

Moral Generalism or Particularism?

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Moral generalism and particularism are two positions in meta-ethics which have different views regarding the relation between moral thought and principles. By accepting this relationship, generalists emphasize the necessity of principles in decision making process, and claim that the rationality of moral thought depends on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principles. In contrast, particularists have rejected, or at least doubted, the existence of moral principles, and believe that the rationality of moral thought depends on recognizing special features of a case and relevant conditions. This is why, unlike generalists, they use case study method rather than syllogism in decision making process and moral judgment. Consequently, to support their view, particularists commonly resort to holism in the theory of reasons, while atomism is in support of generalism. To evaluate these two attitudes, this study surveys some arguments that particularists and generalists proposed to justify their view and criticize the rival's one, and also explains their positions concerning the epistemological and metaphysical role of moral principles and reasons. Finally, after evaluating their claims, the importance of both approaches in meta-ethics is stressed.

Keywords: moral generalism, moral particularism, moral principles, moral reasons, holism, atomism

1. Introduction

Generalism and particularism are two widely discussed approaches in meta-ethics which make diverse assertions regarding the place of moral principles. Generalists insist that the presence of principles in decision making process is necessary and that merely on the basis of principles, rationality of moral thought would be possible. Unlike them, particularists, by negation of the relationship between moral thought and principles, regard the existence of principles in ethics to be impossible, unnecessary, and inefficient.

The first lot maintain that the evaluation and justification of moral beliefs and actions and also recognition of the moral duties would be possible merely on the basis of principles. Consequently, they accept deductive inference as the method of moral reasoning. The second group believe that moral thought does not depend, in any way, on the suitable provision of moral principles and applying principles to particular cases, and think that moral understanding and judgment is possible only when particular conditions and features are considered. Thus, they regard the case study method as efficient.

In spite of serious divergence of views, both of them know themselves as defenders of ethics, and consider the defence of their certain approach to be a defence of ethics, and accuse the other side of making errors in moral decision making. Generalists consider that the refutation of rationality is an immediate consequence of particularism, and on the

basis of atomism in theory of reasons, support the generalism. Particularists, on the other hand, through accusing generalists of neglecting particular truths and certain conditions, put forward holism in support of their attitude.

Although generalists, or in other words, principlists, have contrasting views about meaning, scope, and domain of moral principles, all normative theories can be considered to somewhat as defenders of moral principles.

Since 1980's, particularism has been widely defended by several thinkers, including Jonathan Dancy, Robert Audi, John McDowell, David McNaughton, and Margaret Olivia Little.

This paper will scrutinize two aforementioned approaches and the arguments generalists and particularists presented to justify their attitude and to criticize the rival's one. Taking into consideration that generalists regard ethical principles as necessary both epistemologically and metaphysically and particularists opposed them in both of these aspects, this problem specifically will be discussed. The study of the function of generalists and particularists and evaluation of their claims manifests that none of them is committed to principles and theoretical foundation of its approach. Neither do generalists neglect particular truth absolutely, nor do particularists see principles to be redundant and unnecessary.

At the conclusion, the importance of these two attitudes is emphasized and the necessity of considering principles and particular cases in moral thought is indicated as well. The standpoints of Dancy, because of their significance, are examined more than the rest.

2. Generalism and Moral Principles

In responding to three questions, generalists view three principles as vital: What is it to be a moral person? How ought one to make moral decisions? And how is it possible for an action to be right or wrong? According to their beliefs, an unprincipled person is one not to be trusted, the right way to think morally is to be capable of applying principles to any new situation and to appeal to principles in decision making process and in moral judgment. Therefore, justification of rightness or wrongness of acts, evaluation of moral behaviours, and understanding that what we ought to do while facing difficulties is entirely impossible without principles and general rules. And in a more theoretical way, without principles, there is no distinction between right and wrong.

Generalists believe that overlooking general rules and principles and personalizing moral deductions have confronted ethics with danger of relativism and will result in scepticism (Beauchamp 2003); they attach a great importance to this explanation rather than pointing out that ethical generality facilitates the teaching of ethics, the guidance of moral decisions, the justification of moral judgments, and the formulation of laws and social policies (Hooker 2000; Goldman 2002; Nozick 1993).

Generalists, in general, find the existence of principles essential in ethics from epistemological and metaphysical aspects. On the one hand, they say that there would be no possibility to make a distinction between right and wrong actions and actually, the

rightness or wrongness of an act is determined by its connection to the principles. According to this, it is adequate only to recognize those principles the case falls under. And then by syllogism, everyone can easily infer the rightness or wrongness of the very action.

On the other hand, given that there is a distinction between right and wrong actions, there must be a detectable difference between the properties of the right ones and the properties of the wrong ones. Naturalists tend to justify moral properties on the basis of natural properties. In this approach, descriptive properties are detectable, and moral principles specify such regulations. Indeed, principles connect moral properties to non-moral ones (Dancy 2005). For instance, assisting others may be right because it is pleasant. To support their approach, generalists enjoy the atomism and apply it to both theory of normative reasons and theory of value. Atomism in the theory of reasons says: “a feature that is a reason in one case must remain a reason, and retain the same polarity, in any other” (Dancy 2004; 2007). Consequently, whenever and wherever the very act occurs, invariability and similarity of feature or features is the reason of the rightness or wrongness of the act and the reason for or against doing it. It is worth noting that generalists in regard with principles are either monists or pluralists. Immanuel Kant and David Ross are two notable instances of these two different approaches. Kant, contrary to Ross, is a monist as to moral principles, and holds that all moral principles refer to a priori principle, that is, a categorical imperative which is the source of all principles and rules that are absolute and unconditional.

Ross declares that morality is composed of an irreducible plurality of principles that do not come in a strict order of priority (Ross Sec. 20). Thus as to moral principles, he is a pluralist, and after dividing duties into prima facie and duties in practice, he puts forward seven principles as primary ones. All primary principles are of the same significance. But in practice, a certain act might be an instance of more than one principle; and therefore, principles will be in conflict with each other, for example, a given act might be an instance of inflicting a torment on others so that we know it is wrong, but at the same time may be considered moral because of protecting yourself and others. Stealing, being unfaithful, lying, and several moral or immoral cases can be different from our original judgment in special cases. According to Rossian generalism, whether an act is morally permissible or not depends on the interaction of all these principles. And every one should always do what the balance or mix of moral considerations demands in the case (Hooker 2000). This is why Robert Audi knows Ross as an epistemological particularist (Audi 2006). Nevertheless, particularists regard him as a generalist because of his belief in general principles (Dancy 2004; Audi 2006).

Monistic approach in decision making process and moral judgment requires to be impossible, for a given case to fall under more than one principle. And according to pluralistic approach, one has to decide which principle, of all those that apply, is the dominant one in this case, and this would require more than subsumption, or, like Ross should say, after evaluating conditions, intuition of moral duty is needed.

3. Particularism in Contrast with Generalism

Particularists, contrary to generalists, neither hold that the moral person is someone who has principles nor that the moral judgment is equivalent to application of principles. In spite of various expressions of this opposition, the standpoint of particularism is known as a negative attitude toward principles. According to John McDowell (1979), particularists believe that for evaluating the rationality of attitudes, we do not need principles and we cannot need them.

Particularists do not accept the role and the significance of principles neither epistemologically nor metaphysically. For this reason, they challenge generalism both from the aspect of reasoning method and justification of its approach. Thus, to recognize whether X is right or wrong, it is necessary that all principles that apply to each case must be absolute and decisive, in the sense that either each case falls under one principle or while the principles are plural, superiority of one of them should be proved. However, herein lies the difficulty since none of the principles are decisive, and always it is possible that several principles simultaneously apply to the same case and they are in opposition to each other, i.e., some principles state that X is right and others vice versa. The reason of compatibility of one act with numerous principles is that any act might have several aspects that each one is related to another principle. On the one hand, abortion, for example, is wrong because it is an instance of murder, and on the other hand, according to the principle of respect for autonomy, is right.

Generalists, due to plurality of principles and conflict between them in practice, and being failed in showing a way to release from the conflict, have encountered serious difficulties in the decision making process and moral judgment. Besides, particularists believe that the epistemology originated from principles is not persuasive, since by mere reliance on general principles and turning a blind eye to particular truths and certain conditions, one cannot make proper decisions in order to know whether the act X is right or wrong. Generalists' boundless indication on principles caused particularists to say that they look away conditions and details, and this might result in wrong moral decisions; because of relying on a few rules, generalists arrive at similar decisions in dissimilar situations that might be mistakes due to their unconsciousness about alteration of reasoning under new circumstances (Dancy 1993).

Generally speaking, to confront generalism, particularists have two options: either try to show that the suggested principles are not so flexible to cover the ground, or to claim that there is no reason, whatever, to suppose that morality stands or falls with a supply of principles capable of doing the job required of them. In this case, they must depict that how ethics can work without principles.

Some particularists have chosen the first method and pointed out some counter-examples implying the erroneous application of a principle to a moral action, and thereby question the generality of principles and moral rules (Shafer-Landau 1997) like sadistic pleasures that violate the principle of maximizing pleasure.

Another group do not consider this reason adequate in defending particularism (Hooker, and Little 2000), and in spite of utilizing it for justifying holism, do not regard it as valid. Some thinkers, including Dancy, chose the second method and replaced holism in the

theory of reasons with atomism and considered it as the rejection of generalism. Holism in normative reasons indicates that a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason in another (Dancy 1993; 2004).

In this theory, everything is dependent on conditions; and the reasons are sensitive to context. Particularists welcome to this approach (Hooker, and Little 2000; Lance, and Little 2006; Audi 2006; McNaughton 1988). This group, in contrast to generalists who viewed that moral rationality is necessarily based on the existence of a suitable supply of moral principles and held that moral principles necessarily behave in regular ways, find moral reasons to be the sum of certain properties of each case that probably alter in different situations. Therefore, they assert repeatedly that it is not necessary for a moral reason to remain fixed and stable. In this approach, they devote a lot of effort to demonstrate the incorrectness of atomism in different ways, because annulment of atomism as the supporter theory of generalism will result in annulment of the generalism itself.

One of the criticisms of generalists against particularism is that they deny the rationality of moral thought. Thinking rationally requires at least that one think consistently, and in ethics, we are required to apply our principles consistently, that is, to apply the same principle to similar cases and decisive features would remain in various conditions, it means to take the same feature to be the same reason, wherever it occurs. To demonstrate that this claim is not realistic, Dancy employs the distinction that generalists have drawn between moral and non-moral thinking. Rejecting this distinction, he comes to the conclusion that the generalists' understanding of the rationality of moral thought is mistaken. In his view, their major difficulty is that they, after distinguishing between these two kinds of thinking, made use of atomism merely to support moral thought. For rejecting this type of thinking, he refers to the distinction drawn by generalists between theoretical reasons and practical reasons or reasons for belief and reasons for action. Generalists, at the same time, do not defend atomism as a theory about reasons for belief and maintain that reasons for belief possibly alter under various circumstances; but believe this is not true about reasons for action because according to them, reasons for action always work in a same way. Thus, principle of "lying is wrong" indicates that if an act necessitates lying, this principle always will be a reason against it. Dancy rejects the difference between reasons for belief and reasons for action in dependency on circumstances, and holds that both of reasons are sensitive to context. Then this fact is that atomism is not true about the reasons for belief, and the defender of this sort of reasons is holism, similarly this is true of moral reasons.

To justify the aforementioned standpoint about reasons for belief, he gives an example of a red thing, ordinarily, whose red appearance is some reason to believe it is red. But what if I have taken a drug that makes red things look blue and blue things look red? Thus when it seems red to me, this is a reason that it is blue and vice versa. Dancy holds that this example indicates that both reasons for belief and reasons for action are sensitive to context.

The main reason of particularists in rejecting the above-mentioned distinction is that there is no reason proving that moral reasons function in a radically different way from other

reasons. The chief concern of particularists about accepting this distinction, which means stability of moral reasons, is to be obliged to accept atomism or at least a hybrid conception of rationality, which requires that any type of thought (moral and non-moral) have its own special logic; and this is unreasonable. For this reason, Dancy considers defeating atomism as the only way to vanquish principlism and holds that it is the falsehood of atomism, not the incorrectness of moral principles that resulted in accepting holism in reasons (Dancy 2004; 2007).

4. Holism in the Theory of Reasons and the Theory of Value

Particularists believe that holism, instead of atomism, is true in the theory of reasons and the theory of value. They state, like generalists, that moral agent is sensitive to the moral reasons present in the case, but draw a different image of this sensitivity. In this image, function of moral reasons is not different from other reasons and contrary to generalism which accepts the similarity of performance of reasons, in their view, features have variable relevance that can make one moral difference in one case and an another one in another case.

Therefore, holism in the theory of normative reasons consists of two points: (1) The way in which reasons are combined, is not necessarily determined or combined; (2) One thing might be a reason in a case and not in another one, in a sense that possibly, a property causes goodness of an act and in another case, badness of it, or causes no difference at all. Contrary to generalists who maintain that some features are morally speaking in favour of the action, and another ones against it wherever it occurs (Dancy 1993; 2004), particularists hold that *maybe* a feature in some situation is in favour of it and opposite it in another (Dancy 1993; 2004; 2007).

Particularism is a pluralistic approach regarding properties, and believes that in each case, there is more than one morally relevant property, and it possibly applies to an act in this case and does not in another, i.e., even probably oppose it. What causes a property of an act to be regarded as a different reason in a new situation is the changing of circumstances that can affect the correctness of faithfulness or incorrectness of theft, for example.

Consequently, moral thought does not depend on application of principles in any way, and we do not need a set of common elements and paradigms in order to distinguish right from wrong, but in any case, one should know the moral truths that are the basis of an knowledge. Recognizing these truths constitutes our normative knowledge. Thus in understanding the practical purport of a concept such as cruelty, he observes differences making him abandon the cruel action. In general, according to particularists' view about moral deliberation, through knowing the essence of the case before me, we shall be capable of knowing that whether a given act is right or wrong and therefore, moral judgment means sensitivity to the essence of a situation we are in (Dancy 2004; 2005; Lance, and Little 2004).

Particularists, of course, accept that possibly there would be features that are moral reasons wherever occur (Dancy 1993; 2004). Dancy knows these reasons to be invariant,

and does not advance any kind of reasoning implying that similar reasons do not exist at all, nevertheless, does not consider this similarity to be due to the existence of moral principles. Therefore, he says that it is possible for one feature to perform similarly in two various situations, and does not mean by this that it must function invariably. This possibility does not necessitate the acceptance of atomism and moral principles, but only requires that there be probably general statements that function in the same way. Wrongness of torturing a child is an example of cases that is exactly the same in various conditions, but here like everywhere, the act of torturing a child itself is the reason of its wrongness, and that how it functions in other cases does not concern its function here (Dancy 2004; 2007).

Dancy not only knows holism in connection with normative reasons to be true but also asserts that this theory is true in realm of values as well, i.e., X in the situation A has a value different from its value in the situation B, or maybe has no value at all. In regard with value, he puts the very two previous propositions forward:

- (1) A feature or part may have one value in one context and a different or an opposite value in another.
- (2) The value of a complex or whole is not necessarily identical with the sum of the values of its elements or parts.

With the aid of George Edward Moore's standpoint concerning value, Dancy describes this issue and explains his theory in comparison with Moore's (Dancy 2000; 2004).

Moore accepts the second proposition and rejects the first, because he believes in stability of values and knows the value to be intrinsic, but differs from Dancy in interpretation of the second proposition. According to Moore, the whole could be more valuable, because of the presence of a certain part, than could be explained by the value of that part; a part can contribute more, or less, value than it actually has (Moore 1903). Dancy does not accept this. Their views differ, because Moore accepts the supervenience theory and holds that the intrinsic value of something supervenes upon its other intrinsic qualities; and because of invariability of the value of parts, the whole value also remains the same in various context.

Dancy, first of all, proposes the theory of resultance in regard with value and compares it with supervenience theory. This theory states that the value of each case results from features and can vary because of changes elsewhere. Dancy knows this value to be intrinsic, but he aims at something different from what Moore and others hold. He believes that everything has intrinsic features (value-making features) and resultant or intrinsic values which grounded in them. Thus, value-making features of each case should be considered separately from other cases because there is no common intrinsic feature that is invariant from case to case. The intrinsic value of an object is thus capable of being affected by context. Then he advances the theory of supervenience that in fact is similar to the theory of resultance and different from Moor's intended supervenience. He calls Moore's version a sort of local supervenience and his own version a more global supervenience (Dancy 2004). According to local supervenience, an object cannot change

in intrinsic value unless it changes in other respects, and according to global supervenience, an object cannot change in intrinsic value unless there are other changes somewhere. Thus in this theory, intrinsic value is grounded in other properties, not in its properties, but it can be grounded in properties of other things, in relations to other things, and even in the values of other things to which the value-bearer is related .

This account requires us to offer a criterion of an intrinsic property. Dancy distinguishes between two features: “good-making features” and “enabling features” (Dancy 2004). The second type features are relevant to the value as well, but they are not playing the same role as that play value-making features; in fact, these are properties whose presence or absence can make a difference to the ability of the intrinsic properties to generate the value that they do.

In this case, intrinsic value is a value that grounded in or resulted from intrinsic features of the object, but probably it alters owing to the changes of other features, i.e., because of features whose absence or presence can bring about a difference to the ability of intrinsic properties that are value-bearer.

5. Evaluation

I attempted in this paper to scrutinize theoretical differences of two approaches named generalism and particularism. Generalists, by a positive answer to “whether there is a relation between principles and moral thought or not?”, opposed to particularists. By believing in the dependency of rationality of moral thought on principles, they regarded the existence of principles in the decision making process and moral judgment as necessary and inevitable. However, particularists, in contrast, rejected this relationship and acknowledged the judgment and decision making based on recognizing special features of a case and relevant circumstances. Generalists defended their approach on the basis of atomism, and particularists on the basis of holism.

Each approach accused its rival of committing errors. Generalists accused the other group of denial of principles and rejecting the rationality of moral thought, and particularists, after referring to generalists’ error concerning the distinction between moral and non-moral thought, proposed a picture of rationality that is universalizable including both thoughts. Generalists interpreted the rationality as consistency in beliefs and viewed principles to be necessary for moral thinking, but particularists interpreted rational thinking as having adequate reasons. These reasons are not necessarily of the type of rules and also not independent of context.

On the other hand, generalists accused particularists of neglecting principles, and particularists accused them of overlooking particular truths and conditions. Both of them hold that this negligence will result in committing an error in moral judgment and decision making.

It is needed to ask whether generalists really neglect the particular truths and conditions in their judgments and particularists judge without principles or not. In view of their function, it seems that perspectives of the both sides are extreme, or at least none of them

is committed to principles and theoretical foundation of its approach. Neither do generalists neglect particular truth absolutely, nor do particularists see principles to be redundant and unnecessary.

Studying moral theories' function concerning the role of principles and situation in ethical thinking indicates that none of generalists believes that one can make a decision in isolation, but they see considering the situations as necessary in judgment. Therefore, it is possible to say that holism is compatible with the generalist view that morality can and should be codified. Considering the circumstances and conditions, in some kinds of generalism like Ross's theory, is accepted by particularists. For this reason, Dancy (2004) points out that particularism is not the direct and immediate conclusion of holism because some forms of generalism are compatible with this approach. But among generalists, Ross is not the only one who has taken this position. Perhaps, virtue ethics and utilitarianism forego Kant's theory in this regard. It is clear that in Aristotle's virtue ethics, the rightness or wrongness of acts should be determined in context. It holds that what we ought to do on a given occasion depends on what virtue requires in the circumstances. For Aristotle, virtuous agent should recognize what action, how, why, and to whom should be done. In fact, Aristotle, by these particulars, tells us what an action consists in, and that an agent should not be regardless of these elements in decision making process or moral judgment.

Classical utilitarianism believes that pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable; accordingly, the maximizing of pleasure is regarded as the criterion for the rightness of an act. Particularists usually mention the sadistic pleasures as a counter-example against utilitarianism. It is obvious that none of utilitarian philosophers considers sadistic pleasures as valuable. I think the very principle of pleasure, according to which only reasonable pleasures are permissible, does not allow utilitarian philosophers accept them. Therefore, the fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason to perform the action if and only if the pleasure is non-sadistic. John Stuart Mill and even Jeremy Bentham have proposed some criteria for measuring and determining pleasures which do not let every kind of pleasure, including sadistic pleasures, be valuable. Hence, the rationality which is the basis of all moral theories, including utilitarianism, does not let every act be right just due to being apparently an instance of a principle. Consequently, whether the fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason for performing the action or not depends on the context. Therefore, utilitarianists consider special features and conditions to determine higher quality pleasures, or in general, the greatest amount of happiness.

Because of his belief in unconditional rules, Kant's theory is accused of denial of the sensitivity to the particular cases. However, there are reasons indicating that for Kant, considering the particular case is necessary while applying a principle. He recognizes that the application of rules requires a judgment to determine their applicability to a particular case, and this cannot be formulated in general terms, but is determinable by the particular case (Kant 1999). Then, he deems that the agent must recognize whether the act falls under a rule or not. In order to do it, he needs to consider a particular case in context. The requirement of Kant's attention to necessity of considering cases in judgment indicates that he pays attention to particulars, because a case would be regarded as particular when

its features and the context in which it occurs are considered.

In addition, when he tries to distinguish between suicide and deliberate martyrdom in Doctrine of Virtue, and questions the wrongness of the latter, while regarding the primary as wrong unconditionally, it shows that he accepts, in fact, some exceptions. In other words, for him, deliberate martyrdom is not an example of suicide, and for recognizing it, a judgment is required to determine whether or not the particular case is an example of suicide. “Is it murdering oneself to hurl oneself to certain death (like Curtius) in order to save one’s country?—or is deliberate martyrdom, sacrificing oneself for the good of all humanity, also to be considered an act of heroism?” (Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue* 423).

Therefore, we can not judge about the rightness or wrongness of acts absolutely and abstractly regardless of situations, but we should consider cases, and for this, we need to regard the context. In fact, the same rationality which is the basis of Kant’s ethics demands us to perform the rational acts, and it is natural that in practice, we can not consider some acts as rational or moral without considering circumstances. This point will be more clear when we compare killing for self-defence with killing out of angry.

Another point which confirms that generalists can not ignore details and conditions is that in all forms of generalism, in order to recognize those principles that the case falls under, we are required to consider circumstances and features that are decisive. To reject generalism and to prove that normative reasons are changeable, Dancy gives an example that is a good one to demonstrate this point. Suppose that I have borrowed a book from you. I have a reason to give it back to you, because I have borrowed it, and also I have reasons not to return it on the supposition that you have stolen it from the library. What attracts attention in this question is that changing of conditions has not brought about a change in reasons, but these two differ because the concept of lending has not been realized. Lending does make sense when one lends something to others that he or she is in possession of it. For this reason, the mere act of borrowing a book does not provide a reason to giving it back; we should observe that whether this particular case is a special instance of borrowing or not; then with the principle connected to it, one can come to this conclusion that he must return it or not. Therefore, acceptance of generalism does not force us to apply principles on particular cases unreflectively, but permits us to interpret the case while judging. Then, it is apparent that generalists have not overlooked particular facts in recognizing a proper judgment.

Of course, considering situations by generalists does not mean that they do not believe in intrinsic value of acts. But the point is that, generalists also, like particularists, accept that in some circumstances, some acts can not manifest their inner value. On the other hand, Dancy, like generalists, also admits that the intrinsic properties may be the same in various contexts. The point lies in enabling features which Dancy attempts to distinguish from value-making features. And by emphasizing the role of enabling properties in changing the intrinsic values, he distinguishes between generalism and particularism. But, I think, there is no difference (or at least no important and effective one) between them in these regards, and eventually, both approaches reach a common point about principles and context although they may not confess to that frankly.

In other words, both generalists and particularists believe that properties of an act, in different situations, are the reason to do it. But since particularists suppose that there is a possibility of change in circumstances, they conclude that properties of an act in different contexts may and may not be the reason to do it. On the other hand, generalists state that these properties are in favour of an act unless an obstacle appears. Obstacles in their terms are some exceptional conditions or disablers which may happen every moment, but the probability of these obstacles does not make the generalists to disvalue the mere act basically. Hence, they accept not only the intrinsic value of acts but also the suitable conditions for the presence of the values.

Particularists have the same opinion, too. That means, particularists and generalists, both believe in the intrinsic value-making properties unless generalists state that some special circumstances may inactivate the rule, and particularists state that they may inactivate the inner value of an object or act.

Therefore, Dancy accepts the default value of acts and believes that different conditions can change this value. But this intrinsic property and its resulting value remains the same as long as the conditions have not changed. Consequently, if theft is considered wrong in a specific situation, its wrongness does not change as long as the conditions have not been altered. But upon an alteration in circumstances, theft could be considered right, like when one's life can be saved from starvation by theft. In Dancy's terms, conditions are the very enablers/disablers which help to keep or remove the default values of an act.

Then, Dancy accepts that properties might remain similar in various contexts; he only insists that generalists should utilize the word "can" instead of "must" in order not to face a difficulty while a change in condition makes a change in the features of an act. This is the positive side generalists mention.

Particularists also cannot judge about a proposition as correct or incorrect without considering principles and they actually do not do so. While they say that the wrongness of this given act is not due to the principle "stealing is erroneous" but because the stealing itself in this particular situation is erroneous, they seem to have an image of incorrectness unconsciously in their mind according to which they know the stealing in this situation is considered wrong. This is wrong because that the properties cause incorrectness of stealing is present in this case although a change in conditions may cause a change in features of an object and in judgment.

According to the above-mentioned issues, it seems that the main debate between generalism and particularism is not over the rationality of ethics, because both approaches believe in the rationality of ethics in a way, and both accept either the generality of ethical values or the possibility of their change. In other words, both groups admit the stability of values basically, and also accept that particular properties can be the reason for doing an act. Besides, they both know that the change in circumstances may inactivate some specific values. The only distinction is that generalists more emphasize the intrinsic value of an act and its stability, while particularists insist on the changeability of values. In fact, neither do generalists neglect the possibility of instability of values, nor do particularists ignore the possibility of stability of values.

There are still two points I would like to refer to here. First of all, in spite of the fact that generalism can be compatible to holism (as mentioned), particularists also have not advanced a logical justification about the theory of holism. And some authors, like Dancy, merely on the basis of few examples and possibility of change in conditions, have made an effort to explain this theory. Probably for this reason, Dancy lays a great emphasis on the point that atomism is false and principlism is incorrect because of the possibility of change in conditions. He calls this attitude the moderate approach and in contrast, rejects the extreme approach that maintains that there is no similar feature in two cases.

Moreover, moral thinking, on the basis of cases, necessitates that only persons of high insight are capable of making decisions just in case that they are aware of all enabling conditions. Dancy indicates that while judging in a particular case, we should see what is the contribution made by a given feature in the light of the entire context, and in order to achieve this, recognition of the limit of differences that occur from case to case is needed.

However, he finds this sort of knowledge to be inarticulable and holds that, as a practical concept is understood on the basis of its application in sentence, in the same way, characteristics or features are recognized according to their application and in terms of situation. Therefore, according to him, the main characteristic of human practical rationality is to utilize this inarticulable knowledge in situations and different cases. Consequently, understanding the good-making features and recognizing conditions that make features to be able to play their grounding role is only done by special individuals.

Besides, also in generalism, we need wise and of high insight individuals to release from contradiction of principles, individuals who are aware of the set of truths and principles and are capable of attaining the intended conclusion by means of reasoning or intuition.

I think the above-mentioned points indicate that both particularism and generalism would have a long way to success if they would like to go on separately (of course if they could). Further, they should open new doors to reality if they are to dominate the problems encountered to and to appear finally as a successful theory concerning moral thought.

6. Conclusion

In general, if generalists tend to the extreme side and neglect the role of particular truths and conditions in moral thought, they would encounter serious difficulties. And if particularists totally ignore principles or general statements for cognition, they will not get to justify ethical thought. Therefore, we can not, in practice, stick to just one of these approaches and ignore the other. Moreover, if generalism and particularism are interpreted properly, they will not be considered as contrastive or opposing views any more.

At the end, it is emphasized that moral agents, in decision making process and moral judgment, are not only in need of using moral principles but also must have sufficient awareness about truths and conditions. For this reason, both approaches have particular

advantages that should be taken into account by moral philosophers.

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