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Agent Versus Appraiser Moral Relativism: An Exploratory Study

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Agent Versus Appraiser Moral Relativism: An Exploratory Study

Theories of moral relativism do not always fit well with common intuitions. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato ridiculed the relativist teachings of Protagoras (Plato, 1921), and Bernard Williams dubbed moral relativism “possibly the most absurd view to have been advanced even in moral philosophy” (Williams, 1972, p. 20). Nonetheless, even though some moral philosophers oppose theories of moral relativism due to its counter-intuitive implications (e.g., Streiffer, 1999), other philosophers defend it by referring to common intuitions, lay people’s speech acts, or common understandings of certain moral terms (e.g., Brogaard, 2008; Harman, 1975; Prinz, 2007). These intuitions have been investigated empirically: On the one hand, empirical studies suggest that survey respondents can make relativist moral judgments (Goodwin & Darley, 2008; Sarkissian, Park, Tien, Wright, & Knobe, 2012; Wright, Grandjean, & McWhite, 2012; Wright, McWhite, & Grandjean, forthcoming). On the other hand, the folk’s moral relativist intuitions might be self-contradictory (cf. Beebe, 2010), and this can be used as an argument against relativist moral theories (Williams, 1972).

If the prevalence and coherence of folk moral relativism are to play a role in arguments regarding the philosophical merits of moral relativism, then we need to know what the folk actually adhere to. In this regard, for several reasons, it is important to take into account that there are different kinds of moral relativism (Quintelier & Fessler, 2012). First, failure to do so may lead to an underestimation of the prevalence of folk moral relativism, as respondents may employ relativist intuitions of a kind other than that being measured. Second, some kinds of moral relativism might be more coherent than others (Quintelier & Fessler, 2012).

An important distinction that has received attention in recent philosophical work is agent versus appraiser relativism (Beebe, 2010; Lyons 1976/2001; Prinz; 2007). As we further explain in the next two sections, this distinction refers to the individual toward whom a moral statement

is relativized. Agent moral relativism states that the appropriate frame of reference is the moral framework of the person who performs the act, or of the cultural group to which this person belongs. Appraiser moral relativists state that the appropriate frame of reference is the moral framework of the person who makes the moral judgment, or of the cultural group to which this person belongs. Contemporary empirical work on moral relativism has largely failed to investigate both a) this critical distinction between agent and appraiser moral relativism, and b) the corresponding comparative intuitive appeal of each type of moral relativism.

Here, we explore the existence of both agent and appraiser moral relativist intuitions in lay people. Below, we briefly define moral relativism, after which we explain in more detail the difference between agent and appraiser moral relativism. In the main section, we describe our study and report our findings. Finally, we discuss the possible implications of our findings.

Moral Relativism

We construe the notion of moral relativism as consisting of three necessary components: First, X is relative to Y; second, X is an aspect of the moral phenomenon; and third, there is variation in Y that cannot be eliminated, as illustrated below (cf. Quintelier & Fessler, 2012).

First, we take moral relativism to mean that some aspect of moral statements (e.g., their truth, their referent) or morally relevant acts (e.g., their moral rightness) is relative to a moral framework (cf. Harman & Thompson, 1996). By a moral framework, we mean a set of moral values, principles or sentiments that play a justifying role in one's moral reasoning (e.g., one justifies moral judgments by referring to this framework).

Consider the following example, inspired by Lyons (1976/2001): Assume that pro-choice activists endorse a moral framework that prioritizes the value of personal choice over the value of the unborn life. According to some kinds of moral relativism, a pro-choice activist – say, Christine – can truthfully judge that abortion is permissible because it is in accordance with her

moral framework. Nonetheless, if a pro-life activist – say, Lisa – abhors abortion, Lisa’s statement regarding the impermissibility of abortion is also true because it is in accordance with Lisa’s moral framework that prioritizes the value of the unborn life over personal choice. In this example, the truth of moral statements thus depends on the moral framework of the person uttering a moral statement.

Second, moral relativism holds that there is variation between these moral frameworks. In our example, some people are pro-choice and others are pro-life. People’s moral judgments will therefore sometimes differ because their respective moral frameworks differ.

Finally, moral relativism rests on philosophical assumptions, such that this variation in moral frameworks cannot be eliminated. For instance, one can hold that both frameworks are equally true, that there is no truth about the matter, or that they are equally practical, etc. If moral relativism would allow that all variation in moral frameworks could be eliminated, moral relativism would be compatible with (most forms of) moral universalism. This meaning of moral relativism would be too broad for our purposes.

Agent Versus Appraiser Moral Relativism

The above picture leaves out an important component of moral relativism, namely, whose moral framework matters in deciding whether a moral statement is true or not: Does it matter who is evaluating the act, does it matter who is doing the act, or both? Another example can illustrate this: Both Carol, a pro-choice activist, and Laura, a pro-life activist, are having an abortion. They are agents performing an act with moral relevance. Lisa (the other pro-life activist) and Christine (pro-choice activist) again contemplate these actions and utter their respective judgments: Lisa says neither abortion is permissible, while Christine says both abortions are permissible. They are appraisers evaluating the act. Which moral statement is true now? Should we assign truth values based on the moral frameworks of the agents performing the

act—this being Carol and Laura—or based on the moral frameworks of the appraisers judging the act—this being Lisa and Christine? Or could any moral framework be an appropriate frame of reference?

According to agent moral relativism, the appropriate frame of reference is the agent's moral framework. In this example, it would be permissible for Carol (the pro-choice agent) to have an abortion, but it would not be permissible for Laura (the pro-life agent) to have an abortion. Viewed from the perspective of agent moral relativism, Christine's evaluative statement that both abortions are permissible is false, even though this statement is in accordance with her own moral framework. In contrast, for an agent moral relativist, it would be correct for an appraiser such as Christine to disapprove of Laura's abortion (as inconsistent with Laura's own moral perspective) and to permit Carol's abortion (as consistent with Carol's own moral perspective).

In contrast, according to appraiser relativism, the moral frameworks of the agents (Laura and Carol) are irrelevant for a moral judgment to be true or false. What matters instead are the moral frameworks of the appraisers, Christine and Lisa. Viewed from the perspective of appraiser moral relativism, Christine's evaluative statement that both abortions are permissible is correct, even though abortion is against Laura's (the agent's) framework. In what follows, we consider appraisers as those who evaluate a moral act without being involved in the act. Thus, considering the act of lying, when A lies to B, A and B are not appraisers. Of course, in reality, agents can appraise their own actions. However, simplifying matters this way will make it easier to investigate whether lay people indeed draw a distinction between agents and appraisers when assessing the status of moral statements and behavior.

Importance of the agent-appraiser distinction

The distinction between agent moral relativism and appraiser moral relativism is

important when evaluating moral theories. One possible argument against moral relativism is that it has counterintuitive implications (e.g., Williams, 1972). Moral relativism is often taken to imply that at least some moral statements are true or false depending on the appraiser. In the above example, this would mean that it is true (for Christine) that Carol's abortion is permissible, while it is true (for Lisa) that Carol's abortion is not permissible. As a consequence, conflicting moral statements can both be true at the same time, which is hard to reconcile with common intuitions. Moreover, according to appraiser moral relativism, Christine cannot reasonably say that Lisa is wrong. However, most people do admonish others when they utter apparently conflicting moral statements. Thus, the moral speech acts of most people are not in line with moral relativism.

While this argument against moral relativism holds for appraiser relativism, it does not necessarily hold for agent relativism. According to agent moral relativism, each moral statement about a specific act performed by a specific agent is either true or false, irrespective of who is appraising the act. In the above example, Carol's abortion is permissible, irrespective of who is judging Carol. As a consequence, conflicting moral statements are not both true at the same time, and it is not unreasonable for discussants to admonish those who utter conflicting moral statements. This is easier to reconcile with common intuitions.

Also, agent moral relativism is easier to reconcile with certain existing social practices than appraiser moral relativism. According to agent group moral relativism, the appropriate frame of reference is the moral framework of the group the agent belongs to. This is akin to cultural relativism: an act is right or wrong depending on the moral values that prevail in the culture in which the act takes place. Cultural relativism has been vehemently defended in the past, and moderate forms of cultural relativism—where the wrongness of at least some, but not all, acts depends on the culture in which the act takes place—are still defended and applied in public

policy. For instance, in Belgium, it is illegal to kill animals without previously anesthetizing them. However, the same does not hold for religious groups when ritually slaughtering animals. Thus, whether an act is legally right or wrong depends on the group performing the act. Such policies are put in practice for at least some moral issues, and people seem to be able to relativize their practical judgments to the moral frameworks of agents.

In contrast, according to appraiser group moral relativism, the appropriate frame of reference is the moral framework of the group to which the appraiser belongs. In the case of slaughtering animals, everyone would judge the ritual and non-ritual practices according to their own moral framework, and all these conflicting judgments would be true. This is hard to reconcile with the observation that, in fact, the relevant conflicting judgments were discussed by politicians and pundits in Belgium until a consensus was reached, and an agent group moral relativist solution was adopted.

Thus, those who reject moral relativism because of its counterintuitive implications should clarify what kind of moral relativism they have in mind: appraiser moral relativism might well be counterintuitive in ways that agent moral relativism is not, and, of course, agent moral relativism might be counterintuitive in other ways that appraiser moral relativism is not.

Previous Evidence for Folk Moral Relativism

Existing studies about folk moral relativism most often vary only the appraisers. To date, investigators have yet to examine whether participants also reveal agent relativist intuitions in experimental studies.

Goodwin and Darley (2008) and Wright et al. (2012; forthcoming) both report the existence of relativist moral positions. In these studies, participants are presented with statements such as “Before the 3rd month of pregnancy, abortion for any reason (of the mother’s) is acceptable.” Some participants indicated that the statement was true (or false) but that a person

who disagrees with them about the statement need not be mistaken. Hence, in these studies, it seems that participants allowed the truth value of a moral statement to depend on the appraiser. We do not know if participants would also allow the truth of a moral statement, or the rightness of an act, to vary depending on the agent.

Sarkissian et al. (2011) were able to guide participants' intuitions in the direction of moral relativism by varying the cultural background of the appraisers. They also varied the cultural background of the agents, but this did not have an effect on participants' intuitions. However, this apparent null result is subject to the methodological limitation that the cultural backgrounds of the hypothetical agents were much more similar to each other (an American versus an Algerian agent) than were the cultural backgrounds of the hypothetical appraisers (a classmate versus an appraiser from a fictitious primitive society, or versus an extraterrestrial).

Because the above studies do not address agent moral relativism, we developed scenarios in which we explicitly varied the moral frameworks of both agents and appraisers.

Method

Research Questions

We tested whether manipulating the moral frameworks of agents would have an effect on lay people's moral speech acts. We asked participants about *their own moral judgments* about moral acts performed by agents holding various moral frameworks. We then also tested whether manipulating the moral frameworks of agents and appraisers would make a difference. To do so, we asked the same participants to assess *the truth of others' moral judgments* about moral scenarios. These moral statements were uttered by appraisers who held different moral frameworks. Moreover, these statements evaluated the acts of moral agents that also held different moral frameworks.

Participants

In April and May 2013 we recruited participants using Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk web-based employment system (hereafter MTurk). This is a crowdsourcing website that allows people to perform short tasks, including surveys, for small amounts of money. Anyone over 18 could participate. We analyzed data from 217 participants, who were mostly from the U.S (155) and India (49).

Materials and Design

We developed two questionnaires featuring agents and appraisers. All participants completed only one of the two questionnaires. The first questionnaire featured employees in a firm where, as a punishment, reducing the time allowed for lunch was either against, or in accordance with, the employees' moral framework. The second questionnaire featured sailors on a ship in international waters, where whipping as a punishment was either against, or in accordance with, the sailors' moral frameworks. The 'sailors' questionnaire was a modified version of a questionnaire previously employed in related research; see Quintelier et al. (2012) for a full description of this instrument. In this paper, we therefore give a detailed overview of the 'employees' questionnaire first, followed by only a short description of the 'sailors' questionnaire. The full text of both questionnaires is available upon request.

In order to investigate whether participants' moral intuitions vary depending on the agents' moral frameworks, participants were first presented with two scenarios describing the same act, done by different agents. In one scenario the act was *concordant* with the agents' own moral framework and in the other scenario the act was *discordant* with the agents' own moral framework. After each scenario, we asked participants to morally judge this act. In order to check whether they had understood the particular vignette, we also asked them to complete two comprehension questions. Because the order of presentation of the two scenarios might unintentionally shape responses due to priming or similar psychological effects that are

orthogonal to the phenomena in which we are interested here, the order of presentation was randomized across participants. This generated relatively equal subsamples that differed by order of presentation, allowing us to control for order effects in the final analysis. The ‘employees’ questionnaire consisted of the following scenarios:

Scenario 1. Mr. Jay is the boss of family business J in a small town in the Midwestern U.S. In this company, when employees are late for work, their wages are reduced by a proportionate amount. As a consequence, everyone in this company has come to think that a proportionate wage reduction is a morally right punishment for being late for work. They think reducing lunch breaks as a punishment is morally wrong because this is never done and they value their lunch breaks.

One day, John is late for work. This day, his boss is not in the mood to deal with administrative issues such as adjusting John’s wages. Instead, he punishes John by shortening his lunch break, even though Mr. Jay himself, John, and all the other employees in this company think this is morally wrong.

Participants then answered the following judgment question on a 5-point Likert scale: “To what extent do you think Mr. Jay’s behavior is morally wrong?” (1 = certainly morally wrong; 5 = certainly not morally wrong). The higher the participants’ scores, the more their judgment was discordant with the agent’s moral framework. Henceforth, we refer to this agent-discordant item as *AD*.

Participants then answered two comprehension questions: a) “Does Mr. Jay think that taking time off of John’s lunch break is morally wrong?” (Yes, Mr. Jay thinks that taking time off of John’s lunch break is morally wrong/No, Mr. Jay does not think that taking time off of John’s lunch break is morally wrong), and b) “Does John think that taking time off of his lunch break is morally wrong?” (Yes, John thinks that taking time off of his lunch break is morally wrong/No,

John does not think that taking time off of his lunch break is morally wrong).

Scenario 2. Mr. May is the boss of another family business M in the same small town in the Midwestern U.S. In this company, when employees are late for work, their lunch break is proportionately shortened. As a consequence, everyone in this company has come to think that a proportionately shorter lunch break is a morally right punishment for being late for work. They think that reducing wages as a punishment is morally wrong because this is never done and they value their income.

One day, Michael is late for work. His boss punishes Michael by shortening his lunch break. Mr. May himself, Michael, and all the other employees in this company think that this is morally right.

Participants then answered the following judgment question on a 5-point Likert scale: “To what extent do you think Mr. May’s behavior is morally wrong?” (1 = certainly morally wrong; 5 = certainly not morally wrong). Thus, the higher the participants’ scores, the more their judgment was concordant with the agents’ moral frameworks (AC).

Participants again answered two comprehension questions: a) “Does Mr. May think that taking time off of Michael’s lunch break is morally wrong?” (Yes, Mr. May thinks that taking time off of Michael’s lunch break is morally wrong/No, Mr. May does not think that taking time off of Michael’s lunch break is morally wrong), and b) “Does Michael think that taking time off of his lunch break is morally wrong?” (Yes, Michael thinks that taking time off of his lunch break is morally wrong/No, Michael does not think that taking time off of his lunch break is morally wrong).

In order to test whether participants’ moral judgments depended on the agents’ moral frameworks, we used AC and AD as within-subject levels of the variable AGENT.

In order to test whether participants' moral intuitions varied depending on the appraisers' and the agents' moral frameworks, participants were presented with two additional scenarios, presented in randomized order, that extend the previous scenarios through the addition of appraisers who utter a moral statement about the act.

Scenario 3. James and Jared are employees in Mr. Jay's company. They both know that in Mr. May's company, everyone thinks shortening lunch breaks is morally right.

Of course, in their own company, it is just the other way around: Everybody in Mr. Jay's company, including James and Jared, think that shorter breaks are a morally wrong punishment, and that wage reduction is a morally right punishment.

James and Jared have heard that Mr. May shortened Michael's lunch break. James says to Jared: "What Mr. May did was morally wrong."

Participants answered the following question: "To what extent do you think that what James says is true or false?" (1 = certainly true; 5 = certainly false). Here, the higher the participants' scores, the more that their truth evaluation was concordant with the agents' moral frameworks but discordant with the appraisers' moral frameworks (AGCAPD).

Participants answered one comprehension question: "Does James think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for (that is, in Mr. Jay's company)?" (Yes, James thinks that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for/No, James does not think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for).

Participants then answered the following question: Now Jared replies to James: "No, what Mr. May did was not morally wrong. "To what extent do you think that what Jared says is true or false?" (1 = certainly true; 5 = certainly false). Thus, the higher the participants' scores, the more their truth evaluation was discordant with the agents' moral frameworks but concordant with the

appraisers' moral frameworks (AGDAPC).

Participants answered one comprehension question: "Does Jared think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for (that is, in Mr. Jay's company)?" (Yes, Jared thinks that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for/No, Jared does not think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for)

Scenario 4. Mark and Matthew are employees in Mr. May's company. They both know that in their own company, everybody, just like Mark and Matthew themselves, thinks that reducing wages is a morally wrong punishment, and that shortening lunch breaks is a morally right punishment.

Mark and Matthew have heard that Mr. May shortened John's lunch break. Mark says to Matthew: "What Mr. May did was morally wrong."

Participants answered the following question: "To what extent do you think that what Mark says is true or false?" (1 = certainly true; 5 = certainly false) Higher scores on this statement indicate that the participant's truth evaluation was more concordant with both the appraisers' and the agents' moral frameworks (AGCAPC).

Participants answered one comprehension question: "Does Mark think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for (that is, in Mr. May's company)?" (Yes, Mark thinks that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for/No, Mark does not think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for).

Participants then answered the following question: "Now Matthew replies to Mark: No, what Mr. May did was not morally wrong. To what extent do you think that what Matthew says is true or false?" (1 = certainly true; 5 = certainly false) Higher scores on this statement indicate that

the participant's truth evaluation was more discordant with both the appraisers' and agents' moral frameworks (AGDAPD).

Participants again answered a comprehension question: "Does Matthew think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for (that is, in Mr. May's company)?" (Yes, Matthew thinks that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for/No, Matthew does not think that taking time off of lunch breaks is morally wrong in the company he works for).

Participants thus had to indicate the truth of four moral statements. The variable AGENT TRUTH consists of the following two within-subjects levels: AGCAPC+AGCAPD and AGDAPC+AGDAPD. The variable APPRAISER TRUTH consists of the following two levels: AGCAPC+AGDAPC and AGCAPD+AGDAPD.

The 'sailors' questionnaire featured the following scenario:

Scenario 1. Mr. Johnson is an officer on a cargo ship in 2010, carrying goods along the Atlantic coastline. All the crew members are American but the ship is mostly in international waters. When a ship is in international waters, it has to follow the law of the state whose flag it sails under and each ship can sail under only one flag. This ship does not sail under the U.S. flag. The law of this ship's flag state allows both whipping and food deprivation as a punishment.

On this ship, food deprivation is always used to discipline sailors who disobey orders or who are drunk on duty; as a consequence everyone on this ship, Mr. Johnson as well as all the sailors, has come to think that food deprivation is a morally permissible punishment. Whipping, however, is never used to discipline sailors and everyone on this ship. Mr. Johnson, as well as all the sailors, thinks whipping is a morally wrong punishment.

One night, while the ship is in international waters, Mr. Johnson finds a sailor drunk at a time when the sailor should have been on watch. After the sailor sobers up, Mr. Johnson punishes the sailor by giving him 5 lashes with a whip. This does not go against the law of the flag state.

Subsequent scenarios, experimental and comprehension questions were analogous to the ‘employees’ questionnaire: As in the ‘employees’ questionnaire, there were eight comprehension questions and six experimental questions.

Results

In order to ensure that participants read and understood the scenarios, we only retained those participants that answered all eight comprehension questions correctly. We analysed the data from the two questionnaires separately. We analysed data from 108 participants (33.3% women) for ‘employees’ and 109 participants (51.4% women) for ‘sailors’. For some analyses, the total number of participants was lower due to missing values. For ‘employees’, mean age was 34.93 years ($SD = 11.17$), ranging from 20 to 76 years old. For ‘sailors’, mean age was 35.63 years ($SD = 12.11$) ranging from 20 to 68. Participants were mostly from the U.S. (79 and 76) and India (24 and 25) for ‘employees’ and ‘sailors’ respectively.

To determine whether participants considered punishment as less morally wrong when it was in accordance with the agents’ frameworks, we used a mixed design ANOVA with AC and AD as the two within-subject levels of the variable AGENT, and order of presentation as the between-subjects variable. We found a significant main effect of AGENT on the extent to which participants thought that the punishment was morally wrong (employees: $F(1,106) = 96.8, p < .001$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 43.2, p < .001$). Specifically, participants thought that the ‘agent concordant’ punishment was more morally permissible (less morally wrong) (See Figure 1; employees: $M = 4.16, SD = 0.10$; sailors: $M = 2.87, SD = 0.14$) than the ‘agent discordant’ punishment (employees: $M = 2.76, SD = 0.13$; sailors: $M = 2.04, SD = 0.11$). We found no

significant order effect (employees: $F(1,106) = 2.81, p = .097$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 1.97, p = .164$) and no interaction effect between AGENT and order (employees: $F(1,106) = 2.12, p = .148$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 2.47, p = .119$).

<Figure 1 about here>

To determine whether there was an effect of the agents' and appraisers' moral frameworks on participants' truth evaluation of a moral statement, we conducted a mixed design ANOVA with AGENT TRUTH and APPRAISER TRUTH as within-subject variables and order as between-subject variable. We found that the agents' moral frameworks (AGENT TRUTH) had an effect on whether participants thought that the moral statement was true or not (employees: $F(1,104) = 69.4, p < .001$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 53.9, p < .001$). Specifically, participants thought that the statement was more likely to be true when it was in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks (See Figure 2; employees: $M = 3.50, SD = 0.084$; sailors: $M = 3.49, SD = 0.092$) than when it was not in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks (employees: $M = 2.29, SD = 0.087$; sailors: $M = 2.29, SD = 0.081$).

<Figure 2 about here>

We found that the appraisers' moral frameworks (APPRAISER TRUTH) also had a significant effect on whether participants thought that the moral statement was true or not (employees: $F(1,104) = 69.4, p < .001$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 33.3, p < .001$). Specifically, participants thought that the moral statement was more likely to be true when it was in accordance with the appraisers' moral frameworks (See Figure 3; employees: $M = 3.51, SD = 0.097$; sailors: $M = 3.39, SD = 0.096$) than when it was not in accordance with the appraisers' moral frameworks (employees: $M = 2.29, SD = 0.092$; sailors: $M = 2.38, SD = 0.089$). We did not find a main effect of order (employees: $F(1,104) = 0.953, p = .331$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 0.067, p = .797$).

<Figure 3 about here>

For employees, but not for sailors, we found a significant two-way interaction between AGENT TRUTH and APPRAISER TRUTH (See Figure 4; employees: $F(1,104) = 4.22, p = .024$; sailors: $F(1,107) = 0.199, p = .772$). Finally, for employees, but not for sailors, we found a significant interaction effect between AGENT TRUTH and order of presentation (See Figure 5; $F(1,104) = 36.19, p < .001$). There were no interaction effects for APPRAISER TRUTH and order of presentation.

<Figure 4 about here>

<Figure 5 about here>

Discussion

We investigated whether lay people's moral evaluations were in accordance with agent moral relativism. We tested this in two ways. First, we asked participants to make a moral judgment about an act while manipulating the moral frameworks of the agents. We found that participants were more likely to consider the act as morally permissible when it was in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks than when it was not in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks. This suggests that agents' moral frameworks have an effect on lay people's moral speech acts about the moral wrongness or permissibility of behavior: People are more likely to say that a behavior is morally permissible when it is in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks compared to when it is not in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks. Second, we asked participants to assess the truth of a moral statement while manipulating the moral frameworks of the agents and of the appraisers. We found that participants were more likely to answer that a moral statement is true when its message was in accordance with the agents' moral frameworks. This suggests that agents' moral frameworks have an effect on lay people's moral speech acts about the truth of moral statements: People are more likely to say that

a moral statement is true when the message is in line with the agents' moral frameworks compared to when the message is not in line with the agents' moral frameworks. However, we also found that participants were more likely to answer that a moral statement is true when its message was in accordance with the appraisers' moral frameworks. This suggests that appraisers' moral frameworks also have an effect on lay people's moral speech acts about the truth of moral statements.

We also found two interaction effects in the 'employees' questionnaire, but not in the 'sailors' questionnaire. First, for the truth evaluations, there was an interaction effect between agents' and appraisers' moral frameworks. However, examining Figure 4, although this interaction was significant, the effect of agents' moral frameworks was in the same direction in both conditions and was not notably larger when the statement was concordant with the appraisers' moral frameworks compared to when the statement was discordant with the appraisers' moral frameworks. Second, there was an interaction effect between the effect of agents' moral frameworks and order of presentation. Examining Figure 5, we see that the effect of agents' moral framework was slightly larger when the appraiser discordant scenario was presented first (order 2), compared to when the appraiser concordant scenario was presented first (order 1). Nevertheless, the effect of agents' moral frameworks was again in the same direction in both orders. Thus, the folk seem to be agent relativists regardless of order of presentation or variation in the appraisers' moral frameworks. Further research may reveal whether these interaction effects are a consistent pattern in folk moral relativism, or whether they were an artifact of the 'employees' scenario.

Our results suggests that agents' and appraisers' moral frameworks independently matter for people's evaluations of the truth of moral statements, and that agents' moral frameworks matter for people's evaluations of moral actions. It would be interesting to further investigate the

determinants of both types of relativism. It might be the case, for instance, that some people are predominantly and consistently agent relativists while others are predominantly and consistently appraiser relativists. In order to explore this possibility, we calculated three new variables: AGENT DEGREE (AC-AD) as the degree to which participants relativized the permissibility of behaviour according to the agents' moral frameworks, AGENT TRUTH DEGREE (AGCAPC+AGCAPD-AGDAPC-AGDAPD) as the degree to which participants relativized the truth of moral statements according to the agents' moral frameworks, and APPRAISER TRUTH DEGREE (AGCAPC+AGDAPC-AGCAPD-AGDAPD) as the degree to which participants relativized the truth of moral statements according to the appraisers' moral frameworks. For 'sailors', we found that AGENT DEGREE was positively and significantly related to AGENT TRUTH DEGREE ($F(1,108) = 11.0, p = .001$) but not to APPRAISER TRUTH DEGREE ($F(1,108) = 0.000, p = .989$). This suggests that, at least in responding to the 'sailors' questionnaire, participants who were agent relativists with regard to moral permissibility were also more likely to be agent relativists with regard to moral truth, but were not more likely to be appraiser relativists with regard to moral truth. However, we found no significant relations for the 'employees' questionnaire. Thus, it remains to be seen whether agent moral relativism and appraiser moral relativism are stable and consistent personal dispositions.

Our results are not definitive. Notwithstanding the fact that we excluded all participants who did not fill out all comprehension questions correctly, given the complexity of our scenarios and questions, future investigations would benefit from simpler materials. Also, we examined assessments of only two acts, namely reduction in lunch time, and whipping, both as a punishment. The extent of lay people's moral relativism may depend on the kind of act or the modality of the moral statement. In addition, it remains to be seen whether agent and appraiser relativism are stable intuitions or vary across a range of situations. These and other possibilities

warrant future research, some of which has already been undertaken by the present authors (Quintelier, De Smet, & Fessler, in prep.).

With the above caveats in mind, our study reveals that participants vary in whether they relativize moral speech acts to agents or to appraisers. Such inter-individual variation in types of moral intuitions is in line with previous suggestions (e.g., Gill, 2009; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2009) that different individuals employ quite divergent moral language. The inter-individual variation that we have documented thus supports Gill's position that philosophical theories that appeal to lay people's speech acts cannot rely on a "handful of commonsense judgments," (2009, p. 217), as the philosopher's commonsense judgment will often fail to reflect the actual distribution of moral reasoning among the folk. Moreover, that people may employ divergent relativist forms of language indicates that researchers of moral relativism cannot make claims regarding moral relativism without first specifying the type of relativism at issue, nor can they attend only to appraiser relativism. Methodologically, researchers must take care in designing stimuli and queries in order to minimize ambiguity as to which type of relativism is made salient. Whether they be empiricists or theorists, researchers of moral relativism must take seriously the existence of agent moral relativism, and must consider the differences between it and appraiser moral relativism.

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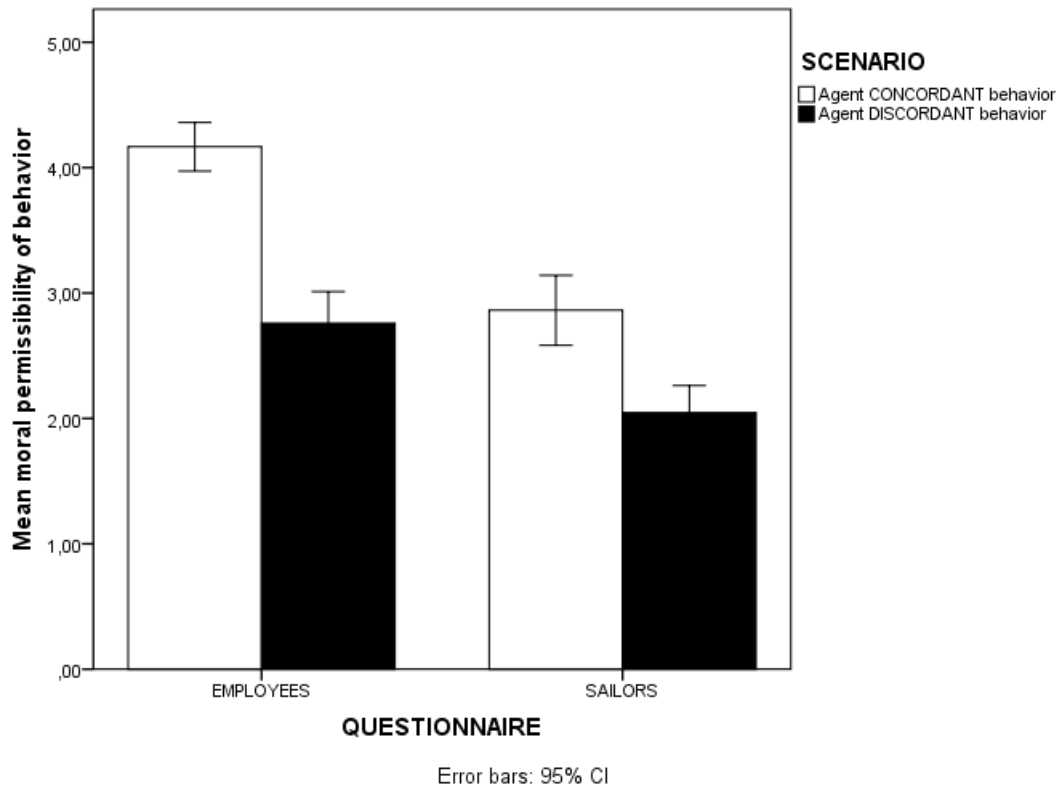


Figure 1. Moral permissibility of behavior as a function of concordance of the behavior with the agents' moral frameworks, for two different questionnaire vignettes.

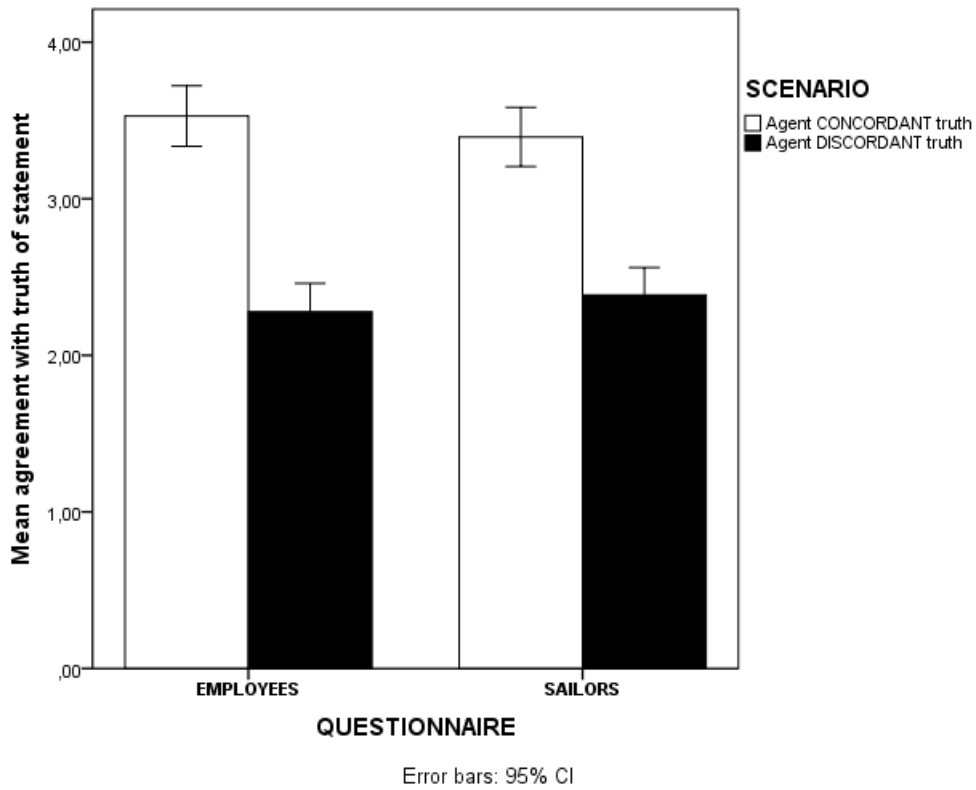


Figure 2. Truth assessment of a moral statement as a function of concordance of the statement with the agents' moral frameworks, for two different questionnaire vignettes.

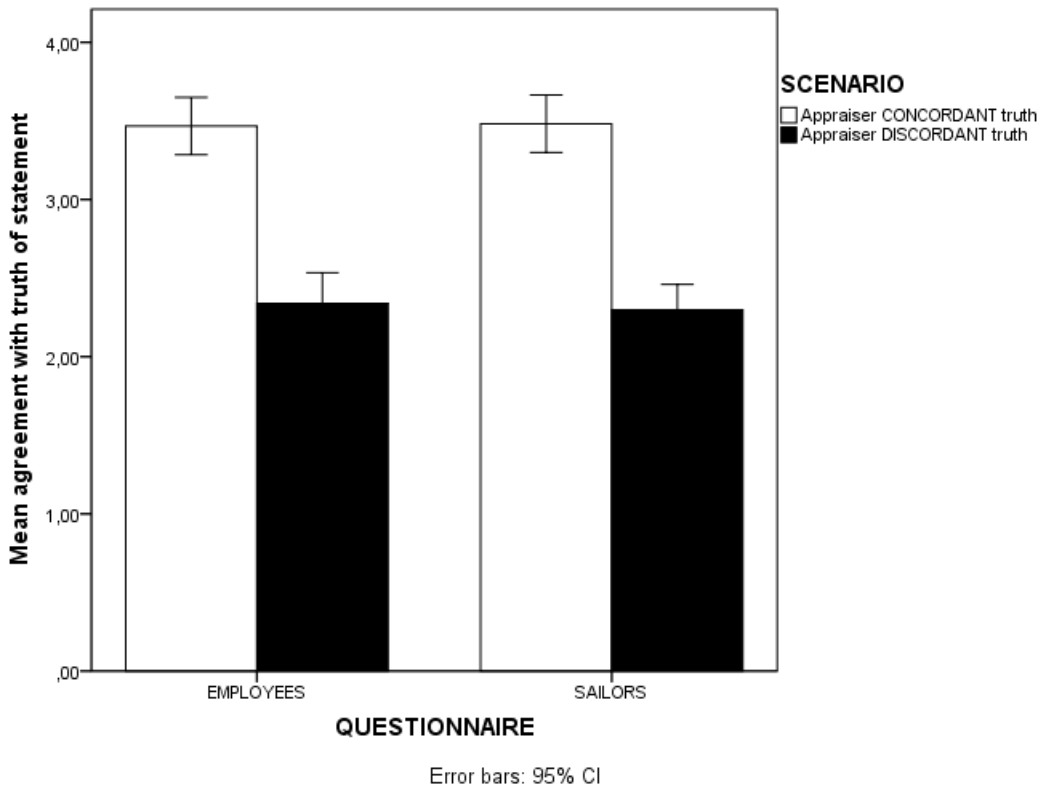


Figure 3. Truth assessment of a moral statement as a function of concordance of the statement with the appraisers' moral frameworks, for two different questionnaire vignettes.

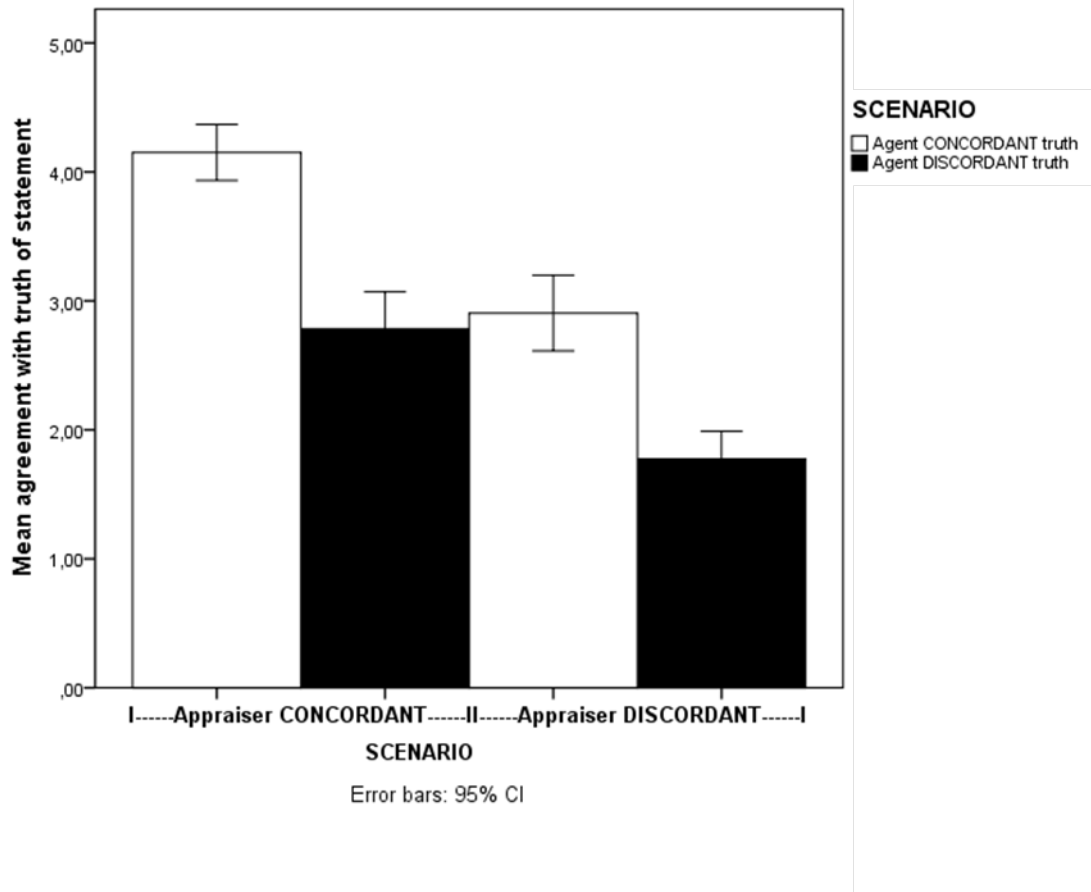


Figure 4. Truth assessment of a moral statement as a function of concordance of the statement with the agents' and with the appraisers' moral frameworks.

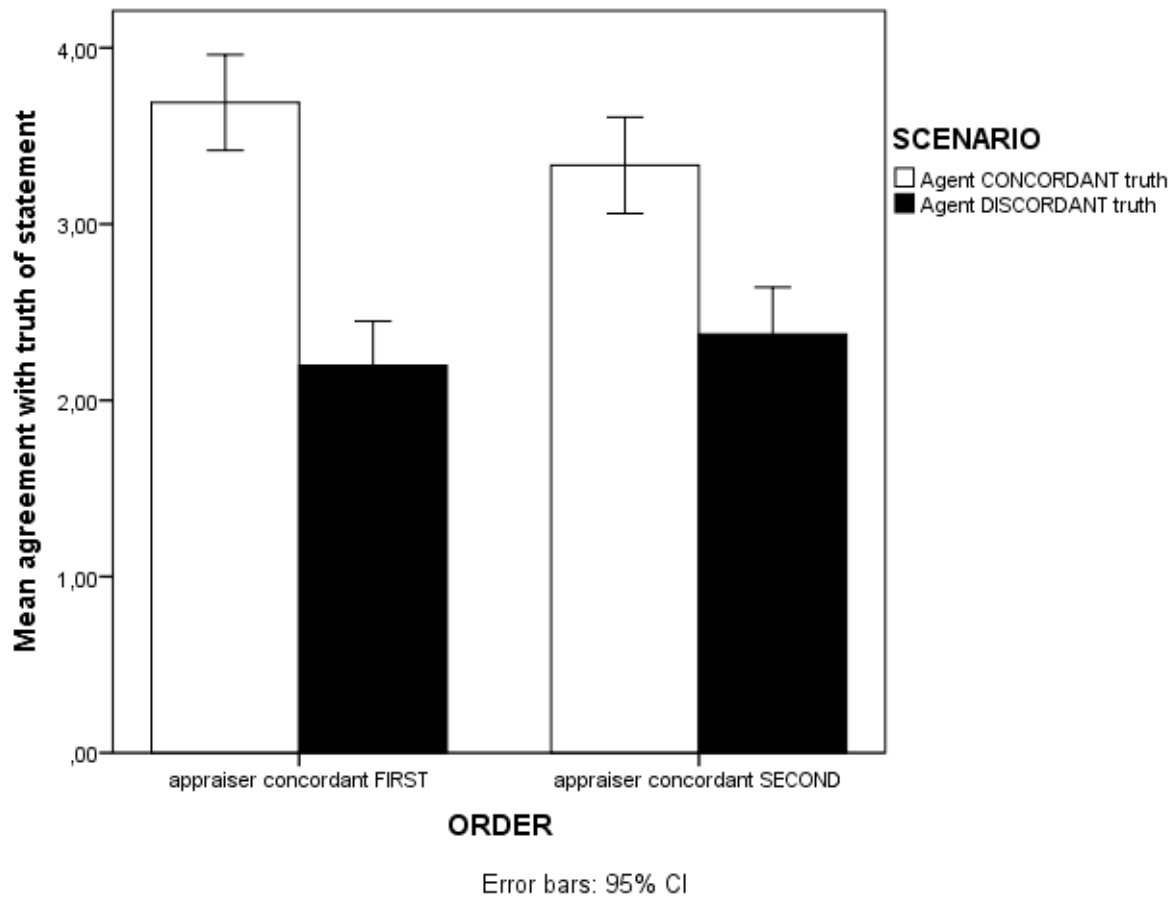


Figure 5. Truth assessment of a moral statement as a function of concordance of the statement with the agents' moral frameworks, for two different orders of presentation.