A FULL-FLEDGED DEFENSE OF PRINCIPLE-BASED ETHICS AGAINST MORAL PARTICULARISM

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In this paper, I try to offer a full-fledged defense of principle-based ethics against moral particularism. My discussions not only refute particularists' allegations against moral generalism but also provide a positive rationale for a principle-based approach in ethics. By borrowing insights from Brandom's and Peregrin's normative pragmatism, I describe the fundamental roles of moral principles. In my view, moral principles constitute morality, and they can function as default reasons in our moral deliberations. Moreover, I argue that my principle-based conception of ethics has advantages over particularism since it explains the phenomenological experience and covers basic intuitions in the moral domain that particularists have difficulty explaining.

1. Introduction

Moral particularism is a rebellion against the common conception of morality according to which moral principles play an essential role in our moral thought and action. In everyday thinking about morality, the person of moral competence is generally characterized as a person of principle who is faithfully following the rules[1] in moral decision-making. This principle-based conception of morality prevails among not only ordinary people but also professional ethicists whose philosophical inquiries are seen as an attempt to articulate a set of moral principles and apply them in complex and controversial cases such as abortion and euthanasia. However, a different voice in meta-ethics challenges this picture. Moral particularism, in its negative approach, is a sceptical position in meta-ethics that casts doubt on the existence or/and the privileged role of moral principles.

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[1] In this article, I use the words principle and rule interchangeably.

Moral particularism is neither a nihilistic approach to morality nor a version of error theory that denies principles on the basis that there is no moral truth. Prominent proponents of particularism, such as Jonathan Dancy and David McNaughton, are both realist and cognitivist, i.e., they believe that there are moral facts and that one can make statements about them that could be true or false. What particularists emphasize is that true principles, if they exist, are "at best useless and at worst a hindrance in trying to find out which is the right action" (McNaughton 1988, 190). Therefore, as Dancy points out, "morality can get along perfectly well without moral principles," (Dancy 2004, 2) and "abandoning the mistaken link between morality and principle is if anything a defense of morality rather than an attack on it" (Dancy 2004, 1). In other words, particularists believe that principle-based ethics is a distorted view that should be replaced with an alternative model. In their proposed model, the capacity to judge, instead of moral principle, is emphasized. Particularists maintain that a person of moral competence is an individual who has enough sensibility and moral vision to see the right course of action in each case. They argue that the ability to judge correctly in particular situations makes general principles superfluous.

In this paper, I try to offer a full-fledged defense of principle-based ethics against moral particularism. By the adjective "full-fledged," I want to indicate that my discussions not only refute particularists' allegations against moral generalism but also provide a positive rationale for a principle-based approach in ethics. I argue that the particularists' argument is not enough to refute all versions of generalism; however, their discussions bring up a crucial question on the role of moral principles in ethics that must be considered by a generalist theory. To deal with this challenge, by borrowing insights from Robert Brandom's and Jaroslav Peregrin's ideas, I describe the fundamental roles of moral principles. In my view, moral principles constitute morality, and they can function as default reasons in our moral deliberations. Moreover, I argue that my principle-based conception of ethics has advantages over particularism since it covers basic intuitions and explains phenomenological experience in ethical life that particularists have difficulty explaining.

To meet the target, I first present a brief overview of particularists' attacks against their generalist counterparts. Second, I show that particularists have targeted a specific conception of moral principles that not all generalists need to accept. Therefore, one can conclude that generalists may have enough resources to respond to particularists' challenges. Third, by borrowing insights from Brandom's and Peregrin's ideas, especially their normative pragmatism, the constitutive role of moral principles is explained. In the end, I focus on the explanatory power of my principle-based model of moral judgment. In this regard, I present two novel arguments in favor of moral generalism.

2. The Particularists' Concern

Before proposing a principle-based model of moral judgment to support principle-based ethics, it is helpful to consider the main concern of particularism. After we reach a clearer picture of what particularists argue for, we should be able to better assess whether generalists can respond to the challenges or not.

However, I should note that particularism comes in different guises. While the earlier version of particularism is an ontological position that argues against the existence of true moral principles, the late version proposes only the epistemological claim that "the possibility of moral thought and judgment does not depend on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principle" (Dancy 2004, 7). In this article, I discuss the late version of particularism, presented extensively by Dancy in *Ethics Without Principles*.

The main concern of particularists is the contextuality of moral judgments. In their works, this interesting point has been represented in terms of "holism in the theory of reason." Particularists claim that when one accepts holism, the prospect of principle-based ethics looks bleak.

Holism is a general doctrine in the theory of reason, which covers both theoretical and practical realms. According to this doctrine, "all reasons are *capable* of being altered by changes in context – that there are none whose nature as reason is necessarily immune to change elsewhere" (Dancy 2005, 325). In other words, reasons are context-dependent; that is, a feature that is a reason in one case *may* be no reason at all or an opposite reason in another (Dancy 2004, 190). For example, in one context, the fact that I see a red pen is a reason for me to believe that "there is a red pen in front of me." However, in another context where I have used a specific drug that makes me see blue things as red and red things as blue, such visual perception are an opposite reason to believe that the above-mentioned proposition is true. Therefore, the available factors in one context, like taking a drug, can change the reason's status.

Particularists argue that moral reasons function holistically. Consequently, one cannot ascribe an invariant valence to morally relevant features. For example, It is not true that lying is *always, in all cases*, a wrong-making property and a reason against doing something since there are situations where lying is not only permissible but also required. For instance, if a murderer who seeks to kill an innocent man asks us to reveal the man's hideaway, it seems intuitively obvious that we have a moral obligation to lie to save the man's life. Through such examples, particularists conclude that it is the "shape" of the situation, i.e., the way morally relevant elements combine in a case, which determines a moral reason's status. Therefore, one should pay serious attention to the details of a situation, its foreground and background, to make the right moral judgment.

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After accepting holism, particularists argue that if moral features have changing valences, and they combine in complex and unpredictable ways in different contexts, morality cannot be captured in terms of moral principles. In their view, moral principles are not only false but misleading. Such rigid, inflexible generalities are a source of error in moral decision-making since they "encourage a tendency not to look enough at the details of the case before one," (Dancy 1993, 64) the details that can change a reason's status. McNaughton has explained this idea as follows:

> Over-reliance on principles encourages serious vices, such as inflexibility and rigidity in one's moral thinking. If we choose to judge a moral system by the good or harm it does to the social fabric then probably more un-happiness has been caused by people "sticking to their principles", rather than being sensitive to what is called for in a particular case (McNaughton 1988, 203).

Therefore, "instead of the inflexible application of previously adopted principles to the case at hand" (McKeever and Ridge 2006, 204), particularists emphasize a kind of sensitivity to the context. Dancy writes:

> Our account of the person on whom we can rely to make sound moral judgments is not very long. Such a person is someone who gets it right case by case. To be consistently successful, we need to have a broad range of sensitivities, so that no relevant feature escapes us, and we do not make mistakes of relevance either (Dancy 1993, 64).

In other words, in particularists' view, the person of moral competence is not a person of principle who neglects or distorts the relevant details. Instead, she uses her capacity of judgment including sensitivity, empathy, virtues, and moral insights to see the right course of action in each case. In this picture, there is a sharp dichotomy between the moral principle and the moral judgment, and, as MacNaughton has mentioned, the second one makes the first one useless:

> If we can be sensitive to the individual moral properties of the particular case, then we have no need to moral principles, as they are conceived, to show us the way (MacNaughton 1988, 203).

Consequently, particularists conclude that generalism that places principles at the forefront of moral thinking is a distorted picture of morality, which should be replaced with an alternative model.

3. A generalist response

Generalists, on the other side, have followed different strategies to defend themselves against particularists' allegations. For example, some generalists have argued that empirical evidence shows that rule-based models if used discriminately "tend to outperform even expert judgment, which casts doubt on the claims that principle guidance is too rigid and that it leads individuals to neglect or distort relevant details" (Zamzow 2014, 132). Therefore, as linear models are useful in approaching complex, non-linear phenomena, there might be a prominent place for moral principles, as useful approximations, in dealing with complex and contextual moral issues. While I find this empirical approach very interesting, in this paper, I would like to defend generalism from the conceptual point of view. As an initial step, in this section, I argue that particularists' argument is not enough to refute all versions of generalism; however, their discussions bring up a crucial question on the role of moral principles in ethics that must be considered by a full-fledged generalist theory.

To my mind, particularists' characterization of generalism is neither fair nor comprehensive. It is not fair since while prominent thinkers of principle-based ethics, like Immanuel Kant and David Ross, have emphasized the role of judgment, particularists charge that their generalist counterparts merely stick to the principles, looking away from the details of the situation. Moreover, it seems that particularists see moral principles as fully-specified algorithms that one can apply mechanically to particular cases, without any consideration of the context. However, not all generalists accept this conception of principles. Therefore, particularists' reading of generalism is also incomprehensive. To examine these allegations, I will look more closely at some aspects of Ross's prima facie ethics and Kantian deontology, as two paradigms of principle-based ethics.

Ross developed a pluralist moral theory based on the notion of prima facie duties. According to this theory, there is a plurality of basic obligations and intrinsic goods: fidelity, gratitude, reparation, self-improvement, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence. These basic features underlie our moral deliberations. However, there are situations where these basic features conflict. For example, imagine a person who promises her colleagues to take part in an important meeting. On the way, her mother calls her and says that she is in an emergency and needs immediate help. It is obvious that in this situation, the duties of fidelity and gratitude conflict with each other. To avoid such inconsistency, and to represent the complexity of the moral domain in his moral theory, Ross characterizes the underlying moral features in terms of prima facie principles. For instance, in the above-mentioned situation, the defeasible principles remind us that it is our prima facie duty to keep our promise, and it is also

our prima facie duty to respect our parents and help them, even if we cannot accomplish such duties at the same time, and one of them outweighs the other.

There are three points about prima facie ethics, which are highly important for our discussion. First, a prima facie principle, unlike an algorithm, is indeterminate so that it does not dictate specifically how to accomplish a duty. For instance, it says that we have a prima facie duty to improve ourselves, but it does not say how and to what extent; one can follow the project of self-improvement in different ways, for example, by studying math and philosophy to flourish intellectually or taking part in sports activities to improve one's health. In other words, prima facie principles only pre-scribe, recommend or prohibit act-types, not act-tokens (Albertzart 2014, 136). It is the task of a moral agent to use her capacity of judgment to determine the course of action. Second, there is no lexical order, no fixed priority, among principles to resolve the possible conflicts between basic features. Since there is not "a fixed, once-and-for-all ranking that tells us how we are to decide between competing moral obligations," (Timmons 2013, 248) we have to rely on our moral judgments including intuitions and sensitivities to determine the actual, all-things-considered duty. Conse-quently, moral judgment plays a prominent role in Ross's principle-based approach to morality. Third, prima facie ethics, as an instance of a generalist theory, is compatible with holism. What holism is inconsistent with is the "reason atomism." According to this thesis:

> **RA** if a feature is a moral reason in one case, then it must be a moral
> reason with the same valence in any context in which it is present.

However, Ross's theory does not entail atomism. A prima facie principle does not ascribe an invariant, universal valence to a property. It just points out that an action-type generally has a specific deontic status. Therefore, context-sensitivity and defeasibility are considered in Ross's theory.

A brief look at some aspects of Kantian deontology[2] is also fruitful for our discus-sion. The first point is that Kant's categorical imperative is a formal criterion. The categorical imperative, by itself, does not have any specific prescriptive content (Albertzart 2011, 50) and does not dictate what we ought to do in a specific circum-stance. It is just a pervasive second-order standard to test the permissibility of the maxims in which the details of the situation and the intended course of action are reflected. Therefore, the categorical imperative should be supplemented by the agent's

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[2] At least, we may call it a respectable version of Kantianism.

sensitivity to be used in moral reasoning.[3] Second, in Kantian deontology, for evaluating an action from the moral point of view, in addition to the form of the action, i.e. the formal conformity of action with the Categorical Imperative, one should consider the agent's will too. Moral agents obey moral obligations for the sake of morality, not other intentions. For example, if a politician takes part in volunteering only to gain publicity, not for the sake of morality itself, his action cannot be evaluated as morally good; such action is just a step to reach a destination, like winning the election by popularity. Therefore, it should be put under the recommendations of instrumental, not categorical rationality. Since the agents' wills can vary from one case to another, one cannot always ascribe the moral rightness or goodness to action and should look to the other elements of the situation, e.g., the agents' intentions, to make a sound judgment. Therefore, Kantian deontology not only is compatible with holism (McKeever, Ridge 2005, 98) but also encourages us to look closely at the features of a situation in our moral reasoning, which casts doubt on the fairness of particularists' allegations against generalists.[4]

By paying attention to the above discussions, one can conclude, "particularists do not have a monopoly on holism" (Mckeever and Ridge 2005, 96). That is, context-sensitivity has found its way into moderate versions of generalism too. Moreover, the dichotomy between the person of principle and the person of judgment is bridgeable. According to moderate generalism, moral principles are not decisive, fully specified algorithms that act as an auto-pilot for life (Albertzart 2013, 341); consequently, they must be supplemented by the capacity of judgment. These conclusions suggest that

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[3] In a similar argument, one might argue that since a particular action sometimes can be described in different ways (for example, "telling an untruth" sometimes can be described as "lying" or "acting in conformity of politeness"), the agent should use his or her moral judgment to choose the maxim of the action to test its permissibility.

[4] One might find it difficult to figure out how holism in theory reason is compatible with the notoriously famous position of Kant on the unconditional wrongness of lying. This issue may turn into an argument as follows. (1) If Kantian ethics is compatible with holism, there must be a clear demonstration of how, on Kant's theory, one could have a reason to lie since contextual features would make it the case that lying would not be wrong; (2) such demonstration is not available, since Kant's position on the wrongness of lying is unconditional, universal, and exceptionless; as a result, this is not the case that Kantian ethics is compatible with holism. However, this argument is wrong, for (1) is based on a misconception of holism. As discussed in section two, according to holism, a feature that is a reason in one case *may* be no reason at all or an opposite reason in another. It is clear that holism is a *modal* claim, and it does not say that if a feature is a reason in one case, there *must* be a context in which the feature has the opposite valence. Fortunately, Dancy acknowledges this point and writes: "particularism should accept the possibility of *invariant reasons*, so long as the invariance is not a matter of the logic of such reasons, but more the rather peculiar fact that some reasons happen to contribute in ways that are not affected by other features" (Dancy 2005, 331). Therefore, one can maintain holism and believe that lying has an invariant valence across different cases. It is worth mentioning that there might be an argument against (2); however, this topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

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there is no inconsistency between moderate versions of the principle-based approach to morality and particularists' main concerns. Therefore, particularists' argument is not enough to refute all versions of generalism.

Although the particularists' argument is not convincing, their debates, in my view, are fruitful for principle-based ethics. Mckeever and Ridge, as two defenders of generalism who wrote extensively on this subject, acknowledge this view and write:

> Particularism has done a great service by highlighting the importance of holism, which is an interesting and previously much-neglected thesis. Particularism is also an important position and its apparent intelligibility should awaken the friends of codification from their dogmatic generalist slumbers (Mckeever and Ridge 2005, 103).[5]

However, I think that the particularists' contributions are not restricted to the above-mentioned points. Their debates also bring up a crucial question on the role of moral principles in ethics.

Generalists *can* indeed develop a conceptual framework that covers holism in the theory of reason and particularists' emphasis on the role of moral judgment while it preserves a principlist theme; nevertheless, it is not obvious why they *ought to* pursue such a project. If moral agents must ultimately rely on their capacity of judgment to determine the right course of actions, why should they preserve principles at all in their moral deliberations? In other words, I think, it is a legitimate query to ask "why moral principles need to be supplemented but are not supplanted, by judgment?" (Albertzart 2013, 339) To refute the main argument of particularism, it is sufficient to either deny holism or show that holism is consistent with some versions of generalism. However, to support generalism, one must answer the neglected question on the rationality of the principled approach, which completely depends on the understanding of the nature and role of moral principles. Therefore, the current debates should be pushed forward and enter a new space. Maike Albertzart, at the end of her article published in 2011, has invited researchers to this challenge. She writes:

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[5] In this section, I argued that particularists' conception of principle-based ethics is wrong; for some paradigms of principle-based ethics, such as Kantian deontology and Ross's theory, do not have an algorithmic understanding of moral principles; moreover, such prototypical generalist theories are compatible with holism and incorporate moral judgment. In such circumstances, the burden is on particularists to clarify to whom they are really opposing. One possible target, as Mckeever and Ridge point out, is "the friends of codification" who want to articulate a set of "codes of conduct" in different branches of applied ethics like engineering ethics. Particularists repeatedly refer to the idea of codification of morality (for example, see Dancy 2004, 11, 12, 108, 109, 196). However, they should distinguish between defending the codification of morality and believing in the significant role of moral principles in ethics.

> The central question that needs to be answered is what moral principles are
> and what role they play in moral thought and action. We should no longer ask
> whether someone is particularist or generalist, but what form and function
> of principles he or she defends and opposes. The result would be a debate
> that is less about labels and more about content (Albertzart 2011, 58).

To offer a full-fledged defense of principle-based ethics, I accept Albertzart's challenge. Therefore, in the next sections, I explain the fundamental roles of moral principles and propose a principle-based model of moral judgment. I show that the generalist approach is vindicated by its explanatory power.

4. The constitutive role of moral principles

Before explaining what essential roles moral principles play in moral thought and action, I have to make my conception of moral principles clear. By moral principles, I do not mean fully specified algorithms but simple, defeasible generalities like Ross's prima facie duties.[6] As discussed earlier, these principles are context-sensitive, since they do not ascribe thin concepts, like "good" and "wrong," to moral features invariantly and universally. Anyway, "the value of something need be neither a brute particular fact nor an instance of a universally valuable property. It can be an instance of generally valuable property" (Goldman 2001, 111). On this basis, such principles just point out that a property *prima facie, generally, in normal conditions, ceteris paribus* has a specific evaluative status.

Although prima facie principles are defeasible, one should not merely interpret them formally, as just valid theorems of deontic logic. These principles have much to say. For example, by saying "prima facie, lying is wrong," the moral agent does not just mean that lying is wrong except when it is not. Rather, she acknowledges her deep commitment not to lie in normal conditions, as if there is an imbalance between lying and not lying in the moral domain, and the moral agent, by approving this principle, shows her pro-attitude to the latter. This imbalance is an important intuition, and, as I will discuss in more detail, a conception of morality should cover it.

I ascribe two interrelated, fundamental roles to moral principles. First, moral principles have a constitutive role in our moral thought. Second, such principles can function as default reasons in our moral deliberations. By accepting these points,

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[6] In this paper, I want to develop and use a conceptual framework to elucidate the role of moral principles in ethics to defend generalist theories, like Rossian ethics, against particularism. Though my conception of moral principles is isomorphic to that of Ross, there are some differences between our meta-ethical positions. For example, while Ross is an intuitionist, my proposed model of moral judgment (see section 5) is completely different from intuitionism. A comparison between these two conceptions of morality, however, is beyond the scope of this paper and needs an independent article.

one can conclude that our moral thought and judgment depend on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principles.

In this section, I discuss the constitutive role of moral principles, and in the next section, I will point to their role in moral reasoning. To elaborate these roles, however, I first have to borrow insights from Robert Brandom and Jaroslav Peregrin who is heavily influenced by Brandom.[7]

Two aspects of Brandom's philosophy are important for our discussion. The first one is Brandom's normative account of human beings' social practices. According to this idea, "living in a human society amounts to steering within a rich network of normative social relationships and enjoying many kinds of normative statuses that reach into many dimensions"[8] (Peregrin 2014, 7). This is because every human interpersonal role is norm-laden, that is, trammeled in the web of commitments, entitlements, and responsibilities. For example, when the concept of "husband" is properly applied to a man, he finds himself in the middle of commitments and responsibilities without which such a role is not constituted. In this respect, consider the commitment of monogamy. It seems that in the modern western culture and many other places in the world, the commitment to monogamy is at the heart of this concept. For this reason, if a boy says sincerely to his sweetheart in the proposal that he will do his best to make the girl happy along with his other wives, he properly not only receives a harsh "NO!" but one can say that he does not know what it means exactly to be a husband. This example shows that some norms have a constitutive role, and the definitions of human interpersonal roles totally depend on them.

The second idea is Brandom's middle way of explaining social behaviors.[9] There are two opposite positions on this topic. One side thinks that human pattern-governed behavior, like the usage of language, is always the result of consciously following the rules. In this view, by obeying a rule, "which requires having the rule in mind and intending to follow it," (Maher 2012, 48) a person knows the right course of action since the rule dictates *explicitly* what she *ought to do* in a certain circumstance. The other extreme, by contrast, avoids any normative language and tries to offer a causal

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[7] It is worth mentioning that both Brandom and Peregrin want to develop and defend a theory of meaning called inferentialism. In other words, their works are mainly in philosophy of language. Nonetheless, their inferentialist approach, due to the emphasis on the normativity of meaning, may shine a light on different meta-ethical questions. In this paper, I have used their rule-following considerations to defend a meta-ethical position; however, a comparison of moral principles with language rules needs another independent paper.

[8] According to Brandom's view, "Linguistic communication institutes an important stratum of such statuses (commitments and entitlements) and to understand language means being able to keep track of the statuses of one's fellow speakers" (Peregrin 2014, 7).

[9] For a detailed study, look at Brandom's discussions over regularism/regulism debate in *Making It Explicit* (1994). For instance, see the following pages: 18 – 29, 41, 46, 99.

explanation of social uniformities based on the actor's dispositions or propensities. In this dispute, Brandom (1994, 18 – 29) stays in the normative realm. He believes that our social practices are bouncing off norms. However, he rejects the idea that all normative behaviors are the result of consciously following explicit rules or ought-to-do's. According to Brandom, "norms need not take the form of explicitly stated rules. At least some norms can be implicit in practice" (Maher 2012, 54). For this, following Sellars (1969, 508), Brandom acknowledges the normative category of ought-to-be. The primary function of these implicit norms, according to Peregrin's interpretation (2014, 109 & 127), is not to regulate act-tokens but to constitute act-types. In other words, unlike ought-to-do's, ought-to-be's, by themselves, do not command us to carry out a specific action in a particular situation; instead, they are general criteria of appropriateness or inappropriateness, according to which new forms of activity (or language games) are defined. For example, chess is a norm-governed activity; however, its norms "do not tell us how to move pieces in the sense of advising us what to do at any particular moment of the game (with the singular exception of a forced move, i.e., of the situation when there is merely one admissible move left)." Instead, such norms define the game; that is, they tell us "what is a legitimate move and what is prohibited" (Peregrin 2014, 109).[10]

By combining Brandom's account of human sociability with his particular way of explaining the normative nature of social behaviors based on implicit norms, one can say that human beings, as Sellarsian might say, are fraught-with-oughts, since humans' social roles like being a husband, mother, neighbor, etc. are already constituted by a system of commitments (or ought-to-be's). Such constitutive commitments (norms) can be implicit in practice and stay in the default background of the inter-subjective understanding of the role one wants to play.

After considering the relevant aspects of Brandom's philosophy, it is time to return to the main discussion and use the adapted insights to delineate what roles moral principles play in moral thought and action.

As discussed before, there is a spectrum of views on the role of moral principles in ethics. On the one extreme, radical generalists think that moral principles act like algorithms by telling moral agents what they ought to do in certain circumstances. On the opposite side, there is principle abstinence among particularists according to which moral principles play no fundamental role in moral judgments. However, there is a third approach in this dispute, for which I argue. According to such an approach, moral principles, by themselves, do not dictate what we exactly ought to do in particular situations; nevertheless, they play an important role in our moral thought and

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[10] In the conceptual framework of this paper, the concepts of implicit rules, implicit norms, implicit principles, constitutive principles, defeasible generalities, and ought-to-be's are interchangeable.

action, since our inter-subjective understanding of morality is based upon them. In Brandomian terms, moral principles are not ought-to-do's but ought-to-be's.[11] They are a subcategory of human beings' commitments that define one's social role as a moral agent. The moral agent finds herself at the intersection of commitments and responsibilities, such as being honest or not being malicious, without which the essence of morality is not understood. In other words, moral principles are shared commitments and constraints that define and delimit morality.

Metaphorically, moral principles "act, in a sense, like walls. Walls restrict us; prevent us from walking through them, but precisely thanks to this they can constitute a house, an inner space that we humans find so useful" (Peregrin 2014, 88). Likewise, the space of morality is constituted by these principles.

The metaphor of space is useful for our discussion. A space is where we can perform many activities, like playing a game. In a similar fashion, the space of morality is where we can perform many moral practices. For example, we can make moral judgments on particular cases and propose different reasons for actions. We can even challenge our or others' judgments in the game of giving and asking for reasons. However, the point is that such *moral* practices are only possible due to the provision of a suitable supply of ought-to-be's, as a general criterion of appropriateness or inappropriateness, which constitute *morality* and delimit our understanding of *ethics*. We must first enter the space of morality and then argue for and against the moral status of a situation. To better understand this point, consider again the chess game. In the space of a chess game, as Peregrin describe, "I can attack the opponent's king, take his pieces, defend myself from his attempts to checkmate me, and so forth – things that I cannot do outside of this space" (Peregrin 2014, 73). However, my entrance to this space completely depends on the existence and acceptance of the implicit norms that define the game and make the pieces of wood into chess pieces. Similarly, my entrance to moral space depends on my commitment to a set of moral principles that define morality.

There might be a particularist-friendly response to this idea that a commitment to certain broad principles constitutes distinctively moral thought and action.

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[11] In the opening of this section, I defined the term 'principle' as a simple, defeasible generality. Such a generality can be articulated in different forms. A moral principle may point out a norm of a certain degree of generality, like Ross's prima facie duties or the four principles of bioethics (beneficence, non-malevolence, autonomy, and justice). Moreover, a defeasible generality that describes the deontic status of an act-type is considered a moral principle. Therefore, propositions like "prima facie, lying is wrong" or "in normal conditions, you should not lie" are examples of moral principles, as I define them. It is clear that such principles, by themselves and independently, do not dictate what the agent should do in particular situations quite straightforwardly. Rather, in the course of moral judgment, the agent should examine other considerations to reach a decision on what she ought to do. In the next section, I discuss this point extensively.

Particularists may point out that while Dancy does not seem committed to any moral principles, he is surely operating in the moral space. In other words, particularists might just accept the same point about the constitution of moral space regarding something other than moral principles. For instance, they might say that the same constitutive role can be played by a commitment to certain kinds of reasons or certain norms. However, I could be happy with a response like this, if it just amounts to using different labels for the same idea – e.g., if I call a commitment to honesty a commitment to a general moral principle and they call it a commitment to the existence of a pattern of moral reasons across cases. Therefore, I do not think that this objection damages my conception of morality unless they show exactly what the substantial difference is between my conception of moral principles and their pattern of reasons (or norms, etc.)

5. The principle-based model of moral judgment

So far, I have tried to show that moral principles are in the medium of our understanding of ethics, and due to their constitutive role, the possibility of moral thought and action depends on them. Now, I want to go further and propose a principle-based model of moral judgment (or moral reasoning). In this model, moral principles, if stated explicitly, can function as default reasons in our moral deliberations. They are not just in the background of moral thinking, but actively play their role in the course of moral reasoning.

In my model, moral reasoning is the process of turning ought-to-be's into ought-to-do's. This process takes place in what I call the default-and-challenge structure. Moral reasoning starts with moral principles that function as default reasons in our moral deliberations and continues with second-order considerations of moral agents, which finally determine what one ought to do in a particular situation.

As discussed before, moral principles are implicit commitments (or ought-to-bes) that suggest that some act-types are generally (in normal conditions) appropriate and some others are generally inappropriate. Such general moral truths, in my model, are the starting point of moral reasoning. For example, we start moral deliberations by thinking there are moral reasons against hurting others, breaking one's promises, lying, and so on. In other words, a moral agent, first of all, finds herself at the intersection of commitments that are in force. Such commitments encourage the moral agent to behave in accordance with certain act-types, and she tries to fulfill them through her behaviors. For example, the moral agent finds herself committed to not lying, and this principle (prima facie lying is wrong) can function as the default reason for her action. That is, *in normal conditions*, by considering this principle and adding factual details relevant to the context (saying X is an instance of lying), the moral

agent can find what she ought to do (not saying X) in a particular situation. However, the story of moral reasoning does not always go as easy as this case; since there might be complex moral situations that are distant from the normal conditions. In such situations, the prescriptions derived from two or more default reasons cannot be fulfilled at the same time, and the moral agent has to evaluate her options and reach an all-things-considered decision. Therefore, due to the possibility of abnormal conditions, the moral agent should always take a critical attitude in her moral reasoning and try to challenge her default reasons by considering the morally relevant elements of the case. Anyway, "the agent's primary concern is not to find out what her reason for the action is, but whether the reason on which she proposes to act is a good reason"(Albertzart 2011, 52) or not. In other words, to find a good reason for the action, the moral agent should critically consider what morally relevant elements are present in the context and how these elements may affect, for example, outweigh or defeat, her default reasons.

To understand these things, however, unlike what particularists suggest, it is not enough to look precisely at the details of the case before one.[12] In addition to the details of the present context in which the moral decision has to be taken, the moral agent should look at other contexts where the similar moral dispute is settled to see how the morally relevant elements that exist in the present case, or something similar to them, have influenced the course of reasoning in those contexts. Then she can use those insights in the present context. In fact, the key of moral reasoning, according to this model, is moral practice, and as much as a moral agent looks at different moral contexts and sees how the distance from the normal conditions, she will gain more competence to challenge her default reasons and make sound moral judgments in particular situations. I believe that this mode of reasoning, especially the advice for looking at other contexts is a point of strength, for generalist theory against their counterpart.

An objection might be raised here.[13] A critic might say that the advice for looking at other contexts and using analogical thinking in moral judgment, as proposed in this model, is neither an advantage for a generalist theory nor a real threat to particularism since this mode of reasoning is a contingent feature that particularists can easily incorporate in their theory too. Emphasizing this feature, the critic may continue, is

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[12] I am not suggesting that particularists would directly advise people not to consider other contexts (or hypothetical cases) when engaging in moral reasoning. However, It should be stressed that Dancy argues for an aesthetics model of moral judgment according to which "one's main duty, in moral judgment, is to look really closely at the case before one" (Dancy 2011, 63). In Dancy's view, a mature moral agent has a kind of sensitivity that enables him to see the right course of action in each case if she carefully observes the context.

[13] I would like to thank the anonymous referee for raising this objection.

significant for generalists only when someone proves that the advice for looking at other contexts and using analogical thinking is incompatible with particularism.

In response to this objection, I should clarify my position in the game of giving and asking for reasons. By pointing out this feature, neither do I want to *attack* particularism, nor am I going to provide a *positive argument* for generalism, since I completely agree with the critic that the advice for paying attention to other contexts in moral reasoning is a feature that particularism can incorporate into their theory too. However, it does not mean that this feature of the proposed model is not important for the project of defending principle-based ethics against particularists' allegations. By considering the proposed model, one can see that it refutes particularists' allegations against their generalist counterparts. According to particularism, defenders of principle-based ethics *stick* to the principles, *looking away* from the details of the context. However, according to this model, the moral agent must not stick to the principles. Rather, she should precisely look at details of different contexts and critically try to challenge the prescriptions derived from moral principles to reach an all-things-considered decision. Moreover, if particularists argue that the emphasis on the context-sensitivity of moral reason is the real advantage of their theory over generalism, it is clear that this principle-based model not only considers particularists' concerns about the contextuality of ethics but also takes it more seriously than particularists themselves take. While particularists encourage a moral agent to look and look precisely at the details of the case before her, this model suggests that in addition to such details, the moral agent should look at other contexts with similar problems to see how default reasons are challenged there. Briefly, my position regarding the contextuality of ethics is defensive, and defensive strategies are different. In this point, I aim to defend generalism through refutations of their opponents' allegations.

My principle-based conception of morality, however, has real advantages over particularism. In other words, there is a *positive argument* for generalism. I think this principle-based model of moral judgment can account for basic intuitions and phenomenological experience in ethical life that particularists have difficulty explaining. Such explanatory power can be considered as evidence that provides the rationality of the principle-based approach. In this regard, I want to mention two cases.

The first case is about the experience of shame that we feel in some contexts of the moral domain. As Terry Eagleton describes, "there just are situations from which one can emerge only with dirty hands." (Eagleton, 2007, 7) In these situations, two or more moral commitments conflict with each other, and one outweighs the other(s). However, in such contexts, even though we do the right course of action from the moral point of view, we feel a kind of compunction and sense that something wrong has happened. For example, when the moral agent, due to the emergency

condition of helping people in need, misses a meeting that she promised to attend, she feels that she owes an excuse to the organizers of the event.

Moral shame, as a phenomenological experience in ethical life, needs explanation. However, particularists have difficulty accounting for it (Hernandez-Iglesias 2006, 77). According to particularism, the shape of the context, i.e. how the relevant elements combine in the case, determines the reason for the action. This reason, which is the single element that is in force in particularists' picture, cannot generate compunction, since the moral agent has acted in conformity with its prescriptions and nothing has been defeated. However, according to the principle-based model presented in this paper, a moral agent finds herself at the intersection of commitments that function as default reasons in moral deliberations. These commitments, as the constituents of the moral space, remain in force, even though they are defeated in some contexts. Therefore, when such default reasons are defeated in a moral situation, they still have a voice that provokes moral shame in the moral agent.[14]

The second case is about the imbalances we sense in the moral domain. When we speak of morality, it seems that there is an imbalance in the attitude of the moral agent to some act-types. For instance, if our friend, who has experienced an ethical transformation, says that from now on, she wants to act only in accordance with morals, and meanwhile she says that she is going to lie to her husband in a case, we find her statements somehow surprising. At least, we think she has to explain why she is going to do so and how this maxim is compatible with her will to act morally. There is an imbalance between lying and not lying in the moral domain, and a moral agent by default has a pro-attitude towards the latter. Likewise, we find an imbalance in explanations of value judgments. For example, in everyday thinking, in face of ordinary moral problems, statements like "lying is morally wrong" can function as reasons that put an end to a dispute. However, "lying is morally right" is a statement that needs further explanations.

It seems that my conception of morality covers moral imbalances very well. According to this conception, moral principles are an integral part of a moral agent's identity; therefore, a kind of default pro-attitude to certain act-types, which generates the imbalance, is considered in this conception. Moreover, in this model, the notions of "normal condition" and "default reasons" explain the imbalances between moral judgments. As discussed before, my proposed model makes a distinction between normal and abnormal conditions and points out that in the normal condition, where

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[14] Moral shame is a complex phenomenon, and I think that we will perhaps need a holistic theory to explain why it is appropriate to feel good or bad about how we act in cases where "prima facie principles" conflict. What I am suggesting here is that principle-based ethics provides a better conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon.

there is only one morally relevant element, moral principles can function as default reasons. A default reason says a certain act-type (like lying) has a default valence. Such reason needs no more explanation and can put an end to relevant moral issues unless we recognize that we are in an abnormal condition. It is important to note that particularists cannot explain these imbalances since they do not ascribe antecedently any valances to act-types. For example, according to a strictly particularistic view, one cannot say antecedently "hurting innocent people is wrong." The rightness and wrongness of act-types totally depend on the details of the context, and the moral agent should not have a pro-attitude to any act-type. Meanwhile, value judgments with opposite valences, like "cruelty is wrong" and "cruelty is right", both need the same degree of explanation since there is no distinction between normal and abnormal conditions. As a result, it seems that particularism rejects our intuitions about the imbalances in the moral domain, while my principle-based conception covers them.

Particularists might object to the above discussions, arguing that while the generalist model captures how people *actually* think and act in the moral domain, the particularist model better captures how people *ought to* think and act in the moral space. According to this line of reasoning, people do in fact feel moral shame in specific situations or sense a kind of imbalance in the moral domain; however, these are just symptoms of sticking too closely to moral principles, and if people take particularists' prescriptions seriously, they will reject such intuition too. In my view, this objection is not convincing since it does not basically recognize my overall point as well as the structure of my argument. My discussion is surely not about moral thought and action as it ought to occur. Rather, my meta-ethical discussion is about how philosophers should depict morality from the epistemic point of view. In this regard, I argue in favor of moral generalism as a better explanation of morality in comparison to particularism since it covers basic, widespread intuitions in the moral domain (such as the context-sensitivity of moral reasons, moral shame, and moral imbalance) without imposing any additional cost to the web of moral belief.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to offer a full-fledged defense of principle-based ethics. In the negative approach, I argued that the main argument for particularism is not enough to refute all versions of generalism. Dancy claims that holism, or the context-sensitivity of reason, "is the leading thought behind particularism" (Dancy, 1993, 60). However, I showed that moderate versions of principle-based ethics are compatible with this doctrine. Therefore, particularists, at best, have targeted a specific conception of principled ethics that not all generalists might accept. In the positive approach, I described the fundamental roles of moral principles and emphasized the explanatory

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power of principle-based ethics. By considering my discussion, one can conclude that the principle-based approach has both strong philosophical foundations and explanatory power that make it a leading theory in elucidating morality.

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