered no more than food / game / resources. People never used words we’d translate as ‘good’ in connection with the satisfaction of the interests of nonhuman animals, and only used them to designate the satisfaction of human interests. (Boyd’s own account of moral goodness on p. 329, incidentally, rules out animal interests.)  
     
   **Question 4:** Would Boyd’s theory predict that it is simply false for a person in 5,000 B.C. to say (what we’d translate as) “It is morally good to treat animals well”? What about the same statement made today?   
     
   Even if Boyd can avoid saying that these assertions come out false, it seems that reference of ‘good’ might be radically indeterminate between referring to *satisfaction of the interests of humans* and referring to *satisfaction of the interests of all animals*. Can Boyd avoid this and other potential cases of radical referential indeterminacy?  
     
   Further questions: As people historically have begun to care about the interests of animals, should we say that the meaning of their word ‘good’ has shifted? Or did the meaning remain constant, while people gained a better understanding of what is good?
3. To defend his comparison between moral inquiry and science, Boyd insists that observation plays a role in moral inquiry. In fact, he states that “observations will play the same role in moral inquiry that they play in the other kinds of empirical inquiry about people” (332). His examples of observations:   
   - “(“Naturally” occurring) political and social experiments whose occurrence and whose interpretation depends both on “external” factors and upon the current state of our moral understanding” (330);  
   - “Self-observation”, i.e., introspection (332);  
   - (Are there others?)  
     
   **Question 5:** Do these examples suffice to make a significant place for observation in moral inquiry? Does introspection count as observation at all? How, exactly, is observation going to tell us that goodness is identical to a given HCP *F*? Should we expect it to? (In comparison, it is straightforward to tell a story about how observation reveals that water is identical to H2O.)
4. Feature (9) of Boyd’s account of HCPs states that for any HCP there will be borderline cases of whether or not something falls under the associated kind or not (323). In these cases bivalence fails. (It is neither true nor false that something is a member of the kind.) Since moral goodness is an HCP, some moral statements will be neither true nor false.   
     
   Unresolvable disputes are a persistent feature of moral discourse. Some—particularly anti-realists—have thought that our lack of knowledgeof the (supposed) facts might be explained by a lack of determinately true or false answers. Boyd thinks a realist can use the bivalence failure produced by HCPs to agree with the anti-realist that bivalence fails in some disputed cases.  
     
   **Question 6:** Does Boyd’s consequentialist account give the right kind of bivalence failures in disputed cases? It seems that his account predicts vagueness about whether an act is good. But on a consequentialist picture, what matters is typically an act’s *degree* of goodness, which might not be vague. Disputed cases would seem to involve questions of which of two acts is more good than the other. Would Boyd’s view give us bivalence failures here?
5. Boyd wants to account for the apparent close connection between moral judgments and reasons, while denying that moral judgments necessarily provide agents with reasons for acting (340). He thinks it is not enough to saying that “psychologically normal” humans will have reasons to act on their moral judgments. Instead, there must be a “*cognitive* deficit” (341) in an agent for whom moral judgments provide no reason to act. He takes this cognitive deficit to be a deficit in moral reasoning. He explains that an agent who lacks moral motivation lacks sympathy, which is a crucial factor in determining the moral truths via moral reasoning.  
     
   **Question 7:** Consider an intellectually brilliant psychopath who knows all the moral facts (e.g. by studying books on morality by non-psychopaths who have figured it all out) but feels absolutely no motivation to do the morally right things. It seems we judge the psychopath to have a “cognitive deficit” just as much as in the cases Boyd considers. But is it plausible to claim that the psychopath has an epistemological defect? After all, they know all the moral facts! Is this a problem for Boyd’s location of the cognitive deficit?

**Horgan & Timmons - “New Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth” (1991) 8-10**

1. According to Horgan & Timmons, Cornell realism (Boyd and Brink’s view) is committed to *Causal Semantic Naturalism* (CSN):Each moral term *t* rigidly designates the natural property *N* that uniquely causally regulates the use of *t* by human beings (Horgan and Timmons, 455). Horgan & Timmons then consider this scenario:   
     
   *Moral Twin Earth:* On Earth, uses of ‘good’ and ‘right’ are causally regulated by certain properties, which, as a matter of empirical fact, are functional consequentialist properties. Moral Twin Earth is almost exactly like Earth, except that uses of ‘good’ and ‘right’ are causally regulated by properties that, as a matter of empirical fact, are functional deontological properties.   
     
   One of the premises of Horgan & Timmons’ argument is that, according to Cornell realists, ‘good’ on Earth refers to a consequentialist functional property, and that ‘good’ on Moral Twin Earth refers to a different, deontological, functional property.   
     
   **Question 8:** There are plenty of communities on Earth that both speak different languages and have widely differing moral beliefs. Cornell realists think that in all of these cases, words we’d want to translate as ‘good’ that are used in the different communities refer to the same property of moral goodness. Why should Cornell realists then think that ‘good’ on Earth and ‘good’ on Moral Twin Earth refer to different properties?
2. Here is a premise-conclusion reconstruction of Horgan and Timmons’ argument against CSN, based on *Moral Twin Earth:*   
     
   P1. Cornell realism entails CSN.   
   P1. If CSN, then ‘good’ on Earth and ‘good’ on Moral Twin Earth differ in meaning.   
   P2. If ‘good’ on Earth and ‘good’ on Moral Twin Earth differ in meaning, then Earthlings and Moral Twin Earthlings do not have genuine moral disagreements.  
   P3. Earthlings and Moral Twin Earthlings have genuine moral disagreements.   
   C. *Therefore,* Cornell realism is false (by three applications of *modus tollens*).   
     
   **Question 9** (The Big Question): Does *Moral Twin Earth* refute Cornell realism? (Is the above argument sound?)

1. On page 460, Horgan and Timmons argue that there are two hermeneutic options available to describe the differences between Earthian and Twin-Earthian uses of “good” and “right”. One is that (a) the differences are analogous to Putnam’s original example, which means that the moral terms used by Earthlings and Twin Earthlings rigidly designate distinct natural properties; the other is that (b) moral terms do not differ in meaning or reference so that the Earthlings and Twin Earthlings have genuine moral disagreements.  
     
   **Question 10**: Why is (a) incompatible with the claim that Earthlings and Twin Earthlings have genuine disagreements? Is it possible both that moral terms refer to different properties *and* that Earthlings and Twin Earthlings have moral disagreements / disagreements in moral beliefs?

1. Compare to Putnam’s original example: Before the discovery that there is H2O on Earth and XYZ on Twin Earth, Oscar and Twin Oscar don’t have any disagreements because they have the same beliefs and the same psychological states (both of them believe that water is liquid, tasteless, etc). However, Earthlings and Moral Twin Earthlings have different psychological attitudes (hence differ in mental states)—there might be an action X of which Earthlings approve and Moral Twin Earthlings disapprove.  
     
   **Question 11**: What do we mean when we say that different agents have moral disagreements/have disagreements in moral beliefs? Might people on Earth and Moral Twin Earth disagree in attitudes? Is this all the disagreement Cornell realists need?

1. Horgans and Timmons argue that the outcome of the Moral Twin Earth argument underwrites a new version of the open question argument directed against CSN (461). Moore’s open question argument is meant to prove that analytic naturalism is false. Boyd, however, holds that, although goodness is a natural property, ‘good’ has no analytic definition. This implies that moral terms cannot be defined in any verbal way.

**Question 12**: Given that Cornell realists reject that ‘good’ is analytically definable, is the open question argument still an intuitive reason for rejecting Cornell realism? How is the new version of the open question argument applicable to Cornell realism? Are Q1 and Q2 open or closed?