

Meaning and Value

Author(s): Stephen Schiffer

Source: *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 87, No. 11, Eighty-Seventh Annual Meeting
American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division (Nov., 1990), pp. 602-614

Published by: Journal of Philosophy, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2026850>

Accessed: 25-06-2016 15:35 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Journal of Philosophy, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Philosophy*

MEANING AND VALUE*

The big issue in metaethics has always been moral realism. But what issue is that? We cannot untendentiously define moral realism as the doctrine that there are moral *facts*, or that some moral sentences state *truths*, or that there are moral *properties* our actions instantiate. For there are pleonastic uses of 'fact', 'true', and 'property' which would render the doctrine acceptable to anyone prepared to make moral judgments. Will you say that Hitler was evil? Then, in the pleonastic senses of 'fact', 'true', and 'property', you will say that it is a fact that Hitler was evil, that it is true that Hitler was evil, and that Hitler had the property of being evil. No clearheaded emotivist ever intended to deny the propriety of such pleonastic restatements of moral judgments.

Moral realism is best defined in terms of a semantic thesis called *cognitivism*. This holds that moral sentences such as 'Eating animals is wrong' are not relevantly different semantically, in terms of the kind of meaning they have, from paradigm fact-stating sentences such as 'Eating animals is a source of protein'. Moral realism may then be defined as the thesis that cognitivism is true *and* there are true moral statements. So defined, the question of moral realism reduces to two other questions: Is cognitivism true? If so, are there true moral statements?

I. COGNITIVISM

To answer the question about cognitivism we need a theory of the semantic features of paradigm fact-stating sentences which help to bestow that status on them; we need to know, in other words, in what *cognitive meaning* consists. A sentence has cognitive meaning, I propose, if it can be used to assert something that can be *believed*, in the strictest, most literal sense of the verb 'to believe'. Belief is the backbone of cognitive meaning.

So consider the two sentences

- (1) Lester believes that eating animals is wrong.

and

- (2) Lester believes that eating animals is a source of protein.

Cognitivism, on my proposal, is true if (1) can be true when 'believes' is taken to have exactly the same sense it has in (2); for then the sense

* To be presented in an APA symposium on Moral Cognitivism and Realism, December 28. Nicholas Sturgeon and David B. Wong will comment; see this JOURNAL, this issue, 615-6 and 617-8, respectively, for their comments.

in which 'Eating animals is wrong' can be used to say that eating animals is wrong will not differ at all from the sense in which 'Eating animals is a source of protein' can be used to say that eating animals is a source of protein.

I am prepared to argue that cognitivism is true, and if I were to make my argument, I would argue for the following three theses, which together entail cognitivism.

The first is the *propositional theory of believing*, which holds, nearly enough, that believing is a relation to referents of 'that' clauses, and that these referents are propositions. To hold this theory is merely to take first appearances seriously. For (2) looks as though it is saying that Lester stands in the belief relation to something referred to by the singular term 'that eating animals is a source of protein'. After all, we may infer 'Lester believes something' from (2), and from it together with 'That eating animals is a source of protein is well confirmed', we may infer 'Lester believes something that is well confirmed'. But what is this thing, *that eating animals is a source of protein*, which is the referent of the 'that' clause singular term? Evidently, it is abstract, in that it has no spatiotemporal location; it is mind- and language-independent, in that it exists and has properties in possible worlds in which there are neither thinkers nor speakers; and it has essentially the truth condition it has, in that, that eating animals is a source of protein is true in any possible world provided that in that world eating animals is a source of protein. So it would seem that referents of 'that' clauses, and a fortiori the objects in the range of the belief relation, are *propositions*: abstract, mind- and language-independent objects that have essentially the truth conditions they have.¹

The second thesis I call the *pleonastic conception of propositions*, and it is perhaps best introduced via its mate, the pleonastic conception of *properties*, which will be needed soon enough in its own right. Earlier I alluded to the pleonastic sense of 'property' that allows one to move back and forth between 'Albert is humble' and 'Albert has the property of being humble', and even to move from there to 'There is some property that Albert has'. Well, to a first approximation, the pleonastic conception of properties holds that there is no more to the existence of any property than is required to account for the truth of these sentences. To borrow Paul Boghossian's² apt way

¹ Here (and elsewhere in this paper) I depart a little from the letter, if not the spirit, of my *Remnants of Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT, 1987).

² "Review of Colin McGinn's *Wittgenstein on Meaning*," *The Philosophical Review*, xcvi, 1 (1989): 83–92.

of putting it, there is nothing more to being a property than having the *grammar* of a property; properties, to mix metaphors, are merely the shadows of predicates.³

Sans metaphor, the pleonastic conception of properties has two parts, the second of which I shall postpone for the next section. The presently relevant part is that, subject to certain qualifications, the singular term 'the property of being *F*', a pleonastic gift of the predicate '*F*', is not liable to reference failure. If '*F*' is a meaningful predicate phrase, then we know that 'the property of being *F*' refers to the property of being *F*. On the pleonastic conception of properties, one cannot make invidious comparisons among grammatical singular terms that ostensibly refer to properties. In whatever sense the property of being a dog is the referent of 'the property of being a dog', so the property of being wrong is the referent of 'the property of being wrong', and both properties are as easily obtained as the expressions that refer to them. The qualifications alluded to are of two sorts. One concerns expressions like 'the property of being married to him', when 'him' fails to refer, and another, which I shall touch on again later, concerns predicates such as 'is a property that doesn't instantiate itself', where respect for the law of noncontradiction appears to preclude our allowing that 'the property of being non-self-instantiating' has reference.

The pleonastic conception of propositions, being *mutatis mutandis* the same as the pleonastic conception of properties, also has two parts, but, again, only the first is relevant to the argument for cognitivism. This holds that, subject to qualifications that need not concern us, the singular term 'that *S*', a pleonastic gift of the sentence '*S*', is not liable to reference failure. If '*S*' is a meaningful sentence in the indicative mood, then 'that *S*' refers to that *S*—i.e., the proposition that *S*. Consequently, if '*S*' is a meaningful indicative sentence, then the 'that' clause in

Lester believes that *S*.

cannot fail to refer to the proposition that *S*. On the pleonastic conception of propositions, one cannot make invidious comparisons among 'that' clauses. In whatever sense the proposition that eating animals is a source of protein is the referent of 'that eating animals is a source of protein', so the proposition that eating animals is wrong is the referent of 'that eating animals is wrong', and both propositions are as easily obtained as the expressions that refer to them.

³ The metaphor is from D. M. Armstrong, *Universals* (Boulder: Westview, 1989), p. 78.

The final thesis needed to derive cognitivism is that moral propositions can be believed, i.e., the belief relation expressed in (2), which relates Lester to the proposition that eating animals is a source of protein, is also capable of relating him to the proposition that eating animals is wrong.

These three theses entail that (1) can be true when 'believes' has the same sense it has in (2), and that therefore cognitivism is true. So it is thus, in other words, that cognitivism is established: a sentence has cognitive meaning if it means something that can be believed; 'Eating animals is wrong' means that eating animals is wrong; and that eating animals is wrong is something that can be believed.

It remains to argue for these three theses; but since that goes beyond present limits, I must take their truth as a working hypothesis for the remainder of this paper.

II. COGNITIVISM AND MORAL ANTIREALISM: A THEORIST'S CHALLENGE

Given cognitivism, moral realism is true if there are true moral beliefs. And it may seem hard for there not to be. The cognitivist of the preceding section who would deny moral realism must hold that while there are moral properties, none can be instantiated, that while there are moral propositions, none can be true. No wonder those persuaded by the arguments against moral realism typically take those arguments to show that there can be no moral properties. Such an antirealist would deny that (1) can be true when 'believes' in (1) has the sense it has in (2), and her argument for this would run the following course.

If 'believes' in (1) has the same sense it has in (2), then the 'that' clause in (1) is a semantically complex singular term that refers to the proposition that eating animals is wrong. Now, the reference of a 'that' clause is determined by its syntax and the references of its semantically relevant parts, and the reference of 'wrong', if (1)'s 'that' clause refers to a proposition, must, like the reference of any predicate in a 'that' clause, at least include a reference to a property; otherwise, it is impossible to see how to account for the proposition's truth conditions. And if 'wrong' in (1) refers to a property, then, of course, that property is the property of being wrong. But, the argument continues, no such property exists: familiar arguments are available to show that wrongness cannot be identified with any property that is intrinsically specifiable in nonmoral terms, and familiar arguments are available to urge that wrongness cannot be an irreducibly moral property. It then follows that 'wrong' in (1) cannot refer to a property, that the 'that' clause in (1) cannot refer to a proposition, and that (1) cannot be true when 'believes' is read as having its primary sense. At this point, our moral antirealist would

have the option of a Mackie-type error theory, which sees the 'that' clause in (1) as necessarily suffering from reference failure, or of noncognitivism, which sees (1) as having a reading in which 'believes' does not have the same meaning it has in (2), a reading which denies that the 'that' clause in (1) purports to have objectual reference and views the sentence as ascribing to Lester a complex *conative* state whose propositional object, if any, is *not* the proposition that eating animals is wrong.

Yet this way of being a moral antirealist is refuted if, as I have suggested, the pleonastic conception of properties and propositions is correct. At the same time, in establishing cognitivism we have hardly established moral realism. How could we have, when the case for cognitivism does not even address the formidable considerations that have for so long been thought to militate against moral realism? Evidently, there is room in logical space for a cognitivist to be persuaded by the case against moral realism. The note of caution is, however, deliberate: the *cognitivist moral antirealist* owes an explanation of *how moral properties, though they exist all right, can fail to be instantiated*. I am a cognitivist tempted by moral antirealism, and it is this explanatory debt I wish to address.

There are, of course, two questions. Why think that moral realism fails? How can the cognitivist moral antirealist account for the inability of moral properties to be instantiated? I must emphasize that my present concern is only the second question. We are to imagine a theorist who is inclined to be persuaded both by cognitivism and by what she takes to be the best case for moral antirealism. Yet she recognizes, and is troubled by, what she perceives as a tension between cognitivism and moral antirealism—namely, the need to make sense of the idea that, while there are moral properties, they cannot be instantiated. It is this tension which I shall try to resolve.

III. HOW TO BE A COGNITIVIST MORAL ANTIREALIST

We are to assume that there are moral properties but that they cannot be instantiated. Then the question is: Why not? Now, there is nothing mysterious about there being properties that cannot be instantiated: for relevant senses of 'cannot', that is the familiar fate of the property of being a round square and the property of being a three-headed human. In these cases the properties cannot be instantiated because they have instantiation conditions that cannot be satisfied—they entail a contradiction, say, or their instantiation is physically impossible. But if there are moral properties that cannot be instantiated, the explanation *will not* be like this. It will not be that they cannot be instantiated because they have instantiation conditions with features that prevent them from being satisfied. If moral

properties cannot be instantiated, it will be because *they do not have instantiation conditions*. But what does this mean, and why think it is true? Let me set up direct answers to these questions by first discussing three matters that will help to motivate the answers.

The second part of the pleonastic conception of properties. The pleonastic conception of properties has two parts. The first part, already used in the argument for cognitivism, is that properties are mere shadows of predicates, that (nearly enough) every meaningful predicate '*F*' has its nominalization, 'the property of being *F*', which cannot fail of reference. The second part, now to be introduced, is an explanatory-asymmetry principle. Succinctly put, the principle is that we do not account for two predicates' having the same meaning in terms of their expressing the same property; rather, we account for their expressing the same property in terms of their having the same meaning.

The intended contrast is with what a heavy-duty Platonist would say. This theorist of predicates would press an analogy with proper names. The semantic value—the meaning, if you will—of a name is the thing it names, and to establish that an expression is a genuine name we must identify some object and determine that the expression stands in the relevant semantic relation to that object. There can be no question of establishing that an expression is a meaningful name by showing that it has a use in the language whose specification does not itself mention that the expression is relevantly related to the object that bears it. In the same way, this Platonist persists, there can be no question of establishing that an expression is a meaningful predicate otherwise than by identifying some property and establishing that the expression stands in the relevant semantic relation to it. There can be no question of establishing that an expression is a meaningful predicate by showing that it has a use in the language whose specification does not itself mention that the expression is relevantly related to the property that is its semantic value. Thus, establishing that two people mean the same by 'wrong' requires identifying the property of moral wrongness and showing that each person's use of the word is relevantly semantically related to that moral property.

By contrast, the pleonastic conception of properties holds that we establish sameness of meaning by showing a relevant sameness of *use*, where this use is specifiable without mention of an expression's being related to a property. Given a meaning-determining use for '*F*'—a use whose intrinsic specification will itself refer to no property—we are licensed, if the predicate is ours, to form the singular term 'the property of being *F*' and to be assured of its having refer-

ence. Give 'F' an appropriate use, and you *ipso facto* have *Fness*; it is not that you start with *Fness* and determine a meaning for 'F' by having it stand in the right relation to *Fness*. It follows that establishing that two people mean the same by 'wrong' is not a matter of getting hold of the property of moral wrongness and determining that 'wrong' in both their idiölects stands in the relevant semantic relation to that property. Instead, it is a matter of showing that features of their uses of 'wrong' entitle us to a sameness-of-meaning ascription. Once sameness of meaning is settled, we are entitled to this redescription: 'wrong' for each person expresses the same property—to wit, the property of being wrong.

So much for the pleonastic conception of properties. To be sure, there is the further little question whether it is right, but, as that takes us beyond what there is space for, I have already announced the conditional nature of my argument.

The argument from disagreement. My purpose now is not to argue against moral realism but to sketch one well-known argument so that I might exploit its bearing on the resolution I shall presently offer. The starting point of the argument is the apparent possibility of rationally irresolvable moral dispute. For example, the following seems possible. One person believes that eating animals is wrong, another that it is morally permissible. Neither belief is based on faulty reasoning, on inadequate intelligence or imagination, or on any false nonmoral beliefs; and their disagreement is rationally irresolvable in that no new evidence or further process of ratiocination will yield a convergence of belief. Now, suppose that one of the two propositions in dispute—that eating animals is wrong and that it is permissible—is determinately true, the other therefore determinately false. Then we shall have to say that, although both people are equally intelligent, rational, sensitive, and thoughtful, and even though neither is laboring under any relevant misconception, there is no mechanism of rational-belief formation whereby the person with the false belief can rid herself of her false belief and acquire the knowledge that the other enjoys. But, the argument continues, this belies the supposition that there really is a fact of the matter as to which proposition is true.

There being no fact of the matter as to whether eating animals is wrong hardly shows that there are *no* moral truths. The final stage of the argument urges that rationally irresolvable moral disagreement is possible on virtually *any* issue. For us it is "self-evident" that it is wrong to cause someone pain for the fun of it, but it is easy to imagine a Nietzschean character who held this did not apply to superior beings like himself.

It goes without saying that there are various ways the argument from disagreement might be resisted, but its moral is the following for one who accepts it. Two people may have radically different ultimate moral principles, moral principles that they cannot justify by appeal to more basic moral principles, and there is, over and above this dispute, nothing to determine that one of these sets of principles is the set of *true* principles. At the same time, these ultimate moral principles provide the conditions that determine a person's application of her moral terms, the instantiation conditions she associates with them. Hence, we can make no sense of a person's moral terms' having *correct* instantiation conditions.

Sameness-of-meaning criteria. One possible response to the argument from disagreement is that the two people are not really disagreeing, and this because there is no proposition, that eating animals is wrong, which one person believes and the other disbelieves. Rather, each means a different property by 'wrong', and what is really going on is that one person believes, so to say, that eating animals is wrong₁, while the other person disbelieves that eating animals is wrong₂. Imagine two linguistic communities within English such that 'fish' is true of whales in one community and false of whales in the other. We can then imagine a dispute between members of the two communities who are unaware of their linguistic differences, one shouting 'Whales are fish', the other 'No, they're not'. But this is no real dispute, for the proposition that the one is affirming is not the one the other is denying. So why not say that the case in question of moral dispute is like this? After all, the two parties to the dispute have, by hypothesis, different ultimate moral principles, and hence different criteria of application for their moral terms.

Yet there are important differences, and they account for why we deny sameness of meaning in the 'fish' case and affirm it in the 'wrong' case, notwithstanding that in both cases the parties to the apparent dispute are operating with different instantiation conditions. (And, by the same token, these differences—i.e., the features now to be listed—explain why, when a person undergoes a change in his ultimate moral outlook, we explain this as a change of mind and not as a change in the meanings of his moral terms.)

First, a mild form of internalism seems to be true. It is arguably constitutive of the concept-fixing conceptual role of 'wrong' that one cannot believe that a kind of behavior is wrong without having *some* disposition not to indulge in it. A corollary of this is that two people engaged in a rationally irresolvable moral dispute will still be disagreeing about *how they want the world to be*, even after they appreciate that their having different ultimate moral principles makes their

dispute rationally irresoluble. The imagined “fish” dispute will dissolve when the parties to it realize that each means something different by ‘fish’, and that, by those meanings, each is asserting a true proposition. But the imagined dispute about eating animals will not have a similar resolution, for even if it were agreed that their different principles *defined* different concepts, they would remain in conflict over how they want the world to be.

Second, we must bear in mind the full range of internalist connections; for in addition to the connection between thinking something wrong and having desires against it, there are also connections with a whole battery of moral emotions. If you think you did something wrong, you are liable to feel guilt, shame, or remorse. You may feel moral pride if you did something especially good, and if someone else does something wrong, you may feel moral outrage or resentment.

Third, it seems to belong to the functional architecture of moral concepts that what ultimate moral views a person has may be partly a function of that person’s conative nature, of that person’s basic and underived views as to the kind of world he cares to inhabit. The possibility of a change of heart leading to a change of ultimate moral views would explain why it is that, while one regards one’s ultimate moral principles (e.g., that it is wrong to cause pain for the fun of it) as necessary truths, one does not regard them as analytic. It would also give point to moral debate even when the debate is rationally irresoluble in the sense explained above; for there would remain the possibility of *affectingly* influencing someone in a way that would lead to a change in his moral views.

Fourth, moral notions come in *families*, and even though two people might associate quite different instantiation conditions with their various moral terms, those terms will belong to structurally identical families of notions. Whatever criteria of application two people have for ‘wrong’, the relation of that term to their uses of ‘right’, ‘ought’, ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘just’, etc., and to the moral emotions associated with those notions will be the same.

Fifth, moral concepts, however interpersonally dissimilar, are inculcated in a similar process of moral training. Reward and punishment are doled out to the child in the course of training her to be, by her parents’ lights, a moral person: “That’s *bad!* Don’t do it!” “That’s not *fair*—give your brother half!” “That’s very *wrong* and you should feel very *ashamed!*” (To appreciate how effective this training can be, think of the residual feelings of guilt and self-hatred that people are capable of feeling regarding behavior they now consider morally permissible.)

Sixth, there may be a *common point* to our having concepts with the features I am ascribing to moral concepts. To ask about the point of moral concepts is to ask what they do for us, in what tangible way we would be worse off without them. Consider concepts of shape and color. It is clear how we would be worse off without them: whether our basic needs get satisfied depends on what we do, and what we do depends in part on what we can believe; and without concepts of shape and color we simply could not form many of the beliefs that now enable us to satisfy basic desires; our ability to survive would be greatly diminished if we could not form beliefs involving those concepts. But it is arguable that this sort of story cannot be told about moral concepts. Naturally, I hesitate to speak of *the* point of anything, but putting that qualm aside, I propose that the point of moral concepts is that they help to get people to behave in ways we call "moral."

This returns us to the main order of business. The challenge to the would-be cognitivist moral antirealist is to explain why moral properties, whose existence the theorist affirms, cannot be instantiated. My answer was that moral properties lack instantiation conditions, and this invited me to clarify what it meant and to explain why it is true. Let me turn to this, now that relevant preliminaries have been dispatched.

I take it that nothing can instantiate a moral property unless it has nonmoral properties on which the moral property supervenes. If an act is wrong, then it is wrong in every possible world that is nonmorally indistinguishable from the actual world. I stipulate that a moral property's instantiation conditions are just those nonmoral properties, if any, on which the moral property supervenes.

My explanation of why moral properties fail to have instantiation conditions is as follows. Typically, we judge two people to mean the same thing by a predicate only if they use, or are disposed to defer to, the same criteria for applying the term, but this is not so in the case of moral predicates like 'wrong'. The "criteria" of application a person associates with 'wrong' are determined by her ultimate views as to what is wrong, and there may be great interpersonal differences among these views, these criteria of application. At the same time, important interpersonal similarities of use of the kind just reviewed account for our judging two people to mean the same by 'wrong', notwithstanding the different criteria of application they attach to the term. Here there is nothing to distinguish any one person's criteria as the *correct* criteria of application; this is the result of there being sameness of meaning in the absence of conditions of application that are criterial for everyone. Enter now the pleonastic con-

ception of properties, which, together with the pertinent facts, implies that two people mean the same property of moral wrongness by their uses of 'wrong', however much their ultimate moral views may differ. Now the instantiation conditions of a property are just the correct criteria of application of the predicate that expresses it, but since for moral terms there are no such criteria, moral properties—the mere shadows of moral predicates—have no instantiation conditions. If we thought of moral terms' getting their meaning by coming to express antecedently existing moral properties, then it would be a big mystery why those properties could not have determinate application. What could account for their being such ontological mutants? But on the pleonastic conception, the property expressed by a predicate supervenes on, and has its nature determined by, the features that fix the predicate's interpersonal sense; and we have seen how sameness-of-sense criteria can ascribe sameness of sense in the absence of interpersonal criteria of application. It further follows that moral propositions, the propositions referred to by 'that' clauses containing moral terms, have not the wherewithal to be true. In this way, we see how it is possible for cognitivism and moral antirealism both to be true.

IV. SUMMARY, MARGINAL SOFTENING, AND UPSHOT

The position I am tempted by is the conjunction of cognitivism and moral antirealism. I have limned part of my case for cognitivism but have done even less for the second conjunct. This paper's primary task has been quite limited: to give the most plausible story of how cognitivism and moral antirealism might both be true; to explain, that is, how it might be that, while there are moral properties, they cannot be instantiated, while there are moral propositions, they cannot be true.

I have been concerned with an extreme position, one that allows no moral truths, but I hope it is clear how it could be softened without loss of interest and without giving up its key ingredients. Perhaps it will be agreed that there may be huge interpersonal differences among ultimate moral principles but insisted that there are limits: no one who has our moral concepts can deny that it is wrong to torture people for smoking in public places. But little need change even if this were conceded. For while this would give moral properties some instantiation conditions, it would still leave a great deal that matters to us uninstantiated by moral properties. Morality, the sum of moral truths, would be the feeblest of guides.

Of the many possible objections to what I have advanced, there is one that I would like to anticipate by sort of accepting. I have argued that our practice of individuating senses, and thus of concepts,

allows us to ascribe sameness of meaning in the absence of interpersonal criteria of application, thus giving rise to properties that have no instantiation conditions. Yet these are surely *defective* practices, so should we not question that they are ours? They are defective practices all right, giving rise to defective properties. But I do not think we should question that they are our practices. Perhaps an analogy will help. Earlier I said that our practice governing the use of 'property' was such that if F is any predicate, then the sentence

a is F .

may be pleonastically rewritten as

a has the property of being F .

But I hastened to add a qualification: logically reflective speakers will not want to restate

Doghood is non-self-instantiating.

(i.e., doghood, not being a dog, is a property that is not instantiated by itself) as

Doghood has the property of being non-self-instantiating.

for if we allow that there is a property of being non-self-instantiating, then we shall be landed with a property that is self-instantiating iff it is not self-instantiating, and that is a contradiction.

This seems to show that our ordinary conceptual and linguistic practices can lead to absurdity. But I do not think it can seriously be denied that it *is* our practice to license the restatement of ' a is F ' as ' a has the property of being F ', just as it is our practice to license the restatement of ' a is F ' as 'It's a fact that a is F '. It is not as if we really employ subtle criteria—criteria perhaps derived from the true inner nature of properties—that allow us to make the move in some cases but not in others; it is rather that we have inherited defective but concept-fixing practices, as if we were taught a game that typically works well but has a defining rule that leads under certain applications to absurdity.⁴ Similarly, I would suggest, our entrenched, albeit

⁴ Cf. Charles Chihara, "The Semantic Paradoxes: A Diagnostic Investigation," *The Philosophical Review*, LXXXVIII, 4 (1979): 590–618. I should add that it is not obvious that one must deny that there is a property of being non-self-instantiating. Paul Horwich has proposed (in conversation) that it may be possible to deny the truth of

The predicate 'is non-self-instantiating' is true of a thing iff it is non-self-instantiating.

Using pleonastic restatement, this would then allow us to deny the truth of

defective, practices lead us to accept properties having no instantiation conditions. We may decry those practices, but they are ours, and to reject them would be to revise our concepts of meaning, property, and proposition. I believe it to be a merit of the deflationary pleonastic conception of properties that it allows us to see how defective linguistic practices can determine defective properties, properties that lack the wherewithal to be instantiated.

What, finally, should be one's stance toward moral concepts and moral language now that we have seen the light? If one believes a single moral proposition, then one is a moral realist; for moral realism is true if there are true moral propositions, and one—or at any rate one who has the concept of truth—cannot believe a proposition without believing that it is true. Since many people have moral beliefs, it follows that they are in error. In this regard, my position is similar to J. L. Mackie's⁵ well-known "error theory," although mine differs from his in the argumentation and theoretical apparatus brought to bear and in the fact that my view does not deny the existence of moral properties.

Now, an error theorist need not renounce the *use* of moral notions, for the theorist may recommend the *instrumental* use of moral talk, even if she relegates the benefit of moral concepts to the status of, as it were, instruments of propaganda or subliminal advertising. But even if one decides to live without full-blooded moral notions, this decision would leave unaffected one's desire to live in what before one's decision one would have called the morally best world.

STEPHEN SCHIFFER

City University of New York/Graduate Center

A thing instantiates the property of being non-self-instantiating iff it is non-self-instantiating.

thereby enabling us to allow the existence of the property without fear of contradiction. The problem is a hairy one, and it is not clear what to say, although the very nature of the problem strikes me as offering oblique support for the pleonastic conception of properties, the view that there is no more to the existence of properties than is licensed by our hypostatizing grammatical transformations.

⁵ *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).