

Moral advice and moral theory

Uri D. Leibowitz

Published online: 27 August 2008
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2008

Abstract Monists, pluralists, and particularists disagree about the structure of the best explanation of the rightness (wrongness) of actions. In this paper I argue that the availability of good moral advice gives us reason to prefer particularist theories and pluralist theories to monist theories. First, I identify two distinct roles of moral theorizing—explaining the rightness (wrongness) of actions, and providing moral advice—and I explain how these two roles are related. Next, I explain what monists, pluralists, and particularists disagree about. Finally, I argue that particularists and pluralists are better situated than monists to explain why it is a good idea to think before we act, and that this gives us reason to favor particularism and pluralism over monism.

Keywords Particularism · Generalism · Pluralism · Monism · Moral guidance

1 The two roles of moral theorizing

It is common to distinguish between two different roles of moral theorizing: a theoretical role and a practical role.¹ The theoretical role of moral theorizing is to

¹ This terminology is due to Smith (1988). Similar distinctions can be found, for example, in Bales (1971), Reed and Brown (1984), Railton (1984), Frazier (1994), Crisp (2000), and Väyrynen (2006).

I am indebted to Daniel Doviak for many invaluable conversations and insightful suggestions. I am also grateful to Fred Feldman, Pete Graham, Ori Herstein, Hilary Kornblith, Gareth Matthews, Michael Zimmerman, and an anonymous referee for this journal for instructive feedback and criticisms. I presented earlier versions of this paper at the Florida State University graduate conference, and at the Yale/UConn graduate conference. I would like to thank my commentators Brian Coffey and Gwen Bradford for their helpful comments.

U. D. Leibowitz (✉)
Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado at Boulder,
232 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0232, USA
e-mail: uri.leibowitz@colorado.edu

provide an account of the rightness/wrongness of actions. Smith, for example, asserts that the theoretical role of moral principles is to “specify the characteristics in virtue of which acts possess their moral status.”² Similarly, Bales states that one thing an ethical theory is supposed to do is “to provide an account of that characteristic, or perhaps that very complex set of characteristics, which all and only right acts have by virtue of which they are right.”^{3, 4} Let us say that a theory fulfills the theoretical role if it explains the rightness/wrongness of actions, or if it identifies the feature (or the set of features) that makes right acts right.

The practical role of moral theorizing is to guide judgment or action. Smith, for example, says that the practical role of moral principles is to serve as “a standard by reference to which a person can guide his or her *own* behavior: a standard to help the person choose which acts to perform and which not.”⁵ And Bales suggests that in addition to identifying a criterion of moral rightness, we may want moral theories to provide us with “a procedure which would help us single out, in the particular case *and under an immediately helpful description*, which alternative would in fact [be morally right].”⁶ In order to fulfill the practical role, a theory must provide some advice regarding which action to perform.⁷ General moral advice is a statement of the following form: *perform* action *A* if and/or only if ψ .⁸

The theoretical role and the practical role of moral theories are distinct. A theory can fulfill one of these roles without fulfilling the other. For example, many act-consequentialists believe that although act-consequentialism provides the best account of what makes right acts right, it offers no moral guidance.⁹ Several non-consequentialists also endorse this distinction. C. D. Broad, for example, writes: “We can no more learn to act rightly by appealing to the ethical theory of right action than we can play golf well by appealing to the mathematical theory of the

² Smith (1988, p. 89).

³ Bales (1971, p. 260).

⁴ Smith and Bales seem to think that in order to provide an account of the rightness/wrongness of actions we must find and formulate exceptionless moral principles of the form: For any action, *A*, if *A* exemplifies property *P*, then *A* is morally right (wrong). However, we need not presuppose that the only way to explain the rightness/wrongness of actions is to identify exceptionless moral principles—there may be other ways to do so. See Sect. II below and Leibowitz (forthcoming).

⁵ Smith (1988, pp. 89–90).

⁶ Bales (1971, p. 261).

⁷ For simplicity of exposition, I focus on guiding action alone rather than guiding action or judgment. However, everything I say about guiding action applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the guidance of judgment as well.

⁸ In particular situations moral advice could take a simpler form: *perform* action *A* (without the ‘if and/or only if ψ ’ clause). I will focus on moral advice that is meant to apply generally, and not only to an individual case. Nevertheless, we sometimes give/receive advice in different forms; e.g., “think about the consequences”, or “if I were you, I would do *A*”. But strictly speaking these forms of advice do not help us decide which action to perform; they could be helpful if they are understood as shorthand for something like the following: “think about the consequences, and perform the action that you believe would lead to the best possible consequences”; and “Perform action *A* if you want to perform that action that I would have performed if I were you”. So even if moral advice does not explicitly take the form: *perform* action *A* if and/or only if ψ , we should be able to restate it in this format.

⁹ See, for example, Bales (1971), and Feldman (2006).

flight of the golf-ball.”¹⁰ In a similar vein, one can offer moral advice without committing oneself to any particular account of what makes right acts right; indeed, this is quite common in the applied ethics literature.¹¹ Simply put, then, the point is this: an explanation of what makes right acts right need not help us determine which act to perform, and a statement of moral advice need not explain what makes right acts right. Let us reserve the term *moral theory* for accounts that explain the rightness/wrongness of actions, and the term *moral advice* for accounts that purport to guide judgment or action.

In principle, we can supplement any moral theory with any moral advice. Consider, for example, the following version of act-utilitarianism:

(AU) An act, *A*, is morally right if and only if *A* maximizes utility.

(AU) tells us that an act is right if and only if it exemplifies the property of utility maximization. We could supplement (AU) with the following advice: Perform action *A* if and only if *A* exemplifies the property of utility maximization. But we could, instead, supplement (AU) with different advice. For example: Perform action *A* only if you believe that your mother would not disapprove of it.

Minimally, moral advice should have the proper form—namely, perform action *A* if and/or only if ψ . But surely there is more to *good* moral advice than having this form. I propose the following two additional constraints on good moral advice. First, good moral advice is advice that agents *can* use. Let us say that agents *can* use moral advice *S* just in case the condition ψ mentioned in *S* is specified under a helpful description. Roughly speaking, a description of ψ is *helpful* if (normal) agents can typically tell whether this condition (as described) is satisfied. Second, good moral advice is advice that agents *should* follow. Let us say that an agent *should* follow *S*, if she is more likely to do the right thing if she follows *S* than if she fails to follow *S*.¹²

It is important to note that it does not follow from the fact that an agent is more likely to choose a morally right action if she follows *S* than if she fails to follow *S*, that all, or even most, agents who follow *S* would agree about which action is morally right in any particular situation. Indeed, it does not even imply that those agents who follow *S* are more likely to choose a morally right action rather than a morally wrong action. The best way to understand this claim is as follows: Consider a large number of agents, each of which is required to make a moral decision. Divide these agents into two groups. All agents in one group—*Group A*—follow *S*, while all agents in the other group—*Group B*—fail to follow *S*. Let us say that the rightness-to-wrongness ratio of each group is the number of morally right acts chosen by members of the group divided by the number of morally wrong acts chosen by members of that group. We should understand the claim that agents are more likely to choose a morally right action if they follow *S* than if they fail to follow *S* as follows: it is likely that the rightness-to-wrongness ratio of *Group A* is greater than the rightness-to-wrongness

¹⁰ Broad (1930, p. 285).

¹¹ See, for example, Hébert (1996), and Strong (1988).

¹² The ‘should’ here is the prudential should; if one wants to act rightly, then one has reason to use good moral advice.

ratio of *Group B*. Surely there are many possible ways to fail to follow *S*, and the rightness-to-wrongness ratio of *Group B* will depend on the procedure the members of this group adopt. If there is a *known* procedure, *T*, which is distinct from *S*¹³ such that if agents in *Group B* were to follow *T* the rightness-to-wrongness ratio of *Group B* would be greater than the rightness-to-wrongness ratio of *Group A*, then agents should follow *T* rather than *S*.¹⁴

To illustrate these constraints on good moral advice, consider the following advice:

(MA1) Perform action *A* if and only if *A* is morally right.

Surely an agent is more likely to do the right thing if she follows this advice than if she fails to follow it. However, the condition ψ is not specified under a helpful description—we often do not know whether an action satisfies the description ‘is morally right’. So although agents *should* follow (MA1), they *cannot* use it.

Now consider this advice:

(MA2) Perform action *A* only if you believe that *A* will bring you pleasure in the immediate future.

Here the condition ψ is specified under a helpful description—we can usually tell whether we believe that an action would bring us pleasure in the immediate future—but it is not true that an agent is more likely to do the right thing if she follows this advice than if she fails to do so. (MA2), like (MA1), is not *good* moral advice. Even though agents *can* use (MA2), it is not the case that they *should* use it.

Much more needs to be said about these constraints on good moral advice. For instance, we must explain what it is for an agent to *use* moral advice.¹⁵ We must also specify more accurately which descriptions of ψ are *helpful* descriptions. However, for the purpose of this paper our intuitive grasp of what it is to use advice, and which descriptions are helpful descriptions, will do. Instead, I want to focus on a certain constraint that good moral advice imposes on moral theories, a constraint that has been largely overlooked: If *S* is good moral advice, our moral theory should be able to explain this fact. That is, our moral theory must explain how it is that agents who follow *S* are more likely to choose a morally right action than those who fail to follow *S*.

Recall that moral advice *S* is a statement of the following form: perform action *A* if and/or only if ψ . Recall, also, that to say that agents should use *S* is to say that agents who follow *S* are more likely to do a right action than agents who fail to

¹³ Advice *T* is *distinct* from advice *S* just in case agents who follow *T* do not, *ipso facto*, also follow *S*. For example, if advice *S* is perform action *A* only if ψ , and advice *T* is perform action *A* only if [ψ and ω] then agents who follow *T* also follow *S*. In other words, since *T* is a precisification of *S*, agents who follow *T* do not fail to follow *S*. This means that it is possible that agents *should* follow *S* even if we know that there is some other moral advice, *O*, that yields a greater rightness-to-wrongness ratio, as long as agents who follow *O*, *ipso facto*, also follow *S*.

¹⁴ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this issue.

¹⁵ Smith (1988) suggests the following: “an agent uses a principle as a guide for making a decision just in case the agent chooses an act out of a desire to conform to the principle, and a belief that the act does conform.” (91) She goes on to make several qualifications to this statement on p. 92, and p. 105 n. 18.

follow S . This means that an agent is more likely to do the right thing if she is sensitive to whether condition ψ is satisfied than if she is not so sensitive. So in order to explain the fact that S is good moral advice, we have to explain how being sensitive to the features mentioned in condition ψ can help agents to identify morally right actions. But in order for ψ to help agents to identify morally right actions, ψ must somehow track morally relevant features of actions—otherwise it would be utterly mysterious how using S could possibly increase an agent's likelihood of doing the right thing.

Consider, for example, the following moral theory:

(TT) An act, A , is morally right if and only if φ .

Presumably φ explain what makes right acts right— φ is the feature in virtue of which right acts are right. Now, if the condition ψ mentioned in S is completely unrelated to the condition φ mentioned in (TT), then the fact that sensitivity to whether ψ is satisfied increases one's likelihood of doing a right action is inexplicable. So although the theoretical role and the practical role of moral theorizing are distinct, they are related in (at least) the following way: there should be some explanation for the fact that sensitivity to the factors mentioned in ψ helps agents to track features that our moral theory identifies as morally relevant.

2 The particularism-generalism debate

The particularism-generalism debate, as I understand it, is a debate about the structure of the best explanation of morality.¹⁶ Generalists believe that in order to explain the fact that an act, A , is morally right, we must identify some property, P , that A exemplifies, and an exceptionless principle according to which any action that exemplifies P is morally right. Particularists, on the other hand, claim that we can explain the rightness of A without appealing to an exceptionless principle. That is, the best explanation of the fact that A is morally right is that A exemplifies a property, P , and that in this particular case P is right-making.¹⁷

Monists and pluralists are generalists because they believe that an explanation of a normative status of an action is inadequate unless it is grounded in an exceptionless moral principle. However, monists and pluralists disagree about the number of *intrinsically morally relevant* properties (henceforth IMR-properties). Let us say that a property, P , is intrinsically morally relevant if and only if P is morally relevant for its own sake, or non-derivatively morally relevant. A property is *extrinsically morally relevant* if and only if it is non-intrinsically morally

¹⁶ I defend this in Leibowitz (forthcoming).

¹⁷ Particularist may be able to say more about why P is right-making in this case. See, for example, Lance and Little (2004). Nevertheless, the key point is that particularists insist that an explanation of the rightness of an action need not be grounded in an exceptionless moral principle.

relevant; that is, if it is only derivatively morally relevant, or morally relevant only in virtue of its relation to some IMR-property.

Monists claim that there is only one IMR-property—call it *P*—and that any action that exemplifies *P* is morally right. Pluralists maintain that there are several IMR-properties—call these properties *P*₁...*P*_{*n*}—and that for each IMR-property, *P*_{*i*}, there will be a *presumptive*, or *pro tanto*, principle: for any action, *A*, if *A* exemplifies *P*_{*i*} then *A* is presumptively morally right (or wrong); or in other words, *P*_{*i*} is always right-making.¹⁸ Pluralists are generalists because they think that in order to explain the rightness of *A*, it is not enough to recognize that *A* exemplifies *P*_{*i*}, and that *P*_{*i*} is right-making here; they think that we must identify an exceptionless principle that states that *P*_{*i*} is always right-making, or that any action that exemplifies *P*_{*i*} is *presumptively* morally right.

The particularism-generalism debate is a debate over whether we must find and formulate exceptionless moral principles in order to provide an adequate account of the rightness (wrongness) of actions. Generalists believe that an explanation is inadequate unless it is grounded in an exceptionless principle (either an absolute principle: *any* action that exemplifies *P* is morally right, or a contributory principle: *P*_{*i*} is *always* right-making); particularists disagree. However, even though monists and pluralists are generalists, they differ with respect to the number of IMR-properties they allow; monists insist that there is only one IMR-property, while pluralists, like particularists, believe that there is more than one.

For example, consider (AU) again. (AU) is a monist theory. According to (AU) there is only one IMR-property—namely, utility-maximization. If an action exemplifies this property, it is morally right; otherwise, it is morally wrong. Justice, for instance, can only be extrinsically morally relevant according to (AU); if justice is morally relevant, it is only in virtue of its relation to utility-maximization. Pluralists, in contrast, hold that there are several morally relevant properties. So pluralists may claim that being just, being truthful, and being beneficent are all IMR-properties. Particularists, like pluralists, think that there are many IMR-properties, but unlike pluralists they hold that a property can be intrinsically morally relevant in some cases, but not in others. So, for example, particularists may claim that the fact that an act exemplifies justice is intrinsically morally relevant on some occasions, but only extrinsically morally relevant, or even morally irrelevant, on other occasions.¹⁹

¹⁸ See, for example, Ross (1930, Chap. 2), and Shafer-Landau (1997).

¹⁹ One might think that if a property is morally relevant in virtue of its intrinsic nature and if the intrinsic nature of a property does not change from one case to another, then a property that is morally relevant in one case must be morally relevant in all cases. However, Jonathan Dancy—the philosopher most associated with particularism—argues that we should distinguish between favorers/disfavorers and enablers/disablers. According to Dancy, a feature that favors an action in one situation may be *disabled* (or it could fail to be *enabled*) in another situation. Nevertheless, the absence of a disabler (or the presence of an enabler) in the first situation is not a part of the feature that favors the action. For a detailed account of holism in the theory of reasons see Dancy (1993, 2000, 2003, 2004).

3 The argument from good moral advice

Consider the following moral advice:

(RD) Perform action *A* only if after reflecting on and deliberating about the normative status of *A*, you do not believe that *A* is morally wrong.²⁰

I submit that for reasonably rational, sensitive, and well-informed agents (henceforth, RSI-agents), (RD) is good moral advice—that is, I maintain that RSI-agents *can* and *should* use (RD).²¹ Surely RSI-agents *can* use (RD) because they can usually tell whether they believe that an action is morally wrong after reflecting on and deliberating about its normative status. But *should* RSI-agents use (RD)?

(RD) is meant to capture the moral advice that colloquially can be stated as follows: Think before you act! Now surely this advice is not helpful to everyone. For instance, if one is completely ignorant about the situation one is facing, or if one is excessively insensitive or irrational, thinking before acting is unlikely to help one choose correctly. The notion of RSI-agents is meant to exclude agents like these, but it is supposed to include most ordinary mature individuals. I submit that there is strong intuitive support for the claim that RSI-agents who follow (RD) are more likely to do the right thing than RSI-agents who fail to follow (RD).

Consider the following case:

A 74-year-old man, following the death of his wife, has severe depression with thoughts of suicide and marked vegetative symptoms. He has accepted medications and counseling but remains emotionally unstable. His physician discovers that he may have prostate cancer.²²

The physician has to decide what to do. Should she tell the patient about his condition? Should she wait until she has a definite prognosis or until the patient's mental condition improves? I will not try to answer these difficult questions here. Instead, I want to ask whether the physician should follow (RD). In order to answer this question we have to compare the physician's likelihood of choosing a morally right action if she follows (RD), to her likelihood of choosing a morally right action if she fails to follow (RD).

There are two kinds of ways for our physician to fail to follow (RD): (1) she could perform an act, *A*, without reflecting on and deliberating about the permissibility of *A*—for example, she could perform *A* because it is the first act she happened to think of; or (2) she could perform *A* even though after reflecting on and deliberating about the normative status of *A*, she comes to believe that *A* is

²⁰ (RD) is a very general form of moral advice, and it can be precisified in various different ways. For example Hébert's decision procedure in Hébert (1996) can be viewed as one possible precisification of (RD). Ross (1930) seems to endorse some version of (RD) as well: "we are more likely to do our duty if we reflect to the best of our ability on the *prima facie* rightness or wrongness of various possible acts in virtue of the characteristics we perceive them to have, than if we act without reflection. With this greater likelihood we must be content." (p. 32).

²¹ More accurately, I maintain that RSI-agents can and should use (RD) as long as they are not under pressing time constraints. For simplicity, I will omit this qualification in the main text.

²² This case description is quoted from Hébert (1996, p. 78) (case 4.7).

morally wrong. I suspect that most readers would advise our physician to use (RD) rather than to choose an act without reflecting on its normative status, or to choose an act she believes is morally wrong. Moreover, I expect that many would advise the physician to use (RD) *because* they believe that by using (RD) our physician increases her likelihood of choosing a morally right action.²³ Indeed, if we do not believe that by using (RD) the physician increases her likelihood of choosing a morally right act, then in so far as we are interested in her doing the right thing, we need not ask the physician to reflect on the permissibility of her actions, or to act in accordance with her considered moral beliefs. I find this result extremely counterintuitive, and I take this to show that there is strong intuitive support for the claim that RSI-agents should use (RD).

In Sect. 1, I argued that if advice *S* is good moral advice, we should be able to explain how the factors mentioned in condition ψ help agents to track features that our moral theory identifies as morally relevant features of actions. So in order to explain the fact that (RD) is good moral advice, we must explain how it could be that the factors that agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of an action are morally relevant features of that action.

The question now is this: can monist theories explain how it could be that the factors that agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of an action are morally relevant features of that action? Recall that according to monism, there is only one IMR-property. According to (AU), for example, the only IMR-property is the property of utility-maximization. So in order to explain the success of (RD), proponents of (AU) will have to explain how those factors that RSI-agents consider while reflecting on and deliberating about the permissibility of a particular act, reliably track the property of utility-maximization.

Consider, again, our physician from the abovementioned example. While reflecting on the normative status of a particular action, *A*, she may think of considerations like these: Will doing *A* violate my patient's autonomy? Will it harm my patient? Will it violate my duty to be truthful to my patient? Will doing *A* bring about bad consequences? Proponents of (AU) must explain how reflecting on factors like these could possibly increase the physician's likelihood of choosing the act that maximizes utility. But how could they explain this? Surely there is no conceptual relation between these factors and utility-maximization; it is conceptually possible that doing *A* would maximize utility (or fail to do so) regardless of whether in doing *A* the physician violates her patient's autonomy, harms the patient, or violates her duty to be truthful to him. Therefore, if these considerations were reliable indicators of whether an act exemplifies utility-maximization, it would have to be a contingent fact.

But can proponents of (AU) offer any reasons to believe that this contingent fact obtains? There are reasons to think that they cannot offer inductive support for this claim—namely, that arguably, we are never justified in believing of any particular

²³ There may be other reasons to recommend using (RD). One could argue that agents should follow (RD) not because (or not only because) it increases the likelihood of choosing correctly, but rather for reasons that have to do with moral responsibility, autonomy, or the manifestation of good moral character. However, I will not discuss these alternatives here.

action that it exemplifies utility-maximization²⁴—and it is not clear what other kind of support they can muster. Moreover, even if inductive support were available, it might not be sufficient, since it is not enough to establish that in the past acts that exemplified the property of harm-avoidance, for instance, were typically the ones that exemplified utility-maximization. To see this, consider the following analogy: Suppose that I watched about one half of the Red-Sox games over the course of one baseball season. Suppose, further, that it turns out that the Red-Sox's win-loss ratio is significantly greater for the games I watched, than it is for the games I did not watch. So over the course of this season the games that exemplified the property of being watched by me were typically the ones that exemplified the property of being won by the Red-Sox. But surely it would be rash to conclude that the Red-Sox are more likely to win their next game if I watch it rather than not watch it. In addition to inductive evidence of this sort, we need some account of how the relevant properties are related; that is, how the exemplification of one property could possibly increase the probability of the other one being exemplified. Overwhelming inductive evidence may give us reason to suspect that an account of this sort is forthcoming. But in the absence of such an account it may well be that the best explanation of the frequent co-instantiation of the two properties in the past is that an unlikely event occurred. For example, the best explanation of the frequent co-instantiation of the relevant properties in the Red-Sox example (given other things we know about the world) is that the co-instantiation of these properties is purely coincidental; after all, unlikely events can, and do, occur.

To the best of my knowledge, no one has yet offered any reason to think that, in fact, the factors that RSI-agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of actions are reliable indicators of the exemplification of the property of utility-maximization. Moreover, I doubt that we have any evidence, not to mention overwhelming evidence, for the co-instantiation of certain properties of actions that RSI-agents typically consider and the property of utility maximization.²⁵ As a result, proponents of (AU) are poorly situated in order to explain how it could be that the factors that agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of an action are morally relevant features of that action.

I believe this point generalizes beyond (AU) to many monist theories.²⁶ Recall that the intuition that our physician should use (RD) was elicited without

²⁴ Mill seems to have thought that we can learn from experience that certain factors are reliable indicators of utility maximization (see Mill's Utilitarianism, Chap. 2). However, if we are never justified in believing of any action that it exemplifies utility-maximization, it is unclear how we can learn from experience that certain factors reliably track this property. See Lenman (2000) for reasons for thinking that we are never justified in believing of any action that it exemplifies utility-maximization.

²⁵ See Feldman (2006) for an explanation of why a move to *expected* utility will not help here.

²⁶ There may be some monist theories that can circumvent this problem. Consider, for example, the following monist interpretation of Ross's theory of *prima facie* rightness: An act, *A*, is morally right iff *A* maximizes *prima facie* rightness. According to this interpretation, there is only one IMR-property—namely, *prima facie*-rightness-maximization. Justice, beneficence, fidelity, and the other *prima facie* duties that Ross identifies are all extrinsically morally relevant; these properties are relevant in virtue of their relation to the property of *prima facie*-rightness-maximization. Nevertheless, the relationship between justice, for example, and *prima facie*-rightness-maximization is, arguably, a conceptual relation.

specifying which features she considers in her deliberation about the permissibility of actions. So in order to explain how it could be that the factors that agents consider when they reflect on the normative status of an action are morally relevant features of that action, proponents of each monist theory will have to show that the plurality of factors that RSI-agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of an action, reliably indicate whether that act exemplifies a single property—whichever property that specific monist theory identifies as the only IMR-property. It seems to me that there is very little monists can say to support this claim. In any case, I take this to be an explanatory burden that rests on the shoulders of monists that has not yet been met.

In contrast, particularists and pluralists need not claim that all the factors that RSI-agents consider when they reflect on the normative status of an action actually track a single property. Instead, they can claim that those factors that RSI-agents consider are typically genuinely morally relevant features of actions.²⁷ And this, in turn, would explain how it could be that the factors that agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of an action are morally relevant features of that action.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, let me briefly summarize my argument. I maintain that there is strong intuitive support for the claim that (RD) is good moral advice. But if (RD) is good moral advice, we should be able to explain how it is that the plurality of factors that agents consider when they reflect on and deliberate about the normative status of an action are morally relevant features of that action. But since we have no reason to believe that the plurality of factors that RSI-agents consider while reflecting on the permissibility of an action track one single property, it seems that monists are poorly situated to meet this explanatory burden. In contrast, particularists and pluralists need only to show that each of the factors that RSI-agents consider in deliberating about the normative status of actions is, or tracks, one of many IMR-properties. Consequently, it seems that these theories are better situated to explain the fact that (RD) is good moral advice. This, I have argued, gives us a reason to prefer particularist theories and pluralist theories to monist theories.

Footnote 26 continued

Monists of this variety (with various lists of *prima facie* duties) may be able to explain how it is that features that RSI-agents consider are (extrinsically) morally relevant.

²⁷ Of course, not all factors that RSI-agents consider are intrinsically morally relevant. For example, in deliberating about the normative status of an action, RSI-agents may consider whether they would be prepared to make their decision public (see Hébert 1996). Surely the fact that an action has the property of being such that the agent of the act is prepared to make it public is (typically) not an IMR-property. However, particularists and pluralists can explain why this property is (sometimes) extrinsically morally relevant; for example, they could say that considering whether one is prepared to make one's decision public helps one to adopt an impartial perspective, which, in turn, helps the agent to recognize whether an action exemplifies morally relevant properties such as being just or being beneficent.

References

- Bales, R. E. (1971). Act-utilitarianism: Account of right-making characteristics or decision-making procedure? *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 8, 257–265.
- Broad, C. D. (1930). *Five types of moral theories*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Crisp, R. (2000). Particularizing particularism. In B. Hooker & M. Little (Eds.), *Moral particularism* (pp. 23–47). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. (1993). *Moral reasons*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Dancy, J. (2000). The particularist's progress. In B. Hooker & M. Little (Eds.), *Moral particularism* (pp. 130–156). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. (2003). What do reasons do? *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 41, 95–113.
- Dancy, J. (2004). *Ethics without principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Feldman, F. (2006). Actual utility, the objection from impracticality, and the move to expected utility. *Philosophical Studies*, 129, 49–79.
- Frazier, R. L. (1994). Act-utilitarianism and decision procedures. *Utilitas*, 6, 43–53.
- Hébert, P. C. (1996). *Doing right: A practical guide to ethics for medical trainees and physicians*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Lance, M., & Little, M. (2004). Defeasibility and the normative grasp of context. *Erkenntnis*, 61, 435–455.
- Leibowitz, U. (forthcoming). A defense of a particularist research program. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*.
- Lenman, J. (2000). Consequentialism and cluelessness. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 29, 342–370.
- Railton, P. (1984). Alienation, consequentialism, and the demands of morality. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 13, 134–171.
- Reed, T. M., & Brown, A. L. (1984). On the rational rejection of utilitarianism and the limitations of moral principles. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 18, 227–232.
- Ross, W. D. (1930). *The right and the good*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Shafer-Landau, R. (1997). Moral rules. *Ethics*, 107, 584–611.
- Smith, H. M. (1988). Making moral decisions. *Nous*, 22, 89–108.
- Strong, C. (1988). Justification in ethics. In B. Brody (Ed.), *Moral theory and moral judgment in medical ethics* (pp. 193–211). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Väyrynen, P. (2006). Ethical theories and moral guidance. *Utilitas*, 18, 291–309.