國立政治大學政治學系研究所

碩士學位論文

道德特殊主義：批判性縱覽

Moral Particularism: A Critical Survey

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Acknowledgement

三載研究生生活，我于師友處獲助良多，心裡的感激望以短文加以抒發。論文以英文寫就，用中文致謝顯得不成體統，然心中萬千，非母語無以表達。

碩士期間，能遇到各位老師是我的慶幸。溫柔美麗的王華老師，在這幾年間給予了我悉心的幫助與教導，心中感激難以言表。我的未來導師又是一位溫柔的女老師，這或是命運使然吧。研一時，去台大上榮麟老師的後設倫理學，是我每週最為期待的時刻。這半年的經歷推著我走入倫理學的大門，不知會否成我一生之志業。大陸文科教育不如台灣，剛到政大的我時常感到自己的無知與愚笨。建綱老師那時與我說：“我覺得你完全有能力去讀博。”這句話使我重拾信心，並伴我至今。在這美麗的島嶼上，還有許多我需致以謝意的師長，無奈篇幅所限，只得心中默默致以敬意。

碩三上于我是陰鬱的半年。前路與經濟常使我萬般焦慮，夜不能寐，精神幾近崩潰。幸好有梓然學姐在煩悶的夜裡陪我飲酒，講些不著邊際的俏皮話，才使這灰色的生活有些許色彩。兩岸交通不便，申請學校與獎學金的過程中，常常有要事我無法親身去處理，海洋與代霓不辭煩擾，常常代我跑腿，如若沒有你們的幫助，我真不知如何是好。堅強樂觀的蒼雅讓我體會到認真生活該有的態度，強風吹拂卻要逆風前行。穎涵陪我度過許多好玩的時光，又為我博論提綱校稿，真是可愛的女孩。希望她快從憂鬱中走出，開開心心地生活。在寫碩論的下半年中，日夜顛倒使我少有人陪伴，每天深夜與梁欣去大快朵頤是百無聊賴的日子最開心的時光。每週與 Milot 去網咖讓奔三中的我仿佛又回到了少年時。還有諸多親愛的友人，難以一一提及，只好寄我心予明月，隨風到你們身旁。

又至夏雨時分，天色灰暗，風吹草低，心中難免有些愁緒。以前總以為自己是風，只要努力，總能左右自己的命運。這幾年的經歷使我漸漸明白，世事變幻，人卻是那微不足道的草。風往哪裡吹，雨往哪裡刮，草就必須往哪裡倒。只望未來能為他人遮擋些風雨。

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摘要

道德特殊主義：批判性縱覽

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本文以回顧圍繞道德特殊主義——特別是原則消除論——的論戰為主線，呈現各方為辯護自己的立場而在理由理論和道德之本質兩個層次上掀起的辯論。文章旨在檢視哪些論證是關鍵性，哪些論證是有定論的，哪些論證又使得論戰陷入僵局。筆者也嘗試在文章中做一些概念澄清與區別，比如暫時性地闡明何謂道德原則、何謂道德特殊主義、將道德特殊主義與其它容易與之混淆的理論分辨開來。經過抽絲剝繭，筆者將行文過程中的線索串在一起，在結論中指出關於道德原則是否存在的辯論礙於「無限制的」理由整體論上的分歧難有進展。但是，由於道德特殊論揭示了道德生活的複雜性，筆者認為相較於道德原則是否存在、這些道德原則是否有利於我們的道德實踐這些議題，特殊論應該將討論重心放在我們如何在極其複雜的道德生活中做好特殊個案中的實踐推理上。同樣地，本文也認為倫理學研究應該聚焦具體個案，而非抽象原則。

關鍵詞：道德特殊主義、原則消除論、道德原則、理由整體論、道德判斷

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Abstract

Moral Particularism: A Critical Survey

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This article aims to be a survey of the debates around moral particularism, especially principle eliminativism. It will represent the arguments made by different parties in defence of their respective positions, with the intention to investigate which arguments are vital, which allow of determinate verdicts and which draw the controversy into a deadlock. In this article, I will also attempt to clarify some concepts, including the notions of moral principles and moral particularism. Eventually, I will draw, from the clues revealed in the course of the discussion, the conclusion that the debate about whether there are true moral principles confronts a standoff due to the difficulty in ascertaining the plausibility of 'unrestricted' holism of reasons. However, I will suggest that compared with the existence of moral principles and their practical value, moral particularism should concentrate on how to appropriately conduct practical reasoning in particular cases, given the complexity of our moral life. Finally, the article will suggest that the cause of ethics should pay more attention to concrete moral cases rather than abstract rules.

Key words: Moral Particularism, Principle Eliminativism, Moral Principle, Holism of Reasons, Moral Judgement

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Content

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Preface

Please allow me to say, in this beginning chapter, something personal and emotional. During these three years, I travelled to and stayed in societies quite different from my own. The exotic experience gained here and there shocked me with numerous moral disagreements occurring in those societies, which made me lose faith in whether humanity could ever grasp moral truths were there any.

Here are some instances of moral disagreements I observed. Some people believe that Catalonia should not be part of Spain, while some believe it should be. Some have the conviction that homosexuality is morally depraved but some are committed to the idea that gay marriage should be legalised. Some judge that islamic refugees ought to be excluded from the EU, while others never doubt that it is a moral duty for their own countries to accept those homeless victims. Some Americans have the faith that Donald Trump's pursuit of making the U.S. great again triumphs over all other values; however, their compatriots treat delegating him as the president of America as disgraceful, as a road to abandon the most precious American ideals. Moral disagreements and controversies are so ubiquitous that it is hardly possible for me to specify all of them. In the cases enumerated above, disagreeing parties tends to have strong affective attachments: they hated those who disagree with them; they easily became irritated when others made contradictory speeches; they gained very powerful motivation to go against their 'enemies' in political arena and in social medias. Associated with moral disagreement, there were also strong judgemental dispositions. Disagreeing parties were disposed to judge their counterparts to be brainwashed, wicked, ignorant or irrational: those disagreeing with us were so evil or naïve that they did not have the right to talk with us about these issues at all! Moral disagreement also tends to have practical consequences. Against their opponents, people raised campaigns and protests, voted and issued policies, and even launched wars wherein thousands of innocent people suffered.

So far were the terrible consequences of moral disagreement. Intuitively, morality should be something regulating our collective life that makes it better. However, history and reality indicate that morality does more harm than good due to human beings' hatred towards those holding different opinions from them. Thanks to the great

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motivational power of morality, moral judgements sometimes contribute to humankind's admirable behaviours. But such motivational force, insofar as I can see, has, had and will always have a dark side. We can never forget that what, during the religious war, separated people into different camps was what they believed to be noble or base; what led Germans to commit genocide was largely their conviction that the Jews were evil; what trapped the world into the Cold War was the contradictory ideologies, which were essentially about political morality. The number of conflicts, to which moral disagreement and its powerful motivational force contribute, is so significant that I doubt mankind can ever have a solution.

Why is moral disagreement so pervasive? In daily life, the moral principles with which we are familiar are relatively simple, in the sense that the factual information we need to have in order to apply them is not tremendous at all. For example, the application of the Christian Testament, 'Thou shall not kill,' requires us only to know which acts amount to be an instance of killing.

One possibility is that the moral is relativistic, that people from different societies or cultures may have different moralities. Therefore, individuals born in different cultures, even if all the non-moral information is in their grip, may still hold contradictory moral views, and the views are simultaneously true. The implication of such a possibility is that morally disagreeing parties, when they dispute and battle on behalf of their standpoints, not only fight for what they believe to be true, but also for what is really true. The world, then, is such a cruel one that it necessarily puts us on an insoluble and permanent war, both theoretically and practically.

Another possibility lies in that true moral principles have a way more complex structure than 'Thou shall not kill' has. A true moral principle is, thus, too cumbersome to be directly applied into moral reasoning and most people, if not all, only grasp and make use of different parts of it. Then, their careless deployment of these partial truths, in combination with some other bad habits of practical reasoning, lead to serious disagreements and controversies.

Apart from these two possibilities, some radicals may take the reason to be that there are no true principles, though there are particular truths, in the field of morality. Human

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beings, sadly, have capacity of different levels to discern these truths, and consequently, only some of them appropriately apprehend what is there to be understood. If the rest, those morally defective or ignorant, could work on their moral sensibility, or listen patiently to moral experts, then moral disagreement would disappear.

That is, very roughly, the moral ideal set by moral particularism. The proponents of this doctrine believe moral life to be too complex to be captured by moral principles. Therefore, moral sensibility or judgement is required for people to comprehend moral facts over there, which are inherently particular.

When I was first acquainted with this doctrine, immediately the idea that there are no moral principles attracted me. How is it possible that moral principles are always there to be taught and learned, given the pervasiveness of moral disagreement? If there were any, should we not easily reach moral agreement to the extent that we are able to agree on non-moral facts?

This motivation has driven me to compose this thesis on moral particularism. And I once intended to develop it into my doctoral dissertation. However, lately I find out that I was wrong about the easiness of getting non-moral or factual information right. In the course of history, conflicting parties seldom settle factual problems such as who caused damage to whom, who had the better ability to rule, whether there was an omnipotent being and what His Testaments were, etc. Nowadays, we seem to have better access to the truths over there due to the development of both natural and social sciences. Unfortunately, human beings still have such a nature that our passions overwhelm our reason in the choice of what to believe. In the time of post-truth, people tend to believe what they *want* to believe so that the availability of sciences can hardly have any contribution to solve moral disagreement.

Moral particularists, although they believe moral life is inherently so complex that moral principles can hardly capture it, chuckle to themselves, as they are convinced that we, human beings, have a more direct access to moral properties. For sure, they still insist that we should pay more attention to a case in front of us, because of the belief that numberless features of a case may contribute to its moral status. Compared with them, on one hand, I am more permissive: humanity has to make true moral judgements

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based on a large amount of factual information, and such information must represent the world as it really is. For me, there is no practical shape of a case – in Jonathan Dancy's sense, this shape is the overall moral status of that case – to which we have a straightforward access in no need of painstakingly surveying a good deal of its non-moral features. However, I am more optimistic than they are, in the sense that I believe we do not have to abandon the ideal of moral principles. After taking a great amount of information in a particular case into account and sincere discourses, we may eventually be able to reach a moral agreement as long as we agree on a good deal of true non-moral features. The existence of moral principles, in such a process, can provide us with conviction that what we are doing is pushing humanity forward in the discovery of general moral truths. Despite all that, I gradually learn that the issue of moral principles does not matter. What really matters is whether human being's recognition of non-moral facts and moral judgement based on them are free from prejudice, arrogance, discrimination and so forth. Insofar as humankind is able to conduct its moral practice free of these negative attitudes, whichever way it reaches moral conclusions is no hindrance to a final agreement.

So far is what I gradually come to realise during these few months. I feel sadder and sadder that in societies where no walls are built by some authority and imposed on them people build a wall in their heart. They refuse to hear anything they do not *like*. They rush to make moral judgements based on limited and most of time fake information. They charge those who also only grasp part of the whole truth of being too brainwashed, wicked or ignorant to even deserve a conversation with them. A wall built to isolate some humans from the external world will necessarily fall but a wall built internally by human beings themselves to isolate their mind will always stand there. As Kant said in *What is Enlightenment*, the immaturity of mankind was self-incurred. Our century of post-truth and fanaticism, I am afraid, will eventually lead to such immaturity again.

I hope that I have made clear in the preface the motivation for me to write something about moral particularism, and clarified how far I have changed my mind. Time is limited so I cannot alter right now the theme of my thesis. But I wish that I could illustrate here the pros and cons of moral particularism and how it relates to my current standpoint. Much work still needs to be done.

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I. Introduction

Moral particularism, broadly considered, consists of various negative views on moral principles. Moral particularists claim that there are no true moral principles, or that moral principles cannot non-trivially contribute to an agent's reliable overall strategy for performing right actions for right reasons. Though diverse in their opinions of moral principles, scholars of a particularist persuasion, for the most part, argue for their standpoints from holism of reasons, which claims that a feature being a reason in one context may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another.

Since these are the basic elements of moral particularism, this thesis as one devoted to the doctrine will try to clarify the idea of a moral principle and different branches of moral particularism. Also, it will attempt to reveal the pros and cons of the most radical branch of this doctrine, principle eliminativism, and its argumentative maneuvre – the holism in the theory of reasons – by introducing the debates surrounding them. I will show that the arguments for and against them have already stepped into a standoff, and thus it is hard to expect great developments to be achieved along the way the debates are going on. However, I will finally suggest that whether there are true moral principles does not matter. What really matters and should be the main focus of moral particularism, briefly, is the exploration of the right way to conduct moral deliberation.

The attractions of moral particularism, as I see it, are its sensibility to the complexity of moral life, and its rejection of the senseless but painstaking project of codifying morality in the history of ethics. This doctrine urges us to pay more attention to details in every particular moral case in order to get it right. This teaching, for me, is what our moderns have to learn.

For me, there are some factors vital to making good moral judgements: taking pains to gather non-moral information with patience; a clear mind in the face of prejudice, arrogance and fanaticism; avoiding hasty moral decisions. Different from our ancestors, we moderns are in a better position to recognise non-moral facts there are, based on which we make moral judgements. However, we tend to make these judgements in haste while acting on them with strong motivations. That causes a horrible lot of practical problems, such as social polarisation, lack of tolerance, mutual hatred, and

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even wars. What underlies such conflicts is neither that some of us do not cling to moral principles nor that we have diverse sets of moral principles, but that we are, most of the time, negligent and/or biased in the factual information required for their application.

If what I said above is the case, we do have plenty to learn from moral particularism. In the following two sections, I will discuss two merits of this doctrine: its emphasis on the complexity of moral life, and its rejection of the recurring theme in the history of ethics – the search of moral principles. In the final section, I will introduce the chapter arrangements of this thesis.

1. The Moral Life is Inherently Complex

Consider the following fact:

(1) She stole 100 NTD from me.

Based on consideration (1), we will probably conclude that she did something morally wrong, or at least morally disgraceful. However, a new consideration, now, is taken into account:

(2) She could not survive without that 100 NTD.

What do we think now? Some people may not be as sure as they were before about whether she did something absolutely wrong. Some of us may, instead, believe that she did something morally excusable. But unfortunately, there is still a further fact:

(3) She could not survive without that money, because she lost all she had in gambling.

If I am right, this further consideration will probably lead to people's moral judgement that she is not to be forgiven, as she incurred the predicament by herself.

Taking all the three considerations into account, it is natural for us to determine that she was very wrong in stealing my money. We may also think that she should have asked for my help instead of committing theft. However, there are much more than the three already-mentioned considerations that can influence our moral verdict in this case.

(4) Her father is a recidivist who had heavily influenced her since the time when she still could not distinguish the good from the evil.

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Now, suppose (4) is a fact we know. How, then, would we respond to this case? We may say that this case was pitiful; nonetheless, she did wrongly and she was still morally bad. Or we may judge that there were no sufficient reasons for us to see her action as morally prohibited: at best, her action was morally wrong but excusable.

Something more dramatic can be added to this story:

(5) She struggled hard with the devil in her heart before eventually stealing my money;

(6) She felt extremely regretful after committing the crime and had blamed herself for countless times.

Do we still think that she was an immoral person or that she did something wrong? Some of us, those full of sympathy, may rather believe that she was a morally admirable person, whether or not what she did was wrong.

I am not going to add more details to this fictional story but you readers can enrich it by yourselves. The point of this story is to indicate how complex or complicated our moral life is. And one of the attractions moral particularism has is its appeal to the complexity of moral life.

Moral particularism develops itself on the basis of W. D. Ross's moral pluralism. According to Ross, there are no moral principles relating to overall moral duties, and furthermore, there are also no principles concerning how to weigh up different moral considerations. What we have, on his model of prima facie (pro tanto) duties, are a set of contributory moral considerations. To make a good moral judgement, there is no other way than balancing different contributory considerations present in a particular case through a sensitive judgement. To sum up, Ross's moral theory, the inspiration of moral particularism, recognises how complex our moral life is, and it therefore rejects that there are simple and absolute moral principles by which we can easily get to determine the overall moral status of a case.

Moral particularism, although heavily influenced by Ross, takes him to be its target. Proponents of this doctrine take it that Ross merely recognises the complexity of morality in the overall level without also appreciating that in the contributory level. As Ross sees morality, contributory moral considerations are constant in the sense that they

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always contribute in the same way to a case. For example, that an action is an instance of justice always counts for it, while an act that exemplifies maleficence is always pro tanto wrong. Moral particularism goes further by virtue of their argumentative manoeuvre, holism of reasons. Holism in the theory of reasons holds that the reason-giving force of a feature depends on its context, and thus, a consideration that is a reason is a case may not be a reason or even an opposite reason in another. Taking justice, the above mentioned 'prima facie duty,' as an example. Most of the time, an act's being just is likely a reason for that act. However, sometimes it is not. Suppose I am invigilating a written exam and notice that a girl is cheating. Now it is tempting to treat saying out as an instance of justice; however, I know for sure that she is always an honest student but currently she is in dire need of a good result to please her dying grandma. It seems to me – to Dancy in fact – the consideration that disclosing her is just no longer counts as a reason for that action.

Whether you agree with me in this conclusion or not, we can see the point that moral particularism extends its recognition of moral life's complexity into the contributory level. Not only are there no absolute moral principles, but the behaviours of contributory moral reasons are also complicated.

If the story at the beginning of this section has shed some light on how complicated moral life is, you should regard moral particularism as somehow attractive: it fully appreciates our moral life as it is, and tries not to over-simplify its image.

2. A Challenge to a Long-lasting Project in Ethics

In the history of ethics or moral philosophy, a recurring theme is the pursuit of true moral principles. Various moral philosophers attempted and attempt to seek these principles in different ways. Some of them endeavour to construe the most general right-making and wrong-making properties. For instance, contractarians in the history of moral philosophy identify an actual or ideal contract as the ground of right and wrong. And this tradition has extended to other moral concepts. The greatest work in contemporary moral (political?) philosophy, *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971), takes the contractarian approach towards the ground of distributive justice.

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Some other philosophers carry out this project in a different way. Instead of seeking the grounding features of moral properties, they analyse moral concepts themselves. They do not ask what makes a thing good or what contributes to an action's wrongness; instead, they ask what it is to be good and/or what it is to be right. Historically speaking, consequentialism – one of the most prominent schools of normative ethics – tended to gain support from moral concept analysis (Moore 1993), if it was not argued for by a mere affirmation (Bentham 1970). The tradition of going after moral principles through concept analysis also has its successors in contemporary philosophy. For instance, T. M. Scanlon in his masterpiece *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998) attempts to defend some moral principles concerning what we owe to each other by the analysis of rightness and wrongness.

So far, I have mentioned some endeavours to derive grand moral principles. However, moral principles have various levels of generality, namely, moral principles can be less general and more specific. In the field of applied ethics, a lot of efforts have been put into the pursuit of these specific principles. What duties do we have towards animals (Singer 1973; 1977)? Do we have a general duty to relieve poverty and famine happening far away from us (Singer 1972)? Is abortion morally wrong (Thomson 1971)?

Besides plenty of efforts that have been made within the philosophical circle to establish some general moral principles, other agents and organisations also attempt to articulate some principles. A significant case is the Catholic Church and its associated Pope. In the history of Christianity, many absolutist prohibitions were issued from Rome to the rest of the world. And debates around these commandments seem endless. Another prominent instance was the establishment of *Bill of Human Rights*, consisting of *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) with its two Optional Protocols, and *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966). Nowadays, those countries that disobey this bill, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have to face tremendous international pressure and various practical consequences. We have been so cherished these rights that we can hardly believe that they may not be completely true.

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Though what has been said above shows a tendency in moral philosophy to establish some moral principles, this theme did not gain much popularity, if I am right, until the rise of Christianity. Classic ethics, viz., ethics in ancient Greece and Rome, is mostly virtue ethics. And this phenomenon did not stand alone, as the great Confucians in about the same time in a remote continent, Eastern Asia, also proposed their own version of virtue ethics. For sure, great Greek philosophers did not completely deny the role of rules in moral life. However, the moral 'principles' in their hand were not exceptionless moral generalisations, which were advocated by philosophers in and after the Dark Ages. For example, moral rules, in Aristotle's eyes, are merely 'for the most part' generalisations based on past moral experience (Aristotle 2000). They are 'rules of thumb' that are useful in ordinary cases; however, when one confronts a fancy or novel moral situation it is virtues and practical wisdom that help a good person get the case right.

These historical facts, as I see it, put some doubt on whether ethics has to be principled. Why is it impossible that some contingent historical moments, e.g. the rise of the powerful Church, pushed human thinking into a blind alley? I find no reasons to deny such a possibility. Given that moral life is extremely complex, the prospect of looking for a finite set of true moral principles seems dim. And it is exactly here comes another attraction of moral particularism.

Moral particularism is hostile to moral principles. At its most trenchant, this doctrine claims that there are no defensible moral principles (Dancy 2017). Other branches of moral particularism are more moderate but none of them is not sceptic of the principle-seeking project. If the arguments for it are convincing or plausible, a dramatic earthquake in ethics can be expected: the way of doing ethics may be totally changed.

Personally, I now feel that there may still be true moral principles, though they are too complex – due to the complexity of moral life itself – to be formally articulated. And I have realised that the arguments provided by moral particularism did not fulfil its strongest ambition to eliminate moral principles from the scene of ethics. Nonetheless, it has indeed put some nonnegligible pressure on the project of principled ethics. For if moral particularism and its ancillary holism of reasons have persuaded us of how complicated moral life is and how pointless the systematic search for moral principles

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is, then we had better come up with a new avenue to deepen our understanding of the moral world: a Copernican revolution will arrive.

These are what I take to be the intriguing points of moral particularism.

3. Chapter Arrangement

Moral particularism, broadly speaking, is hostile to moral principles. But the concept of moral principles is not self-evident. Thus, the chapter after this Introduction will focus on the notion of moral principles, as the preliminary step to approach moral particularism.

After making clear the roles and the variety of moral principles, I will then move to various moral particularisms. Moral particularism, although united by a negative attitude towards moral principles, is not at all a unitary doctrine. Moreover, it is easy to conflate moral particularism with other meta-ethical theories, such as moral relativism and error theory. Therefore, I will survey the landscape of moral particularism in the third chapter. During this journey, the protagonist of this thesis – principle eliminativism – will be brought into the scene.

A theory's success or failure, of course, depends on its argumentative manoeuvre. The next chapter, then, will be devoted to the pros and cons of holism of reasons, a theory of reasons employed by principle eliminativists in favour of their rejection of moral principles. However, even if holism of reasons indeed calls for the elimination of moral principles, morality by its nature may still give some room to their existence. For example, maybe there could not be moral obligations without the existence of general principles. Besides, the lack of moral principles may render it impossible to recognise moral properties. Last but not least, there may be some way to consider moral principles in which their existence is consistent with holism of reasons. Taking the above into consideration, I include several points concerning the nature of morality into the fifth chapter.

The chapters mentioned above will show that the project of eliminating moral principles has stepped into a deadlock, because the controversy surrounding 'unrestricted' holism

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of reasons – whether the features affecting a consideration's reason-giving force can be infinite – can hardly dissolve. Moreover, the course of discussion will show that many debates have no clear-cut solutions without a deeper understanding of the nature of reasons. Furthermore, the practice of adducing a justificatory or explanatory reason, as I will indicate in the last chapter, counts in favour of moral principlism, because in doing so we always presuppose a regularity underlying that reason. Eventually, I will try to illustrate that the being of moral principles and their practical value, in fact, do not matter. What is left to be done by moral particularism is to investigate the right way of practical (moral) reasoning in an intricate moral world. And I will also suggest that ethics should pay more attention to concrete moral cases by guiding readers to relevant information and some proper way of deliberation. The foregoing, then, is the jobs of the Conclusion of my thesis.

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II. Moral Principles

1. Two Roles of Moral Principles[1]

Tentatively, moral principles have two logically distinct roles to play in morality. One role of moral principles is to serve as standards that provide the accurate application conditions for moral predicates (McKeever and Ridge 2005a, 84 - 7). These principles *qua* standards should also be able to explain why a predicate applies when it does. It is tempting to think that a moral principle, in playing the role of a standard, specifies the sufficient conditions for applying a certain moral predicate. But we need to be cautious about this: moral particularists, the same as moral generalists, acknowledge the supervenience thesis, that is, the thesis that there cannot be some moral difference between two objects of ethical assessment without some non-moral difference as well. The supervenience thesis necessarily implies that there exist true ethical generalisations, because for any given possible object of ethical evaluation, there is a corresponding complete characterisation in purely descriptive terms of the world where that very object exists with the applicability of a certain ethical predicate, and this specification necessarily provides a sufficient condition for the application of the ethical predicate to any descriptively identical object in any descriptively identical world.[2] We can infer from this that there must be true generalisations, which are infinitely long disjunctions of all the possible worlds described in non-ethical terms where a certain ethical predicate applies to a given object of assessment. Nonetheless, moral particularists do not regard these generalisations, though true, as moral principles in any interesting sense (Little 2000). First, meaningful moral principles cannot be infinitely long, otherwise we finite beings cannot grasp how to apply moral predicates with their help. Furthermore, moral principles *qua* standards should be able to explain why a certain moral predicate applies to a given object when it does. True generalisations guaranteed by the supervenience thesis involves too many redundant factors that disable them to be explanatory.

On the other hand, moral principles might serve the role of practical guidance. Different from moral principles *qua* standards, these principles *qua* guides do not have to be the accurate criterion for the application of moral predicates. For example, rule

[1] Both McKeever and Ridge 2005a and Väyrynen 2011 give introductions to moral principles' roles.
[2] cf. Jackson, Pettit and Smith 2000, pp. 84 -6.

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consequentialism may treat as the only standard for correctly applying the predicate 'right' the principle of utility, but it in the meantime allows common-sense morality to guide moral actions. Furthermore, principles *qua* practical guidance do not have to figure explicitly in an agent's deliberation. In other words, not all agents draw their moral conclusion from a moral principle in conjunction with factual information through a practical syllogism. By contrary, a moral principle plays the part of practical guidance, as long as it helps non-trivially to an agent's reliable overall strategy for performing right actions for right reasons (Väyrynen 2008, 77 -80). For instance, Kant's Categorical Imperative expressed as the Formula of Universal Law – act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law – can be seen as recommending a specific mode of deliberation instead of giving a premise for a practical syllogism.[3] Suppose the moral rule that 'do not kill innocent people' can be willed to be a universal law. Then, what really figures in your deliberation when you face a relevant situation is this rule rather than CI itself. Also, moral principles, once accepted, may shape an agent's responsiveness to moral reasons without entering directly into her deliberation. This is commonplace in our ordinary moral practice. Moral teachings at people's early age inoculate them with many moral rules, which lead them to form the habit of following those rules. When they grow up, in many circumstances they respond to the situations directly – if those principles are in fact helpful, then they respond to actual moral reasons – without consciously applying those moral rules.

Although many moral principles *qua* standards are also capable of guiding practice, they do not have to play this role. Because some principles that give the criterion of moral predication may be too complex to be directly deployed in figuring out what to do, and some principles, though comparatively easy to be put into practice, may still be too challenging for some agents, such as children and illiteracies. As different people have different epistemic capacity, "it would therefore be unhelpful to debate whether there are principles *qua* guides simpliciter (McKeever and Ridge 2005a, 86)."

[3] This formulation of the CI claims that you are to "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." See Kant 1996.

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So far, we have had some idea of what the roles of moral principles are: standards and guides. Although both roles are equally important and interconnected, the focus of this thesis, as it is sadly limited in length, is moral principles *qua* standards. In other words, I will exclusively discuss moral particularism about principles *qua* standards in the following, leaving the other role for future discussion. For the sake of brevity, I will abbreviate moral principles *qua* standards to moral principles below.

We, as moral agents, often apply a moral principle to a relevant situation in order to conclude what to do. That moral principle, thus, is in the meantime playing the role of a guide. We also from time to time morally evaluate other people's actions via the application of moral principles. Corresponding to these two functions, moral principles are able to provide moral conclusions to act and moral evaluations with justifications. I shall investigate the justificatory function of moral principles in the next section.

2. Moral Principles and Justification

When we apply a moral principle to give a moral verdict about what we shall do or the moral character of, say, another agent's action, we at the same time give justification to this verdict. In other words, this moral principle has a justificatory function to convince ourselves and others of the moral character of the performed action (Holton 2002, 196).

The justificatory function of moral principles is actually quite significant in our ordinary moral practice. Besides the time when we are making a moral decision or a moral evaluation, we also make use of moral principles to count in favour of our past moral judgements introspectively. As moral life is inherently complex, we tend to reach moral conclusions of which the correctness we are unsure. For example, sometimes we may make a moral conclusion in haste, of which we attempt to say anything counting in favour later. On some occasions, justifications can even be desiderata. Imagine that you were in an afire building knowing a kid and her parents were dying because of the poisonous smoke, while you could only save either the kid or her parents in that they stayed in different rooms and the apartment would be burned down at any moment. Like most people, you saved the kid, for he still had a longer life to lead. Nevertheless, later on you always regret the decision you made, because you could have saved two people instead of merely saving one! Such a regrettable moral decision, obviously,

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needs a justification, without which you may not able to keep your life intact. Serious or not, there are times when something has to be said in favour of our past moral conclusions, and it may be provided by moral principles.

The justificatory function of moral principles can also be interpersonal. When you morally evaluate another agent's behaviour or character trait, you had better back up your moral verdict with a justification. If it is impossible for you to provide one, your alleged 'moral evaluation' is not a moral conclusion at all but mere oral bullying. Besides interpersonal evaluations, when your behaviour affects others' well-being, you may also need to provide them with justification, not to mention when you morally demand another agent of or blame him for doing something. On these occasions, obviously, moral principles can be appealed to justify your moral evaluations or decisions.

One caution, though. It is quite easy to conflate justifying something – be it a belief, an attitude or an action – to a second person with persuading or convincing her of it. There is always possibility that the one offered reliable evidences or good reasons cannot recognise the force of them, and therefore fails to be persuaded. Likewise, a moral principle cited by a justifier may really apply to a case, and thus, have justificatory force, while failing to convince those who do not share that principle.

Some unnecessary confusion may occur here. Previously I identified two distinct roles of moral principles: standards and guides. Now it seems that I have attributed another role to moral principles, namely, the role of justifying moral verdicts. In fact, I do not take it that moral principles have a distinct role of giving justification; instead, it is no more than a function of a moral principle *qua* a standard to justify a verdict attributing the moral property according to it. A moral principle, in giving justification, merely serves to identify a reason and states that the feature identified is really a reason. What really has the justificatory force here is the reason identified.

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3. Absolutist Principles and Contributory Principles

A moral principle can either be an absolutist rule or a contributory rule. One difference between these two kinds of principles shows up, when they are applied into a case so as to reach a true moral conclusion.

If a principle is an absolutist one, the moral conclusion of that case is to be determined by that principle alone conjoined with an appropriate characterisation of the case. "The rule cites a grounding property that is correlated with some moral feature, and the case description certifies that the grounding property is instantiated by the act or trait under scrutiny (Shafer-Landau 1997, 587)."

One significant instance of an absolutist principle is the principle of utility, which is preached by the school of utilitarianism. This principle claims that actions or behaviours are right in so far as they promote happiness or pleasure, wrong as they tend to produce unhappiness or pain. The utility principle is absolutist in the sense that it is by itself sufficient to certify a moral verdict so long as the action in question has the feature of promoting pleasure or that of incurring pain.

Except absolutist principles, there may be contributory principles. Sir William David Ross is famous for advancing a model of pro tanto principles. Ross himself calls these principles prima facie duties,[4] which include: a duty of fidelity – a duty to keep our promises, a duty of reparation (or a duty to act to right a previous wrong we have done), a duty of gratitude (or a duty to return services to those from whom we have in the past accepted benefits), a duty to promote a maximum of aggregate good, and finally a duty of non-maleficence – or a duty not to harm others (Ross 1930).

According to this model of moral principles, particular moral judgements, that is, judgements relating to concrete cases, are not able to be deduced from a conjunction of a principle and case description. Instead, a contributory principle only claims that if an action (or another object of moral assessment) has a certain feature, that counts in favour of or against the very action. The contributory conception of moral principles

[4] That something is prima facie means that it at first seems to be true, although it may be proved false later. However, what Ross really wants to say is that those duties may be overridden by other considerations. So "contributory" rather than "prima facie" fits better with Ross's intention.

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allows that more than one principle is able to apply to a particular case, in that it admits that every principle is partial; each specifies how things are only in a certain respect. But actions may have many relevant features, some counting in favour and others against. “Whether the action is overall right or wrong can only be determined by the overall balance of right and wrong in it (Dancy 2017).” Furthermore, contributory principles themselves do not tell us how to determine that balance – we have to figure out how to add up the pro tanto verdicts so as to come up with an overall moral conclusion.

Many important moral systems seek to provide an absolutist principle that is overarching. As we have seen above, utilitarianism expects the principle of utility to give an overall moral conclusion in every particular case. The Categorical Imperative advanced by Kantians have the same ambition, as it not only covers all possible cases but also produces determinate verdicts.

Besides these absolutist moral systems, it is not hard to imagine a moral theory which at once consists of absolutist moral principles and contributory principles, although it seems to me that we do not have one in reality. For example, there could be a theory claiming that lying is overall wrong whenever it occurs, and in the meanwhile preaching several contributory moral considerations in order to capture the whole moral landscape. Then, the feature of lying, according to this theory, overrides every other consideration in attributing wrongness to a certain action, whenever the consideration that an action is lying conflicts with other features. However, in those cases where lying is irrelevant, a model of contributory principles is at work: we need to work out how relevant pro tanto moral considerations add up in order to come up with an overall moral conclusion.

With regard to the way how pro tanto considerations add up, controversies persist. Some people think that there should be a lexical ordering of the significance of various contributory principles, via which we can figure out the moral direction in any given case. By contrast, others do not believe that the principles are ranked in order of importance. For them, only can people exercise unaided faculty of judgement to reach true overall verdicts, when relevant principles pull a given case in opposite directions.

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If there is no lexical ordering of contributory moral principles or no absolutist principle covering the whole moral landscape, tough cases may show up where no determinate moral conclusions are possible. In other words, a particular case may be so inherently controversial that how different pro tanto considerations come down turns out to be opaque. Moreover, ambiguity in moral conclusions may appear, when the whole set of true moral principles, be they absolutist or contributory, do not completely capture morality. That is to say that some cases escape the reach of principles. Moral ambiguity may also occur when moral principles are themselves vague in meanings, which is actually commonplace. The application of principles, laws and rules often needs interpretation and elaboration because there are gaps or openings between the general and the particular. To see whether and how a given principle applies to a particular case tends to require the exercise of judgement, though it is still controversial what on earth the faculty of judgement is.

4. Moral Principles and the Faculty of Judgement

As I have mentioned in the last section, ambiguity is commonplace in morality. As a result, the application of moral principles is seldom algorithmic and often in need of exercising judgement.

The first type of situations where the faculty of judgement is necessary for making use of moral principles are those in which there are openings between principles and practice. Moral principles do not apply themselves, nor do they usually contain or come with a subset of application rules with which we can figure out their applicability. Even if a moral principle does contain such a package determining when it apply to a particular case, this package for sure would “require another package, and so on *ad infinitum* (Crisp 2000, 29).” We can understand this point through an example given by H. L. A. Hart: how to apply the rule 'No vehicles in the park'? Is a war-memorial statue of a Jeep a 'vehicle’? Of course, a package of operation rules that specify what counts as a vehicle can be established, but we can still predict that the concepts involved in those rules are vulnerable to interpretations and elaborations. Back to moral principles, the moral requirements that people should respect others’ property and that what maximises the total utility is right all the same involve concepts in need of

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interpretations. What counts as property is always a hot issue in political philosophy, while the debate between subjective and objective accounts of utility seems endless.

The need for discretion is also inherent in moral principles in that different circumstances tend to call for varied implementations. For instance, the principle 'Good teachers should set work that is adjusted to each child's level of ability' certainly have differentiated implications for students of different ages,[5] as their levels of cognitive ability are surely different. Although there can be operation rules that specify every pair of cognitive levels and their corresponding workload, it is not hard to imagine a point at which discretion has to intrude so as to settle the things down. For using such discretion appropriately, good judgement is indispensable. Without this faculty, no one seems to be able to apply moral principles such as ‘take people not as means but as ends’ and ‘return to people their dues’, not to mention those principles involving thick ethical concepts.

Compared with absolutist principles, the application of contributory principles has a more intimate relation with the faculty of judgement, if no procedure determining the relative importance between them is available. There may be many cases where more than one contributory principles apply, and the comparative significances are left to the exercise of judgement for determination. A possible case is one in which I promised that I would lend my friend one thousand dollars to help him purchase a car but suddenly a person who once did me a favour shew up and tried to borrow that amount of money from me. As one thousand dollars are all that I had, I could not fulfil both duties at once. In fact, this case is quite tricky because two contributory duties involved, at first glance, had more or less the same importance. Thus, the requirement of judgement is indeed demanding.

We have seen above different situations where the exercise of judgement is necessary for applying a moral principle. However, the faculty of judgement may be the only instrument for us to ascertain moral facts, when particular cases lie beyond the reach of moral principles. As said in the last section, there can be some moral theory offering partial principles that do not capture the whole moral landscape. The truth of such a

[5] See O'Neill 1996, 75.

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theory, if possible, necessarily entails some grey zones that no moral principles cover. If we step into those areas and if there are still moral facts in them, only can judgement contribute to our getting a veridical moral conclusion (for sure, here I assume that we do not have the mystical faculty of moral perception).

Though the faculty of judgement has great use in moral practice as well as other important aspects of life, it is still unclear what it on earth is. However, there is necessarily a point beyond which the faculty of judgement no longer functions. For example, one may judge from the tap-tap that someone is knocking his door but it is hard for him to judge from that sound exactly who is knocking the door. If the pattern of that tap-tap is strange to the hearer, to judge the exact identity of the knocking person is absolutely impossible. In this situation, we would take him to be good at guessing rather than at judging, even if he got the knocker right. From this, we see that the exercise of judgement is always based on the gathering of information. In other words, to judge is to mobilise information obtained in order to reach a conclusion *a priori*. If this is the case, people may come across cases where no amount of information is sufficient for arriving at a conclusion via judgement.

Suppose that human beings really have free will. Then, given enough amount of information about a person's past experience, current desires, the circumstances he is in and so on, can we judge what he will do next? If we make a distinction between judging and guessing, it seems to me that we had better regard any prediction of that person's future behaviour as a conjecture instead of a judgement.

The limitations on the faculty of judgement have implications for what counts as informative moral principles. If the application of some moral principle requires conjecturing rather than the exercise of judgement, such a principle is not informative. For example, a principle 'do whatever God demands of you' is typically uninformative in that no matter how much information one has gathered it is certainly impossible for her to judge what she ought to do based on those pieces of information. At best, she can guess God's will. No one, of course, is a big fan of a moral theory consisting of 'principles' the application of which is totally speculative.

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5. Normative-Moral Principles, Moral Ideals and the Nature of Moral Properties

Moral principles *qua* standards are those true generalisations that provide the accurate application conditions for moral predicates. These principles are normative principles that "purport to articulate which considerations count as good- or bad-making, right- or wrong-making," and so on (Lance and Little 2006, 569). Historically, many principles have been proposed to be the proper candidates of true moral principles, including the deontologist' lists of duties, the utilitarian's injunction to maximise net aggregate utility, the ten Christian Commandments, etc. To make it clearer, a normative-moral principle should have the form of 'For all x, if *Fx* then *Gx*', in which x stands for the object of moral assessment, *F* picks up the feature(s) *x* has and *G* stands for the moral status of *x*. For sure, we can formulate a principle in slightly different ways. Instead of saying 'if an action involves lying, this action is morally prohibited', we may say 'that an action is lying is a feature counting against it' or even simply 'you shall never lie'. Of course, whether such translations are available depends on one's own meta-ethical commitments, e.g., whether all moral properties can be reduced to the property of being a reason.

Apart from offering lists of normative-moral principles, many historically-influential moral theories also attempt to explain the *M*-making force, namely, the normative force of morally relevant features to endow some moral status. To make sense of their *M*-making force, various moral ideals have been invoked.[6] Some moral philosophers, especially those deontologists, tend to regard normative principles as the output of some idealised contract. However, some theist philosophers, although most of them are deontologists as well, commit to taking a divine commandment as the source of moral principles. Consequentialists, different from deontologists, seek to define the right in terms of the good, so the moral principles concerning the right appeal to the notion of goodness that explains why right-making features are right-making. Virtue ethicists, for the most part, have something in common with consequentialists, that is, they are also attracted by the idea of Goodness, although this Goodness is Happiness or the perfection of human species. For them, Happiness or perfection is the final source in which any plausible list of virtues should have a footing.

[6] A moral ideal may be the most general *M*-making feature. However, the exploration of a moral ideal may ascend from normative ethics to meta-ethics, to the analysis of *M*-ness.

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Since moral theorists tend to justify the normative-moral principles they prefer by way of invoking some moral ideal, there is probably a false appearance that any moral ideal must imply some set of normative-moral principles. This impression is fraudulent in that a moral ideal has to be contentful in order to entail informative moral principles. To take contractarianism as an example: contractarians, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, tend to draw a broad picture of the state of nature before the establishment of a contract between people, for without such a depiction no substantive principles are deducible from an alleged social contract.

As moral ideals by themselves do not entail (informative) moral principles, there is a possibility that one identifies himself with a moral ideal, say, a celestial being giving laws to earthly beings, and at the same time denies the existence of any set of moral principles. In fact, I suspect that every devout theist should embrace this possibility: how can a pious believer deny the moral authority of Him or believe that we can ascertain the will of Him, the omnipotent Being?

Going beyond the terrain of normative ethics, we may wonder about the nature of moral properties, that is, the nature of goodness and badness, rightness and wrongness, the nature of being a *M*-making reason, etc. Commitments to a meta-ethical doctrine do not necessarily lead to commitments to any substantive moral principles; however, commitments to some specific meta-ethical doctrine do. For example, a reductionist naturalism that reduces the property of rightness to the property of promoting pleasure necessarily implies the utilitarian principle 'Insofar as an action promotes pleasure, it is right'. Reductionist naturalism, as I have said, can also be such that no substantive principles are entailed. An ideal observer theory, which reduces some moral property to an ideal observer's subjective response, does not directly imply any set of normative-moral principles unless it gives a sufficiently detailed description of the observer. Moreover, non-naturalist realism itself certainly does not have any implication for normative-moral principles and is free to combine with any substantive moral ideals. On one hand, T. M. Scanlon, being a realist about reasons, proposes a contraction theory

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of morality.[7] On the other, many other fellow non-naturalists take a tough stance on moral particularism.

Now the distinctions among normative-moral principles, moral ideals and meta-ethical commitments are clear: although the three are somehow interconnected, they are at least theoretically separable. However, one may be able to defend a specific doctrine in normative ethics by way of arguing for a standpoint in the other two levels of ethical thinking, since commitments in each level may have prominent impact on the rest.

[7] See Scanlon 1998 and 2014.

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III. Moral Particularism

1. Classifying Moral Particularisms

Following McKeever and Ridge, I initially classify the many moral particularisms into five logically distinctive theses. However, please do not think that any given particularist only argues for any of them. On the contrary, moral particularists, such as Dancy, McNaughton, and Little, tend to defend combinations of some of the theses, without themselves clearly classifying their positions.

The first thesis for which a moral particularist may argue is principle eliminativism. According to it, there are no true moral principles. Among others, early Dancy (1993) is often taken to advocate this doctrine, since he claims that holism of reasons is not consistent with there being true moral principles. The stringency of this thesis can vary, as one may either think that there is no principle at all or only deny the existence of moral principles linking moral to non-moral properties. With respect to the latter, there can be intra-moral principles (McNaughton and Rawling 2000). Besides, others may think that there are defeasible moral generalisations that are not moral principles (Lance and Little 2007; Little 2000).

According to McKeever and Ridge (2005, p. 87), there is a weaker particularist position – principle scepticism, which argues that there is no reason to believe there is any moral principle (Little 2000). However, as the sceptics always employ the same argumentative strategy as those eliminativists do, that is, holism of reasons, we do not have to take principle scepticism as a distinctive position.

The third one is principled particularism. Richard Holton (2002) dubs his branch of moral particularism this name. According to it, there are moral principles hedged by a 'That's it' clause, and a hedged moral principle of this kind can only be true in an argument since the 'That's it' clause indicates that there are no other morally relevant features present in an argument. This position amounts to a version of moral particularism, as it implies that any finite set of finite moral principles would not be sufficient to capture the whole moral landscape.

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Another type of moral particularism that is shared by many particularists, as eliminativism is, is principle abstinence. This particularism mainly opposes to the role of moral principles as practical guidance. It treats moral principles as an obstacle to acting morally, which can be vividly expressed by a sentence in *Moral Vision*:

> Moral particularism takes the view that moral principles are at best useless, and at worst a hindrance, in trying to find out which is the right action (McNoughton 1988, p. 190).

In other words, moral principles, in the eyes of the proponents of principle abstinence, cannot non-trivially contribute to an agent's reliable overall strategy for performing right actions for right reasons (Väyrynen 2008, 77 -80). Thus, we should rather abstain from relying on them. Though this thesis keeps untouched principles' role as standards, a sound defense of it, if any, would necessarily bring about a great revolution in our commonly held views about the nature of moral theory – its value and its task, as moral philosophy tends to regard itself as a doctrine seeking reliable approaches to acting morally.

The final kind of moral particularism, which is the most favoured by Dancy himself, is the thesis that "though there may be some moral principles, still the rationality of moral thought and judgement in no way depends on a suitable provision of such things (Dancy 2017)." Lance and Little (2006, pp. 584 - 8) reckon this thesis as claiming, with which I agree, that a moral reason does not explain the moral status of action by virtue of a true moral principle. As principle eliminativism denies there being any moral principle, it necessarily implies the preceding thesis. As a result, to defend principle eliminativism, one has to defend this thesis too, though not vice versa.

Because of the limited space here, I have to focus exclusively on principle eliminativism in this thesis, and I will leave the discussion of principle abstinence to the future. However, most moral particularists employ holism of reasons as their argumentative manoeuvre, so we can still get acquittanced with other particularisms in the discussion of eliminativism. In the following sections, I will introduce principle eliminativism in depth, and successively compare it with moral relativism as well as error theory.

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2. Extreme and Moderate Eliminativisms

As Dancy (2017) states, "Moral Particularism, at its most trenchant, is the claim that there are no defensible moral principles." In this sentence, Dancy does not carefully distinguish principles *qua* standards from principles *qua* guides. However, if there are no defensible moral principles *qua* guides, then no moral principles are able to contribute non-trivially to an agent's reliably acting rightly for right reasons, that is, principle abstinence is true. In order to make a distinction between principle eliminativism and principle abstinence, we had better treat eliminativism as solely relating to moral principles *qua* standards.

The strategy invoked by moral particularists in favour of the claim that there are no moral principles is holism of reasons (I will in the next chapter explicate this theory in details). According to this doctrine, "a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another (Dancy 2004, p. 7)." Moral particularists claim further that holism of reasons is not consistent with there being true moral principles (Dancy 1993). The rationale behind this is simple: if no features have an invariant valence, then it is natural to think that their behaviours – how they contribute to objects of moral assessment – are not able to be captured by exceptionless generalisations, which are justificatory and explanatory with respect to the moral import of the objects. For example, we tend to believe that lying is always wrong-making; however, in a case where lying to some Schutzstaffel is necessary, sadly, for saving a persecuted Jew's life, lying to them may instead make the action morally heroic. If so, the principle is false that lying is wrong-making. Some may suspect we can rather generalise the behaviour of lying as that lying is always wrong-making except in those cases in which the very action of lying is necessary for saving the life of the innocent. In other words, we may, the opponents believe, include in the principle concerning lying qualifiers that limit the scope of its validity. Be that as it may, we cannot know in advance where the moral valence of lying may change: some case may suddenly jump out in which lying has an unexpected moral impact. Therefore, no matter how many provisions we insert to the lying principle, it is still possible that some exceptions are left outside.

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Though the thought conforms to our intuition that many features have a variant moral valence, some regard as going too far that no single feature is morally invariant. The opponents insist on a distinction between non-ultimate and ultimate reasons (Crisp 2000, pp. 36 - 40), or primary and secondary reasons (McNaughton and Rawling 2000, pp. 266 - 72).

Moral particularists, such as Dancy, wish to establish holism of reasons by means of adducing particular examples. Although the examples appealed, as the Lying instanced above, can establish without contentions that many considerations have moral valences that change with context, it is not at all clear how adducing a few cases can reveal that no considerations are morally unvarying. Rather, virtues exhibited by an action may always count in favour of that action; and on the contrary, vices may all the time count against actions involving them.

Take justice as an example. Dancy has a famous example, *The Book*, in support of his holism of reasons, according to which normally the consideration that I borrowed a book from you is a reason for me to give you the book back but this consideration is no longer a reason for doing that if you have stolen that book from the library (Dancy 1993, p. 60). In this case, we can clearly see that the consideration that you lent a book to me has varying moral valence. However, the varying valence of it, as a non-ultimate or secondary reason may be explained by an appeal to an ultimate or primary reason, that is, justice. In *The Book*, I have an obligation to return the book borrowed if the book is not stolen from the library, because it is the requirement of justice. Thus, when it comes to the case where the book has really been stolen from the library, this requirement disappears and justice, by contrast, demands me to refuse to give you back (Crisp 2000, pp. 37 - 8). The variant moral significance of my borrowing a book from you is thus able to be explicated by reference to a more fundamental reason - justice.

Besides virtues, non-moral features with evaluative riders attached may also have unvarying moral import, because "the evaluative riders lend moral shape to more commonly important non-moral features (McNaughton and Rawlings 2000, 268)." Promise-keeping, for instance, does not always have the same moral valence: in the case where the promise is to kill an innocent or in the case in which the promise is extracted under severe duress, having made a promise does not count in favour of

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fulfilling it. That a promise is extracted under severe duress, some people may think, is a totally non-evaluative description, but this is false. A promise made under the mere use of force may still have positive moral import, such as the promise extracted by force from a despot to refrain from tormenting his subjects. It is, instead, "unjust coercion (the use of force where the person using it has no *right* to do so) that invalidates the normal force of a promise" (ibid., p. 270). Thus, not being extracted under severe duress as a rider attached to promise-keeping as a constant reason is inherently evaluative. And in the case of promising, therefore, the primary reason is that one made a promise fulfilling some set of relevant conditions (described by invoking evaluative terms): it is not one to kill an innocent and it is not extracted under severe duress. For sure, the conditions qualifying promise-keeping can be and probably should be expanded, though the present formulation has already hit the point: some reasons may, compared with other, be located in a more central place in the moral landscape and their valence never changes; correspondingly they explain the varying valences of those features in the periphery.

Unsurprisingly, those who prefer a distinction between primary and second reasons over "unrestricted" holism of reasons are prone to favour a Rossian model of moral principles, namely, a model of weak moral principles. In terms of this model, there are only intra-moral principles, that is, principles linking thick moral properties to thin moral properties.[8]

The distinction is initially plausible between reasons that are more fundamental and invariant and reasons that are variant and to be explained by more fundamental reasons, but the weak principles this distinction ensures cannot guarantee that there are also principles linking non-moral properties to thick moral properties. What feature(s) an action should have, for instance, to count it as a just action? Do these features always make an action having them just?

Furthermore, can one, who endorse a set of weak moral principles, claim himself as a moral generalist only if this set of principles are able to capture a significant space of morality (Dancy 2004, p. 76). In other words, the invariant reasons, if any, should

[8] For a distinction between thick and thin moral properties, see Williams 1985, 129, 140.

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occupy a considerable preponderance over variant reasons, as well as be able to explain the latter. But convincing arguments for this point have not yet been given.

Finally, there is one point made by Dancy that is more important. He claims that reasons *qua* reasons are not variable, though some reasons because of their specific content are invariable (ibid., pp. 77 - 8). This point, although important, is hard to understand. One interpretation could be that a reason *qua* a reason is the consideration that explains or justifies the moral status of an object of assessment. For variable reasons, there are no exceptionless generalisations relating to them. Consequently, these reasons do not explain or justify in virtue of exceptionless generalisations the normative import of an object of assessment. Then, we shall not regard invariable reasons as explaining or justifying normative status in virtue of exceptionless generalisations if we believe in a united account of rationality. As no reason depends their justificatory or explanatory force upon generality, the concept of a reason as something justificatory or explanatory does not imply that reasons must be but only can be invariable.

Recall that moral principles *qua* standards should be explanatory or justificatory besides being exceptionless. As no reasons rely their explanatory or justificatory force on generality, even if the behaviours of all reasons can be generalised as exceptionless these exceptionless generalisations are still not moral principles (Lance and Little 2006, p. 585). However, in serious discussions, such as scientific or academic debates, we tend to believe that *X* explains *Y* in virtue of *X* figures in a exceptionless generalisation in relation to *Y*.[9] For example, we would refer to the presumptive generalisation that *ceteris paribus* economic growth always contributes to democratisation and Taiwan's experiencing economic booming in the 1980s, when asked why Taiwan came to be a democracy. Even during the occasion where we omit a (presumptively) exceptionless generalisation for the sake of convenience or simplicity, we seem to assume that there is some background understanding of a generalisation. In a class of classical physics, the teacher may not reassert the Newtonian laws but he does assume them to be shared by the students when he explains why a certain object moves because of several forces.

[9] Maybe the concept of an explanation is not contextualist, that is, perhaps those alleged "explanations" we are familiar with are no explanations at all. But this idea, for sure, is very controversial. Indeed, I do not agree with it myself. Thus, I mention here that in a serious discussion a reason adduced to explains or justifies something in virtue of an exceptionless generalisation. Now, two things need caution: first, do ordinary explanations implicitly depend on generality; second, does morality have to model science?

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Do we not think that moral justification or moral explanation is as serious as the explanations mentioned above? Is it not even as serious as the high school's physical lecture is? If we do, there seems to be some reason for us to wonder how moral reasons, in Dancy's sense, explain moral status without referring to exceptionless moral generalisations.

3. The Narrative Account of Justification/Explanation and Defeasible Moral Principles

The explanation/justification model mentioned above is the subsumptive model, which subsumes a case under a general principle (or a set of general principles) in order for justification or explanation. And it certainly reflects the way in which we explain or justify our moral conclusion in daily life. Imagine that a little child is picking a flower from the next door's garden but his father stops him, saying that 'it is wrong to steal things from others'. In doing this, his father subsumes this case under the general moral principle that stealing is wrong(-making) to justify and explain his verdict and action. Making use of the subsumptive model of justification/explanation is quite pervasive in daily life.

As this is the case, it is hard to see how we can explain a moral case without the assistance of a general principle that compels consent among people. In other words, is moral justification and explanation possible if there are no exceptionless moral generalisations? It is in addressing this problem Dancy writes the most beautiful section in *Moral Reasons*, where he gives a narrative account of explanation or justification (Dancy 1993, pp. 111 - 6).

According to Dancy, moral justification or explanation is not subsumptive in nature but narrative. Reasons, as believed by Dancy, are salient features in a situation, which make a difference to the moral import of it. Together the salient features construct a shape of the situation where they are the various peaks, major or minor. To justify or explain to those in the opposite camp the moral status of this situation is to give a description of it by virtue of displaying the saliences here present in good order.

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For sure, the practice of describing a case needs skills. An analogy is the aesthetic description of a building. A good aesthete does not describe a building just starting from its left to its right. Instead, he necessarily attempts to pick out the aesthetically salient features the building has and how they relate to one another. In his narrative of the construction, a shape pops out, which enables listeners to appreciate what the story-teller has seen.

One complication still remains. If one really tells a wonderful story about a moral case, it may successfully lead others to perceive the moral shape, that is, the thin moral property of that case. However, to make people see what one sees is one thing, while to justify or explain what one believes he has seen may be another. For example, a person suffering from severe hallucination can lead others to share his horizon by having others eat some hallucinogens, but doing this does not justify his own vision. Analogously, telling a compelling story may not at all amount to an explanation of why a moral conclusion is correct or a justification in favour of it.

Underlying the narrative account of justification and explanation is the thought that morally salient features of a situation result in the moral shape of it, while that shape, as it were, constitutes the moral status of the object of moral assessment there. Moreover, the resultance tree in every case, i.e., the relation between morally salient features and their resultant moral property in each case is unique.

The tree for the same property of a different object will quite probably be different, because the way in which that object gets to be F (where F-ness is a resultant property) will probably be different from the way in which this one got to be F (ibid., p. 74).

From this we see a 'token identity' theory of resultance: the resulting property in this case is constituted by the resultance base here present, while the resulting property in that case is instead resulted by what present there. Namely, every resulting relation, as it were, is particular. To make this more obvious, please refer to graphs here below.

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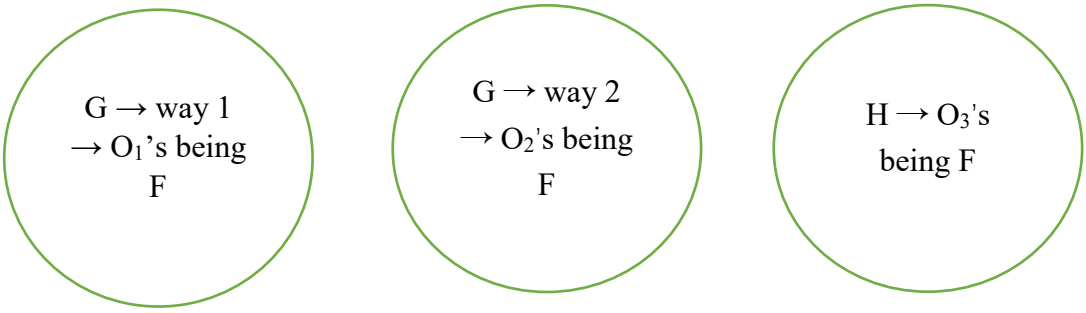

As every resultance relation is particular, we do not need to appeal to general principles to explain the resultant property in the case here. To the contrary, adducing an exceptionless generalisation would distort its particularity. If so, the best way to explain or justify the moral status of the case here is to describe, as it were, the real and particular shape of this particular situation. No exceptionless moral generalisations are required; rather, they would not have justificatory or explanatory force at all even if they really existed.

We may not be convinced by this narrative account of explanation if we reflect the drawback of telling stories. For any given event, there are always multiple narratives that can be offered. The multiplicity of narratives, for sure, can be limited by the joint purpose of the persons seeking and giving an explanation in conjunction with the question asked. Obviously, in daily life when a person asked you why you are eating a hamburger, you would not abruptly mention the Energy Conservation Law but just say you feel hungry. Be that as it may, given a particular joint purpose and a specific question, there may still be more than one narrative.

In social sciences, for example, there are two major research methods, qualitative and quantitative, and the doubt the latter often puts on the former is whether the causal narratives it offers for a case are really true of the causality present there. For instance, to 'explain' the change of institutions in a given case, different qualitative political scientists may appeal to different explanatory frameworks – rational choice theory, sociological approach or historical institutionalism. Correspondingly, there are several causal stories that can be told. Then, which one really captures the causality in that case? For sure, the change of institutions is necessarily contributed to by more than one factor, as social reality is so complicated that things in it are always intertwined. However, we still want to know which cause has the most important effect on the situation, and to

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what extent. Without testing the validity of those causal stories and making clear the comparative effects of various factors, can these stories be regarded as explanations? Contrarily, quantitative researchers tend to believe that for something to be an explanation, be it true or false, it should reveal precisely the comparative causal effect of each cause.

So much for the notion of an explanation. The notion of reasons involved in Dancy's narrative account of explanation and justification – the practice of giving reasons – is also at best strained, because a reason cannot just be a one-off (Goldman 2001). Use the father preventing his child from defloration as an example again. Imagine that the father adduced the consideration that the flower belonged to their neighbour as a reason in that case against the little child's defloration. Then, when that boy again witnessed some strange guy picking his neighbour's flowers he cried out, "Oh, he is picking other's flower, it is wrong!" The father looked at the boy with a deep confusion, "Why is it wrong? Why is the flowers' being other's a reason for him not to pick them?" I think that boy would afterward, as it were, lose the sense of what was meant by 'a reason' in front of such a reaction. The account of resultance base given by Dancy to underpin his narrative account of explanation claims that every reason in a particular case is unique having nothing to do with how it functions anywhere else. This implies that reasons are one-offs, which goes against our intuition about what a reason is, that is, *F*'s being a reason for or against *G* should be a type-type identity instead of a token-token identity.

If there is a difference between a narrative and a justification/explanation, then we have to rethink how to explain the moral status of an object without appealing to exceptionless generalisations, that is, how moral explanations are possible if there are no exceptionless generalisations.

Little and Lance, after refuting Dancy's account of moral explanation, propose a model of defeasible moral generalisations. According to them, the lesson of holism of reasons is not to "deny the role of theoretical generalisations in morality, but to give a different picture of what those generalisations must look like if they're to do the work asked of them (Lance and Little 2007, p. 588)." Lance and Little argue that the sorts of explanatory generalisations deployed in various theoretical enterprises are both

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explanatory and porous – "shot through with exceptions that cannot be usefully eliminated (ibid.)."

As a rule, matches light when struck; for the most part, appearances are warrant-conferring; absent defeaters, fish eggs turn into fish (ibid.).

But these theoretical generalisations are not statistical reports of what usually happens. For instance, most fish eggs do not finally become fish, as they eventually end up in other creatures' belly. Furthermore, these generalisations are not '*ceteris paribus*' generalisations. Because the qualifier '*ceteris paribus*' means 'all other things being equal', which abstracts away other possible variables except the one picked up by a qualified generalisation. For example, a certain force *F* can push an object *O* towards a specific direction *D* for some metres *M*, absent other forces pushing that very object. In order to generalise the effect of that force, we employ a generalisation qualified by '*ceteris paribus*': *ceteris paribus*, *F* makes *O* move to *D* for *M*. In some departments of natural sciences, scholars tend to conduct experiments under laboratory conditions so as to test the effect of a certain variable free from other control variables. The results of such experiments, optimistically speaking, are '*ceteris paribus*' generalisations. By contrast, the qualifiers in those generalisations mentioned above refer to various "privileged conditions" in which they hold (Lance and Little 2004). "The core content of a defeasible generalisation on this approach is the claim that 'in privileged conditions,' all As are B: Understanding such a conditional is a matter *both* of understanding what, for its purposes, count as privileged conditions, *and* what compensatory moves are required by various deviations from those conditions (Lance and Little 2007, p. 589)."

To Lance and Little's mind, moral generalisations are and should be – because of holism of reasons – defeasible generalisations. Bellows are two instances of defeasible moral generalisations:

(1) Defeasibly, killing is wrong-making;

(2) In privileged conditions, lying is wrong-making.

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Although both generalisations make reference to privileged conditions, the conditions may not be privileged in the same way. In the case of killing, privileged conditions are morally superior situations, as killing is not wrong-making, say, in a postapocalyptic scenario where people all try to kill one's family. That a certain case is not privileged marks off its being morally defective. However, privileged conditions, with regard to lying, do not delimit morally superior cases but merely indicate explanatory or justificatory superiority. That is, in explaining a case where lying makes an action wrong we do not have to appeal to the context that lying takes place, while in cases where lying is not wrong-making context has to be adduced for the sake of explanation.

> The difference between privileged conditions from non-privileged ones requires the understanding of not only the various sorts of privileged conditions and notions of privilege, but also one's relationship to them and what compensatory moves that relationship urges; and it also requires a capacity of recognising the trace left by the defeasible generalisation in non-privileged conditions (ibid., p. 599).

The problem remains for Lance and Little is whether the privileged conditions of any defeasible generalisations is codifiable. Taking as an example the defeasible generalisation that defeasibly killing is wrong-making. In this generalisation, the term 'defeasibly' refers to the idea that the moral proposition – killing is wrong-making – holds in morally superior situations. Plausibly these morally superior situations are able to be articulated by words or be grasped implicitly. We may be able to add qualifications to the proposition that killing is wrong-making in the following form: except in situations M_1, M_2, M_3, etc., killing is wrong-making. Even if this generalisation's scope of applicability cannot be articulated explicitly – we cannot speak out or write down a qualified generalisation as its scope of applicability is too complex, we may still be able to grasp implicitly all the possible situations where that generalisation holds. The skills of cooking are too complicated to be completely written down as a recipe; however, the complexity of those skills does not stop good cooks from implicitly mastering them in the form of know *that* (a 'defeasible' cook may claim that he merely knows *how*): although normally a good cook does not exhibit his cooking knowledge by talking of some set of propositions, when asked a relevant question he may say, "you should add some sault", "chicken should be roasted with carrots", etc. Analogously, a moral generalisation's applicability scope, that is, its privileged conditions, may be too

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complex and intertwined to be formulated articulately; however, it is possible that we implicitly grasp the privileged conditions of a defeasible generalisation, and therefore, implicitly grasp a qualified but exceptionless moral principle. Besides, even if the nuances between the privileged conditions and the non-privileged ones, being extremely complex, escape implicit understanding, it does not prove that, ontologically speaking, there *are* no qualified but exceptionless moral principles as a matter of fact, which human beings are not capable of cognising. To deny this possibility is to claim that moral generalisations, however qualified, are necessarily shot through by exceptions. But is there anything that entitles principle eliminativists to claim this?

So far, I have drawn a broad picture of various positions within the principle eliminativist camp. The extremists believe that there are no moral principles at all and that moral generalisations have no justificatory and explanatory roles to play. Based on the criticisms upon this extreme position, some moderates claim that there are intra-moral principles while denying the existence of the moral principles linking non-moral properties to moral properties. In addition to this standpoint, there are other moderates acknowledging the explanatory function of moral generalisations. As they hold that holism of reasons necessarily eliminates exceptionless moral generalisations, namely, moral principles, they then turn to moral generalisations with necessary exceptions – defeasible moral generalisations.

In the next two sections, I am about to explore a pair of relations, one between principle eliminativism and error theory, the other between eliminativism and moral relativism.

4. Principle Eliminativism and Error Theory

At a first glance, principle eliminativism has a lot in common with error theory, since the former claims that there are no true moral principles while the latter argues that our moral thought or talk is deeply in error. By implication, error theory also renders as systematically in error our thought or talk about moral principles.

Precisely, there are several different stances within the camp of error theorists. Extreme error theorists suggest that all moral claims are false, while the moderates accept a more qualified but still comprehensive thesis, that all positive moral claims are false. The

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reason why they limit their thesis to positive claims is that they find it natural to show their endorsement of error theory by insisting that nothing is right, good, morally required or permitted, bad, or impermissible. However, there are even more conservative error theorists, who refrain from attributing truth or falsity to any moral claim, because they believe that the underlying problem prevents moral claims from being straightforwardly truth assessable: they think that a claim that presupposes a falsity is in virtue of that neither true nor false. The content of thought or talk about moral principles are moral propositions attributing moral properties to actions with relevant features, that is, moral principles. And therefore, thought or talk about moral principles are true or false so long as its content – moral principles – are true or false. From these various positions, we see that the first two types of error theorists necessarily endorse principle eliminativism ***qua* the thesis that** there are no true moral principles, though they do not accept the non-naturalist presupposition underlying moral particularism. With regard to the third stance, it seems to me not far from the standpoint of principle eliminativism, as it denies truth assessability to moral principles.

Withstanding this great similarity, principle eliminativism, at least in the hand of non-naturalists such as Dancy, McNaughton, and Little, is apparently different from error theory. The proponents of principle eliminativism are still able to claim that some moral judgements in particular cases are true as they accurately represent the world, but error theorists, due to their comprehensive thesis, are excluded from claiming the truth of any particular moral judgement. This difference comes from their contradicting attitudes towards the existence of moral properties. For sure, I do not deny the possibility that there might be other branches of principle eliminativism, except the non-naturalist one, which hold that no moral properties exist. However, here I only intend to distinguish error theory from the form of principle eliminativism we currently have.

Error theory can be seen as logically having two-layers, the first of which argues that properties being moral properties must possess some feature while the second denies that any property has such a feature.

One of the features employed by the argument for error theory is to-be-pursuedness. According to the contemporary founding father of error theory – John Mackie (1977, p. 40), "an objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not

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because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it." Mackie himself names this postulated to-be-pursuedness "objective prescriptivity," but it is so vague that allows of several interpretations.

According to a natural interpretation, moral properties' to-be-pursuedness is their motivational powers. For example, moral wrongness, according to this reading, would be a property that has the capacity of motivating people not to do what instantiates it without the assistance of any contingent features of the people so motivated, including their desires, tastes, propensities to act, etc. Then, the mere apprehension of moral wrongness would be sufficient to get people to avoid doing an action irrespective of their antecedent psychologies. Error theorists may, then, endorse a Humean theory of motivations, claiming that no belief alone can motivate action so there is no property the mere acquaintance with which is enough to have people carry out/avoid an action.[10] Since ordinary moral judgements predicate properties of a sort that could never be instantiated, these judgement are false or at least suffer from presupposition failure.

This interpretation, obviously, endorses the strongest form of motivational internalism, and this incurs many criticisms from non-error-theorists.[11] Therefore, error theorists display more candidates for the so-called queerness or to-be-pursuedness of moral properties. One of them is the claim that moral judgements presuppose that moral properties are necessarily reason-providing. For instance, an agent would necessarily have a reason in his deliberation to do what is right, no matter whether he has any motivation to do it or not. Corresponding to this interpretation of moral properties is the Humean theory of reasons, in terms of which there is a reason for an agent to do *X* only if she has a motive somehow relating to *X*.[12]

I am not about to present any other possible candidate for the alleged queer feature of moral properties, since so far we have already possessed enough to make sense of the

[10] "Less contentiously, even if Hume is wrong, there must be some psychological conditions that block, defuse, or defeat motivation, including motivation grounded in the apprehension of any moral property. Relatedly, the real possibility of actual amoralists makes it likely that knowledge of moral truths doesn't by itself suffice for motivation." See van Roojen 2015, 77.
[11] My apology that the length of this thesis prevents me from introducing these criticisms.
[12] One famous defense of the Humean theory of reasons is Bernard Williams's "Internal and External Reasons". See Williams 1981.

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difference between error theory and (non-naturalist) principle eliminativism. On a superficial level, they disagree on the existence of moral properties. And this disagreement has a deeper root. Moral particularists, to a certain extent, are followers of John McDowell who makes great efforts to argue against Humean theory of Motivations. According to them, mere apprehension of moral reasons is by itself motivating – a 'besire' – without the help of any contingent desires, ends or propensities. Rather, they believe that we attribute to the agent motivated a desire who has an appropriate apprehension/conception of a moral situation (McDowell 1978). Thus, the motivational power of moral properties, which is taken by error theorists as a queer feature, is not mystical at all in the eye of non-naturalist principle eliminativists. Furthermore, non-naturalist principle eliminativists, with the help of the notion of 'besire', can square moral properties with morals/reasons existence internalism. A morally sensitive person, say these non-naturalists, is able to have a proper conception of or appropriately apprehend the moral character of a particular situation, and once he possesses such a conception he is then correspondingly motivated to do what is required by the situation. As this is the case, they seem to have no tension with morals/reasons existence internalism (though there is a complication: Whether one who is not morally sensitive does not know the reason he has, or he simply does not have a reason?).

Besides their disagreement about the existence of (robust) moral properties, there are other controversies between them. John Mackie questions harshly the alleged faculty of intuition. According to him, moral intuition is a type of judgemental capacity, which allows us to judge reliably the moral value of an action or an outcome based on its empirically determinable properties. We indeed, think error theorists, need not postulate such an extra faculty to explain the moral judgements we make or the disposition to make moral judgements. Instead, mere appealing to social environments and mundane psychological characteristics of human beings are well enough.

A further argument against intuitionism can be borrowed from Sharon Street (2006)'s evolutionary debunking argument regarding moral knowledge. This argument points out that the moral claims we accept are largely determined by our psychological propensities, which in turn are the result of the evolutionary process the 'goal' of which is reproduction. If so, what reason do we have to take our disposition to make moral judgements to be a reliable epistemic faculty that indeed contributes to our grasp of

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judgement-independent moral truth, instead of seeing it as an accidental consequence of a selective process aiming at keeping the species going?

There are, for sure, more arguments in favour of the rejection of moral intuitionism but I will stop here short of giving a full picture of them. The point of this broad picture is only to exhibit the difference between non-naturalist principle eliminativism and error theory as regards moral epistemology. Although maybe not all moral particularists are intuitionists, the most significant figures, such as Dancy and McNaughton, definitely are. As we see in section 3, Dancy takes pains to talk about the practical shape of a particular situation. This practical shape, to his mind, is apprehensible via the faculty of moral perception: one does not even need to judge the moral status of a case based on its empirically determinable features. This apparently amounts to a strong version of moral intuitionism, which is at odds with the appeal of error theory.

Far from including all the pros and cons of both stances, this section merely serves as a warning that we should not confuse these two distinct positions with one another. However, their similarity may encourage someone who approves of principle eliminativism to seek inspiration from error theory, once if he abandons the non-naturalist meta-ethical burden, though how this works is still not clear.

5. Principle Eliminativism and Moral Relativism

It is very natural to conflate principle eliminativism with moral relativism, as the former claims that there are no true moral principles while the latter claims that "there is not a single true morality (Harman 2012, p. 13)." For all that, there are still a lot of nuances and even categorical difference between the two positions.

Moral relativism, although falling under one and the same banner, in fact includes two idiosyncratic stances – semantic moral relativism and metaphysical moral relativism (for simplicity, I will call them semantic relativism and metaphysical relativism respectively below), not to mention various substantive theories within these two categories. Semantic relativism, just as its name implies, is about the semantics of moral language, whereas metaphysical relativism concerns the ontological status of morality. Precisely speaking, semantic relativism is "the view that the truth value of a moral claim

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is relative to some suitable parameter: a morality, or a set of moral norms, standards, or whatever (Stojanovic 2018, p. 123)." Thus, can the analysis given by semantic relativism of the truth conditions of moral claims be correct only if we indeed have a language consisting of moral terms such as "right", "good", "morally permissible", etc.[13] to express moral propositions. However, metaphysical relativism may not be restrained by this condition. Even if we are not able to express moral propositions, there can still be moral facts – for sure, proponents of some substantive meta-ethical positions will not agree with this but the point here is that the two branches of moral relativism are at least logically independent from one another. Imagine that there was a primitive tribe made of quasi-human-beings who had just transformed from anthropoids to their current form. As they were primitive and naïve enough, they still had not developed a moral language which would have helped them think about and communicate moral business. Be that as it may, it seems that – we know this from some anthropological records – they organised their society decently with some kind of patterns. For example, they excluded through exile individuals who committed theft, adultery, murder and so forth, though they did not have moral concepts to make any moral judgement about these act types – they might even not have concepts to refer to the act types. From our perspective, do we think that moral facts existed there? If we do, then we can admit that the ontology of morality (the existence of moral properties or moral facts) is a different area from the semantics of moral language (the meanings of moral terms and the truth conditions of moral claims).

Except the temptation to treat moral relativism as a singular position, it is also easy to confuse semantic relativism with moral contextualism. In fact, moral contextualists, historically speaking, tended to regard themselves as moral relativists, and this tendency held until recently the booming popularity of moral contextualism. For instance, one of the most contemporarily influential contextualist Jamie Dreier sees his moral contextualism "one version of moral relativism (2006, p. 251)."[14]

The distinction between moral contextualism and moral relativism is easily confusing because both are relating to the semantics of moral language. Contemporary semantic

[13] For sure the moral terms do not have to be those we are actually using. Probably there is a species of alien beings who also have a moral language though employing quite different terms from us.
[14] For Drier's arguments for moral contextualism, refer to Dreier 1990, 1992.

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relativists and contextualists, inspired by Wittgenstein (1965), believe that moral claims are inherently relativized. Just like a right road must be relative to some destination, a right action must be relative to some standard. It is meaningless to claim that an action is bad, wrong or moral prohibited *tout court*, just as it is unintelligible to claim that a tree is taller *simpliciter*. Only can a moral statement, they all believe, be true or false if a certain set of rules, standards or moral norms are taken into account, that is, a moral statement can only be true relative to a criterion.

However, there are still two directions to go, given this consensus. Moral contextualism insists that moral terms are inherently indexical in the way that pronouns (such as 'her', 'I' and 'it'), demonstratives (such as 'this' and 'that') and context-sensitive adverbs (including 'here' and 'now') are. Thus, it believes that a correct semantic interpretation of a moral term is context-sensitive, just as a correct semantic interpretation of pronouns, demonstratives and context-sensitive adverbs is. For example, when Daisy says in Louvre, "I am going to spend another day in this city," the correct interpretation of the sentence's semantics should be: Daisy will spend another day in Paris. By contrast, if Ann says the same sentence in the Forbidden City, the semantic content it expresses changes: Ann will spend another day in Beijing. Since moral language functions in a similar way to this, according to moral contextualism, the semantic content of a moral claim is context-sensitive. Whether the context of uttering a moral claim or the context of assessment determines the exact meaning of a moral sentence, which standards are relevant and what sort of object a moral claim is relativized to, etc. all depends on the substance of some contextualist theory, but we provisionally postulate that the semantic content of a moral claim is relativized to the moral norms accepted by its speaker in the context of utterance so as to demonstrate the basic idea of moral contextualism.

(M), say, is the sentence "lying is morally wrong." When Davis, a utilitarian, utters (M), the content of which is, roughly, lying always causes pain. On the contrary, when a Kantian, Koen, utters the sentence, he literally means that to lie is to treat others not as an end but merely a means. Semantic content of moral language is relativized to context. This is the basic idea of moral contextualism.

Semantic relativism is different from moral contextualism in the sense that the former does not think that semantic content of moral language varies according as context

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changes. Rather, semantic relativism believes, a moral claim retains its meaning in different contexts but its truth value may change. In other words, context of utterance or assessment is taken into account when considering the truth conditions, but not the semantic content, of a moral claim. Furthermore, moral contextualism does not imply moral relativism. Although it insists that moral terms are inherently indexical so that the semantic interpretation of moral claims has to refer to the standard(s) embedded in their context, it does not entail that there must be multiple standards. It is possible that there is one and only standard that should be referred to in every context for correct interpretation. If so, one and the same moral sentence cannot be true and false in the same time, which contradicts the basic idea of moral relativism.

Despite the distinction between the two positions above, they are apparently different from principle eliminativism. Principle eliminativism, the thesis that there are no true moral principles, is an ontological claim. No matter whether we have a language to express moral propositions generalising the behaviours of moral reasons or not, moral reasons either function in a principled way or not. If they do, then there must be moral principles, irrespective of our ability to recognise (even implicitly) and express them, vice versa. Moreover, principle eliminativism, at least in the hand of non-naturalist realists, claims that a moral judgement in a particular case has a unique semantic content as well as a single truth value, which is at odds respectively with moral contextualism and semantic relativism. Thus, semantic relativism and principle eliminativism are, at best, tangential to one another.

This is, for all that, not to deny that semantic relativism of any sort has no bearing at all on moral metaphysics. Semantic relativism is, as made clear above, theoretically not about the ontology of moral properties, such as goodness, rightness and so forth; but when it is combined with some metaphysical analysis of moral properties, it may have metaphysical implications. Suppose that there is a meta-ethical theory that claims an intimate connection between moral language and moral ontology to the effect that moral properties would not have existed were there no people making moral judgement or thinking about morality by use of some moral terms. Then, a semantic account of moral terms, with such a moral-ontological commitment, obviously has implications for what it is for something to be a moral property. It also has bearing on moral principles *qua* moral facts – whether it is a fact that the distribution of moral properties

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is principled: the existence of moral principles depends on there being a moral language, as the existence of moral properties themselves depends on there being moral terms.

For sure, it is not clear how plausible it can be that a meta-ethical view treats moral properties as relying on the use of moral terms; however, it is commonplace that many meta-ethical accounts of moral properties regard them as depending on human beings' response to actions, character traits, states of affairs, etc. Thus, it is not so implausible to believe that, emancipated from a mind-independent view of moral properties, the existence of moral principles somehow depends on human beings', or other intelligent beings', states of mind.

Compared with semantic relativism, metaphysical relativism, the idea that there is no single, absolute, universal morality, may share more in common with principle eliminativism: they are both about the ontology of morality. Contemporarily, one main figure arguing for metaphysical relativism is Gilbert Harman, as he states that "Moral relativism is the theory that there is not a single true morality. It is not a theory of what people mean by their moral judgements" (2012, p. 13). However, metaphysical relativism and semantic relativism (and even moral contextualism) are so intimately connected that an argument for metaphysical relativism is often apt for different interpretations.

Through a series of influential articles, codified in *Harman 2000*, Harman has become a key philosopher in the defence of metaethical relativism. There are two significant phenomena in people's moral practices motivating Harman's works. First, it is necessary to take into account the moral considerations and reasons to which a person responds so as to make a moral judgment, such as whether he ought to conduct a certain action. And normally we only make moral judgements if we take it for granted that the person about whom we judge is responsive to the same sort of reasons and considerations that we ourselves are responsive. The second motivation is morals/motivations internalism: whether an agent ought to act in a certain way depends on their motivating attitudes.

Motivated by the two considerations above, Harman proposes that morality comes from a set of implicit, not necessarily conscious, agreements to which a group commits, and

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as the agreements reached by various groups may be varied and evolve over time there is probably no single, absolute morality. Further, whether an agent should morally do something is relative to their motivating attitudes that are shaped by the moral agreements the agent has undertaken with respect to others.

Harman's proposal, if true, makes it possible that killing the innocent is morally wrong-making for a certain society such as ours while morally permissible or even right-making for another which has a quite different moral agreement from ours (recall the movie *The Purge* in which human beings are suffering from over-population). However, this entailment does not amount to principle eliminativism. First of all, Harman's relativism only claims that there is no absolute and universal moral system but it does deny the possibility that some moral principles are true of every society in every historical period.

Moreover, Harman's standpoint is open to different semantic interpretations, which enables moral contextualists to regard him as the most important figure among them. A moral principle is supposed to be a generalised moral proposition so if something like "it is wrong-making to kill the innocent" has different semantic content in societies reaching different moral agreements, then it in fact consists of several propositions. Even if these propositions are all true, they are apparently not a moral principle. Despite all that, principle eliminativists probably do not favour such a semantic account of moral language.

Harman's relativism is only, furthermore, a "first-order relativism," consistent with the possibility that there are objective higher-order constraints on moralities. He stresses: "I am not denying (nor am I asserting) that some moralities are 'objectively' better than others or that there are objective standards for assessing moralities" (1975: p. 4). Even conceding that there is no singular set of true moral principles, how can we be sure that no set of moral principles are 'objectively' better than others. However, the most fatal difference between metaphysical relativism (at least Harman's) and principle eliminativism lies in that the latter claims that there are *no* true moral principles but not that there is *no single set of* true moral principles.

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The moral principles to which principle eliminativism pays attention is exceptionless moral generalisations that have explanatory or justificatory force. It does not insist that moral generalisations cannot be qualified in scope. In other words, true moral principles can be exceptionless moral generalisations that include in themselves provisos limiting the scope of their applicability. Then, that there is no single set of true moral principles does not imply principle eliminativism, because every true moral principle may be so qualified that they are ever true within the scope of applicability. For instance, lying to a kitty is wrong-making in a passionate cat-loving society *K*, while making no moral difference in every other society. Then, the qualified moral proposition that in society *K* lying to a kitty is wrong-making is always true without exceptions. And people in society *K* or anthropologists observing it can always adduce the consideration that an act is lying to a kitty, where it occurs, to explain or justify its wrongness.

Above I have tried to explicate some nuances between principle eliminativism and moral relativism, but some cautions are required. What counts as a moral principle is still controversial: should a moral generalisation qualified in applicable scope be regarded as a moral principle? Also, some eliminativists, such as Lance and Little, may be satisfied with the project of rejecting the idea that there are true moral generalisations that are unqualified as well as exceptionless. Most importantly, do we have any reason to argue for principle eliminativism within the framework set up by non-naturalists? Why should we not broaden the notion of principle eliminativism to cover some moral relativism under its banner?

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IV. Holism of Reasons

1. Holism in the Theory of Reasons

I believed that I have, so far, made clear what moral principles are and what appeals moral particularisms, especially principle eliminativism, have. However, I have not officially introduced the argumentative strategy of naive eliminativists, despite briefly mentioning it. According to Dancy, the main argument for particularism in ethics is "based on holism in the theory of reasons (Dancy 2004, p. 73)."

Holism in the theory of reasons, to Dancy's mind, is the thesis that "a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another (ibid.)." This position is exactly the opposite to atomism in the theory of reasons, which claims that "a feature that is a reason in one case must remain a reason, and retain the same polarity, in any other (ibid., p. 74)." The difference between two positions lies in whether they believe that context is able to affect the ability of a feature to make a normative difference in a new case, that is, whether they believe that a feature's normative valence is context-dependent.

To confirm holism of reasons, naive principle eliminativists tend to make reference to examples. Here below are some examples given by Dancy himself (1993, pp. 60 – 2):

The Book My having borrowed a book from you is normally a reason for returning it to you. However, if you have stolen it from the library, then the consideration that I have borrowed this book from you is not a reason for returning it to you.

Contraband The consideration that my statement will be a lie counts as a reason against my making it. But that my claim will be a lie counts in favour of making it, when we are playing a game called 'Contraband' where the aim is to smuggle goods past a 'customs officer'.

Traditions Sometimes that we did this last time is a reason for doing the same this time. On some occasions, the consideration that we did this last time, on the contrary, is a reason for doing something different (by implication, a reason against doing the same thing) this time.

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Hunting That an action is fun is a reason for doing it; however, the fun experienced by hunters chasing an innocent fox is a reason against hunting.

Pain That my action will consciously cause pain is a reason against doing it. But the same consideration counts as a reason for it, since the sufferer deserves pain.

The Journal An author's having published two papers on a topic in a journal counts both for and against publishing a third (depending on context?).

Illegality That an action will be against the law is a reason against doing it. But in some cases where a sort of behaviour ought not to be regulated by law, its being against the law is exactly a reason for doing it.

Except Dancy, other moral particularists also refer to examples in support of reasons holism. Lance and Little (2007, pp. 163 - 4), in defending their notion of a defeasible moral generalisation, employ S&M practice to illustrate the valence-switching of reasons.

In non-S&M conditions, plausibly one should take others' claims about their own desires at face value: 'No' means no! Thus, when a sexual partner asks you to stop doing something, or claims that she wants you to stop, it would be an assault on his autonomy to continue, that is, that she asks you to stop would be a reason against your continuing the behaviour. In the practice of S&M, though, 'Please stop, I don't like that!' is appropriately taken to indicate that one's partner enjoys what is happening. The valence of not taking someone at their word shows a justificatory dependence on its context: it is only because we have willingly consented to be engaged in a S&M practice that it is possible for her saying 'No, please stop!' to count in favour of my continuing the sadist behaviour. The move to the S&M context, according to Lance and Little, switches valences of certain morally significant features of acts; in other words, this move changes the context moral reasons depend on.[15]

[15] Originally, Lance and Little do not intend to use this instance to argue for reasons holism. Furthermore, the reason they have in mind in reason *why*. However, I adapt it to reason for, for the sake of writing order.

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Moral particularists do not only intend holism of reasons to be a thesis about practical reasons; instead, they see it as a global thesis. The valence of a normative reason of any sort, they believe, may change.

For instance, theoretical reasons, that is, reasons for belief are also holistic. Suppose that it currently seems to me that something in front of me is red. Normally, this is a reason for me to believe that there is something red in my sight. However, in a case where I also believe that I have recently taken a drug that makes blue things look red and red thing look blue, that the thing in front of me seems red is a reason for me to believe that there is a blue, but not a red, thing before me (Dancy 2004, p. 74).

Holism of reasons, the particularist believes, also applies to the grey zone between practical and theoretical reasons – aesthetical reasons. Painterliness sometimes is a reason for judging that a painting is beautiful, while sometimes not.

We have by now seen that holism of reasons, according to moral particularists, applies to all sorts of reasons *for* or justifying reasons. In Dancy's words, these reasons are favouring reasons, viz., they favour some belief, action or aesthetic judgement. But it has not been showed that reasons *why* or explanatory reasons are all the same holistic. Explanatory moral reasons – Dancy believes them to be the reasons that make an action right or wrong, and thus explanatory with respect to that action's moral status – stand in a different normative relation from justifying/favouring reasons. Favouring relation "is the relation in which features of the situation stand to action or to belief when they are reasons for doing one thing rather another or for believing one thing rather than another," while explanatory/making relation "is the relation in which features of the situation stand to an action when they make it right or wrong (ibid., p. 79).

When we refer to a moral principle, say, that lying is always wrong, although pragmatically speaking we sometimes suggest that there is some reason against making a statement that is a lie, the main semantic point is to express that lying generally makes wrong an action having it as a feature absent other contrary considerations, or that lying always (partly) explain that action's wrongness when it is overall wrong. In a nutshell, moral principles "seem to be in the business of specifying features as general

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(explanatory)[16] reasons" (ibid., p. 76). Thus, whether holism in the theory of reasons applies to explanatory moral reasons is more important to principle eliminativists.

2. Practical Reasons, Justifying Moral Reasons, and Explanatory Moral Reasons[17]

Although we conflate from time to time justifying reasons with explanatory reasons, there is a natural distinction in our language between the reasons of two sorts. When I say "I have a reason to marry her" or "there is a reason *for* my marrying her," it is tempting to think that I am referring to a favouring or justifying reason. On the contrary, it is natural to take the expressions as indicating some explanatory reason such as "this is a reason why I want to marry her". If you go on to ask me what makes me desire to marry her, I may reply, "she is both pretty and kind." Here we can apparently feel that the consideration that she is a beautiful and good person counts in favour of my wanting to make her my wife. In the meantime, the consideration that she is both beautiful and good also explains why I want to marry her. Similar to this case, on many occasions justifying reasons coincide with explanatory reasons. In other words, it is quite normal for a feature of a situation to simultaneously justify something and explain its occurrence, be it an action, a belief or an aesthetic judgement. This explains why most of the time we do not carefully distinguish a reason of one sort from that of another.

Be that as it may, there are occasions where two sorts of reasons diverge. Imagine that I am a horny person who do not pay attention to the character traits of a female at all. All that I care about is a girl's appearance. Thus, not only does her being sexy and pretty justify my willingness to marry her but also explain the emergence of this willingness. Fortunately, not only is the girl whom I want to have as my wife pretty and sexy, but also very kind. Her kindness, for sure, justifies or favours my wanting to marry her. However, be the kind of person I am, this consideration never enters my deliberation, that is, it is never *my* reason for desiring to marry her. Consequently, it cannot explain at all my wanting to marry her.

[16] This is added by the me.
[17] For a comprehensive introduction, please refer to Alvarez 2017.

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In fact, we do not have to posit that I am totally indifferent to character traits. Maybe I do care about virtues, but not so much as I care about appearance. Thus, what in fact made me want to marry her is that she is beautiful; by contrast, that she is kind did not enter my deliberation and thus fails to explain my motivation.

One way to understand the concept of practical reasons is to see them as something that can figure in an agent's deliberation counting in favour of action. There are practical reasons of many sorts, such as self-interest reasons, prudent reasons and moral reasons. Some, including Dancy, think that the distinction between different practical reasons concerns only their subject matters. For example, prudent reasons are reasons to do prudent behaviours, namely, behaviours conducive to the long-term interest of the agent in question, while moral reasons are reasons to behave morally. As the behaviours advised by the reasons of various sorts often overlap, it is difficult to distinguish them. In other words, an action for which there are some reasons often instantiates moral property as well as other properties so it is hard to see to which category the reasons favouring that action belong. A piece of evidence in favour of this view is that "nobody knows how to distinguish moral from other reasons. (ibid., p. 76)"

Others, on the contrary, may think that it is different perspectives that differentiate various practical reasons (Baker 2018). Moral reasons are the reasons I have seen from the perspective of morality, while prudent reasons are those seen from the perspective of prudence. All the same, my mother believes that I need to drink more milk so as to keep healthy, and therefore, I may have some reason from my mother's perspective to drink more milk. The problem of this view, perhaps, relates to motivations. I may not have any motive, and would not have any motive after a good deliberation, to drink milk. Then, even if my mother has a reason to urge me to drink milk – that it keeps me healthy – do I have any reason to do that? According to this view, I do have a *my-mother's* reason, a reason seen from my mother's perspective, to drink milk, which seems to imply that the existence of reasons does not depend on motivating attitudes.

If we normally cannot distinguish moral reasons *for* – justifying/favouring moral reasons – from other practical reasons, there seems no reason to deny that holism of reasons, if it does hold in the fields of other practical reasons, also holds in the domain of justifying moral reasons. This still leaves room for the claim that moral reasons *why*

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– explanatory moral reasons – are different: a reason that makes an action wrong or explains why that action is wrong in a case may *constantly* make an action wrong or explains why an action is wrong in every case where it occurs.

In the previous section, I have briefly talked about the relation between justifying reasons and explanatory reasons; however, I have not discussed the relation between justifying moral reasons and explanatory moral reasons. A reason that explains the wrongness of an action, as I see it, always counts against doing it, although it may sometime be overridden by other reasons. Likewise, a reason that makes an action right always counts in favour of doing it. However, justifying moral reasons and explanatory moral reasons may not coincide – a feature that is an explanatory reason why an action has a certain moral status may not be a justifying reason. Explanatory moral reasons are diversiform: there are reasons explaining why an action is right, morally permissible, morally supererogatory, etc. They may be all moral reasons for action. For sure, this is only to say that a moral reason *for* an action is not necessarily a moral reason explaining why that action is right; thus, it does not deny that all moral reasons *for* may in the meantime be moral reasons *why* broadly considered.

To see why justifying moral reasons may not coincide with explanatory moral reasons, we need to investigate the case of an amoralist. Although when he intends to lie to someone there is a moral reason explaining why this action is wrong, is it a moral reason counting against lying? If we think there is indeed a justifying moral reason, then justifying moral reasons may always coincide with explanatory moral reasons. But if we believe that justifying reasons must be able to figure in an agent's practical deliberation, and sometimes explain the occurrence of his behaviours, then that the action is a lie apparently fails to be candidate for a justifying moral reason in the case of the amoralist – he, by definition, would not care about morality at all. After all, most of us seem to feel an intimate connection between reasons *for* (be it about moral matters or not) and motivations. This point is not limited to moral reasons: a feature that explains why a certain action of mine is prudent is still able to explain its being prudent, despite that I would not have a motive at all to pursue my long-term interest; by contrast, it is at best a bit constrained to say that it is a reason for me to do that action, since I do not care about my long-term interest.

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Dancy himself does not directly argue that holism of moral reasons *for* action also applies to moral reasons *why*, even though those features serving the two roles may not be identical. He gestures at the ease of providing examples supporting this extension without actually offering some. But this task, as I see it, is not quite hard. Also, he suggests that there is no reason to suppose moral metaphysics is so different from moral epistemology that reasons making action right or wrong (and thus explain its moral status) are atomistic but reasons justifying moral decisions and judgements are holistic.

3. Complete Reasons and Overridden Reasons

Holism of Reasons, I believe, is supported by our ordinary sense of a reason. The same as me, some philosophers, even with a principlist mindset, find reasons holism plausible (Raz 2000). However, this doctrine, holism, is still challenged by many.

One objection is that we are not sure whether the features cited by holists as examples really change their normative valence due to other background features present, or are merely overridden by other features (Shafer-Landau 1997, 590; Hooker 2000a; 2008; Stratton-Lake 2000). To support his opinion, Russ Shafer-landau makes reference to Kant's inquiring murderer. There are two possibilities about our lying to him: lying may be right-making in this case, or it may be still wrong-making but simply overridden by the fact that an innocent will die if a lie is not told to the murderer. The examples cited by reasons holists, according to this objection, cannot alone determine the truth of holism of reasons.

This objection, though may make sense in some cases, is weak. We sometimes have conflicting reasons in favour of two contradictory actions simultaneously. For example, lying to a murderer in the case cited by Shafer-landau apparently conflicts with saving the life of a potential victim; thus, in this case, the reason not to lie is in contradiction to the reason to save the innocent, which makes the former reason overridden. However, we are actually able to distinguish reason-giving features from other relevant features in many cases. Recall the *Hunting* case:

Hunting That an action is fun is a reason for doing it; however, the fun experienced by hunters chasing an innocent fox is a reason against hunting.

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Here in this case we intuitively do not think that the fun involved in hunting is a reason in favour of this activity but overridden by other considerations. By contrast, it is more tempting to think that the fun here is exactly the consideration counting against hunting. We do not charge an agent of being wrong, heartless or inconsiderate who would die were he not to hunt.

For sure, this reply to the objection still leaves a large room for the possibility of reasons that do not switch valences. In many controversial cases, whether a reason is overwhelmed or changes polarity can be settled by nothing but the exercise of judgement, absent further arguments.

Another objection is that holists may not have fully specified the reasons in those examples they cite (Crisp 2000; Hooker 2000a, 2008; Raz 2000, 2006). Once reasons achieve their full specifications, their normative valence keeps constant. For example, people may at most of their time say that their reason for returning the book borrowed is that they borrowed it. But at the time when the person from whom the book is borrowed does not have the right to process that book, e.g., he just stole it from the library, if you ask people whether this right is part of the reason for returning the book, they will probably say yes. If they sincerely do not regard the right to process the book as part of the reason, you will think that they have merely an incomplete understanding of the reason to return the book. For the sake of convenience, when asked for a reason, people tend to specify only part of it. But this does not mean that they do not have an implicit understanding of a full reason, which can be articulated if necessary. Of course, sometimes the complete specification of a reason is too complex to be given explicitly, but this does not mean that there is no such reason. And sometimes a reason for which an agent acts, thanks to its complexity, may not even be transparent to him. Examples cited by holists cannot appropriately refute such possibilities.

A similar objection can be made by reference to the notion of an ultimate, complete or whole reason. According to Crisp (2000, p. 37), an ultimate reason is "a reason that we can rest satisfied with as grounding [the moral property of] the actions in question." To his mind, what we ordinarily offer as a reason present in a case is one with which we are not able to be satisfied, as the reason offered may not play the same role on other

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cases; for him, if a feature or set of features is offered as a reason for rightness in one case but not in another, then this feature is not an ultimate reason, that is, not one with which we can stay satisfied. Thus, only could an ultimate reason be offered were we able to produce a guarantee, in the sense of something that guarantees that there is a reason to do the relevant action in any case where this guarantee occurs: every ultimate reason is something whose presence makes sure that there is a reason – a reason of the sort that we can be satisfied with. For Crisp, though ordinary reasons with which we cannot rest satisfied are holistic, an ultimate reason is atomistic since it guarantees that there is always a reason to do the relevant action.

The problem with this objection, Dancy points out, is that "a guarantee that there is a reason to do the action need not itself be a reason in favour of doing it, so that in moving from our original account of the reason to the guaranteeing, ultimate reason, we may move from something that is a reason to something that is not, something that only guarantees that there is a reason. (Dancy 2004, p. 96)" To make it brief: it is at best constrained to call an ultimate reason or a guarantee 'a reason' in our ordinary sense. This reply, likewise, applies to the objection that once we fully specify a reason it has invariant valence: the so-called 'full specification of a reason' may fail to be a reason in the ordinary sense at all.

4. Reasons and Suitable Conditions

Above we see that reasons holists argue against the idea that a full specification of a reason is normatively constant and the idea that in those cases where the valence of some reason is supposed to be converted it is in fact just overwhelmed by other considerations. So far so good, but there is still something to be said: if 'a full specification of a reason' is not a reason, what is it; if other morally relevant considerations are not competing reasons, what metaphysical status do they have?

To sustain holism of reasons, reasons holists put forward a distinction between reasons and suitable conditions (Väyrynen 2006, 714 -716). These suitable conditions, viz., background features that make a feature suitable (or unsuitable) to be a reason, include enablers, disablers, attenuators, etc. Correspondingly, "a putative reason might be

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defeated, enabled, or intensified by specific elements of the context. (Ridge and McKeever 2016)"

Here I am solely concerned with enablers and disablers. With regard to them, Dancy (2004, 45) says as below:

> In fact, I suggest that the distinction between favourers and enablers can be generalized: there is a general distinction between a feature that plays a certain role and a feature whose presence or absence is required for the first feature to play its role, but which does not play that role itself.

The distinction is intuitively credible between a feature that plays a central role and a feature whose presence or absence is necessary for the first feature to play its role, because in everyday life we indeed make such distinctions all the time. Take the growth of a plant as an example. We normally think that a plant grows well because of enough sunlight, rain and probably a planter's care. And we do not normally include the absence of disasters, such as flooding or tornado as part of the reason why the plant grows well, except in the extreme case where flooding or tornado often occurs. Furthermore, we certainly do not treat the fact that no birds ate the plant when it was still a seed as part of the reason.

This distinction seems to apply generally to normative reasons of all sorts. In the field of reasons for belief, we similarly distinguish reasons from enablers and disablers. That something in the table looks like an apple is the reason for me to believe that there is an apple on the table. By contrast, that no devil is cheating me is not a reason. However, if there were really a devil who is making me mistake a pear as an apple, the appearance of an apple in the table would no longer be a reason to believe that an apple is really in the table. Practical reasons for action can also be subsumed under this distinction. That a story is fun is a reason to tell it, although I should not tell it were it offensive. But it seems far-fetched, when asked for the reason why I told that story, I answered that it was not offensive.

If this metaphysical distinction between different normatively-relevant considerations is solid, then we have a good ground to refute the two objections mentioned in the last section. Although there are some cases where it is difficult to see whether a reason is

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converted or overridden, this metaphysical distinction guarantees the possibility that there are cases where the normative valence of a reason is undeniably converted. Likewise, even though in some cases a full specification of all normatively-relevant features still counts as a reason, this metaphysical distinction assures the possibility that some full specifications fail to be a reason as they comprise suitable conditions.

If the examples I adduce so far are plausible, then, pre-theoretically we do have an intuition for a metaphysical distinction between reasons and suitable conditions. But this intuition itself does not guarantee that such a distinction really exists. We may just be misled by the habitual use of language, so we had better find out the rationale underlying this distinction: what can provide this distinction with some theoretical support? Theoretical support is well needed, because the objections similar to the two mentioned above can also be raised against this distinction: a so-called disabler may in fact be an overriding reason, or the full specification of a reason may include its albeit suitable conditions. Without an appropriate rationale, judgements alone cannot solve the controversies between them (Schroeder 2011).

There is also another motivation for giving a rationale for this distinction. As reasons holists often cite examples for the claim that reasons behave holistically relying on context, objectors may in the same vein list some counterexamples for atomism of reasons. The property of being honest, say, may always count in favour of actions that instantiate it (Crisp 2000; McNaughton and Rawling 2000). Holists may concede that some reasons, due to their specific content, have constant normative valence, but deny that reasons *qua* reasons are atomistic. That is, the concept of a reason does not guarantee that there must be atomistic reasons (Dancy 2004, p. 77). Even if this idea is true, we still need to know why it is so. Whether the concept of a reason implies atomism or holism of reasons belongs to the debate between different conceptions of a reason. And we need to find out which conceptions are in support of holism.

A conception of a reason that presupposes holism of reasons is given by McKeever and Ridge (2005, pp. 93 - 4): "a naturalist ideal adviser theory according to which F's being a reason for an agent A to φ in circumstances C just is F's being a fact in virtue of which A's fully informed (of all natural facts) self would want A to φ in C." This theory implies that *F* is *A*'s reason to φ only in virtue of facts about *A*'s idealised self that are

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not reasons themselves. For example, given some facts about my idealised self, he would recommend me as I am to drink a glass of wine because of the wine is delicious. Then, that the wine is tasty is a reason for me to drink it. However, in other circumstances, my idealised self would not suggest that I drink the wine, even though the wine were still delicious. The reason to drink the wine, that is, the fact that the wine tastes good, depends on its context. This theory of reasons by itself entails holism of reasons.

Another example of a theory of reasons that supports holism of reasons is the reasons internalism defended by Bernard Williams (1981). According to it, there would be a reason for an agent to do an action *A* only if the agent could reach a conclusion to *A* via a sound deliberative route from his current motivational set. This theory requires some counterfactual motivational condition to be satisfied for there to be a reason. "It would seem better to treat this as a condition for a consideration to count as a normative reason than as part of each individual reason's content (Väyrynen 2006, p. 715)." If this is the case, then reasons internalism sustains the distinction between reasons and their suitable conditions.

Although many conceptions of a reason, I believe, do count in favour of our intuition that there is a metaphysical distinction between reasons and other suitable conditions, and thus count in support of holism of reasons. However, to be capable of vindicating holism of reasons is one thing, while to be able to conclude principle eliminativism is quite another. The aim of reasons holists *qua* principle eliminativists is to argue for principle eliminativism from holism, but some conceptions of a reason fail them because such conceptions by themselves already entail that there are moral principles. Therefore, the problem left for principle eliminativists who intend to argue from holism of reasons is to find some conception of a reason that presupposes holism of reasons while not entailing moral principles. I will return to this shortly.

5. The Gap Between Holism of Reasons and Principle Eliminativism

Even if holism of reasons is true, principle eliminativism is not guaranteed, because reasons' context-dependency may be codifiable. McKeever and Ridge (2005, p. 96)

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demonstrate how holism of reasons is perfectly compatible with codifiability through a utilitarian theory:

(U) The fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason to perform the action if and only if the pleasure is non-sadistic. The fact that an action would promote pain is a reason not to perform the action. An action is morally right just in case it promotes at least as great a balance of reason-fiving pleasures over pain as any of the available alternatives; otherwise it is wrong.

This theory, although it is typically utilitarian – not to mention generalist, presupposes holism of reasons, because it specifies the suitable condition for the feature that an action promotes pleasure to be a reason – the pleasure it promotes is not sadistic. Following the same logic, we can include into this utilitarian principle any background feature that may be relevant to promoting pleasure's reason-giving force so that it keeps as an exceptionless principle while compatible with holism.

The example of returning a book is compatible with a general principle, too. See the following: that you borrow something from someone is a moral reason to give it back to him in due time, provided that he has the right to process that thing.

Many other instances can be listed, and they show that "holism itself provides no reason to suppose that such context-dependence cannot be codified in finite and useful terms (McKeever and Ridge 2005)." If so, then holism of reasons is in no support of the thesis that there are no exceptionless moral generalisations. Worse still, these generalisations do have explanatory force with regard to why an action has a certain moral status.

In the last section, I promise to return to the idea that some conceptions of a reason, although counts in favour of holism, by themselves entail that there are moral principles. Now it is the time to invoke an instance to elaborate this point, as McKeever and Ridge's model of hedged principles shows how to consider these principles; but I do not restrict it to moral principles. Sharon Street offers a very attractive constructivist account of what it is for something to be a reason:

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According to metaethical constructivism, the fact that *X* is a reason to *Y* for agent A is constituted by the fact that the judgment that *X* is a reason to *Y* (for *A*) withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of *A*'s other judgments about reasons (Street 2008, p. 223).

This account of a reason, obviously, distinguishes a consideration that is a reason from other considerations that are merely suitable conditions: *X* is a reason for *A* to *Y*, while the judgement that *X* is a reason to *Y* (for *A*) withstands scrutiny (here we do not have to engage in what it means by 'to withstand scrutiny') from the standpoint of *A*'s other judgments about reasons is a suitable condition. Thus, this account of a reason presupposes holism of reasons, that is, the normative valence of a reason-giving feature depends on its context. However, it implies, in the meantime, that the behaviours of reason-giving considerations are codifiable. For example, let the fact that an action is a lie replaces *X*. Then, we consequently have a normative principle for action in the following form: the consideration that an action is a lie is a reason not to do it, provided that the potential agent is the one whose judgement that an action is a lie is a reason not to do it withstands his other judgements about reasons. Clean and beautiful, we arrive at a hedged principle.

For sure, for something to be a (moral) principle, it should be informative enough to provide an accurate criterion for applying a (moral) predicate. Whether the qualification 'provided that the potential agent is the one whose judgement that an action is a lie is a reason not to do it withstands his other judgements about reasons' bars a generalisation involving it from being an accurate standard is open to discussion. I believe that the *accuracy* requirement needs to be exploited by those who agree to there being a plausible account of reasons while believing in principle eliminativism. Because it seems dim that the behaviours of (moral) reasons cannot be codified by hedged principles, if there is some plausible conception of a reason.

For eliminating the possibility of hedged moral principles, some principle eliminativists may instead argue for an "unrestricted holism (Jackson, Pettit and Smith 2000, p. 28)," according to which, the context-dependency of reason-giving features is in no way codifiable in finite or helpful propositional form (McKeever and Ridge 2005, p. 101).[18]

[18] cf. Jackson, Pettit and Smith 2000. According to their opinion, unrestricted holism is the view that there is no pattern in the use of moral predicates.

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But such argument just begs the question: whether the behaviours of a moral reason are codifiable or not is exactly the thing in question. We may have the intuitions that reasons behave holistically relying on their contexts and that there is a distinction between reason-giving features and background conditions, but we certainly do not have the intuition that contexts have unrestricted influence on features' reason-giving force. Otherwise, it would not be a historical fact that moral philosophers were keen to find true moral principles.

5. Conceptual Competency and 'Unrestricted' Holism of Reasons

Frank Jackson, Philip Pettit, and Michael Smith, the Canberrans, do not object to holism of reasons. As mentioned above, they are only hostile to 'unrestricted holism of reasons.'

The concern the Canberrans have is whether there is any pattern to the way in which descriptive information determines moral conclusions. They take it that principle eliminativists, by endorsing unrestricted holism, deny the existence of any such pattern. Because were there such a thing as the pattern for, say, rightness or a right-making reason, it would be possible that we specify that pattern on the left-hand side of a moral principle (or it would be possible to formulate a hedged principle).

The Canberrans go on to argue that there must be a pattern – a pattern where purely descriptive features are presented – that occurs in every case if there is a concept of rightness at all. For we use words to mark divisions, e.g., tables are different from chairs, and wrong acts are different from right ones. To mark the division between right actions and wrong actions, there must be something the right ones have in common that the wrong ones lack (Jackson, Pettit and Smith 2000, pp. 86 - 7). In other words, right actions must have a pattern that marks them off from actions that are not right. Likewise, right-making reasons must have something in common that marks them off from other considerations.

The supervenience thesis entails that for any right action A_i, there is necessarily a full specification in purely descriptive terms of the world D_i where A_i occurs that guarantees a right action is done. According to the Canberrans, the many D_i where various right

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actions show up must have a pattern for finite creatures like human beings to be able to grasp the concept of rightness.

Grasp of the predicate 'is right' simply consists in a grasp of the various D^i which constitute that set. But this cannot be all that unites the class of right actions. There must be some commonality in the sense of a pattern that allows projection from some sufficiently large sub-set of the D^i to new members. If there isn't, we finite creatures could not have grasped … the predicate 'is right'. So, there must be a pattern or commonality – in the weak sense … of that which enables projection – uniting the set of right acts (ibid., p. 87).

From this, they continue:

But if there must be a pattern uniting the right acts, either it is a descriptive one, in which case particularism [principle eliminativism] is false, or it is one which cannot be understood in terms of the presence or absence of the descriptive – something unanalysable and non-natural, as G. E. Moore put it when discussing goodness. If this is the particularists' view, however … the new and exciting thesis that there are no moral principles collapses into the jejune doctrine advanced by Moore …: moral properties are sui generis, and hence are not to be found among the descriptive (ibid., p. 88).

To sum up, their idea is that descriptive features determine moral properties, and there must be a pattern or commonality uniting the descriptive. And this pattern must be descriptive, too. As long as there is such a pattern, principle eliminativism is false because "there will be a true principle to the effect that wherever that pattern is exemplified, a right is done (Dancy 2004, p. 110)."

This objection given by the Canberrans to unrestricted holism or directly principle eliminativism is problematic. For many predicates attributing grounded properties, we finite creatures in fact do not rely on the pattern occurring in grounding properties to learn those predicates. For example, being smiling is a property grounded by some lower-level physical properties. As average people short of being a good biologist, we never recognise a pattern exemplified by those lower-level physical properties grounding various instances of smiling. Nonetheless, we can still accurately point out who is smiling, and who is not. In other words, we grasp the concept of smiling without

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relying on a pattern had by its grounding properties. We, instead, grasp that concept by experiencing many instances of smiling itself.

The disagreement between the Canberrans and principle eliminativists *qua* non-naturalists, in fact, is whether moral properties are *sui generis* properties to which we have direct access. The Canberrans believe we do not, while principle eliminativists *qua* non-naturalists believe we do. Thus, the Canberrans just smuggle their naturalist assumptions into the argument against 'unrestricted holism', which begs the question.

In the last section, I said that we do not have an intuition in favour of unrestricted holism; however, it seems that we do not have the intuition that the context-dependency of reason-giving features must be codifiable either. Therefore, to pay an exclusive attention to this debate, at best, is for each to stick to his own argument.

6. Defeasible Moral Generalisations Revisited

In the last chapter, I mentioned the idea of defeasible moral generalisations provided by Lance and Little. Moral generalisations of this sort, according to them, have the following form:

Defeasibly, killing is wrong-making;
In privileged conditions, lying is wrong-making.

The qualifiers of defeasible moral generalisations, such as 'defeasibly' and 'in privileged conditions' here, limit the claimed validity of the generalisations. However, there are privileged conditions of many sorts, which is well summarised by Dancy:

Theme/Riff: there is a clear sense in which the theme is present in the riff; a variation is a variation on a theme.
Conceptual Priority: to understand the exception you have to know the rule.
Explanatory Priority: we explain the exception partly by appeal to the rule.
Explanatory Asymmetry: the privileged case needs no explanation; what requires explanation is the exception.
Trace: exceptional cases carry a trace of the non-exceptional ones (Dancy 2004, p. 115).

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To Dancy's mind, the idea of defeasible moral generalisations does not add anything new to his own idea, the conception of a default reason. A default reason is a feature that does not require explanation if it has a certain normative valence but needs explanation if it switches its valence. For example, that an action is lying, although not always count against doing it, needs no explanation why it counts against that action when it does; but the fact that this feature does not count against or even counts for doing the action is in need of explanation. This does not mean that a default reason is able to give a *prima facie* epistemic warrant to some specific belief. For example, the consideration that an action is telling a lie cannot initially warrant the belief that this action is wrong, and thus justify this belief if no further considerations show up. By contrast, according to the conception of a default reason, this feature – that an action is lying – is one such reason, insofar as its positive contribution to a case needs no explanation while those cases are to be explained where it makes no such contribution.

As Dancy says, "Conceptual Priority and Explanatory Priority seem to be caught between saying too little and saying too much, at least in their application to the moral case (ibid.)." Because we do not have to know a defeasible generalisation in order to understand the case, say, where cruelty is not a reason against. "One only needs to know the rule in order to understand the exceptionality of the case where cruelty is not a reason against – but to say that is to say too little to be interesting (ibid.)."

The Theme/Riff distinction and the Trace idea, in Dancy's view, do not fit the moral cases so well: what happening in the privileged case is also present in the exceptional one? Why should we think the reason-giving feature in the exceptional case is the riff on the theme exhibited in the non-exceptional case, and why should we think that the exceptional case bears a trace to the non-exceptional one? In fact, the terms 'riff', 'theme' and 'trace' are too metaphorical to help people grasp what Lance and Little actually mean by employing them.

Then, the only kind of privileged conditions left is the Explanatory Asymmetry, that is, the privileged case needs no explanation whereas what requires explanation is the exception. This exactly reflects the idea of a default reason proposed by Dancy himself.

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Besides the intra-particularism debate between Dancy on one hand, and Lance and Little on the other, which is about whether the notion of defeasible moral generalisations adds anything new beyond that of a default reason, we may want to know if defeasible moral generalisations are moral principles.

Up to this point, we have reviewed the idea of the hedged principles advocated by McKeever and Ridge, which is apparently an instance of moral principlism. Recall the utilitarian principle taken by them as an example:

(U) The fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason to perform the action if and only if the pleasure is non-sadistic. The fact that an action would promote pain is a reason not to perform the action. An action is morally right just in case it promotes at least as great a balance of reason-fiving pleasures over pain as any of the available alternatives; otherwise it is wrong.

Corresponding to principle (U), we may construct a defeasible moral generalisation (U)' as follows: In privileged conditions, the fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason to perform the action. Then, what is the difference between (U) and (U)'?

I believe that underlying the difference is their distinct views of to what extent reasons are holistic. For McKeever and Ridge, holism of reasons is restricted; in other words, there must be a boundary where no further features can affect the normative valence of a supposed reason-giving feature. Therefore, those features that are suitable conditions are finite so that the behaviour of a reason can be codified. Perhaps the codification is too complex to be written down in paper or spoken out; or worse still, it is impossible for an intelligently mature person to implicitly comprehend the codified moral generalisation. After all, as a matter of fact, a reason's context-dependency is codifiable.

Contrary to McKeever and Ridge, Lance and Little have a way more radical holistic view of reasons. For them, the suitable conditions of a supposed reason-giving feature are infinite, that is, there can always be extra features that switch the normative polarity of it. As this is the case, not only cannot exceptionless generalisations in the form of hedged moral principles be apprehended, they in fact do not exist at all. All moral generalisations must be porous with exceptions. Thus, we can, at best, use qualifiers

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such as ‘in privileged cases’ to mark off some distinction and formulate defeasible moral generalisations.

Still, the substance of the disagreement between both parties is how far a reason can be holistic, and I am afraid that there is simply no way to resolve such a disagreement. If my worry comes true, then to argue from holism of reasons either for or against principle eliminativism is, unfortunately, a dead end. But is there any alternative to the question of whether there is any moral principle?

7. Are There General Reasons?

In the first chapter, I gave an account of the role of moral principles *qua* standards. They serve as standards that provide the accurate application conditions for moral predicates. These principles *qua* standards should also be able to explain why a predicate applies when it does. However, not all moral philosophers agree on this account of moral principles. Dancy, instead, believes that “moral principles, however we conceive of them, seem all to be in the business of specifying features as general reason (Dancy 2004, p.76).”

This idea of the role of moral principles (*qua* standards) is in fact more demanding than the one previously offered. For standards that provide the accurate application conditions for moral predicates do not presuppose that moral reasons are *general*. To understand this point, we have to make it clear what it means by ‘a *general* moral reason’.

A moral reason, as I have said, is some feature(s) contributing to the moral status of an object of assessment. For the sake of simplicity, let a wrong-making reason be an example. A wrong-making reason is a feature that contributes to an action’s being wrong, and it would result in the action’s *overall* wrong were there no other contradictory considerations overriding it. There are many features we normally take to be wrong-making reasons, e.g., an action is lying, it is the killing of the innocent, it is malicious and so forth; in other words, we believe that many features are apt to contribute to the wrongness of an object possessing them. However, were holism of reasons true, these features may fail to be wrong-making reasons from time to time due

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to the presence of disablers or the absence of enablers. On the contrary, given the presence of some suitable conditions, those features we ordinarily do not take to be reasons may contribute to an action's wrong in some cases.

Dancy takes pains to elaborate the notion of moral reasons in terms of their contribution to a case, for he intends to emphasise that there are many ways in which features of the same type can make contributions. Take the consideration that an action is lying as an example. In one case, this consideration functions as a reason contributing to the action's wrongness partly in virtue of the absence of a disabler that he did not lie to me in the first place. However, in a case where he did first lie to me an exactly similar consideration that an action is lying, although it is still a wrong-making reason, does not function as a reason in the same way. It, instead, may function as a wrong-making reason thanks to an enabler that lying back to him negatively affects the well-beings of both of us. Thus, the exactly similar facts (or the same fact – depends on whether we treat it as the same fact occurring in two cases) function as wrong-making reasons in different ways. We may be, then, tempted to consider them as two distinct or particular reasons, instead of taking the fact that action involves a lie as a *general* reason.

Some people may insist that some facts always function as a moral reason in the same way. These reasons are invariant not only in the sense that these facts always count as moral reasons whenever they occur, but also in the sense that they function as moral reasons in the same way all the time. For example, that an action involves the destruction of an unwilling and blameless victim may always function in the same way as a wrong-making reason.

Take the well-known example of the fat man stuck in the only outlet from a cave that is rapidly filling with water from below. We and our families are caught in between the fat man and the rising water. But we have some dynamite. We could blow the fat man up and get out to safety. But the fat man is unwilling to be blown up (he, at least, is safe from drowning, being head up); and, let us immediately admit, he is blameless in being where he is, and in being fatter than the rest of us. So what we propose to do involves the destruction of an unwilling and blameless victim. As such, we might say, this is some reason against lighting the fuse and standing back. The question I want to raise is whether the fact that this feature (that we are causing the death of an unwilling and blameless victim) is functioning as the reason it here is, is in any way to be

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explained by appeal to the (supposed) fact that it functions in the same way in every case in which it occurs (ibid.).

The fact that an action involves the destruction of an unwilling and blameless victim may – I am not sure whether there are occasions where it no longer contributes to the wrongness of an action – always contribute to an action's being wrong. However, in different cases, there may be various suitable conditions that enable this fact to make such contributions, though it is hard to consider how there can be features making such a difference. It is more natural to think the functioning of the destruction of an unwilling and blameless victim as a wrong-making reason is not affected by other background features. In other words, we tend to believe that this feature always functions in the same way as a reason. If this is really the case, then we have a reason that is invariant in the both senses mentioned – invariantly counting as a reason and counting as a reason in an invariant way. Do we now have to take the fact as a *general* reason that action involves an innocent and unwilling person's destruction? Dancy thinks we do not have to. He believes that the fact that this feature (that we are causing the death of an unwilling and blameless victim) is functioning as the reason it here is, needs not "be explained by appeal to the (supposed) fact that it functions in the same way in every case in which it occurs (ibid.)."

Let us understand Dancy's point by an analogy. In the case of aesthetics, the redness of a painting sometimes contributes to the beauty of that painting. Suppose, then, there are two drawings whose redness makes them beautiful. However, as the two paintings are quite different in composition and other structural features, it is hard to consider the redness in them as contributing in the same way to their being beautiful. We rather prefer to see the redness in them as two particular beautiful-making reasons, particular in the sense of making the paintings beautiful in virtue of other features respectively present in one of the two drawings. But there are other more comprehensive features that always contribute to paintings' beauty in one and the same way, e.g., vividness in any painting makes it beautiful non-differentially. Despite all that, when someone attempts to have another understand why the vividness in this picture makes it beautiful, it seems that she need not appeal to any other vivid painting in order to explain this. The thing she has to do is to show her counterpart how vividness makes everything here better, to tell a story so as to make him see what she has seen.

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I suspect that Dancy has this in mind when he raises the question "whether the fact that this feature (that we are causing the death of an unwilling and blameless victim) is functioning as the reason it here is, is in any way to be explained by appeal to the (supposed) fact that it functions in the same way in every case in which it occurs (ibid.)," for he later gives a narrative account of moral explanation or moral justification, which I have introduced.

To explain the fact that the destruction of an unwilling and blameless victim is functioning as the reason it here is, for Dancy, is to depict in this particular case how such a feature makes a contribution. That it here makes such contribution is quite independent of how it functions elsewhere, and therefore it does not function as a *general* reason. To rephrase it: it is not because this feature always functions in the same way as a reason that this feature functions here as a reason in this way. We may be able to summarise as a pattern the way how a feature functions but the functioning of that feature in a certain way in any particular case does not depend on this pattern.

This pattern that a feature functions in the same way in every case it occurs, as Dancy sees it, gives us some epistemic advantage, because whenever we see it occur we have some idea of what contribution it may make here and how; however, this pattern "in no way constitutes the sort of contribution it makes to the store of reasons here present (ibid., p. 78)."

As Dancy takes (contributory/pro tanto) moral principles to be specifying moral reasons as *general*, there are no such things. Because a moral reason is by its nature *particular*.

The same point applies to the *overall* level, that is, the level concerning action's overall rightness or wrongness (ibid., pp. 85 - 93). An action's being overall right or wrong is always resulted in by a resultance base, which is a set of moral reasons. If two cases had the same resultance base, their moral statuses would be the same. Thus, it seems that we can in the *overall* level generalise resultance bases, the aggregations of moral reasons, into moral principles determining overall rightness and wrongness.

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The difficulty of such a strategy, first, is that features play the role of moral reasons in one case may not play that role in another. This is the main claim of holism of reasons. To preclude such possibility, other relevant features – suitable conditions – should be added into the left-hand side of an *overall* moral generalisation. Suppose this can be done, do we successfully gain a moral principle concerning the overall moral status of an action?

Dancy does not think so. To his mind, "There is, however, no such thing as the resultance base for a property (wrongness, say) *in general* (ibid., p. 86)." The reason why this is so is similar to that why there is no *general* reason. A resultant property, say, wrongness, may be one that there are many different ways of acquiring so there need be no way of capturing all those ways at once – "there are many different ways in which an action can get to be wrong (ibid.)." An *overall* moral generalisation would conflate or ignore the many ways in which the resultance base results in a moral property.

Perhaps Dancy's notion of moral principles is too demanding. Moral principles do not need to specify moral reasons as *general* or specify resultance bases as *general*; instead, they just serve to summarise the pattern of how some reason-giving feature works or how some resultance base works, with the help of which we are able to predicate moral properties. According to this weaker view of moral principles, all that required for there to be a moral principle is that the presence of some feature(s) always leads to (or contribute to) the presence of a moral property. Whether the feature(s) in question results in or contributes to the property in the same way is beyond consideration. It accords with this weaker view that standards that provide the accurate application conditions for moral predicates and explain why a predicate applies when it does are moral principles.

The hedged moral principles advocated by McKeever and Ridge, apparently, are moral principles *qua* standards. Although Dancy claims that it would be a cosmic accident were it to turn out that a morality could be captured in such a set of hedged principles, it is hard to see why if one does not endorse unrestricted holism of reasons (ibid., p. 82).

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At best, I suspect, Dancy could claim that the existence of moral reasons, which are essentially particular, do not depends on a sufficient supply of hedged moral principles, were moral reasons essentially particular. But the idea is doomed to be challenged by many that moral reasons are by their nature particular, and not less controversial than unrestricted holism of reasons – recall Lance and Little's challenge.

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V. The Nature of Morality

1. Is Morality Aimed at Social Predictability?

Some scholars believe that the practical consequence of the (public) commitment to a moral doctrine has an effect on its plausibility. Brad Hooker (2000, pp. 15 - 22; 2008, pp. 26 - 8) is one among them when he claims:

> However, in the special case of choosing between moral theories that are otherwise equally plausible, a difference in how predictable people who accepted these theories would be does seem, at least to me, to count in favor of the theory whose adherents would be more predictable (Hooker 2008, p. 28).

Let us call Hooker's argument against moral particularism (principle eliminativism) argument from social predictability. His argument (Hooker 2000a) is relatively simple, which we can present via a thought experiment. Suppose there are two people whose moral commitments you know. The first one is Patty, a devoted moral particularist, about whom you only know that she believes in neither absolute nor contributory moral principles. Another person is Gerry, a Rossian generalist, who you merely know takes some features to be general reasons for or against the action possessing them.

> Suppose Patty is such a person. All you know of her is that she really does live by her particularist beliefs … Let us compare our particularist Patty with a Rossian generalist, Gerry. Gerry believes that physically harming others is a serious moral minus, and that stealing or destroying others' property, promise breaking, and lying are moral minuses. He also believes that promoting justice, helping others, and expressing gratitude are moral pluses. But he believes each of these considerations can be overridden … As with Patty, the only thing that might make him keep his promise is morality (ibid., pp. 17, 19).

Now both of them ask you to help them get in their crop now in return for their promising to help you back in the next month. If you refuse to help any of them, half of that person's crop will spoil, and this would drive him or her to bankruptcy. Likewise, you have to get help with your crop later if you want to avoid your own bankrupt. Now, whose offer of promise are you going to accept, Patty's or Gerry's?

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Hooker believes that we are more tempted to accept Gerry's offer, as we "have vastly less to worry about with the generalist Gerry than with the particularist Patty (ibid., p. 20)." If this the case, it seems that "collective public commitment to Rossian generalism would lead to considerably more trust amongst strangers than would collective public commitment to particularism (ibid., p. 21)." This is so because collective public commitment to moral principles establishes mutually social predictability.

Hooker, for sure, does not think that social predictability alone is able to determine which moral theory to be accepted, otherwise, he should have proposed moral absolutism of a certain sort. His point is that it is more plausible to accept one moral theory the commitment to which makes people more predictable, provided that it has equal plausibility to its alternatives in all other aspects. Because, he claims, "The overall plausibility of a moral view is seriously impaired if it denies that one of the points of morality is to increase the probability of conformity with certain mutually beneficial practices (ibid., p. 22)." If this idea is incorrect, it has a lot of companions in guilt. For example, many kinds of consequentialists, contractualists, Kantians and natural law theorists all believe that (conceptually?) morality must be conducive to mutually beneficial practices.

Personally, I prefer to read Hooker's argument against moral particularism as an argument from the nature of morality. Why is the moral theory, the public commitment to which has a positive effect on social predictability, more plausible? Or in other words, what grounds our reasons to endorse such a moral theory? The only plausible answer to this question is that the necessary condition for something to be a morality is that it is good for mutually beneficial practices or humanity's well-being. All other things being equal, then, we have a good reason to endorse a moral theory that proposes a socially beneficial morality. Moral particularism in the form of principle eliminativism claims that there are neither absolute nor even contributory moral principles, and thus, it is natural to suspect that the behaviours of those sincerely believing in this doctrine are less predictable. Here some caution is well needed. There are always people who claim that they are convinced by a certain moral theory but never or seldom exhibit the so-called conviction in their practice. People of this kind, of course, are not those to whom I refer here. The moral particularists I refer to here are those who not only sincerely hold the belief that there are no true moral principles, but also have behaviours

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consistent with their professed conviction. As principle eliminativism makes its followers less predictable, to Hooker's mind, this doctrine is less plausible than a principled ethics.

As far as I see, principle eliminativism can respond to this objection from two aspects:

(1) The nature of morality does not entail that it has to increase people's social predictability;
(2) The commitment to principle eliminativism does not or not necessarily reduce one's social predictability.

Let me say something about (1) first. Does the nature of morality conceptually require it to be something contributing to mutually beneficial practices? If it does, to what extent? If such a requirement is very demanding, that is, for something to count as morality it has to have a great effect on improving social cooperation, then, it seems to me that consequentialism of a kind would be made more favourable than other moral theories. Because we can know by its name that consequentialism aims at resulting in the most favourable outcomes. And among various consequentialisms, rule-consequentialism would be the most favoured, as most of the time relying on rules is much more predictable than relying on an agent's calculation in each case. For Brad Hooker is himself a steadfast advocate of rule-consequentialism (Hooker 2000b), it is easy for us to suspect that he smuggles some of his own preferences into the nature of morality. For sure, what I have said by now is *ad hominem*, which I do not intend to be an argument against Hooker. Here I simply want to raise some doubts on this notion of morality, and make readers more susceptible to Dancy's reply to the arguments similar to that of Hooker's. And if this requirement is not demanding, what threshold something has to pass to be a morality?

One is that morality is essentially a system of social constraints, and as such it must meet certain conditions … And it must be regular, so that we can tell in advance what effects this or that feature will have on how we and others should behave. My own view about this is that it is a description of something like ***a set of traffic regulations***.[19] But morality was not invented by a

[19] The relevant words are made bold and italics by the author.

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group of experts sitting in council to serve the purposes of social control. It may be that it does serve those purposes, but even if so, it does not follow that one can derive from that fact a set of requirements on the nature of any effective moral system (Dancy 2004, p. 83).

Human beings enact laws and other social regulations for purposes, and one significant purpose, at least in our modern world, is to enhance social cooperation. Some other social conventions evolved naturally, and the result of that natural evolution tends to benefit social cooperation, though it is not necessarily so. For instance, etiquette in some society may be so sexist that impairs social harmony between different genders. Morality is certainly nothing like enacted laws and social regulations. It is not invented by anyone at all. Thus, it does not involve any human purpose though it may serve some. Is morality, then, a sort of naturally evolving conventions? This issue is still very controversial. But even if morality indeed is natural conventions, it still does not imply that morality has to benefit social cooperation. At best, it entails that morality (or its evolution) has a 'goal' – one we retrospectively attribute to it – to fortify human beings' reproduction.

To conclude, it is at least very controversial to claim that the nature of morality sets a requirement on its ability to enhance social cooperation, not to mention the capacity of establishing social predictability.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose for now that the nature of morality has such a requirement, and turn to (2): Will the commitment to principle eliminativism reduce one's social predictability? I admit that a person who does not believe in any moral rule may be unpredictable, if he also holds that anything goes. However, a committed particularist is not a moral sceptic. Instead, he has faith in there being moral truths.

I am not to deny that some people believing in principle eliminativism may make moral decisions in haste, which in turn contributes to the unpredictability of their corresponding behaviours. However, this seems to me not a problem of this theory itself but one of those careless people. Holism of reasons emphasises on the complexity of moral life, and consequentially urge people to make moral judgements carefully and attentively. A good follower of principle eliminativism, thus, should pay more attention to the details in each case in front of her, and always hesitate to make any moral decision.

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Through a careful decision procedure, I am confident that her action is well predictable. At least, her action can be predicted by those who are also careful moral agents.

Adherents to any moral theory, Rossians or even absolutists, are never exempted from unpredictability, as long as they may make moral decisions carelessly. For Rossians, there are often multiple moral considerations present in a case. How to weigh up them? Her overall moral verdict will probably be jaw-dropping, if she makes it in haste. Even for devout absolutists, being careless contributes to unpredictability in many cases. For one may ignore a fact that is morally relevant, or interpret a brute fact in a wrong way. The resultant moral decision may, then, fail to meet others' expectation.

The right way to ensure the social predictability of people's actions, in my eyes, is not to preach some moral theory with fixed (and probably rigid) rules, since rules can always be applied in a wrong way. Rather, it is to bring in the right kind of moral education. People should be encouraged to think twice confronting hard moral cases, to focus on details in a moral situation, and to listen to patiently others' moral suggestions as well as their factual interpretations of the situation. Carefulness and communication enhance cooperation, the platitude we have learned since our childhood.

Hooker's argument from predictability, to sum up, poses no threat to the idea that there are no true moral principles.

2. Moral Obligations and Moral Principles.

Holism in the theory of reasons seems to me persuasive in many normative areas, theoretical and practical. In epistemology, for example, we do believe that the normative force of a reason for belief depends on its context. That the item in front of me seems red normally is a reason for me to believe that it is indeed red, but sometimes it fails to be a reason for that belief. As regards practical matters, concessions to holism can also be made. That eating this Brownie is able to satisfy one of my desires is sometimes a reason for me to do it, while sometimes it is not, say, the time when I need to practice controlling my appetite. As this is the case, most of us do not think of epistemology, prudence and other normative areas as governed by some substantial principles. Nonetheless, most of us, in the meantime, take it that morality is principle-

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based. What makes us endorse such an apparent dualism? What is so special about morality that distinguishes it from other normative domains?

One case for such dualism is that there are moral obligations or what we owe to each other (Scanlon 1998) in morality. Moral obligations, conceptually, are what we are morally accountable for doing, and the practice of holding one responsible for his obligation presupposes that he can know he is obligated, that he can regulate his behaviours according to this knowledge and that this is all capable of being common public knowledge (Darwall 2013, p. 174).

Moral obligations are those moral requirements the failure to do which would be morally wrong. They are conceptually distinct from what is favoured by moral reasons, even those most favoured by moral reasons, because it is possible that what moral reasons (most) favour in a case is moral supererogation. As long as we recognise the conceptual difference between moral obligations and moral supererogation, we have to admit that moral obligations are categorically different from actions favoured by moral reasons.

According to Stephen Darwall, moral obligations are conceptually linked to accountability: "What we are morally obligated to do is, as a conceptual matter, what we are morally answerable for doing (ibid., p. 176)." We are morally accountable for moral obligations in the sense that it is warranted for us to have certain 'reactive attitudes'[20] such as indignation, blame, and guilt, and we are to be justifiably blamed, when we fail to do what morality requires without an adequate excuse. To sum up, "What it is, indeed, for an action to be morally obligatory and its omission morally wrong, is just for it to be action the omission of which would warrant blame and feelings of guilt were the agent to omit the action without excuse (ibid., p. 177)."

Moral obligations, according to Darwall's analysis of them, have a 'second-personal' character (Darwall 2013). They are the demands we legitimately make of one another and ourselves from a second-personal standpoint, even when they are addressed to oneself, as in the motion of guilt. Furthermore, it makes sense to (or we can intelligibly)

[20] For the idea of reactive attitudes, please refer to Strawson 1962.

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make putatively legitimate demands to one another, or to make them implicitly through some reactive attitude, only if the object is regarded as capable of holding himself responsible.

As I would put the point, we can intelligibly regard someone as under a moral obligation and hold her accountable, only if we regard her as able to take up the impartial (Strawson's 'impersonal') second-person standpoint of a representative person on herself, recognize the legitimacy of the moral demand, and make the demand of herself from this perspective (ibid., p. 183).

Furthermore, moral obligations are necessarily authoritative. Though what it is for something to have authority is a controversial issue, one thing clear is that such authority is not *de facto* but *de jure*. In other words, the omission of what is morally obligated may not in fact incur punishments to the agent but it *ought* to have such consequences. If 'moral obligations' had no such *de jure* authority, they would not exist at all. However, moral obligations can have *de jure* authority only if those obligated can be intelligibly expected to be able to hold themselves to the demands from the impartial second-person standpoint. For example, we certainly do not regard as a moral obligation 'do not smack the lips while having food'. One reason of this is that it is ridiculous to expect one to be able to see it as legitimate from the second-person standpoint. In sum, "*de jure* obligations cannot possibly exist unless those subject to them can be intelligibly held answerable for complying with them (ibid., p. 185)."

Then, how is it possible that we can intelligibly hold one another accountable for complying with moral obligations? It is possible, Darwall believes, "only if there exist general rules and principles that are accessible to all who are morally bound as a matter of common public knowledge (ibid., p. 187)." Only by presupposing both parties are committed to the publicly shared knowledge of a set of general principles, one can intelligibly regard another as able to take up the impartial second-person standpoint of a representative person on herself, recognize the legitimacy of the moral demand, and make the demand of herself from this perspective, and thus intelligibly hold another responsible for complying with the demand.

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If we believe that there are moral obligations, we must also believe that there are general rules and principles that are accessible to all who are morally bound as a matter of common public knowledge. Darwall goes on to argue that moral obligations are central to morality in the sense that morality would not exist were there no moral obligations at all. Therefore, he concludes that morality depends on there being general principles.

If Darwall indeed makes a good case for general principles regarding moral obligations, the project of eliminating all principles out of morality is doomed to fail. Because morality would be so closely connected to some principles that the former cannot survive without the latter. In other words, there would be no principle eliminativists *qua* moral particularists but only moral nihilists were Darwall's account of moral obligations correct.

The problem now is whether the concept of a moral obligation is really so central to that of morality. It has no doubt that many philosophers do not agree with Darwall in this aspect. They think not just that moral obligations do not cover the whole domain of morality (Ridge and McKeever 2016), but also that morality or ethics will be better by getting rid of the concept of moral obligations or that this concept makes no sense in a secular age (Anscombe 1958; Williams 1985). Thus, the centrality of moral obligations is not uncontroversial, for which further arguments have to be supplied. Without plausible arguments for this view, Darwall is, at best, able to claim that there are some general principles concerning what is morally obligated. And such a claim is even consistent with these principles being an unhealthy set of rules to live by.

On the other hand, whether Darwall succeeds in making a case for general principles depends on the plausibility of 'unrestricted' holism of reasons. Though personally, I am not at all attracted to 'unrestricted' holism, it would make Darwall's case for principle-based ethics a case for moral nihilism were such a holism plausible. For were the context-dependency of reasons really unrestricted, there would hardly be any general principles. In turn, moral obligations based on such principles would not exist, and inferentially, morality itself would, then, not exist at all. For sure, principle eliminativists are not moral nihilists, so they are obviously not willing to accept the non-existence of morality; however, their commitment to holism of reasons in

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combination with Darwall's argument for general principles is able to arrive at such an unacceptable conclusion.

From the above, we see that Darwall's argument for moral generalism does nothing more than McKeever and Ridge have done but just repeats the same point from another aspect: there must be moral principles unless the behaviours of reason-giving features are unrestricted. Nonetheless, the debate about whether 'unrestricted' holism of reasons is true is deadlocked, to which I sadly find no solutions.

3. Rethinking Moral Principles

By now I have introduced two notions of moral principles, one of them less demanding than the other. The looser conception of a moral principle treats it as an accurate criterion for applying moral predicates, such as 'right', 'wrong' and 'morally permissible'. This notion of a moral principle also insists that a principle must be able to explain why a certain predicate applies to a case when it does. The stricter conception of moral principles accommodates all the claims made by the looser one with a further requirement: a moral principle must specify a reason-giving feature as a *general* reason. The second conception is more demanding, as the first one needs not to regard moral reasons as general. There may be a bunch of particular reasons contributing in exactly similar ways to cases, among which there is a regularity that can be summarised into a moral principle, according to the first notion. But such summarised regularity, for the second notion, amounts to no moral principle. This action's being cruel in this case may be distinct from that action's being cruel in that case: two features are two distinct particular reasons, though they contribute to their respective cases in exactly alike ways. This is possible because a feature's being a reason depends on some suitable conditions present in the case it occurs. If there is a difference between what enables two exactly alike features to be reasons in two cases, then we can at best speak of them as two particular reasons with exactly alike contributions to the cases. Even if the suitable conditions, say, enablers and disablers, are the same in two cases, they may still possess suitable conditions for enablers and disablers that are different. If so, then there is no one and only general reason present in the two cases. Judging from the above, the second conception of a moral principle puts a much more demanding requirement on what it is to be a moral principle.

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Apart from what role a moral principle *qua* standard should perform, there are also doubts on what a moral principle is supposed to look like. It is tempting for us to take a moral principle to be a rule written down or at least articulated, and to see the knowledge we acquire when we comprehend a principle as the knowledge *that*. But there are several objections to this idea of moral principles. In ordinary life, we seldom make practical reasoning in the form of a syllogism, such as the following:

Premise 1: Lying is wrong;
Premise 2: My action is lying;
Conclusion: My action is wrong.

Rather, we appear to have a direct sense that such an action is wrong without deriving that conclusion from a strict syllogism. Even in the case where we have a direct moral intuition, some of us may still want to see it as a case of principle-application. After moral inculcation for years, many people know *how* and *why* to apply a specific moral predicate without knowing *that*. For these people, we may still be inclined to attribute to them the knowledge of moral principles concerning that moral predicate.

Moreover, the 'moral principle' figures in *Premise 1* seems to me too simple to be true, since our moral life is probably quite complex. Suppose it is true that moral life is really complex and no simple principle is able to capture morality. Then, no rules that can be written down or articulated are true moral principles. If we are tempted to endorse the idea that morality is complicated but, in the meantime, reject principle eliminativism, we had better broaden our view of a moral principle.

Given the considerations above, there are, as I see it, two ways to go. Some people may still take the knowledge of moral principles to be knowledge *that*. However, they now believe that such knowledge is (or can be) implicit. Since moral life is inherently complex, its principles are necessarily complex in the sense that most of them cannot be articulated, not to mention being written down. Be that as it may, moral principles, to their mind, are still expatiatory rules, by virtue of an implicit understanding of which people are able to make correct moral judgements.

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The other way to go is to treat the understanding of a moral principle as seeing a point.

When we understand a principle. We do not know some truth, it seems; it is rather that we see the point of a prohibition or constraint. To do this is to understand why there should be a constraint on actions of the kind in question, and to understand the structure of the constraint itself (Dancy 2004, p. 135).

This is actually a straightforward way of construing the ordinary phenomenon – at most of the time we know *how* and *why* to apply a moral predicate without consciously knowing *that*. It is straightforward because it simply takes this phenomenon literally: the understanding of a moral principle is exactly to know *how* and know *why* because moral principles are never propositions but some points, a very metaphorical way of speaking. The drawback of this approach to moral principles is that it blurs the distinction between principle eliminativists and principlists. If to know a moral principle is to see the point of a moral concept, moral particularists can accept there being moral principles without difficulty, as seeing the points is exactly what they are preaching.

To distinguish proponents of moral principles from eliminativists, some further things about seeing the point should be said. For example, moral principlists can think of seeing the point as having a grasp on an incompletely specified principle. For example, J. D. Wallace takes moral knowledge to be seeing the point when he writes:

If all I know about truth-telling as a practical consideration is that we have a reason to tell the truth, I do not understand about truth-telling … One has a fuller or less knowledge and understanding of truth-telling as a practical consideration depending upon the extent of one's understanding of the importance of truth *in various areas of life*, why it is important, and how it is to be compared in importance with other considerations that pertain in these areas (Wallace 1996, p. 22).

Up to now, there is nothing in his words separating him from a principle eliminativist who also agree in knowing *how* and *why*. However, Wallace goes on to suggest that "we modify a norm or principle in the light of novel cases within an established practice, or as we move to a new practice, and we do this in such a way as to *preserve the point of* the original norm (Dancy 2004, p. 137)." The point of a moral concept or a morally

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relevant feature, for principlists, is an incompletely specified principle, which principle eliminativist, for sure, see as non-existent.

4. Practical Shape

Suppose in this section that 'unrestricted' holism of reasons is true, that is, given a certain feature there can be infinite suitable conditions affecting its normative valence. And this holism is also true of the moral field. Can we, then, ever be in a position to determine how things actually are in the world of reasons? In every case, there are numberless features that may enable or disable other features to be moral reasons, and the potential reasons can in turn determine the overall moral status of the case. As finite beings, how is it possible for us to have moral knowledge?

For sure, there may be cases where we happen to make correct moral judgements without examining all the potentially relevant features. But in those cases, we reach correct verdicts out of mere luck – the features that we have not yet investigated might have a normative influence on the cases – which disqualifies them to be instances of knowledge.

A convenient answer to this question is that moral reasons have salience and the overall moral status of a case has a practical shape. By virtue of discerning "the salience of those features that are salient in a situation, and the overall evaluative shape of the situation (Dancy 2004, p. 143)" we arrive at a moral conclusion that counts as an instance of moral knowledge.

Something problematic is obvious here. The superficial one is whether we really have the skill of moral discernment, while a deeper one is whether there are saliences and shapes for us to discern. The first needs not be answered once the second is rendered false, so here I focus on the latter.

Salience and shapes, as I understand them, have conceptual intimacy with perception, especially the sense of vision. For example, we can see the beauty of *Mona Lisa* and the salient features in it without making a detailed survey of its every feature. Being beautiful, in this case, is the aesthetic shape of *Mona Lisa*, of which we exactly have

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some discernment. What is ironic here is that the more we pay attention to its details the more likely we lose hold of its aesthetic value. Therefore, the idea of salience and shapes make sense at least in the field of visual arts.

Dancy intends the concepts of salience and shapes to cover more grounds. He believes that they are also at work in playing chess, when he says the competent chess player needs not "be aware of all the indefinitely ramifying contributions of the different aspects of the position in front of her in order to reach a responsible judgement about which move there is most reason to make (ibid., p. 142)." The player's judgement based on his identification of the salience and the shape, for me, is indeed responsible, in the sense that he cannot probably do better than that. However, to be responsible is one thing, while to be an instance of knowledge is another: the player, who has made a responsible judgement on what is the best move without examining the whole context, does not have the knowledge which move is the best.

There are still many areas that, I am afraid, do not have a shape at all. For these areas, the concept of salience often, accordingly, fails to apply. For instance, does love have a shape? Are behaviours out of love salient? For sure, there are many cases in the domain of romance that have 'shapes' because of which good women or good men are deeply trapped. There are also many behaviours or words that appear to be 'salient', attracting lovers' souls. Sadly, plenty of such 'shapes' and 'saliences' are merely instances of hooking or propositioning, for which good people deceived can only regret. They certainly do not supply us with love's knowledge. By contrast, only by adverting to life's details could Elizabeth Bennet know that she was loved by Mr. Darcy.

Whether moral features have salience and whether a moral case has a shape, if my talk about love is correct, depend on the appropriateness of paralleling morality with visual arts. For me, morality as a practical matter has more similarity to love, and thus, the concepts of a shape and salience are, unfortunately, not available there.

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VI. Conclusion

In the course of my discussion, I have given tentative verdicts to some debates between moral generalists and particularists, while leaving others unsettled. These unsettled debates are what I regard as vital to the fate of moral particularism. The last chapter of this thesis, then, serves to review these tricky issues and explore the direction to which they should bring moral particularism and the cause of ethics.

1. Analysing the Concept of a Reason

Moral particularism claims that reasons behave in a holistic way, and in order to sustain this thesis it further claims that there is a distinction between reason-giving features and the suitable conditions for a feature to be a reason. As I have explained in the chapter *Holism of Reasons*, both claims are really intuitively attractive. However, moral particularists tend to support their arguments solely by examples, which renders their viewpoints no solider than an air castle; because their opponents can similarly invoke counter-examples to deconsolidate their theoretical foundation.

In fact, the practice of adducing counter-examples is not uncommon among the arguments against holism of reasons. Besides, the instances of reasons holism do not close off alternative interpretations that count in favour of atomism of reasons. For example, when a reason holist says the consideration that I borrowed a book from you counts as no reason for giving you back in the case where you stole that book from the library in the first place, an atomist may, instead, claim that this consideration still counts as a reason but merely gets overridden by a weightier one – a reason to give the book directly back to the library. Likewise, an atomist may see what a holist claims to be a valence-switching reason as merely part of a reason that is normatively constant.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that atomists of reasons would interpret cases, as their holist counterparts do, in a way that involves a distinction between reasons and suitable conditions. Rather, they may just regard those ‘suitable conditions’ as overwhelmed reasons.

For sure, one way of interpreting a case can be intuitively more appealing than another, and it is possible that the way employed by holists, as a tendency, has this advantage

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over the one used by atomists. But this cannot be settled until we investigate an sufficient set of examples, which, unfortunately, has not been done by both parties. Even if it turns out that seeing reasons from a holistic perspective generally gains more support from our intuition, it only brings us little comfort. For we just know *that* reasons are holistic without know *why*.

It is hard to believe it is merely a brute fact that reasons behave in a holistic way. We may in the end admit that the concept of a reason is unreducible, that is, the property of being a reason cannot be reduced to other more basic properties; however, it seems inappropriate and unsatisfying to go on to claim that this concept is even unanalysable and that the phenomenology of reasons is unexplainable. Such a move would compromise too much to the unintelligibility of reality. By contrast, we seem to have the confidence that, at least, we are able to explain many things relating to the concept of a reason, such as its relational character and optionality (Scanlon 2014). Then, how can we insist that the way in which features function as reasons is such a brute fact that allows no explanation?

A promising way to understand the postulated fact that reasons behave in a holistic way is to analyse the necessary conditions for there to be a reason (please refer back to 4.4). For if the existence of a reason requires the presence of some other factor, a metaphysical distinction is assured between reasons and suitable conditions.

Now the problem is how far an analysis of the concept of a reason can reach. As I suggested earlier, if the analysis is full-scale in the sense that it not only reveals the necessary but also the sufficient conditions for there being a reason (or that it amounts to a reduction of being a reason), then the prospect of 'unrestricted' holism is dim. Because the background features shaping a reason would probably not expand infinitely, and as a result, a reason's context-dependency would be able to be codified into a hedged moral principle. If this is the case, those sympathetic with the project of eliminating moral principles from the moral landscape had better argue for their standpoint from another aspect.

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Judging from the discussion above, we see that the success of principle eliminativism in its current form relies on 'unrestricted' holism of reasons, that is, on whether the suitable conditions of a reason expand infinitely.

2. 'Unrestricted' Holism of Reasons

Just now, I claim that 'unrestricted' holism of reasons would sound suspicious were an analysis of the concept of a reason able to display the sufficient conditions for there to be a reason. But it is not necessarily so, as it is possible that there are lower-level suitable conditions for there being suitable conditions *infinitum*.

Taking as an example a revised version of Williams's reasons internalism. Suppose that there would be a reason for an agent to do an action *A* ***if*** the agent could reach a conclusion to *A* via a sound deliberative route from his current motivational set. Then, the reason for me to tell a truth depends on my counter-factual motivation under certain circumstances to do so. Since the motivation that matters here has to be the one I would have after a sound deliberative route, the consideration that I have an actual motivation to tell the truth cannot contribute to another consideration's being a reason unless I come to have it through a good deliberation. But there must be some relevant considerations making a deliberation good, e.g., I conducted reasoning without any error in facts. Therefore, there should be some lower-level suitable conditions for the consideration that I have a motivation right now to tell the truth to be an enabler. Moreover, these further suitable conditions may depend, for their normative relevance, on the presence or absence of some other considerations. It is not impossible for the list of the relevant factors to go *infinitum*.

As this is the case, a plausible account of the sufficient conditions for there being a reason cannot sentence 'unrestricted' holism to death, though it does cast some doubts on the latter's plausibility: we gain more confidence in there being a boundary delimiting other normatively relevant features if those shaping a reason has one. This should, as I see it, motivate both moral particularists and generalists to a deeper probe into the nature of reasons.

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However, we should not be overconfident, I suspect, in the extent to which an exploration of the nature of reasons can help us settle the controversy about 'unrestricted' holism of reasons. As I said in the previous chapter, although we do not have the intuition that reasons behave holistically in an unrestricted way, neither do we intuitively believe that the features relevant to something's being a reason is definitely delimited. In other words, the standpoint of either party between this controversy is intuitively rootless. As a consequence, only to a limited extent could it count in favour of 'unrestricted' holism were we unable to find some sufficient conditions for the existence of a reason. Likewise, even if there are indeed some sufficient conditions, it provides no guarantee that 'restricted' holism must be false.

What if the context-dependency of reasons is, in the end, not uncodifiable but just extremely complex? In other words, the suitable conditions for there to be a reason are not unrestricted but diverse to a large extent. According to such a holism, there are always enablers for enablers, disablers for disablers, enablers for disablers, etc., although they will eventually come to an end.

If this is the case, metaphysically speaking, there are necessarily hedged moral principles, namely, exceptionless moral generalisations qualified in their scope of validity. The general form of them would be: provided that C_a, C_b … C_x, *F* is a general reason to *A*. But this metaphysical payoff may bring us no epistemological and practical advantages, depending on how complex the context-dependency of a reason is. For example, if the features are extremely diverse that may affect the moral-reason-giving force of the consideration *C*, then it is highly possible that we know there must be a principle that *P* concerning C without ever knowing what that *P* is. We may deepen our understanding of it through moral practice and discourse, which amounts to moral progress; but it is too challenging for us to specify or even implicitly grasp that *P*.

Now suppose that we are epistemologically able to implicitly grasp that *P*, in the sense that we can always give a right answer whenever asked about whether a certain feature in a case is relevant to *C*'s normative valence although we cannot articulate the accurate formulation of that *P*. What benefits does this implicit grasp of that *P* bring to our moral practice? There is certainly no doubt that that *P* is too cumbersome to be employed as

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a premise in a practical syllogism. Thus, even if it is indeed helpful, it does not contribute to our moral practice in this way.

Some principlists may claim that the implicit grasp of that *P* is able to help us identify the relevant features there are in a case. However, what is it to implicitly grasp such a complicated principle that *P*, a principle that allows of no specification? It seems to me that there is nothing apart from the capacity of recognising relevant features case by case qualifying someone as knowing the principle that *P*. In other words, to implicitly grasp that *P* is to be able to identify morally relevant features case by case. It is, then, simply a tautology – and thus uninformative – to claim that the implicit grasp of that *P* is able to help us identify the relevant features there are in a case.

To sum up, a holism holding that the context-dependency of reasons is restricted but extremely complex, contrary to 'unrestricted' holism of reasons, is able to secure the existence of moral principles. It may gain us some foothold in moral epistemology, that is, we may be able to make progress in formulating those principles; nonetheless, such progress contributes barely anything to our practical matters.

3. Moral Justification and Explanation

Some people may regard as overly strong my claim that extremely complicated principles have no bearing on our moral practice. After all, moral justification and explanation, they believe, are in need of moral principles.

The worries about the possibility of moral justification and explanation in the absence of moral principles, in fact, arise mainly within the camp of moral particularists. Holton (2002), for example, proposes the notion of moral principles hedged by a 'That's it' clause, because he sees general principles as playing an indispensable role in moral justification. Similarly, McNaughton and Rawling (2000) invoke the idea of primary reasons – those reasons that do not change their normative polarity in terms of context – to make sense of the explanatory force of valence-switching reasons. Also, it is exactly because Little and Lance, as we see above, are not satisfied with Dancy's narrative account of moral explanation, they propose a model of defeasible moral generalisations.

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Even Dancy, who himself insists that the rationality of moral thought and judgement in no way depends on a suitable provision of moral principles, shows some concerns about how we can manage to justify our moral conclusions to others, when he says the followings:

The thought here again concerns what resources we have available to us, should someone disagree with our identification of a reason in the present case. It is all very well saying that different cases can be revealing, so that some progress can be made by considering a suitable range of other possibilities. But suppose that this does not work, either because the present case is so unusual that no such range can be found, or because our objector disagrees with us about them as strongly as she did about the first case (Dancy 2004, p. 159 - 60).

Moral explanation and justification, in my eyes, consist solely in the business of citing reasons.[21] In our ordinary practice of citing reasons, we seem to presuppose that there is always some kind of regularity underlying a reason invoked. When I say that you should eat that apple because you will enjoy its flavour, I seem to presuppose that the consideration that one will enjoy doing *A* is always a reason to do it *ceteris paribus*. When I point out the water's reaching 100℃ so as to explain why it is boiling, I seem to have the presupposition that water boils so long as it reaches 100℃ *all other things being equal*. The phenomenon of presupposing some regularity, if I am right, underlies moral particularists' collective anxiety, though Dancy's worry is a little bit different: he worries about how we can *persuade* each other without appealing to something shared in common.

Tackle Dancy's worry first. To justify something is one thing, while to persuade others of it is quite another. In court, a defense lawyer cites every piece of good evidence that counts in favour of the putative innocence of his client but it still depends on the judge whether to believe it or not. Likewise, one may invoke every good reason there is to support his moral decision without getting the other swayed: he just cannot recognise

[21] Although there are many occasions where justifying reasons are not the same with explanatory reasons, they coincide with one another from time to time. For example, suppose that there is an action that is not only right but also supererogation. Now the extension of those reasons that explain why it is right is smaller than that of the reasons counting in favour of it. By contrast, the explanatory reasons why it is supererogation is probably the same as the justifying reasons.

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the reasons presented because of prejudice or blindness. However, this is not a failure of the justifier but a mistake or even irrationality of her counterpart. Dancy's worry is in effect about moral persuasion, from which no moral theory is exempted, be it principled or unprincipled.

The phenomenon of presupposing a regularity of some kind is harder to deal with, if we believe that it really captures something about the nature of reasons. In sciences, it is a common sense that there being a reason presupposes a natural law underpinning that reason, and the whole scientific cause exactly consists in looking for such generalisations, such as physical laws, biological laws, social laws (the laws that explain social occurrences), etc. As holism of reasons intends to cover the ground of both theoretical and practical reasons, there is hardly any reason for moral particularists to reject their parallel in this respect – it is *ad hoc* to claim the autonomy of ethics here in order to cut off the connection between a moral reason and a moral regularity.

Seeing from the above, moral principlists, at least, have an upper hand over eliminativists in explaining the theoretical presupposition of the claim of a reason, although it does not guarantee that there must be moral principles because our presupposition, for sure, may be in error. But this does not provide any evidence that moral principles, if there is any, must be compact. Many (explanatory) natural and social laws, including biological, psychological and political generalisations, are strictly and heavily qualified, so why should moral laws not be the same? If we have been attracted by holism of reasons because of the recognition that moral life is inherently complex, as those moral particularists have done, it is natural for us to believe that moral laws or principles are all the same strictly and heavily qualified.

In the last section of my thesis, I am exactly about to discuss the way to proceed with ethics if moral life is inherently complex.

4. Navigation Around Moral Life

One factor contributing to our obsession with a novel is the suspense in its storyline. A good novel not only contains a rich supplement of suspense but also eventually uncovers it from an omniscient perspective, which would finally amaze its readers.

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Following its storyline, readers make moral judgements on its characters and timely correct them in the wake of the ups and downs of the plots. The progression in a novel's narrative helps readers with such a process by virtue of revealing further information, based on which they know more events that have happened, interpret them in a different light and consequently modify moral judgements previous made.

Those, who have carefully read *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*, can hardly but find that it is wrong for Kang Yang *杨康* to set free Honglie Wanyan *完颜洪烈* in the abandoned temple. But before coming to such a judgement from an omniscient perspective, readers tend to have a hard time when the relevant information is sparse. Despite that they recognise that there is some reason why it is wrong for Kang to kill the one who made his natural parents suicide – Wanyan, they see the consideration that Wanyan treated Kang as his real son for 18 years – Wanyan was even willing to sacrifice himself for saving Kang's life from a tiger – as a reason that makes Kang' setting him free pro tanto right. However, later they no longer see this consideration as a right-making reason, due to the further uncovered detail that he set Wanyan free solely for high official positions and riches. Apart from this plot, there is still much more suspense in this novel, which reflects the complexity of morality.

Our ordinary moral life, although way more insipid than the ethical world depicted by Jin Yong's fiction, is no less intricate than the latter. As protagonists of our own narratives, we have no way to see their moral landscape from a panoramic view. Worse still, as readers, we are able to know the whole (moral) context settled by an author for us, as protagonists we are doomed to be blind to plenty of relevant details. We cannot but only gather information piece by piece in order to interpret events appropriately and make corresponding moral judgements. We believe something is the case for some reasons, and we believe something ought to be in a way based on reasonable beliefs. Sometimes we make mistakes in holding false beliefs because of carelessness, lack of factual information or errors in reasoning. Sometimes we make poor moral judgements, thanks to false beliefs, bad reasoning or lack of moral discernibility.

What I have said are no more than some platitudes. And it has yet to concern the actual role of moral principles in our moral practice, to which I now turn.

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Holism of reasons, as is its greatest merit, represents to us how complex moral life is. This is what people can feel when they read a good novel, but be unwilling to accept when it comes to their daily life. How much more efforts have to be made by them in order to navigate properly around moral life, if it is really so intricate that escapes the grip of brief principles? How much more careful and sensible should moral agents and judges be for them to be seen as responsible? Laziness and fluke mind motivate people to pretend that moral problems in reality can always be dealt with at ease, and blind them to what they always see in reading a good novel. They prefer to argue with their fellow beings in what they cursorily take as right or wrong than to double-check their own judgements. They prefer to cling to unsolvable disagreements about moral principles than making concerted efforts by communication and mutual understanding to investigate concrete cases patiently. If that is how people conduct their moral practice, can the fact that moral principles, **which are such that they exemplify compatibility with the complex structure of moral life**, exist make it any better? Not really. A crutch may be of some use to the crippled, but it is definitely useless to someone who himself chooses not to walk, not to mention that these moral principles *qua* standards are too cumbersome to be put into practice.

But imagine human beings, as moral agents or judges, are able to do more better than this in making moral decisions and judgements. In each moral case they face, they are willing to survey enough pieces of information with sufficient attention. Moreover, they are able to distinguish which is a fact from which is not, avoiding wishful thinking. Not only do they endorse factual beliefs based on good evidence, but they also try hard to identify moral reasons on the basis of these beliefs as well as deliberately balance them. Finally, they make moral judgements in a cautious way that recognises them as falsity-apt: people admit that they may have omitted some significant details present in a case, that they may have committed logical mistakes, that they may have failed to interpret events in a veritable way, that they may have consciously denied moral reasons there in fact are, and so on and so forth. To sum up, imagine the situation where human beings are willing to make moral decisions with *responsibility*. What use, then, do moral principles have in such a case?

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On one hand, I believe that they are somewhat useful, in the sense that people would have the conviction that they are making moral progress of some sort when they work shoulder to shoulder cautiously in solving every moral dilemma: they can be convinced that they are situated in a collective search of general moral truths. However, on the other hand, they are, to a large extent, useless. As readers of a good novel holding diverse conceptions of general moral principles, we need not share a set of moral generalisations to converge on a certain judgement. We just read the fiction carefully, afraid of omitting even a negligible detail, and then naturally come to a moral agreement. As protagonists of our own moral stories, all the same, the existence of moral principles adds nothing more and nothing less to our good moral practice than the conviction that there are general moral truths to which we can get closer by doing well in every particular case.

Rather than showing that there are no moral principles or that these principles are practically useless, the plausibility of reasons holism, by way of revealing the inherent intricacy of moral life, indicates another direction for moral particularists to go. *Principle Abstinence* is quite critical of tackling concrete moral cases in a principled way; but it has not depicted an alternative at great length, which renders this position itself no more than a lip-service. The new avenue for moral particularists with an emphasis on practical matters to go, then, is to give an informative image of how to get moral verdicts right case by case, that is, how to carry out practical reasoning properly.[22]

The supposed moral complexity, I believe, also has some implication for the cause of ethics. In the history of moral theory, philosophers tend to give disproportionate efforts to discover moral principles. Given how complicated moral life is, I am afraid, such efforts are unfortunately wrong-headed. Instead, moral-theoretic thinking should occupy itself with concrete cases. A scholar, working in the field of normative ethics, should bring into light the information he regards as relevant. He should, moreover, interpret for the public those events that are in themselves ambiguous. Also, he must appeal to the best natural and social sciences of his time to predict consequences as well

[22] It seems to me that the new book of Dancy, *Practical Shape: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (2018), shows the same concern.

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as side-effects of an occurrence. Finally, he ought to exhibit what he takes to be the moral reasons there are in a case and the putatively proper way of balancing them. All in all, a moral philosopher should take the responsibility in every important happening to lead the folks into well-informed and reasonable moral discourse, which in the end, if there are moral principles, contributes to humanity's moral progress.

Briefly, whether moral principles *qua* standards exist in fact does not matter, at least with regard to our day-to-day moral practice. What really matters is the right way of making particular moral judgements, and this should be the main focus of moral particularism and even the whole enterprise of moral philosophy.

The concern motivating me to compose a thesis on moral particularism is the vast number of moral disagreements and controversies present in our society. However, it seems to me that the arguments offered by this doctrine are far from sufficient to sustain that claim that there are no true moral principles – instead, we seem to have some reason to believe that there are in fact general moral truths – and neither does this claim track the root cause of moral conflicts. Careful readers of a good novel tend to share the same evaluative view on its main characters by virtue of their good reading habits, and likewise, conscientious human beings are able to reach a moral consensus by way of good practical reasoning, no matter whether there are true moral principles or not. Many good habits are vital to good moral judgement in every particular case, including but not limited to: painstakingly gathering non-moral information; keeping alert to prejudice, arrogance and fanaticism; employing the best methods we have to construe the possible causes and effects of an event; communicating patiently with those who initially disagree with oneself; avoiding hasty moral decisions. If there are, in effect, general moral truths, unremitting cultivation and exemplification of these dispositions are capable of bringing humanity closer to them. Here, I have to confess that I exaggerated a little bit when I claimed in Preface that morality does more harm than good. In fact, those tragedies were never brought about by morality itself but by the lack of epistemological virtues and proper moral cultivation.

Unfortunately, to depict a fuller picture of appropriate practical reasoning and to investigate the right way of moral education exceed far beyond the scope of a master thesis. I wishes I could manage to do that in the near future.

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