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# **Moral Reasons: Particularism, Patterns and Practice**

**by**

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of Warwick, Department of Philosophy  
February 2006

## **Table of Contents**

|   |      |
|---|------|
| <b><u>Introduction</u></b>  | p. 1 |
| <b><u>Chapter 1. The Patternability of the Reason-Giving Behaviour<br/>of Morally Relevant Features</u></b>                             | p.4  |
| 1-1. To What Extent Are Moral Reasons Patternable?  | p.5  |
| 1-1-1.The Particularist’s Answer:   | p.14 |
| 1-1-1-1. Elaborating Epistemological Particularism  | p.17 |
| 1-1-1-2. Evaluating Epistemological Particularism   | p.22 |
| 1- 1-1-3.Normative or Metaphysical Particularism  | p.23 |
| 1-1-1-4. Evaluating Normative or Metaphysical Particularism   | p.29 |
| 1-1-1-4-1. Defeaters, Open-endedness, Patternability and<br>the Distinction Between the Format and the Content of<br>the Concept ‘Game’ | p.30 |
| 1-1-1-4-2. Pragmatic Point of View  | p.57 |
| 1-1-1-4-3. Normative Versus Deliberative Relevance  | p.58 |

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| 1-1-1-4-4. Normative or Metaphysical Particularism Is                          | p.60  |
| Counter-Intuitive  |       |
| 1-2. What Is Left: A Minimal Generalistic View                                 | p.62  |
| <br>   |       |
| <b><u>Chapter 2. Emerging Moral Patterns</u></b>                               | p.64  |
| <br>   |       |
| 2-1. The Rossian Position: An Example of the Modest-Generalistic Position      | p.65  |
| 2-2. The Wittgensteinian Position  | p.73  |
| 2-2-1. Realistic Account of Patterns of Word Use                               | p.73  |
| 2-2-2. Kripke: Sceptical and Anti-Realistic Account of Wittgenstein            | p.76  |
| 2-2-3. Rejecting the Kripkean Story: The Metaphysical Account                  | p.81  |
| of Wittgenstein  |       |
| 2-3. Seeing the Similarities: Emerging Moral Patterns                          | p.88  |
| 2-4. Making Sense of the Distinction Between Rightness and Wrongness in        | p.94  |
| Moral Vocabulary: The Analogy with the Concept ‘Game’                          |       |
| 2-5. Reading Ross in the Light of the Metaphysical Account of Wittgenstein     | p.99  |
| <br>   |       |
| <b><u>Chapter 3. In Defense of Atomism</u></b>                                 | p.101 |
| <br>   |       |
| 3-1. The Holist’s Problem  | p.104 |
| 3-1-1. The Contribution Problem  | p.105 |
| 3-1-2. The Holist’s Metaphysical Account is Vague and Unclear: The Combination |       |
| problem  | p.112 |

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| <b>3-2. The Holist's Problem with Moral Realism: Realism Requires Atomism</b>   | p.117 |
| 3-2-1. What Is It to Be a Moral Realist?  | p.118 |
| 3-2-2. Powers, Dispositions, Closed-System Versus<br>Open Systems   | p.121 |
| 3-2-3. The Analogy Between Science and Morality   | p.129 |
| <b>3-3. Modest-Generalistic Metaphysics: More Clarification</b>   | p.134 |
| <br>  |       |
| <b><u>Chapter 4. The Combination Problem</u></b>  | p.138 |
| <br>  |       |
| <b>4-1. Spelling Out the Combination Problem in Rossian Ethics</b>  | p.139 |
| 4-1-1. A Scientific Analogy: The Distinction Between Mass & Weight  | p.145 |
| 4-1-2. Cashing Out the Analogy: Vector Analysis   | p.146 |
| <b>4-2. The Wittgensteinian Solution to the Combination Problem: The Concept<br/>            'Game', Lexical Order and Open-endedness</b> | p.151 |
| <b>4-3. Improving the Notion of Prima Facie Duty</b>  | p.162 |
| <b>4-4. Dancy and Looking Away</b>  | p.166 |
| <br>  |       |
| <b><u>Chapter 5. Practice Goes All the Way Down</u></b>   | p.170 |
| <br>  |       |
| <b>5-1. Practice As Therapy: The Negative Aspect of the Whole Idea of<br/>            Normativity</b>                                     | p.172 |
| 5-1-1. Rule-Following Argument: Once Again  | p.176 |
| 5-1-2. The Normative Standard of the Rightness and Wrongness of   | p.179 |

Moral Vocabulary Cannot be Theorised in Rossian Ethics

**5-2. Therapy Is not Adequate: The Combination Problem Emerges** p.182

**5-3. Practical Legitimation of the Concept ‘Practice’: The Positive Aspect** p.188

5-3-1. First Order Account of the Concept ‘Practice’: Its Constituents p.190

5-3-2. Second Order Account of the Concept ‘Practice’: Doing Goes p.195

All the Way Down

**5-4. Treat People Politely** p.204

**Conclusion** p. 209

**Bibliography** p.211

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Professor Michael Luntley for his supervision and his comments in writing this thesis. I would also like to thank Martin Warner, Roger Trigg and Tim Thornton for the discussions that I had with them which I found helpful. I would like to acknowledge my friends Benedict Smith, Tom Barker, Ali Fanaie, Ali Paya, Hadi Tavasoly, Peter Shortall and Vahid Sazegara for their support and comments in writing this thesis. I would also like to thank my parents, mother-in-law and father-in-law for their encouragement.

And greatest thanks to you Leila for your patience and support towards me and our dearest son, Sepehr.

*I declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree  
at any other university.*



## **Abstract**

This is the study of the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different ethical contexts. Whether or not the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is generalisable is examined in this research. I argue in favour of a core and constitutive modest-generalistic theme, according to which there are general patterns of word use, to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different contexts is answerable. To this end, I reject the constitutive particularistic claim which holds that the way in which a morally relevant feature behaves in different cases is fully context-dependent. An account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts which emphasises the key role of the concept 'practice' is presented to give an account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is answerable to general patterns of word use. Ross's ethics is introduced as an example of the modest-generalistic position. To substantiate this modest-generalistic position, an apparent dilemma is presented for particularists, e.g. Dancy. In order to resolve the second horn of the dilemma, which is an example of a general problem with which any generalistic account is confronted, the account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts is again used. Finally, a distinction between the first order and the second order account of the concept 'practice' is presented to give a more plausible account of the concept 'practice' which has an indispensable role in the Wittgensteinian account.

## Introduction

This is a study of the idea of generalism in the metaphysics of moral reasons. I focus on the extent of the patternability of the contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different cases. I examine whether or not there are general patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different contexts is answerable. I argue that we can defend a core notion of generalism in moral reasoning, according to which the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is answerable to and can fit into general patterns of word use. To this end, firstly, I examine the particularistic view which denies any account of generality in moral reasoning. According to a particularist like Dancy, the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is fully context-dependent in such a way that its reason-giving behaviour cannot be answerable to general patterns of word use. In order to criticise the particularistic position, I utilise an account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts. This Wittgensteinian reading rejects the existence of determined and fixed patterns of word use while endorsing the existing of emerging patterns. Having criticised the particularistic position, we are left with a modest-generalistic account which makes room for the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts. This is the core and constitutive notion of modest-generalism.

Secondly, Ross's ethics is presented as an example of the modest-generalistic position in moral reasoning. In order to shed light on the modest-generalistic position

which endorses the existence of general patterns of word use, Rossian ethics can be read in the light of the Wittgenstein account of the nature of concepts.

Thirdly, in order to defend the modest-generalistic view and reject the particularistic position from another perspective, an apparent dilemma with which the particularist is confronted is presented. According to the dilemma, the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases either leads to the generalistic view which can give an account of patternability in moral reasoning or a vague metaphysical account with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. The first problem can be called 'the contribution problem' and the latter 'the combination problem'. The combination problem should be tackled by any generalistic account. It concerns the account available of how different morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. Moreover, as another argument in favour of modest-generalistic view, I argue that moral realism requires moral atomism. In order to justify this claim, I borrow some notions from the philosophy of science.

Fourthly, I spell out the combination problem in Rossian ethics as an example of how this problem applies to the modest-generalistic position which endorses the existence of general patterns of word use. In order to do that, I use a scientific analogy to make the metaphysical nature of the problem clearer. I then use the account drawn from Wittgenstein to resolve the combination problem.

Finally, having resolved the combination problem, I examine the concept 'practice' which has a key role in the Wittgensteinian solution to the combination problem. I argue that the account of the concept 'practice' utilized so far is therapeutic. According to the therapeutic account, the normative standard of the rightness and

wrongness of word use cannot be theorised and put into words. This account makes the negative aspect of the whole idea of normativity. I then argue that therapy is inadequate and leads to the recurrence of the combination problem. In order to stop the combination problem returning, the positive aspect of the concept of practice has to be presented. Thus, the distinction between the first-order account of the concept 'practice' and the second-order account of the concept 'practice' is used to elucidate the positive aspect of the concept 'practice'. The first-order account concerns the components of the concept 'practice'. The second-order account concerns the idea that the analysis of the components of practice reveals that practice goes 'all the way down'. The way in which we are engaged with things in the world at the very basic level so that it shapes our cognitive profile is based upon practice rather than theory. Mental activity is primitive. Overt activity is based upon mental activity.

I start the research by examining the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts. Having seen what is wrong with the particularistic view, the contribution problem, the combination problem and the negative account of the concept 'practice', we are left with the core metaphysical idea of modest-generalism, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different contexts is answerable to general patterns of word use.

## The Patternability of the Reason-Giving Behaviour of Morally Relevant Features

According to ... [particularists], the relationship between descriptive or non-evaluative information, on the one hand, and a moral or evaluative verdict, on the other, is not merely complex...it is *irreducibly* complex. There is no codifiable pattern to be found in the passage from the descriptive to the ethical, and vice versa.<sup>1</sup>

Frank Jackson et al.

A particularist conception [of ethics] is one which sees little if any role for moral principles. Particularists think that moral judgment can get along perfectly well without any appeal to principles, indeed that there is no essential link between being a full moral agent and having principles.<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan Dancy

Moral particularism takes the view that moral principles are at best useless, and at worst a hindrance, in trying to find out which is the right action. What is required is the correct conception of the particular case in hand, with its unique set of properties. There is thus no substitute for a sensitive and detailed examination of each individual case.<sup>3</sup>

David McNaughton

Introduction: This chapter examines the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different ethical contexts, and argues for a minimal or modest generalism. The argument is presented by way of a critique of particularism. To this end, firstly, the particularistic account is explained in some detail. Secondly, four arguments are presented to criticise the particularistic view about the way in which morally relevant features contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. Having criticised the particularistic position, we are left with minimal generalism. According to the minimal generalistic view, the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, F., Pettit, P. and Smith, M. (2000) 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Dancy, J. (2004) *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> McNaughton, D. (1988) *Moral Vision: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 190.

and can fit into patterns. Finally, I introduce a version of the minimal generalistic position which is investigated in the next chapter.

### **1-1. To What Extent Are Moral Reasons Patternable?**

What can we say with regard to the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different ethical contexts? The main issue between generality and particularity in moral reasoning concerns the existence of patterns in the use of moral vocabulary that would permit the formulation of general statements governing the applicability of that vocabulary. Particularism challenges an intuitive notion of generalism. Whether or not there are general patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant non-moral property in different contexts is responsive is the main issue in evaluating the arguments of particularism and generalism. The issue concerns the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases. The subject can be formulated using the idea of supervenience, according to which if two concrete ethical situations are relevantly similar with respect to their non-moral (descriptive) properties, their moral (evaluative) properties would be the same. Suppose we are confronted with a concrete ethical situation, in which a moral property F supervenes on non-moral properties G and H. According to the generalist, should we come across a similar ethical situation in which G and H are combined together, the ultimate moral evaluation of the case would be the same —F would apply. So, subscribing to the existence of supervenience leads to approving the existence of general patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant non-moral property can fit. In other words, with the aid of such patterns, we can see how a morally relevant non-moral property contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases.

According to generalists who subscribe to the notion of supervenience, the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different cases is generalisable in the sense that its reason-giving behaviour is answerable to patterns of word use. But a particularist like Dancy prefers to talk about the idea of resultance with regard to the way in which non-moral properties are related to moral properties in ethical contexts. According to him:

Resultance is a relation between a property of an object and the features that 'give' it that property. Not all properties are resultant; that is, not all properties depend on others in the appropriate way. But everyone agrees that moral properties are resultant. A resultant property is one which 'depends' on other properties in a certain way. As we might say, nothing is just wrong; a wrong action is wrong because of other features that it has... The 'resultance base' for the wrongness of a particular action consists in those features that make it wrong, the wrong-making features. There is, however, no such thing as the resultance base for a property (wrongness, say) *in general*. This is because a property that is resultant may be one that there are very many different ways of acquiring, and there need be no way of capturing all those ways at once. I would say this is how it is with wrongness: there are many different ways in which an action can get to be wrong...Supervenience, as a relation, is incapable of picking out the features that make the action wrong; it is too indiscriminate to be able to achieve such an interesting and important task (2004, 85-88).

According to this view, there is no such thing as a general pattern which summarises the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature. In other words, we cannot see how a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases by appealing to supervenience. Supervenience deals with the behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different ethical contexts, the way in which moral properties supervene upon the *class* of non-moral properties. In contrast, resultance concerns the way in which a moral property results from non-moral properties in a specific ethical situation. So, a particularist who says that there is no metaphysical account available of generality in moral reasoning, emphasises that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature and its contribution to moral evaluation can vary from case to case as a result of combining with other features in many different ways. It follows from this that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is not generalisable in the sense that its relevance for reasoning in different

cases is not answerable to general patterns of word use. Rather, the reason-giving behaviour results from the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in a specific moral situation. So, according to a particularist like Dancy, the idea of resultance, unlike supervenience,<sup>4</sup> can better systematise our common sensical intuitions with regard to the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together in different ethical contexts.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Dancy discusses this idea in a different way by referring to Hare's 'universalizability thesis' in order to develop his particularistic position with regard to the way in which a non-moral feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases.<sup>6</sup> According to Dancy's account of Hare's universalizability thesis, if a moral situation has features  $F_1$ - $F_n$ , by virtue of which it is morally right, should we come across any relevantly similar situation, it too would be right. However, Dancy criticises this idea. Consider the following quote by him:

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<sup>4</sup> For Dancy, supervenience is associated with generalism. As Dancy thinks that there is no such thing as exactly similar non-moral properties in different contexts, according to him the whole idea of supervenience which leads to generalism has no use with regard to the way in which a morally relevant feature behaves in different ethical contexts, metaphysically speaking. He says: '...supervenience is of no use in the project of generating moral principles from particular cases. What we get out of supervenience is the truth that any object exactly similar to this one in natural respects must share the moral properties that the first one has...At best, this is of little use, since there will be few such cases. But there is the danger that there will be none, for the rather annoying reason that it is impossible for any two objects to share all their natural properties'(1993, pp. 78-79).

<sup>5</sup> For more on the distinction between resultance and supervenience, see Dancy, J (1981) 'On Moral Properties', *Mind*, 90, pp, 367-385, 380-382 & (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 73-79. See also Rønnow-Rasmussen, T. (1999) 'Particularism and Principles', *Theoria*, 65, pp.114-126, 115-119. See also Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (1999) 'Some Varieties of Particularism', *Metaphilosophy*, 30, pp. 1-12, 2-5.

<sup>6</sup> Dancy discusses Hare's notion of universalizability in *Moral Reasons* in two places. The first one with which I deal at the moment is based upon Hare's book *Freedom and Reason* published in 1963 which is, according to Dancy, Hare's earlier view. The second one is based upon Hare's book *Moral Thinking* published in 1981 which is Hare's later view. Dancy thinks that Hare's later view on 'universalizability' is what he means by 'supervenience'. I am not going to discuss Dancy's account of Hare's second view about universalizability at this stage.

Please note that when I refer to Dancy's account of Hare's universalizability thesis in the text, I mean Hare's earlier view. For more detail on Hare's later view see Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), Appendix II, pp. 258-260.



The rejection of universalizability is part and parcel of the rejection of generalism in the theory of reasons... Hare holds that moral judgments are universalizable in this sense: a person who makes a moral judgement is committed to making the same judgment of any relevantly similar situation. A situation is relevantly similar to the first if it shares with the first all the properties that were the person's reason for his original judgment ...the doctrine of universalizability is clearly false. I cannot possibly be obliged to make the same judgment wherever that limited set of properties recurs. For there may in a new case be a strong reason against the judgment which was not present in the first case – a defeater, as we might call it (1993, pp. 57&80).

According to Dancy, it is not clear what a universalist means by a 'relevantly similar' situation, because the behaviour of a feature like  $F_1$  might be changed due to the existence of another feature which can alter the metaphysical status of the case. He adds that the universalist can broaden the list of features which have to be considered in order to arrive at the idea of relevant similarity in a way that takes into account any feature whose presence or absence can affect the overall metaphysical situation.

Dancy believes that having done that, we arrive at the account of universalizability which is useless and counts for nothing. He says:

...what is going on here is that the original conception of universalizability base, which was rather narrow, is getting progressively larger. Eventually it will grow to coincide with the supervenience base, i.e. it will cease to exclude any of the natural properties...One thing we should notice on the way is that the moral principles generated by thoughts about universalizability are becoming progressively less use, since as the universalizability base grows the number of actions relevantly similar to the first diminishes correspondingly (1993, p. 81).

According to Dancy, as the list of defeaters is added up, we are left with an account of universalizability which is not substantive and cannot guide us to arrive at the way in which a non-moral feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different ethical cases. Rather, all we are left with is the long list of defeaters which ultimately leaves no substance to the idea of universalizability.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Dancy says that this account

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<sup>7</sup> I do not wish to discuss the relationship between universalizability and particularism in detail, but for further clarification I would say that as Schroth points out, there is a significant distinction between the universalizability thesis and the principle thesis which has to be considered. If we say that 'this action is right, then any action which is similar to this act in *all* morally relevant aspects is right', using Schroth's phrase, analytically and conceptually, this proposition is true. According to Schroth, this is

of universalizability and the way in which we arrive at the rightness or wrongness of a moral case is based upon subsumptive rationality, according to which arriving at rightness and wrongness is associated with it being subsumed under a general rule; the determined and complete rule under which a new situation must be subsumed in

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not the target of a particularist like Dancy. In contrast, what the particularist denies is a proposition like this: 'keeping the promise is a right-making feature in this particular case. So, promise keeping is *always* a right-making feature; promise keeping is a right-making feature in *relevantly similar* cases'. Intuitively speaking, one can accept the first formulation while denying the second one. The first one is the universalizability thesis while the second one is the principle thesis. Consider the following quote by Schroth: 'The essential point of particularism is the rejection of moral principles along with the rejection of the claim that properties which are morally relevant in one case are likewise morally relevant in other cases...The universalizability thesis does not imply moral principles. If, for example, someone judges an action to be wrong because it is a lie, all that she is committed to by the thesis is that she has to judge as wrong every action similar in all morally relevant respects. This, however, does not imply, that she has to judge every lie as wrong, and there is no way to derive this or any other moral principle from applying the universalizability thesis to the particular moral judgment', (2003, p. 456).

It seems that Dancy has the principle thesis in mind when he criticises the universalizability thesis in some places. In other words, the particularist can subscribe to the universalizability thesis while rejecting the principle thesis.

So, I avoid using the universalizability thesis throughout this research and utilise the principle thesis which is under attack by the particularist. By questioning to what extent the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is patternable in different ethical contexts, one deals with the principle thesis rather than the universalizability thesis. Both the particularist and his opponent can subscribe to the universalizability thesis while disagreeing about the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature in different ethical contexts.

It is worth noting that according to Schroth, the confusion between the universalizability thesis and the principle thesis which also leads Dancy, stems from Hare: 'The confusion...can be traced back to Hare's introduction of the universalizability thesis in his *Freedom and Reason*.' (Ibid., p. 457).

Finally, I would point out that the example of Captain Vere's decision to hang Billy Budd in Herman Melville's story is discussed in some of the following references. According to the discussed universalizability thesis the point in the example is about whether or not one would hang Billy Budd if he were the Captain and was in the same situation. It is not about whether or not killing as a morally relevant feature *always* behaves as a wrong-making feature in different contexts. Whether or not killing always behaves as a wrong-making feature concerns the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts which is an example of the particularist-generalist debate in moral reasoning. However, one can subscribe to the former in the sense that if one were the Captain, he would hang Billy Budd, but still reject the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts.

For more elaboration on the idea of universalizability, see Crisp, R. (1993) 'Motivation, Universality, and the Good', *Ratio*, 6, pp. 181-190, 184-187 & (2000) 'Particularizing Particularism' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 23-47, 40-42. See also Dancy, J. (1981) 'On Moral Properties', *Mind*, 90, pp. 367-385, 375-380 & (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 57, 79-91 & (1999) 'Defending Particularism', *Metaphilosophy*, 30, pp. 25-32, 25-29. See also McNaughton, D. & Rawling, P. (2000b) 'Unprincipled Ethics' in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 256-275, 256-266. See also Raz, J. (2000) 'Truth in Particularism' in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 48-78, 70-78. See also Schroth, J. (2003) 'Particularism and Universalizability', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 37, pp. 455-461. See also Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (1999) 'Some Varieties of Particularism', *Metaphilosophy*, 30, pp. 5-8. See also Wiggins, (1987) *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 166-173. See also Winch, P. (1972) 'The Universalizability of Moral judgments' in his *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 151-170. See also Bakhurst, D. (2000)

order to arrive at the rightness or wrongness of a moral case. Dancy thinks that this subsumptive account is implausible because of its rigidity and inflexibility.<sup>8</sup>

Given the above, it seems that the debate between generality and particularity in moral reasoning can be articulated in this way: Is there any firm relationship between non-moral (descriptive) properties and moral (evaluative) properties in different ethical situations such that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to patterns that pick out the general recurrent character of different cases?

Before I go further, let me clarify one issue at this stage. The concept 'codifiability' is used in the literature to refer to the battle between particularism and generalism in moral reasoning.<sup>9</sup> In my view, articulating the conflict in terms of whether or not the relationship between non-moral properties and moral properties is

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'Ethical Particularism in Context', in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp.157-177, 162-163.

<sup>8</sup> Dancy utilizes Wittgenstein's rule-following argument to criticise subsumptive rationality. According to Dancy, the real lesson of the rule-following argument is that one can follow a rule like 'add 2' without resorting to subsumptive rationality, according to which a new number has to be subsumed under a definite principle. Rather, one has to be engaged in practice as an insider to see how to go on. There is an element of uncertainty and vertigo at hand which is unavoidable. I will discuss Wittgenstein's rule-following argument in a metaphysical sense, in chapter 2, to give a modest-generalistic account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is answerable to general patterns. For more detail on Dancy's account of subsumptive rationality, see Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 82-84.

The crucial point which has to be considered is that the debate between generalism and particularism in moral reasoning concerns the existence of general patterns of word use. Talking about decision procedure and the way in which we arrive at justified moral judgment, which is an epistemological issue, is irrelevant. Now, the way in which Dancy articulates the subsumptive reading of rationality sounds more epistemic. It deals with the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment in a concrete ethical situation. If this is the case, his subsumptive conception of rationality, which is an epistemological claim, cannot criticise the generalistic idea with regard to the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases, which is a metaphysical thesis.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Jackson, F. et al. (2000) 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 79-99, 89-91. See also (1999b) 'Can The Particularist Learn The Difference Between Right And Wrong?' in Brinkmann, K. (ed.) *The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, 1: Ethics*, pp. 59-72, 60 & Dancy, J. (2004) *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 109. See also Little, M. (2000) 'Moral Generalities Revisited' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp.276-304, 288-291. See also Lang, G. (2001) 'The Rule-Following Considerations and Metaethics: Some False Moves', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 9(2), pp. 190-209, 204-206.

codifiable and expressible in language sounds both metaphysical and epistemological. When we ask whether or not something can be codified in language, we raise questions about both the existence of patterns of word use and the way in which we understand and recognize those patterns. The question does not only deal with the existence of general patterns. However, the real battle between generalism and particularism only focuses on the constitutive issue about the existence of patterns of word use. So, using the concept 'patternability' is more appropriate to the debate on moral reasoning. The idea of patternability concerns the existence of general patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different cases is answerable. Whether or not there are some general patterns of word use is a constitutive issue. This is how the debate between generalism and particularism in moral reasoning has to be articulated. I therefore avoid using the concept of codifiability throughout my work to clarify what I mean by the constitutive claim with regard to the existence of patterns of reasons which the generalist endorses and the particularist denies.

To put the issue between particularism and generalism in this way makes it a metaphysical thesis rather than an epistemological one. What role these patterns can play in the decision procedure and the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment is an epistemological issue, whereas the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is a metaphysical one. For instance, Dancy<sup>10</sup> and McNaughton<sup>11</sup> deny that there is a determined relationship

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<sup>10</sup> See Dancy, J. (2000) 'The Particularist's Progress' in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 130-156 & Dancy, J. (2001) 'Moral Particularism' in the *Stanford On-line Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
URL: <[http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2001/entries/moral-particularism />](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2001/entries/moral-particularism/).

between non-moral (descriptive) properties and moral (evaluative) properties, and maintain that the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different cases is not answerable to general patterns. In contrast, Jackson et al<sup>12</sup> and Luntley<sup>13</sup> subscribe to the existence of moral patterns, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant non-moral properties in different contexts is answerable and can fit into patterns of word use. In other words, the way in which a feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is not arbitrary or random.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the battle between particularism and generalism in moral reasoning concerns the extent to which moral reasons are generalisable. Can we give an account of how the behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is patternable? Or, do we have to reject any notion of patterns to the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features?

As we have seen, the real conflict between generality and particularity in moral reasoning is about the metaphysics of reasons. Dancy agrees:

...particularism is a view in moral metaphysics: it is a view about the ways in which actions get to be right and wrong. For me, this way of looking at things has meant a change of perspective over time. I used to think that particularism was a position in moral epistemology...But it now seems to me that the real battleground lies in moral metaphysics (2004, p.140).

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<sup>11</sup> See McNaughton, D. (1988) *Moral Vision: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell), Chapter 13.

<sup>12</sup> See Jackson, F. et al. (2000) 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns' in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press). pp. 79-99.

<sup>13</sup> See Luntley, M. (2002) 'Patterns, Particularism and Seeing the Similarity', *Philosophical Papers*, 31, pp. 271-291, 272.

<sup>14</sup> As we will see later on in this chapter, the way in which Jackson et al. articulate the idea of patternability is different from Luntley's formulation which is taken from Wittgenstein. The crucial thing, at this stage, is that both Jackson et al and Luntley subscribe to the point that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts can be articulated in general patterns.

If this is the case, those who claim that the epistemological issues have to take priority in the debate between generality and particularity are wrong. They think that the way in which we arrive at a tenable moral judgment is the main issue.<sup>15</sup> O'Neill says:

Rules can be indispensable and yet indeterminate; they can be indeterminate and yet action-guiding... In using rules we shape our lives, we make judgments – often nuanced judgments – both about the situations we face and about the lines of action we will pursue... Rules are not the enemy but the matrix of judgment (1996, p. 85).

According to O'Neill, whether or not there are moral rules, and whether or not they are determinate or indeterminate is not the main issue. The key point is to what extent they are action-guiding and can guide one to arrive at justified moral judgments.

O'Neill focuses on the epistemological aspect of the debate between generality and particularity in moral reasoning whereas, in this study, I shall investigate what I believe to be the key metaphysical issue concerning generality and particularity in moral reasoning. In order to give an account of how a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases, firstly, we have to deal with the metaphysical aspect of the issue. Whether or not the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can fit into patterns is the main issue. This is how I understand the patternability issue. The issue is patternability as such, not what epistemic use, if any, a statement of a general pattern might make.

I shall now outline the particularist's answer with regard to the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features and the way in which they contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in more detail.

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, Garfield writes: 'Is the debate between particularists and universalists one about the ontology of the moral domain or a debate about moral epistemology? In arguing for a particularist understanding of what constitutes a rule-governed ethical domain, I will be locating the debate firmly in the domain of moral epistemology (2000), 'Particularity and Principles: The Structure of Moral Knowledge' in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 178-204, 179.

### 1-1-1. The Particularist's Answer

According to the particularist's standpoint, moral principles are strongly context-dependent in the sense that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is not answerable to general patterns. In other words, one cannot form a general moral rule by combining a non-evaluative property (such as telling the truth) and an evaluative property (like right, wrong...) and spell it out propositionally. In this sense, one has to subscribe to the notion of shapelessness, according to which there is no definite connection between non-evaluative and evaluative properties. Little states:

There is no way of cashing out propositionally the ways in which nonevaluative properties contribute to the evaluative natures of situations, actions, characters... The particularist's claim is that the *good-making relation* cannot be cashed out in propositional form... [Particularists] share the intuition that moral properties are, to use Simon Blackburn's felicitous phrase, "shapeless" with respect to the nonmoral ... To understand the real lesson of particularism is to understand that there is reason to doubt the existence of any codifiable generalities linking moral and nonmoral properties (2000, pp. 283, 285, 279 and 288).<sup>16</sup>

According to the particularist, the way in which moral properties are related to non-moral properties is not answerable to general patterns in the sense that there is no fixed and determined relationship between these two sets of properties. Now, in order to deal with moral reasoning and the way in which non-evaluative properties are related to evaluative properties, I think it is useful to distinguish between the metaphysical, epistemological, psychological and methodological aspects of the matter.

So, in order to clarify what we mean by 'moral particularism' and the particularistic position, I wish to classify and separate different versions of the particularistic position as "psychological particularism", "analytic particularism", "methodological particularism", "epistemological particularism" and "normative or

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<sup>16</sup> I have quoted this from Jackson, F. et al. (2000) 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns' in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 79-99, 80.

metaphysical particularism”.<sup>17</sup> I shall assume that the first three kinds of particularism are of no relevance in settling the metaphysical debate I wish to concentrate on:

1. Psychological particularism: This is the view that comprehension of a duty in a concrete instance, e.g. helping someone who is drowning in a pool, is psychologically prior to comprehension regarding a duty in general, such as the principle stating the duty of beneficence. The way in which a non-moral feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases, normatively speaking, is a metaphysical issue which is different from the psychological issue regarding the way in which a moral principle is formed.

2. Analytic particularism: This view claims that judgments of moral wrongness and rightness are basically concerned with particular actions. Consider the following specific moral judgment: Nancy ought to come here to give me a hand to take care of the baby tomorrow evening at 5 p.m. According to an analytic particularist, it is not the case that what she ought to do is some act of a kind. Each moral judgment fundamentally concerns only one particular action. In contrast, an analytic generalist believes that each moral judgment implies more than one particular action. Whether or not a moral judgment is *only* about a particular action which has the logical form of the singular judgment or a judgment with a quantification structure is a logical issue which is different from the metaphysical issue regarding the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature in different contexts.

3. Methodological particularism: This is a pragmatic view, according to which one will act in a morally better way in everyday life if one looks carefully at each

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<sup>17</sup> I follow Sinnott-Armstrong and Audi in this. For a classification of different versions of particularisms, see Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (1999) ‘Some Varieties of Particularism’, *Metaphilosophy*, 30, pp. 1-12. See also Audi, R. (1998) ‘Moderate Intuitionism and the Epistemology of Moral Judgement’, *Ethical Theory and Moral practice*, 1, pp. 15-44, 36-41.



particular decision as it arises. One has to close one's eyes to arrive at a comprehensive moral theory which guides one in each concrete ethical situation. Subscribing to the particularistic view, according to which looking at cases in detail guides us to arrive at the justified moral judgment in real life, does not affect the metaphysical issue regarding the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature in different cases.

4. Epistemological particularism: according to this view, in order to give an account of what should be done in concrete ethical situations, each case has to be considered individually and with no regard to other cases. There is no such thing as a moral principle or a plurality of moral principles which can guide us to arrive at justified moral judgments. According to this view, one has to apply moral intuitions or moral perceptions or practical wisdom to arrive at sound moral judgments in different ethical contexts. So, the epistemology of moral judgment is neither driven by nor derived from principles. In other words, one is not entitled to predict the ultimate outcome of similar cases in advance by appealing to principles.

5. Normative or metaphysical particularism: The metaphysical or normative particularist subscribes to the thesis of shapelessness, according to which there is no such thing as an invariant relationship between non-evaluative and evaluative properties. According to the metaphysical particularist, the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different cases cannot fit into general patterns. Its reason-giving behaviour can vary from case to case.

We must avoid confusing epistemological particularism with normative or metaphysical particularism. Whether or not moral principles are action-guiding, impartial, worthless and redundant in decision-making is one issue; while the

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existence or otherwise of a definite link between descriptive properties and evaluative properties in moral propositions is another. The former is an epistemological issue, while the latter is an ontological one. Talking about the role and merit of moral principles in the sense of to what extent they can support knowledge and determination of a right decision is an epistemological matter, which must be taken into account after examination of the metaphysical issue. In the first instance, the notion of shapelessness has to be considered as an ontological issue rather than an epistemological one.

Now, having seen different versions of the particularistic position, let us discuss epistemological particularism which helps to clearly distinguish it from the metaphysical issue which we want to focus on.

#### **1-1-1-1. Elaborating Epistemological Particularism**

An epistemological particularist is suspicious about the positive task that moral rules can play in arriving at justified decisions. According to the epistemological particularist, each moral decision is fully context-dependent and has to be taken without appeal to principles. McNaughton and Rawling say:

The term 'ethical particularist' has sometimes been used, in a broad and loose way, as a label for anyone who expresses hostility to the view that a decision about what we ought to do in some particular case can be mechanically 'read off' from a general moral principle or principles. Rather, it is urged, a correct moral verdict can only be reached by paying close attention to the individual case — to what differentiates it from other cases as much as what it has in common with them (2000, p. 256).

According to the epistemological particularist, we do not need to learn moral rules to make justified moral decisions. On the contrary, all we need is a means of paying close attention to each concrete ethical situation to improve our moral vision. In other words, according to the epistemological particularist, all we need to arrive at a justified moral judgment in a concrete ethical situation is to keep looking at the case

regardless of its relationship with similar cases. Each case must be decided separately and on its own merit. According to McNaughton:

What we need to be taught, on the particularist view, is a way of seeing, a way of being sensitive to the moral facts which we can make our own... We all have moral blind spots, areas of insensitivity, and so there is always room for improvement...What we need is not a better set of principles but better moral vision (1988, p. 205).

And Dancy says:

The primary focus of particularism is the particular case, not surprisingly. This means that one's main duty, in moral judgment, is to look really closely at the case before one. Our first question is not 'Which other cases does this one best resemble?', but rather 'What is the nature of the case before us?'... The crucial question is how things are in the case before us (1993, p. 63).<sup>18</sup>

Epistemological particularism denies the important role that other moral theories allocate to moral principles in moral reasoning. The epistemological particularist suggests that the role of moral principles is merely to remind us of the significance of a non-evaluative property and the impact it *can* have in different situations; their actual impact and force are variable. Dancy states:

I think, then, that the account of moral principles as reminding us of the importance a property can have in suitable circumstances solves several outstanding problems in moral theory...Although we are able to observe, in a given case, the importance that a property can have in suitable circumstances, the particularist can still insist that no notion is available of a sort of circumstance in which it *must* have that importance (1993, p. 70).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> I shall return to this quote in chapter 4. I will argue that the particularist's suggestion to look at a case over time, on its own, to arrive at a justified moral judgment is useless. We have to be given an account of how we arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of morally relevant features in a particular case. Moreover, this unclear epistemological account is based upon a vague metaphysical story which cannot give us an account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases.

<sup>19</sup> I return to this quote again in chapter 3. I will argue that *the importance* of a morally relevant feature which Dancy discusses destroys the whole idea of 'holism' which Dancy puts forward as an argument in favour of particularism. In fact, I shall argue that his holism ultimately leads to atomism.

In addition, according to the epistemological particularist, ordinary moral principles subscribed to by most people are too general, and require analysis and interpretation and we need to exercise moral sensitivity in their application. We need more detail to reach a recommendable moral judgement in each case. McNaughton says:

... 'honour your father and mother'; 'love your neighbour as yourself'; 'be true to yourself'. The purpose of such remarks appears to be to serve to indicate areas of general moral concern, leaving us to work out how, or if, they may have a bearing on any particular case.

In order to know, for example, whether a child's action is genuinely a case of honouring its parents we need to look at all the details of the case. Take the case of the Eskimos who, it is said, used to leave old people to die on the ice once they had become too old to hunt or to make a contribution to the welfare of the tribe in other ways. At first glance such an action appears callous and uncaring in the extreme. But more knowledge of the context can completely reverse that initial impression. When this practice flourished euthanasia was essential for the survival of the tribe as a whole. This was generally recognised and accepted by everyone, including the aged parents themselves, who would initiate the chain of events leading to their own death (1988, p. 202).

According to McNaughton, it initially appears that the child's act is an example of cruelty, instead of honouring its parents. But familiarity with the tribe's traditions and rituals teaches us that performing such an act has a survival value for the tribe as a whole. So, he is claiming that moral principles, which are applied by the majority of people, are context-dependent in the sense that their application can vary from context to context. So, moral principles demand that we exhibit both knowledge and sensitivity to context to be utilized.

On this view, to reach a moral verdict or to issue a moral judgement one has to keep practising and pay close attention to the details of each concrete situation. Of course, moral judgement is cognitive, but moral knowledge requires sensitivity to what is relevant in the case at hand, and this sensitivity can be obtained only after a long period of teaching and experience. With the aid of lengthy experience and

observation, one improves his moral cognitive capacities, which helps to make moral issues more intelligible.

Also, according to the epistemological particularist, we can compare moral appreciation and the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment with aesthetic appreciation. McNaughton believes:

Someone can fail to notice on first encounter aspects of a painting or piece of music which, perhaps after repeated study, later become apparent. The natural and almost irresistible conclusion is that he has developed a fuller and livelier appreciation of the work by coming to see or hear more clearly what was always there, waiting to be noticed.

On this observational model of aesthetic appreciation, how would you go about trying to justify your view of the work to someone who disagrees? By bringing him to see or hear it the way you do... The realist claims that this provides an illuminating analogy for moral justification...the result of successful training in the aesthetic case is a change in perception... Training has improved your recognitional capacities in music... The change in your evaluation is the result of a cognitive change... Analogously, a change in someone's moral views may be brought about by someone getting him to see the situation in a new light, either by enabling him to appreciate more fully some feature of the situation whose significance he had overlooked, or by revealing an overall shape or pattern which was hidden (1988, pp.58-59).

According to the epistemological particularist, experiencing and practising have epistemological value and all one needs to become a virtuous person is to keep looking at the salient feature or features of each concrete ethical situation over time in order to promote the capacity for moral judgment. According to McNaughton, moral judgment in principle is a kind of cognitive skill which can be advanced by ongoing practice.

Furthermore, the epistemological particularist has a stronger claim with regard to the role of moral principles in education. He believes that the task of general rules has been exaggerated. According to this view, the merit of general rules has to be confined to that of a tool with which the pupil becomes familiar with morality at the beginning of moral training. As life goes on, the pupil finds out gradually that a general principle can be defeated, and we have no exceptionless rules. In other words,

the pupil will find out that we can throw away a moral principle in a particular case, after being well informed about what is relevant in that case. Little says:

Such [moral] principles, it is said, are useful pedagogic devices—helpful crutches for novices in moral judgment who, like beginning cooks, often need intentionally simplified rules or recipes to guide them as they gather needed experience. Or again, they are valuable heuristics: they aid our ability to interpret a case by serving to remind us of what *can* be salient... Sometimes the directives we issue are very crude ones (the sweeping “never lie!” uttered to a five-year-old), meant to be left behind once one moves from novice to expert (2001, p. 36).

Therefore, learning a set of moral rules is just a point of departure in moral life and everyday moral practice, and has no justifying value, because it can be overridden at any time. According to McNaughton:

But why, it might be objected, teach them moral principles in the first place if it is better, in the end, if they dispense with them? Because they are useful at the time. When people are learning to write essays they are taught rudimentary rules of style. Later they come to realize that there is no rule of style that has not been broken by some writer to considerable effect. They could not have started without stylistic guidelines of any kind—rules which are, for the most part, acceptable. As their sense of prose rhythm develops they gradually dispense with them. In the end, if they are not discarded, they prove a hindrance to good writing. And so it may be with moral principles (1988, pp. 202-203).

To summarise, the epistemological particularist is doubtful with regard to the role of moral principles in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment. He believes that the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment in a case is fully context-dependent in the sense that it cannot be subsumed under a general moral principle. Moreover, arriving at a tenable moral judgment requires the details of the case which we are considering which leaves no room for a general moral principle to be used. In contrast, moral judgment which can be compared with aesthetic appreciation is a skill which can be grasped to the extent that the moral subject is engaged in looking at the salient feature or features of different ethical cases over time. Finally, the epistemological particularist believes that the merit of moral principles in moral education is overstated. As they can be overridden at any stage in

everyday moral practice, their merit has to be limited to the early steps in which the pupil is acquiring competence in morality.

### **1-1-1-2. Evaluating Epistemological Particularism**

Now, having noted different themes of epistemological particularism, I must mention another issue at this stage. It seems that this version of particularism can be reconciled with a metaphysical generalistic account, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to general patterns. In other words, as the epistemological particularist emphasises that we need to look at the case before us carefully to pick up the ultimate outcome of the combination of different morally relevant features in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment, one might think we need some general patterns of word use, in the light of which moral concepts can be utilised correctly and consistently.<sup>20</sup> The idea here is that the very notion of using a word correctly requires some idea of patterns of use regardless of whether it can be formulated easily or in the abstract. In the denial of this point, the epistemological particularist cannot utilise moral concepts coherently and consistently.<sup>21</sup> So, if the latter argument about patterns is correct, in order to be regarded as an epistemological particularist one has to subscribe to the existence of general patterns of word use in the first place. Subscribing to the existence of these patterns is necessary in order to be engaged in practice and promote the capacity for moral judgment.

Furthermore, all the epistemological particularist can criticise is a strong generalistic account, according to which arriving at a tenable moral judgment is not

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<sup>20</sup> This point will be discussed later on in this chapter in order to criticise normative or metaphysical particularism. All that I am saying at this stage is that epistemological particularism, unlike normative or metaphysical particularism, can be compatible with metaphysical generalism.

<sup>21</sup> Whether or not the content of these patterns of word use is abstract and determined is a crucial issue which I will deal with later on in this chapter. At this stage, let us say that in order to be regarded as a

context-dependent and the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment is clear in advance. However, it does not follow from accepting criticism of this strong generalism that there is no generalistic account which takes into account the details of the case before us to arrive at a sound moral judgment. In contrast, there are modest-generalistic accounts which are context-dependent. In other words, in order to take account of the salient features of the case to arrive at defensible moral judgment, one does not need to reject all accounts of generality in moral reasoning.<sup>22</sup>

As a result, epistemological particularism could be reconciled with metaphysical generalism. Both would subscribe to the existence of the patterns of word use in order to utilise moral concepts coherently and meaningfully. Moreover, context-dependency can be consistent with a modest-generalistic account.

So, if epistemological particularism is compatible with metaphysics of patterns, then it does not provide the key argument for particularism. It might provide additional support for the main metaphysical thesis of particularism. However, the core particularistic metaphysical thesis needs to be argued independently of the epistemological consideration. Thus, I shall concentrate on the main metaphysical issue and, from now on, ignore epistemological particularism.

### **1-1-1-3. Normative or metaphysical particularism**

First I will outline normative particularism; my criticism will follow afterwards. Normative or metaphysical particularism denies the existence of a definite relationship between non-moral properties and moral properties. According to the

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generalist, one does not need to subscribe to the existence of abstract and determined patterns. There is another version of patterns of word use which I will present later on in this chapter.

<sup>22</sup> As we will see in this chapter later on, an account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts can be given to reconcile between context-dependency and a modest-generalistic account, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to general patterns. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, Rossian ethics tries to reconcile between generality and particularity in moral reasoning by drawing a distinction between prima facie duty and actual duty.



normative or metaphysical particularist, the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts cannot fit into general patterns. Rather, moral properties are shapeless with respect to non-moral properties. According to Dancy:

The particularist idea is that a feature that here contributes to the rightness of an act may there detract, making its owner less right than it would otherwise have been, and in another case have no moral relevance at all. Contributing features, in this sense, are variable in their moral relevance (1999b, p. 61).

I would suggest that normative or metaphysical particularism appears in two forms: ‘particularism through holism’ and ‘particularism through relevance’.

#### *1-1-1-3-1. Particularism through holism*

According to this form, we cannot generalise what we find as a wrong-making feature of action, such as lying, in a particular case into a moral principle about lying in general. The main argument for this form of normative particularism draws on the idea of *holism* about reasons for action which can appear in two forms: strong holism and weak holism.<sup>23</sup> According to strong holism, morally relevant non-moral properties are highly contextual, and may change their reason-giving behaviours from case to case where they are compounded with other morally relevant non-moral properties, so that what makes an action wrong in one case may make it right in another case. In other words, the deontic valence of a moral consideration (such as one's duty to fulfil his promise to someone else) is not constant, and may vary from case to case. McNaughton says:

If the presence of a non-moral property is a reason for an action's being wrong then, since its being a reason will not be altered one whit by other properties the action may have, whenever an action has that property it will provide a reason

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<sup>23</sup> For more elaboration with regard to two different forms of holism, see: Crisp, R. ‘Ethics without Reasons?’, forthcoming. According to Crisp, Dancy has argued in favour of strong holism in his *Moral Reasons* while endorsing weak holism in his *Ethics Without Principles*. This paper was read in a conference on moral particularism held at the University of Kent in Canterbury, on 1st December 2004. I should thank the author who gave me a copy of the article which, to my knowledge, has not yet been published.

for the action's being wrong. The particularist regards this account of reasons as unduly atomistic. It supposes that each reason is insulated from its surroundings so that the effect of each on the rightness or wrongness of the action as a whole can be judged separately. The particularist prefers a holistic account... The contribution that each property makes will depend on the other properties that go along with it in this case (1988, pp. 192-193).

And Dancy states:

I maintain that *all* reasons are *capable* of being altered by changes in contexts... My holism holds that every consideration is capable of having its practical polarity reversed by changes in context... I see ethical particularism as merely one expression of an overall holism in the theory of normative reasons... Such an overall holism can be expressed as follows:

1. What is a reason in one situation may alter or lose its polarity in another.
2. The way in which the reasons here present combine with each other is not necessarily determinable in any simply additive way.

...If generalism is taken to be the view that all reasons are general reasons, i.e. that if a feature is a reason in one case, it is the same reason in any other case, generalism is uncontentiously false of theoretical reasons (2000, pp.130-132).<sup>24</sup>

And:

If an action is wrong, it is made wrong by certain other features that it has; its wrongness cannot be among these wrong-making features. I take this as a metaphysical remark; others may understand it in a different way... a feature that is a reason in one case is the same reason in any case in which it appears, which I call generalism in the theory of reasons. To put it another way, a feature that makes a moral difference in one case must make the same difference on every reappearance. ... I take generalism to be false of theoretical reasons, reasons for belief, and false of ordinary practical reasons, reasons for action. In the light of this, it seems to me very odd to suppose that it could be true only of moral reasons – that rationality in ethics could differ *structurally*, as it were, from rationality elsewhere (1999a, pp. 25-26).

Dancy's argument in favour of holism about reasons for action is an application of holism about normative reasons in general. Dancy claims that normative reasons for belief are obviously and non-controversially holistic (highly contextual), and that it is very odd to account for reasons for action as non-holistic. But how could normative reasons for belief be holistic? Dancy's argument for this claim is as follows: suppose

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<sup>24</sup> Note that Dancy is only talking about very simple generalism at this stage. The idea of 'the same reason in any other case' indicates that the behaviour of a morally relevant feature cannot be affected by the context at all. But we can have more complicated accounts of pattern, according to which the behaviour of a non-moral feature is affected by the context. Such a complicated pattern tries to give an account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature is changed following the combination with other morally relevant features in different cases. As we will see in this chapter later on, Sinnott-Armstrong tries to present a complicated and conditionalised moral pattern by resorting to the varieties of defeaters.

that something is in front of me, and I experience it as a red pencil. Experiencing something as a red pencil is a justified reason for me to believe that a red pencil is in front of me. Again suppose that, as a thought experiment, I have taken a pill which makes blue things seem red to me. In this case, experiencing something as a red pencil is a reason that justifies me in believing that a blue pencil is in front of me. Therefore, it is not the case that experiencing something as red always justifies me in believing that there is something red in front of me. Conversely, it can justify me in believing that there is something blue in front of me. Dancy says:

It is not as if it is some reason for me to believe that there is something red before me, though that reason is overwhelmed by contrary reasons. It is no longer *any reason at all* to believe that there is something red before me; indeed, it is a reason for believing the opposite (2004, p.74).

This means that reasons for belief behave holistically, and the way in which they are combined together and contribute to ultimate justification can vary from context to context. In other words, they have no intrinsic and invariant valence outside context, for their valence can change as a result of reacting to other reasons.

I shall criticise normative particularism in detail later on in this chapter. However, at this stage, I must point out that Dancy's claim with regard to the behaviour of a theoretical reason in different contexts is implausible. The notion that the behaviour of a theoretical reason in several contexts is different does not lead to the idea that there is no generality in the behaviour of the theoretical reason. All we are left with is a complicated account of generality with regard to the behaviour of the theoretical reason in different cases. Suppose that 'something seems red to me' is a reason which justifies me in believing that something red is in front of me. Why can't 'something seems red to me' behave similarly, as a reason, in similar contexts in

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which we deal with seeing something which seems red to us? Why can't a theoretical reason behave as a type? 'Something seems red to me' is generally a reason for believing X is red. In other words, we can say that in the class of cases in which 'something seems red to me' we have a reason for believing X is red. Moreover, when I have taken a pill which makes me see blue things as red, 'something seems red to me' is generally a reason for believing X is blue. In the class of cases in which I have taken the pill, I have a reason for believing X is blue. So, there are two different complicated types of cases in which theoretical reasons do not behave holistically in different contexts.<sup>25</sup>

The second form of holism is weak holism. According to this kind of holism, although practical reasons are combined together the same as theoretical reasons, and the way in which different morally relevant features contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases can vary from case to case; it does not follow from this that the reason-giving behaviour of all morally relevant features cannot be invariant. In other words, weak holism allows that there can be a morally relevant feature which has an invariant deontic valence and can contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way. For instance, the feature 'sexual abuse of a child' might be an example of a feature that always contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases as a wrong-making feature. In other words, this feature can behave atomistically and keep its deontic valence in different ethical situations. Moreover, according to the particularistic account which is associated with weak holism, these alleged invariant reasons are invariant not because they can be regarded as reasons but because of their specific content. According to Dancy:

It could be true that every reason may alter or lose its polarity from case to case, even though there are some reasons that do not do this. If they don't do it, this will be because of the

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<sup>25</sup> See also 1-1-1-4-4.

particular reasons they are. Invariant reasons, should there be any, will be invariant not because they are reasons but because of their specific content. And this is something that the particularist, it seems, should admit...So can the particularist admit the existence of *some* invariant reasons? The obvious examples are things like the causing of gratuitous pain on unwilling victims... If we can think of such general statements as principles, holism will turn out to be compatible with the existence of at least some principles (2004, pp.77, 81).

### *1-1-1-3-2. Particularism Through Relevance*

The second form of normative or metaphysical particularism is a stronger claim. Consider a purported morally relevant feature F. As we have seen, according to the first form of particularism, F is a morally relevant feature whose valence can switch polarity from case to case. According to the second form, F might become irrelevant in some ethical cases. The *relevance* of a consideration may change from case to case. Any non-moral property might be both morally relevant and morally irrelevant. For instance, if promise keeping in a concrete situation is morally relevant, it does not follow from this that it is relevant in all similar cases. Dancy says:

If a property which is relevant to the moral value of a particular act is one which actually affects the value of that act, so that somehow the act would have had less/more value without it, what guarantee is there that all properties that we think of as generally morally relevant will 'make a difference' in every case in which they occur? ...why should we admit that if a property 'makes a difference' in a particular case, then it generally 'makes a difference?' Isn't it possible that circumstances in a later case have the effect that the presence of *this* property does not make a difference there, though it does here? ... Pluralists have difficulty in providing a smooth account of the relation between general relevance and relevance in a particular case (1983, p. 534).

And McNaughton says:

...there is no way of ruling out, in advance, some non-moral properties as being morally irrelevant. Any property may be morally relevant. Whether it is so will depend... on the surrounding properties (1988, p.193).

And:

Whether a particular feature will have a bearing...is something that can only be decided in the particular case when we can determine how the various features of the case interact...I want to stress that the particularist sets no *a priori* limits on what kinds of feature may be morally relevant. Scientific, relational and cultural facts may all be relevant. The latter may include ...facts about people and animals which stem from our cultural makings (1991, p.68).

If a non-moral property is not morally relevant at all in a concrete situation, then why should we consider whether its deontic valence is variant or invariant? With regard to any non-moral property, the first question is whether or not it is morally relevant, and if the answer is that it is relevant, then we are entitled to ask whether it is always relevant in a particular way, or whether its valence may change from case to case. Therefore, the second form of normative particularism is stronger than the first form.

Audi says:

This view is stronger because although valence entails relevance, relevance does not entail valence; e.g., a relevant factor might only render probable, but not entail, a valence and might indicate different valences in different contexts (1998, p. 37).

The following example from Dancy illustrates the point.

I borrow a book from you, and then discover that you have stolen it from the library. Normally the fact that I have borrowed the book from you would be a reason to return it to you, but in this situation it is not. It isn't that I have *some* reason to return it to you and more reason to put it back in the library. I have no reason at all to return it to you (1993, p. 60).

According to Dancy, it is not the case that the way in which the moral feature 'returning the book to you' contributes to the moral evaluation of the case is changed because of the presence of another feature. Rather, in the above case, there is nothing that requires fidelity. Returning the book is not relevant at all, not that it is relevant, but changes its behaviour or has a different deontic valence.

#### **1-1-1-4. Evaluating Normative or Metaphysical Particularism**

Having reviewed two versions of normative particularism, in this section I review a series of objections against normative or metaphysical particularism.

*1-1-1-4-1. Defeaters, Open-endedness, Patternability and the Distinction Between the Format and the Content of the Concept 'Game'*

**1-1-1-4-1-1. Criticising the Idea of Holism.** According to the first version of normative or metaphysical particularism, morally relevant features are combined together holistically, and evaluative properties are related to non-evaluative properties in a contextual way. In other words, because the behaviour of each right-making or wrong-making feature can vary from case to case, and evaluative properties are shapeless with respect to non-evaluative properties, it follows that there is no account available of the patterns of word use, to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary is answerable. The normative particularist subscribes to the notion that each morally relevant feature can contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in different ways. Note that the normative particularist is not making an epistemic point about decision procedure. Rather, he has a constitutive claim with regard to the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts in such a way that he rejects its answerability to general patterns of word use. The first claim is epistemological whereas the second one is metaphysical.

This metaphysical claim is not, however, irresistible. It does not follow from the fact that the rightness or wrongness of a moral consideration can vary from case to case that it has no invariant deontic valence and cannot contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way. As Sinnott-Armstrong points out, all a normative particularist can deny is an extremely simple moral principle.<sup>26</sup> More complex principles will survive from different counterexamples, which are put

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<sup>26</sup> See: Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (1999) 'Some Varieties of Particularism', *Metaphilosophy*, 30, pp. 1-12, 2-4.

forward by normative particularists.<sup>27</sup> Consider the case that Roger has promised Julia to lend her £5000 in the near future. Both a normative particularist and a generalist endorse the idea that what makes Roger morally obliged to give Julia the money is the morally relevant feature of fidelity which requires Roger to give the money to Julia. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, in order to talk about generality in the realm of morality, we need to give an account of how evaluative properties are related to non-evaluative properties in different contexts in which we come across some exceptions. Let me add more detail to the promise example to make the point clearer.

If Roger asks Julia to find somebody else to borrow the money from, and Julia accepts, then this cancels his reason to give her £5000. When a fact has this power, it is an *underminer*. However, if Julia changes her mind and tells Roger not to pay the money, this cancels Roger's reason to pay the money and also gives him a reason not to pay the money. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, such facts not only cancel but also reverse the power of the reason. Consequently, these facts can be regarded as *reversers*. Furthermore, the fact that Roger is very sick to the extent that he will be hospitalised tomorrow may remove his responsibility to give her the money. This sort of fact with such a force can be regarded as an *excuse*. In the meantime, the fact that Roger's brother asked him for the money simultaneously is a conflicting reason for him to give the money to his brother instead of Julia. If this reason overrides his reason to give her the money, it is an *overrider*. We can regard all of these restrictive factors as reason defeaters. According to Sinnott-Armstrong:

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<sup>27</sup> As we have seen earlier, the normative particularist tries to reject the simple account of generalism. However, there is a complicated and conditionalised account of moral pattern which has to be investigated by the normative particularist.

Furthermore, as we will see in Ross's ethics in the second chapter, considering the metaphysical distinction between invariant moral value and variant moral weight could explain the different common sensical moral intuitions which we have regarding generality and particularity in moral reasoning.



Overriders, underminers, reversers, and excuses are, then, all reason *defeaters*. This list of defeaters is hard to spell out in general and in detail... Nonetheless, even if some are hard to classify, different kinds of facts can still be different kinds of defeaters because they have different effects on reasons.... my classification of defeaters also shows one way to qualify moral principles so as to avoid exceptions. Instead of saying that there is always a moral reason not to kill any adult human, just say that there is always a moral reason not to kill any adult human *when* there is no underminer, reverser, excuse, or overrider (1999, pp. 5-6).

Although a moral principle is confronted with a long list of defeaters, it does not follow from this that it has no real shape. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, not only could we classify and demarcate several defeaters into groups, but also we could still give a metaphysical account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can fit into general patterns of word use. Sinnott-Armstrong points out that in order to maintain moral generality, we have to distinguish between completeness in principle and completeness in practice. It is true that the list of defeaters in practice has not been completed, and confrontation with new cases might lead to increase the list of defeaters, but it does not follow from this that the list of defeaters is not complete in principle. In other words, it is not impossible to suppose that as the process of adding defeaters goes on indefinitely, we might be faced with an ethical situation in which no more defeater is needed. Despite the fact that the behaviour of a moral consideration might be altered in different ways, however, it can keep its generality. In fact, although in practice the list of several defeaters is incomplete, it does not follow from this that in principle the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is not patternable. It only shows that complete patternability cannot be reached in practice.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I shall put forward a stronger argument in favour the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features later on in this chapter; using an account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts. According to the argument, patternability of patterns of word use is a matter of degree. Even if the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature cannot be thoroughly articulated in a principle, it does not follow from this that it is not patternable at all. Rather, the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases can be articulated in a pattern to the extent that we are engaged in practice. Answerability to patterns of word use is grounded in being engaged in practice.

Dancy has a response to this. Whilst he is happy with Sinnott-Armstrong's distinction between underminers, excuses, reversers, and overrides, he thinks that this demarcation can be seen as the same as what he has offered with regard to the very idea of 'default reason', which ultimately retains no generality. According to him:

...I take Sinnott-Armstrong here to be characterizing the notion of a *default reason* – a feature that is a reason, as we might put it, other things being equal, or unless something prevents it from being the reason it would otherwise be...The problem, as I see it, is how to cash all this out at the ground level. Let us suppose that there are features that are default reasons, that is, that are reasons unless something occurs to prevent them from being so. Can we manage to specify the conditions capable of preventing them from being so?...will it be enough to be told that this feature plays that role unless something occurs to prevent it from doing so? I think not. What we want to be told is whether it does play that role, not whether it would unless prevented (1999a, pp. 27).

According to Dancy, what we are offered by Sinnott-Armstrong is a conditional generality, according to which a feature like promise keeping can contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way, provided that all kinds of defeaters are taken into account. But Dancy believes that the list of defeaters is open-ended and can never come to an end. If this is the case, according to Dancy the moral shape and generality which are being proposed are not the supposed shape and figure which we are looking for:

...the sort of shape we are being offered is formal rather than material, and we need our moral principles to be material. There is little use, that is, in being told that there is a reason unless something occurs to stop it from being so.

Sinnott-Armstrong takes it that...the real problem, if there is one, is incompleteness rather than shapelessness. But I still feel that the sort of shaping that has been offered is not the sort that was sought, and therefore that my worries about shapelessness have not yet been met...For underminers can themselves be undermined by meta-underminers, and for all I know those meta-underminers are themselves underminable and so on. And the same is true of reversers. There need be no end to this process, so far as I can see...and the sorts of principles offered by Sinnott-Armstrong are still vulnerable to particularist challenge. Remember that what we are doing is trying to capture general right-making features. My conclusion, so far, is that there are no such things, but at the best merely general conditions under which acts are right, which is a different thing (1999a, pp. 28- 29).

Dancy believes that the process of adding the defeaters is open-ended, providing only a formal shape which has no content, and there is little use in pointing out that there is

a reason unless something occurs. In other words, Dancy claims that in such a situation, in which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature might be changed because of the presence of another morally relevant feature, a real moral pattern, to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable, cannot exist. In contrast, what we are confronted with is merely a general formal shape which has no content. In other words, it is only a formal and logical constraint with nothing which can be regarded as a general pattern. There is no such thing as a pattern to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can fit.<sup>29</sup> The normative particularist rejects the constitutive notion of answerability, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is responsive to general patterns of word use.

In order to criticise the generalistic approach regarding the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features and improve his idea with regard to the way in which morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases, Dancy utilises the distinction between favourer and enabler:

...I suggest that the distinction between favourers and enablers can be generalized: there is a general distinction between a feature that plays a certain role [favourer] and a feature whose presence or absence is required for the first feature to play its role [enabler], but which does not play that role itself ... there are many different ways in which the presence or absence of a consideration can make a difference to how one should respond, the main distinction in this connection being between favouring and enabling something else to favour (2004, pp. 45, 73).

Dancy tries to show that the behaviour of each reason strongly depends on several factors which have crucial roles in actualising a morally relevant feature to contribute

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<sup>29</sup> Note that the relationship between content and format is associated with the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts. If we say that the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to moral evaluation is to some extent patternable, it follows from this that it has some content. As we will see in this chapter, according to Wittgenstein, although the concept 'game' does not have any pre-existing and determined pattern and

to the moral evaluation of different cases.<sup>30</sup> Let me give an example to make the point clearer. Suppose that Peter has promised to help Kim repair her house. According to Dancy, that Peter promised Kim to help her is a reason which requires him to help Kim to repair her house. Promising here is a favourer, a right-making feature which requires him to fulfil his promise. Moreover, suppose that:

1. Peter's promise is not given under threat.
2. He is able to fulfil the promise.
3. There is no greater reason not to fulfil it.

Dancy is trying to give an account of how these three conditions have to be taken into account. According to him, none of these conditions is part of the favourer. In other words, none of them has any reason-giving power. Rather, they enable the favourer and right-making feature to exert its reason-giving power. In other words, the fact that Peter's promise was not given under threat is not a second reason for doing it, but its presence enables the promise to be fulfilled. However, in the absence of (1), the promise cannot be fulfilled. So, (1) is an enabler which makes the fulfilling of the promise possible. In fact, (1) helps the favourer to play its role, its reason-giving role. Moreover, (2) and (3) are other kinds of enablers whose presence are required for the promise to be fulfilled. In other words, in the absence of (2) and (3), the promise cannot be fulfilled.<sup>31</sup> So, all of (1), (2) and (3) are different kinds of enablers which

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content, it does not follow from this that the concept 'game' is not patternable and has no shape at all. Rather, its patternability is compatible with the open-endedness of the list of game-making features.

<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Dancy in *Moral Reason* makes a distinction between three different types of properties which are foreground properties, active background properties and inert background properties. These properties contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in different ways. The distinction between foreground properties and active background properties can be regarded the same as the distinction between favourer and enabler. For more elaboration, see Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 55-56. Also, see Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (1999) 'On Denying A Significant Version of The Constancy Assumption', *Theoria*, 65 (2-3), pp. 90-113, 99-104.

<sup>31</sup> For more detail, see Dancy, J. *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 38-45.

are required to permit the favourer to play its role. In other words, in the absence of these enablers, the favourer cannot exert its right-making power.

Dancy is trying to show that the distinction between enabler and favourer (right-making) can be reconciled with what Sinnott-Armstrong has put forward as different kinds of defeaters. According to Dancy, overrides can be regarded as favourers which play their role as right-making or wrong-making features and contribute to the moral evaluation of different ethical situations. Reversers, underminers and excuses can be regarded as enablers in whose presence, favourers can play their role and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases; and in whose absence, they cannot play their role as a right or wrong-making feature. He says:

There are ...roles which it is important to distinguish from the one of contributing directly to the rightness or wrongness of the action in the case before us. There is the role of an enabling condition, played by any feature which by its presence enables the right-making features to play their role, without playing that role itself; and there is also such a thing as a disabling condition, which does the same thing by its absence. These enabling or disabling conditions do not play the role of a contributor to the rightness or wrongness of the action... I welcome Sinnott-Armstrong's distinction among underminers, excuses, reversers, and overrides. I think of (some of) this as a slightly more elaborate reworking of an aspect of my distinction between enablers and disablers, on the one side, and real contributors on the other (1999a, p. 26).

On Dancy's account there are numbers of enablers and disablers which allow and disallow the favourer to play its role and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases.

At this stage, I shall not go into great detail on this distinction because of the argument which will be presented by appealing to Wittgenstein; nevertheless, it seems to me that the distinction between favourer and enabler is implausible and counter-intuitive. In *Ethics Without Principles* Dancy says that in a concrete context in which one promised to do something, the real favourer is not that one freely promised to do

that, but merely that one promised whether or not this was done under threat.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, he adds that in cases where the promise was given under pressure, not doing what was promised upsets the promiser. In fact, according to Dancy, the promise, on its own, plays its role as a favourer, whether or not it was given freely. He says:

...it is a mistake to think that promises only give a reason if they are freely made. I stick to the view that what favours my doing the action is that I engaged myself to do so. But it is hard to know how to tell whether this is correct or not. One clue is that those who recognize that their promise was deceitfully extracted from them often feel some compunction in not doing what they promised, even though they themselves recognize that in such circumstances their promise does not play its normal reason-giving role (2004, p. 39).

I must conclude that, intuitively speaking, Dancy's position is wrong. I cannot see any source of remorse or regret in such a case. In fact, it is not the case that only by being involved in a promise situation, promise keeping behaves as a right-making feature and favourer in a concrete context. Rather, the promise which is given freely can be regarded as a favourer. Intuitively speaking, the promise which is given under threat has no reason-giving power and cannot contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. So, at least the distinction between favourer and one type of enablers is counter-intuitive.

For now I shall say that even subscribing to Dancy's distinction between favourer and enabler does not lead to holism, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is not responsive to general patterns. In other words, even if the list of enablers and disablers is open-ended, it does not follow from this that what we are offered is merely a general formal pattern which has no content and that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts cannot fit into that pattern.

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<sup>32</sup> See *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp.39-40.

As we have seen in the above, a normative particularist like Dancy has a constitutive claim with regard to the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different cases, according to which the way in which it contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is not answerable to general patterns.

In order to criticise Dancy's constitutive and metaphysical claim with regard to the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different contexts, I draw on the account from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts. Note that, at this stage, I shall apply the Wittgensteinian account with regard to the nature of concepts to repudiate Dancy's constitutive claim regarding the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts. I will examine the justification of the Wittgensteinian account of the nature of concepts in the next chapter.

Suppose we want to articulate and define the concept 'game'. On the face of it, it seems that in order to do this we need to state the property or properties common to different kinds of games, with which we have been confronted so far, such as: basketball, handball, snooker, squash, cricket, chess, boxing, badminton, wrestling etc. On the basis of the common properties obtained, we would say that:

If  $x$  meets the condition  $g_1, g_2, g_3 \dots g_n$ ,  $x$  is a 'game'.

This view supposes that there is something in common which needs to be articulated and categorised to arrive at the definition of the concept 'game'. It suggests that there is something in common among different kinds of games with which we are familiar. By utilising the obtained general rule, we can say whether or not a new phenomenon can be regarded as a game. In this model, the general pattern acts as the normative

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standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, under which different examples of the concept 'game' can be subsumed.

However, Wittgenstein rejects the existence of such a property or set of properties common to different kinds of games, something which can be articulated as an essence of the concept 'game'. The whole idea of 'family resemblance' in *Philosophical Investigations* is concerned with the denial of such an approach to defining a concept like game. There is nothing in common among different games which can be articulated. For instance, if someone says that losing and winning can be regarded as a common feature of different games, we can *show* him other games in which there is no such thing as losing and winning like the child who builds a house using Lego. Moreover, if we want to consider equipment such as a ball, goal, net, racket etc. as a common feature or features of different games, one can *show* other games such as: boxing, wrestling etc. in which these items not used. So, it seems that there is an open-ended list of game-making features which forms the different games with which we are familiar. So, it seems that we cannot arrive at what the concept 'game' is through stating and articulating a feature or features common to different games. Nevertheless, we, as language-users use the word 'game' in our communication meaningfully. In other words, although there is an open-ended list of game-making features, we cannot regard anything we like as an example of the concept 'game'. It seems that there is a normative constraint that requires us to see whether or not the phenomenon with which we are dealing can be regarded as a game. Wittgenstein attempts to show that the normative constraint that we are talking about cannot be put into words. Rather, it can only be grasped through ongoing practice of *seeing* the similarities and dissimilarities. There is nothing beyond seeing the similarities which can do this job. He states:



What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it?... Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of games; shewing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these (1953, §75).

According to Wittgenstein, it is not the case that I know what the concept 'game' is before being engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities. Rather, what we see within practice is all we have about the concept 'game'. It is not the case that in practice the pre-existing notion of game is becoming clearer. There is no such thing as the pre-existing concept of game. However, the more we are engaged in the practice of using the word, the more clearly we see what a game is. This is an open-ended process which never comes to an end. To grasp the meaning of a concept such as game, all we have is seeing the similarities: this is a game, that is a game, this is not a game etc. and this is not ignorance. Being engaged in practice is not a halfway and second hand explanation of what a game is. This is all we have at hand. According to Wittgenstein:

How should we explain to someone what a game is? I imagine that we should describe *games* to him, and we might add: "This and *similar things* are called 'games'". And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is? —But this is not ignorance (1953, §69).

There is nothing beyond seeing the similarities. Seeing the similarities is prior. We know what a game is to the extent that we are engaged in practice. It is not the case that we know what the concept 'game' is, but cannot entirely articulate it to someone who does not know what it is. Rather, the more we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar and dissimilar things, the more we see what the concept 'game' is.

It does not follow from this that any phenomenon can be regarded as an example of the concept 'game'. Rather, there is a normative constraint which lies in the way in which we are engaged in seeing things as similar. In other words, it is not the case that regarding a new phenomenon as a game is a matter of taste and can be

done arbitrarily or at random.<sup>33</sup> Rather, there is a normative constraint which can be seen within practice. There is an account which can be given with regard to whether or not the new phenomenon is a game. The account becomes clearer to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar. There is no such thing as a pre-existing and abstract pattern which can be utilised in order to see whether or not the new phenomenon is a game. Rather, there is an account with regard to the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which is associated with the way in which we are engaged in seeing the similarities. The crucial thing at this stage is that there is an account with regard to a normative constraint which can be given. In fact, in place of the notion of the pre-existing source of normativity, there is a normative constraint which can be seen merely within practice.

To the extent that we are engaged in the activity of seeing things as similar, we can see what the concept 'game' is. We have a role in shaping the concept. In other words, the concept 'game' *emerges* following our ongoing practice of seeing the similarities. Moreover, the shape of the concept 'game' is extendable. The more we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar games, the more the shape of the concept 'game' is extended. Practice has an indispensable role in the extendibility of the concept 'game'. So, we can say that there is some generality in the concept 'game', albeit one that emerges.

Now, one point which has to be taken into account is that although the list of features and properties which make different games is open-ended, it does not follow from this that there is no generality in the concept 'game'. It is not the case that in

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<sup>33</sup> Of course there is an issue about the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words and the whole idea of normativity which must be taken into account. I shall turn to this issue in chapter 2.

order to be able to define the concept 'game', all possible game-making features have to be distinguished. In other words, although all possible game-making features have not been distinguished, we can use the concept 'game' rightly and consistently. What follows from this is that the normative reason which justifies us in regarding a new phenomenon as a game does not lie in open-endedness or the completeness of game-making features. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is not associated with the number of game-making features which make different games. Rather, it depends on the way in which we are engaged in the practice of seeing this game as similar to that game. Seeing the similarities is primitive.

What follows from the Wittgensteinian story is that the reason-giving behaviour of the word 'game' in different contexts is answerable to general patterns of word use. This is the constitutive and metaphysical claim with regard to the existence of patterns of word use. The point is not about whether there is a decision procedure for determining whether something is a game. That is an epistemological point. The metaphysical point is whether or not there is a pattern to the use of word 'game'. Wittgenstein does not deny this and neither does his view show that the pattern of word use is only formal.

Similarly, we can criticize Dancy's constitutive view about the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features and the way in which they are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. According to Dancy, as the list of defeaters (enablers and disablers) is open-ended, all we are offered is a kind of formal pattern which has no content. Consequently, there is nothing to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can be answerable. In other words, as the list of defeaters (enablers and disablers) gets larger, the whole idea of

patternability evaporates. There is no content which remains in the end. All we are confronted with is a formal pattern which has no content. This floppy and loose pattern is different from what we should have.

But, as we have seen in the case of the concept 'game', the number of game-making features does not determine the normative constraint of the concept 'game'. Whether or not the list of game-making features is finite or infinite, the whole idea of normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words deals with the way in which we are engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities and seeing things as similar.

In fact, the account drawn by Wittgenstein shows us that the whole idea of normativity and normative constraint have no relationship with the number of game-making or right-making features. There is a reason to regard a new phenomenon as a game, whether or not the list of game-making features is complete. In other words, although the content of the concept 'game' is not pre-existing or is not capable of being articulated in a general principle, it does not follow from this that it cannot have any content at all, nor that it is not general. To say that the list of game-making features is open-ended and cannot be formulated in advance is a formal constraint for the concept 'game'. But in order to give an account of the content to the concept 'game', we have to be engaged in the practice of using the word. The more we are engaged in practice, the more we are confronted with the patternability of the concept 'game'. As we are engaged in the practice of seeing this game as similar to that game, the content of the concept 'game' shapes. In fact, to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing different games, the reason-giving behaviour of a game-making feature is answerable to the pattern of the concept 'game'. So, although there is no such thing as a determined or articulated content for the concept 'game', it does not

follow from this that it cannot be answerable to a general pattern. The more we are engaged in practice, the more the content of concept 'game' is shaped. So, Dancy is right in saying that if the list of defeaters is open-ended, there is no such thing as a pre-existing pattern with content to which the reason giving-behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable. But a generalist does not need to subscribe to the existence of pre-existing general patterns with determined content in order to give an account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can fit into patterns. Rather, the generalist can accept the patterns whose content is shaped to the extent that he is engaged in the practice of using moral vocabulary correctly. In other words, like the concept 'game', the pattern which the generalist accepts has an open-ended set of right-making and wrong-making features (formal constraint) and its content is shaped to the extent that he is engaged in the practice of seeing similar right-making and wrong-making features: this is a promise, that is a promise, that is not a promise... The crucial issue is that although the list of defeaters for the concept 'promise keeping' is open-ended; it does not follow from this that we have no reason to regard a new phenomenon as an example of promise keeping. The content of the concept 'promise keeping' is shaped within practice.<sup>34</sup> The reason-giving behaviour

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<sup>34</sup> Some moral generalists like Jackson et al. believe that patterns of word use have to be articulated propositionally. Patternability is associated with categorisation in complete propositions. However, the position which I develop, although a generalist one, does not confine patternability to the existence of complete and finalised patterns. Rather, there are some patterns which are general, albeit in an emerging way. For instance, Luntley, as a modest-generalist, criticises Jackson et al.'s account of patternability and accepts the existence of emerging patterns. See Jackson, F. et al. (2000) 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 79-99, 89-91. See also Luntley, M (2003b) 'Ethics in the face of uncertainty: judgments not rules', *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 12(4), pp. 325-333, in particular, fn 8.

Moreover, it should be noted that Jackson et al. read Wittgenstein's discussion on 'game' and 'family resemblance' in a different way. According to them, Wittgenstein tries to show how difficult and complicated it is to articulate all game-making features which make the concept 'game' in a general pattern. We have to give up trying to articulate a finalised pattern. There is an element of ignorance which is unavoidable. As we cannot categorise such a sophisticated pattern, in order to see what the concept 'game' is we have to resort to similarities and dissimilarities. In other words, their account focuses on something which is missing in arriving at the concept 'game'. In contrast, my account says that there is no such thing as ignorance in the way in which we arrive at the concept 'game'. All we can arrive at with regard to the concept 'game' can be seen within practice. There is no

of a morally relevant feature like 'promise keeping' can be answerable to the pattern of the concept 'promise keeping' in different ethical contexts the same as the reason-giving behaviour of a game-making feature which is answerable to the pattern of the concept 'game'. So, there is a kind of patternability which can be seen within practice.

If Dancy says that still the way in which we are familiar with the content of these emerging patterns is not clear in advance and entirely depends on the different cases with which we are dealing, the generalist can say that this point is an epistemological issue concerning our knowledge of the patterns of moral reasons. This is different from the metaphysical issue with regard to the existence of patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable. In other words, the generalist can agree with a normative particularist's idea that the way in which we are familiar with the content of general patterns is fully context-dependent and can vary from case to case. But it does not follow from this that the behaviour of a morally relevant feature cannot be answerable to patterns. The latter is a metaphysical issue, while the former is an epistemological one.

As far as this Wittgensteinian argument is concerned, the distinction between weak holism and strong holism is not crucial. The argument deals with the issue that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary requires of us that the reason-giving behaviour of each morally relevant feature is answerable to general patterns. What follows from this is that both weak holism and strong holism are wrong. According to strong holism, no morally relevant feature is answerable to general patterns, while weak holism allows that there is at least one morally relevant feature which is answerable to general patterns. But it does not

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such thing over and above being engaged in practice which enables us to see what the concept 'game' is. For more detail, see Jackson, F. et al. (2000) 'Ethical Particularism and Patterns' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 79-99, 83. See also Luntley, M. (2003a) *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgment* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 77-83.

follow from this that each morally relevant feature is answerable to general patterns of word use. Having seen the Wittgensteinian line of argument, we are entitled to say that both versions of holism are untenable.

Furthermore, having considered the Wittgensteinian account of the idea of patternability and the way in which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable and responsive to patterns of word use, it seems that Dancy's claim about the very idea of supervenience is implausible. According to Dancy, as there is no such thing as an exactly similar ethical situation, to say that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature would be answerable to general patterns in other ethical contexts is useless.

But as we have seen in the example of the concept 'game', although several game-making features are combined together in different ways, it does not follow from this that they are not responsive to general patterns of word use. In other words, answerability to general patterns is not necessarily associated with the existence of *exactly* similar situations. As far as an emerging pattern is concerned, there is no such thing as a finite list of features which make the pattern. Nevertheless, there is such a thing as a normative constraint which can be seen to the extent that we are engaged in practice. So, we can subscribe to the idea of supervenience, according to which moral properties supervene upon non-moral properties in the sense that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different context is answerable to patterns without resorting to phrases like 'exactly similar situation'. In other words, the modest-generalist can agree with a particularist like Dancy in criticising the idea of a pre-existing and fixed pattern according to which a new phenomenon has to be subsumed under a determined and rigid pattern. Such an account of pattern requires the new phenomenon to be *exactly similar* to the components of the pattern. But the

modest-generalist can appeal to the idea of open-endedness to give a constitutive account of patternability without appealing to pre-existing and determined pattern.

**1-1-1-4-1-2. Criticising the Idea of Relevance.** Consider again the concept ‘game’.

As we have seen in the above, although the list of game-making features is open-ended, it does not follow from this that we cannot see what the concept ‘game’ is.

Rather, to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar things, we see what a game is. In other words, the reason-giving behaviour of a game-making feature can fit into general patterns of word use.

Now, consider Dancy’s claim that a non-moral feature like promise keeping could be relevant or irrelevant in different ethical contexts. Dancy holds that it is not the case that promise keeping is morally relevant in each ethical context in which it is combined with other non-moral features. Rather, its relevance depends entirely on the way in which several non-moral features are combined. There is no such thing as general relevance for a non-moral feature which can be picked out.

What I wish to argue at this stage is that the denial of Dancy’s account of the general relevance of a non-moral feature does not lead to normative particularism. To say that whether or not a non-moral feature is morally *relevant* is not clear in advance, does not lead to ‘particularism through relevance’, according to which the relevance of a non-moral feature in an ethical context is fully context-dependent and cannot be answerable to general patterns.

Consider again the concept ‘game’ and its several game-making features. Whether or not a new phenomenon can be regarded as a game cannot be articulated in advance. Whether or not the new phenomenon is a game depends entirely on the way in which several features are combined. For instance, it could be the case that features like ‘having a team’ or ‘having a ball’ behave differently in different contexts.



For instance, the existence of a feature like 'having a ball' in a phenomenon does not mean that it has to be regarded as a game. Consider the case that a teacher uses some balls in his class to explain Newtonian physics. Intuitively speaking, he is not playing, even though he is using the ball in his teaching. On the other hand, consider the case of a child throwing a ball against the wall and catching it. Intuitively speaking, he is playing.

Now, having seen that the feature 'having a ball' plays different roles in different phenomena, we are entitled to say that 'having a ball' is a game-making feature in some cases and is not a game-making feature in others. In other words, whether or not 'having a ball' is a game-making feature is not clear in advance. It depends on the way in which several features are combined together in a case. But it does not follow from this that the way in which the feature 'having a ball' behaves in different contexts cannot fit into a pattern. Rather, to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases, we can see whether or not the feature 'having a ball' is a game-making feature. The fact that the way the feature behaves is not articulated in advance does not require that we deny that there is a normative constraint with regard to the behaviour of the feature 'having a ball' in different contexts. Rather, its normative constraint is grounded in the way in which we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar.

So, although a feature like 'having a ball' is not regarded as a game-making feature in some contexts, it does not follow from this that the behaviour of the feature 'having a ball' is not answerable to a pattern. Rather, its behaviour can fit into a general pattern, where this means that there is a generality to the way 'having a ball' contributes to making things games. The pattern emerges to the extent that we are engaged in practice.

Similarly, to say that the relevance of a non-moral feature like promise keeping to the moral evaluation of different cases is not clear in advance would be inadequate to criticise the core generalistic thesis. All that can challenge is the specific account of generalism, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature in different contexts can be subsumed under a determined and abstract pattern.

As a result, if we accept the Wittgensteinian account of concepts as a basis for an account of generalism which is compatible with open-endedness, we can give an account of how the relevance of a non-moral feature like promise keeping is answerable to a pattern, though not through a determined and abstract pattern. To the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar, we are entitled to say whether or not a non-moral feature is relevant.

To summarise, Dancy's claim with regard to the way in which the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases can be reconciled with the generalistic Wittgensteinian position which deploys the idea of patternability and answerability. But this is exactly what Dancy rejects with regard to the way in which a non-moral feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases.

**1-1-1-4-1-3. Being Competent with Moral Concepts: Pre-existing Concepts versus Emerging Concepts.** Jackson et al point out that without subscribing to the existence of patterns of word use, we cannot talk about the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases coherently.<sup>35</sup> If we want to utilise moral concepts consistently and correctly, we need some general patterns of word use at the descriptive level. We have a strong intuition that the

existence of general patterns of word use gives an account of how we apply moral concepts coherently and correctly. In other words, there is such thing as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which these patterns reveal, and we, as language-users, are answerable to them. So, we need to commit ourselves to the existence of some notion of patterns of word use in order to talk about moral properties with respect to non-moral coherently.<sup>36</sup> Jackson et al. state:

We use words to mark divisions. Tables are different from chairs, and we mark this by using different words for them. In the same way, wrong acts are different from right ones— how else could it make sense to care which we did? And we use the moral terms to tell each other about the difference; the word ‘right’ is ... a good word for talking about right acts. What, then, marks off the acts we use ‘right’ for from the acts we use ‘wrong’ for? Or, equivalently, what do the right ones have in common that the wrong ones lack? (2000, pp. 86-87).

A particularist like Dancy has to subscribe to the existence of some patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of a concept is answerable. Otherwise, he could not talk about the relationship between moral properties and non-moral properties coherently.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Dancy tries to show that in order to utilise moral concepts coherently, we do not have to resort to patterns of word use at the descriptive level.

He states:

Right actions are similar in being right, that is, but there is no lower-level similarity that binds all instances of rightness together...I think there are ways of showing that one can build up a

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<sup>35</sup> See Jackson, F. et al. (2000) ‘Ethical Particularism and Patterns’ in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press). pp. 79-99.

<sup>36</sup> Whether or not these patterns have fixed and determined content is not crucial at this stage. The whole point is that we need something to bring normative constraint for word use.

<sup>37</sup> We must remember that the patterns of word use which we are talking about do not have to be picked out at the descriptive and natural level. Jackson et al. point out that in order to give an account of how we utilise moral concepts coherently, there has to be such a thing as finalised patterns of word use at the descriptive level, to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary is answerable. However, I do not agree with Jackson et al. that it has to be something as determined as fixed patterns at the descriptive level in order to give an account of how we utilise moral concepts coherently. As I have already indicated, I accept the Wittgensteinian story, according to which patterns of word use are not abstract and determined. Rather, they are emerging and have to be seen within practice. But, the crucial thing which Jackson et al put forward is that a particularist like Dancy has to give us an account of how we use moral concepts coherently.

concept without keying into anything worth calling a lower-level pattern that repeats from one instantiation of that concept to the next...The whole idea of the need for a repeating pattern as that which grounds and explains our ability to apply a concept correctly to new cases on the basis of old ones begins to lose its force (1999b, pp. 66 and 71).

According to Dancy, in order to give an account of how we utilise moral concepts coherently, we are not entitled to resort to an abstract and determined pattern at the natural level, under which the new instances are subsumed. Rather, we can give another metaphysical account with regard to the way in which we become competent with moral concepts by resorting to the idea of moral prototype or prototypes. He says:

...instead of building up a concept by developing lists of necessary and sufficient conditions for 'being of that sort', we do it rather by developing a set of prototypes, clearest cases, or best examples, in such a way that we conceive of less clear cases or less good examples in terms of distance from the prototype or prototypes. The less clear cases are still perfectly good as cases, but they may not count as central or obvious cases. The notion of distance in terms of which similarity to a prototype is judged is not itself something for which we either have or could have a prototype...competence with a concept does not seem to be being understood in terms of the ability to respond to 'the same thing again'. There need be no pattern at the level of the features to which we are responding in judging distance from a prototype (1999b, p. 70).<sup>38</sup>

What Dancy is trying to criticise is an abstract and determined account of pattern, according to which what makes a pattern is a complete and finite list of features. In order to be subsumed under such a pattern, the new instance has to have all the constituents of the list. The whole idea of 'the same thing again' which Dancy is talking about makes sense in such a situation.

The idea of prototype is presented to give an account of how we arrive at moral concepts without being engaged with such an abstract and determined pattern. According to Dancy, all we have to do in order to become competent with moral

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<sup>38</sup>Following Dancy, Kirchin criticises Jackson et al's view with regard to the way in which we become competent with moral concepts. According to Kirchin, we can acquire concepts without resorting to any pattern at the natural level. He says: ...as Dancy points out...concept acquisition generally, not just in ethics, is compatible with irreducibility (2003, p. 58, ft.15). See Kirchin, S. (2003) 'Particularism, Generalism and the Counting Argument', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 11(1) pp. 54-71.

concepts is to lessen our distance from the moral prototype or prototypes which are presented.<sup>39</sup> However, prototypes, unlike patterns, have no set of necessary and invariant features to be picked out. Dancy says:

..a prototype is quite unlike a pattern. A prototype is a real concrete instance of the type, and contains many features that are not, and are recognised not to be, important to its functioning as such. If the life of St. Francis is a prototype of a moral life, our ability to use it as such...includes an ability to tell which features of the prototype are not really contributing much at all, and which are pretty central...A pattern, by contrast, is an abstract object with respect to which all the selection of 'relevant' features has already been done. The relation between prototypes and 'ectypes' is different from that between patterns and their instances (1999b, p. 71).

According to Dancy, there is a significant distinction between the relationship between patterns and their instances on the one hand, and the connection between prototypes and ectypes on the other hand. Each pattern has a complete list of features, under which a new instance can be subsumed, while a prototype can have some irrelevant and unnecessary properties which have to be seen and recognised in practice. In other words, as far as the pattern is concerned, the list of relevant and irrelevant features and constituents is determined in advance. In contrast, whether or not a component is relevant in a prototype is not determined in advance, and has to be discovered in practice.

Moreover, Dancy says that the particularist theory of meaning deals with the point that being competent with a moral concept cannot be articulated in a pattern. Grasping the meaning of a concept, in this sense, is a kind of skill and knowing-how rather than knowing-that, because it is grounded in a series of possibilities. He claims that his account of meaning and normativity is Wittgensteinian. He says:

To know the meaning of the term is to know the *sorts of* semantic contribution that the term can make to a larger context...There is nothing here that could be captured in a rule. Rules, in

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<sup>39</sup> I will return to this point in chapter 4. How can a particularist like Dancy, who emphasises that we have to *look at* each case on its own instead of *looking away* at other cases to arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of morally relevant features of a case, talk about the role of other cases throughout the process of being competent with a moral concept? He needs to give us a metaphysical account, according to which looking away can be reconciled with looking at.

the sense with which we are here concerned, must be articulable in principle, even if our competent speaker is incapable of articulating them in practice. But if the meaning of the term consists in an open-ended *range* of available *sorts of* contribution in this way, it is essentially inarticulable. Competence with it will therefore have to consist in a kind of skill rather than a grasp on a specifiable rule; it will have to be conceived as a sort of know-how, for there is nothing of propositional form that, in knowing the meaning of the term, we might be said even vaguely to grasp. A range of possibilities cannot be captured propositionally... What we have ended up with is effectively a particularist theory of meaning, one in which semantic competence (knowledge of meaning) is strongly analogous to practical competence (knowledge of practical purport)... I view the general picture of linguistic competence that I am offering here as essentially Wittgensteinian. It is one under which linguistic competence is not, indeed cannot be, knowledge of a rule... Normativity, according to the particularist, is not a matter of the application of rules, if by rules, we mean something articulable, something that is independent of context (2004, pp. 196-198).

According to Dancy, being competent with a concept is a practical skill which is open-ended, cannot be articulated in a proposition and never comes to an end.

Having seen several of Dancy's claims, I believe that what he is trying to reject is only a specific version of the idea of a general pattern, which is the idea of a fixed pattern with a determined content. However, as we have seen above, this is not the only version of pattern to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can be answerable. Rather, as we have seen with regard to the way in which we grasp the concept 'game', there is such a thing as an open-ended and emergent pattern, to which the reason-giving behaviour of several game-making features is answerable. In other words, although the list of game-making features is open-ended, it does not follow from this that we are not entitled to use the concept 'game' meaningfully and consistently.

All Dancy tries to reject is an abstract and determined account of pattern, under which new instances can be subsumed. He says:

...we have detailed models of conceptual learning and competence which appear to be coherent and which flesh out the claim that we can acquire competence with a concept without cottoning on to a pattern that is expressible at the level of the grounds. With these models to appeal to, the particularist is in a position to say that our ability to acquire competence with such concepts is more than a mere abstract possibility (2004, p. 111).

But the fixed and abstract pattern is not the only account of pattern available to the generalist. We can give an account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can fit into patterns by resorting to open-ended and emerging patterns of word use. This shows that there is a generality to the way in which the morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases. So, in order to criticise the generalistic position, Dancy has to go further and show that subscribing to emerging patterns of word use is also indefensible. Otherwise, his narrow account of patterns of word use which only deals with abstract and determined pattern is incomplete as a critique of generalism.

Moreover, the generalist can subscribe to the idea of prototype which Dancy uses. In fact, there is no difference between the way in which we grasp the concept 'game', and the way in which we see what a prototype is. As there is no such thing as an abstract and determined pattern of the concept 'game', whether or not a feature can be regarded as a game-making feature is not clear in advance. Rather, we have to be engaged in the practice of using the word to see whether or not the feature can be regarded as a game-making feature. The list of game-making features is open-ended. But it does not follow from this that the reason-giving behaviour of game-making features is not answerable to general patterns of word use. Rather, there is a generality to the way in which a game-making feature contributes to making things games. Similarly, the way in which we become competent with prototypes is answerable to general patterns, albeit the ones which are not determined and abstract.

In addition, what I draw from Wittgenstein is different from Dancy's account. In other words, although the account of Wittgenstein that I use is compatible with open-endedness, it does not follow from this that this account cannot say anything with regard to truth-conditions, under which the application of a word is right or

wrong. Rather, the way in which we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar gives us an account of how the distinction between rightness and wrongness makes sense. So, it is not the case that being engaged in practice is a kind of knowing-how in the sense that there is no such thing as truth-conditions in it. Rather, there are truth-conditions which can be seen to the extent that the language-user is engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar. The truth-conditions which we are talking about cannot be fully articulated in an explicit context-free proposition. In other words, the particularist theory of meaning is right in saying that the way in which we become competent with a concept cannot be fully articulated in an explicit context-free proposition. Normativity and the way in which we arrive at the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be subsumed under a determined general rule. But it does not follow from this that there is no such thing as truth-conditions that govern a concept like 'game'. Rather, truth-conditions can be acquired to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities, though they cannot be categorised propositionally. Moreover, this theory of meaning can be compatible with a modest-generalist one, according to which the language-user is answerable to the reason-giving behaviour of a word in different contexts. In other words, a theory of meaning that denies that meaning can be fully articulated in an explicit context-free proposition can be regarded as a modest-generalist position, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a word in different contexts is responsive to patterns of word use. In fact, in the denial of the finalised and rigid account of pattern, what we are left with is a flexible account of pattern which emerges to the extent that we are engaged in practice.<sup>40</sup> Finally, what Dancy means by the particularist theory of

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<sup>40</sup> The realistic account of Wittgenstein which makes room for truth-conditions in the way in which we arrive at the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.



meaning is a theory about the *knowledge* of meaning and semantic competence which is an epistemological issue, whereas the controversial issue with regard to the way in which we become competent with a concept is a metaphysical one. In other words, a modest-generalist can accept that we cannot articulate all the sort of contexts in which moral vocabulary contributes to its meaning. But it does not follow from this that the way in which a language-user answers to the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different contexts cannot be fitted into patterns. The first point is an epistemological issue whereas the second one is the metaphysical one. So, the generalistic Wittgensteinian position with regard to the way in which we become competent with concepts can be compatible with Dancy's Wittgensteinian account about the way in which we understand the meaning of a concept. But it does not follow from this that the generalistic Wittgensteinian position about the nature of concepts which is a metaphysical point is untenable.

To summarise, Dancy's position with regard to the way in which we become competent with moral concepts can be reconciled with the generalistic Wittgensteinian position which deploys the idea of open-ended and emerging patterns. But, this is exactly what Dancy rejects with regard to the way in which a morally relevant feature behaves in different ethical contexts. Moreover, the particularist theory of meaning holds that the way in which we arrive at the meaning of a concept cannot be articulated. The particularist says that grasping a moral concept is a matter of skill and knowing-how. However, the account which I draw from Wittgenstein accepts that the way in which we arrive at the meaning of a concept cannot be fully articulated in an explicit context-free proposition. But it does not follow from this that it is not answerable to general patterns of word use or that there is no knowledge of truth-conditions in being competent with a concept either. Rather, the concept's

patternability emerges to the extent that the language-user is engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar. Finally, the particularist theory of meaning focuses on the epistemological aspect of the issue while the crucial issue which has to be investigated is the metaphysical one.

#### *1-1-1-4-2. Pragmatic Point of View*

The second objection to normative or metaphysical particularism is this. As Hooker points out, to be able to predict other people's behaviour is important for social life, and a crucial way in which we can predict the behaviour of others is to look at the moral principles they are committed to. But if we know that someone endorses normative particularism, we cannot cooperate with him because we know beforehand that he may change his behaviour from case to case. He may promise us to do something and then break his promise for unknown and unpredictable reasons.

Hooker says:

As a particularist, Patty thinks that there are no considerations that always retain their moral polarity. She thinks a consideration (such as the fact that she promised to do something) might be a reason for keeping her side of the deal in one situation, but a reason against keeping it in another situation. So, will she think that having made a promise to you gives her *any* reason to do what she promised?

Not necessarily... As a particularist, she also thinks that *any* fact *can* be morally relevant, depending on the circumstances. So she thinks any fact would conceivably interfere with the moral status and force of the promise. If Patty would really live by such beliefs, how much could you trust her? (2000, p. 18).

In fact, if we know that a friend of ours subscribes to 'normative particularism', to what extent we can trust him sufficiently to support social cooperation? Pragmatically speaking, if other things hold constant, and we compare two persons only through the ethical theories which they believe, it seems that having a relationship with a normative particularist in comparison with a person who accepts any generalistic view would be more difficult.

So, to be regarded as a normative or metaphysical particularist in comparison with any generalistic account would lead to unsatisfactory results from the pragmatic point of view.

It seems that Hooker's argument can be illuminated in the light of the core constitutive thesis of generalism. According to the core constitutive thesis, the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is answerable to general patterns of word use. However, the normative particularist denies the idea of answerability. As the normative particularist undermines the idea of answerability, we cannot give an account of how the reason behaves in different contexts. The uncertainty of the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features at the constitutive and metaphysical level leads to the pragmatic issue, according to which we cannot make the behaviour of the normative particularist intelligible. As there is no general account available of his behaviour in several contexts, he can behave differently in each context. His behaviour in different contexts is less reliable in comparison with others who subscribe to any account of generality with regard to the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts.

#### *1-1-1-4-3. Normative versus Deliberative Relevance*

As a separate argument, consider normative or metaphysical particularism through relevance again. As we have seen, such a normative particularist denies the notion of general relevance according to which, if a non-moral property is relevant in a concrete ethical situation, then it is relevant in similar cases. It seems that such a normative particularist confuses the metaphysical dimension of a moral consideration with the epistemological dimension of moral consideration in the sense that the distinction between *normative* relevance (metaphysical) and *deliberative* relevance (epistemological) has not been observed. The distinction is made by Audi. He states:

... it is essential to distinguish the *deliberative relevance* of a consideration, roughly its relevance to a decision regarding what to do, from its *normative relevance*, its valence in relation to the action(s) in question (1998, p.37).

Consider the example of returning a stolen book to a library. Although it is true that I have no responsibility to return the stolen book to somebody who has already stolen it, and the fact that I promised to return the book is not relevant for making a justified moral judgement, we have to remember that it is *only* the epistemic and deliberative relevance which has been defeated. It does not follow from this that the fact that the book is borrowed by me has no metaphysical and normative relevance either. In other words, we can accept that one is obliged to return somebody else's property, if other things hold constant, and this non-moral feature has an invariant deontic valence which contributes to the moral evaluation of the case constantly. Now, we can accept that, although the invariant deontic valence of the non-moral feature is at hand, for the sake of the presence of another non-moral feature, the deontic valence of the duty of returning the book is overridden and the ultimate result is changed. Consequently, it has no deliberative relevance. But it does not follow from this deliberative irrelevance that there is no metaphysical relevance either. As we can suppose that if one finds out later that the library has made a mistake, and the book is not stolen, the book has to be taken from the library and given back to its owner, who is owed an apology (all of these actions have to be done because of the deontic valence of the feature 'fidelity' which is manifested). We can accept that even in the case of a stolen book, the deontic valence of the feature 'fidelity' is at hand and has a metaphysical relevance and interaction with another feature's deontic valence; but the final outcome is changed. On the basis of that ontological result and relevance, we can say that it has no deliberative or epistemic relevance.

*1-1-1-4-4. Normative or Metaphysical Particularism Is Counter-Intuitive*

This is another argument for criticising normative or metaphysical particularism. This objection presupposes that the task of a moral theory is to give an account of how we can systematise our moral intuitions in a suitable way. The best moral theory is the theory that gives the best explanation of moral intuitions. In this view, the only test, or the main test, for the validity of a moral theory is to see how compatible it is with moral intuitions. Now, if we take this view for granted, we might criticise normative particularism for failing to meet the test. This is because we have a strong intuition that the subject matter of moral reasoning is act-types, and what is a right- or wrong-making property in a particular case has a similar function in similar cases. We may have, and actually have some difficulty in seeing whether two cases are similar or different, but we intuitively feel that two cases that are similar in a morally relevant aspect possess the same moral status other things being equal. That is, we have strong intuitions that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is generalisable in similar contexts, and evaluative properties are related to non-evaluative properties in similar cases in the same way. The subject matter of moral reasoning is always the *type* of actions, though the extent to which we can legitimately generalise is not always obvious. According to the normative particularist's opponent, to be sensitive to the distinctive and unknown features of new situations is one issue, but to eliminate moral principles from the practice of moral reasoning is another. In other words, one is not obliged to abandon any ethical theory which subscribes to any account of generality at the cost of paying close attention to each concrete ethical context. In fact, according to the opponent, the normative particularist's complaints against moral generalism are in fact against the

specific version of generalism which undermines context-dependency and cannot give an account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is both answerable to general patterns and context-sensitive.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Dancy argues that the reason-giving behaviour of a theoretical reason can vary from context to context. So there is no account of generality which can be given with regard to the behaviour of a theoretical reason in different contexts. In response, I argued that subscribing to what Dancy says does not lead to his holistic view in theoretical reasoning. All we are left with is a complicated account of generality. Being given that the behaviour of a theoretical reason in several contexts is different does not lead to the idea that there is no generality in the behaviour of the theoretical reason. All we are left with is a complicated account of generality with regard to the behaviour of the theoretical reason in different cases. The theoretical reason behaves as a type in similar cases. It behaves similarly in the contexts in which we deal with such a theoretical reason.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, a practical reason behaves as a type in similar cases. Consider the stolen book case again. According to the normative particularist, returning the book is not relevant and does not require fidelity. I have criticised 'particularism through relevance' above. What I wish to say, at this stage, is that there is nothing specific about the person who borrows the book, the one who steals the book and the book in the example, intuitively speaking. In similar cases in which somebody steals the book, returning the book is not relevant either. So, returning the book behaves as a type in

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<sup>41</sup> Hooker criticises holism for theoretical reason in a way similar to my line of argument. He argues that by saying that 'something seems blue in front of me' is a reason to believe that something blue is in front of me, there are some 'standard conditions' such as: normal lighting, the physical fitness of the person etc. which are assumed. In other words, the theoretical reason 'something seems blue in front of me' behaves similarly in the contexts which are in the standard conditions. So, there is an account of generality with regard to the behaviour of the theoretical reason 'something seems blue in front of me' in similar contexts which can be given. See Hooker, B. (2000) 'Moral Particularism: Wrong and Bad' in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp.1-22, 13-15.

similar cases. It follows from this that there is an account of generality with regard to the behaviour of a non-moral feature like returning the book which can be given.

### **1-2. What Is Left: A Minimal Generalistic View**

Having seen different versions of the particularistic view and what is wrong with normative or metaphysical particularism, at this stage, I suggest that what is left with regard to the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is the minimal or modest-generalistic view. In order to be regarded as a modest-generalist, one needs to acknowledge that there are patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable and can fit. This is the central constitutive thesis of generalism which concerns the existence of some general patterns of word use. In other words, in the denial of the existence of such patterns of word use, we cannot give an account of how morally relevant features contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. Consequently, we can no longer be regarded as particularists in the debate between generalism and particularism in moral reasoning. This is the minimum ingredient for one to be a generalist.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, on the basis of this minimum ingredient, we can classify generalists by means of the number of the morally relevant non-moral properties which they subscribe to in order to distinguish between the monistic view and the pluralistic view as follows:

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<sup>42</sup> On the basis of the minimum ingredient, we can classify generalists into several groups. For instance, a generalist might subscribe to the Platonic position, according to which moral patterns and rules are strong abstract formulations, which can be articulated independently of what we, as language-users, do. As they can be set up abstractly and entirely independently of us, they can be regarded as pre-existing patterns. Alternatively, a generalist could subscribe to an account according to which we need general patterns at the natural level to utilise moral vocabulary coherently and consistently. Thirdly, a generalist could accept the Wittgensteinian view, according to which moral patterns do not exist in a determined and firm way. Rather, they emerge to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar. For the purpose of this research, from now on, I focus on the third position as a way of developing a modest-generalistic view.

According to the monistic view, there is merely one basic morally relevant non-moral property that has an invariant deontic valence, and all moral decisions should be made with the aid of a general principle that states this valence. So, we can tell in advance what our final duty would be in all new and unforeseen cases; that is, in order to justify our particular moral judgments we have to appeal to the general moral principle. In this way, moral ontology is relevant to moral epistemology; a metaphysical view that there is only one morally relevant non-moral property, and the view that the deontic valence of this property is constant leads to an epistemological view about moral knowledge and the justification of moral beliefs. Utilitarianism can be regarded as an example of this monistic approach.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, a particularist like Dancy introduces the idea of holism to criticise the strong generalistic account in moral reasoning. In response, I have appealed to a modest-generalistic position which rejects strong generalism while endorsing modest-generalism. So, both the particularist and the modest-generalist criticise strong generalism. If this is the case, a modest-generalist cannot subscribe to the monistic view which is based upon strong generalism. However, it is not necessary for the modest-generalist to subscribe to monism. There is another account of modest-generalistic view which can be given. This is the pluralistic view with regard to the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features which says that there is a plurality of general patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different cases is answerable. Ross's 'ethics of prima facie duties' can be regarded as an example of this pluralistic approach.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss the Rossian account in the light of the account drawn from Wittgenstein as a pluralistic and modest-generalistic position.



## Emerging moral patterns

If particularism denies the existence of patterns, the position I develop is not particularist, but it is a critique of generalism. The existence of patterns is not the main business. What matters is the account of our role in the metaphysics of reasons.<sup>43</sup>

Michael Luntley

When [someone] argues that moral expertise requires a “principled” understanding of morality, everything depends on what is meant by “principled”. If it’s read as a requirement that one possess exceptionless definitions or codified generalizations, it simply isn’t true...Generality, in short, is not just found in theoretical generalization.<sup>44</sup>

Margaret Little

It has long been known that concepts, and hence also principles and rules that use concepts, are indeterminate, and that it is fruitless to seek to complete them by looking for rules for the application of rules, which can lead only to an infinite regress.<sup>45</sup>

Onora O’Neill

Introduction. Having criticised the particularistic position with regard to the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different contexts, we are left with a minimal generalism. The minimal generalistic account is investigated in this chapter. Firstly, Rossian ethics is presented as a picture of the minimal generalistic position. Secondly, an account drawn from Wittgenstein is presented as a new model of understanding the Rossian position. If the model works, the distinction between the rightness and wrongness of use of moral vocabulary needs to be articulated. To this end, I utilise the analogy of the concept ‘game’. Finally, I suggest that we can read Rossian ethics in the light of the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein.

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<sup>43</sup> Luntley, M. (2002) ‘Patterns, Particularism and Seeing the Similarity’, *Philosophical Papers*, 31, p.272.

<sup>44</sup> Little, M. (2001) ‘On Knowing “Why”’: Particularism and Moral Theory’, *Hastings Center Report*, 31(4), p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> O’Neill, O. (2001) ‘Practical Principles and Practical Judgment’, *Hastings Center Report*, 31(4), p. 18.

As we have seen in the first chapter, the normative particularist claims that the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is not patternable. The way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to moral evaluation cannot fit into patterns. Different arguments have been presented to criticise the particularistic position. As a result, we are left with the minimal generalistic position according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to patterns of word use, though the patterns are open-ended and cannot be articulated thoroughly in advance. This is the minimum ingredient for one to be a generalist with regard to the metaphysics of reasons. Based upon the minimum ingredient, one way of cataloguing different generalistic positions is to categorise them in accordance with the number of morally relevant features they subscribe to. That is, we can classify them into two groups: the monistic view and the pluralistic view. Having noted the monistic view, for the objective of this research, we move to the pluralistic and modest-generalistic position, according to which there is a plurality of patterns of word use, to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different contexts is answerable. Rossian ethics can be regarded as an example of such a view. In what follows, I am going to explain the key themes of the Rossian ethical framework. Then, I will offer a model derived from Wittgenstein by virtue of which Rossian ethics can be understood as a modest-generalistic position.

### **2-1. The Rossian Position: An Example of the Modest-Generalistic Position**

The idea of "an ethic of prima facie duties" which is presented by W. D. Ross (1930 & 1949) to clarify the problem of moral conflict can be regarded as a generalistic account with regard to the metaphysics of reasons.<sup>46</sup> According to Ross, the problem

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<sup>46</sup> The key themes of Rossian ethics are discussed in the following references: Audi, R. (1993) 'Ethical Reflectionism', *The Monist*, 76, pp. 295-315. Hooker, B. (1996) 'Ross-style Pluralism versus Rule-Consequentialism', *Mind*, 105, pp. 531-552. McNaughton, D. (2000a) 'Intuitionism' in LaFollette, H. (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (:Blackwell), pp. 268-287 & (2002) 'An Unconnected

of moral conflict is best understood in terms of conflict between competing moral considerations. Moral conflict arises when the situation we are dealing with possesses more than one morally relevant non-moral property which pull in opposite directions. This gives us conflicting prima facie duties. In order to decide what our actual duty is, we have to find out which relevant non-moral property is more important from the moral point of view. But, says Ross, we do not have a basic general principle to say in advance which prima facie duty is overriding because the weight or importance or magnitude of the relevant non-moral features of the situation may vary from case to case, though its valence; i.e. the way in which it contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is invariant.<sup>47</sup> On Ross's view, there are several basic non-moral

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Heap of Duties?' in Stratton-Lake, p. (ed.) *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-evaluations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 76-91, first published in *Philosophical Quarterly*, (1996), 46, pp. 433-447. Frazier, R. (1995) 'Moral Relevance and *Ceteris Paribus* Principles', *Ratio* 8, pp. 113-127. Shafer-Landau, R. (1997) 'Moral Rules', *Ethics*, 107, pp. 584-611, 584-588. Dancy, J (1991a) 'An ethics of prima facie duties' in Singer, P. (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 219-229, (1991b) 'Intuitionism' in Singer, P. (ed.) *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 411-420 & (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 92-108.

<sup>47</sup> The idea of 'prima facie duty' and 'actual duty' is controversial in the literature. For instance, Hooker, following Kagan, thinks that utilising the term 'pro tanto' is more justified in comparison with 'prima facie'. He says: 'I agree with Kagan... that the term "pro tanto" is less misleading than "prima facie". For the idea is that a duty or consideration is overridable, not that it can be seen at first glance but on closer inspection may prove to be an illusion. So I shall generally follow Kagan's terminology' (1996, p. 534, fn.6). See also Hooker, B. (2000) 'Moral Particularism: Wrong and Bad', in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 1-22, 4.

On the other hand, Stratton-Lake believes that Hooker and Kagan's account of the very idea of prima facie duty is not compatible with the way Ross defines them in *The Right And The Good* and *Foundations of Ethics*. He says: 'According to Ross (1930, p.20; 1939, pp.84-5), prima facie duties are neither prima facie *nor* duties. The distinction Ross makes between duties proper and prima facie duties is not one between real and apparent duties. Prima facie duties are real moral considerations, not ones which only appears to be real at first sight... For Ross, prima facie duties do not describe general, but overridable duties, but the general features of actions in virtue of which they are right or wrong: that is, they describe the sort of general considerations which are salient to determining what one's duty is' (1997, pp. 752-753).

Some commentators categorise the above-mentioned issue by drawing a distinction between a weaker conception of prima facie duty and a stronger conception of prima facie duty in Rossian ethics. According to them, Rossian ethics suffers from an ambiguity which can be shown in both *The Right And The Good & Foundations Of Ethics*. According to the weaker account of prima facie duty, different prima facie duties are *potentially* and *conditionally* duties. They appear to be duties. Because of that, if they override in a situation, there is no such thing as moral residue which remains. However, the stronger account of prima facie duty holds that different prima facie duties are genuinely duties. They make a real contribution to moral evaluation wherever they appear. Consequently, if they are overruled by a prima facie duty, their moral residue remains at hand.

properties that are morally relevant, and these cannot be reduced to one or more basic property, hence these properties are not just 'at first sight' epistemically, but real general types of duty. Morally relevant non-moral properties are not contextual: their deontic valence and the way in which they contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases is constant, but their effect and power may vary from case to case. We can call the former *moral value*, and the latter *moral weight*.

To clarify this point, let us consider an analogy with the distinction between mass and weight in physics. According to this distinction, the mass of a metal ball is an intrinsic and essential property, in the sense that it is totally dependent on the ball's internal structure and the way in which its atoms and molecules are combined together. But the same is not true concerning the weight of the ball. The weight depends on the amount of gravitational pull, and varies from context to context. Now, consider the following physics equation: " $W = M * G$ " in which W stands for weight, M for mass, and G refers to the gravitational pull. According to this equation, the weight of the ball will vary, according to variations in gravitational pull. But, in all cases, the amount of mass is invariant. Similarly, the Rossian says that the moral valence of a morally relevant feature and the way in which it contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is invariant, but moral weight may vary from case to case.

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For more detail about the distinction between the weaker and stronger accounts of prima facie duty, see Brummer, J. (2002) 'Ross And The Ambiguity of *Prima Facie* Duty', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 19(4), pp. 401- 422. It is worth noting that fns 13 & 16 refer to some commentators who subscribe to the weaker and stronger accounts of prima facie duty.

I put forward the idea of 'prima facie duty' and 'actual duty' in such a way that prima facie duties pick out real types of act which need to be considered. What is crucial for me is that prima facie duties contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way. In contrast, actual duties do not have invariant deontic valences, and their metaphysical status entirely depends on the way in which different prima facie duties are combined together in different ethical contexts. Meanwhile, my account of 'prima facie duty' is closer to Stratton-Lake who affirmed that prima facie duties are real moral considerations.

As we will see in chapter 4, if we read Rossian ethics and its key concepts such as 'prima facie duty' and 'actual duty' in the light of the account derived from Wittgenstein, we can give a justified account of Rossian ethics without resorting to the distinction between the weaker and stronger accounts of prima facie duty.

For instance, promise keeping is invariably a right-making feature with an intrinsic deontic valence, that is, it always works to make actions right. Its weight, however, may vary from context to context, depending on other morally relevant non-moral properties which exert their constant deontic valences in the case at hand. So, according to the Rossian, although the value of promise keeping remains unchanged, its overall weight may vary from case to case. Consider the following quote by Ross:

I suggest '*prima facie* duty' or 'conditional duty' as a brief way of referring to the characteristic (quite distinct from that of being a duty proper) which an act has, in virtue of being of a certain kind (e.g. the keeping of promise), of being an act which would be a duty proper if it were not at the same time of another kind which is morally significant. Whether an act is a duty proper or actual duty depends on *all* the morally significant kinds it is an instance of... There is nothing arbitrary about these *prima facie* duties. Each rests on a definite circumstance which cannot seriously be held to be without moral significance... But no act is ever, in virtue of falling under some general description, necessarily actually right; its rightness depends on its whole nature and not on any element in it (1930, pp. 19, 20 and 33).

According to Ross, different *prima facie* duties pick out types of act. Because *prima facie* duties apply to types of act, he subscribes to generalism with respect to *prima facie* duties. Moreover, he claims that there is no general ranking or lexical order for different types of *prima facie* duties. There is just a formless list of duties, none of which has priority or greater importance than the others. These morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in different ways. According to Dancy:

There is no general ranking of the different types of *prima facie* duty... There is just a shapeless list of them, which is no more than a list of the things that make a moral difference, a difference to what we should do (1991a, p.221).

In addition, in Ross's view, the list of *prima facie* duties is not complete; it is an open-ended list because there is no guarantee that we have discovered all *prima facie* duties (i.e., all morally relevant non-moral properties). It could be the case that a new *prima facie* duty is discovered, following confrontation with a new moral requirement which cannot be subsumed under the *prima facie* duties with which we are familiar. The

distinction between prima facie duties and actual duties enables us to defend generalism about the former and particularism about the latter. Prima facie duties are general, because the metaphysical status of lying, for example, in new cases is clear in advance, if we suppose that other things are equal. For instance, suppose I have promised my wife I will take her to a concert tonight. Suppose further that my mother has given me a call just half an hour ago, has told me that she is very sick, and she could not find anybody else to stay with her. So, she asks me to go to her house tonight. This is an example of a conflicting moral situation in which we have two or more morally relevant non-moral properties that come into conflict with each other. On the one hand, I have a prima facie duty of fidelity to keep my promise to my wife, and on the other hand, I have a duty of gratitude to my mother, which I owe her for the many favours she has done for me in the past.

According to the Rossian, if I am confronted with just one of these considerations, I have to fulfil that prima facie duty. But, in the above case, I have two prima facie duties which come into conflict with each other in such a way that my actual duty is not clear in advance. If there were only one prima facie duty or one non-ultimate reason at stake, that is, if I were confronted with just one morally relevant non-moral property, then my actual duty would be obvious in advance. But this is not the case, and in order to find out my actual duty I need to determine which prima facie duty is more important, and this is exactly what I cannot do by appealing to a general principle or principles. This notion is supported by two claims. First, the list of prima facie duties is not complete and we are confronted with an open-ended list of duties. Second, there is no such thing as lexical order or a hierarchy for prima facie duties. So, according to Ross, I have to consult my intuition, my perception or my conviction in every case, and I cannot generalise the result. By 'intuition' and 'intuitive moral

judgment', Ross means something which we can arrive at infallibly and directly, like endorsing the validity of a form of inference which is grasped non-inferentially after acquiring adequate mental development.<sup>48</sup> He says:

That an act, *qua* fulfilling a promise, or *qua* effecting a just distribution of good...is *prima facie* right, is self-evident; not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident (1930, p.29).

Therefore, the Rossian position consists of two components: generalism about *prima facie* duties and particularism about actual duties. The first component is the denial of normative particularism, and the second is the denial of a monistic approach. According to the first part, the way in which a morally relevant feature like promise keeping contributes to the moral evaluation of different contexts can be articulated in a pattern. The second part emphasises that the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment in a moral context cannot be capturable by resorting to just one moral rule. Moreover, the first component is a metaphysical claim while the second component is an epistemological one.

The Rossian argues that moral considerations are general and their deontic valences are invariant. The idea behind this claim can be dubbed *atomism* with regard to reasons for actions, according to which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases in a similar way, and this is exactly what the normative particularist who subscribes to holism with regard to reasons for action denies.

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<sup>48</sup> I will compare the notion of adequate mental development with the Wittgensteinian notion of 'practice' in chapter 4. I suggest that in order to give a justified account of what Ross means by 'sufficient mental maturity', we have to appeal to the Wittgensteinian account of how we can see what a concept is by being engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar.

According to the atomistic approach, the final result is not clear in advance and may vary from context to context, but it does not follow from this that reasons have no invariant value. In other words, the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is invariant, although the ultimate outcome can vary depending on other morally relevant features which contribute to the moral evaluation of cases. It is this idea that enables the Rossian to distinguish between prima facie duties and actual duties and defend generalism about the former and particularism about the latter. The idea can be expressed in terms of the difference between the "*other things being equal*" and "*all things considered*" qualifications. As a thought experiment, we can single out one morally relevant feature and talk about its metaphysical status in different cases. In other words, we hold other things constant to see the behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different cases. According to the Rossian, if other things are held constant, each morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way. This is exactly what Ross says about prima facie duties and their generality. On the other hand, if several morally relevant features are combined together in a case, we cannot see what would be the ultimate outcome in advance. The way in which we arrive at the ultimate outcome is context-dependent in the sense that it depends on how these morally relevant features are combined together in a case. It depends on how we view the situation, all things considered. This is precisely what Ross claims with regard to actual duties and their particularity.

Suppose that one is confronted with an ethical situation in which three morally relevant non-moral properties - fidelity, gratitude and beneficence - come into conflict with each other. The subject might be confused to see how these conflicting duties are combined together and be unsure of how he can evaluate them and make a justified



decision. In other words, when he wants to take all things into account, the ultimate outcome is not clear in advance. But it does not follow from this that he is dealing with a situation in which there is no invariant deontic valence or moral value that is at stake, because he can suppose as a thought experiment that if he deals with just one of those morally relevant non-moral properties, beneficence, for instance, and other things are held constant and equal, he will be confronted with only the moral power of beneficence. To clarify this point, consider again the distinction between "moral value" and "moral weight". Every prima facie duty has an invariant deontic valence (moral value), which does not vary from context to context, but its weight may vary from case to case. In fact, if we are dealing with an ethical situation in which just one prima facie duty -e.g., promise keeping - is morally relevant, then the weight of this moral consideration shapes our actual duty, and we are entitled to generalise the conclusion to similar cases by supposing that other things are equal. But if we have more than one morally relevant non-moral property that come into conflict, then we have several invariant deontic valences, and different moral weights that may vary from case to case. And since the moral weight of the relevant non-moral properties may vary from case to case, the final result of moral deliberation is not generalisable. This metaphysical consideration leads to the Rossian epistemological account, according to which we have to use our moral intuition and perception to pick up the more stringent morally relevant feature in a concrete ethical situation.

To sum up, the Rossian position holds that there are several prima facie duties, which express invariant deontic valences. Therefore, the Rossian generalist embraces moral pluralism: the view that there are irreducible, though limited, morally relevant non-moral properties. These prima facie duties can come into conflict and therefore their moral weight may vary from case to case. Promising, for instance, is always a

prima facie reason to deliver what has been promised, though the moral weight of promising may vary from case to case, and may be overridden by a stronger moral consideration, such as saving the life of an innocent child. Moreover, in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment, we have to use our intuition to pick up the more stringent morally relevant feature (actual duty).

## **2-2. The Wittgensteinian Position**

As we have seen, the pluralist-generalist subscribes to the existence of patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different contexts is answerable and can fit. For the generalist, we are responsive to these patterns, as language-users, which show us how to go on correctly and consistently in our use of moral concepts. It is not the case that we use words arbitrarily. On the contrary, we respond to the patterns of word use which require of us to use words correctly.

### **2-2-1. Realistic Account of Patterns of Word Use**

Generalists who subscribe to the existence of these patterns of word use can be regarded as realists. They are realists because according to them, language-users are answerable to these patterns. There is a normative constraint which requires of language-users to use words correctly. In other words, it is not the case that we, as language-users, use these linguistic patterns in a way that they entirely depend on us. Rather, there are patterns of word use to which we are responsive.

We have to bear in mind that, in this context, we are talking about the very idea of 'reality' in the normative sense. In other words, the crucial point with which we are dealing concerns what we can say with regard to realism and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. It might be the case that we are confronted with a non-realistic situation, according to which there is no such thing as the standard criterion of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words.

Alternatively, on the other hand, there may be such a thing as truth-conditions and the distinction between the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which can be articulated.

Before going further, I should clarify what I mean by using realism and the realistic account in this context. By realism and the realistic account, I mean the existence of some normative pattern of word use to which, we, as language-users, are answerable and responsive. This realistic account is required to make sense of the normative constraint that confines a language-user. This can be regarded as a minimal realism, for it is compatible with allowing that we, as language-users, have *some* role in the formation of patterns of word use. What we do with words might have some role in the formation of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. As long as the role of language-user which we are discussing is not meant to undermine the notion of answerability, then a minimal realism is available.

In contrast, strong realism holds that we have no role in the formation of patterns of word use. These patterns are pre-existing, formed independently of us, and need to be followed to arrive at the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. In other words, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is not grounded in what we, as language-users, do with words.

Having seen the distinction between strong realism and minimal realism, we can say that minimal realism is compatible with the metaphysics of patterns that acknowledge our role in creating and sustaining them.

Given this notion of minimal realism, we are entitled to say that according to each generalistic account, we are confronted with at least a minimal realistic situation, according to which there is such a thing as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. In other words, we, as language-users, are responsive

to patterns of word use. Normativity requires of us to be answerable to these patterns and apply words correctly.

For instance, for a Platonic generalist, word use is governed by general rules that are posited in a Platonic heaven. These rules are formulated totally independently of us. There are such things as rules, which are out there and can be followed to arrive at the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which we are looking for. In other words, whether or not we use a word correctly depends on its being subsumable under a general rule. So, for a Platonic generalist, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is posited in abstract and transcendent patterns which are formulated entirely independently of us.

Now it is common ground among commentators on the *Philosophical Investigations* that Wittgenstein denies the existence of abstract and transcendent patterns in a Platonic sense. He criticises the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which is based upon a Platonic metaphysics. According to Wittgenstein, subscribing to the idea that word use is driven by Platonic rules is untenable. What Wittgenstein is trying to put forward in place of the idea that word use is governed by Platonic rules is contentious. Is he struggling to destroy the whole idea of normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words and arguing in favour of the sceptical and anti-realistic account of meaning; thereby undermining the whole idea of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words? Or is he trying to show a realistic account of meaning and normativity, according to which there are normative patterns of word use which make the distinction between the rightness and wrongness of the use of words intelligible?

I am now going to elaborate and evaluate the sceptical reading of Wittgenstein which is needed to justify the realistic account of Wittgenstein. This can provide a basis for the reading of Wittgenstein which is given in chapter 1.

### 2-2-2. Kripke: Sceptical and Anti-Realistic Account of Wittgenstein

According to the anti-realistic and sceptical account of Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as what we intuitively and common sensically take there to be as meaning and normativity. There is nothing beyond our past behaviour that can fix future word use. If this is the case, and there is no such fact as meaning and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, how one can still be regarded as a generalist? As we have seen, to be classified as a generalist, no matter which kind, one must subscribe to the existence of general patterns of word use by virtue of which the generalist states his reasons for belief and action. In other words, the reason-giving behaviour of words is answerable to the patterns to which they fit. So, the generalist has to reject the anti-realistic account of Wittgenstein, according to which there is no such thing as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words.

Let us examine the sceptical account of Wittgenstein in more detail. According to Kripke,<sup>49</sup> the most influential sceptical reader of Wittgenstein, the whole idea of the rule-following argument in the *Philosophical Investigations* is that there is no such fact as meaning. All we have in language has been made by agreement.

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<sup>49</sup> For more detail on the Kripkean account of Wittgenstein, see Kripke, S. (1982) *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Oxford: Blackwell). See also McGinn, M. (1997) *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the "Philosophical Investigations"* (London: Routledge), chapter 3. See also Thornton, T. (1998) *Wittgenstein on Thought and Language: The Philosophy of Content* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), chapter 3 & (2004) *John McDowell* (Chesham: Acumen), chapter 1. See also Verheggen, C. (2000) 'The Meaningfulness of Meaning Questions', *Synthese*, 123(2), pp. 195-216.

Suppose that I write the sign ‘ + ’ right now. What does it mean? Prima facie, it seems that whenever we come across such a sign, it means ‘addition’. In other words, if a teacher writes ‘  $47+59=?$  ’ on the board, and asks his students to find the answer, we think that the students know what they have to do. In other words, we think that they are required to ‘add’ these two numbers. Why do we think so? Because ‘addition’ is indicated by the sign ‘ + ’, it means ‘adding’. If somebody asks us how we know that ‘addition’ is indicated by the sign ‘ + ’; according to Kripke, all we can say is that the sign ‘ + ’ means, and always has meant, ‘addition’. There is no guarantee about the present and future usage of the sign ‘ + ’. All we can talk about is about the previous usage of signs and words, and previous usage of signs indicates nothing regarding the present and future usage of a word. We are not entitled, normatively speaking, to say anything regarding the current and future application of words.

According to Kripke:

There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict (1982, p. 55).

So, according to Kripke, I am allowed to write ‘ + ’ and mean something different from what is meant, and always has been, by ‘ + ’. For instance, one can say that, henceforth, by using the sign ‘ + ’, one means ‘saddition’, which means ‘addition’ if the numbers that are supposed to be ‘sadded’ are less than 500; otherwise 50. So, according to Kripke’s Wittgenstein, it is not the case that word use is governed by a normative constraint. There is no such thing as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, and we can apply signs and words arbitrarily and at random. In other words, when we are discussing meaning, it turns out we are not talking about the truth-conditions of using words. In contrast, as Kripke claims,

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meaning is based upon ‘assertability conditions’ which specify the conditions which are acknowledged by society. According to Kripke, there is no such thing as truth-conditions in the patterns which are admitted by community. In the absence of truth-conditions in the patterns of word use in the Kripkean story, normativity is associated with the way in which other language-users dispose us to use words in the accepted way. So, the patterns of word use to which Kripke subscribes have no such thing as truth-conditions.<sup>50</sup>

If we want to articulate what Kripke is trying to say in a logical structure<sup>51</sup>, we would say that Kripke’s reading of Wittgensteinian remarks on rule-following argument and meaning can be configured as follows:

Premise 1. Meaning: sign display + interpretation

Premise 2. Nothing we say can fix the interpretation

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Result: there is no such thing as determinate meaning

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<sup>50</sup> Note that Kripke in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* claims that he is going to present an anti-dispositional analysis with regard to the way in which the idea of meaning is formed within society. However, having seen that there is no such thing as truth-conditions affecting the way in which patterns of word use are shaped within society in the Kripkean account, we are left with an account which cannot make room for the distinction between correctness and incorrectness in using words over time. In this sense, in the denial of the existence of normative patterns of word use, according to which the distinction between the rightness and wrongness of word use makes sense, the Kripkean account, ultimately, leads to a dispositional analysis. In other words, in the Kripkean story, a language-user as an individual is limited by the normative constraint which is exerted by society. However, at the level of society, there is no such thing as normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. There is nothing independently of society to which the reason-giving behaviour of words is answerable and responsive. So, we can conclude that when we consider individual level in the Kripkean story, there is a normative account which can be given with regard to the way in which words are used in society. However, when we deal with the society level, there is no such thing as normative account which can be given. In this sense, the Kripkean account in the level of society, ultimately leads to a dispositional analysis which cannot make room for the distinction between correctness and incorrectness in the use of words.

<sup>51</sup> I follow Luntley in this. For more detail, see Luntley, M. (2003a) *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgement* (Oxford: Blackwell), chapter 4.

On this reading, according to Kripke, Wittgenstein's theory of meaning consists of two components. The first part is 'sign display' which is understood as normless. For instance, when someone writes signs like ' + ' or '  $x! 2$  ' or '  $\rightarrow$  ', the signs do not mean on their own. They are normless and do not have any normative power. The second part of meaning is a normative one, it is the component which gives normative power to the dead sign. It is what makes it the case that in the example, "47 + 59 = 106" the sign ' + ' means 'addition'.

According to Kripke, the whole issue of the rule-following argument is the denial of the account of normativity that can be given in truth-conditional terms. In other words, every candidate which is presented to play the role of interpreting and calibrating words is, ultimately, a further fact about sign display with no normative power. This is because interpretation can only be given by further sign display and, by hypothesis, sign display does not provide normativity. In other words, if sign display is normless and cannot supply the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, no further sign display can do this job and produce normativity. All we will have is an endless series of interpretations which have no intrinsic semantic power. Moreover, this process is open-ended and we are confronted with an infinite regress situation. The more we try to arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, the less we find such a thing which can define the truth-conditions of word use. Therefore, there is no such fact as meaning. There is no such thing as truth-conditions in virtue of which the correct and incorrect application of words can be distinguished from each other. Consider the following quotes by Wittgenstein:

"But how can a rule shew me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule."—That is not what we ought to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support (1953, §198).



And:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here (Ibid., §201).

Every rule can be interpreted in infinitely many ways because there is no such thing as normative pattern and the standard criterion of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. In place of such a sceptical result, the role of other people in the community is merely to dispose one to use a word in the same way as them. Kripke refers to these conditions as 'assertability conditions'. In other words, what is happening in the community is that other language-users dispose one to communicate and use a word in the same way as them.

To summarise, Kripke's sceptical reading of Wittgenstein is based upon what can be called a bipartite account of meaning, according to which meaning consists of two components.<sup>52</sup> The first part is sign display, which is normless, has no semantic power and needs to be animated. The second one is the part which supplies the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, and interprets the sign display. As each candidate, which is presented for giving normative power, is another sign display there is no such thing as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. We are confronted with an infinite regress situation. Therefore, we have to give up the idea of normative patterns that show us the truth-conditions of word use. In other words, there is no such fact as meaning. There is no account available of how the distinction between correctness and incorrectness in the use of words makes sense. All we can say about meaning is assertability conditions, according to which under accepted conditions, a language-

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<sup>52</sup> The bipartite account of meaning is discussed in the following reference: Luntley, M. (2003a) *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgment* (Oxford: Blackwell), chapter 4.

user is disposed by other language-users of a community to use a word over time.<sup>53</sup>

### 2-2-3. Rejecting the Kripkean Story: The Metaphysical Account of Wittgenstein

According to the anti-realistic and sceptical account of Wittgenstein, word use is not governed by patterns, except dispositional patterns. There is no such thing as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, and the language-user is not responsive to the patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of words can fit. In the absence of such normative and general patterns, how can one subscribe to the generalistic account with regard to the metaphysics of moral reasons, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to general patterns? In other words, it seems that by endorsing an anti-realistic account of Wittgenstein, any kind of generalism with regard to moral reasons, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature can fit into general patterns in different ethical situations, is under attack.

There is, however, an alternative reading of Wittgenstein available. We could call it the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein, as a response to the anti-realistic account. According to this view, Wittgenstein gives a realistic account of the patterns

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<sup>53</sup>It is worth noting that the communitarian reading of later Wittgenstein in the literature is influenced by the Kripkean anti-realistic and communitarian account. According to this communitarian account, the meaning of words can only be grasped through the way in which it is used within society. There is no such thing as normative patterns of word use, to which the reason-giving behaviour of words over time is answerable. Truth-conditions do not have any role in the way in which a language-user arrives at the meaning of words.

The communitarian account of Wittgenstein is discussed in the following references: Trigg, R. (1990) 'Wittgenstein and Social Science' in Phillips Griffiths, A. (ed.) *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 209-222 & (1999) *Ideas Of Human Nature: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell), second edition, pp.168-182. See also Williams, M. (1991) 'Blind Obedience: Rules, Community and the Individual' in Puhl, K. (ed.) *Meaning Scepticism* (Berlin, New York: WDEG), pp. 93-125. See also Bloor, D. (1997) *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions* (London: Routledge). Cupitt has applied communitarian and anti-realistic Wittgensteinian account of meaning in the philosophy of religion in the following reference: Cupitt, D. (1994) *The Sea of Faith* (London: SCM Press), second edition, pp. 220-237.

of word use, according to which in the absence of pre-existing general patterns of word use, we still have normative reasons to use words consistently and coherently. For instance, although there is no such thing as a complete list of game-making features, it does not follow from this that we have no reason to regard a new phenomenon as a game. Normativity and normative constraint are compatible with open-endedness.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, a generalist could endorse this metaphysical account of Wittgenstein as an argument in favour of his position regarding the metaphysics of moral reasons, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features in different contexts can fit into patterns of word use.

To understand this account, we should see the target of the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein as the bipartite account of meaning. As I shall be using this reading of Wittgenstein, it is worth clarifying the structure of the position. According to this view, it is not the case that Wittgenstein is trying to put forward a sceptical account of meaning by appealing to the bipartite theory of meaning. In contrast, the whole idea of the rule-following argument is to deny the bipartite account of meaning. According to this view, for Wittgenstein, meaning does not consist of two separate components. It consists of one part. There is no such thing as sign display which is normless and has to be animated. We cannot start with sign display and then add something else as a normative component to provide normativity. All we have here is one thing: sign-in-use. In fact, the concept 'sign-in-use', which can be dubbed 'the unitarian account of meaning', can provide the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which we are looking for. So, we have patterns of word use, to which the reason-giving behaviour of words is answerable and responsive. However, they are not patterns of sign display, but patterns of sign-in-use.

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<sup>54</sup> For more elaboration, see 1-1-1-4-1.

In this metaphysical account, the notion of ‘practice’ in Wittgenstein’s later work has to be taken into account in a normative sense, rather than a descriptive or sociological one. In this account, Wittgenstein is saying that meaning is grasped in a non-theoretical way and nothing we say can fix it. In other words, being engaged in the practice of using a word over time provides the normativity which is required for the whole idea of meaning. In this sense, what we do with words provides meaning.

According to Wittgenstein:

How can he *know* how he is to continue a pattern by himself— whatever instruction you give him? —Well, how do I know? —If that means “ Have I reasons?” the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons (1953, §211).

Justification will come to an end somewhere and we cannot give an account of how the meaning of a word is formulated in a determined and articulated way. However, it does not follow from this that we do not have any reason to apply the word rightly and consistently. It only shows that we cannot articulate the meaning of a word in a sentence or proposition. Its normative constraint cannot be put into words. Yet it does not follow from this that the usage of the word is not answerable to and cannot fit into patterns at all. All it shows is that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be thoroughly articulated in advance. There is, however, an alternative reading of patternability which can be compatible with open-endedness. The unitarian account of meaning tries to give an account of how the notion of practice can do this job and bring normativity and normative constraint into meaning.

Let us have a look at the unitarian account of meaning in more detail. According to the bipartite account, meaning consists of two elements. The normless element (sign display) and the normative element, which makes signs animated.

According to the unitarian account, it is true that the bipartite account of meaning is subject to the problem of the infinite regress argument, and this leads to the sceptical account of meaning. In other words, Kripke, who believes in a bipartite account of meaning, is right to argue that we cannot arrive at the normative part of meaning by resorting to sign display interpretation. Any interpretation is a sign display, and further sign display cannot produce normativity and normative patterns of word use. But the whole issue, according to those who subscribe to the unitarian account, is that Wittgenstein does not endorse the bipartite account of meaning. He rejects it. According to the unitarian account of meaning, the whole idea of Wittgenstein's rejection of the Platonic source of grammar, i.e. the transcendent and abstract patterns of word use, is the denial of the bipartite account of meaning according to which word use is governed by Platonic rules. Let me put forward the argument in a more articulated structure. Consider the bipartite account of meaning, which is formulated as follows:

Premise 1. Meaning = sign display + interpretation

Premise 2. Nothing we say can fix the interpretation

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Result: there is no such thing as determinate meaning

As we have seen, according to Kripke, Wittgenstein accepts this account of meaning, and the rule-following argument deals with the sceptical consequences of this account of meaning. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein tries to show that, ultimately, there is no such fact as meaning.

In contrast, according to the unitarian account, Wittgenstein's main target in the rule-following argument is the first premise. When he rejects the Platonic source of grammar, it is the first premise which is under attack.<sup>55</sup> In other words, according to Wittgenstein, what is wrong with the Platonic normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is the abstract rules which are supposed to animate the normless and dead sign. As a Platonist subscribes to the bipartite account of meaning, either he has to accept that abstract Platonic rules are ultimately interpretations, further sign display and have no normative force; or he should say that Platonic abstract patterns which are posited in the Platonic realm are self-interpreting and need no further normative force. In other words, the Platonist is confronted with a dilemma. According to the first horn of the dilemma, any abstract rule is an interpretation and sign display which has no normative force. It follows from this that the process of finding the normative patterns of word use is endless, and we are confronted with an infinite regress situation, which leaves nothing as normativity for meaning. According to the second horn of the dilemma, the Platonist accepts that abstract patterns of word use are self-interpreting. In this way the Platonist removes Kripke's problem at the cost of subscribing to an obscure and strange metaphysical account which says that there are self-interpreting patterns of word use which are posited in the Platonic realm.

Let me put it this way. If we endorse the first horn of the dilemma, Kripke's argument and conclusion would be tenable and justified. If we accept that meaning consists of normless sign display, which needs to be animated by normative patterns of word use, ultimately, there is no such fact as meaning. Otherwise, we have to resort to the magic Platonic self-interpreting patterns in order to make room for the

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<sup>55</sup> For more elaboration, see Luntley, M. (2003a) *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgement* (Oxford:

normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which sounds implausible.

However, according to the unitarian account, Wittgenstein is not trying to say that there is no such fact as meaning. In contrast, he wishes to show that there is no such thing as the bipartite account of meaning. Rejecting the bipartite account of meaning does not necessarily lead to the denial of the whole idea of meaning. Rather, it puts forward the unitarian account of meaning according to which sign-in-use is primitive, immanent and provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which we are looking for. All we have here is sign-in-use which, on its own, provides normativity. There is no thing independent of sign-in-use which determines meaning. Sign-in-use is intrinsically normative. To the extent that we are engaged in sign-in-use, we can give an account of how we arrive at normativity and the normative patterns of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of words is answerable. In fact, as there is no such thing as patterns separate from word use which provides normativity, the reason-giving behaviour of a word is answerable to itself. The more the language-user is engaged in the practice of using a word, the more the normative patterns of word use are shaped. There is a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which emerges to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of using words over time. So, the language-user has to do something with words in order to arrive at the normative patterns of word use.

What we do with words, not what we say, brings the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of word use. Because of this primacy to the notion of 'what we do', the 'subject' has an indispensable role in producing normativity. In other

words, the source of normativity and truth-conditions of word use lies in what *we* do, as language-users, not what we say. Remember that discussing the role of language-users in producing normativity is compatible with the minimal realistic view, according to which language-users are answerable to patterns of word use. This seems to be what Wittgenstein is trying to say in the rule-following argument. He presents a non-theoretical account of normative patterns of word use, according to which the subject has an indispensable role in grasping a rule, non-inferentially. Wittgenstein states:

What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases (1953, §201).

It seems that Kripke has missed this part of §201 in his interpretation of the rule-following argument.<sup>56</sup> In §201, Wittgenstein talks about the point that grasping a rule, in itself, is not an interpretation, otherwise we are confronted with an infinite regress situation which never comes to an end. In other words, it is not the interpretation which determines what a rule is. Rather, grasping the rule can be achieved in a non-theoretical way. It cannot be obtained by stating and giving another interpretation. Interpretations need to be stopped somewhere. In contrast, grasping the rule needs to be seen, needs to be captured pre-theoretically. We have to do something rather than saying something in order to see what the rule is.

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<sup>56</sup> For more detail about what is wrong with Kripke’s reading of rule-following argument, see: McDowell, J. (1998) ‘Wittgenstein on Following a Rule’ in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press), pp. 221-262. See also McGinn, C. (1984) *Wittgenstein On Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 59-92. See also Luntley, M (1991) ‘The Transcendental Grounds of Meaning and the Place of Silence’ in Puhl, K.(ed.) *Meaning Scepticism* (Berlin, New York: WDEG), pp. 170-188 & (2003a) *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgement* (Oxford: Blackwell), chapters 3 & 4.



The following should help to illuminate the unitarian account of meaning, which has been put forward by the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein:

Meaning: sign-in-use which is practised by a language-user over time

To summarise, according to the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein, patterns of word use are still real in the sense that the reason-giving behaviour of words is responsive to patterns of word use. These linguistic patterns are regarded as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words to which the reason-giving behaviour of words can fit. Moreover, as there is no such thing as patterns separable from the use of words which provide normativity, the language-user has an ineliminable role in the emergence of the normative patterns of word use.

### **2-3. Seeing the Similarities: Emerging Moral Patterns**

On the basis of what we have seen with regard to patterns of word use and the way in which we arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, generally speaking, one can say that the very moral patterns emerge from our ongoing practice of seeing the similarities. Let me give more detail to make the point clearer.

According to Wittgenstein, we cannot arrive at the meaning of concepts by the aid of Augustinian ostensive definition. Language has no essence or ideal formulation. Suppose that we want to know that what a leaf is, and what one means by the concept 'leaf'. According to Wittgenstein, we do not have determined or firm language templates that have been formulated independently of us, by which we will find out what the idea of a 'leaf' is. In other words, it is not the case that we need an abstract guideline according to which we can subsume what we are confronted with as new examples of the concept 'leaf'. There is no abstract pattern for the concept 'leaf'

in a Platonic sense under which different examples of the general concept 'leaf' can be subsumed:

Here also belongs the idea that if you see this leaf as a sample of 'leaf shape in general' you *see* it differently from someone who regards it as, say, a sample of this particular shape. Now this might well be so—though it is not so—for it would only be to say that, as a matter of experience, if you *see* the leaf in a particular way, you use it in such-and-such a way or according to such-and-such rules. Of course, there is such a thing as seeing in *this* way or *that*; and there are also cases where whoever sees a sample like *this* will in general use it in *this* way, and whoever sees it otherwise in another way (1953, §74).

All we have here is seeing the similarities: seeing this leaf like that one... There is no such thing as a theoretical articulation of the 'concept' leaf under which new instances can be subsumed. In contrast, concepts and patterns could be characterized through only seeing the similarities and being engaged in seeing things as similar. There is nothing over and above the being engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar which could grant us the concept 'leaf'.

At this stage, let me come back to Wittgenstein's discussion with regard to the concept 'game' again in order to make the point clearer. As we have seen earlier, according to Wittgenstein, the very notion of 'game' is indefinable in the sense that we cannot define what the concept 'game' is by means of several game-making features of different games with which we are familiar. In contrast, the concept 'game' can be categorised only through our ongoing practice of seeing the similarities between different games. He states:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? —Don't say: "There *must* be something common, or they would not be called 'games' "—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. —For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! ... One might say that the concept 'game' is a concept with blurred edges.—"But is a blurred concept a concept at all?" —Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need? (1953, § 66, 71).

Luntley refers to this Wittgensteinian point as:

Being able to see that one activity is similar to another and is therefore a game is not something that stands in need of further analysis. It is primitive. There is no reason behind our use of words for classifying something as a game. The reason lies in our seeing similarities. We cite examples and, as we become competent with the concept, we learn to see activities as similar. We see one activity as like another and call it a game (2002, p.279).

All we have in order to see what the concept 'game' is, is similarities and dissimilarities. That is all, and this is not ignorance. If this is the case, we, as language-users, have a crucial task in shaping the metaphysics of patterns, because *we* are actively engaged in shaping the patterns by seeing the similarities.

The metaphysical account of Wittgenstein does not support the traditional account of realism, according to which there is a significant distinction between 'reality in itself' and 'reality as appears to us'. Rather, to the extent that we, as language-users, are responsive to normative patterns of word use, we are realists. Moreover, we are not passive agents who have passive involvement with things in the world. In contrast, we are actively engaged with things. *We* couple with them. *We* hook up to the things in the world and have an authentic relationship with them. *We* are the point of departure and start having the relationship with things in the world by seeing the similarities.

So, we have an ineliminable role in the emergence of patterns. It is not the case that there are patterns that are articulated independently of us. Rather, we let patterns emerge by being engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities and seeing things as similar. According to Luntley:

The Platonist has rules in charge, the language user follows rules. On my reading, the language user is in charge, for it is the language user with the capacity to see similarities, to make wise discriminations and find saliences in things that is the source of the patterns of language use. This is still realism about patterns, but the condition for the possibility of patterns of correct use is not the existence of transcendent patterns, it is the existence of active language users, judges with a capacity to see similarities in things (2003a, p. 84).

We have the ability to see how to carry on by being engaged in practice. Normativity lies in our seeing things aright and the way in which we are engaged with things in the world, not in the transcendent and abstract patterns of word use.

Suppose that a mathematics teacher asks us to continue this sequence of numbers: 1, 4, 7, 10, ... How can we follow the series? According to the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is associated with the way in which we see things aright. There is no such thing as an abstract and articulated normative standard of the rightness and wrongness that can be used. The bipartite account of meaning and normativity is rejected. Grammar is immanent and needs to be seen and practised instead of articulated. In fact, we fill the gap between the numbers by seeing things aright. There is no such thing as an abstract and articulated normative patterns that can be followed to arrive at the right next number. The crucial point here is that we *see* the gap and fill it by being engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar.

Likewise, to grasp the meaning of a concept like 'game', all we have is seeing the similarities: that is a game, that is a game, that is not a game... and this is not ignorance. Wittgenstein states:

How should we explain to someone what a game is? I imagine that we should describe *games* to him, and we might add: " This *and similar things* are called 'games' ". And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is? —But this is not ignorance (1953, §69).

There is nothing beyond seeing the similarities. Even the very idea of 'and so on' can *only* be grasped by being engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities.

I suggest that the formation of a moral pattern is the same in the sense that its shape emerges through seeing the similarities. All we have here is seeing the similarities. We cannot appeal to pre-existing and articulated patterns to arrive at what

the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary is. Pre-existing and given templates simply do not exist. There is nothing beyond being engaged in the practice of using moral vocabulary which can guide us to arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary.

Having rejected the Platonic position, we have to say that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is immanent and intrinsic, not transcendent. It cannot be fully described in an abstract pattern. We have to *do* something instead of stating something. There is nothing hidden which can be articulated and spelled out propositionally. However, it does not follow from this that something is missing here. Neither does it follow from this that there is something here which is mysterious. Rather, it follows from this that there is something that has to be seen, and this constitutes precisely the source of normativity. According to Luntley:

The notion of correct use does not consist in transcendent patterns, things that could in principle be articulated as general rules and in virtue of which our particular seeing of two things as similar could be justified. Instead, our seeing of things on a particular occasion as similar is the source of the normative patterns of word use. The patterns of language use follow the seeing of the similarities, not the other way around (2002, p.280).

In this sense, seeing the similarities is primitive and constitutes the normative standard of rightness and wrongness. In fact, the very idea of 'practice' in a normative sense constitutes the source of normativity. This source of normativity, unlike the Platonic and transcendent source of normativity, needs to be seen. We cannot articulate it in a complete and inclusive pattern. However, it does not follow from this that there is no such thing as patternability at hand. There is another account of being articulated in patterns which can be gathered with open-endedness. In this sense, seeing the similarities constitutes the immanent and intrinsic normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary. The activity of practice enables us

to see things aright. So, what we need to arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is a right way of seeing, a correct attitude to the things in the world, a capacity and capability to see things aright. Consider the following passage from Wittgenstein:

I wanted to put that picture before him [the pupil], and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*. (Indian mathematics: “Look at this.”) (1953, § 144).

The crucial role of practice is to put right the agent’s attitude towards the world, to help him to see the world aright. There is nothing here as an articulated instruction which would guide the agent to arrive at the right attitude to things. All we have here is ongoing practice. In fact, having coupled with things in the world over time, the agent *sees* things aright. He latches on to the things in a way that can help him see how to go on correctly. There is nothing beyond practice which can help:

If there has to be anything ‘behind the utterance of the formula’ it is *particular circumstances*, which justify me in saying I can go on—when the formula occurs to me... ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, “Now I know how to go on,” when, that is, the formula *has* occurred to me?... Thus what I wanted to say was: When he suddenly knew how to go on, when he understood the principle, then possibly he has a special experience—and if he is asked: “What was it? What took place when you suddenly grasped the principle?”... for us it is *the circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands; that he knows how to go on (1953, § 154 and 155).

The ‘particular circumstances’ that enable me to go on cannot be put into words. It can only be seen within ongoing practice. Something has to be *done* in this relation.

The idea of ‘seeing’ which Wittgenstein as a modest-generalist is talking about is different from the idea of ‘seeing’ which a particularist like Dancy refers to. According to the particularist, seeing only deals with the characteristics of the individual case which is at hand, whereas seeing in the Wittgensteinian sense is not confined to the individual case. Rather, it is seeing the similarities, which requires of

us seeing more than one object. In such a way, looking away at similar cases gives us generality. That is to say, seeing it 'as of a type' in the Wittgensteinian account.<sup>57</sup>

#### **2-4. Making Sense of the Distinction Between Rightness and Wrongness in Moral**

##### **Vocabulary: The Analogy With the Concept 'Game'**

According to the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as a pre-existing shape between evaluative and moral properties with respect to descriptive and non-moral properties. However, it does not follow from this that the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein leads to the notion of shapelessness with regard to moral patterns. Rather, the shape emerges and comes out from our being engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities. There can still be a shape between evaluative and descriptive properties in different ethical contexts which is not formed arbitrarily or at random. There can still be patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable. In other words, we are not authorised to regard whatever we want as an example of right promise keeping, for instance. So, although there is no such thing as an abstract, pre-existing and transcendent pattern in a Platonic sense, which states the relationship between moral properties and non-moral properties, there can still be a shape and general pattern which is formed through seeing the similarities.

But how can we show that the denial of the Platonic source of normativity which is associated with the existence of some pre-existing and abstract normative patterns does not lead to the random situation, according to which the distinction between the right moral proposition and the wrong moral proposition does not make sense? Can we give an account of how the normative constraint which we are talking about makes sense?

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<sup>57</sup> This point is discussed in detail in 4-4.

In order to answer the above question, let us go back to the concept 'game' again. Suppose that we want to articulate and define the concept 'game'. Prima facie, it seems that in order to do that, we should list the common properties of different kinds of games with which we have been confronted so far, such as: football, chess, snooker, boxing, tennis, cricket, rugby, golf... On the basis of the obtained common properties, we would say that:

If  $x$  meets the condition  $g_1, g_2, g_3 \dots g_n$ ,  $x$  is a 'game'.

In fact, this view presupposes that there is something in common which needs to be articulated and categorised to arrive at the definition of the concept 'game'. In the light of the achieved general rule, we can say what a new 'game' is. In other words, if we are wondering whether or not a new phenomenon with which we are dealing is a 'game', and whether we have any reason to regard it as a 'game', we can appeal to the general pattern under which the new phenomenon has to be subsumed. The general rule acts as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, which shows us whether or not the new phenomenon can be regarded as a 'game'. However, Wittgenstein rejects the existence of such common properties among different kinds of games, something which can be articulated as an essence of the concept 'game'. The whole idea of 'family resemblance' is about the denial of such an essentialistic approach with regard to defining a concept like 'game'. In rejecting the Platonic source of grammar, which is based upon the bipartite account of meaning, Wittgenstein tries to show how we can define the concept 'game' just through learning examples and our ongoing practice of seeing the similarities and dissimilarities. According to him:

What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it?...Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game; shewing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these (1953, §75).



The pattern of the concept 'game' which emerges in this way is a real pattern. We do not need a theoretical tool to provide normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. The normative constraint lies in the way in which we are engaged with similar games in the world. To the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar games, we see what a game is. Seeing things as similar is prior. Concept possession comes after, not the other way around. Luntley says:

...concept possession involves generality. Grasp of a concept requires a capacity to use the concept in contexts other than that in which it is first presented. Grasp of the concept *game* requires an ability to apply it to things other than those encountered on learning the concept. This means that there is a pattern to the use of the word 'game'... The need for the idea of a pattern to word use flows from the basic point that words are used to say things that can be true or false, correct or incorrect. It is that underlying normativity to concept possession, the concept's contribution to a notion of what it would be for an utterance to be true or false, that necessitates the patterning of concept application... the generality of concepts emerges from acts of judgement in which agents see things as similar. When explaining a concept to someone we always reach the point where we say, 'This and similar things are .....' (2004, pp. 8-9).

The generality of a concept is associated with the way in which we regard this thing as similar to that thing. The normative constraint emerges to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar.

Consider the case that someone asks us how we can put forward an argument in favour of the normative constraint that we are talking about in the emergence of the pattern of the concept 'game'. She may ask us to give her an account according to which a new phenomenon can be regarded as an example of the concept 'game'. According to her, what is going on when we regard something as a new 'game', normatively speaking?

For instance, when we say that baseball is a game, chess is a game, and then add that a child playing with her doll is a game as well, is there really a normative

constraint at stake here? Is there such thing as the normative standard of rightness and wrongness of the use of words which direct us to regard something as a new 'game'?

The answer to this question has two parts, the negative part and the positive one. According to the negative part, if we are looking for an articulated and abstract pattern, according to which under specific circumstances the new phenomenon can be regarded as a game, the answer is negative. There is no such thing as a common property or properties which can be articulated as a rule. When we look at different types of games, with which we have been confronted so far, we see that there is no such thing as a common property or properties that can be articulated. So, there is no general pattern of the concept 'game' which can be used to see what a new game is. There is no articulated normative constraint on calling something a 'game'. But that is not the whole story, for in place of the common property or properties among different games, we have lots of similarities and dissimilarities which can supply the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which we are looking for. In other words, if the opponent asks us whether or not playing with a doll can be regarded as a game, we cannot give her a general pattern which can be used. We cannot provide her with a general normative pattern according to which playing with a doll is a 'game'. Rather, we would ask her to *look at* the whole situation and its features carefully. We ask her to pay close attention to the details, and compare its similarities and dissimilarities with other games with which she is familiar. For instance, there is no such thing as winning and losing in playing with a doll. So, in this respect, playing with a doll is dissimilar to football, rugby, tennis, chess, golf.... Now we ask the opponent to consider the case of a child who throws his ball at the wall and catches it again. Common sensically speaking, the child is engaged in playing a game. Now, is there such a thing as winning and losing at stake? The

answer is negative. But, we can still regard the phenomenon as a game. Moreover, it seems that we are allowed to say that throwing a ball at the wall and catching it again is amusing and entertaining. If this is the case, we can say that a child playing with her doll, in this respect, is similar to the playing of a child who throws his ball at the wall and catches it again. Furthermore, we ask the opponent to compare a child who plays with her doll and a boxer in a boxing-match. Would it be the case that boxing is amusing and enjoyable, the same as playing with a doll? We do not think so. But still boxing can be regarded as a 'game', although it has some dissimilarities with the phenomenon of the child playing with her doll. In fact, in order to see what the concept 'game' is, the language-user is being invited to join in the practice of using the word 'game' over time.

So the positive answer to the question about the existence of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of word is that there is a normative constraint according to which we can regard a new phenomenon as a 'game', but it cannot be articulated in an abstract general pattern. We are not authorised to give a closed list of features in advance, only an open-ended set is available. This set is fully context-dependent and depends on all the characteristics of the phenomenon that we are dealing with. To the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar and dissimilar things, we can say whether or not the phenomenon with which we are dealing with can be regarded as a game.

So, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words lies in our ongoing practice of seeing things as similar and dissimilar. There is still a normative pattern of word use to which the reason-giving behaviour of the word 'game' is answerable and responsive. In other words, although there is no such thing as the normative pre-existing pattern of the concept 'game', which shows us whether

or not the new phenomenon can be regarded as a game, it does not follow from this that the reason-giving behaviour of the word 'game' is not answerable to general patterns. And then, in being answerable, the use needs to be put alongside similar and dissimilar cases. Answerability demands that we find the use slot into patterns— that is, there is a generality. The patterns come from the demand for answerability.

### **2-5. Reading Ross in the Light of the Metaphysical Account of Wittgenstein**

As we have seen, applying the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein to moral vocabulary, moral patterns are not pre-existing and transcendent in a Platonic sense because the Platonic source of grammar is indefensible and untenable. The Platonistic source of grammar is based upon the bipartite account of meaning. However, Wittgenstein rejects the bipartite account of meaning and suggests the unitarian account of meaning, according to which moral patterns emerge and come out to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words lies in the way in which we are engaged in seeing things aright. In other words, there are patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of words is answerable. The more we are engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar, the more we see what the source of normativity is.

Similarly, we can say that there are moral patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features is answerable. Moreover, according to this account, we, as word users, have an ineliminable role in the emergence of moral patterns. We let moral patterns emerge by being engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities. I wish to suggest that Rossian ethics, according to which there are some prima facie duties which state our moral obligations, can be read in the light of the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein which subscribes to the existence of emerging moral patterns. Both the Rossian position and the metaphysical account of

Wittgenstein hold that there are patterns to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features is answerable. According to Ross, these prima facie duties, which have invariant deontic valences, are combined together in each concrete ethical situation in such a way that their weight can vary from case to case. In other words, if we are dealing with more than one morally relevant non-moral property in each concrete ethical situation, the way in which these prima facie duties are combined together shapes our actual duties. In other words, as several game-making features such as: 'having a ball' or 'having a team'... are combined together in different ways and make several games, different prima facie duties are combined together in different ways and make several actual duties.<sup>58</sup>

In the next chapter, I am going to criticise the idea of 'holism' which is the main argument in favour of normative particularism from another perspective. What follows from this is that the modest-generalistic position like the Rossian account, which denies that the behaviour of a morally relevant feature cannot be answerable to general patterns, is tenable.

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<sup>58</sup> I will return to this point and elaborate on it in chapter 4. As we have seen in the above, there is a distinction between prima facie duties and actual duties in Rossian ethics. I will argue in chapter 4 that the Rossian metaphysical account with regard to actual duties and the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together is vague and unclear. I will utilise the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein to illuminate the Rossian metaphysical account with regard to actual duties.

## In Defence of Atomism

...we have to learn to live with a sense of vertigo, though if we still feel the vertigo this shows that we have not yet escaped from a sense of insecurity that is based on an illusion. If we can only dispel the illusion the vertigo must fall away with it.<sup>59</sup>

Jonathan Dancy

Introduction: Having seen the modest-generalistic view in the light of the metaphysical account of Wittgenstein, in this chapter, I am going to develop modest-generalism by rejecting the particularistic position from another perspective. To this end, two arguments are presented in favour of the generalistic and atomistic position. According to the first argument, the holist is confronted with an apparent dilemma. The first horn of the dilemma which can be called 'the contribution problem' concerns the problem with the idea of the contribution a morally relevant feature makes to moral evaluation. The second horn of the dilemma which can be called 'the combination problem' deals with the point that the holist's metaphysical account with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together is vague. According to the second argument, moral realism requires moral atomism. In order to justify this claim, I borrow some notions from the philosophy of science. The similarity between science and morality is discussed. Furthermore, an ethical example is given to shed light on the metaphysical situation of prima facie duties. Finally, I emphasize that any account of generality has to have an answer to the contribution problem.

Accounts of the metaphysics of reasons and the way in which morally relevant features contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases can be classified into one of two broad types: particularist and generalist. According to the particularist, the

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<sup>59</sup> Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 84.

reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is not answerable to general patterns. This means that there is no generality to the reason-giving impact of a morally relevant feature; the feature's impact is not on types of situations. Given this core metaphysical claim, it follows that we cannot generalise what we find as a wrong-making feature of action, such as killing, in a particular case into a moral principle about killing in general. The main argument for this draws on the idea of holism with regard to the moral power of morally relevant non-moral properties. The idea is that the contribution of each morally relevant non-moral property to the moral evaluation of different cases is contextual, and its contributory behaviour may change from case to case. In different cases it is compounded with other morally relevant non-moral properties so that what makes an action wrong in one case may make it right in another case. In other words, the deontic valence of a morally relevant non-moral property such as causing pain, i.e. its reason-giving behaviour in different concrete ethical situations, is not constant and may vary from case to case. Therefore, we are not entitled to say anything, metaphysically speaking, with regard to the deontic valence of each morally relevant non-moral property outside different contexts. In other words, the moral power of a morally relevant non-morally property is a function of how it stands in the context. There is no generality to the moral power of a feature and so its power cannot be articulated in a general rule.

According to particularists such as Dancy and McNaughton it is not the case that different morally relevant non-moral properties are combined together atomistically in the sense that the occurrence of a property has an invariant deontic valence which can be retained outside the context. Rather, such properties have no invariant deontic valences independent of different contexts. They have no stable invariant contribution to the moral evaluation of different contexts and their

contribution can vary from case to case. This means that there is no shape between non-moral (descriptive) properties and moral (evaluative) properties, and different morally relevant non-moral properties are combined together holistically. In other words, metaphysically speaking, particularists are *anti-realist* with regard to generality and general rules. According to them, we can justifiably talk about the nature and metaphysics of the moral power of morally relevant non-moral properties only within a concrete ethical situation. We are not entitled to generalise from the outcome of a particular case in similar cases. Indeed, there is no such thing as a class of relevantly similar cases. Consequently, particularists have to be regarded as anti-realists concerning the existence of general patterns for reasons.

On the other hand, as we have seen in chapter 1, to be regarded and classified as a generalist one needs minimally to acknowledge that there is a pattern to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable. In other words, the generalist holds that there are patterns which have shape and articulate the relationship between right-making, wrong-making... features, on the one hand, and right, wrong... properties on the other hand. This is the minimum ingredient that is required for generalism. On the basis of this minimum ingredient, we can categorise generalists into two groups: the monistic view and the pluralistic view. As we have seen in the second chapter, the Rossian position can be offered as an example of the pluralistic and modest-generalist position that satisfies the minimum requirement. Meanwhile, an account drawn from Wittgenstein can be given, in the light of which Rossian ethics can be read from a different perspective. This account also shows how minimal and modest the concept of general patterns of word use can be.

On a modest-generalist account, reasons for action exploit the patterns of word use which figure in language. According to the Wittgensteinian account,



although patterns of word use by which we state our reasons do not exist in the Platonic and determined sense, it does not follow from this that they do not exist at all. Rather, patterns of word use exist in a way that allows that the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features is answerable to these emerging patterns within our practice of seeing similarities; just as our use of the word 'game' is answerable to the patterns of correct and incorrect use even though we cannot specify in advance what those patterns are nor predict all the features that make something a game.

As we have seen, according to the particularist who subscribes to holism, the moral power of a morally relevant non-moral property has no invariant deontic valence independent of different ethical contexts. In other words, it is not the case that the moral power of a morally relevant non-moral property like causing pain has a stable contribution to the moral evaluation of different concrete ethical situations. The particularist holds that its contribution may vary from case to case. McNaughton says:

One powerful reason for rejecting generalism in moral as in aesthetic justification is that it offers an unduly atomistic picture of moral reasoning. It supposes that each reason is insulated from its surroundings so that the effect of each on the rightness or wrongness of the action as a whole can be judged separately. The moral particularist prefers a holistic view (1991, p.68).

At this point, I wish to argue that the particularist's position with regard to the nature of the moral power of a morally relevant non-moral property is inconsistent and counter-intuitive.

### **3-1. The Holist's Problem**

Here, in outline, is the argument I wish to propose. Consider the very idea of holism which constitutes the main argument in support of normative particularism. According to holism, the moral powers of different non-moral properties are combined together holistically. These non-moral properties have no invariant contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases. For instance, causing pain can

be regarded both as a right-making and wrong-making feature in different contexts. Its deontic valence and contribution can vary from case to case. A particularist denies the atomistic approach with regard to the nature and the combination of the moral power of different morally relevant non-moral properties.

What I wish to argue is that the holism which the particularist is offering leads, when thought through, to atomism. There is a problem facing the particularist that has the appearance of a dilemma: either they face the charge of having no account of contribution and hence should embrace atomism, or if they embrace atomism, they face 'the combination problem' that all atomists face. According to the combination problem, the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together is vague and unclear.

### 3-1-1. The Contribution Problem

I start with the contribution problem, according to which holism leads to atomism. When a particularist talks about the contribution of a morally relevant non-moral feature like causing pain to moral evaluation in different contexts, the central question is: what is it to have an invariant or variant contribution? How can we talk about *the* contribution of a morally relevant non-moral property like causing pain in different ethical contexts? What is *its* contribution to moral evaluation? It seems that when we are talking about *the* contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different cases, we regard it as it is, that is to say, as it is in itself, and that seems to be to consider it independently of context. The very idea of 'its contribution' seems to require the idea of what its intrinsic valence is independently of context. This suggests the idea of the invariant characteristics of the morally relevant feature which is at stake in this metaphysical account. Now, if the morally relevant feature and *its* contribution is crucial and has to be taken into account in order to arrive at the

ultimate outcome of the moral evaluation of the case, why cannot we subscribe to atomism? If *it* and *its* contribution matters, it seems that subscribing to holism would be untenable and indefensible. The very notion of 'it and its contribution' seems to suggest the atomist's conception of a context-independent character that the feature then contributes to different cases.

Indeed, when a particularist talks about a morally relevant feature and its different contributions in different contexts, he *individuates* the morally relevant feature and its contribution to the moral evaluation of the case. In other words, when one says that a morally relevant feature like promise keeping makes different contributions in different contexts, the particularist is trying to individuate the morally relevant feature and talk about its individual contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases.

Now, here is the question. If the particularist tries to individuate each morally relevant feature in order to arrive at a tenable explanation of the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different ethical situations, why has he not committed to atomism? An atomist individuates each morally relevant feature in order to give an account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. If this is the case and the whole idea of individuation has an indispensable role in giving the metaphysical account of how several morally relevant features are combined together in different contexts, what is the difference between the particularist and the atomist? Why does holism not lead to atomism?<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Dancy puts forward the idea of holism and the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases as a metaphysical point. Whether or not we know the behaviour of a morally relevant feature in each concrete ethical situation is an epistemological issue. Now, if the particularist wants to say that we cannot know what the behaviour is of each individual morally relevant feature in concrete ethical situations beforehand, the modest-generalist can subscribe to his point. But the point which is offered by the particularist at this stage is epistemological rather than

Consider a morally relevant non-moral feature like causing pain. According to the particularist, it is not the case that causing pain is a wrong-making feature in the sense that in different concrete ethical situations, *its* deontic valence would be invariant and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way. Rather, *its* contribution can vary from case to case. In other words, *its* deontic valence entirely depends on the context and how *it* is combined with other morally relevant non-moral properties which are at stake. These morally relevant features are combined together holistically and have no independent nature and characteristics outside the context. They have to be seen and evaluated solely within the context. We are not entitled to say anything with regard to *their* invariant deontic valence and *their* contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases in advance.

According to the opponent, if it is the case that morally relevant features are combined together holistically and none of them has separate characteristics outside the context, how can we talk about *the* contribution of a morally relevant non-moral property to the moral evaluation of different cases and *its* alteration? In fact, when we are talking about a morally relevant feature like causing pain and *its* invariant or variant deontic valence, we consider the morally relevant feature on its own regardless of the context. However, the particularist who subscribes to holism cannot apply such a method to evaluate the metaphysics of the situation. The particularist cannot apply such a method because he endorses the view that in each concrete ethical situation we are confronted with a condition in which several morally relevant features are combined together concurrently and there is no account available of how

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metaphysical. In other words, if the particularist is going to regard the notion of individuating morally relevant features as an epistemological point, the modest-generalist can endorse his point. However, it does not follow from this that the critique of individuating morally relevant features can be regarded as a metaphysical claim. As we have seen in the first chapter, the modest-generalist can subscribe to epistemological particularism while rejecting normative particularism.

that combination has the resulting characteristics.<sup>61</sup> In such a situation, how can we detect and individuate a specific morally relevant feature and talk about *its* contribution to moral evaluation which might be changed in another ethical context? We have to bear in mind that the very idea of holism rejects the notion that each morally relevant feature can be evaluated on its own and alone. In contrast, holism holds that each morally relevant feature has to be examined only within a concrete context. But, at the same time, the holist claims that *the* deontic valence and *the* contribution of a morally relevant feature can vary from case to case. How can that be the case? If it is the case that each morally relevant feature which we have in the realm of morality is fully context-dependent, how can he talk about *its* contribution to moral evaluation? If *its* contribution really matters, how can he still stick to holism?

Consider the following quote by Dancy:

Although we are able to observe, in a given case, the importance that a property can have in suitable circumstances, the particularist can still insist that no notion is available of a sort of circumstance in which it *must* have that importance (1993, p. 70).

What does Dancy mean by *the* importance of a morally relevant feature in different circumstances? If we can pick out a morally relevant feature and talk about *its* metaphysical status and the way in which its importance *must* or *can* be manifested in other cases, why cannot we subscribe to atomism with regard to moral reasons, according to which the metaphysical status of a morally relevant feature and the way in which it contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is evaluated on its own?

Consider a concrete ethical situation in which four morally relevant features F,

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<sup>61</sup> Again, if the particularist means an epistemological point by mentioning that there is no account available of how morally relevant features are combined together, the modest-generalist has no problem with it. But, as we know, the main discussion at this stage is a metaphysical issue rather than an epistemological one.

G, H and I are combined together. According to the particularist, we are only entitled to say something with regard to the whole metaphysical status of the case. Suppose that the ultimate metaphysical outcome of the case, following the combination of these features together, is right-making. Now, as a thought experiment, let us remove the morally relevant feature F. If the metaphysical situation changes, it follows from this that F had a contribution to the moral evaluation of this case. But, according to the particularist, we are not allowed to say anything with regard to F's contribution to moral evaluation outside the context. All we can say is that in this concrete situation; F, G, H and I are combined together, and the final outcome is right-making. In the meantime, in another ethical situation in which F is removed, the end result is such-and-such. In other words, strictly speaking, according to the particularist, all we are entitled to say about the morally relevant feature F, is that it can be joined with G, H, and I in different contexts in different ways. That is all. We cannot say that F is right-making in this case and wrong-making in that case. All we can say is something about the ultimate outcome of the combination in which F, G, H and I are combined together. We are not allowed to go further and give details regarding *the* contribution of F to the moral evaluation of the case. We cannot say that F contributes to the ultimate outcome of the case in this way or in that way. In order to talk about a morally relevant feature like F in such a way, one has to subscribe to atomism, according to which a morally relevant feature like F has an invariant deontic valence which can be kept outside the context. But this is exactly what a particularist like Dancy rejects. Nevertheless, the moral particularist appears also to allow the examination of the behaviour of a morally relevant feature outside the context. So, to be a real particularist, one has to talk about the metaphysical status of a concrete case as a whole, regardless of the behaviour of a specific morally relevant feature.

Consider a morally relevant feature like promise keeping. The particularist cannot give an account of how it behaves. He cannot say that promise keeping is right-making or that it is wrong-making. All he can say is that, in a concrete ethical situation in which promise keeping is joined with gratitude and other properties, the ultimate outcome, for instance, is right-making. He is not entitled to say that promise keeping behaves here as a right-making feature, and behaves somewhere else as a wrong-making feature. That would require atomism and the atomistic approach to the combination of morally relevant features in different context.

In order to reject the contribution problem, one might make a distinction between individuating a feature like F and individuating its contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases. In other words, although feature F remains unchanged in different ethical contexts, its contribution can vary from case to case. That is, the particularist can stick to the idea that the behaviour of a morally relevant feature can vary from case to case, whereas the morally relevant feature remains as it is in different contexts. For instance, although a morally relevant feature like causing pain remains unchanged in different contexts, metaphysically speaking, its reason-giving behaviour can change from case to case. In other words, causing pain is just that – the feature of causing pain. But, whether it has moral significance depends on context, how it fits with other features.

Now, I have to say that this sounds plausible as an account of Dancy. One can read Dancy and other particularists who subscribe to holism in such a way. In response, I have to say that, firstly there is no textual evidence for such a distinction in the literature. In other words, the way in which Dancy and other particularists put forward the idea of holism is not based upon such a metaphysical

distinction. Secondly, if the distinction between the feature and its contribution to moral evaluation is upheld, the position is counter-intuitive, e.g. it removes any scope for saying causing pain is a bad thing in itself, or is *prima facie* bad. In other words, if the feature and its behaviour can be distinguished and what is crucial is the behaviour of a feature rather than *the* feature, why does this feature have to be regarded as a feature which is related to the case which we are talking about? If that is his position, how can we say that causing pain is a morally 'relevant' feature at all? What can be said with regard to its moral relevance? Perhaps Dancy would accept such a metaphysical distinction. It makes sense of his metaphysics, but at a high price. In other words, if a particularist like Dancy subscribes to such a distinction, he owes us a metaphysical account with regard to the idea of moral relevance.

Thirdly, the distinction between a morally relevant feature and its behaviour sounds redundant. We can give an account of how a morally relevant feature behaves in different ethical contexts without resorting to such a strong metaphysical distinction. If we combine a morally relevant feature like causing pain and its behaviour, we can give an account of how a morally relevant feature like causing pain contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases without resorting to anything else. For instance, we can say that causing pain contributes to the moral evaluation of this case in such-and-such way and so on. What follows from this is that if we can give an account of how a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases without supposing such a metaphysical distinction, why should we appeal to it? We can get along well without any appeal to such a metaphysical account.



### 3-1-2. The Holist's Metaphysical Account Is Vague and Unclear: The Combination

#### Problem

If a particularist like Dancy accepts the first argument which holds that individuating the contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different cases leads to atomism that he denies in the first place, then the particularist is confronted with the combination problem.

I now turn to the combination problem, according to which the particularist puts forward a vague and unclear account of the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together in different concrete ethical situations.

The particularist subscribes to the holistic approach with regard to the nature of the combination of different morally relevant features. Consider the case in which several morally relevant features such as fidelity, gratitude and giving pleasure are combined together. If one asks the particularist about the metaphysics of combination in a concrete ethical situation in which giving pleasure, fidelity etc. are joined together, the particularist would say that they are combined together in such a way that the ultimate outcome would be such-and-such. He cannot say that fidelity, for instance, is a right-making feature in this case, or is combined with giving pleasure in that way. So, what can the particularist say instead? He can only say that the metaphysical status of the case overall is either this or that. However, this cannot be regarded as a lucid metaphysical account. If we ask the particularist about the behaviour of a morally relevant feature F in a concrete case, he cannot tell us clearly what is going on there. All he can say is that F is joined with other morally relevant features and the result is such-and-such. Moreover, as the particularist rejects any account of generality in the realm of morality, looking at similar cases to assess the overall metaphysical status cannot help us. All we have is *this* concrete ethical

situation. We have to keep looking at this case to arrive at a holistic metaphysical point, according to which morally relevant features, in this context, are combined together in such a way. We are not offered any more detail. It seems that the metaphysical account which is offered here is imprecise and mysterious. In other words, we are not offered an account according to which the metaphysical status of each case can be explained. All we can do is to look at the case over time to arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of several morally relevant features of the case. So, it follows from the combination problem that the particularist's account with regard to the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together in different cases is untenable, or, at least, vague and mysterious.

To recap, the particularist who subscribes to holism is confronted with both the contribution problem and the combination problem. According to the contribution problem, to be regarded as a holist regarding the contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different concrete cases, one has to reject the existence of a morally relevant feature which can be examined on its own and outside the context. To be classified as an atomist with regard to the contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different cases, one has to subscribe to the account of morally relevant features which can be examined on their own and outside the context. So, the holist who claims that the contribution of a morally relevant feature to moral evaluation can be changed from case to case, disregards what he says concerning the nature of morally relevant features. Consider the following quote by

McNaughton:

...I take my nephews and nieces to the circus for a treat. They enjoy it. I have done the right thing. Why? Because I succeeded in giving them pleasure. Because the fact that my action gave pleasure was here the reason for its being right, does it follow that, whenever an action gives pleasure, we shall have reason for thinking it right? No. ...Whether the fact that an action causes pleasure is a reason for or against doing it is not something that can be settled in isolation from other features of the action. It is only when we know the context in which the pleasure will occur that we are in a position to judge (1988, p. 193).

On the face of it, it looks like McNaughton is trying to make an epistemological point at this stage. However, if this is not the case and he is dealing with a metaphysical notion here, it seems that his account of holism is incoherent and leads to atomism. Let me give more detail to make the point clearer.

According to McNaughton, giving pleasure as a morally relevant feature can contribute to the moral evaluation of a number of concrete ethical situations in different ways. In some cases, it contributes as a right-making feature, while in others it contributes as a wrong-making feature. According to McNaughton, one is not authorised to talk about the contribution of giving pleasure to the moral evaluation of different cases in advance.

The whole issue according to the generalist is that if it is the case that *the* contribution of a morally relevant feature like giving pleasure can be changed from context to context, there is something which has its specific and definite metaphysical characteristics and can be investigated on its own. Otherwise, how can we say that the contribution of a morally relevant feature like giving pleasure to moral evaluation cannot be settled in isolation of other relevant features? If it is the case that giving pleasure can contribute to moral evaluation in different ways in several contexts, then there has to be a distinct metaphysical character of a morally relevant feature like giving pleasure. Let me give an example to make the point clearer.

Consider the case that some sugar, some coffee and some milk are combined together in a glass. The sugar contributes to the causal outcome of the case according to its intrinsic structure, and the way in which its atoms and molecules are combined together. The ultimate causal outcome depends on the intrinsic structure of the sugar, the coffee and the milk. Consider again the case in which some sugar and some hot water are combined together in a glass. It seems that the sugar contributes to the

causal outcome of the case according to its structure, and the final causal outcome depends on the structure of the sugar and the hot water. Now, if we want to apply the particularistic account in this case, we would have to say that the contribution of the sugar to the causal outcome of the first case differs from the contribution of the sugar to the causal outcome of the second case. In fact, as the situation is changed in the second case, the sugar's contribution to the causal outcome of the case can vary. But, as we have seen, the contribution of the sugar to the causal outcome entirely depends on its intrinsic structure and the way in which its atoms and molecules are combined together. A causal particularist would have to say that the contribution of the sugar to the causal outcome of the second case can differ from the first one. It follows from this that the intrinsic structure of the sugar in the second case is different from the intrinsic structure of the sugar in the first case. In other words, the sugar in the second case is different from the sugar in the first case. But, how can that be possible? Would it be the case that the characteristics of the sugar in the second case is different from the first case? It seems that the causal particularist is confronted with a dilemma at this stage. According to the first horn of the dilemma, if the thing which we are talking about in the second case is not sugar, we are not authorised to say that the contribution of the thing to causal outcome can vary from context to context, because we are talking about two different things which have different causal outcomes in different cases. According to the second horn of the dilemma, if the particularist says that the thing which contributes to the causal outcome of the second case is sugar, his claim sounds counter-intuitive and implausible. How could it be the case that the sugar contributes to the causal outcome of different cases differently?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Of course, given other ingredients the sugar can produce novel effects, e.g. be the catalyst for an explosive reaction. But although this shows how its individuation as a feature can be distinct from its behaviour in a context, it still seems right to insist that its behaviour systematically results from its essence as individuated. Anyway, in the moral case, separating behaviour from the individuation of the

In order to do that, the intrinsic structure of the sugar has to be changed. In such a situation, the thing with a different intrinsic structure which we are talking about is no longer sugar. So, either the thing which contributes to the causal outcome of the cases is sugar with a specific atomic and molecular structure, or it is not sugar and has another atomic and molecular structure. If the thing is sugar in both cases, it has to contribute to the causal outcome of the cases in the same type of way because of its intrinsic structure. Otherwise, in the second case we are confronted with something which is not sugar, has another intrinsic structure and contributes to the causal outcome of the case differently. It would be impossible for a thing to be regarded as sugar with different atomic and molecular structures concurrently.<sup>63</sup>

Having considered the sugar example, we can say that the particularist's claim that there is no metaphysical account available of how several morally relevant features are combined together is counter-intuitive. In fact, if there is no account available of how several morally relevant features are combined together, it follows from this that none of these features can be selected and examined on its own, because they are strongly combined with other relevant features to the extent that one cannot detach them from each other.

Therefore, it seems that the particularist who puts forward an argument in favour of holism needs to subscribe to a minimal form of atomism, according to which the individuation of a morally relevant feature has to be taken into account;

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feature results in an account of, e.g. pain producing, that has no prima facie wrong-making power. And that seems counter-intuitive.

<sup>63</sup> If one says that the relation between moral effect and essence of feature is unlike that of causal effect and essence of feature in the sugar case, in response, I have to say that as the moral particularist accepts that there are moral properties which are part of the furniture of the world (as he is a realist), there is a causal account regarding the occurrence of moral properties and the way in which they supervene on non-moral properties which can be given. For more detail, see 3-2-1 & 3-2-3.

otherwise he cannot talk about the alteration of the metaphysical status of a morally relevant feature like giving pleasure.

The combination problem is this. As the particularist has to disregard the individuation of each morally relevant feature in order to give a holistic account of how several morally relevant features are combined together in different contexts, his metaphysical account of the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together sounds vague. In other words, according to the particularist, each case has to be considered on its own, regardless of similar cases. So, we have to focus on the case to arrive at the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together. At the same time, the holist is not allowed to talk about the individuation of each morally relevant feature and its contribution to the moral evaluation of the case. Consequently, the metaphysical account of the combination of features which we are offered is a vague one, according to which there is no account which can be given regarding the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together in different contexts.

### **3-2. The Holist's Problem with Moral Realism: Realism Requires Atomism**

Having seen the apparent dilemma which the particularist who subscribes to holism is confronted with, at this stage, I am going to give another argument in favour of the atomistic account, according to which the behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different cases is answerable to general patterns. In order to do that, firstly, it needs to be explained in what sense the particularist and his rival, the generalist are realist.

### 3-2-1.What Is It to Be a Moral Realist?

Moral particularists like Dancy, McNaughton and McDowell<sup>64</sup> are realists with regard to moral properties.<sup>65</sup> In other words, they subscribe to the idea that moral properties are part of the fabric of the world, although their account of the existence of moral properties in the world is not the same. According to their view, in a concrete ethical situation in which a moral subject is confronted with one or more than one morally relevant features, something reveals itself to the moral subject. It is not the case that the moral subject invents or projects moral properties such as: goodness, rightness... Rather, he is confronted with the moral properties which are out there in a sense independent of the subject. As these properties are not entirely subjective and are part of the fabric of the world, moral propositions regarding these properties can be, in principle, true or false. For instance, when the subject is confronted with a situation in which someone is lying, as the property of badness or wrongness is part of the fabric of the world, he can truly say that 'it is wrong to tell a lie'.

Furthermore, McNaughton following McDowell compares ethical properties to secondary qualities like colour in order to give an account of how moral properties can be regarded as part of the furniture of the world, and claims that moral properties are similar to secondary qualities and both of them are as real as primary qualities.

McNaughton says:

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<sup>64</sup> A version of moral particularism is presented by McDowell, although he does not use such terms as 'particularism' and 'particularist'. He deals with the epistemological aspect of moral reasoning rather than the metaphysical aspect of the issue.

<sup>65</sup> See McNaughton, D. (1988) *Moral Vision: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell), chap.3, 4 and 5 & (1991) 'The Importance of Being Human,' in Cockburn, D. (ed.) *Human Beings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 63-81. See also Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), chap. 9. See also McDowell, J. (1998) 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following', pp. 198-218 & 'Values and Secondary Qualities', pp. 131-150 in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press). See also Thornton, T. (2004) *McDowell* (Chesham: Acumen), chap.2. See also Kaebnick, G. (1999) 'Particularist Moral Reasoning And Consistency in Moral Judgments', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 33, pp. 43-56.

... secondary as well as primary qualities come out as real. We think of the leaves of a tree as retaining their colour whether or not someone is seeing it; a tree that falls on an uninhabited island makes a noise. Similarly, the moral realist has argued, value is presented to us as something out there waiting to be encountered; the moral quality of the action does not depend on anyone's recognition of it. If we come to realize that an action was wrong then we do not think of its wrongness as existing only in virtue of our response. On this account of what is real, the moral realist can accept the analogy between secondary qualities and moral properties but be a realist about both (1988, p. 96).

Thornton refers to this McDowellian point as:

McDowell's basic argumentative strategy is to claim that secondary or sensory qualities differ from primary qualities in a way that makes an analogy with value judgments appropriate because both depend on subjective responses. At the same time, however, secondary qualities are genuine features of the world and thus value judgments can also answer to parts of the real world...McDowell *does* want to locate the normative structure of moral requirements in a world "out there"...secondary qualities are thus supposed to serve as a model for a property that is part of the fabric of the world but that nevertheless has to be understood through its effect on subjects (2004, pp. 68 and 72).

According to McDowell and McNaughton, although moral properties cannot be regarded as a kind of primary quality, it does not follow from this that they are non-real. Rather, they are real in the same way as secondary qualities like colour. In other words, as when one talks about a red pencil and refers to its redness, its redness is out there, although not the same as primary qualities; when one is talking about moral properties, one also refers to something which is out there. So, the realist says that moral properties are out there and are part of the furniture of the world in a way independent of the moral subject.

On the other hand, Dancy criticises such claims for the similarities between secondary qualities and moral properties, while subscribing to the point that moral properties are part of the fabric of the world independent of the subject. He prefers to regard moral properties as dispositions. He says:

...we can admit that it is plausible to see value in the world as the disposition to elicit a merited response, and thus agree with McDowell here, while distinguishing colour from value in this respect and therefore offering a different explanation of the features he wanted the dispositional account to explain(1993, p. 163).



Thornton refers to this point as follows:

[Dancy] suggests that while the analogy with secondary qualities like colour is supposed to clarify how values can be both part of the world yet only understood in relation to the will, it does not succeed... Dancy concedes that it might be possible to construe values as dispositions. If so, they would be dispositions to extract an appropriate or merited response from a moral subject. But, he argues, it is not possible to construe colours in this way (2004, p.72).

According to Dancy, although values and moral properties are part of the furniture of the world, it does not follow from this that we can compare them with colour to give an account of how they are 'out there' in the world. Neither does it follow from this that regarding moral values as dispositions 'out there' which need to be encountered is implausible.<sup>66</sup>

So, as we have seen, according to particularists, moral realism can be conjoined with moral particularism, according to which the contribution of a morally relevant feature to moral evaluation can vary from case to case.

At present, I would argue as a modest-generalist that realism requires generalism. In fact, having considered the realistic view, according to which there is something which is part of the fabric of the world and which forces itself upon us in each concrete ethical situation, it does not follow from this that realism can be associated with the particularistic view. In other words, according to the modest-generalist who subscribes to moral realism, to be regarded as a moral realist in any

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<sup>66</sup> It is worth noting that Dancy has argued in favour of strong moral realism, according to which moral properties can be regarded as primary qualities. Consider the following quote by Kaebnick: 'Dancy's argument presupposes that we would go about discovering the features of moral properties in the same way that we discover the features of non-moral properties. The crux of the position is that moral values are part of the world as it is, independent of human responses. On this view, moral values are analogous to Locke's primary qualities: substance and shape, for example' (1999, p. 46). For more detail, see Dancy, J. (1986) 'Two Conceptions of Moral Realism. Part1', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. (60), pp. 167-188.

Note that the comparison between McDowell and McNaughton on the one hand and Dancy on the other hand is not my concern at this stage. In other words, I do not wish to judge whether McDowell and McNaughton's position is justified or Dancy's view. What is crucial for me is that all these three particularists subscribe to moral realism, to varying degrees, according to which there is something out there as moral properties which are in a way independent of the moral subject and are

sense leads one to the generalistic view, according to which we can account for the behaviour and contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different cases. In other words, as a modest-generalist, I would argue that realism requires atomism with regard to the behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different ethical situations.

Now, in order to elaborate the above points, let us borrow some notions from the philosophy of science. To this end we need very briefly look at the views of realists in the philosophy of science.

### 3-2-2. Powers, Dispositions, Closed Systems Versus Open Systems

According to realism in the philosophy of science, notions such as tendency, causal power, propensity, etc. play a significant role in the realm of science and the philosophy of science in order to provide an explanation of phenomenon. This set of notions, which I will henceforth refer to as power, has been talked about widely in the philosophy of science.

Powers and the related group of concepts are applied to all physical entities. According to realist philosophers of science, the world is full of powerful entities, or entities with tendencies, which regularly exercise their powers. These entities react to each other in different ways in several contexts, as a result of which we are confronted with various phenomena in the world. Harré and Madden have defined the idea of 'causal power' which refers to this fundamental and basic power of entities in the following way:

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part of the fabric of the world. Moreover, these moral values force themselves upon the moral subject in each concrete ethical situation.

The proper analysis of the ascription of a power to a thing or material (and, with some qualifications, also to a person) is this:

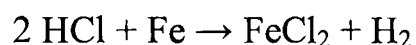
'X has power to A' means 'X will/can do A, in the appropriate conditions, *in virtue of its intrinsic nature*'. In ascribing power to people 'can' must be substituted for 'will' (1975, pp. 86-7).

Some philosophers have used other terms such as "disposition" for the same purpose.<sup>67</sup>

Note that in the above definition, the concept "intrinsic nature" refers to what is known in the philosophy of science as 'conjectural essence'. It is plausible to suppose that notions such as power and disposition presuppose the existence of a conjectural essence for the entities which we are talking about. When one refers to the power of an entity in a phenomenon, one refers to its contribution to the overall causal outcome of the case. We can say that the entity has a contributory power to contribute to the causal outcome of the phenomenon.

An example from the realm of science sheds further light on the issue at hand.

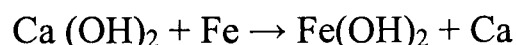
Consider this typical chemical reaction:



According to this reaction, acid dissolves the metal in the appropriate conditions, such as appropriate pressure, temperature, concentration, solvent solubility, PH and so on.

So, we can say that acid has a causal power or contributory power to dissolve metal, and its contribution to the overall causal outcome of the case will manifest in the

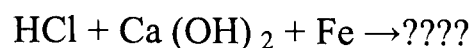
suitable condition. Again consider another chemical reaction:



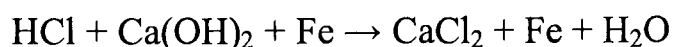

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<sup>67</sup> For more discussion on the notion of disposition see Wright, A. (1991) 'Dispositions, Anti-Realism and Empiricism', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 91, pp. 39-59. See also Mellor, D. (1978) 'In Defence of Dispositions', in Tuomela, R. (ed.) *Dispositions* (Dordrecht: Reidel), pp. 55-76. See also Popper, K. (1959) *The Logic Of Scientific Discovery* (London & New York: Routledge) & (1978) 'Universals and Dispositions' in Tuomela, R. (ed.) *Dispositions* (Dordrecht: Reidel), pp. 147-153.

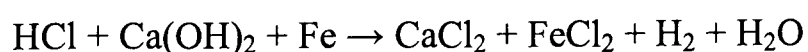
According to this reaction, the base can dissolve metal in the appropriate conditions too, and this means that the base has a contributory power to dissolve the metal, and its contribution to the overall causal outcome of the case will actualise in the appropriate condition. Now, consider the following chemical reaction in which, acid, base and metal react with each other simultaneously:



As we have seen, both acid and base have the contributory power to dissolve the metal and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case in the appropriate conditions. However, in some chemical reactions, we have more than one contributory power, which come into conflict with each other. In the above example, there are two contributory powers: the acid's contributory power to dissolve the metal, and the base's contributory power to dissolve the metal. But the acid and the base will react with each other, prevent each other from exerting the contributory power they have, and prevent each other from contributing to overall causal outcome in this way. The final result depends on other factors, such as the concentration of the reactants, temperature, pressure and so on. For instance, if the concentration of the acid and base are exactly the same, they neutralise each other, the acid and base's contribution to overall causal outcome will change, and the metal remains unchanged:

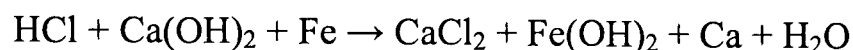


But if the concentration of the acid is more than the base, an equal amount of the acid neutralises the contributory power of the whole amount of the base, and then the rest of the acid will dissolve the metal:



Thus, the contributory power of the base to dissolve the metal is not actualised, though its conjectural essence exists. On the other hand, if the concentration of the

base is more than that of the acid, an equal amount of the base will neutralise the contributory power of the whole amount of the acid and the rest of the base will dissolve the metal:



Therefore, though the acid fails to dissolve the metal and contribute to overall causal outcome in this way, it does not follow from this that acid does not have a contributory power to do that at all. One can reiterate the reaction with different temperatures, in different solvents, in different PH, etc., and arrive at similar results.

There is a difference between a contributory power and its actualisation. In some concrete situations, these contributory powers can be actualised and in other cases they cannot. In other words, each contributory power, in principle, can be actualised and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case. But the crucial point which has to be considered is that each contributory power does not have to be actualised and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case. In fact, according to the realist, although there is a conjectural essence that has a contributory power which *can* be actualised and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case, it does not follow from this that it *has to* be actualised and contribute to overall causal outcome in each concrete situation. Rather, it can be manifested and contribute *only* within the suitable conditions and environment.

Having confirmed that there is a significant distinction between a contributory power and its actualisation, we should add that in a number of positions in which we deal with more than one contributory power, it is very difficult to demarcate between several contributory powers which are manifested concurrently and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case simultaneously. As they are exercised and combined together at the same time, we need a method to separate them.

So, in order to find out the different contributory powers of a material and their contribution to an overall causal outcome of the case or different contributory powers of different materials, one needs to make a distinction between “closed systems” and “open systems”. Open systems can be found in many parts of nature, where there are several contributory powers that come into conflict with each other and contribute to the overall causal outcome at the same time. Within an open system, as each contributory power has an influence on others, contributory powers can be manifested and contribute to overall causal outcome. This is a complicated situation, in which these powers are reacting with each other, and the precise contribution of each contributory power is not clear. However, given the metaphysical individuation of distinct powers, scientists construct closed systems in order to discover and find out the exact contribution of each contributory power on its own.

Therefore, closed systems have been designed by scientists to calculate the fluctuation and rise and fall of each contributory power and its exact contribution, by holding other factors constant and invariant. In other words, scientists try to neutralise the influence of the interfering and unwanted items and purify the environment in so far as they can in order to measure the effect of a contributory power and its contribution in question. Although it is theoretically possible to rule out the effect of other factors, it is not possible in practice, and therefore, closed systems are to some extent approximate. However, scientists apply these imperfect models to demarcate and distinguish different powers which exist in open systems.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The distinction between closed systems and open systems is discussed in the following reference: Bhaskar, R. (1978) *A Realist Theory of Science* (Sussex: The Harvester Press).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the distinction between closed system and open system is used to criticise the particularist view in moral reasoning in the following reference: Paya, A. ‘Open system-Closed system Distinction, and Ethical Particularism’, forthcoming. The author has applied such a distinction along with other theoretical tools which are taken from the philosophy of science to put forward an argument in favour of modest-generalism while criticising the particularistic view in moral reasoning. According to him, we can apply this scientific explanation to give a justified generalistic account of how a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different

Let us see what would be the case if we apply the particularistic key notion of holism in the realm of science. In other words, what would a moral particularist like Dancy say, if he is considered as a particularist in the territory of science? As we have seen, according to the moral particularist, in each ethical situation, morally relevant features are combined together holistically not atomistically. In other words, we cannot say that a wrong-making feature like breaking a promise has an invariant deontic valence and stable contribution to moral evaluation which can be individuated outside the context. Its contribution varies from case to case. One is not authorised to predict what will happen in similar cases in advance. In contrast, each case has to be examined on its own, both metaphysically and epistemologically speaking.

Consider the above chemical example. According to the realist, the acid has a contributory power to dissolve the metal and contribute to overall causal outcome. However, in some concrete situations, because of other factors such as the existence of the base in the environment, this contributory power might not be actualised and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case. But it does not follow from this that such a contributory power does not exist and cannot contribute to overall causal outcome at all. According to this contributory power analysis, we are entitled to say that the acid has a contributory power to dissolve the metal and contribute to overall causal outcome whether or not it is actualised in different contexts. However, the acid can keep its contributory power to dissolve the metal outside the different situations because of the power which is grounded in its conjectural essence, whether or not it is

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cases and the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different contexts. I should thank the author for giving me a copy of the article.

However, as I shall argue later on in this chapter and chapter 4, I agree with the analogy between science and morality as long as it tries to give an account of how a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different contexts. However, the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together cannot be explained by this scientific explanation, metaphysically speaking. There are some elements in science such as accurateness and quantitateness which cannot be seen in the realm of morality.

actualised. In the meantime, we know what would be the ultimate outcome in similar cases in advance. For instance, if the acid and the base and the metal are combined together in a concrete situation in which the concentration of the acid and the base are the same, the acid and the base will react together and the metal will remain unchanged. In addition, we can say in advance that in the similar situation, in which the concentration of the acid and the base are the same, they will react together and contribute to the overall causal outcome in this way, and the metal will remain unchanged. In other words, we are entitled to say that the contributory power of the acid will be actualised or will not be actualised in similar cases beforehand. If we are confronted with a situation in which merely the acid and the metal react together, the contributory power of the acid will be actualised and contribute to the solution of the metal. In all cases in which only the acid and the metal are combined together, the ultimate outcome will be the same and the contributory power of the acid will be actualised and contribute to the case. Similarly, if we are confronted with a situation in which the acid, the metal and the base are combined together and the concentration of the acid and the base are the same, the contributory power of the acid to dissolve the metal cannot be actualised and contribute to the case. In addition, in the cases in which the acid and the base and the metal react with each other, and the concentration of the acid and the base are the same, the ultimate outcome will be the same, and the contributory power of the acid to dissolve the metal will not be actualised and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case. Things contribute to the context atomistically, not holistically in the realm of science. They maintain their valence outside the concrete situation, and behave the same in similar situations.

On the other hand, according to the scientific particularistic account, according to which things contribute to the context holistically we are not entitled to say what



would take place in similar concrete situations in advance. Consider the above chemical case, in which only the acid and the metal are present and react together. According to the scientific particularist who subscribes to realism, the contributory power of the acid dissolves the metal and contributes to the causal outcome of the case. But it does not follow from this that it will have to contribute in similar contexts. However, according to the scientific particularist, the situations which can be taken into account as 'similar contexts' never happen. In other words, we cannot generalise the outcome of a concrete case to other cases in advance. Having considered the reaction between the acid and the metal and their contribution to the causal outcome in the manner of a scientific particularist, in other cases in which the acid and the metal are combined together we are not permitted to say anything with regard to their contribution to final result. We just have to wait and see what happens. Similarly, having taken into account the reaction between the acid and the base and the metal and their contribution to the causal outcome as above, in other cases in which the acid and the base and the metal are combined together, we are not allowed to say anything concerning the eventual result.

According to scientific particularism, one cannot predict what would happen in the next empirical experiment, which is similar to the previous one. The result is entirely context-dependent and depends on the way in which the components are combined together and contribute to overall causal outcome. However, this epistemological claim is based upon a metaphysical point, according to which the contribution of each entity to overall causal outcome is shapeless and cannot keep its valence outside the context. In other words, they contribute together holistically not atomistically.

This particularistic account of the contribution of each entity to overall causal outcome in the realm of science is counter-intuitive, especially for a realist. The realist, who subscribes to the existence of contributory powers in natural phenomena, will distinguish between the contributory power and its actualisation and contribution to overall causal outcome of the case. According to the realist, the contributory power exists, whether or not it can decide the overall causal outcome of the case. So, we can guarantee that the contributory power will be found in each concrete situation whether or not it can decide the overall causal outcome of the case. In this way, for the realist, realism is associated with generalism. Being a realist essentially leads to acknowledging at least a minimal generalism, for it requires an acknowledgement of the individuation of contributory powers that function in general law-like ways. According to the realist philosopher of science, one cannot reconcile realism and particularism.

### 3-2-3. The Analogy Between Science and Morality

Let us return now to morality. We can use the above model to explain the contributory powers of the relevant non-moral features of actions in the realm of morality. Here is the issue: consider a non-moral feature F. The whole point according to a particularist like Dancy and his modest-generalist opponents is whether we can give a justified account with regard to the contribution of F to the moral evaluation of a case. Is it the case that F contributes to other morally relevant features in an atomistic way and keeps *its* contribution outside the context? Or, by the opposite account, it is that F has no stable contribution to moral evaluation, but contributes to other morally relevant features in a holistic way.

According to the moral realist like Dancy and his modest-generalist opponent, in every concrete ethical situation, one has to demarcate and differentiate between

several contributory factors which are at work simultaneously. We can see how the moral realist analyses this situation. Suppose that someone observes that someone else is trying to burn a cat. According to the moral realist, "burning a cat" has a real non-moral feature, namely, causing pain, which is morally relevant and contributes to overall moral evaluation of the case. This property is morally relevant because it is a base for a thick moral property such as "malfeasant," which is in turn a wrong-making feature, and supervenes on causing pain. And then, there are thin moral properties such as "wrong" and "bad" that supervene on malfeasant. We can say that causing pain has a contributory power to contribute to the moral evaluation of the case, and makes the action wrong and bad, other things being equal.

The moral agent, who has a tendency and capacity for moral understanding, can grasp and conceptualise the relationship between the moral and relevant non-moral properties and express his cognition in terms of moral propositions. This comprehension, in its turn, may motivate the agent to react to what he sees by expressing his moral emotions and attitudes and trying to stop the other person from performing the wrong action. Therefore, we have several contributory powers here. First, there is a contributory power in the relevant non-moral feature to contribute to the overall moral evaluation of the case and make something right or wrong, and this contributory power is objective and real: it is independent of our knowledge and inclinations. Second, there is a contributory power in the agent to understand and grasp the first contributory power as "moral demand" or "moral power," or "moral fact." We may call this contributory power "moral sensibility," or "moral sense," or "moral consciousness," or "moral faculty". This latter notion of contributory power is not meant to be incompatible with the account of particularists like Dancy.

Third, moral knowledge or moral belief, in turn, has a tendency to evoke moral emotions and attitudes in the agent, and a tendency to force him to issue a moral judgment. Therefore, we can say that the agent has a contributory power to make moral judgment. He also has a tendency to act according to his judgment. We may call this the contributory power to be moral.

Therefore, in every concrete situation, the agent is dealing with several contributory powers, but the basic contributory power is the one that belongs to the relevant non-moral feature of the situation, and it is this contributory power that causes the others.

As we have seen, the relevant non-moral property F like causing pain, according to the moral realist, has a contributory power to contribute to moral evaluation and makes the action wrong and bad, other things being equal. On the other hand, we have to bear in mind that talking about the contributory power of an acid to dissolve the metal and its contribution to overall causal outcome of the case in the realm of science, is to give an account with regard to the essential contributory power of the acid which is manifested within the chemical reaction to dissolve the metal. It follows from this that the acid's contribution to overall causal outcome will be manifested within a similar chemical situation in which metal exists. So, we can say in advance that, in another chemical reaction in which the amounts of acid and metal are the same as those which we discussed earlier, the acid will dissolve the metal and contribute to the overall causal outcome of the case. In other words, in the realm of science, things contribute to overall causal outcome atomistically not holistically. They keep their own contributory power outside the context. It is not the case that the contributory power of an acid to dissolve the metal and contribute to overall causal outcome varies from case to case. Rather, the power is out there; *only*

its actualisation to contribute to overall causal outcome may vary from case to case. Moreover, if things contribute together atomistically in the realm of science, why are they not combined together atomistically in the realm of morality? Why has atomism to be taken into account only in the realm of science?<sup>69</sup>

Let us see how the analogy between “science” and “morality” goes. According to the moral realist, the contributory power of the relevant non-moral feature exercises its power on the agent, something which has an effect on the subject. As in the scientific case, we deal with the relationship between the contributory power of the morally relevant non-moral property and the moral subject which in no way can be ignored or ruled out.

Moreover, the analogy between “science” and “morality” has to be considered only in a narrow and precise way. As we have seen above, according to realist moral philosophers like Dancy and his modest-generalist opponent, in each concrete ethical situation, the contributory power of a relevant non-moral property is exerted on the moral agent. The whole issue regarding the analogy between “science” and “morality” is associated with this contribution, contributory power and its effect on the moral subject. I am not assuming any further similarities between “science” and other sorts of contributory powers which are at stake in each concrete ethical situation. Other characteristics of “science” such as: accuracy, calculating... have not been taken into account, and are irrelevant to the issue. The analogy deals only with the contributory power analysis in the realms of “science” and “morality” which seem very similar.

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<sup>69</sup> Note that, at this stage, I am saying that the way in which the acid’s contributory power dissolves the metal in different contexts can be articulated in a pattern. Similarly, the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases can be articulated in a pattern. However, the analogy cannot give us an account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in a case. In the chemical case, there is a precise model of combination. The acid interacts with the base. However, we cannot give such a precise account with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. I leave this issue of what account can be given of combination in the moral case as a problem to be explored in chapter 4.

Dancy, for instance, tries to show that the analogy between science and “morality” is misleading and confusing in the following way:

The second option is to attack the analogy... in the moral case the eventual overall property (rightness, say) is identical with the property which the strongest party *tends* to give the action. This seems not to be true in the physical case. There we can be more or less sure that the eventual behaviour of the object is not something that it has any tendency (of the sort we are talking about) to do. Take the example of a balloon thrust in a particular direction. It has a tendency to travel straight on, another to go directly downwards, another to rise (since it is lighter than air) and another to decelerate, traveling in its original direction. In fact it will not exactly do any of these things, but what it does do will be some function of these tendencies... in the ethical case there is only one polarity at issue, in the nature of things, whereas in the physical case there are very many. In ethics our action is being dragged by its various properties between the two extremes of right and wrong, whereas in physics there is up/down, slow/fast, left/right (not really, of course) and so on ... We could have predicted, from the multi-polarity of physical tendencies, that the eventual behaviour of the object will not be in exact accordance with any of the tendencies it has, while it is necessarily true that the action will either end up right or wrong (or neither – are some of its properties tendencies to make it indifferent?) (1993, pp. 101-102).

According to Dancy, science is computational and quantitative whereas morality is inaccurate and rigid. From his point of view, we are dealing with several possible options in science, which can be measured and calculated precisely by the aid of vector analysis, while in morality we are dealing with just two possible options: right and wrong. But, as we have seen in the above, the analogy between science and morality does not focus on such factors. The accurateness and computability of science is irrelevant to the issue. As far as the analogy is concerned, using a ‘contributory power’ analysis can explain several phenomena in the realm of science and morality. What is common to the realistic approach to science and morality is the idea of *the contribution to causal outcome* in the scientific case and the idea of *the contribution to moral evaluation* in the ethical case.

I am not going to apply the scientific model to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together. The scientific metaphysical account is based upon vector analysis, by which we can give a precise account of how

different vectors are combined together in different cases. However, this exact and accurate scientific method cannot be applied in the realm of morality. However, it does not follow from this that there is no similarity between science and morality. Rather, the moral realist who accepts that moral properties are part of the furniture of the world can endorse that the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases can be articulated in patterns. Similarly, the scientific realist who says that entities' dispositions are part of the furniture of the world can endorse the view that the way in which a disposition contributes to the causal outcome of the case in different cases can be articulated in patterns.

According to the modest-generalist, the contributory power of every morally relevant non-moral property is invariant and general. And if we suppose that our system is closed, that is, if we suppose that other things are equal, then the contribution in question will become actualised. However, in everyday life we are usually confronted with open systems, in which different contributory powers come into conflict, and since the weight of these contributions is not constant and may vary from context to context, the outcome is not generalisable across all contexts. However, it does not follow from this that those contributory powers are shapeless and variant. As is clear from consideration of the chemical case, the fact that the acid has a contributory power to dissolve the metal in a concrete situation does not lead to the fact that in each concrete situation, in which the acid is at hand, its power has to be actualised. Nor does it follow from this that the acid is powerless and has no capability of dissolving the metal.

### **3-3. Modest-Generalistic Metaphysics: More Clarification**

Having argued that realism requires atomism, I now wish to give an example to shed light on the modest-generalistic position, according to which the way in which a

morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is answerable to general patterns.

Now, subscribing to atomism instead of holism with regard to the contribution of a morally relevant feature to the moral evaluation of different cases can be elucidated in terms of the moral case of a bank manager who is confronted with a gang of robbers who take the staff of a bank hostage. They threaten to kill the staff unless the manager opens the safe. Now, what ought the manager to do in this situation from the moral point of view? On the one hand duty of 'saving a life' requires the manager to save the lives of his staff. On the other hand, the duty of 'fidelity' requires him to keep the customers' money safe and not give it away without their consent.

In order to arrive at a justified moral judgment, the manager tries to evaluate the weight and magnitude of each morally relevant feature in this context.

The crucial point here is that, according to the moral realist, 'promise keeping' and 'saving a life' have constant contributions to the moral evaluation of the case, metaphysically speaking. Whether or not promise keeping outweighs saving a life in such a situation, its contribution to the moral evaluation of the case is exercised in this case.<sup>70</sup> In this sense, the realist says that the morally relevant feature 'promise keeping' has an invariant contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases.

As we have seen, realist philosophers of science explain different phenomena, with which they are confronted, using contributory powers and dispositions of physical entities. Ross has tried to do the same for moral principles. According to him:

Tendency to be one's duty may be called a parti-resultant attribute, i.e. one which belongs to an act in virtue of some one component in its nature. *Being* one's duty is a toti-resultant attribute, one which belongs to an act in virtue of its whole nature and of nothing less than this. ... Another instance of the same distinction may be found in the operation of natural

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<sup>70</sup> I am dealing with the case from the second-order point of view. Whether or not the manager has to open the safe is irrelevant.



laws. *Qua* subject to the force of gravitation towards some other body, each body tends to move in a particular direction with a particular velocity; but its actual movement depends on *all* the forces to which it is subject. It is only by recognizing this distinction that we can preserve the absoluteness of the laws of nature, and only by recognizing a corresponding distinction that we can preserve the absoluteness of the general principles of morality (1930, 28-29).

In fact, what Ross regards as a parti-resultant attribute is contributory power which is exerted in a concrete ethical situation. However, as this attribute deals with only one constituent of the whole nature of the action regardless of other constituents of it, it can be regarded as the same as the outcome of a particular disposition which is manifested within the confines of a closed system. What he calls a toti-resultant attribute deals with the whole nature of the action and can be regarded the same as the outcome of different invariant contributions to moral evaluation which are manifested and come into conflict in an open system.

What Ross is trying to make clear, which can be better understood in the light of what has been discussed so far, is that each prima facie duty is a contributory power which has a constant contribution to moral evaluation which may not be manifested and actualised in a concrete ethical situation in which more than one prima facie duty is being exerted. However, the real and authentic power of each prima facie duty can be seen within the confines of the closed system in which other things hold constant. In this sense, these duties can be called parti-resultant duties.<sup>71</sup>

To summarise, if an act has a right-making contributory power, it will always keep this property and will always exercise its contribution in the same way, should the appropriate conditions become available, even though its contribution to the case may not always be manifested. It is the task of closed systems to make manifest such

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<sup>71</sup> Again, in my view, the similarity between natural laws and Rossian ethics only has to be considered with regard to prima facie duties and the way in which they contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. As far as actual duties are concerned, Ross is confronted with a problem in such a way that this analogy does not work. I will discuss this point in detail in chapter 4.

contributions. In these systems, there is only one relevant feature in operation, and therefore, it is this feature or property which contributes to the overall moral evaluation of the case. In real cases, these contributory powers are combined together in different ways.

So, metaphysically speaking, we have some general patterns with regard to the way in which contributory powers contribute to the moral evaluation of different ethical situations, though not all of them have to be manifested and actualised in each case. It follows from this that the Rossian has to be regarded as a *realist* with regard to the existence of general patterns (unlike Dancy and McNaughton). The way in which right-making and wrong-making contributory powers contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases is answerable to these patterns.

In the next chapter, I deal with the issue of what account can be given about the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. To this end, I shall discuss the combination problem in Rossian ethics, according to which the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together can be explained by scientific vector analysis.

To put the issue in a different way, the combination problem is not limited to the particularist who endorses holism. Rather, any modest-generalistic account should tackle the combination problem, according to which the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together is vague. Any account of generality has to have an answer to this problem.

## The Combination Problem

We may not be able to spell out any but the most trivial definition, then, but this doesn't keep us from being able to catch on... to the shape and point of a concept... Once we do catch on, we can come to *see* that a situation is kind, or cruel— not because we have some spooky faculty of moral intuition, but because what it is to have mastery of a concept... is to possess the ability to see directly rather than infer its instances in the world.<sup>72</sup>

Margaret Little

Introduction. We have seen in the previous chapter that there is a problem facing the particularist that has the appearance of a dilemma, according to which the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to moral evaluation either leads to atomism or a vague and unclear metaphysical account. This latter point is an instance of the more general combination problem. In the light of the apparent dilemma, this chapter deals with a problem which any generalistic account should tackle. I address the issue of what account can be given of the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. In order to give an account of how morally relevant features are combined together, firstly, I discuss the combination problem in Rossian ethics according to which there is no account available of how different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. A scientific analogy is utilised to make Rossian metaphysics clearer. I show that the analogy is unjustified, as far as actual duties are concerned. Secondly, I use an account drawn from Wittgenstein to resolve the combination problem. Then, I use the account drawn from Wittgenstein to illuminate the concept of 'prima facie duty'. Finally, I show that Dancy's account also suffers from the combination problem. The account drawn from Wittgenstein can be given to adjust Dancy's metaphysical account.

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<sup>72</sup> Little, M. (2001) 'On Knowing 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory' *Hastings Center Report*, 31(4), p. 35.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the broad metaphysics of Rossian ethics has a more tenable account of the metaphysics of reasons in so far as it endorses the core metaphysics of modest-generalism. According to the core and constitutive modest-generalistic theme, the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases is answerable to general patterns of word use. In contrast, the particularistic view cannot give us an account of how a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases.

Now, having rejected the holistic view with regard to the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases, any generalistic account, including modest-generalism, should tackle the combination problem and give an account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. In order to tackle the combination problem, firstly, I am going to draw out the combination problem in Rossian ethics as an example of the pluralistic and modest-generalistic account, according to which the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together is vague and unclear.

#### **4-1. Spelling Out the Combination Problem in Rossian Ethics**

I wish to explore Rossian metaphysics in more detail and argue that the Rossian account with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together and make actual duties suffers from the combination problem. In order to do so, we need to look at different Rossian metaphysical and epistemological claims in more detail.

According to Ross, we have several prima facie duties; i.e. we are required to pick out different forms of behaviour that respond to different morally relevant non-

moral properties which are general, underived and have invariant deontic valences.<sup>73</sup> In cases in which we deal with only one morally relevant feature, that feature determines the ultimate metaphysical status of the case. In cases in which more than one prima facie duty are combined together and come into conflict, each morally relevant non-moral property exercises its deontic valence and contributes to the moral evaluation of the case. The ultimate outcome depends on the way in which these morally relevant features are combined together. In order to find out and pick out the ultimate outcome of the combination of these prima facie duties which makes our actual duty and arrive at justified moral judgments, we have to use our moral intuition.

We can distinguish five different claims in the Rossian ethical system: four metaphysical claims and an epistemological one. According to the first metaphysical claim, there are several prima facie duties which are general. In other words, these are duties to respond to morally relevant features that contribute to the moral evaluation of concrete ethical situations in a regular way, i.e. they make the same contribution to each situation. The second metaphysical claim is that the list of prima facie duties is open-ended which means that, in principle, the list can be bigger or smaller. The third claim is that these prima facie duties are underived and fundamental in the sense that they cannot be reduced to more basic duties. According to the fourth metaphysical claim, there is no such thing as a lexical order and hierarchy for these prima facie duties. They can combine together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in different ways to the extent that we cannot determine what would constitute the ultimate outcome (actual duty) in advance. In other words, as there is no lexical order between prima facie duties, actual duties cannot be subsumed under a general

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<sup>73</sup> As I mentioned in chapter 2 fn. 47, the way in which I utilise the idea of 'prima facie duty' and 'actual duty' deals with the point that prima facie duties have an invariant contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases while the metaphysical status of actual duties entirely depends on the way in which several prima facie duties are combined together in different contexts.

rule. Actual duties in different concrete situations are formulated in different ways. It does not follow from this, however, that actual duties in similar contexts would be formulated in different ways. Rather, there are patterns and rules for actual duties that can be applied in similar ethical situations. So, on the one hand, actual duties are not rule-governed in the sense that we cannot *calculate* how different morally relevant features are combined together and shape actual duties in *different* contexts; on the other hand, they are rule-governed in the sense that we can say that there is a pattern for the ultimate outcome (actual duty) in *similar* cases in advance. In other words, actual duties are not rule-governed in the sense that the way in which we arrive at them in other cases cannot be subsumed under a determined rule. At the same time, they are rule-governed in the sense that the way in which different prima facie duties are combined together and make actual duties in similar cases can fit into rules.

According to the epistemological claim, in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment or an actual duty in a concrete ethical situation, we have to use a faculty of intuition. By intuition, Ross refers to a source of knowledge which is perceptual and non-inferential. In other words, as there is no lexical order between prima facie duties, we cannot arrive at justified moral judgments through rules governing prima facie duties and their combinations (as in 'Kantianism and Utilitarianism').<sup>74</sup> Ross does not believe that we can arrive at moral judgments by the mediation of a moral rule. There is no such thing as a theoretical procedure in this relation. Rather, according to Ross, we arrive at moral judgments perceptually and non-inferentially. We pick up the ultimate outcome of the combination of morally relevant features directly by looking at the case in more detail in order to arrive at a

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<sup>74</sup> According to Kantian ethics, we arrive at justified moral judgment by utilising the Categorical Imperative. We cannot arrive at tenable moral judgments perceptually. By perception, I mean something which is grasped directly and non-theoretically. Likewise, according to Utilitarian ethics, we arrive at justified moral judgments through the principle of utility. We cannot do so non-theoretically.

moral judgment. Ross claims that there is no such thing as a set of moral rules which can guide us to arrive at moral judgment. Direct experience is the point of departure.

According to Dancy:

For him [Ross], respectable agents are ones who are sensitive to the morally relevant features of the situations they find themselves in, not in a general way but just case by case. There is a stress on perception here; moral agents see as relevant the features that are relevant, and see as most relevant the ones that in fact are most relevant. They do not *work out* that these features matter by bringing a packet of moral principles to bear on the situation. They see them as relevant in their own right, without help from the list of moral principles which they admittedly know. (1991a, p.225-226)

Having sketched the Rossian ethical framework and its several metaphysical and epistemological claims, I wish to suggest that the Rossian metaphysical account with regard to actual duties and the way in which different *prima facie* duties are combined together and contribute to moral evaluation in moral conflict cases is vague and unclear. Ross talks only about the epistemological aspect of actual duties and the way in which they guide us to arrive at justified moral judgments, and gives no metaphysics of combination.

For Ross, the idea of *prima facie* duty is used to reject the absolutistic account of moral duties normally associated with Kant. Consider the following quotes from Ross:

One is the view of Kant, that there are certain duties of perfect obligation, such as those of fulfilling promises, of paying debts, of telling the truth, which admit of no exception whatever in favour of duties of imperfect obligation, such as that of relieving distress (1930, p.18).

And:

It is necessary to say something by way of clearing up the relation between *prima facie* duties and the actual or absolute duty to do one particular act in particular circumstances. If, as almost all moralists except Kant are agreed, and as most plain men think, it is sometimes right to tell a lie or to break a promise, it must be maintained that there is a difference between *prima facie* duty and actual or absolute duty (Ibid, p. 28).

According to Ross, Kant holds that there are perfect obligations which can never be defeated, unlike imperfect obligations. Morally speaking, one has to subscribe and act

in accordance with these obligations which are derived from the Categorical Imperative in each concrete ethical situation. According to Ross, this account of moral reasoning and the distinction between perfect obligation and imperfect obligation is implausible and doubtful. Ross considers common sense and everyday moral practice as a valuable source of moral knowledge. He thinks that common sense requires of us to ignore and disregard what these perfect obligations require of us in some concrete ethical situations.<sup>75</sup>

According to Ross, Utilitarianism also has significant problems, as a result of conflicting with common sense and everyday moral practice. He says:

When a plain man fulfils a promise because he thinks he ought to do so, it seems clear that he does so with no thought of its total consequences, still less with any opinion that these are likely to be the best possible. He thinks in fact much more of the past than of the future. What makes him think it right to act in a certain way is the fact that he has promised to do so—that and, usually, nothing more. That his act will produce the best possible consequences is not his reason for calling it right (1930, p.17).

Utilitarianism subscribes to monism, the idea that there is only one morally relevant feature which has to be considered. That feature is pleasure. Other features are morally irrelevant and have to be ignored, but Ross thinks that there are other morally relevant features which have to be considered in order to arrive at a plausible moral judgment, according to everyday moral practice. According to Ross, when a plain man is planning to fulfil his promise, the consequence of the action is not his main concern. In other words, as Ross regards common sense as an important source of moral knowledge, he tries to show that common sense requires us to take into account features apart from pleasure in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment.

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<sup>75</sup>I do not wish to suggest that a Kantian adherent cannot give an account to tackle such critics. The Kantian ethical system and its plausibility or implausibility is not the issue at hand. As far as I am concerned, Ross has some problems with the Categorical Imperative and tries to reject absoluteness and keep generality in the realm of morality by putting forward the idea of 'prima facie duty'. For more elaboration on the way in which the Kantian can hold that telling a lie is justified in certain ethical situations, see Brannmark, J. (1999) 'Rules and Exceptions', *Theoria*, 65, 127-143, 127-129. See also



In order to reject Kantian absolutism while retaining generalism in the realm of morality, Ross puts forward the idea of *prima facie* duty, according to which moral duties are general, but not absolute as the Kantian conceives perfect obligations. In addition, Ross appeals to the pluralistic notion of *prima facie* duties and the distinction between these and actual duties to rescue the generalistic account and reconcile it with pluralism. He points out that *prima facie* duties are general and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way, while actual duties contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in different ways. According to Ross, we are entitled to say that fidelity, for instance, is a right-making feature and has an invariant deontic valence and contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way. But we cannot determine what would be the ultimate outcome of the case in which fidelity is combined with another *prima facie* duty, say gratitude, because the final upshot strongly depends on how these morally relevant features contribute to the moral evaluation of the case. As there is no lexical order to these morally relevant features, we have to wait and see how they are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of the case by the aid of our intuition in order to arrive at a moral judgment. In other words, we can pick out the ultimate outcome of the combination of several morally relevant features when we look at the case rigorously and in more detail. This is how Ross expresses the point:

When I am in a situation, as perhaps I always am, in which more than one of these *prima facie* duties is incumbent on me, what I have to do is to study the situation as fully as I can until I form the considered opinion (it is never more) that in the circumstances one of them is more incumbent than any other; then I am bound to think that to do this *prima facie* duty is my duty *sans phrase* in the situation (1930, p. 19).

According to Ross, in order to arrive at a moral judgment in a concrete ethical situation, one has to evaluate all the morally relevant features and think about the whole case and its characteristics in so far as he can.

#### 4-1-1. A Scientific Analogy: The Distinction Between Mass & Weight

At this stage, I wish to utilise a scientific analogy to make the Rossian metaphysical account clearer.<sup>76</sup> Consider different cases in which two morally relevant features fidelity and gratitude come into conflict. In one case, fidelity can be overridden by gratitude; while in another case gratitude can be overridden by fidelity. Whether or not fidelity can be overridden by gratitude depends on all the characteristics of the case and the way in which these morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of the case. In Ross's view, morally relevant non-moral properties are not contextual: their deontic valence is constant, but their effect and power may vary from case to case. In chapter 2, I called the former *moral value*, and the latter *moral weight*. Let me re-introduce the analogy which I used in the second chapter to make this Rossian point clearer.

Consider the analogy with the distinction between mass and weight in physics. The mass of a metal ball is an inherent property in the sense that it is entirely dependent on the internal structure of the ball. The same, however, is not true of the weight of the ball. It depends on the amount of the gravitational pull, and varies from context to context; whereas, in all cases, the amount of mass is invariant. Similarly, a Rossian says that moral valence is invariant, but moral weight may vary from case to case. For instance, causing pain is invariably a wrong-making feature with an intrinsic deontic valence, but its weight may vary from context to context, because of the other

morally relevant non-moral properties which exert their constant deontic valences in the case at hand. So, according to Ross, although the value of causing pain remains unchanged, its overall weight may vary from context to context. On this metaphysical basis, Ross claims we use intuition to pick up the morally relevant feature which has the most weight to arrive at a justified moral judgment.

However, it seems that Ross does not provide any account with regard to the metaphysical status of 'actual duty' and the way in which these prima facie duties, i.e. several forms of behaviour that respond to several morally relevant features, are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. He speaks only of the epistemological status of actual duties. His metaphysical account with regard to actual duties and the way in which several prima facie duties come into conflict and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases is unclear and vague. The very idea of 'combination' has not been elaborated or spelt out by Ross. I shall call this issue the 'combination problem'. Even if the Rossian metaphysical account with regard to prima facie duties is tenable and defensible, in so far as it captures the atomistic approach with regard to the nature of their contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases, what is needed is a metaphysical account of how these prima facie duties are combined together.

#### 4-1-2. Cashing out the analogy: Vector Analysis

Let me elaborate the analogy with regard to the distinction between mass and weight at this stage. I suggest there is a combination problem in the Rossian ethical system, for it is not clear what is going on when a plurality of morally relevant features come into conflict and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. Ross focuses on

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<sup>76</sup> As we have seen in the third chapter, Ross thinks that the metaphysical aspect of his theory can be seen in the light of science. He tries to shed light on his distinction between prima facie duties and

the epistemological aspect of actual duties and leaves the metaphysical aspect vague and unclear. The analogy of mass and weight tries to fill the gap and put forward a metaphysical scenario of moral conflict cases in which a plurality of morally relevant features come into conflict. The distinction between mass and weight in the analogy attempts to show what is going on in the metaphysics of moral conflict cases. Mass is an invariant and context-independent feature, whereas weight is variant and context-dependent. We cannot say what would be the weight of the metal ball on the moon in advance because we cannot calculate the Moon's exact gravitational strength. We have to determine the Moon's gravitational strength in order to calculate the ball's weight. However, this is not the case with the metal ball's mass. We can see what would be the amount of the mass of the metal ball in the moon in advance, because mass is an essential characteristic of the metal ball which depends on the way in which its atoms are combined together. Mass does not vary from case to case.

What is now required is that we elucidate the analogy and give more detail to see to what extent it can be applied in the realm of morality. The analogy is based upon the scientific method of Vector Analysis. According to this method, when we are dealing with several vectors in a phenomenon which are posited in different and opposite directions in order to arrive at the magnitude and direction of the final vector, we have to resort to mathematical calculation and analyse these several vectors. We have to bear in mind that in this method, these vectors are operating in a single dimension of measurement. In other words, we put several vectors which are placed in different directions in one dimension in order to measure them, e.g. consider all values for physical forces acting on the ball. If the forces are different, they need to be converted into a common form in order to be measured. The crucial point which has

to be considered here is to what extent this way of analysing, according to which these several vectors can be located in one dimension to be measured, is compatible with what is going on in moral conflict cases in which a plurality of morally relevant features are combined together. *Prima facie*, it seems that there is no such thing as a single dimension which can be measured in the Rossian account. Ross subscribes to a list of morally relevant features which is underived and basic. Furthermore, there is no such thing as a lexical order to these features. If this is the case, how can we put them in a single line or dimension in order to measure their contribution in an overall vector analysis? We cannot give an account of how these morally relevant features can be reduced to a single dimension. Each of them can be measured on its own and has its own dimension. For instance, can fidelity be measured against gratitude without providing the utilitarian reduction? Given Ross's denial of the latter, it would seem we are not entitled to do that.

As we have seen in chapter 3, notions such as 'causal power', 'open system' and 'closed system' can be utilised to defend atomism and criticise holism with respect to moral reasons. According to the atomistic approach, the deontic valence of a morally relevant feature will be exerted and contribute to moral evaluation in different cases in advance, even if it does not determine the actual duty. So, atomism is associated with generalism, according to which the deontic valence of a morally relevant feature is manifested in different cases. As we have seen, it seems that the Rossian account with regard to *prima facie* duties can be regarded as a kind of atomistic approach to moral reasons. Ross subscribes to a generalistic view, according to which each morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases in the same way.

But what about actual duties? Can we provide the same account with regard to their metaphysical status and the way in which different prima facie duties contribute to moral evaluation? Can we apply the same sort of analysis to give an account of how different morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to moral evaluation in different ethical situations? In particular, can we apply vector analysis to give an account of how the combination problem can be resolved?

On the face of it, it seems that notions like 'causal power' cannot give us an account of how morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. Ross only talks about prima facie duties in a general sense. He claims these morally relevant features can contribute to the moral evaluation of *different* cases in the same way but gives no model of how they combine. According to Ross, all we can say with regard to actual duties and the way in which prima facie duties are combined together is that they contribute to the moral evaluation of *similar* cases in the same way. As there is no such thing as a lexical order for prima facie duties, we cannot determine what would constitute the actual duties in different concrete ethical situations. If this is the case, we cannot use theoretical tools like 'causal power' to give an account of how several prima facie duties are combined together and contribute to moral evaluation in different concrete situations. Notions like 'causal power' suggest we can give an account of how a thing contributes to the causal outcome of different cases constantly and in the same way. But this is exactly what Ross rejects with regard to actual duties and the way in which several morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of cases in different contexts. According to Ross, the way in which morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of

different contexts can vary, while they are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of similar contexts in the same way. In contrast, prima facie duties contribute to the moral evaluation of both similar and different contexts in the same way.

Let us examine the vector analysis model in more detail. On the face of it, it might seem that there are similarities between the vector analysis model which is based upon mathematical computation and the Rossian account in which different morally relevant features come into conflict and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. Each morally relevant feature can be regarded as a vector which comes into conflict with other vectors. They are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of cases in such a way that we cannot see what would constitute the ultimate outcome in advance. However, the crucial point which needs to be discussed is to what extent this model can give an account according to which the combination problem can be resolved. Figuratively speaking, we can say that conflicting morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases in such a way that one of them overshadows the other. But we need an account to cash out this metaphor. When we say that one morally relevant feature overshadows the other, what is the metaphysics behind this metaphor? To what extent can this metaphorical account be used to answer the combination problem? Strictly speaking, phrases like 'overshadow' and 'override' are metaphors which need to be elaborated.

As we have seen in chapter 3, Ross has used the analogy between natural laws and ethical laws in *The Right And The Good* to point out the distinction between prima facie duties and actual duties from a different perspective. He says:

Another instance of the same distinction may be found in the operation of natural laws. *Qua* subject to the force of gravitation towards some other body, each body tends to move in a

particular direction with a particular velocity; but its actual movement depends on *all* the forces to which it is subject. It is only by recognizing this distinction that we can preserve the absoluteness of the laws of nature, and only by recognizing this distinction that we can preserve the absoluteness of the general principles of morality (1930, pp.28-29).

According to Ross, we can compare moral laws with scientific laws. As we can use vector analysis in the realm of science to arrive at a comprehensive model of the movement of a particle or a body, we can use this theoretical tool to see how things are going on in a moral conflict case, and the way in which morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases.

On the face of it, it sounds an intuitive account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in a concrete ethical situation. However, in order to arrive at a plausible model, this account needs to be scrutinized. This metaphor has to be cashed out in a more philosophical way. The combination problem, which deals with the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to moral evaluation, cannot be left as a metaphor. It has to be explained.

#### **4-2. The Wittgensteinian Solution to the Combination Problem: The Concept**

##### **'Game', Lexical Order and Open-endedness**

As we have seen, the Rossian metaphysical account of what is going on in a moral conflict case is vague and unclear. There is no metaphysical account of how prima facie duties are combined together in different ethical contexts. All he says is that we ought to look at the case in more detail to arrive at a justified moral judgment. He emphasises the epistemological aspect of the combination of prima facie duties rather than its metaphysical aspect. In fact, as the Rossian metaphysical account regarding the very idea of actual duty is vague, his epistemological account about actual duty is unclear.



An account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts can be given in order to explain how several morally relevant features are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. On the basis of this metaphysical account, the vagueness and imprecision of the epistemological account will be removed.

The Rossian ethical framework consists of four metaphysical claims and an epistemological one. According to the first metaphysical claim, there are several *prima facie* duties which are general. According to the second, the list of *prima facie* duties is an open-ended list. The third claim is that these *prima facie* duties are underived and basic. According to the fourth metaphysical claim, there is no such thing as a lexical order and hierarchy for these *prima facie* duties which come into conflict and they can combine together and contribute to moral evaluation in different ways. According to the epistemological claim, in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment we have to use our moral intuition.

Now, in order to assess the fourth metaphysical claim and the epistemological claim, let us look at the concept 'game' and the way in which we grasp this concept. Suppose that we want to articulate and define the concept 'game'. As we have seen previously, on the face of it, it seems that in order to do so, we state the common properties of different kinds of games. On the basis of the obtained common properties, we would say that:

If  $x$  meets the condition  $g_1, g_2, g_3 \dots g_n$ ,  $x$  is a 'game'.

This view presupposes that there is something in common which needs to be captured and categorised to arrive at the definition of the concept 'game'. In other words, the general rule acts as the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. However, Wittgenstein rejects the existence of such a set of common

properties among different kinds of games, something which can be articulated in a proposition as an essence of the concept 'game'. In rejecting that, Wittgenstein attempts to show that we can define the concept 'game' just through learning examples and the ongoing practice of seeing the similarities and dissimilarities. He states:

What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it?...Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game; shewing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these (1953, §75).

According to Wittgenstein, it is not true to say that I know what a game is and can fully express or define it before being engaged in practice. Rather, what we see within practice is all we have with regard to the concept 'game'. It is not the case that within practice a pre-existing notion of game becomes clearer. Rather, the more we are engaged in practice, the more we see what a game is. Grasping the concept 'game' is an open-ended process. Moreover, it does not follow from this that any phenomenon can be regarded as an example of a game. In contrast, there is a normative constraint which lies in the way in which we see things as similar.<sup>77</sup>

Now, let us consider the concept 'game' and its constituents from another point of view. As we have seen in the previous chapters, although the list of game-making features is open-ended, the reason-giving behaviour of different game-making features is patternable. What I wish to say, at this stage, is that there is no such thing as a lexical order for several game-making features which make different games. However, it does not follow from this that the reason-giving behaviour of a game-making feature cannot be articulated in a pattern.

Consider the relationship between the concept 'game' and the features that make something a game. Think about features such as: role of team; use of equipment

such as: ball, racket, net, goal, bat, helmet, basket...; winning or losing. Consider a possible hierarchy of different game-making features in this way: having teams is more important than using a ball, using a ball is more important than winning or losing, and so on. According to such a lexical order, the question of whether a phenomenon has a team is crucial and sufficient for it to be regarded as a game. In contrast, the question of whether a phenomenon uses a ball is not as important as having a team to be regarded as a game because having a team is more important than using a ball. Likewise, whether or not a phenomenon deals with winning and losing is not as important as having a team and using a ball, and so on. Such a lexical order is counter-intuitive. It is not the case that a game-making feature like having a team overrides another game-making feature like winning or losing in different games. Rather, there are different game-making features which are combined together in different ways and make several games without any hierarchy. There is no general lexical order in the several game-making features of different games. Different combinations of game-making features give us different games. For instance, the combination of 'using a racket, net and ball' and 'losing or winning' gives us badminton and tennis. The combination of 'having a team', 'using a ball, goal and goal post' and 'losing or winning' gives us football. The combination of 'having a team', 'using a ball and bat' and 'losing or winning' gives us cricket, etc. These game-making features are combined together in different ways. There is no lexical order in these features. It is not the case that 'having a team' is more important than 'using a ball'.

However, if this is the case and the way in which these game-making features are combined together cannot be regarded as a hierarchical way, how do they combine

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<sup>77</sup> This point is discussed in chapter 2.

together? Could it be the case that there is an account which can be given with regard to their combination? Or, are they combined together in a mysterious and inexplicable way as in the Rossian account of actual duties? As we have seen in the above, the Rossian metaphysical account suffers from the combination problem. The question is whether we can add any detail to provide a solution to the combination problem.

To answer this question, we have to use the notion of ‘seeing the similarities’ and seeing things as similar. This concept has to play a metaphysical role. There is no such thing as a lexical order for different game-making features of several games, but it does not follow from this that these features are combined together vaguely to the extent that nothing can be said with regard to their combination. Rather, we *see* the way in which different game-making features are combined together to the extent that we are engaged in practice. The more we are engaged in practice, the more we *see* how these game-making features are combined together. In other words, *looking away* at similar cases is an essential ingredient to understanding. There is nothing beyond seeing the similarities. For instance, we see that the combination of ‘using a ball, net and racket’ and ‘winning or losing’ gives us badminton because it is similar to tennis. Moreover, we see that the combination of ‘using a ball, net, racket and table’ and ‘winning or losing’ gives us ping-pong, for this is also similar. We also see that the combination of ‘having a team’, ‘using a ball and basket’ and ‘losing or winning’ gives us basketball.

Now, what can we say with regard to the way in which these game-making features are combined together? Is there an account which can be given here? As we have seen, there is no such thing as a lexical order to these features. All we can do to see how these game-making features are combined together in badminton is to see how different game-making features are combined together in similar games such as:

squash, snooker, cricket, volleyball, etc. There is no other way to see how these features are combined together in badminton. So, instead of just looking at badminton over time, we have to look away at similar and dissimilar cases to arrive at the classification. The more we are engaged in the practice of seeing different game-making features in similar games, the more we see what can be said with regard to the way in which these features are combined together in badminton. Seeing the similarities is the main issue. The account which can be given with regard to the way in which several game-making features are combined together and form badminton, is this: look at similar games to see how they are combined together. There is no such thing as a determined general pattern according to which several game-making features are combined together and form several games. Rather, they are combined together in different ways which can be seen *only* within practice: this combination is like that one, that combination is like the other one.... There is nothing beyond these several combinations. Seeing similar combinations is primitive.

Let us return to the Rossian ethical account at this stage. We can compare the fourth Rossian metaphysical claim with what we have seen with regard to the concept 'game' and different game-making features of several games. According to Ross, there is no such thing as a lexical order to different prima facie duties. They are combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of moral cases in different ways. As everyday moral practice is a valuable source of moral knowledge for Ross, he thinks that the denial of the existence of such a lexical order for prima facie duties can better accommodate and systematise our different moral intuitions. But the problem with the Rossian metaphysical system, as have seen, is the combination problem. We are not offered an account of how these morally relevant features are

combined together and contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases. It seems that they are combined together in a mysterious and unclear way.

Now, on the basis of the account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of the concept 'game', it seems that we can give an account to resolve the combination problem. As we have seen, there is no such thing as a lexical order between different features of several games. However, there is an account which can be given with regard to the way in which several game-making features are combined together and form different games. We have to *see* this combination as similar to that combination. The more we are engaged in practice, the more we can see what different combinations are. In other words, the issue regarding which different game-making features are combined together in different games is clarified to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of using the word. Although there is no such thing as a lexical order for different game-making features which make different games, there is an account which can be given with regard to the combination of these features. Here is the account: the more we are engaged in practice, the more we can see how these different features are combined together. So, we have an indispensable role in seeing this combination as being like another combination and calling it a combination. Combinations need to be seen. *We* see this combination as being similar to that combination. In this sense, we have a role in the metaphysics of combination.

According to this Wittgensteinian account, there is neither a lexical order to these several game-making features which constitute different games, nor are these features combined together in a mysterious way. Rather, they are combined together in a way that can be seen to the extent that we are engaged in the ongoing practice of seeing similar combinations. *Prima facie* duties can be combined together and contribute to moral evaluation in the same way in which different game-making

features are combined together and formulate different games. There is an account with regard to the way in which different prima facie duties are combined together, the same as the account with regard to the way in which different game-making features are combined together and form different kinds of games. Seeing this combination as similar to that combination is the account with regard to the way in which several prima facie duties are combined together. The more we are engaged in practice, the more we see how morally relevant features are combined together. Looking away at similar combinations in different cases instead of looking at a combination in one case is the whole issue.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, being engaged in the practice of seeing this like that makes our behaviour intelligible. There is an account available of how we behave reasonably in different ethical contexts which is grounded in the way in which we are engaged in looking away at similar cases. Looking away at similar cases is associated with being answerable and responsive to general patterns. In this way, our behaviour in different contexts makes sense.

Moreover, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, Ross tries to give an account of common sensical moral practice and build up his ethical framework so that it is compatible with common sense. Similarly, the account drawn from Wittgenstein to resolve the combination problem is common sensical in the sense that the way in which we arrive at actual duties in different cases entirely depends on being engaged in seeing what is going on in every day moral practice. The more we are engaged in seeing the similarities in common sensical moral practice, the more we see how actual

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<sup>78</sup> I use the Wittgensteinian approach to give an account of how 'the combination problem' can be solved. In other words, the way in which I am engaged with Ross and Wittgenstein is metaphysical. To see another way of utilising Wittgenstein to analyse Ross, see Arrington, R. (2002) 'A Wittgensteinian Approach to Ethical Intuitionism' in Stratton-Lake, P. (ed.) *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-evaluations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 271-289. Arrington tries to analyse the Rossian notion of 'intuition' in the light of what Wittgenstein calls 'grammatical propositions'. He deals with the epistemological aspect of the Rossian story while I am dealing with the metaphysical one.

duties emerge. So, there is an analogy between Rossian ethics and the account drawn from Wittgenstein in taking common sensical moral practice seriously. In fact, reading Ross's idea of common sense in the light of the account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concept can give us an account to resolve the combination problem.

Now, let me give an example to clarify the Wittgensteinian solution to the combination problem.

Suppose that a manager of a company arranges an appointment which is crucial for the company, financially speaking. Moreover, he finds out that his mother has been hospitalised following a car accident, just half an hour prior to the time of the appointment. What does he have to do? Would he be justified in cancelling his appointment and go to his mother in the hospital, or should he fulfil his promise, leave his mother on her own and ask somebody else to see her? According to Ross, the manager has two different prima facie duties, fidelity and gratitude, which come into conflict in this case. On the one hand, fidelity, which rests on the previous action of the manager, requires him to fulfil his promise. On the other hand, gratitude, which rests on the previous actions of his mother, requires him to stay with her in such an important situation. If the manager asks the Rossian how he can arrive at a justified moral judgment in this situation, what would he say? As we have seen, there is no such thing as a lexical order for these prima facie duties. So, what can the manager do? According to Ross, he has to use his intuition to arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of these morally relevant features. If the manager asks the Rossian how to arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of the morally relevant features, he would say that he must look at the case in more detail and consider all things which are morally relevant. Later on, if the manager says that still he cannot see the



point, what should he do to grasp the more weighty morally relevant features? The Rossian would say: have a look at the case again, look again... that is all. He cannot say anything else. According to the Rossian account, actual duties and the way in which prima facie duties are combined together and contribute to moral evaluation cannot be seen in advance and are different in different contexts, unlike prima facie duties. So, the manager has to look at the case over time to arrive at a justified moral judgment. The manager is not, in effect, offered an account according to which he can arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of the morally relevant features. So, it seems that the Rossian epistemological story does not offer a clear account of how one can arrive at a justified moral judgment. In other words, as the Rossian account with regard to the combination of morally relevant features in moral conflict cases and their contribution to the moral evaluation of different cases is vague, the epistemological Rossian account which is based upon that is also obscure. The epistemological Rossian account is not answerable. One is not offered an account according to which one can arrive at a justified moral judgment. Thus, it seems that the Rossian metaphysical account with regard to how different morally relevant features are combined together in moral conflict cases has to be revised. There is an account regarding the combination problem which has to be given.

Consider the case of a man crossing the road who sees two boys that seem to be fighting with each other. Having seen this scene, he decides to go ahead and stop them fighting. When he tries to restrain them, they tell him they are just playing, not fighting! The man tells them that it looked as if they were fighting, because they were hitting each other. In response, the boys give him some more detail of what they were doing. They try to give him some examples of the games in which players hit each other: boxing, wrestling and American football. According to the boys, 'having fun' is

not an essential property of the concept 'game' which has to be picked up. And it is not the case that whenever the man sees a number of men hitting each other, they are necessarily fighting. Some more detail of the case is needed. In fact, the boys try to convince him that what they were doing is similar to what some players do when they play. They do their job by referring to similar cases and the way in which different game-making features are combined together in different games. In the game-making features, there is no such thing as a 'hierarchy' or lexical order. They do not appeal to common properties or lexical order in different game-making features to improve their argument, because there is no such thing as a property or properties common to different games. Instead, what is constitutive between several games which needs to be seen is similarities. Consider the following quote by Luntley:

The language learner has to come to understand that this and similar things are called 'games'. But what is it to understand this, for there is no general rule or theory that constitutes the similarity? ... Being able to see the similarity is a matter of knowing something...What this amounts to is the idea that the capacity for seeing the similarity is primitive. It is not reducible to a theoretical articulation...The key knowledge that one acquires in learning the concept 'game' is the knowledge that this and similar things are called 'games'(2003b, pp.328-329).

The capacity to see things as similar enables us to see that the behaviour of a game-making feature in different contexts is answerable to general patterns. It is not the case that we need to grasp a theory in order to see what the concept 'game' is. Rather, all we need is the capacity to see things as similar. In other words, there is a genuine uncertainty with regard to whether or not a new phenomenon is a game which can only be tackled within practice. Nothing can do this job better.<sup>79</sup> There is an account which can be given in defence of the point that the two boys were playing not fighting. The normative source of the story lies in the capacity to see different phenomena as similar. Introducing different types of games and the way in which several game-

making features are combined together may help to convince the man to see the new phenomenon as another game. In other words, being familiar with the way in which different game-making features, among which there is no such thing as ‘hierarchy’ or ‘finality’, are combined together and make different games would help the man to see the phenomenon the same as the two boys. There is an account which can be given to enable the man to see the point by introducing the idea of looking away at similar cases. The more he looks away at similar cases, the more he can see whether or not the new phenomenon is a game. Whether or not the man accepts that the new phenomenon can be regarded as a game is irrelevant at this stage. The crucial point here is that there is an account which can be given about the point why the new phenomenon is a game.

Similarly, in the case of the manager, he will arrive at the justified moral judgment to the extent that he is engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases. There is no theoretical account available which can be used in order to arrive at the justified moral judgment, neither can looking at the case over time provide the manager with a sound moral judgment. Rather, he has to look away at similar cases to see what has to be done in the case.<sup>80</sup>

### **4-3. Improving the Notion of Prima Facie Duty**

Having seen the way in which the combination problem for the concept ‘game’ can be removed, the same account can be given with regard to the way in which we become

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<sup>79</sup>See Luntley, M (2003) ‘Ethics in the face of uncertainty: judgment not rules’, *Business Ethics*, 12(4), pp. 325-333, for more on this.

<sup>80</sup> Note that I am dealing with the manager case here from the metaphysical point of view. As there is no account available with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in the case, the way in which we arrive at a justified moral judgment which is an epistemological issue is not clear either. The account drawn from Wittgenstein tries to give a metaphysical account of how the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary is answerable to general patterns. On the basis of this metaphysical account, the way in which we arrive at the moral judgment in the manager case can be justified.

competent with moral concepts and *prima facie* duties.<sup>81</sup> We can see that promise keeping is right only within a practice and through seeing the similarities and dissimilarities: that is a promise, that is a promise, that is not a promise... the more we are engaged in moral practice, the more we see what moral concepts and *prima facie* duties are. This is an open-ended process. For instance, if we are wondering whether or not the new situation with which we are dealing can be regarded as an example of gratitude, we have to look at other gratitude cases and compare it with them. Moral concepts and *prima facie* duties emerge to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar instances.

So, in the Rossian account, each *prima facie* duty emerges to the extent that we are engaged in moral practice. Perhaps, when Ross is talking about *sufficient mental maturity*<sup>82</sup> and its vital role in grasping a *prima facie* duty, his view can be developed by introducing the Wittgensteinian notion of 'seeing the similarities'.

Consider the following quote from Ross:

The general principles of duty are obviously not self-evident from the beginning of our lives. How do they come to be so? ... we see the *prima facie* rightness of an act which would be the fulfilment of a particular promise, and of another which would be the fulfilment of another promise, and when we have reached sufficient maturity to think in general terms, we apprehend *prima facie* rightness to belong to the nature of any fulfilment of promise. What comes first in time is the apprehension of the self-evident *prima facie* rightness of an individual act of a particular type. From this we come by reflection to apprehend the self-evident general principle of *prima facie* duty. (1930, pp.32-33).

And:

...when I reflect on my own attitude towards particular acts, I seem to find that it is not by deduction but by direct insight that I see them to be right, or wrong. I never seem to be in the position of not seeing directly the rightness of a particular act of kindness, for instance (1939, p.171).

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<sup>81</sup> In this context, by 'moral concept', I mean both thin moral properties like: good, bad, right, etc. and thick moral properties like fidelity, justice, gratitude, reparation, etc.

<sup>82</sup> See *The Right and The Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 29.

According to Ross, seeing a number of examples is a necessary condition to see the rightness of promise keeping. The more we see different promise keeping cases, the more we see what promise keeping is. What sounds puzzling in the Rossian account with regard to the way in which we arrive at moral concepts like promise keeping, is the very idea of 'the nature of promise keeping'. As we have seen in the second chapter, the idea of 'emerging moral pattern' rejects the existence of an essence of a morally relevant feature like 'promise keeping'. Rather, having the capacity to be engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar shapes our account of moral patterns. What the fulfilment of a promise is, for instance, becomes clearer and clearer to the extent that we are engaged in practice. It emerges via seeing similar cases and seeing things as similar. That is all. There is no such thing as a pre-existing essence which can be shown with the aid of practice. There is no such thing as the nature of promise keeping. All we have here is similar promise keeping cases.

Now, the crucial thing which has to be considered at this point is that we cannot keep both the idea of 'seeing things as similar' and the idea of 'essence'. If the Wittgensteinian account with regard to the metaphysics of moral patterns is convincing, we cannot reconcile the Wittgensteinian notions like 'practice', 'emerging pattern', 'family resemblance' and the essentialistic notions like 'pre-existing pattern' and 'the nature of a thing'.

It seems that Ross wants to have both of them. On the one hand, he is talking about the crucial role of seeing similar cases in the process of arriving at a general concept like 'fulfilment of promise'. On the other hand, he refers to the nature of promise keeping which can be achieved after grasping sufficient mental maturity. But the whole point in the Wittgensteinian account is that the procedure of grasping a moral concept is open-ended. It does not follow from this that there is no such thing

as a concept. What follows from this is that the more we are engaged in practice, the more we see what the concept is. If this is the case, we are not entitled to talk about the nature of a moral concept like 'promise keeping'. In other words, we cannot define a moral concept theoretically. There need be no such thing as a pre-existing and theoretical moral concept which can be achieved. Rather, we can grasp a moral concept to the extent that we are engaged in practice. Again, Ross's emphasis on common sense can be understood in the light of the account drawn from Wittgenstein in a way that moral concepts emerge to the extent that we are engaged in the practice in which moral concepts are applied in every day moral practice over time.

So, it seems that it would be better to read the Rossian metaphysical account with regard to prima facie duties in the light of the Wittgensteinian notions of practice and open-endedness. However, we have to bear in mind that it does not follow from this that there is no such thing as moral concepts. Being engaged in an open-ended practice does not lead to avoiding the whole idea of concepts.

As a result, the Rossian notion of prima facie duty can be better understood in the light of such Wittgensteinian illumination. In this Wittgensteinian account, seeing the similarities and looking away at different instances has a crucial role in the account of duties. We see this instance of promise keeping as similar to that one and so on.... So, we can give an account of how a prima facie duty emerges. To the extent that we are engaged in practice, the reason-giving behaviour of promise keeping is answerable to general patterns.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> As we have seen in the second chapter, according to some commentators, there is a distinction between a weaker account of prima facie duty and a stronger account of prima facie duty. Now, in my view, if we read the idea of prima facie duty in the light of Wittgensteinian notions of practice and open-endedness, the distinction will be redundant. Each prima facie duty emerges to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing the similarities. There is no such thing as pre-existing prima facie duty which contributes to moral evaluation. The way in which we arrive at a prima facie duty is open-ended and has no essence. Weakness and strongness only depend on the way in which the language-user is engaged in the practice of using moral vocabulary over time.

#### 4-4. Dancy and Looking Away

According to the second horn of the apparent dilemma, a normative particularist like Dancy is confronted with the combination problem. As we have seen earlier, the particularist accepts holism with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. According to the holistic view, the reason-giving behaviour of a non-moral feature can vary from case and is not answerable to general patterns. The way in which different morally relevant features are combined together is fully context-dependent. So, each case has to be decided on its own. We have to focus on each case and consider all things which are morally relevant to arrive at a justified moral judgment. Nothing else is needed. Consider the manager case again. According to the particularist, in order to arrive at the right thing to do, he should have a look at the case over time. That is all. There is nothing beyond the specific characteristics of the case which can guide the subject to arrive at the justified moral judgment. According to Dancy:

Particularism claims that generalism is the cause of many bad moral decisions, made in the ill-judged and unnecessary attempt to fit what we are to say here to what we have said on another occasion..... We also know the person who insists on a patently unjust decision here because of having made a similar decision in a different case. It is this sort of *looking away* that particularists see as the danger in generalism. Reasons function in new ways on new occasions, and if we don't recognize this fact and adapt our practice to it, we will make bad decisions. Generalism encourages a tendency not to look hard enough at the details of the case before one, quite apart from any over-simplistic tendency to rely on a few rules of dubious provenance (1993, p. 64).

He thinks that looking away at similar cases is the danger of generalism.<sup>84</sup> In fact, being engaged in the practice of seeing other cases amounts to the failure of the

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<sup>84</sup> Dancy has discussed elsewhere that in order to grasp moral concepts, we have to make room for a moral prototype or prototypes such as St. Francis. According to him, we can ... judge the worth of other lives in terms of their distance from this one, includes an ability to tell which features of the prototype are not really contributing much at all, and which are pretty central (1999b, p. 71). Now, if we have to look at the case before us and looking at other cases is a real danger of generalistic view, how can lessening the distance from the prototype which Dancy is talking about be possible without looking at other cases and lives?

subject to look at the case in more detail to arrive at the justified moral judgment. Now, if we ask Dancy to give us an account of how the subject can arrive at the ultimate outcome of the combination of morally relevant features in a case, he would say that the subject has to look at the case in more detail to see the right thing to do. That is the end of the matter. In fact, there is no account of how different morally relevant features are combined together which is given by the particularist. One cannot see how to arrive at a justified moral judgment in a concrete ethical situation.

In the light of our consideration of the combination problem with regard to the way in which different prima facie duties are combined together and make actual duties in the Rossian account, it seems that the particularistic account with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together suffers from the same problem. We are offered a vague and unclear account, according to which in order to see how different morally relevant features are combined together in a case, we have to look at the case over time.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast, according to the Wittgensteinian approach, there is an account which can be given with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together. As we have seen in the above, according to the Wittgensteinian account, in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment, one ought not only to 'look at the case' in more detail, but also to *look away* at similar cases.

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<sup>85</sup> Closely relevant to what we are discussing, Dancy points out that : ...our judgment here is enlightened by a comparison between the new case and others in our experience' (1993, p. 65). But the problem is that if we take seriously what he says here with regard to the significance of other cases, we have to disregard what he has mentioned elsewhere. If the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is not answerable to general patterns and we have to look at the case carefully to see the ultimate upshot of the combination of different morally relevant features, how can the comparison with other cases improve our moral judgment? As the way in which morally relevant features are combined together is fully context- dependent, even looking away at other cases might decrease the accuracy of our judgment.

The significant role of the idea of comparison in moral judgment is discussed in the following reference: Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (1999) 'On Denying A Significant Version Of The Constancy Assumption', *Theoria*, 65 (2-3), pp. 90-113, 108-111.



The more one is engaged in the practice of seeing similar things, the more he sees what the right thing to do is.

The crucial point is that there is an account with regard to the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together which can be given, unlike the Rossian account and the particularistic position. Looking at the case over time is insufficient. We also need to look at similar cases. Seeing the similarities and being engaged in the practice of seeing things as similar can give us an account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature contributes to the moral evaluation of different cases.

To summarise, the Rossian ethical account has two metaphysical problems. According to the first metaphysical problem, the way in which different prima facie duties are combined together and make actual duties is vague and unclear. We can regard this problem as 'the combination problem'. According to the second metaphysical problem, it seems that Ross want to keep both 'essence' and 'being engaged in the practice of seeing similar things' with regard to prima facie duties, which sounds inconsistent. In order to tackle the first problem, in the light of Wittgenstein, we can use the way in which we arrive at the concept 'game', according to which there is no such thing as a lexical order to several game-making features of different games. However, it does not follow from this that the reason-giving behaviour of a game-making feature is not answerable to general patterns. In order to answer the second problem, using the Wittgensteinian account of 'practice' and 'seeing the similarities', we can improve the Rossian account with regard to the idea of prima facie duty by ruling out the idea of 'essence'. On the basis of the offered metaphysical account, we can give an account of how we arrive at a justified moral judgment in a concrete situation.

Furthermore, it seems that the particularist who subscribes to holism owes us an account of how several morally relevant features are combined together in different cases. In other words, his metaphysical account also suffers from the combination problem. By using the Wittgensteinian account of 'seeing the similarities' and 'practice', we can give a justified account of how morally relevant features are combined together in different cases.

In the next chapter, I am going to examine the concept of practice from another point of view. As we have seen in this chapter, the Rossian metaphysical account of the way in which several prima facie duties are combined together and make actual duties suffers from the combination problem. Likewise, the particularistic view with regard to the way in which several non-moral features contribute to the moral evaluation of different cases suffers from the combination problem. If we stick to the concepts 'practice' and 'being engaged in practice' without going further into detail with regard to the constituents of the concept 'practice', there is a danger that the Wittgensteinian account will also encounter the combination problem.

Now, in order to give a justified account of how the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is answerable to emerging patterns, we have to clarify what we mean by the concept 'practice'. A positive aspect of the concept 'practice' has to be given.

## Practice Goes All The Way Down

...we are good reasoners, as opposed to merely consumers of good reasons, not because we are bound to abstract rules and laws, but because we are agents who bind ourselves to, and hold ourselves to finding, particular things worthy of our attention. ... The source of good reasoning is the active self-legislating subject binding herself to how things are in the world.<sup>86</sup>

Michael Luntley

Introduction. Having resolved the combination problem by the account drawn from Wittgenstein, in this chapter I deal with the concept of practice. This concept is key to the Wittgensteinian solution to the combination problem and without further scrutiny of the concept, that solution cannot be fully endorsed. To this end, firstly, it is shown that the account of the concept 'practice' deployed so far is a therapeutic one. According to this account, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be put into words. Similarly, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary cannot be theorised in Rossian ethics. This account can be seen as the negative aspect of the whole idea of normativity. Secondly, I argue that therapy alone is not adequate and leads to the recurrence of the combination problem. In order to block the combination problem, the positive aspect of the concept 'practice' has to be presented. Thirdly, I suggest that distinguishing between the first order and the second order account of the concept 'practice' might be a way of explaining the positive aspect. According to the first order account, the constituents of the concept 'practice' have to be given. The second order account sketches out the idea that practice goes all the way down. Our confrontation with things in the world is based upon doing rather than theorising at the very basic level. Overt activities ultimately depend on mental activities. Finally, an ethical example is presented to examine the suggested account of the positive aspect of the concept 'practice'.

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<sup>86</sup> Luntley, M. (2005) 'The Role of Judgment', *Philosophical Explorations*, Special Issue, Competence: Educational Philosophy of Minded Agency, eds. Branson & Luntley, 8(3), p. 292.

As we have seen in the fourth chapter, the Rossian metaphysical account of how different prima facie duties are combined together and make actual duties is vague and unclear. I called this issue the combination problem and tried to describe the metaphysical account of how several morally relevant features are combined together in different ethical contexts by drawing from Wittgenstein. According to this Wittgensteinian account, the activity of seeing the similarities and being engaged in practice has an indispensable role in the formation of moral patterns and actual duties. In other words, as the distinction between the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary is grounded in the way in which we are engaged with things in the world; the more we are engaged with moral circumstances, the more we see what moral patterns and actual duties are. In this account, the role of the subject and its practice is central to the metaphysics of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary.

Unlike the Platonic account of the way in which we arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, according to which patterns of word use are formulated independently of what we, language users, do with words; we have some role in the metaphysics of patterns. In fact, the subject, as a language-user who is engaged in the practice of using words over time, has a role in shaping the source of normativity. In other words, if one asks, in order to give a justified account with regard to the source of normativity, which comes first, the subject or the idea of practice?—the answer is that the subject who is engaged in the practice of using words is the point of departure. So, to the extent that we are engaged in seeing similar moral cases, we can give an account of how moral patterns and actual duties emerge during our everyday moral practice.

Having considered what we have already seen in the first, the second and the fourth chapters, we can say that there is an account drawn from Wittgenstein which can be presented to provide normativity and the normative standard of rightness and wrongness in moral reasoning. According to this view, although the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary cannot be put into words, it does not follow from this that the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant non-moral properties can vary from case to case. So, the notion of full-inexpressibility in language does not require the denial of the generalistic view, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of morally relevant features is answerable to general patterns. Being answerable to patterns can be compatible with the idea of open-endedness.

### **5-1. Practice As therapy: The Negative Aspect of the Whole Idea of Normativity**

The account of the concept 'practice' which has been discussed so far emphasises that not what we say, but what we do with words is crucial and central to an account of the metaphysics of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. This account can be regarded as an anti-theoretical approach, according to which the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be theorised and put into words. Theorising has to stop somewhere, otherwise we are confronted with an infinite regress situation which never comes to an end because each theoretical candidate for the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words has to be interpreted and interpretation never comes to an end. In other words, instead of what we say, it is what we do with words that provides normativity. This account of the concept of practice results from a negative thesis: the normativity of word use cannot be put into words. In the absence of the theoretical account of normativity, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be put into words.

This Wittgensteinian anti-theoretic approach, which is often read as a therapeutic account, amounts to a denial of the idea that there are theoretical endeavours in the realm of philosophy. This is a negative thesis about practice which emphasises that there is nothing over and above practice and what we do with words which provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. Normativity is grounded in what we do with words.<sup>87</sup>

According to the therapeutic account,<sup>88</sup> Wittgenstein tries to show that philosophy does not deal with making theories. Rather, philosophy is an activity which never comes to an end. Philosophy deals with what we do with words. Being engaged in philosophy does not lead to arriving at theories. There is nothing over and above activity and being engaged in practice. We have to do something instead of saying something to be involved in philosophical activity. In such a way, we can make our problems clearer. Wittgenstein says:

Our... investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language (§90).

Philosophy deals with an ongoing clearing-up of different parts of language. There is no such thing as a theoretical approach to resolving philosophical problems. Rather, to the extent that we are engaged in practice, we can cure ourselves of thinking that philosophical problems exist. In other words, an ongoing arrangement and re-arrangement of words helps us to remove incorrect usage of words from language.

Philosophy is about what we do with words. Wittgenstein states:

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<sup>87</sup> For more elaboration with regard to the therapeutic account, see the following references: Lovibond, S. (2002) *Ethical Formation* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press), chapters 1,2 and 3. See also McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind And World* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press), Lecture 5. See also Thornton, T. *John McDowell* (Chesham:Acumen), pp. 17-20 & chap. 1.

<sup>88</sup> I am concerned here with the application of this therapeutic account in the realm of morality. In other words, I am dealing with the issue of how the normative standard of rightness and wrongness in moral vocabulary is formulated in the light of Wittgenstein's therapeutic account.

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery (§119).

According to Wittgenstein, as philosophy deals with what we do with words in language over time, the ultimate outcome of what we do with words is not clear in advance. In other words, activity and being engaged in practice allows the idea of open-endedness in arriving at the idea of the correct use of words. When we say that there is nothing over and above what we do with words which makes the correct usage of a word, it follows from this that we cannot guarantee when such an investigation will come to an end. By contrast, when we say that the way in which we arrive at the correct usage of a word can be theorised and put into words, it follows from this that such a theoretical account does not allow the idea of open-endedness in the way in which we arrive at the correct usage. All we have to do to arrive at the correct usage is to apply the theory correctly.

According to the therapeutic account, there is no such thing as a general and pre-existing signpost and criterion according to which we can find the right way to use a word. Rather, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is formed through our practice. There is no such thing as a theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which is posited over and above practice. Being engaged in practice, on its own, guides us to how to go on. Let me give an example to make the point clearer.

Consider again the concept of game and the way in which we arrive at what a game is. As we have seen, the way in which we decide whether or not a new phenomenon can be regarded as a game cannot be articulated by resorting to a general pattern under which a new phenomenon can be subsumed. In other words, the way in which we arrive at the rightness and wrongness of the use of words in a concrete case

is open-ended in the sense that it entirely depends on the way in which several features are combined together. We cannot give an account of how several features are combined together in the new phenomenon in advance. So, according to the therapeutic account, Wittgenstein is an anti-theorist in the sense that he subscribes to the idea that there is no such thing as a theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words under which a new phenomenon can be subsumed. Rather, he believes that correct usage will be captured to the extent that we are engaged in practice. What we do with words guides us to go ahead in the right way.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein as an anti-theorist has focused on the very idea of 'seeing' to give an account of the metaphysics of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. In other words, although he does not subscribe to the existence of normative theories of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, it does not follow from this that he cannot give an account of how the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is distinguished in a philosophical endeavour. Rather, seeing the similarities provides the normativity which we are looking for. According to him:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words.— Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases* (§122).

According to the therapeutic Wittgensteinian account, the idea of 'clear view' and 'seeing connections' grounds in the way in which we arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. This attitude cannot be put into words. It can be reached only through practice. There is no other short-cut which can provide normativity. What we need in the first place, is the right attitude to things in the world rather than theories.



### 5-1-1. Rule-Following Argument: Once Again

Let us now look in more detail at the rule-following argument in *Philosophical Investigations*, which we have already seen in the second chapter, to make the therapeutic account clearer.<sup>89</sup>

According to the therapeutic account of Wittgenstein, the rule-following argument deals with the inability of a pupil to theorise and put into words the notion of following a rule like ‘add 2’. Each explanation and interpretation needs to be interpreted. The interpretation never comes to an end. So, there is no such thing as a theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of following a rule.

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<sup>89</sup> The rule-following argument has a great impact on the literature of moral particularism. For instance, McDowell thinks that the rule-following argument supports the particularistic approach to ethics, which is based on virtues rather than rules, while Lang argues that the rule-following argument has nothing to do with particularism. Neither is it in favour of the generalistic view, nor in support of the particularistic view. Rather, to borrow a Wittgensteinian phrase, as Lang points out, the rule-following argument leaves both sides of the debate as they are. Similarly, Crisp points out that as far as normative ethics is concerned, the rule-following argument makes no contribution. He says:

‘...Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations have no implications concerning which normative ethical theory we should accept, or whether an ideal moral agent will attempt always, never, or sometimes to follow rules’, Crisp, R. (2000) ‘Particularizing Particularism’ in Hooker, B. and Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 32.

Furthermore, note that I gave a realistic and metaphysical account of the rule-following argument in chapter 2, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different contexts is answerable to normative patterns of word use. Whether or not the rule-following argument can support epistemological particularism and/or normative or metaphysical particularism is not my concern at this stage. What I am doing is utilising the rule-following argument to make the distinction between the therapeutic account and its rival, the theoretical account, clearer.

For more elaboration on the rule-following argument and particularism, see O’Neill, O. (1996) *Towards Justice and Virtue: a Reconstructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 77-89. See also Blackburn, S. (1981) ‘Rule Following and Moral Realism’ in Holtzmann, S. & Leach, C. (eds.) *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 163-187. See also Dancy, J. (1993) *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 82-84. See also Lang, G. (2001) ‘The Rule-Following Considerations and Metaethics: Some False Moves’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 9 (2), pp. 190-209. See also Crisp, R. (2000) ‘Particularizing Particularism’ in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 24-32. See also Garfield, J. (2000) ‘Particularity and Principles: The Structure of Moral Knowledge’ in Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds.) *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 178- 204. See also McDowell, J. (1998) ‘Virtue and Reason’, pp. 50-73 & ‘Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following’, pp. 198-218 in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press).

There is no final theoretical account of how we arrive at the normativity which we are looking for. Consider the following quotes by Wittgenstein:

...Now we get the pupil to continue a series (say +2) beyond 1000— and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012.

We say to him: “ Look what you’ve done!”— He doesn’t understand. We say: “ You were meant to add *two*: look how you began the series!”— He answers: “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I was *meant* to do it.”— Or suppose he pointed to the series and said: “ But I went on in the same way.”—It would now be no use to say: “ But can’t you see....?”—and repeat the old examples and explanations (§185).

According to Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as a theoretical understanding according to which we follow the rule. However, it does not follow from this that the whole idea of normativity will evaporate when we talk about obeying a rule. Rather, the right way of following a rule comes out to the extent that we are engaged in practice. The right way of following a rule cannot be theorised and put into words. It cannot be articulated in a proposition, otherwise we will be confronted with a regress situation which never comes to an end. Wittgenstein says:

The absent-minded man who at the order “Right Turn!” turns left, and then, clutching his forehead, says “ Oh! right turn” and does a right turn.—What has struck him? An interpretation? (1953, §506).

And:

To use a word without a justification does not mean to use it without right (§ 289).

According to Wittgenstein, the absent-minded man sees the right thing to do in a flash. It is not the case that an interpretation of the rule “right turn” guides him to do the right thing, because any interpretation needs to be interpreted. The absent-minded man is right to turn right, although he cannot theorise his argument and put it into words. In other words, one could say that the man does the wrong action at the beginning because he does not see the right thing to do. Afterwards, however, the subject sees in a flash that he has done the wrong thing and consequently turns right.

According to the Wittgensteinian therapeutic account, the subject's reason and justification cannot be theorised and put into words in such a situation because each theory has to be supported by another theory which never comes to an end. However, it does not follow from this that the man is not justified in turning right. He gets the point to turn right in a flash which can be regarded as a kind of justification, although it cannot be put into words.

Furthermore, according to commentators like McDowell, the whole idea of the rule-following argument is that normativity is grasped directly and based upon what we do with words. There is nothing outside practice which provides normativity. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words can only be formed by being engaged in practice. To the extent that we are engaged in practice, we can see the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. Practice and what we do with words is prior. Thornton refers to this McDowellian point in this way:

[McDowell's strategy] begins with Wittgenstein's suggestion that obeying a rule is not an interpretation but a practice.

Wittgenstein's problem is to find a way to reject the "insidious assumption" (McDowell 1998:239) that there must be an interpretation between an order (or the explanation of a word) and an action (or the use of the word). Thus he talks of obeying rules *blindly* and of being *trained to react* to, for example, signposts.... Wittgenstein does *not* aim to give an account of norms using concepts that are not themselves norm-presupposing. He does *not* attempt to dig beneath a bedrock of already normative behaviour. This is why he describes following a rule as *fundamental* to our language... The ground-level moves made are always within the sphere of norms (2004, p.43).

In fact, the slogan of this therapeutic account of the rule-following argument is that instead of adhering to rules and their interpretations to give an account of what normative constraint consists of, focusing on practice and what we do with words over time provides normativity.<sup>90</sup> In the denial of the Platonic source of normativity,

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<sup>90</sup> The role of time in arriving at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is this. Seeing the rightness of the usage of a word requires the word to be applied on different occasions. In other words, the language-user needs time to be engaged in using the word in several circumstances. Only in this way the language-user can arrive at the right usage of the word.

according to which the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words consists of the theoretical patterns which are formulated entirely independently of what we, as language -users, do with words; we have a crucial role to provide normativity by being engaged in practice. What we do with words has the main role in the metaphysics of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words.

5-1-2. The Normative Standard of the Rightness and Wrongness of Moral Vocabulary  
Cannot be Theorised In Rossian Ethics

At this stage, let me return to morality. Having seen the therapeutic account of Wittgenstein, I am going to look at Rossian ethics which has been discussed earlier from another point of view. What I want to say is that Rossian ethics, which is a minimal or modest-generalistic position,<sup>91</sup> can be regarded as an anti-theoretical account as well. By an anti-theoretical position, I mean that there is no such thing as a comprehensive ethical theory by which one can give a justified account of how the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary can be distinguished in a concrete ethical situation. It does not follow from this that the anti-theoretical position has no structure. Rather, it has a structure which can be seen, although it has no theoretical frame. Let me give an example to clarify this point.

Consider Utilitarianism and the way in which a utilitarian deals with moral issues.<sup>92</sup> We can say that the utilitarian account is a theory in the sense that the way in which we can arrive at the rightness or wrongness of moral vocabulary in each concrete ethical situation is lucid, clarified and can be subsumed under a general pattern. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary

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<sup>91</sup> I have discussed in chapter 1 what I mean by minimal or modest-generalism.

<sup>92</sup> The distinction between different versions of Utilitarianism is irrelevant in this debate.

is the utility principle, which has to be followed to arrive at right or wrong in each case.

By contrast, there is no such thing as a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary which can be theorised in Rossian ethics. As we have seen in the second and fourth chapters, Rossian ethics consists of an open-ended list of *prima facie* duties. Moreover, there is no lexical order among these duties. It follows from this that in a concrete ethical situation in which several *prima facie* duties come into conflict, it is not clear which *prima facie* duty outweighs the others and has normative power in advance. Rather, we have to use our moral intuition to arrive at a judgment about actual duties in different contexts. In other words, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary cannot be theorised. What is supposed to be done cannot be reached by being subsumed under a normative theory. Rather, moral intuition helps one to arrive at right or wrong in each concrete case. So, Rossian ethics can be regarded as an anti-theoretical approach in the sense that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary cannot be theorised. According to Dancy:

Theory could only help if we could rank our different *prima facie* duties in order of importance, so that we knew in advance that, say, it is always more important to help others than to keep one's promises. But no such ranking fits the facts. The plain fact is that sometimes one ought to keep one's promises even at an overall cost to others, and sometimes the cost of keeping one's promise means that here it would be better to break it, for once. Ross would say that this sort of thing is just a feature of our moral predicaments. It would no doubt be nice if the world was neat and orderly, so that our different *prima facie* duties could be ranked once and for all (1991a, p.221).

As we have seen in the fourth chapter, the Rossian metaphysical account can be clarified by resorting to Wittgenstein's realistic account. According to Wittgenstein's account, moral patterns emerge to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases. In other words, actual duties in the Rossian sense emerge following being engaged in seeing similar cases.

The similarity between the Wittgensteinian account of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words and the Rossian account of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary needs to be discussed further at this stage. As we have seen in the above, there is no lexical order between several *prima facie* duties. It follows from this that the way in which we arrive at the rightness or wrongness of moral judgment in a concrete ethical situation cannot be theorised and put into words.

Similarly, as we have seen earlier with regard to the way in which we acquire the concept 'game', there is no lexical order in different game-making features with which we are familiar, intuitively speaking. In other words, the way in which several game-making features are combined together in different cases cannot be put into words in advance. However, it does not follow from this that we are not entitled to utilise the concept 'game' meaningfully and coherently. Rather, to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of seeing similar combinations, we can use the concept of game correctly. So, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words can be seen within practice, although it cannot be theorised. Likewise, to the extent that we are engaged in seeing similar cases, we can see the way in which several *prima facie* duties are combined together. In other words, in the absence of the theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary, we can provide the normativity which we are looking for, should we be engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases.

So, Rossian ethics can be regarded as an anti-theoretical account, according to which the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary cannot be theorised and put into words.<sup>93</sup>

### **5-2. Therapy Is Not Adequate: The Combination Problem Emerges**

Having considered the therapeutic account of Wittgenstein, according to which the whole idea of normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be theorised in general patterns; at this stage, I wish to discuss the therapeutic account of practice and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words in more detail.

So far, we have dealt with the negative aspect of the whole idea of normativity and normative constraint, according to which there is no such thing as a theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words to be followed. Rather, to the extent that we are engaged in practice we can see what the right thing to do is. Now, what I am planning to show is that if we concentrate only on the point that being engaged in practice is enough to provide normativity, it seems that we are offered a mysterious and unclear account, according to which there is no account available of how we arrive at the rightness and wrongness of the use of words in a concrete situation.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The comparison between Rossian ethics and the utilitarian approach has been carried out in the second order sense, not the first order one. In other words, whether or not the monistic attitude or pluralistic attitude in normative ethics is tenable is not my concern at this stage. Rather, I am concerned with the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary and the issue of whether or not it can be theorised and put into words. In this sense, my approach is a second order one, according to which the justification of the monistic or the pluralistic perspective in normative ethics is ignored.

<sup>94</sup> We must remember that we are talking about the whole idea of practice and its association with the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words in a first order sense. In other words, whether or not the way in which we are engaged with things in the world at the very basic level, is practising and doing but not theorising is not my concern at this stage. This is an issue with regard to the concept of practice from the second order point of view.

The mystery and vagueness of the concept of practice which I am discussing lies in *the way* in which we arrive at the rightness of 'telling the truth', for instance, in a concrete case in which it is combined with another morally relevant feature such as reparation. So, it is a first order perspective in

According to the therapeutic account, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be put into words. We have to do something to see what the normative standard of rightness and wrongness is. There is no account of a standard criterion of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which can be theorised and articulated. If this is the case and there is nothing which can be put into words, how can we make the distinction between the rightness and wrongness intelligible? If there is nothing which can be put into words, how can we tell a convincing account, according to which someone who has got the wrong normative judgment in a concrete ethical situation, changes his judgment? It seems that the way in which a therapist arrives at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words leads to 'the combination problem' again. Let me give more detail to clarify this point.

As we have seen in the fourth chapter, the Rossian metaphysical account of actual duties and the way in which different prima facie duties are combined together suffers from the combination problem. In other words, in order to arrive at the actual duty in a concrete ethical situation, there is no analysis available of how prima facie duties combine together; all we can do is to look at the case over time. Consider the case that different prima facie duties such as fidelity, gratitude and beneficence come into conflict in a concrete case. According to the Rossian account, in order to arrive at a justified actual duty, we have to look at the case in more detail over time. If this is offered as an epistemological part of the Rossian account, then it requires a metaphysical account according to which several prima facie duties are combined

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the sense that it deals with what we do in each concrete ethical situation to arrive at the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary. In this philosophical endeavour, the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary, and the way in which we arrive at right or wrong in each concrete ethical situation are under investigation.



together in a way that the ultimate outcome would be such-and-such. There is nothing more which can be said with regard to the way in which these prima facie duties are combined together and formulate the actual duty in the case. In fact, Rossian metaphysics is based upon vector analysis, according to which the more stringent prima facie duty outweighs the others. Although such a method works properly in the realm of science, a pluralistic approach like Rossian ethics is not entitled to use such a method, because each morally relevant feature is unique and cannot be compared with other prima facie duties. They cannot be put into one line or dimension to be measured when more than one morally relevant feature come into conflict. So, resorting to such a method cannot give us an account of how we arrive at a justified moral judgment. There is no metaphysical model by which we can give an account of how these morally relevant features are combined together in the Rossian account.<sup>95</sup>

Dancy's metaphysical account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in a concrete ethical situation is similarly vague and unclear.

According to him, in a concrete situation in which different morally relevant features F, G and H are combined together, these morally relevant features are combined together in a way that the ultimate outcome would be such-and-such. There is no metaphysical account which is offered in this particularistic account.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> In fact, any pluralistic account which is based upon vector analysis suffers from the combination problem. A particularist like Dancy and McNaughton who says that any non-moral property, in principle, can be morally relevant, subscribes to an extreme pluralistic position. If this is the case, the particularist owes us a metaphysical account of how different morally relevant features are combined together. Like the Rossian, the particularist is not entitled to use the vector analysis model.

<sup>96</sup> This point has been elaborated in chapter 3. I have argued that a particularist like Dancy is confronted with the contribution problem and the combination problem. According to the contribution problem, the notion of holism with regard to the way in which morally relevant features are combined together leads to atomism. According to the combination problem, we are offered a mysterious and unclear metaphysical account of how different morally relevant features are combined together. In other words, all we can say is that several morally relevant features are combined together in a way that the result is such-and-such. That is all. The particularist cannot go further and give an account of how these morally relevant features are combined together in a way that the result is such-and-such. At this stage, we are dealing with an example of the combination problem. For more detail see chapter 3-1-1 & 3-1-2.

Furthermore, on the basis of what has been discussed regarding the Rossian story and the particularistic account, we can say that if we focus only on the negative conception of practice in order to give an account of how morally relevant features are combined together in different ethical situations, we are confronted with the combination problem of how morally relevant features are combined together in concrete ethical situations. There is more that needs to be said regarding the notion of practice and its positive aspect. Let me give an example to clarify the point.

Consider the case that X has promised to do one thing and then finds that a near relative is in distress and needs some help. Now, what should he do, morally speaking? Does X have to violate his promise and join the relative who is in trouble? Or has he to fulfil his promise and leave the relative alone?<sup>97</sup>

According to the therapeutic account of practice, there is nothing which can be put into words in this situation. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary can be seen only within practice. There is nothing beyond practice which can help the subject arrive at the right thing to do. In other words, to the extent that the subject is engaged in seeing similar and dissimilar cases, he can see what would be the right thing to do. There is nothing which can be theorised and put into words in this relation.

On the face of it, it seems that the therapeutic account better systematises our scattered intuitions in the realm of morality. It captures the intuitions which tell us that the way in which we pick up the most stringent morally relevant feature in different ethical cases in which several morally relevant features come into conflict cannot be articulated and put into words. In other words, resorting to any general

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<sup>97</sup> I am dealing with the case from the second order point of view. Whether or not X has to fulfil his promise is not my concern at this stage.

moral pattern in order to arrive at a justified moral judgment would be useless and ineffective. Moreover, this epistemological point is based upon a metaphysical point, according to which the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different ethical contexts cannot be theorised and articulated. Rather, the notion of being engaged in practice gives us an account of how different morally relevant features are combined together in different contexts. So, the subject has to be engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases to see what the right thing to do is in a conflict situation. We have to bear in mind that the therapeutic account, in comparison with the Rossian and the particularistic accounts, sounds less mysterious. In other words, unlike the Rossian and the particularistic accounts which require of us only to look at the case over time to see what to do in a concrete context, the therapeutic account requires of us to look away at similar cases to arrive at the right thing to do. In other words, there is an account which is told here: to the extent that you are engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases, you see what the right thing to do is in a concrete situation. There is nothing more which can be put into words.

But, having considered the whole situation of the case, would it be enough merely to say that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary cannot be put into words and the subject has to be engaged in practice to see what the right thing to do is? Would it be sufficient to say that what we do with words provides normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary? What do we mean in detail by saying that we have to be engaged in practice? What can we say about the ingredients of the concept of practice?

In my view, we have to clarify what we mean by the thesis what we do with words can provide normativity. In other words, if it is only what we do with words

and being engaged in practice that can provide normativity, how can we explain the distinction between correct and incorrect practice? If the whole issue with regard to the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary depends on what we do with words, how can we make the distinction between right and wrong intelligible?

Consider a dilemma case again. In order to arrive at a justified moral judgment, the therapeutic reading would suggest that the subject has to be engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases. To the extent that he is engaged in practice, he can see the right thing to do. However, the therapeutic account has to give an account of how correct and incorrect practice can be distinguished. In other words, if the subject says that having seen similar cases and being engaged in practice, I am going to defeat my promise and join the relative, how can we evaluate his claim? On the contrary, if he states that he is planning to fulfil his promise and leave the relative alone, how can we say that he has made a right or wrong decision? Would it be enough merely to adhere to the negative conception of practice in order to see what the right thing to do is?

In order to give an account of how morally relevant features are combined together in different ethical contexts, it is not adequate only to focus on the negative conception of practice in which it is contrasted with theory. The therapeutic account only shows us that there is no such thing as a theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary to be followed.

If it is not adequate to say that what we do with words provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary, something else has to be added to the negative conception of practice which we have seen so far.

In order to give an account of how the distinction between rightness and wrongness makes sense, something has to be added to the negative conception of practice. There is an account with regard to the positive conception of practice which has to be given. The notion of practice has to be unpacked in such a way that the distinction between rightness and wrongness makes sense. It is not adequate to say that the concept of practice cannot be theorised. Something else has to be added and doing this provides the positive account of the concept of practice.

### **5-3. Practical Legitimation of the Concept 'Practice': The Positive Aspect**

I have suggested that the notion of practice and being engaged in practice has to be unpacked and elaborated. There is an account with regard to the positive conception of practice which has to be told, otherwise we are left with an unclear account of normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, according to which the distinction between rightness and wrongness does not sound lucid and clear.

Now, in order to unpack the concept of practice and give an account of the positive conception of practice, let us look at the concept 'game' again. As we have seen earlier, unlike the Platonic account, there is no such thing as a theoretical and pre-existing account of the concept of game according to which a new phenomenon can be regarded as a game. However, it does not follow from this that there is no such thing as normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, according to which we can see what a new game is. Rather, the pattern of the concept 'game' emerges to the extent that we are engaged in the practice of using the word 'game' on different occasions. Referring to the list of features of different games cannot guide us to see what the concept 'game' is. In other words, there is no such thing as a theoretical account of the concept 'game' according to

which the concept of game and its entire constituents can be articulated and put into words. Rather, we have to do something instead of saying something in order to see what the concept 'game' is. Normativity deals with practice and what we do with words. Nothing else can provide normativity and the normative constraint which we are looking for.

Now, the crucial point at this stage is that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is considered *only* in a negative sense. The Wittgensteinian account of the concept 'game' only shows us that there is no such thing as a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words in the Platonic sense which can be put into words and provide normativity. It highlights the implausibility of the theoretical account of normativity and normative constraint and puts forward the idea of practice which provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. This part of the normative account can be regarded as the negative aspect of the issue, according to which in the absence of the theoretical normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, just being engaged in practice provides an account of normativity and normative constraint. It is negative in the sense that the notion of practice and being engaged in practice is left unanalysed.

The positive account of the concept of practice needs to provide an account of the components of the concept of practice and give a more detailed account of the activities that provide the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. To the extent that we refer to the components of the notion of practice, the positive aspect of the normative story is unfolded. As long as we adhere to the unanalysed account of the notion of practice and being engaged in practice, we are not offered a positive account of the idea of normativity, according to which we can

distinguish between rightness and wrongness. In other words, it is not adequate merely to say that what we do with words gives us normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which we are looking for. Rather, the very idea of practice and what we do with words can be analysed to the extent that we can see what the concept 'practice' consists of.<sup>98</sup> If it is analysed we can get a better sense of what the appeal to practice achieves. In fact, by analysing the issue we are talking about the practical legitimation of the concept of practice. What follows below is just a sketch of the idea of practical legitimation of the concept 'practice'. I give an outline account of the positive aspect of the concept 'practice'.

#### 5-3-1. First Order Account of the Concept 'Practice': Its Constituents

So far, we have investigated the negative aspect of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which is grounded in what we do with words and the idea of being engaged in practice. In order to give an account of the positive aspect of the normative story, it might be a good idea to distinguish between two different aspects of the concept of practice. Let us regard these two different aspects of the concept of practice as the first order account and the second order account.<sup>99</sup>

The discussion with regard to the concept 'practice' from the first-order point of view deals with the components of the concept of practice. It concerns the elements of practice which have to be acquired before one can be regarded as a person who

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<sup>98</sup> We have to remember that only such a positive conception of practice gives an account of how the Wittgensteinian account could be illuminating for moral judgment. In other words, as long as we subscribe to the unanalysed account of the concept of practice, we are not offered an account according to which the distinction between rightness and wrongness in moral reasoning makes sense. By contrast, to the extent that we see the positive conception of practice, we can give an account of how the distinction between rightness and wrongness makes sense in moral judgment.

<sup>99</sup> What is crucial at this stage is to give an account of the positive aspect of the concept 'practice' to remove 'the combination problem', according to which being engaged in practice is the end of the matter and there is nothing more with regard to the components of the concept 'practice' which is necessary. Note that what I am saying with regard to the distinction between the first-order and the

practises well. In other words, talking about the constituents of the concept 'practice' at this level makes clear what one must do in order to be regarded as an individual who practises well. Moreover, the whole idea of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, at this level, concerns the circumstances in which a practice can be regarded as correct or incorrect, though it cannot be theorised. However, the role of the concept 'practice' in arriving at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is not at stake.<sup>100</sup> By contrast, having endorsed what we do with words which cannot be theorised and provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, the discussion with regard to the notion of practice, at this level, tries to shed light on the constituents of the concept of practice which have to be considered so that one can be regarded as a person who practises well. Let me give an example to clarify the point.

Consider the case of a professional tennis player preparing to take part in a tennis championship. He starts practising under the supervision of his coach. Now, would it be enough for the coach just to say to the tennis player that one has to be engaged in practice to be prepared for the championship? If this is the case, how can the coach assess the tennis player's progress? How can the coach say that the player is going the *right* way or not?

It seems counter-intuitive to say that the coach has only to ask the tennis player to be engaged in practice without clarifying what he means by practice in detail. In other words, the components of the notion of practice have to be unfolded during the training. If this is not done, the tennis player cannot see how to go on and make significant progress. For instance, the coach has to give the tennis player some

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second-order account of the concept 'practice' is only a possible suggestion to elaborate the positive aspect of the concept 'practice'.

<sup>100</sup> This is the issue with regard to the concept of practice from the second-order point of view.



instructions according to which he manages his energy throughout the game. The coach has to train him how to use the racket in different positions in the game; how to manoeuvre his body during the game; how to serve; how to return serve in the game; how to assess the height of the net; how and in which circumstances he needs to smash ; how he should hit the ball to make sure the opponent cannot return it; how he maintains his self-confidence even if he is losing the game, etc.

The components of practice have to be given in detail. If not, the trainee is offered a strange and mysterious account of practice, according to which there is no way to evaluate his progress. In other words, being engaged in practice is associated with being familiar with the components of practice. To the extent that the tennis player is familiar with the components of practice, he can be assessed. Suppose that the tennis player does not pay attention to what the coach says with regard to the circumstances in which he needs to smash. Rather, the tennis player smashes whenever he thinks that it is a good time to do so. In such a situation, we can say that the tennis player is not going the right way and he practices *wrongly*. So, the constituent of the concept of practice which makes part of the positive aspect of the whole idea of normativity gives an account of how being engaged in wrong practice can be distinguished from being engaged in right practice.

Moreover, suppose that the tennis player is trained by the coach in the sense that he is provided with the list of instructions which the coach is talking about. For instance, he knows how to use the racket in different positions in the game; how to manoeuvre his body during the game, etc. At this moment, the point is whether or not familiarity with these component parts of practice would be good enough to make him a successful tennis player during the game. Is it the case that to the extent that the

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player is familiar with the instructions and practice according to the coach's comments, he will defeat his opponents during the tournament; in other words, can we say that to the extent that the player goes on according to the instructions during the game, he will play well?

Let us put the issue this way. Being familiar with and engaged in practice and its components and constituents as a trainee is one thing, while playing as a tennis player in a real game is another. Familiarity with the instructions in detail is not adequate to make one a successful tennis player. For, in the real game, the player is confronted with a complex situation, in which different factors are combined together. For instance, the opponent serves in such a way that he cannot react properly in the way that he was trained to do. Moreover, the opponent is good at reacting to his smashes in a way that the tennis player cannot gain the expected advantage from smashing. In such a situation, although the tennis player has practised a lot earlier and has been provided with a list of instructions, the way in which he has engaged in practice does not work. So, throughout the game, the tennis player changes tactics so that, for instance, he looks as if he is going to smash but hits the ball slowly in a way that the opponent cannot return the ball, or the tennis player smashes on and off in such a way that the opponent cannot react properly.

On the other hand, having seen the change of the tennis player's tactics, the opponent changes his tactics to the extent that the tennis player cannot continue with his new tactics. For instance, the opponent finds out during the game that if he hits the ball so that it lands in the corner of the court, the tennis player cannot react properly. In such a situation, the player does not have enough opportunity to smash on and off.

So, by any realistic detailed account, there is no such thing as a definite procedure of practice according to which the tennis player may defeat his opponent.

In other words, although he has to be familiar with all instructions in detail and be engaged in practice by the trainer in this relation, it does not necessarily follow from this that the player will play well. Rather, as the tennis player is confronted with a complex situation in the real game which cannot be subsumed under a general pattern, to the extent that he is engaged with such a complex situation, the player wins the game. Being engaged in the practice of seeing similar cases helps the player to see how to react to his opponent in the real game.

Having seen the complexities of the situation of the real game, I wish to emphasise that all the player has to be familiar with, in order to be regarded as a professional player, is the components of the concept of practice. In other words, although being provided with a list of instructions would not be enough for him to play well, it does not follow from this that the player has to resort to something else, like a theory, to defeat his opponent. Rather, he has to be engaged in seeing the components of complex situations to acquire the ability to play well. Familiarity with the components of complex situations will guide the player to practice well. In other words, the trainer instructs him how to proceed in the real game by appealing to the components of the complex game with which the player is being familiarised. So, there is no essential difference between being engaged in simple practice and being engaged in complex practice. To the extent that the player is trained and familiar with the components of both kinds of practices, he can practice well.<sup>101</sup>

At this stage, we must remember that talking about the components of the concept of practice from the first-order point of view does not lead to the theoretical account of normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of

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<sup>101</sup> Note that we are still talking about the concept of practice and its constituents from the first-order point of view. According to this level of discussion, putting forward the components of the concept of practice, regardless of how simple and complex it is, removes the vagueness of the way in which we distinguish between right practice and wrong practice.

the use of words which was criticised earlier. Rather, once the point has been endorsed, the whole idea of normativity and normative constraint cannot be theorised and put into words; this part of the positive aspect of the whole idea of normativity tries to give an account of how the concept of practice and its constituents provides normativity and a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words which we are looking for. In other words, according to the negative aspect of the normative story, not what we say but what we do with words provides normativity and a normative standard of rightness and wrongness of the use of words. We have to do something with words in order to provide normativity. But, according to the positive aspect of the normative story which deals with the concept of practice from the first-order point of view, saying only that what we do with words provides normativity would not be enough and we will end up with an unclear account of what the distinction between right and wrong is. So, we have to unpack the notion of practice and give more detail with regard to the components of the concept 'practice'.

### 5-3-2. Second-order account of the Concept 'Practice': Doing Goes All the Way Down

Now, let us consider the concept of practice from the-second order point of view in order to give more detail to a possible account of the positive aspect of the whole idea of normativity.

As we have seen in the above, talking about the concept 'practice' from the first-order point of view is associated with cataloguing the constituents of the concept of practice, though not in a theoretical sense, in order to make intelligible what we mean by saying that what we do with words provides normativity. The cataloguing which we talk about provides the constituents of practice, not theory, e.g., the coach says, 'hit with the racket like this', not 'hit with the racket at angle  $\alpha$ '.

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Talking about the concept of practice from the second order point of view deals with the issue of whether or not being engaged in practice is prior to theorising at the very basic level of our confrontation with things in the world. Which comes first at the very basic level? Being engaged in practising or being engaged in theorising? Shall we say that our overt activity is the end of the line? Or, going deep down, our overt activities are based upon mental activities?

According to the ethical schools which subscribe to any theoretical attitude like Utilitarianism, for instance, theorising ultimately provides normativity and a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary. It is not the case that doing and being engaged in practice provides normativity and a normative standard of rightness and wrongness. Rather, theorising is fundamental and basic in the formation of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary. Being engaged in practice and activity does not have any primary normative force. All we have to do in order to give a justified account of the whole idea of normativity is to endorse a theory which provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary.

At this stage, by considering the concept of practice from the-second order point of view, I am outlining the idea that overt activities are ultimately grounded in mental activities. Being engaged in practice and doing is prior to theorising at the very basic level of our confrontation with things in the world. In other words, our beliefs, desires, etc. which outline our cognitive relationship with the world are based upon what we do instead of what we say. Doing goes all the way down, theories come afterwards. Moreover, we have to bear in mind that there is a normative element in saying that our beliefs, desires, etc. are formed by practice all the way down, which has to be taken into account. In other words, it is not the case that only theories are

associated with *ought* and the idea of normative constraint. Rather, if we subscribe to the point that what we do with things in the world shapes our cognitive profile even at the very basic level, an account of how we arrive at the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is presented. We show that we ought to respond to things in the world in such a way rather than the other way. In other words, there is a normative constraint which is being formed here to the extent that we are engaged with things in the world. If it is practice 'all the way down', then practice has to be intrinsically normative: it does not need theory to provide the normative 'ought'. What I want to sketch is one possible way of making sense of this idea. The idea is that in performing practice, we are *committing* ourselves to responding to the environment in a specific way. Practice goes all the way down. Attending and committing to the environment starts with mental activity, not a mental stasis that is then shaped by reasons. It is not the case that the way in which we are engaged with things in the environment is derived from some fixed and static rules. Rather, it is flexible and based upon our ongoing commitment to things in the world. Mental activity is the point of departure. Bodily practice is based upon mental activity. Let me give an example to clarify the point.

Consider a very simple action and the role of mental activity. Take the case of a student sitting in front of his laptop and typing his essay which is supposed to be submitted in the near future. At the same time, a bee comes into the room through the window. Now, if the student is planning to carry on with typing his essay, he has to stand up and wave his hand in such a way that the bee will leave the room through the window. Otherwise, the bee could sting him and stop him from typing. The crucial point at this stage is that the way in which the student engages with the bee at the very basic level is an ongoing mental activity which cannot be theorised and put into words.

Bodily practice is based upon mental activity. In other words, there is no such thing as a theory which can be followed by the student to form his cognitive profile with regard to the bee. Rather, he has to attend to the bee over time to form a belief with regard to his confrontation with the bee in the room. There is nothing over and above his straightforward attending to the bee and being engaged in mental activity which can make his cognitive profile in this respect. Overt activity is based upon mental activity. For instance, he follows the pathway of the bee over time and waves his hand in such a way that he can make the bee move in the direction of the window. In other words, by being engaged in attending to the bee over time which is a kind of mental activity, the student is shaping his cognitive profile. As a result of this, he appeals to bodily practice in order to get the bee out of the room. The student's bodily practice is based upon his mental activity which emerges from his confrontation with the bee in the room at the very basic level.

Now, it seems that what is going on in the environment is a matter of doing rather than theorising. It is not the case that the student resorts to theories in order to make his relationship with the bee intelligible. Rather, attention as a basic doing comes first. He *attends* to the bee and the way in which he is confronted with the bee forms his cognitive profile with regard to the bee. In other words, what is going on, at the very basic level, is a matter of doing and committing to the bee in the environment rather than following theories. In other words, what is primitive is the way in which the student attends to the bee and commits himself to what is going on in the room. This kind of commitment and attending cannot be theorised. Rather, he has to be engaged in doing and attending to the bee at the very basic level. There is nothing beyond being engaged in practice and doing which can make intelligible the student's confrontation with the bee in the first place. In other words, as the student's cognitive

profile with regard to the bee is shaped following his being engaged in practice and doing, we can say that the student is involved in a kind of mental activity. It is not the case that there are theories according to which the student's confrontation with the bee can be explained, normatively speaking. At the very basic level, the student does not resort to theories to make his relationship with the bee intelligible. Rather, he attends to the bee in the sense that he commits himself to the way in which the bee moves in the room over time. This kind of confrontation, which is relational in the sense that it is formed only after perceptual coupling and relating with a thing in the environment, cannot be theorised. So, according to this account, what comes first in the confrontation with the bee is attending and mental activity rather than following rules. Attention and commitment is prior, theories come after.<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, if attending and perceptual coupling with things leaves no place for theorising at the very basic level, the role of the agent who engages with things is crucial and has to be taken into account. What I mean by the task of the agent is his capacity to engage actively with things in the environment. The agent has a capacity to shape his cognitive profile following his active engagement with things in the environment. In fact, his capacity to couple with things at the very basic level and the way in which the agent conceptually engages with things in the environment gives an account of how we couple with things in the world at the very basic level. This kind

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<sup>102</sup> The bee example is one of the most basic examples which could be mentioned. In other words, I am trying to show that even at the very basic level, our confrontation with things in the world is based upon doing rather than theorising. We cannot go beyond attending to things in the environment. Mental activity and attending to things is primitive. There is nothing over and above mental activity which can give an account of the idea of normativity. Moreover, based upon what we have seen in the bee example, we can say that more complicated confrontation with things in the world is still a kind of mental activity. In other words, our cognitive profile following confrontation with more complicated situations in the environment is based upon our doing and attending to things in the environment, normatively speaking. Consider the case of a goalkeeper trying to catch a ball in a football match. Although the case is more complicated, what is going on at the very basic level, is the goalkeeper's attending to the ball which shapes his cognitive profile. Coupling with the ball is primitive, and cannot be theorised.



of engaging and coupling with things in the environment is relational and provides a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. Luntley says:

By 'coupling' I mean a conceptually articulated engagement with a thing or property of the environment. Couplings are relational (2004, p.2).

So, the subject as an agent has a capacity to couple actively with things in the environment. The way in which his thought is formulated can be regarded as a kind of mental activity. This is an agent with a capacity to be engaged with things in the environment through mental activity which is primitive in the formation of a normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. Theories come afterwards.

Now, having considered the role of the active agent with a capacity to be engaged in mental activity, we can say that the way in which the agent couples with things in the environment and articulates his cognitive frame is the start to a contribution to an account of reasoning as a form of mental activity the analysis of which starts with activity, rather than states that are regimented by rules. The formation of beliefs and cognitions is not derived from fixed rules. Rather, the way in which the subject attends to a thing in the environment is ongoing and mobile. In other words, as the agent with a capacity to couple with things in the environment is engaged in mental activity, what is going on here is being shaped by his active engagement with things in the environment. In fact, his thought is being made to the extent that the agent is engaged in mental activity. The more the agent attends to a thing in the environment, the more he commits himself to the thing. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is grounded in reasoning which is an activity and cannot be subsumed under fixed and rigid rules. Reasoning is

associated with attending to things in the environment at the very basic level.

According to Luntley:

... the good reasoner is trying to get the world right, rather than trying to get rules right... What makes her a reasoner who is bound is that she is an agent with a capacity to find interesting, and thereby commit to, the particular things that make up the circumstances in which she acts... what we do is, in the first instance, commit to particular bits of the world. And this is an issue in the metaphysics of reasoning (2005, p. 292).

The metaphysics of reasoning deals with mental activity in which the subject with a capacity attends to the things in the world. This mental activity is not derived from states regimented by rules. Rather, it deals with ongoing practising and engaging with things in the world. This is in contrast to a metaphysics in which practices are based upon rules. There is no account available of the normative standard of rightness and wrongness which can be given without resorting to rules that mobilise static states. By contrast, the suggested model of the metaphysics of reasoning highlights the role of mental activity in our very basic confrontation with things in the world. This reasoning, which is associated with activity at the very basic level, can give an account of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of word use. According to the metaphysics of reasoning, the agent primarily commits himself to a thing by attending to the thing in the world over time at the very basic level. Overt and bodily practice is based upon mental activity. There is nothing over and above being engaged in mental activity which can ultimately give an account of the idea of normativity.

As another example, consider the circumstances in which an agent acquires the concept 'game'. As we have seen earlier, there is no such thing as a theorised normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, according to which we can see what the concept of game is. However, it does not follow from this that we cannot see what the concept of game is. Rather, the agent has to attend,

actively, to things like: football, cricket, chess... and see things as similar in the world to learn the concept. His coupling takes place at the very basic level and commits him to see similar things in a specific way. So, being engaged in mental activity and attending to similar things at the very basic level provides an account of normativity, according to which we can see what the concept 'game' is. Luntley says:

... patterns of rationality are immanent to our practice, where by 'practice' I mean the ongoing structure of couplings with the environment. Our rationality is not an imposition. It is there in our doings, including, primitively, those doings that constitute the attention by which we couple with things. Attention comes first, patterns follow attention; not the other way around (2004, p.15).

Being engaged in practice by attending to things in the environment at the very basic level is primitive. Overt practice is based upon mental activity. Theories and patterns come afterwards.

So, having sketched the concept 'practice' from the second order point of view, we can say that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words deals with what we do. Doing and practising goes all the way down in the analysis and forms our cognitive relationship with the world at the very basic level. The agent attends to things in the environment at the very basic level which provides the normativity which we are looking for. Moreover, the account of the concept 'practice' from the second-order point of view, unlike from the first-order point of view, is far from the common sensical account of the concept 'practice'. In other words, the common sensical account of the concept of practice deals with what we do in real life. For instance, a goalkeeper during a football match practises goal keeping. Such a goalkeeper can be a better goalkeeper provided that he keeps practising throughout the tournament. This is the account of the concept 'practice' which we have seen in the discussion from the first-order point of view. To the extent that the components of the practice of goalkeeping are unfolded, they can be applied by the

goalkeeper so that he can become a better goalkeeper. Being familiar with the components of the practice of goalkeeping is necessary for him to become a better goalkeeper.

On the other hand, the account of concept 'practice' from the second-order point of view does not deal with the common sensical account of the concept 'practice'. Rather, it tries to show that we cannot get away from being engaged in practice and doing even at the very basic level of our confrontation with the world. According to this account of the concept 'practice', doing goes all the way down. The way in which we are conceptually engaged with things in the world is based upon what we do rather than what we say at the very basic level. In other words, our cognitive profile, primitively, is shaped by a kind of mental activity rather than mental theorising. Bodily practice is based upon mental activity. Normativity and the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is associated with the way in which an agent, actively, attends to a thing in the environment.

To recap, in order to sketch the idea of the practical legitimation of the concept 'practice', giving an outline account of the positive aspect of the whole idea of 'normativity', it is a good idea to distinguish the first-order and the second-order accounts of the concept 'practice'. According to the first-order account of the concept of practice, taking into account 'what we do with words', which provides the negative aspect of the normative story, sounds mysterious and vague. So, in order to eliminate the mystery from the concept 'practice' and give a justified account of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words, the constituents of the concept 'practice' have to be articulated. The more the components of the concept of practice are unfolded, the more we see what the distinction between the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is. Talking about the components of the concept

'practice' does not lead to a theoretical account of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. Rather, once we have subscribed to the point that the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words cannot be theorised and put into words, the first order account of the concept 'practice' tries to give more detail of the concept of practice according to which the distinction between right and wrong makes sense.

Furthermore, according to the second-order account of the concept 'practice', the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words is entirely associated with activity. Overt activities depend on mental activities. Doing and being engaged in practice goes all the way down in the analysis to the extent that there is no space left for theorising in the first place. Being engaged with a thing or a property in the environment at the very basic level provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. The subject attends to a thing in the environment to form his cognitive profile at the very basic level. There is nothing beyond attending to the thing and mental activity in our confrontation with things in the world. Bodily practice is based upon mental activity. Attending to the thing is primitive, patterns and theories come afterwards.

#### **5-4. Treat People Politely**

As we have seen in the above, in order to give a justified account of the positive aspect of the normative story which deals with the first-order and common sensical account of the concept 'practice', the constituents of the concept of practice have to be given. Otherwise, we are confronted with a mystical account of the notion of practice, according to which the distinction between rightness and wrongness cannot be explained.

At this stage, let us go back to morality and give an example to see what is meant by the point that the components of the concept 'practice' have to be mentioned from the first-order point of view in order to provide a positive aspect of the normative story and make the distinction between rightness and the wrongness intelligible.

Suppose that a teacher instructs his pupil to treat people politely. Moreover, the teacher asks the pupil to engage in the practice of being polite. Now, would it be enough for the teacher just to ask his pupil to be engaged in the practice of being polite? According to the negative aspect of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary, only what we do with words provides the normative constraint which we are looking for. There is nothing which can be theorised and put into words. Continued practice will provide the politeness which we are looking for. But, if the teacher focuses merely on the concept of practice in an unanalysed sense, and asks his pupil to be polite, how could he assess his student? To keep saying to the pupil that he has to be polite without stating what politeness is supposed to be is useless. In other words, although there is no such thing as a theoretical account of the concept of politeness in the Platonic sense according to which the whole features and components of the notion of politeness are clear, it does not follow from this that we cannot say anything with regard to what politeness is. What we do with words is crucial, but we have to analyse what we mean by what we do with words. The components of what we do with words have to be clarified and elaborated. Still, the concept of practice and what we do with words is basic in order to give an account of the whole idea of normativity, but the components of the concept 'practice' have to be unfolded. For instance, in the case of 'treat people politely', the teacher can state some components of the notion of politeness in this

way: try to listen to people when they speak to you, try not to interrupt people, try not to intrude on people, try not to insult people, try not to annoy people, try not to raise your voice when you speak to people... Understanding these components of the concept 'politeness' requires some common appreciation and shared ways of living.

So, the teacher has to clarify what he means by 'treat people politely' in so far as he can. Then, he can ask the pupil to be polite. In fact, to the extent that the components of the concept 'politeness' are unfolded, being engaged in practice makes sense. Moreover, the more the pupil is familiar with the components of the concept 'politeness', the more he can be regarded as a polite student. For instance, if the pupil does not listen to people when they speak to him, he practices wrongly and cannot be regarded as a polite pupil.

Furthermore, as we have seen in the tennis-player example, these components are combined together in real cases in a way that being regarded as a polite pupil is not an easy thing to do. But, again, the pupil has to be engaged in the practice of seeing complex cases in order to become a polite pupil. There is nothing over and above practice and being familiar with the components of the concept 'politeness' which makes the distinction between rightness and wrongness intelligible. So, as there is no such thing as a theoretical account of the concept of politeness, under which the new phenomenon can be subsumed; to the extent that the pupil becomes familiar with the components and constituents of the concept 'politeness', he can be regarded as a polite person.

Let us now consider the concept 'politeness' from the second-order point of view in order to complete the positive aspect of the whole idea of normativity. The second order account of the concept of practice deals with the point that activity goes all the way down, and an agent with a capacity to attend to the things in the world at

the very basic level has an indispensable role in the formation of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of the use of words. It follows from this that there is no space left for theorising as a ground of practice. All we have to do to form our cognitive profile is to be engaged in practising and mental activity. Coupling with a thing or a property is primitive, theories come after.

At this point, consider the concept 'politeness'. The second-order account of the concept of politeness deals with the point that acquiring the concept 'politeness' is associated with being engaged in mental activity in the first place. There is no space left for theorising to ground the practice. Bodily practice is based upon mental activity. An agent attends to instances of politeness and commits himself to the way in which he couples with the instances of politeness. So, having a capacity to attend to different things at the very basic level in the realm of morality is primitive. This kind of attending to things and committing himself to how things are going on in the moral environment provides the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary. Using Luntley's phrase, the moral subject, by attending to the things at the very basic level in the realm of morality acquires and exploits his *character*. By character, I mean the capacity to couple with things in the world which can shape the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary.<sup>103</sup> In other words, in the absence of having moral theories which can guide us how to proceed in each concrete ethical situation, acquiring and exploiting character can help us to attend actively to things at the very basic level and commit ourselves to how things

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<sup>103</sup> The idea of character is discussed in the following references: Luntley, M. (2003b) 'Ethics in the face of uncertainty: judgment not rules' *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 12(4), pp. 330-332 & (1999) 'Postmodernism And The Education Of Character' in Mclaughlin, T. & Halstead, M. (eds.) *Education in Morality* (London: Routledge), pp. 185-205.



are going on in the moral environment. In such a way, we can provide the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary. According to Luntley:

...the idea of character is meant to capture the following thought: there are capacities for belief and for reasoning with beliefs that have a contingent basis in the way the subject is situated in the world...By 'character' I mean the sum of a subject's capacities for belief. By saying that moral education is an education of character I am saying that the capacity for ethical judgment and ethical reasoning is a skill that has to be acquired, honed and sustained...Moral education is not a training in doctrine, an instruction in the catechism of learning right from wrong ... In moral education we bring young people within the ongoing conversation about the contingencies that confront us. We equip them with the character to respond to contingencies that we cannot yet conceive, but we leave them, we hope, with a character to make timely judgments about how to proceed (1999, pp. 192, 193 and 198).

To summarise, in order to give an outline account of the positive aspect of the normativity in moral reasoning, the first order and the second-order account of the concept of practice can be distinguished. According to the first-order account, the components of moral concepts like politeness have to be articulated, albeit in practice. The more the constituents of a concept like politeness are unfolded, the more the distinction between rightness and wrongness in moral reasoning is made intelligible. In such a situation, the non-theoretical account of the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary can do its job in a non-mysterious way.

According to the second-order account, there is no space left for theorising as the ground of moral reasoning. Mental activity is prior to overt activity. Activity goes all the way down. An agent's attention to a thing in the realm of morality is primitive. The normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary is grounded in the way in which the agent couples with a thing in the realm of morality and commits himself to the confrontation with it in the environment. Moreover, the moral subject by acquiring and exploiting his character, which is the capacity to couple with things at the very basic level, plays a significant role in providing the normative standard of the rightness and wrongness of moral vocabulary.

## Conclusion

My thesis presents a series of arguments in support of what I call modest-generalism. I began by examining the extent of the patternability of the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts. I discussed the particularistic view, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature is not patternable. I criticized the particularistic position by arguing in favour of the minimal or modest-generalistic position and appealing to an account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts. According to the modest-generalistic view, the reason-giving behaviour of a morally relevant feature in different contexts is answerable to general patterns of word use. Second, I discussed the Rossian view as an example of the modest-generalistic position. To substantiate this position, I read it in the light of the account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts. To elaborate the Wittgensteinian position, I criticized the Kripkean anti-realistic account and argued in favour of realistic and metaphysical account of Wittgenstein. Third, as another argument in favour of a modest-generalistic view, I showed that there is a problem facing the particularist that has the appearance of a dilemma: either the particularist faces the charge of having no account of the way in which a morally relevant feature contributes to moral evaluation and hence he should embrace atomism, or if he embraces atomism, he faces 'the combination problem' that all atomists face. According to the combination problem, the way in which different morally relevant features are combined together in different contexts is vague and unclear. As a separate argument in favour of modest-generalism, I argued that moral realism requires moral generalism. Fourth, I elaborated the combination problem mentioned in chapter 3 with respect to Rossian ethics as a modest-

generalistic view. To this end, I utilized the analogy between mass and weight and vector analysis. To resolve the combination problem, I again utilized the account drawn from Wittgenstein with regard to the nature of concepts. Finally, a distinction between first order and second order accounts of the concept 'practice' was presented to give a more plausible account of that concept which has an indispensable role in the Wittgensteinian account.

Having criticized the particularistic view as well as different arguments in favour of modest-generalism, we are left with the core and constitutive metaphysical claim of modest-generalism, according to which the reason-giving behaviour of moral vocabulary in different contexts is answerable to general patterns of word use.

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