

# NARRATIVE AND JUSTIFICATION IN MORAL PARTICULARISM

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*Abstract:* In this paper I will discuss the problem of justification in moral particularism. The first part is concerned with Jonathan Dancy's account of justification, which is a narrative one. To justify one's choice is to present a persuasive description of the context in a narrative fashion, not to subordinate singular cases to universal rules. Since it dismisses arguments and employs persuasiveness, this view seems irrational, so the second part of my paper will consist of a personal reconstruction and reformulation of Dancy's account that will aim at defending particularist justification from being labeled as "irrational".

*Keywords:* particularism, generalism, justification, moral reasons, ethical decision, narrativism, salient features, shape of situation.

How does a moral person look? Is it a person who holds a set of firm principles and knows how to apply them? Or is it a person who manages to take each and every time a moral decision without depending on a wide range of moral rules? Could morality be codified in a set of universal principles? Or moral life is too complex to be governed by strict rules?

This sort of questions has taken a central place in the contemporary ethical debates, splitting analytical moral philosophy into two rival perspectives: ethical generalism and ethical particularism. The generalist view is not a novel product on the market of ethical ideas. It is nothing else but the traditional perspective according to which morality could and should be structured by ethical principles. In the past, it was advocated by authors like Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and David Ross. Nowadays it is endorsed by all those authors who elaborate and support various ethical theories and decision making procedures and by other authors who don't necessary hold an articulated moral theory, but believe that particularism is an error.

What is particularism and what is its place in the present landscape of ethical debate? Moral particularism is a view elaborated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, advanced by some philosophers like John McDowell, David McNaughton and Jonathan Dancy. Each of them has some slightly personal version of particularism. But what unites all of them is the claim that there are no defensible universal moral rules and that moral features change their moral valence from case to case (McDowell 1979, 336; Dancy 1983, 530; Jackson, Pettit & Smith 2000; McNaughton 1988, 62). In other words, an action may be right in one case, wrong in another and morally neutral in a third case. This belief, named the thesis of holism in the theory of reasons, is entailing a series of other ethical judgments and theoretical effects. Thus, the supporters of particularism consider that morality is uncodifiable, i.e. the plurality of ethical phenomena can't be regulated by general standards and procedures (Dancy 1999, 144). That is why moral education and moral knowledge cannot be assimilated from manuals or codes of ethic, but learned from daily practice of decisions. The moral person is an experienced person, a person who pays great attention to particular details of ethical cases, a person who believes that every situation has an irreducible moral profile. Therefore, the knowledge, the explanation and the justification of morality have to be contextual. Consequently, the explanative and justifying roles of rules the traditional ethical principles are redistributed to particular moral judgments, to moral perspicacity, rules of thumb, life experience, character and justifying narratives. Such elements offer a new perspective about ethical justification. The traditional way of justifying a moral decision is to subordinate it to one or several

ethical principles. Since particularists don't believe in moral principles – whether these are strictly universal or only *prima facie* – the aspect of ethical justification will be discussed in very different terms. As we will see, the problem of justification will be discussed in terms of narrative justification. It's been a couple of decades since many humanities entered a so called *narrativist turn* (For further information, see Kreiswirth 1992, 640). But how could moral truth accommodate with telling stories? I will try to give an answer in the following.

In this paper I will discuss the problem of justification in the works of Jonathan Dancy, the most prominent voice of contemporary moral particularism. His account of justification is a narrative one, i.e. one which presents moral justification as a 'narrative' or a 'story'. Here, a narrative must be understood as a depiction whose purpose is meeting the assent of others. In the first chapter of my paper I will present Dancy's account of moral justification. Dancy argues that the role of moral justification is not to subordinate cases to rules, but to elaborate convincing narratives. Narratives are depictions of reality whose purpose is of making the others see things in the same light as oneself. This kind of moral justification seems to neglect or even to get rid of the traditional role arguments play in the ethical debate, making particularism vulnerable to the accusation of irrationalism. The kind of accusation I have in mind sounds like this: if particularist justification consists of telling stories, than any story that sounds appealing might count as a rational justification. But telling a story is a matter of seduction, not of reasoning. Thus, morality becomes an activity of charming others, not of giving the right arguments. So particularist ethics is irrational. That is why, in the second chapter of my paper, I will make my own reconstruction of particularist justification. My reconstruction is meant to avoid these irrationalism allegations; it has Dancy's texts as a standpoint, but contains several other additions, clarifications and reconfigurations of the particularist's ideas. In my opinion, Dancy's account of justification is quite ambiguous. For an analytic philosopher, Dancy makes too many hints, uses too many metaphors and analogies and leaves a lot of unexplained concepts and unfinished ideas. My strategy has two steps which will correspond to the two sections of my paper. In the first section, which is shorter than the second one, I will resume Dancy's ideas. In the second section, I will try

first to make a reconstruction of his argument in which I want to explain and clarify some of his notions, trying not to move away from his ideas. Further on in this second section, I will modify some parts of his argument in order to make it more plausible. The plausibility I have in my mind refers to the rationality of particularist justification. As I've already stated, the problem of justification might be charged of irrationalism. Once more, my aim is to see if we could understand contextual and narrative justification as a rational endeavor. At the end of this paper, I hope that narrative justification will become clearer and more plausible.

### **1. Dancy's Account of Justification**

In this section, I will introduce Dancy's idea of moral justification. The presentation I am going to make in this first part is deliberately uncritical, following that throughout the next chapter I will emphasize and analyze the critiques which may be laid down to this account. Dancy's view is a view enforced by narrativism. Here's what the author says:

“To justify one's choice is to give the reasons one sees for making it, and to give those reasons is just to lay out how one sees the situation, starting in the right place and going on to display the various salient features in the right way; to do this is to fill in the moral horizon. In giving reasons one is not *arguing* for one's way of seeing the situation. One is rather appealing to others to see it the way one sees it oneself and the appeal consists in laying out that way as persuasively as one can. The persuasiveness here is the persuasiveness of narrative: an internal coherence in the account that compels assent. We succeed in our aim when our story sounds right. Moral justification is therefore not subsumptive in nature, but narrative.” (Dancy 1993, 113)

A narrative, according to Dancy, is a depiction of a certain situation from a specific point of view. This depiction is not a mere inventory of the non-moral features which compile a particular situation. Such a depiction must not contain all the elements of a situation, but only the morally relevant ones. The description is a “narrative” or a “story” about what does that situation look like in the eyes of a moral agent.

When a father, for example, tells his son not to pick flowers from the neighbor’s yard, because such an action will be wrong, the father’s speech must not be seen as a statement through which an action is subordinate to the rule “Stealing is wrong”. Dancy argues that such a speech must be seen as a pointing of the most salient feature of the situation (that the flowers belong to someone else), feature which, in this particular context, offers the child a sufficient reason not to commit the action of picking those flowers up (Dancy 1993, 113). Even if the parent used the imperative utterance “Stealing is wrong”, this must not be taken as a subsumptive judgment. Rather, he reminds his son about that type of salience which might have the fact that an action is an act of stealing (113-114). (For the moment, Dancy’s argument may seem extremely provocative and questionable, but I will return later to these issues<sup>1</sup>.)

Dancy considers that, for better understanding what a narrative justification means, a good analogy might be one between the ethical description of a situation and the esthetical description of a building. Suppose I want to explain someone else how I see a building lying in front of both of us. Not a single genuine description will start, for example, from the left side of the building and pass to the right side enumerating all the details of the building. Dancy claims that this wouldn’t even be a description, but a mere list of properties, and such a list is different from a description. In a genuine description, the properties don’t have a “flat profile”; the description has a certain *shape* revealed by the

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of moral utterances as non-subsumptive judgements may seem questionable, because in the history of modern philosophy, or at least in the history of modern ethics, the statements that express interdictions and obligations are considered normative or moral, because it is supposed that every agent who uses such utterances has in mind general standards which circumscribe those interdictions and obligations. These general standards function like a major premise of a syllogism. The fact of picking flowers from the neighbor’s garden functions like a minor premise. So the utterance “Stealing is wrong” is regarded as the conclusion of the syllogism. This is an idea criticized by moral particularism.

order in which the properties are mentioned. This order is the narrative structure of the description (112-113).

This particularist version of justification regards persuasiveness as having a crucial role in moral thinking. But where does this centrality of persuasiveness, a feature more suitable for advertising industry than philosophical discourse, come from? Dancy admits that the assumption lying behind his thought is that the best way to bring over those who are in moral error is not to use abstract principles, but instead to present them the right perspective in detail, relying not on argumentability, but on attractiveness (114). (This concept seems a strange concept. What kind of attractiveness does Dancy has in mind. He makes his analogy with an aesthetical description of a building so we may assume that he has in mind an aesthetical attractiveness. I will later come back to this concept)

But the question which comes along with this version of justification is the following: how could ethics remain a rational enterprise if its strength lies in persuasion, not in the argument? I will later return to this aspect. Anyway, at this point, Dancy introduces a new concept of justifying reason. He states that the type of rationality promoted by narrative approach isn't the rationality of arguments, but a type of rationality based on "the ability to hear and appreciate a story"<sup>2</sup>. Dancy holds that generalist ethics relies on a concept of rationality that is essentially comparative. For example, the concept of moral choice available for a utilitarian is a concept of moral choice based on the balance between probable outcomes of different courses of action<sup>3</sup>. Choosing an action over another is rational if the chosen action promises more pleasure than the other. Dancy claims that, for a utilitarian, no action is rational in itself, because rationality is rooted in comparison<sup>4</sup>. On

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. This type of rationality may seem strange. How could ethics engage a type of rationality which is based on this "the ability to hear and appreciate a story"? In the second section of my paper, I will try to clarify that being able to hear and appreciate a story means being able to comprehend not only the morally relevant details of a context, but also the general form of a case or, as Dancy puts it, to the shape of a situation.

<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, characterizing rationality in moral generalism by the concept of comparison is not suitable for Kantian ethics. In Kant's works, we can see that the thing at stake is not comparing different courses of action, but obeying a universal rule. Nevertheless, if we really want to see Kantian rationality as a comparative one, we'll have to work with another definition of the concept of comparison. In this case, we won't speak about comparing different courses of action, but comparing a maxim with a universal principle.

<sup>4</sup> I think that Dancy doesn't make the distinction between simple act-utilitarianism and multilevel act-utilitarianism. According to the first, selecting the right action is essentially a comparative endeavor,

the other hand, the narrativist approach – though not suspicious about the comparative action of reason – affirms that the central role of moral reasoning is finding *a view of the situation*. This view has an internal structure which is persuasive in the same way a narrative is (114). (For the moment, this sort of claims Dancy is making may seem very obscure, but in the second section I will try to make it clear.)

This way of stressing the importance of persuasiveness seems to bring Dancy along the line with Ayerian emotivism, a metaethical theory that regards ethics as a mere expressive speech. For A. J. Ayer (1956, 103), the moral statements can be reduced to “exhortation of moral values”, that “are not propositions at all, but exclamations or commands which are designed to provoke the reader to action of a certain sort”. But, in Dancy’s work, the way in which a narrative is persuasive differs from the way a sermonizing discourse or theatrical performances are persuasive<sup>5</sup> (i.e. the way which they are designed only to determine an emotion or an action). For him, the essential characteristic of a moral story is neither the rhetorical ability, nor the expressive virtue of one’s rant, but the internal coherence of a situation. To assess a narrative is to assess its internal coherence (Dancy 1993, 114).

## 2. Narrativist Justification - A Reconstruction Proposal

By the importance Dancy gives to the concept of persuasiveness and by characterizing particularist justification as a narrative one, the author leaves the impression that he is

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because the decision procedure is the same as the criterion of morality. According to this type of utilitarianism, if I have to chose between two actions,  $x$  and  $y$ , I must weigh the probable pleasure quantum of both actions, make balance between pleasure and pain and opt for the action which has the higher probability of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. According to multilevel act-utilitarianism, the criterion of morality isn’t the same thing with the decision-making procedure. The first one is maximizing happiness. The second is observing the current rules within a society. This sort of utilitarianism has two different procedures. The first and the most common procedure is following the socially approved conduct (because this conduct was historically selected through the utilitarian principle). Only the second procedure requires the actual applying of the *felicific calculus*. Most of the time, we apply the first procedures, we don’t lose time making complex calculations. We act like Kantians, in respect to an objective rule. But, faced with a dilemma or a normative void, we apply the utilitarian principle.

<sup>5</sup> I will argue in the next chapter why Dancy’s idea of persuasiveness as the central piece of moral justification must not be understood as a pleading for expressivity and rhetorical efficiency.

more of a postmodern ironist or a literary critic disguised as a theorist rather than a professional moral philosopher. Thus he looks more like a representative of the hermeneutic tradition than of the analytical one. Dancy's account of justification left such an impression to Robert Piercey, for instance, who – in his book *The Uses of Past from Heidegger to Rorty* (2009 37-38) – regards Dancy as a follower of Richard Rorty. For Piercey, the concept of justifying narrative proposed by Dancy, belongs to the conceptual family of the Rortyan discourse. Piercey sees particularist justification as a reconfiguration of the Rortyan theory of redescriptions and vocabularies. From this point of view particularist justification is not a rational-argumentative endeavor, but a “Gestalt shift”. I think this point of view is inappropriate because Dancy's discourse is as technical as it can be, focused on conceptual investigation and elaboration of arguments. His texts have neither the metaphorical flavor of hermeneutics, nor the paradoxical burst of postmodern philosophy, but the technical and ‘scientific’ character of analytic philosophy. He is not an advocate of transforming philosophy in a “literary genre” or an apostle of relinquishing arguments.

Nevertheless, reading Dancy's pages about justification leaves you with the opposite feeling. He explicitly talks about the crucial importance of persuasiveness, minimizing the role of arguments in his new type of rationality which he develops. But one couldn't say Dancy is an irrational thinker. Still, one might say Dancy employs a sort of ambiguity when he develops his account of justification. At a first reading, Dancy seems a philosopher who abandons the validity of ethical reasoning in favor of the efficacy of moral exhortation. A hasty conclusion which can be drawn is that ethical justification could take the form of a commercial ad or a PR campaign whose only purpose would be gaining great market shares. In other words, if we want to justify abortion is wrong, we have to abandon the arguments and create a touching ad with a baby who tries to reach his mother's hand while a voice in the background tells us about the sacredness of life. I think this would be a fake conclusion.

This is why, in the following, I will try to reconstruct the particularist's thoughts in a more clear and rigorous way. I mention that, though the support of my reconstruction is



offered mainly by Dancy's considerations, a part of the following exposure doesn't have explicit backing in Dancy's texts. The reason my enterprise has a rather interpretative than an expository-explanatory fashion is that, lacking such an 'interpretation', the particularist justification would risk to be perceived as a way of seduction, not as a rational demarche.

The particularist assumption is that an action is not an isolated element, but a piece within a context. For instance, the act of promising something is not an individual element which can be analyzed under the moral evaluation microscope, outside the environment within which it has occurred. The promise was made by someone, was addressed to someone else, and this fact took place in certain circumstances. In the same way, the act of fulfilling a promise takes place in an environment of some particular circumstances. Fulfilling the promise, this element, is part and parcel of a whole. This whole is named "situation", "case" or "context". Dancy states that every situation has a shape (Dancy 1993, 112). This means that each situation has a certain configuration in the sense that: a) the constitutive features have a certain profile; and b) there is a certain disposition or lay out in the general picture of the situation. There are some elements or features which are central; and others which are peripheral. Dancy calls the first ones "salient features", and the second ones "non-salient features". Here Dancy uses a geographical metaphor and says the non-salient features are in a valley or a depression and the salient features are sitting on peaks or tops of various heights according to their various saliencies (112). To illustrate, I will take the case of a promise fulfillment. Let's suppose I promise my friend X that I'll pay him a visit one night to see the ballgame together. In the ballgame's night, another friend of mine, let's call him Y, asks me to take him to the hospital because he has had an accident. In this situation, some features like the kind of sport we were supposed to watch or the channel that broadcasts the game are non-salient features. These sorts of features are situated in the valley, in the depression. At a higher altitude we find some relevant features, like the promise I'd made to X or Y's the need for medical care.

I think Dancy uses this metaphor of altitude in order to suggest that moral relevance is a matter of visibility, of common transparency, not a matter of esoteric perception. However, I think Dancy's metaphor doesn't serve well the particularist

argumentation. The low altitude of a valley and the high altitude of a mountain are intrinsic properties of the valley and the mountain. But this analogy doesn't leave room for the role of practical reason and its activity of identifying the salience in contexts. Moreover this analogy doesn't make clear the concept of narrative order that I will present further on. I think that a more suitable analogy would be between a situation and a picture<sup>6</sup>. Let's think of Michelangelo's famous picture "The Creation of Adam". On the left side of the picture a completely naked young man (Adam) lies on a hill with his hand outstretched at an elderly white-bearded man (God) wrapped in a swirling cloak and surrounded by children and teens (angels). As we see the picture, we understand that the elder and the young are the central characters and the children and the teens are the secondary ones.

Dancy claims that the shape of a situation can be grasped by a description. There are at least two types of description. One is an inventory-list-description, an index of the non-moral features present in the situation. The other is a display of those features in a certain order. The best description is not an array of elements of the situation, but – as Dancy reminds – a description in which the elements are specified in a particular order (113). Such a description is called a "narrative". The order in which the elements are mentioned must reflect the configuration or the shape of the situation. This means to identify the salient features of the situation and the relation between them. In Michelangelo's picture the description wouldn't be an enumeration of the elements (a young man, a hill, an elderly man, a cloak etc.), but a display of them in an order that would make visible the salience of certain features and the relation between them. The only description that could do this would be a narrative. In my example with the promise, the description wouldn't be a register of features (friend X, ballgame, friend Y, accident etc.), but the proper description would have a narrative dimension that could stress the most important features. This would be the story that could reveal the overwhelming relevance of helping Y instead of watching the ball with X). These features are the reasons (the specific reasons of this particular case) in virtue of which an ethical decision can be made.

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<sup>6</sup> Dancy makes an analogy with a building but he doesn't get into details. I will use the analogy with a picture because I think it's more intuitive.

To this point, my reconstruction is based on certain suggestions and affirmations made by Dancy. From here now, my analysis will have an interpretative character as I will try more than to elucidate some ambiguous or insufficiently explained concepts. At this point, I will try to fill in some of the blanks Dancy left in his argumentation. To say so, I will make not only a reconstruction, but a construction as well. I will start from several ambiguous concepts used by Dancy and I will try to put them together in what I think it would be more a satisfying way. Dancy has several unexplained concepts like “internal coherence”, “shape of the situation”, “persuasiveness”. I will take these concepts and try to adapt them to fit my view of narrative justification. I will start with the concept of “internal coherence”. Although Dancy doesn’t enter into details about the meaning of this concept, thus leaving room for unfortunate interpretations, I think we could make a plausible idea about what internal coherence of a situation is. Understood as a mere compatibility between the elements of a story, the term of “coherence” is misleading. From this point of view any monstrosity could be packed in a seductive story, a narrative in which all the elements are compatible. If we understand the internal coherence this way, the Nazi narrative could be seen as compatible and, consequently, rational and justifiable in particularistic terms. (Back in the ’30s, when Hitler won the elections for the position of Chancellor of Germany, his ideas had been meeting a major assent among the Germans. The Nazi doctrine seemed to be perfectly coherent to the population and Hitler was appraised like the savior of Germany. What Hitler had given to his people was a very attractive narrative<sup>7</sup>, one that had had met the consent of others.) I don’t think that this is what Dancy has in mind; or rather I don’t think that this is what we should have in mind when we read about narrative justification. I think we must assume that a given context has a given internal coherence as well. I believe that, when Dancy speaks about the “shape” of the situation, another insufficiently explained concept – the concept of “shape” refers to the internal coherence of the situation, i.e. to the relations between the features of the situation. Having in mind Michelangelo’s work, the internal coherence of the picture refers to the layout, the size, the height, the gestures etc. of the characters which the painter is suggesting in his representation. The internal coherence would be, in other

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<sup>7</sup> For a very interesting analysis of the narrative structure of Nazism, see Bearman, & Stovel.2000, 69-90.

words, those elements and relations between elements which make that painting the representation of a scene<sup>8</sup>. When I look at the picture, I don't see an arbitrary cluster of children, teenagers, a man, an elder. What I see is a scene. When I think about the accident case, I don't have in mind a bundle of disparate features like a promise, a friend, a ballgame, an accident, another friend. What I see is an ethical context, namely a situation with a given internal coherence. I suppose that what Dancy has in mind when he talks about the internal coherence of a narrative is the way in which the story manages to grasp the shape or the internal coherence of the situation. There is a relation of adequacy between the narrative and the situation. Each of them has an internal coherence; and a successful moral justification reveals the adequacy between the internal coherence of a narrative and the internal coherence of a situation. To grasp the structure of a context coherently is to see the interplay between the non-moral features of the situation and the manner in which this interaction makes a feature a morally relevant one. To illustrate, let's think of our previous case. In this case, the morally relevant feature is the feature of Y's suffering. A narrative is coherent to the extent it grasps the internal coherence of a situation. In our example, a narrative is coherent as long as it emphasizes Y's suffering and the moral significance of his pain that overwhelms the moral significance of my promise promise to X.

But why didn't Dancy formulate the problem this way? I think Dancy kept away from such an exposure of moral rationality because such a conception may easily be conflated with a doctrine of correspondence. The relation of adequacy between cases and narratives could have been conflated with a relation of correspondence. And assuming such an epistemological theory would have employed three types of risks. The first risk would have been that narrative justification had appeared as very strange mixture between two opposite theories, correspondence theory and coherence theory. The second risk would have been the import of the correspondence theory of truth in ethics, which would have lead to the naturalization of moral properties. But the moral properties are, for the

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<sup>8</sup> My analogy is obviously suitable for "traditional" painting. In the case of cubist painting, of non-figurative art, the analogy between painting and justification is difficult to be upheld, though I personally think that would be valid even in the complex case of some non-figurative pictures. But, for the present account, I stay with the traditional art.

generalists and particularists both, essentially normative properties, i.e. evaluative properties which supervene<sup>9</sup> on non-evaluative properties. The third risk would have been to admit that the salience of a narrative element corresponds to a standard salience of a feature of the situation. Namely he would have risk to admit that the ethical relevance the promise or the suffering have in the narrative must have a standard correspondent in the factual world. But this would have been an adherence to a version of invariability of the reasons, this being a generalist thesis. According to Dancy, a feature gains its relevance only in a specific context which has a specific shape or internal coherence. And the purpose of the narrative is to grasp the internal coherence of the situation, that is to say the role of the narrative is to identify the salient features.

Returning to my reconstruction, another misleading concept of Dancy is that of “persuasion” or “persuasiveness”. Dancy states that a narrative must be persuasive (Dancy 1993, 113). The first impression one could make is that the cardinal virtue of a narrative is expressiveness and the conclusion would be that ethics could be annexed to rhetoric or literary criticism. But taking into account of his philosophical style and the objectives of his investigation, it would be more than bizarre that an author like him conflated philosophy with a literary discourse or with propaganda. Dancy claims that the virtue of a description is “its narrative persuasiveness: an internal coherence an internal coherence in the account that compels assent” (113). To be persuasive is to describe coherently a situation, which means to identify the way in which the interplay between the elements of a situation determines the occurrence of a morally relevant feature. In our example, to be persuasive is to tell the story in a way which the internal coherence of the case shed a light upon Y’s suffering. The narrative must have an internal coherence that reveals how my friend’s pain becomes a central element of the situation and my promise to X becomes a peripheral one. Such a narrative must compel assent of others. And when Dancy says that this description must “compel assent”, I don’t think he refers to influence the others at any

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<sup>9</sup> Dancy doesn’t speak of supervenience. He uses the term “resultance”, claiming it is a difference between supervenience and resultance, as the first one has a “larger base” than the second one, and is more suitable for generalist theories. See Dancy 2004, 85-86. I think this difference is not of great importance and they are basically the same, but I won’t prove it here as my purpose is talking about justification, not about supervenience.

cost, but to provide public transparency for the moral verdict. When, for instance, we describe the case of broken promise, the persuasion doesn't consist of speech's eloquence, but of coherent exposing the whole context in which the promise was broken. And a coherent exposure envisages certain standards of acceptance and transparency which are not private, but public. What I want to say is that this narrative has to sound right not only to me or to a small number of people, but to everyone who is in good faith and understand the situation. And that is the reason why persuasiveness doesn't exclude arguments. In the case discussed here, my persuasive narrative about helping Y instead of keeping company to Y is a story that contains observable facts, deductive arguments and inductive ones. Narrative persuasiveness is primarily the right description of a situation, but this also means that I can appeal to facts in order to support my claims, that I can use inductive arguments to reach probable truths, and to allow some deductive arguments in order to establish conclusions that are certain.

But why Dancy says that the rationality he pleads for is not an argumentative one? I think that when Dancy talks about arguments, he has in mind a special type of deductive inferences, namely moral syllogisms. The particularist justifying rationality abandons moral syllogisms because they claim that contextual justification is not a subsumptive one. The arguments which Dancy refute are those which have the form: if a set of actions M have the moral property P, and  $x$  is a member of set M, then  $x$  has the moral property P.

I conclude this paper by resuming my argument. Being particularist, Dancy doesn't think an ethical decision can be made by subordinating a case to a universal principle, but only by regarding the whole ensemble an action is part of. This means paying attention to most of the features of a situation and to the relations between them in order to identify the salient feature or features. Those salient features will constitute the reason in virtue of which we may give a moral verdict. To justify this verdict, we have to offer a persuasive narrative, i.e. one whose internal coherence must reflect the internal coherence of the situation. In this narrative, the arguments – except normative deduction – shouldn't be excluded, because they may contribute in emphasizing the morally relevant feature. The narrative will be persuasive to the extent it meets a large social assent.

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