



Dominikus Sukristiono

Debunking Moral Generalism

New Vindications of Moral Particularism

LIT

Dominikus Sukristiono
Debunking Moral Generalism

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preliminary I: Thematic Introduction

These following questions may strike us: Should doctors always keep all the information secret about their patients? Should politicians always tell the truth? Is killing always wrong? Is war never morally justified? Should friends always keep their promises? Let us consider briefly the very last question. If we promise to do something for our friends, it seems natural to think or feel that any time we promise to do something for our friends, we *should always* keep that promise. The reason behind this thought or feeling is, perhaps, that our relationship with one another, when it comes to making promises (and surely with regard to the doctor–patient or other kinds of relationship), should be built on the principle that “promises must be kept” (or “doctors should always keep information secret about patients from those who are not immediately involved” or “people should always tell the truth”). These principles seem to guarantee trustworthiness among us. But we know from our life experiences that there are situations in which it is best not to keep that promise or that, in a particular situation, these principles are irrelevant, or even trustworthiness should be sacrificed. Even if we know that there are situations in which we *should not* adhere to these principles, still, the appeal to principle is ubiquitous. In the context of communication, we hope that people will always tell the truth because we assume that a successful relationship is built on the principle that “one ought to tell the truth,” even though we know that there are situations where it is best not to tell the truth. In the context of our relationship to the needy, we feel or believe that “one ought to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves,” even though we know there are situations where we are not obliged to help them. These phenomena that we have just outlined are usual but striking. On the one hand, our daily moral experience seems to be shaped by moral principles upon which we build trust, love, and respect for one another. However, on the other hand, our experiences call into question whether we should always adhere to these principles to become moral persons (or, at the very least, to perform moral actions) or even whether these principles are necessary.

Moral principles are not only common to our daily moral practice but are also frequently referred to and even aimed at by moral philosophers. At the very beginning of the first chapter of his renowned book, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Jeremy Bentham wrote that it is the principle of utility that will recognize what we ought to do and determine what we shall do because “nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign

masters, pain and pleasure.”¹ J. S. Mill, in his *Utilitarianism*, also clearly wrote that “our moral faculty, [...] supplies us only with the general principles of moral judgments.”² He claimed that these principles are abstract doctrines that must be found through reason and not perception. For him, the moral status of a particular action, whether it is right or wrong, or good or bad, is determined by applying these principles to an individual case. Even though both Bentham and Mill were consequentialists, Immanuel Kant, who was not a consequentialist but rather a deontologist, would agree that the primary concern of moral philosophy is to investigate the fundamental principle(s) of morality. In the preface for his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, he wrote, “the present groundwork is, however, nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*, which already constitutes an enterprise whole in its aim and to be separated from every other moral investigation.”³ Moreover, in many religious traditions, moral principles that are thought rather as moral rules are explicitly present as well; for instance, the Ten Commandments or Golden Rule. These examples show us that moral generalizations or codifications, either in the form of principles, rules, or laws, are omnipresent in moral thought and practice. Joshua and Bernard Gert have recently written that morality is to be understood as the thought and practice that “refer to certain codes of conduct” as expressed either as formulae, principles, norms, laws, or rules.⁴

The belief that moral thought and practice are and must be generalizable or codifiable and that their intelligibility depends on the existence of the forms of “codes of conduct” is currently challenged by so-called “moral particularism.” Moral particularism is not a single and simple view. Most of the defenders of particularism claim that it is a family of views that question the existence and/ or roles of moral principles.⁵ However, as a thematic introduction, we might formulate that particularism is as a view that opposes any moral codification or generalization. Moral principles might be better thought of as one among many forms of moral codification. Formulae, rules, norms, and laws are other forms of

¹ Jeremy Bentham (1907). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 1.

² John Stuart Mill (1861). ‘The Complete Text of ‘Utilitarianism’’. In: *The Blackwell Guide to Mill’s Utilitarianism*. Ed. by Henry R. West. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, p. 1.

³ Immanuel Kant (2002). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. and trans. German by Allen W. Wood. New York: Yale University Press, Ak 4:392, emphasis original.

⁴ Bernard Gert and Joshua Gert (2020). ‘The Definition of Morality’. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Fall 2020. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/morality-definition/>.

⁵ The arch-particularist, Jonathan Dancy, uses the term “moral principle” as his target of criticism. Because his writings are the central exposition of recent developments in moral particularism, many supporters of moral generalism or critics of moral particularism use the same term as him (moral principle). We here adopt a slightly different perspective in terms of the terminology being used, considering the confusion that has resulted from the usage of this quite specific term generally.

moral codification that are ubiquitous either in daily moral practice or in moral philosophical (including religious) literature. It must be noted, however, that with the term “codification” we do not mean that its instances (principles, formulae, norms, etc.) must take the form of an exhaustive generalization, the one that is applicable as the major premise in a “practical syllogism” of a deductive explanation of the moral status of an action.⁶ With the term “codification” we are using in this investigation, we would rather intend to express both the *process* and the *result* of the formation of generalization with regard to the relation between the moral status of an action, like rightness/wrongness, goodness/badness, etc., and the description of the action.⁷ This process of generalization or codification has been assumed either by laymen in their daily moral practices or by normative ethicists.

With our understanding and use of “codification” or “generalization,” we have some advantages. This usage allows us to consider not only the exhaustive or exceptionless generalizations such as Bentham’s principle of utility, the principles that “promises must be kept,” “one ought to tell the truth,” or “one ought to help the needy,” but also other types or forms of moral generalization, such as Kantian formulae of Categorical Imperative, Rossian *prima facie* duties, *ceteris paribus* laws, defeasible generalizations, or hedged moral principles as the way and/or the result of any codification. The other advantage is that we have the possibility to include as much literature about moral particularism as possible that does not only explicitly deal with the moral principles, but also with moral

⁶ Codification as an exhaustive generalization is John McDowell’s view when he uses this term. For him, this term refers to the exhaustive moral principles that serve as the major premises in a deductive form of explanation of a virtuous person’s action, while statements about the specific situation serve as the minor premises. Because, for him, the explanatory picture of the action of a virtuous person takes a deductive form, “the one he has targeted to criticize,” the moral codes or principles must only be the exhaustive generalizations. This view is disadvantageous because it cannot take the inexhaustive generalizations, like Rossian *prima facie* duties, *ceteris paribus* laws, or defeasible generalizations, into consideration. (See John McDowell (1979). ‘Virtue and Reason’. In: *The Monist* 62.3, pp. 331–350; Jonathan Dancy (1983). ‘Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties’. In: *Mind* 92.368, pp. 530–547.)

⁷ With “moral status,” we mean the moral properties of an action, whether it is right/wrong, good/bad, ought (not) to be done, permissible or forbidden. With “the description of an action,” we would not only include the natural properties of an action, such as telling the truth, making a promise, killing individuals, or helping the needy, but also the so-called thick moral properties of an action, such as being just, nasty, or lewd. Furthermore, we think that “actions” are the clear bearers of moral and nonmoral properties. Nevertheless, we are also open to the possibility that persons and institutions would also be bearers of such properties. We sometimes write that actions, persons and institutions are a triad of the bearers of such properties.

rules,⁸ moral laws,⁹ and moral codes to avoid confusion that might be caused by the variety of terms used by various authors. The usage of “moral generalization,” taken as broad as possible, will allow a more comprehensive discussion about the tenet of the particularist thoughts in the metaethical and normative – ethical discourse.

Particularism is a complex view, not only because it defends the thesis as we have outlined in the previous paragraphs at different levels and strengths, but also because some of its concepts are not precisely formulated and explained, or in some cases, even formulated differently by various authors. Therefore, the first difficulty and task in this work is to make clear the concepts and distinctions that are disguised, blurred, or confused in the particularism/generalism debate. In this case, an overview of the many forms of moral generalizations needs to be done and thereby clarify the target of criticism of moral particularists. Moral particularism, according to the view we are defending, is a claim that these moral codifications or generalizations cannot be true and their existence and roles in moral thought and practice are not necessary.¹⁰

Many authors on both sides, those promoting particularism or advocating generalism, seem to identify moral generalism (or sometimes also called moral principlism) with mainstream moral theories, such as Utilitarianism, Kantianism, or Rossian ethics, or even claim that these moral theories endorse moral generalism. As the current literature demonstrates, this is the second reason why the dispute between particularism and generalism in ethics is becoming increasingly complex. It is perhaps true that some mainstream moral theories, to a certain extent, endorse moral codification. However, these moral theories have different ways and strengths for how the process of codification is done. A simple identification that these moral theories are the ones that are targeted by moral particularism could be misleading, or at least confusing. This is also our second aim in this

⁸ See E. F. Carritt (1928). *The Theory of Morals an Introduction to Ethical Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell; Russ Shafer-Landau (1997). ‘Moral Rules’. In: *Ethics* 107.4, pp. 584–611; Johan Brännmark (1999). ‘Rules and Exceptions’. In: *Theoria* 65.2-3, pp. 127–143.

⁹ See Luke Robinson (2007). ‘Moral Principles are Not Moral Laws’. In: *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 2.3, pp. 1–23; Bruno Niederbacher (2017). ‘Was ist ein moralisches Gesetz?’ In: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 139.4, pp. 373–386.

¹⁰ The formulation of particularism we discuss here is quite strong. We have two methodological reasons for it. First, we want to pursue a theoretical clarity by drawing a clear demarcation between generalism and particularism. Any theory that supports the possibility and necessity of generalization, either taken separately or conjunctively, is generalist in nature. This has something to do with our second reason, namely, that we want to do justice to generalists. We assume that, in the eyes of generalists, people who identify themselves as particularists yet allow for moral generalization do not do credit to the tenet of moral generalism. For instance, particularists who claim that generalists’ generalizations are not defeasible draw an inaccurate picture of generalism.

particular work: to define the extent to which these moral theories can be classed as moral generalism or as favoring moral codification.¹¹

If we have been successful in defining the thesis of moral generalism and its possible explicit forms in mainstream moral theories, we can then present the reasons why some philosophers endorse moral generalism. The questions of why morality *should* be codified and whether it *can* have rarely been examined by moral theorists. Most normative ethicists implicitly endorse moral codifiability, either directly by saying which codes or principles are ultimate and/or should be applied, or indirectly by suggesting the way one should follow to find the codes or principles applicable to any particular moral practice. However, they do not explicitly provide the reasons for, or justify why, morality should and can be codified. Some former and recent metaethical works on moral generalization will help us to see these reasons.¹²

Understood as a negation of moral generalism or moral codification, it seems that particularism only provides a negative thesis. It is natural therefore to ask about the positive arguments for moral particularism. The answer to this question is two-fold. First, we see how the arguments for moral generalism fail to provide

¹¹ P. Stratton-Lake, for instance, argues that the opposition between Aristotelianism and particularism, on the one hand, and principled ethics and Kantianism, on the other, can be transcended by distinguishing the roles of moral principles. According to Stratton-Lake's alternative account of Kantian acting from duty, moral principles do not play a justificatory role for a practical reason. The conditions that justify the particular obligations or the major motivations for moral conduct are not the observance of moral law, but rather the particular concrete factors. For him, "the moral law may be understood as grounding particular obligations not in the sense that it justifies them, but in the sense that it acts as the condition of their possibility." He calls this "the transcendental conception of moral law." (Philip Stratton-Lake (2000). *Kant, Duty and Moral Worth*. London: Routledge, p. 68) Another author who tried to reconcile Kantian and Aristotelian ethics, as far as we are aware, is Nancy Sherman (See Nancy Sherman (1989). *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press).

¹² The former works on this topic that we particularly consider are those by Henry Sidgwick (1962). *The Methods of Ethics*. 7th ed. London: Macmillan, Richard M. Hare (1952). *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, Richard M. Hare (1963). *Freedom and Reason*. Oxford: Clarendon Press and Markus G. Singer (1961). *Generalization in Ethics*. New York: Alfred A. Knop. While the more recent works, among others, that we consider are Mark Lance's and Margaret Little's theory of defeasible generalization (Mark Lance and Margaret Little (2006). 'Particularism and Antitheory'. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Ed. by David Copp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 567–594 and Mark Lance and Margaret Little (2008). 'From Particularism to Defeasibility in Ethics'. In: *Challenging Moral Particularism*. Ed. by Vojko Strahovnik, Matjaz Potrc and Mark Norris Lance. New York: Routledge, pp. 53–74), Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge's theory of generalism as regulative ideal (Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge (2006). *Principled Ethics. Generalism as a Regulative Ideal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press), Pekka Väyrynen's theory of hedged moral principles (Pekka Väyrynen (2009). 'A Theory of Hedged Moral Principles'. In: *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*. Ed. by Russ Shafer-Landau. Vol. 4. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 91–132) and Maïke Albertzart's theory of indeterminacy of moral principles (Maïke Albertzart (2014). *Moral Principles*. Bloomsbury Ethics. London: Bloomsbury Publishing).

nontrivial or substantial true moral generalizations. Second, we see the particularist's arguments that moral codification at any level and form is unnecessary. In short, for particularists, a plausible moral theory and an account of moral practice do not require the generality or universality of moral judgments, but rather its particularity that is more essential. Those who defend particularism will conclude that "morality can get along perfectly well without [moral] principles."¹³

1.2 Preliminary II: Nearby Intellectual Developments to the Debate

Recently, the moral particularism/generalism debate has emerged as a fundamental issue in moral philosophy, and moral particularism is now acknowledged as a distinct metaethical and ethical theory (or at least, a stable position about these matters). This progress is, however, not independent of the moral particularists themselves, but related to other thoughts in ethics and metaethics in the history of analytic philosophy. In our view, the closely connected intellectual developments that might be seen as the conceptual background of this recent debate are the development of intuitionism and antitheory in ethics, a new interpretation of Aristotle's ethics, and the study of reason in moral philosophy. These topics must be discussed, if only briefly, so that we can have some conceptual foundations prior to the investigation and discussions in the later chapters.¹⁴

ETHICAL INTUITIONISM AND MORAL PARTICULARISM. Moral particularism stems from and finds the strength of its arguments in ethical intuitionism or even, intuitionism in philosophy, generally. Ethical intuitionism is conceptualized in various ways, but its distinctive feature is its epistemology and metaphysics.¹⁵ Every traditional intuitionist maintains that basic moral propositions are self-evident and ethical intuition is the basic source of evidence. Intuition, in its initial sense, such as that proposed by Richard Price, is the ground of how "we owe our beliefs of all self-evident truths, our ideas of the general, abstract affections and relations of things, our moral ideas, and whatsoever else we discover,

¹³ Jonathan Dancy (2004a). *Ethics Without Principles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 2.

¹⁴ We regard these four thoughts as background because we have in my mind that "moral particularism" is a distinct strand of (meta-) ethical thought that has particular features. Others might regard that moral particularism does not have a quite distinctive position; rather, it is a branch of virtue ethics (See Rosalind Hursthouse (1995). 'Applying Virtue Ethics'. In: *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory: Essays in Honour of Philippa Foot*. Ed. by Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence and Warren Quinn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 57–75, Margaret Olivia Little (1997). 'Virtue as Knowledge: Objections From the Philosophy of Mind'. In: *Noûs* 31.1, pp. 59–79. DOI: 10.1111/0029-4624.00035) or a cousin of antitheory (See Annette Baier (1985). 'Doing Without Moral Theory?' In: *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism*. Ed. by S. Clarke and E. Simpson. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, Stanley G. Clarke (1987). 'Anti-Theory in Ethics'. In: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24.3, pp. 237–244). However, given the recent development of moral particularism, we think it is legitimate to regard it as a distinctive moral thought and the other views as background.

¹⁵ Philip Stratton-Lake (2020). 'Intuitionism in Ethics'. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2020. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/intuitionism-ethics/>.

without making use of any process of reasoning.”¹⁶ Propositional beliefs grasped by intuition of this sense are factive, meaning that when an agent *S* believes that *p*, where *p* is a self-evident proposition, it is the case that *p*. The later intuitionists, such as William David Ross, however, had a different notion about beliefs grasped by intuition. They considered them to be nonfactive and therefore fallible because for them, intuition is an intellectual seeming, “as something analogous to the nonfactive notion of perceptual experience.”¹⁷

Ethical intuitionists are epistemic foundationalists, maintaining that all moral reasoning and true moral beliefs must be ultimately grounded on (a) proposition(s) that is/are not inferred from other propositions. The basis or the ultimate ground is the self-evident truths grasped by intuition. When considering self-evident moral truths as the basis of derived moral knowledge, some ethical intuitionists, such as W. D. Ross, are pluralists, whereas others, such as Sidgwick and Moore, are monists, in the sense that there is only one ultimate self-evident true moral proposition. While these ethical intuitionists, either pluralists or monists, are generalists about basic self-evident true moral propositions (meaning that some features of the world or of actions have stable or invariant moral valence, so that there is/are moral judgment(s) that will always be true), moral particularists believe in the particularity of “self-evident” true moral propositions. In terms of moral principle, for generalists, the basic self-evident true moral proposition(s) is/are possible and, perhaps, necessary to be codified (or at least codifiable) into (a) moral principle(s)). In contrast, assured by the belief about the steadfastness of the intuition in every single moral judgment and decision, particularists do not accept the possibility and necessity of codifiability of true moral propositions. While some intuitionists are ethical generalists, arguing for the view that there are universally true statements specifying the relation between nonmoral (or later will also be called “descriptive”) and moral facts that can be grasped by intuition, ethical particularists argue against this conviction. As a distinct species of ethical intuitionism, so to speak, particularism also makes the similar epistemological claim that moral knowledge is possible, but basic moral knowledge is gained case by case. To gain this knowledge, sensitivity to particular moral facts is required where the person must be able to recognize the *salient* feature(s) of that particular action and take it into his or her consideration when making moral judgments or decisions. For particularists, to gain moral knowledge, one does not need to appeal to any principles so that one can make an inference from a general principle to a particular judgment or universalize one’s judgment to justify it.

¹⁶ Richard Price (1758). *A Review of the Principal Question in Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 169.

¹⁷ Stratton-Lake, ‘Intuitionism in Ethics’.

Justification and explanation of one's moral judgment and/or decision are particular and do not involve any moral principles.¹⁸

Ethical intuitionists do not only endorse cognitivism and foundationalism but also metaethical realism and non-naturalism about moral properties. For them, moral judgments grasped by intuition are cognitive states that are truth-apt, or capable of being true or false. Some moral judgments are true when the things being referred to have the moral property attributed to them. This implies realism about moral properties, whose relationship with the nonmoral properties renders moral judgment to be true (or false). The moral properties usually considered here are the thin ones, like goodness/badness or rightness/wrongness. According to intuitionists, these moral properties cannot be defined or analyzed (completely) by nonmoral terms, such as psychological, social, or biological ones. Because our present work here is not a complete exposition about ethical intuitionism, what is relevant in this work is that most particularists also maintain this non-naturalistic realism about moral properties. Particularists, like Dancy, maintain that moral properties exist "out there" as the genuine part of the world and these properties are particular to the specific circumstance. For particularists, rightness or wrongness of action is not a brute fact. What makes an action right or wrong are also not rightness or wrongness as property-universals but the features of the particular action themselves.¹⁹

¹⁸ For some authors, this particularist's thought resembles the casuistry model of practical reason as developed by Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin. (See Ulrik Kihlborn (2002). *Ethical Particularism - An Essay on Moral Reasons*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell Stockholm International; Albertzart, *Moral Principles*; and Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin (1988). *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.) Our account of particularist moral epistemology is presented later in Section 6.3.

¹⁹ The contrast of intuitionism as a methodological view of moral inquiry is the method of reflective equilibrium (RE). According to RE, we should begin our moral inquiry with our initial moral judgments, i.e., our existing beliefs. Just like the Cartesian methodological doubt, we then must question whether we have a settled opinion about that initial moral judgment. If we have not made up our minds, we must set our moral judgments aside. We do this screening until we find the settled initial moral judgments that may be called the *considered moral judgments*. We might find that some of our considered moral judgments regarding actions are inconsistent with the general moral principles we have (as shown by examples we have elaborated in the first paragraph of this chapter). When there is a conflict between our particular judgment on the one hand and a moral principle on the other hand, we develop a moral theory that accounts for all our moral judgments by integrating them into a comprehensive, consistent system. The difference between RE and intuitionism is the (ir)revisability of considered moral judgments. While intuitionists maintain that the fundamental moral truths of considered moral judgments are self-evident, apprehended by intellectual seeming or direct perception, and irrevocable, proponents of reflective equilibrium argue that such judgments are subject to revision. (See Michael DePaul (2011). 'Methodological Issues: Reflective Equilibrium'. In: *The Bloomsbury Companion to Ethics*. Ed. by Christian Miller. London: Bloomsbury, pp. lxxv–cv; Norman Daniels (1979). 'Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics'. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 76.5, pp. 256–282; John Rawls (2009). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press)

ANTITHEORY AND MORAL PARTICULARISM. The second development in moral philosophy that we may consider as a proximate idea to moral particularism is the skepticism to traditional moral theories, such as Utilitarianism or Kantian ethics. This skeptical view about moral theory, usually known as “antitheory,” has been exhibited by philosophers such as Elisabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Bernard Williams. Antitheorists claim that the conceptual framework of modern moral philosophy that seeks to provide a thoroughly and systematic account of correct ethical thought and practice goes into an erroneous direction.²⁰ Anscombe in her paper “Modern Moral Philosophy” states that modern moral theories employ a *legal* conception of ethics and put the concept of obligation as the center of the theory.²¹ This implies that being morally obliged means “being bound or required as by a law.”²² But being bound by a law implies the role and/or the existence of the legislator of that law. This, she claims, is evidence that modern moral philosophy has been heavily influenced by Christian ethics, in which God is the legislator, wrongdoing is a violation of His law, and the concept of obligation is based on belief in and of the authoritative God. However, modern moral theories have abandoned the role and existence of God. Consequently, they lack the authoritative lawgiver and hence, so Anscombe says, the theories are unintelligible.

While Anscombe criticizes the conceptual foundation of the ethics of modern ethical theories, Williams attacks the very project of systematizing ethical life as reductive because it cannot provide a realistic phenomenological and psychological picture of ethical life.²³ Moral theories parsimoniously seek a unified and consistent explanatory picture of ethical life, employing a single principle that may serve to assess the moral status of any action in any circumstance. This simplification project is a fault for Williams, because an ethical life is complex “due both to the messiness of life itself and to the fact that our own ethical outlook is the contingent product of a range of traditions in ways that often pull in conflicting directions.”²⁴ Williams diagnoses that this project of simplification evolves from the theoretical ideal of consistency. Moral theories assume that there must be a consistent explanatory criterion of rightness and wrongness, but according to Williams, this will eliminate genuine moral conflicts of ethical life or unresolvable inconsistencies.

Furthermore, these theories also assume that theoretical consistency will keep rationality intact. Consequently, due to the pursuit of consistency and the preservation of rationality, moral theory must either abandon the actual complexities of

²⁰ Simon Robertson (2016). ‘Anti-Theory: Anscombe, Foot and Williams’. In: *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*. Ed. by S. Golob and J. Timmermann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 678–691.

²¹ G. E. M. Anscombe (1958). ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’. In: *Philosophy* 33.124, pp. 1–19. DOI: 10.1017/S0031819100037943.

²² Anscombe, ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’, p. 6.

²³ Bernard Williams (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London: Fontana.

²⁴ Robertson, ‘Anti-Theory: Anscombe, Foot and Williams’, p. 685. See also Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 16.

ethical life (therefore, making the theory irrelevant) or regard that inconsistency as irrational. The theoretical ideal of consistency would suggest two things to resolve the conflicting or inconsistent ethical claims so that the conflicting claims would make sense. First, reduction of the conflicting claims into one claim. If this is the case, however, moral theories cannot match all the actual experiences. Second, the invocation of the independent or impartial standard or method to adjudicate the conflicting claims. Nevertheless, Williams is doubtful that this impartial standard could resolve the conflicting claims.²⁵ According to him, such an impartiality and the generality of ethical theories will require one to abandon personal concerns whenever one pursues the goal of becoming an ethical person.

There are some reactions to Williams' criticism, and moral particularism might be thought of as one of them.²⁶ Some consequentialists and neo-Kantians defend their monistic view by providing a less pervasive account of obligation. However, there is a good chance that they will be challenged by others for their reductive tendencies in their theories about rightness. Others, like W. D. Ross, would provide the pluralist account of duty (i.e., the abovementioned plurality of intuitively accessible moral truths) to resolve this reductive tendency and to overcome the insensitivity of ethical theory in relation to the complexity of ethical life. According to Ross, the wider range of normative accounts about rightness would be context-sensitive, so that they preclude reduction to a codifiable criterion or general test. However, in our opinion, pluralism still cannot escape a reductive tendency because it would provide a fixed "list" of features that will always have a permanent proclivity to become what is right to do. Ross identifies that there are at least seven *prima facie* duties: fidelity, reparations, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and nonmaleficence.²⁷ These features are not fixed, and he allows that there are other *prima facie* duties. However, the "list" of *prima facie* duties has a reductive tendency because it includes some features or considerations that might be a duty proper, although the *prima facie* duties are not by themselves duties. For instance, to say that fidelity, like keeping promises, is a *prima facie* duty would exclude the facts, e.g., that there is no duty at all to keep promises that involve wrongdoing.²⁸ Thus, Ross's pluralist concept, although in this regard it is better than a monistic one, cannot escape a reductive tendency.

²⁵ Robertson, 'Anti-Theory: Anscombe, Foot and Williams', p. 685.

²⁶ Robertson, 'Anti-Theory: Anscombe, Foot and Williams', p. 688.

²⁷ See William David Ross (1930). *The Right and the Good*. Ed. by Philip Stratton-Lake. New ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 21.

²⁸ Another notorious problem for Ross's account is that it fails to fulfill its own project, i.e., to provide a criterion for right and wrong. First, the account of *prima facie* duties suggests that one must make moral discernment whether the feature in question would be an actual duty. Thus, his theory seems to say that these features might be your duties but might also not, and the theory does not provide you with a suitable guidance to discern whether it is a duty or not. Second, there might be, in specific situations, conflicts between competing *prima facie* duties. There is also no guidance, other than moral discernment in the actual case, to resolve

To escape this tendency, some philosophers then turn to virtue ethics because it abandons the project of providing any criterion of rightness or wrongness. Rather than seeking a general test of rightness, virtue ethicists pursue a more holistic approach capable of viewing the ethical life as an ongoing process of the development of an ethically excellent (i.e., virtuous) character: someone who is inclined to do the right thing in the given circumstances, with the right intention and feelings. Moral particularism, which endorses the ideas that, firstly, moral import might not be codified but irreducibly context-dependent, and secondly, that moral persons are not those who adhere to principles but those who have a sensibility to particular considerations, and, therefore, moral thought and practice can get along well without moral principles or any kind of codification or generalization, is the other alternative that goes along with antitheory.²⁹

PARTICULARIST INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS. The rise of antitheory in modern moral philosophy triggers another development. As previously mentioned, virtue ethics is one of the alternative conceptions of morality as a response to antitheory and one that rejects the reduction of the complexity of ethical life into a single or extremely limited number of concepts, such as obligations, rightness, or wrongness. The root of such a thought is the new reading of Aristotelian ethics. Another new reading of Aristotelian ethics that is closely related to virtue ethics is the particularist interpretation of such concepts. Both virtue ethics and moral particularism find support for their theoretical framework in Aristotle's thoughts, especially in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The early particularism-friendly interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* can be found in John McDowell's 1979 article "Virtue and Reason," which appeared in *The Monist*. He provides the view that emphasizes the concept of virtue in the first rank of moral philosophizing rather than the concept of moral principles. Concerning a virtuous person's action, he argues for the uncodifiability of the knowledge of virtue. Knowledge about virtuous actions that should be done in a particular circumstance is uncoded and "[o]ccasion by occasion," he claims, "one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by

the conflict. (See Russ Shafer-Landau (2010). *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 242–243)

²⁹ Margaret Olivia Little, however, denies that moral particularism is at its core endorsing an antitheoretical approach. She argues that moral particularism is compatible with a moral-theoretical approach. She does not present moral particularism as an account that denies the role and existence of moral principles entirely. For her, moral principles take the form of defensible generalizations or *ceteris paribus* or "for the most part" generalizations. Moral principles as *ceteris paribus* generalizations are neither statistical nor enthymeme in a deductive explanation. *Ceteris paribus* generalizations are generalizations that "privilege the conditions or cases in which a certain connection holds." According to this view of moral principles, she argues that moral particularism endorses a specific theory about morality that is not in the first place necessary to provide the general knowledge about right and wrong actions but important to provide the understanding about morality. (See Margaret Olivia Little (2013). 'On Knowing the "Why": Particularism and Moral Theory'. In: *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. by Russ Shafer-Landau. 2nd. London: Blackwell, pp. 776–784)

being a certain kind of person: one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way.”³⁰ As a result, he appears to argue that Aristotle supports the view that particular-perceptual moral knowledge takes precedence over knowledge of universal principles in making correct moral judgments and decisions. The universal or general moral judgments a person makes are derived from the particular ones, and not *vice versa*.³¹ Jonathan Dancy, strongly influenced by McDowell through his various works, has led to the situation where moral particularism has become the established and well-recognized position in moral philosophy. Though he has altered his views regarding strong and weak particularism, he is consistent in arguing for the unnecessaryness of moral principles in morality.³²

The historical and conceptual support for the recent developments in moral particularism can be found in the expanded particularist-friendly interpretations of Aristotle’s ethics, which are to a certain extent similar to McDowell’s views. Some recent authors can be mentioned here: First, Robert Loudon who contends that Aristotle’s view of practical knowledge “(1) is knowledge of genuine particulars rather than of universals or types and (2) agents cannot know these particulars by inferential reasoning but only directly through intuition.”³³

Second, Martha C. Nussbaum. In some of her writings, specifically in *The Discernment of Perception*, she argues that Aristotle attacks the view that “rational choice can be captured in general rules or principles that can then simply be applied to each new case.”³⁴ According to her interpretation, Aristotle regarded

³⁰ McDowell, ‘Virtue and Reason’, p. 347.

³¹ Here we must mention the works of David Wiggins. He, and perhaps McDowell as well, seem to argue that what the virtuous or well-brought-up person needs in deliberations and choices is situational perception (corresponds to Aristotle’s *aisthesis*) of the indefinitely varied contingencies, which cannot be expressed in general judgments. What one needs in practical deliberations or decisions is the perception of particulars to recognize which salient or decisive features should play a role. (See David Wiggins (2002). ‘Deliberation and Practical Reason’. In: *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*. 3rd. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 215–238; Ruth Chang, ed. (1997). *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press)

³² Dancy’s early distinctive views about particularism, following the step of McDowell, can be found in these essays: Jonathan Dancy (1981). ‘On Moral Properties’. In: *Mind* 90.359, pp. 367–385 and Dancy, ‘Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties’.

³³ Robert B. Loudon (1986). ‘Aristotle’s Practical Particularism’. In: *Ancient Philosophy* 6, pp. 123–138. URL: <https://doi.org/10.5840/ancientphil198668>.

³⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum (1992b). ‘The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality’. In: *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 55–105. It must be noted that her particularism does not preclude the role and existence of the universal theories and general rules of conduct. She insists, however, that such rules are insufficient for a correct conduct and that judgment about the complex particulars has an important role. Good judgment involves both rules and particular perception, where rules will keep the perception on the right track. See Angela Kallhoff, ed. (2001). *Martha C. Nussbaum: Ethics and Political Philosophy*. Münsteraner Vorlesungen zur Philosophie Vol. 4. Münster: LIT Verlag, specifically these chapters: “Let’s Talk about Love” (pp. 43-53) and “Love, Literature and Human Universals” (pp. 129-152).

that for an individual to display practical reasoning, prior perception of the particulars is more important than a knowledge of the universals. Furthermore, he endorsed the view that practical wisdom cannot be considered as systematic knowledge about the universals and general principles.

The third author we might mention is Nancy Sherman, who provides a similar understanding of Aristotle but stresses the role of emotions as an important capacity to get the right evaluative information to have a perception of the particulars.³⁵ On her view, the virtuous person's ability to use perception and emotions as a source of evaluation must be habituated or trained. However, this should not be understood in the Kantian sense, i.e., as a "mindless process of learning by repetitive skill and reinforcement."³⁶ According to her interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, habituation of perception and emotion is instead "a critical process of learning that involves judgment, inquiry, and a growing capacity to make one's actions comprehensible and to transform one's goals and circumstances into rational decisions."³⁷ This process, she argues, suggests that Aristotle is not an intuitionist in the sense that moral judgments gained by perception of the particulars are mysterious and need no justification or explanation. For her, there is no reason to think that Aristotle's notion of perception must be viewed as an immediate apprehension cut off from a more discursive process. A moral judgment grasped by perception always takes the circumstances into consideration, so that the preceptor or the wise person might see the salient feature shaped by that context. Recognition of one shape is not a pure description of it but involves how one's shape is connected to or resembles another. In this sense, Aristotle is a particularist but not an intuitionist.

Fourth, a recent particularism-friendly interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is presented by Uri D. Leibowitz.³⁸ He defines particularism as a research program that aims at providing an explanation of the rightness or wrongness without appealing to exceptionless moral principles. He argues that in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle does not aim to formulate one exceptionless principle, e.g., a virtue-based principle³⁹, as the criterion of rightness and wrongness that

³⁵ See Nancy Sherman (1997). *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, specifically, pp. 239-283. In this book, she seems to argue that there is a convergence between Aristotelian particularism and Kantian universalism.

³⁶ Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*, pp. 242–243.

³⁷ Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*, p. 243.

³⁸ Uri D. Leibowitz (2013). 'Particularism in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*'. In: *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10.2, pp. 121–147. DOI: 10.1163/174552412x628904.

³⁹ According to this principle, "[a]n act is right, if a fully virtuous agent might perform it in the circumstances." There is, however, no evidence, so Leibowitz argues, that Aristotle pursues this kind of principle. This principle is also explanatorily meaningless because what makes an action right is not the fact that a virtuous person would perform it. Instead, the action done by a virtuous person is right because of the features of that action that make it right. So, this principle presents the wrong order of explanation. (Leibowitz, 'Particularism in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*', p. 126.)

will always be explanatory with regard to particular actions. What Aristotle gives is rather an explanatory schema, because, unlike the scientific explanation that is a “pure demonstration,” the explanation of the rightness of actions lacks fixity and its account cannot be precise. Leibowitz argues that Aristotle does not want to show which actions are right or what is the criterion of rightness. Instead, he wants to show the explanatory schema of action; that if an action is right, which is something “[that] is (already) known to us,” there is a scale on which the action is neither excessive nor deficient.⁴⁰ The features of virtuous actions will fill this schema. With this schema, one can clearly explain the extent to which a certain action is right, without appealing to any general principle, but by filling the schema (that the action is neither excessive nor deficient) with the features of that particular action. There are surely many other studies we could include, but we think that the abovementioned are the most illuminating ones. These show that one can find in the writings of Aristotle some precursors of the particularist’s ideas about the unnecessariness of general moral principles, the priority of perception in gaining moral knowledge and the priority of the particulars in providing justification and explanation of an action.⁴¹

THE RECENT STUDY OF MORAL REASON AND MORAL PARTICULARISM. The study of reason is as old as philosophical reflection itself. However, in contrast to the former study that focused on the faculty of Reason, contemporary study of reasons investigates the very nature and the roles of reasons.⁴² People may have reasons for action, for believing, for feeling, and so on, but theoretical reasons, reasons for believing, and practical reasons, reasons for action, are two

⁴⁰ Leibowitz, ‘Particularism in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*’, p. 130.

⁴¹ There is certainly another interpretation of Aristotle’s ethics that shows that Aristotle is not a particularist. T. H. Irwin, for instance, argues that Aristotle takes some ethical generalizations to be principles that exist prior in the order of explanation, justification, and knowledge to the ethical beliefs that they explain. Irwin contends that Aristotle does not take ethics and ethical generalization less seriously than science and physical generalization. His argument is that “Aristotle normally takes the principles of a discipline to be ‘better known by nature’ (*gnôrimôteron phusei*) that the initial beliefs that provide the starting points for inquiry [...] what is better known by nature is also more universal, prior, and more explanatory [...] The Ethics makes it clear from the beginning that Aristotle is looking for principles.” (See Terence H. Irwin (2000). ‘Ethics as an Inexact Science: Aristotle’s Ambitions for Moral Theory’. In: *Moral Particularism*. Ed. by Brad Hooker and Margaret Olivia Little. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 100–29. See also the discussion about the inexactness of ethics in Georgios Anagnostopoulos (1994). *Aristotle on the Goals and Exactness of Ethics*. Berkeley: University of California Press)

⁴² In German, the terms “reason” or “reasons” should be translated and understood as *Grund* or *Gründe*, which does not denote “*Vernunft*”. Unfortunately, the English word for both terms is the same, “reason,” which might cause confusion for some people. In this book the terms “reason” or “reasons” will always refer to “*Grund*” or “*Gründe*”. We use “Reason” (capitalized R) only when we refer to “*Vernunft*”.

fundamental types of reasons.⁴³ The details are subtle and difficult to simplify, but what is relevant for us, particularly in this preliminary analysis, is that the recent defenses of particularism are mostly based on the study of the role and nature of reasons. The enabling condition for their particularist defenses is the contemporary confidence of moral philosophical reflections that appealing to reasons for acting and believing in certain ways will better enable us to account for various normative and evaluative phenomena than appealing to value, obligation, or other concepts. The basic concept is rather simple. We may presuppose that there are normative and evaluative phenomena. Normative and evaluative phenomena are believed not as brute facts, but they have these normative and evaluative properties in virtue of other properties. For example, the fact that a holiday in Bali is good is not a brute fact. The fact that its stunning views, quiet rooms, and tasty food are pleasurable is what makes a holiday in Bali worthwhile. There is/are reason(s) *why* some normative or evaluative facts are normative or evaluative as they are. The same is true for moral actions. The fact that some actions have normative or evaluative properties is not believed to be a brute fact. There must be some reason(s) *why* these actions are also normative or evaluative as they are.⁴⁴

In the standard debate, people distinguish between two kinds of practical reasons based on the roles of these reasons.⁴⁵ There are good reasons for an action or reasons that favor the action. These are usually called *normative reasons*.⁴⁶ Such reasons are usually the ones that also justify the action; therefore, these are also

⁴³ The intensive study of reason in the second half of the 20th century begins, perhaps, with Joseph Raz (1975). *Practical Reason and Norms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Some years before this publication, there were prominent publications about practical reason, such as G. E. M. Anscombe (1963). *Intention*. 2nd. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Donald Davidson (1963). 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes'. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 60.23, pp. 685–700; Thomas Nagel (1970). *The Possibility of Altruism*. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, that already have influentially shaped the discussion around this topic. In the 19th century, David Hume and Immanuel Kant also provided views about how Reason guides and justifies human actions. However, these writers took reason rather as the faculty of Reason of a human being than reason as such.

⁴⁴ In Chapter 6, such a requirement in moral thought and practice is called "the because-constraint." In that chapter, we argue that the analysis of this constraint shows that there is a plausible particularist account of explanation. We leave the discussion of this topic in that chapter.

⁴⁵ Maria Alvarez (2017). 'Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation'. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Winter 2017. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>.

⁴⁶ The standard definition of normative reasons is due to T. M. Scanlon's phrase, "I will take the idea of a reason as primitive. Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favour of it. 'Counts in favour how?' one might ask. 'By providing a reason for it' seems to be the only answer." (Thomas M. Scanlon (1998). *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, p. 17 and Thomas M. Scanlon (2004). 'Reasons: A Puzzling Duality?' In: *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*. *Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*. Ed. by R. Jay Wallace et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 231–246)

called the *justificatory reasons*. For example, the fact that calling my mom will fulfill a promise I made to her is a good reason or a justification for me to make that call. There are also reasons for which people do an action. These are reasons that motivate the agent to act, and therefore, are called *motivating reasons*. An agent who is motivated by that reason acts “in the light of that reason.” When he or she comes to the practical reasoning, that motivating reason will usually also play the role of the explanation of her action. Motivating reasons are those that usually figure in the explanation of an action; therefore, these are also known as *explanatory reasons*. Nevertheless, whether it is true that motivating reasons are always explanatory is a matter of debate that we cannot extensively discuss at this juncture.⁴⁷

However, there is no consensus regarding how many kinds of reasons there are. Jonathan Dancy, for instance, argues that there is only one kind of reason for action. The reasons that favor actions are of no different sort to the reasons that motivate the agents to act. The distinction between normative and motivating reasons is due to two different questions, but not to the existence of two different sorts of reasons. He writes, “[w]hen I call a reason ‘motivating,’ all that I am doing is issuing a reminder that the focus of our attention is on matters of motivation, for the moment. When I call it ‘normative,’ again all that I am doing is stressing that we are currently thinking about whether it is a good reason, one that favours acting in the way proposed.”⁴⁸ However, there is evidence that the basis on which the agent acts, the motivating reason, is sometimes not the same fact that also justifies that action. The reason that has motivated (and explained) why Europeans during the colonial period subjugated the indigenous people in Africa was to gain political and economic power over the region. However, there is no reason that justifies that subjugation. Thus, at least as a theoretical distinction, it is plausible to talk about normative and motivating/explanatory reasons separately.

There are some complications and disagreements about the nature of reasons for action. So far, I have assumed that when we talk about reasons, we think that reasons are facts, i.e., something that is mind-independent. There is, however, also no consensus as to whether all reasons are facts, or that they are propositions or even beliefs, i.e., something that is mind-dependent. It seems plausible to talk about normative reasons as facts, like what we have done above.⁴⁹ However, there is disagreement among philosophers as to how certain facts have or might have normative force, i.e., how a certain action has a particular normative property, because of these factual reasons. Some philosophers even reject the idea that

⁴⁷ For further debate, see Alvarez, ‘Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation’; Maria Alvarez (2009). ‘How Many Kinds of Reasons?’ In: *Philosophical Explorations* 12.2, pp. 181–193; Jonathan Dancy (2000a). *Practical Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁸ Dancy, *Practical Reality*, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁹ Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, pp. 17–18; Dancy, *Practical Reality*; Maria Alvarez (2010). *Kinds of Reasons: An Essay in the Philosophy of Action*. Oxford University Press.

there are normative facts.⁵⁰ Indeed, what factive reasons are, is also a matter of disagreement. Some philosophers hold that because true propositions are about facts, factive–normative reasons are nothing but true propositions.⁵¹ However, if normative reasons are propositions, they must be abstract and representational, which seems unsuitable to account for reasons that are in fact concrete and nonrepresentational.⁵² Philosophers also have different claims about the normativity of reasons; some argue that reasons are normative or have normative force because they play the role of the good- or right-making basis of actions⁵³ or because of their relation to rationality⁵⁴ or desires⁵⁵. While it seems that there is an agreement that normative reasons are conceived as facts that are mind-independent, philosophers disagree whether or not motivating reasons are mind-dependent, that is, entities that depend on someone’s thinking or believing certain things.⁵⁶ So, it seems plausible to say that the reason that motivated the Europeans to subjugate the indigenous peoples in the countries they conquered was their belief in gaining political and economic power, even though there was no fact that justified that subjugation.

What is then the relation between normative and motivational/explanatory reasons and moral particularism? Particularists, especially Jonathan Dancy in his *Moral Reason* and later in *Ethics without Principles*, argue that particularism is the natural implication of the “behaviour of reasons.” Even for him, particularism

⁵⁰ The most notable one is J. L. Mackie (1990). *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Pelican Books.

⁵¹ Stephen L. Darwall (1983). *Impartial Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Michael Smith (1994). *The Moral Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell; Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*.

⁵² Jonathan Dancy (2004b). ‘Two Ways of Explaining Actions’. In: *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 55, pp. 25–42.

⁵³ Joseph Raz argues for this view of the normativity of normative reason: “Reason is then explained in part by invoking value: valuable aspects of the world constitute reasons. This approach [...] can be characterized as holding that the central type of human action is intentional action; that intentional action is action for a reason; and that the reasons are facts in virtue of which those actions are good in some respect and to some degree.” (See Joseph Raz (1999). *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 22–23.)

⁵⁴ Christine M. Korsgaard (1996). *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Joshua Gert (2004). *Brute Rationality: Normativity and Human Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁵ This comes from Hume’s account of desired-based practical reason, maintaining that all normative reasons derive their normativity from a relation to some desire of the agent. See Bernard Williams (1981). ‘Internal and External Reasons’. In: *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 101–113. See also Mark Schroeder (2008). ‘Having Reasons’. In: *Philosophical Studies* 139.1, p. 57; Alan H. Goldman (2009). *Reasons From Within: Desires and Values*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁶ Those who argue that motivating reasons are mind-dependent are, among others: Robert Audi (2001). *The Architecture of Reason: The Structure and Substance of Rationality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Alfred R. Mele (2003). *Motivation and Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

is meant to be “a doctrine about how moral reasons work.”⁵⁷ For Dancy, reasons are holistic, meaning that one feature that is the reason for an action (or for a belief) in one case might be the reason against or an irrelevant reason in other situations. Reasons for action and for believing have no stable valence. For instance, the fact that I have borrowed a book from a friend is the normative reason to give back the book. If I know that my friend has stolen the book from the library, the fact that I got the book from him or her is no longer the reason for me to give the book back to him or her. The holistic nature of normative reasons (and of motivational/explanatory reasons) makes it impossible to capture or codify them into moral principles because moral principles “seem all to be in the business of specifying features as *general* reasons.”⁵⁸ The particularists would contend that any appropriate provision of moral principle is not necessary for the normative, motivating, or explanatory reasons found in morality. Moral generalists, conversely, might claim that reasons are not entirely holistic but atomistic, maintaining that there could be features that will always be the reason for (or against) any actions whenever they occur. They may also claim that, although reasons are holistic, nonstrict generalizations are still possible and/or necessary.⁵⁹

So far, we have shown the complicated issues that arise in the moral particularism/generalism debate due to the intellectual background of the discussion, specifically in the second half of the 20th century. If we are to understand the recent development of moral particularism, we must first understand these related topics; otherwise, we lose sight of the significance of moral particularism for ethical life. Before moving on, however, one more preliminary is needed to clarify which area of study of morality should the moral particularism/generalism debate be placed in.

1.3 Preliminary III: First- and Second-order Study of Morality

In the study of morality or in moral philosophy, generally, people distinguish at least two domains of study. First, the question can be asked about what one should do in a particular situation or whether one has an obligation to do something (e.g., telling the truth, helping the needy, keeping a promise). These questions belong to the first-order study about morality that is usually considered to be the “province of *normative ethics*.”⁶⁰ Some theorists provide the decisive answers to these questions. Most answers provide the monistic principle as the criteria for wrongness and rightness and the guidance upon which people may discern what they should do. The theories about the criteria or guidance are usually called *normative theories*, e.g., Kantian ethics, Utilitarianism, Natural law, or Divine Command theory. There are also some normative ethicists who argue that there is no decisive answer to the question of what one should do because the standard

⁵⁷ Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, p. 76.

⁵⁹ We deal with such an issue in Chapter 6 of this investigation.

⁶⁰ Alexander Miller (2013). *Contemporary Metaethics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity, p. 1.

and guiding principles are nonmonistic or pluralistic. There is no single standard or guiding principle. Ethical pluralists, the most prominent being W. D. Ross, suggest that there is no absolute principle that may act as the criteria of rightness/wrongness or as the guidance for decisions, but there are *prima facie* duties that play the role of strong reasons when they occur but might be outweighed by competing reasons. These are the examples of answers to first-order questions. The second category of questions in the study of morality deals with the metaethical questions such as the meaning of moral concepts (rightness, wrongness, goodness, badness, or value), the nature of moral judgments (whether they are cognitive or noncognitive entities), the way to justify moral opinions, and the existence and nature of moral facts. This study belongs to the field of metaethics.

The relevant question here is whether the moral particularism/generalism debate is a normative or metaethical one. On the one hand, we believe that particularism and generalism are metaethical theories. They attempt to provide the answers to metaethical questions (the nature of moral judgments, the possibility of moral knowledge, and how one determines the moral status of an action and makes moral decisions) either with or without appealing to any substantial theory about the decisive criteria of rightness/wrongness or goodness/badness. However, on the other hand, particularism and generalism might also be seen as normative theories. Generalism usually endorses substantial theories about the criteria of rightness/wrongness or goodness/badness, while in contrast, particularism might be seen as the extreme pole of ethical pluralism, as it endorses the view that there is a vast, perhaps infinite, number of right-/wrong-making features that are impossible to be captured by generalization or codification. These observations suggest that the particularism/generalism debate may not be properly classified as metaethics or normative ethics. However, we may hope that this should not cause difficulty for us because sometimes the strict demarcation between one domain of study and another may hinder us in our aims to understand the subject more comprehensively.⁶¹ If this occurs, we are in a position to combine both studies

⁶¹ Regarding this matter, Ulrik Kihlbom brings a similar claim. For him, the debate between particularism and generalism (which he calls universalism), in one interpretation, can be categorized in the realm of both metaethics and normative ethics, but from another perspective, both positions belong to neither domain. He argues that both particularism and generalism put forward both metaethical claims (such as claims about moral knowledge and truths) and normative claims (where particularism might be regarded as the strong form of moral pluralism). Therefore, we can say that both theories can be placed in the areas of metaethics and normative ethics. However, in his discussion, he does not maintain that both positions are taken to be substantial theories of values and norms and, therefore, they do not belong to these categories. In this book, however, we maintain that both particularism and generalism claim something morally substantial, although in the particularist accounts it is not codifiable. In our account, the particularist claim about the uncodifiability of moral judgments or moral facts does not make it an empty or nonsubstantial moral theory. (See Kihlbom, *Ethical Particularism - An Essay on Moral Reasons*, pp. 18–20)

and lose the strict terminological demarcation between them without relaxing the systematic clarity.⁶²

1.4 Aim and Claims

The primary goal of this investigation is to clarify, assess, and defend moral particularism, thereby debunking our belief that morality is dependent on substantial true moral generalizations. The systematic and most fruitful way to achieve this objective is to strictly take the demarcation line between what moral particularists believe and what their opponents, moral generalists, believe and analyze both of their arguments. However, as we demonstrate, we believe that ethical particularism has a more plausible theoretical argument. Nevertheless, we might concede that there are some truths in some forms of moral generalism. We conduct the investigation on the arguments of both sides as follows.

As we investigate the central points of controversy between moral generalism and particularism, we think that the central argument for moral generalism lies in the doctrine of universalizability of moral judgments and the thesis of moral supervenience, according to which moral properties supervene on non-moral properties. We intend to dismantle these two generalists' arguments and defend the following five claims. First, the two generalists' arguments fail with the result that there are no substantial true moral generalizations derived from the doctrine of universalizability and the thesis of moral supervenience. Second, what is defensible is only the existence of loose moral generalizations, i.e., general statements that depict the loose relation between certain moral and nonmoral properties. However, they cannot be true in a realist sense of truth. Such generalizations are also not necessary for moral thought and practice. Third, fourth, and fifth, given the claims that there are no substantial true moral generalizations and that moral thought and practice do not require moral generalizations, we argue that moral particularists can provide adequate accounts of how certain nonmoral properties have a certain moral tendency, of how we understand particular moral facts, beliefs, and actions without maintaining the existence of moral generalizations and general moral facts, and of what moral education would be like without relying on the existence and role of moral generalizations.

⁶² For some particularists, specifically McDowell, Dancy, and McNaughton, moral particularism is sometimes discussed in the context of the moral-epistemological and metaphysical discussion. In defending his pure-cognitivist theory of moral motivation, Dancy argues that there is an internal coherence between his notion of the pure theory of moral motivation and McDowell's account of moral particularism. (See Jonathan Dancy (1993). *Moral Reasons*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 55–58) McNaughton discusses moral particularism also in the context of his defense of non-naturalistic moral realism. He seems to argue that if all the right actions share nothing in common except their being right, then moral generalizations or principles are unnecessary. (See David McNaughton (1988). *Moral Vision: An Introduction to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 62). Dancy in his *Ethics without Principles* also puts forward the notion that contributory reasons for actions are best understood in terms of non-naturalistic realism. (See Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, pp. 53–70)

The structure of this book is as follows: As we have seen, this chapter sets out some preliminaries of the debate between moral generalists and particularists and elaborates on the aim and the claims of this investigation. Chapter 2 presents the target of criticism of moral particularism where we investigate the possible forms and notions of moral generalizations. In chapters 3 and 4, we aim to demonstrate that the core arguments for moral generalism, i.e., the arguments from the doctrine of universalizability and from the thesis of supervenience, are unsound. Chapter 3 particularly tackles the generalists' argument from universalizability. We lay out two particularist strategies to refute this argument: (1) showing the falsity of the doctrine, and (2) demonstrating that the doctrine cannot account for the rationality of moral judgments. Chapter 4 discusses the thesis of supervenience in ethics, or the so-called thesis of moral supervenience. After clarifying what the thesis of moral supervenience is and providing the possible arguments for believing why it is true, we argue that particularists have some good reasons to invalidate the generalists' argument from moral supervenience. In Chapter 5, we discuss another form of moral generalizations, the loose moral generalizations, which are considered under the topic of moral landscape. In this chapter, we consider to what extent loose moral generalizations hold and whether moral particularism implies the existence of such moral generalizations.

The moral particularists' claim that there are no defensible substantive true moral generalizations raises several issues, two of which will be discussed in the following chapters: moral explanations and moral education. In Chapter 6, we show how moral particularists might provide an account of moral explanations without involving the existence and role of moral generalizations. We think that these accounts of explanations provide a way to understand normative phenomena, in particular moral facts, beliefs, and actions. Our approach is to consider that the because-constraint holds, meaning that for every moral fact, belief, and action, there must be some reason(s) that explain(s) why they obtain. The analysis of the because-constraint provides a plausible account of explanation of the particulars where moral generalizations and general moral facts are not necessary. The penultimate chapter (Chapter 7) investigates an account of moral upbringing that is consistent with moral particularism and, thus, a reply to the generalists' criticism that there would be no adequate account of moral education derived from moral particularism. Here, we consider Dancy's and McDowell's notions of moral upbringing that aim at acquiring *phronesis*. Moral *Bildung* or moral upbringing must not be an inculcation of moral principles as moral standards but rather an initiation into the space of reasons. In the conclusion (Chapter 8), we summarize our investigation into the moral particularism versus moral generalism debate. As a result of our investigation, we must be skeptical of the implicit tendency to maintain that some general ethical beliefs are unaffected by changes in circumstances, as such beliefs are unnecessary and may lead us in the wrong direction. As moral particularists would argue, moral thinking works well without such general ethical beliefs.

1.5 Summary

In this introductory chapter, we have given three preliminaries to the investigation about moral particularism. We began not with a sophisticated philosophical dispute but with a consideration of our daily moral thought and practice. As a clue to the philosophical problem, we show that moral particularism is a view that questions the possibility and necessity of moral codification or generalization, as assumed by mainstream moral theories. We have provided an outline of the complexity of the particularism/generalism debate. We also have shown that there are at least four topics around the moral particularism–generalism debate. The conflicting views about moral particularism–generalism are sometimes regarded as the debate about whether, ultimately, moral knowledge should and can rely only on intuition. It seems that moral particularists do rely on the ability of our intuition to grasp the knowledge about rightness/wrongness or oughtness of particular circumstances. Moral particularists, however, take a different view from the early intuitionists, who maintained that there is some finite number of moral truths that might be captured by moral principles.

Furthermore, moral particularism also emanates from the rise of the antitheoretical thought in presenting a rejection of moral theories. Intuitionism and the antitheory approaches that promote virtue-based ethics derive their strength and inspiration from the new interpretation of Aristotelian ethics, which prioritizes perception of particulars over universal judgments, views ethics as an inexact science, and endorses habituation as a means of acquiring moral competence. This reading is regarded as a particularist-friendly interpretation of Aristotelian ethics. The last intellectual development that we think is the most important to understanding the debate is the study of moral reasons. Recent particularist writings in the field base their arguments on the nature and role of reason for action. Finally, in the third preliminary, we have argued that the moral particularism/generalism debate might not be placed into one domain but that it involves both normative ethics and metaethics. The next chapter will begin the investigation by laying out the many forms of moral generalizations.