Can we be Particularists about Environmental Ethics?

Assessing the Theory of Moral Particularism and its Practical

Application in Applied Environmental Ethics.

By Karyn Gurney Toerien

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Abstract

Moral judgments have tended to be made through the application of certain moral principles and it seems we think we need principles in order to make sound moral judgments. However, the theory of moral particularism, as put forward by Jonathan Dancy (2004), calls this into question and challenges the traditional principled approaches to moral reasoning. This challenge naturally began a debate between those who adhere to principled accounts of moral rationality, and those who advocate a particularist approach. The aim of this thesis is thus to assess the theory of moral particularism as recently put forward by Jonathan Dancy. In pursuing this project I initially set up a survey of the field of environmental ethics within which to explore traditional approaches to applied ethics. This survey suggests that applied ethical problems have traditionally been solved using various principled approaches and if we are inclined to take the particularist challenge seriously, this suggests a philosophical conundrum. On the one hand, increasingly important and pressing applied environmental ethical concerns suggest there is a practical need for ethical principles, whilst on the other hand, the particularist claim is that we do not need principles in order to make sound moral judgments.

The survey of environmental ethics then establishes the first side of the philosophical conundrum. I then move to explore the second side of the conundrum; the theory of moral particularism, looking at why the challenge it presents to traditional principled approaches needs to be taken seriously. I then move to explore theoretical challenges to moral particularism; this is done to establish the current state of the theoretical debate between the particularist and the generalist. I conclude from this that the theoretical debate between the two has currently reached a stalemate; it is, at present, simply not clear which account is correct. As the main goal of this study is to evaluate particularism, this apparent stalemate led me to explore certain practical challenges to particularist theory as a means of advancing the debate. As particularism is a theory that challenges our traditional conception of how to make moral judgments, there will be important implications for applied ethics if particularism turns out to be correct, and I thus finally apply particularism to a practical environmental problem in order to assess the validity of practical challenges to particularism. In order to do this, a particularist ethic is applied to the question of whether or not to allow mining in Kakadu National Park in Australia. This provides a means of seeing what an applied particularist ethic could look like, as well as providing something of an answer to the practical challenge to particularism and achieving the goal of evaluating it within the applied context of environmental ethics.

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Author's Declaration

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a higher degree.

.... (Signed)

18 November 2008 .... (Date)

Introduction

Ethicists have, on the whole, taken moral judgment to be principled in nature. This is reflected both at the normative and applied levels of ethics. At the normative level ethical theories have tended to be principled in nature, seen for example in utilitarian theory, Kantian ethics and virtue ethics. At the practical level, it is these principled normative theories that are then applied to ethical problems in the world, as a means of solving them.

Recently, philosophers working in meta-ethics[1] have questioned whether morality indeed works in this principled way. For example, moral particularism, a theory about moral reasons, challenges the traditional view that moral judgment must be based on principles. The particularist claim is that there is variability in the way that moral reasons work; the function of a reason will vary case by case. Whilst the aim of principles is to specify invariant reasons, particularists argue that moral reasons don't work in this way. In short, the particularist claim is that we don't need principles in order to function morally, and more strongly still, particularists claim that applying moral principles to moral judgments is to reason about moral situations in the wrong kind of way (Dancy, 1993: 56-62; 2004: 1 & 7).

Particularism thus offers a new way to think about moral reasoning and this fundamentally challenges traditional principled approaches to moral reasoning. This presents something of a problem: our moral reasoning must track moral reality but it is not clear what this is. Traditional normative and applied ethics tend to suggest that this reality is one in which effective moral judgment requires moral principles. On the other hand recent work in meta-ethics purports to show that moral reality is such that moral particularism is true and that our moral reasoning and judgment does not require principles. There is thus a seeming tension between traditional approaches to normative and applied ethics and particularist claims about the nature of moral reality. This tension raises an obvious concern about which account has the correct picture of moral reasoning; a tension that needs to be further explored in order to be satisfactorily solved.

Applied work in environmental ethics supports the principled assumptions taken by traditional approaches to moral judgment. Environmental ethics is an applied field of ethics attempting to answer urgent practical problems. Amongst environmental ethicists, there is an implicit commitment to moral principles at both the practical and theoretical level. Normative theories applied to practical environmental problems tend to be principled in nature, for example Peter Singer's utilitarian approach (Singer, 1993: 1-15, 55-82 & 264-288). Added practical support is gained for this claim in that there is a

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[1] See particularly the work of Jonathan Dancy (2004). Although, there are a number of different ways of characterising moral particularism, Jonathan Dancy has given sustained attention to the development of moral particularism for the better part of three decades. I attend here particularly to the mature work of Jonathan Dancy (2004).

strong pull to principles in the rallying of action groups to affect change in the world. Environmental movements also make use of principles first to highlight morally troubling practices in the world and then to rally support for their view. In short, environmental thinkers have all implicitly worked at a principled level, endorsing the thought that for sound moral judgment and practice we need to create some kind of principled approach to environmental ethics.

We are thus faced with a philosophical conundrum. On the one hand, increasingly important and pressing concerns in the environmental field (and other applied fields) suggests there to be a practical need for ethical principles. This is endorsed by the kinds of ways we try to get liberation movements and political agendas off the ground. Intuitively we have gravitated toward a principled style of moral judgment in the practical world of environmental ethics. On the other hand there is the particularist claim, a meta-ethical commitment to the view that we do not need principles in order to make sound moral judgments, and that making use of principles means that we actually go about making moral judgments in the wrong kind of way, and this can lead us to make wrong moral judgments.

Currently, it is simply not clear which account is correct and one main goal of this study is to evaluate particularist theory. As a theory that challenges our traditional conception of how we make moral judgements, there will be important implications for how we understand moral reasoning if particularism turns out to be correct. Particularists like to claim that the generalist will end up making bad moral decisions because, by applying principles to cases we tend to ignore or distort what actually has moral relevance in the case before us, whilst the generalist holds to the belief that moral reasoning requires the provision of general moral reasons and principles.

The second major goal is tied up with the first and involves evaluating the particularist approach within the applied context of environmental ethics. The goal here is to explore, in terms of environmental ethics, what the theoretical application of particularism will be. It has been suggested that particularism will not be easily applied to practical problems, if it can be at all. Moral principles have been compelling and useful as tools for making moral judgments and affecting practical change in the world in the field of environmental ethics so, if particularism is true, a careful look at the consequences for environmental ethics seems required. One obvious way to assess this is to examine an applied environmental problem using moral particularism. The aim being to assess whether it is possible to do environmental ethics as a particularist, given the goals that environmental ethicists wish to achieve. As regards particularism, the driving concern of this project is the implications for this theory if it turns out that environmental ethics genuinely does need moral principles. If it turns out to be possible, the implications for environmental ethics at the normative and applied levels will need to be spelt out and if it turns out that it cannot, the implications for particularism will need to be spelt out.

Both of these questions require reflection on the relationship between theory and practice. This requires reflection on the question of which should be 'in the driver's seat' as far as articulating a stance in environmental ethics is concerned. Brad Hooker (2000:1-23),

explicitly, and Peter Singer (1993), implicitly, consider this relation and both suggest that theory needs to be driven by what is practical. Both articulate the idea that moral theory is pointless if it fails to map on to the practical concerns of the world. These thinkers then, suggest that our awareness of the necessary practical aspect of ethics should take precedence, placing constraints on what is said at the normative and meta-ethical levels. Thus because ethics is necessarily practical, the rejection of principles might turn out to be a problem for particularism, if it cannot be effectively applied in the real world. However, whilst it may be the case that principles are useful, it may also be the case that true, or correct, moral judgment does not need them and indeed may lead even lead us astray, as Dancy thinks. The interplay between particularism and the applied problems of environmental ethics raises the question about the nature of the relationship between theory and practice. This is an important concern to be addressed and one that will impact at the various levels of ethical thinking. In other words, it has important implications for the practical, the normative, and the meta-ethical levels. Investigating this issue in the context of environmental ethics, offers to add both to the way we understand particularism to work, and to the way we go about making moral judgments, specifically in the applied field of environmental ethics.

We can make sense of why solving this particular philosophical tension in the context of environmental ethics is useful, as environmental ethics presents a real practical need, making it clear that part of morality is aimed at action. As Christine Pierce and Donald VanDeVeer (1995:1-23) point out in their introduction to *People, penguins and plastic trees,* what we do as individuals, societies and nations is largely dependent on what we believe and how we think. To tackle practical problems like those in environmental ethics we need a rationally defensible ethic that is able to guide thinking and behaviour with regard to how we ought to treat others and how we ought to treat the environment. These are pressing practical and theoretical concerns. Ethical theory then must be practical, at least to some extent; a point highlighted by the nature of current environmental problems. This provides an added level on which to assess particularist theory; the practical. To the extent that we accept that moral theory ought to be practical and to the extent that it appears moral particularism is not, there is a means of assessing to what extent ethicists should take particularist theory to have a correct account of moral judgment.

An analysis of this problem will provide insight into the current debate between the particularist and the generalist. No matter where the conclusions fall, they will shed light on how best to understand the nature of ethical judgment which is important both theoretically and practically. Furthermore, working out the complexities of this puzzle will add to our understanding of the relation between theory and practice, an increasingly important relationship to understand in a field like environmental ethics where theory and practice are inextricably linked.

Chapter one:

A Survey of the field of Environmental Ethics.

1. Introduction

The field of environmental ethics covers a broad range of topics generally focussed on issues regarding the welfare of nonhuman animals and natural environments[2] like lakes, mountains and rivers. It is primarily an applied field of moral philosophy, however, in order to achieve practical solutions and change in the world environmental ethicists look to normative and meta-ethical theory. This is ultimately used to argue for and define moral codes or theories that can outline the responsibilities of communities and persons in their treatment of natural environments and the organisms that inhabit them.

The following chapter surveys the field of environmental ethics, a relatively new and growing applied field of moral philosophy. The environmental literature covers a wide range of topics and a complete survey of the field, in its totality, is not possible given the limitation of space and the need to remain relevant to the tasks of this study. The discussion presented here is set out in terms applicable to the requirements of what is being investigated and thus in terms that capture the specific focus of this study. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to show that environmental ethicists have tended to assume, without question, that whatever the content of their normative approach, it must be a principled one. In other words there is a meta-ethical commitment to a generalist approach to moral reasoning.

Showing this implicit commitment to principles is achieved through a selection of key theoretical and applied points that are representative of the general focus of environmental philosophy. In order to do this the survey starts with the historical background of environmental ethics and moves on to explore the current situation in the field. The points made are thus taken to be illustrative of the field in general and the contention is that environmental ethicists have an implicit meta-ethical commitment to a subsumptive approach to ethical reasons. This is significant as this meta-ethical commitment to ethical principles no longer stands unchallenged. The rise of particularist theory has called into question the assumption by most applied ethicists that ethical principles[3] are necessary to their work.

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[2]   The term 'nonhuman animals' is technically correct and for this reason is used as my initial reference, this is clumsy however, and from here on I shall simply refer to 'animals' in order to capture those organisms that are not a part of the group *homo sapiens*. For the sake of ease the term 'environment' will also be used to replace the more clumsy term 'natural environments' to refer to environments that are not human-made.

[3]   Initially debates around particularism started off speaking about principles but have now moved to talk about features of invariable valence. There has thus been an evolution of thought in this regard. On the whole, in this work, I continue to use the term 'principles', as this is the term that best captures the work that is currently happening in applied fields like environmental ethics. Furthermore, the two terms have remained linked, as the particularist point about there being no variable valence still comes to bear on whether or not we can speak of principles. If we do not have features of invariable moral relevance we

This recent particularist challenge to the principled approach to ethical reasoning has set up a debate between the traditional subsumptive approaches to ethics and moral particularism. Until recently principles have been used by environmental ethicists unselfconsciously; now however, particularism challenges this and forces a conscious examination of the role and necessity of principles. Those in favour of principles have retaliated by claiming that one cannot do the tasks required of applied philosophy in a particularist way. This survey of the environmental literature serves as a context within which to explore a principled approach in an applied setting and provides a chance to draw out the motivation for environmental ethics, its goals and how the applied work of environmental philosophers gets done. From this it should be possible to gain an understanding of the role and importance of principles in an applied setting which should provide a stepping stone towards a solution in the debate between the moral particularist and the moral generalist.

2. Historical Background

Environmental ethics is a comparatively new area of ethical enquiry stemming from the recognition of practical and theoretical needs in the world. Environmental philosophers recognise that human beings stand in a certain moral relation to the natural world, but they also recognise that this relation is still unclear (Light and Rolston, 2003: 9-11). Aldo Leopold (commonly considered the father of the environmental movement) recognised the problematic nature of the idea that human beings are somehow better than animals and nature. Leopold challenged this view of humankind as master of the land, arguing that we need to understand ourselves to be members of the 'land community' instead. He thus questioned the generally accepted anthropocentric approach to ethics and pushed for a conception of morality based on the land; an ethic that could guide our actions in relation to the land and the plants and animals living on it. The considerations presented by Leopold set the scene for much of the early, and current, debate in the field of environmental ethics, which explored the question of whether a new ethic (an environmental ethic) is needed to address how humankind should conceive of, and behave towards, the natural environment (Leopold, 1949: viii-ix; LaFollette, 1997: 631-633).

Much impassioned writing and action have followed from Leopold's work driving the call for a new ethic; an ethic that takes account of the natural environments of the planet, and all that inhabit them. Albert Schweitzer (2001: 95-100) for example, also picked up on the need for a new focus in ethical thinking and argued that traditional ethics was flawed as it focused primarily on human relations. He pushed for the idea that what is really needed in our ethical thought is an understanding of human attitudes to the whole world and all who inhabit it (Rolston, 1988: xiii, 65 & 340). Schweitzer recognised and

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cannot hope to create principles as they are set to capture such features of invariable valence. Thus, if there are none, there can be no principles. In this regard, although I recognise the shift in the terminology and focus of the debate I hold that it ultimately, in terms of the task set up here, comes to mean the same result for the use and place of principles in applied ethics.

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highlighted a need for a new approach in European philosophy, one that could take account of the 'reverence for life' (an expression he became well known for)[4]. (Palmer, 1997: 34-35; Barsam & Linzey, 2001: 169-173).

Rachel Carson added her voice to the growing call for a new ethic in her book *Silent Spring* published in 1962, a work often cited as the spark for the modern environmental movement. Carson set out to document the dangers of the extensive use of DDT and other pesticides. She was one of the first to recognise and then write about the danger of the impact humanity was having on the planet. Again we see the idea of a connectedness with nature, a connectedness that, it is felt, should change our ethical stance towards animals and natural environments (Carson, 1962; Barsam & Linzey, 2001: 169-173; Corcoran, 2001: 194-200; MacGillivray, 2004: 6-7 & 120-123).

In short, over the years, there has been an increasing call for an environmental ethic. Leopold, Schweitzer and Carson present three key voices in the early environmental movement, all calling for a change in the focus of our ethics. They all pointed at similar worries and gave credence to a growing movement. It was only after Carson's work, in the early 1970's however, that serious philosophical reflection on the ethical issues of human action in the natural world began. What eventually came out of this was an ecological movement that argued for social and political change much as the peace movement and women's movement had done in the past. It articulated a fundamental concern with the old ethic that existed primarily for human agents and called for a re-evaluation of how we understand the value of nature, this being in order to change the way we interact with and make use of the natural world (Palmer, 1997: 31-32; 2003: 15-37; Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11).

2.1 A Practical Need

Human beings are facing a growing number of environmental challenges. Over the last four decades, theorists and political campaigners have made individuals and governments increasingly aware of the current practical threats to the natural world and those who inhabit it. One early example of this, as noted already, is the work, *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson published in 1963. After World War II, pesticide use increased and the survival of birds feeding at the top of the food chain, for example the bald eagle and peregrine falcon was threatened. In *Silent Spring*, Carson documents the damage done by pesticides like DDT to animals, natural environments and human beings, focussing attention on the long term deadly effects of DDT and bringing out both the political and ethical implications of pesticide use. Through her work, Carson challenged scientists, farmers, industries and the public to take seriously the long term effects of pesticides on the environment (Carson, 1962; MacGillivray, 2004: 6-7, 51-53 & 120-123; DesJardins, 2006: 3-5 & 8).

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[4]   This understanding of reverence for life that Schweitzer put forward has been significant in the development of environmental ethical thinking, most specifically in the deep ecology movement (Palmer, 1997: 35; Barsam & Linzey, 2001: 167-173).

Environmental ethics stems from urgent practical need and the list of environmental challenges facing human beings today is long, and thus it is only possible to discuss a few as illustrations of the kind of challenges and needs that face human beings to do with the natural environment.

We are faced with the fast depletion and pollution of natural life supporting resources like air, water and soil. Atmospheric pollution has been found to mostly be caused by human beings and gives rise to a number of different problems. Central amongst these are occurrences like stratospheric ozone depletion, acid rain and poor ground level air quality. Looking at just one of these results, namely stratospheric ozone depletion, provides enough evidence to illustrate the magnitude of the problem faced by humanity. The possibility of ozone depletion was first identified in 1974. In 1984 a hole was discovered in the ozone layer over the Antarctic and it was at this point that stratospheric ozone depletion became a topic of urgency to the international community. We now know that at least some of the effects of this depletion are potentially very dangerous. An increased exposure to UV light has caused an increase in human skin cancer and cataracts, the suppression of the human immune system, a reduction in plant growth and the harming of aquatic organisms (Palmer, 1997: 49-53; DesJardins, 2006: 5).

Another occurrence on the list of current environmental challenges is the reduction in biodiversity on the planet. Biodiversity is used to describe the existence of the many different kinds of life on the planet. Biodiversity can refer to diversity of individual animals, genetic material and species though it is most often measured with reference to the diversity of species. Although there is no final agreement on the number of species currently in existence, 10-30 million is the most common estimate (Palmer, 1997: 54). Due to human activity life on the planet is currently facing the biggest mass extinction since the end of the dinosaur age which occurred 65 Million years ago with some of the estimates of the current number of extinctions are placed at more than one hundred species a day and it is thought possible that this could double or triple over the next few decades. Using the assumed calculation of one extinction per million species per annum an acceptable annual extinction rate would be any number between 10 and 30 species per annum. However, with reported rates nearing 36500 per annum it is clear that species are becoming extinct at a faster and higher rate, most likely due to human activity[5] (Palmer, 1997: 54-55). The main reason for this seems to be the fact that human beings are destroying so many habitats through development, seen for example in the draining of swamps, deforestation, and the results of industrial pollution. Certain ethical questions and issues are raised from this practical challenge. For example, we are led to investigate whether maintaining biodiversity or aiming to increase it is a good thing; whether human beings do have an ethical duty to preserve species, and is the extinction of species necessarily a bad thing given that it is a process that has gone on since life evolved on earth (DesJardins, 2006: 5 & 162; Palmer, 1997: 53-57).

Possible climate change is another major challenge facing humanity today. It is believed to be caused by human industrial and farming activities which have released large

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[5]   Although on the whole this is held to be true not all biologists agree, see for example Julian Simon (Palmer, 1997: 54).

amounts of what are commonly known as greenhouse gases, examples of these being carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluoro carbons. These gases trap the heat of the sun by absorbing solar radiation preventing it from being reradiated. In the early 1970's, there was increased concern in the scientific community that the increase in the production of greenhouse gases would augment the natural process of global warming leading to higher temperatures and climate change. The 1980's and 1990's saw a further increase in this concern as computer generated climate models came to predict that the processes of global warming were being enhanced. Scientists currently predict that such climate change will cause sea levels to rise and thereby increase the numbers of extreme and violent weather events like hurricanes and droughts, which lead, in turn, to desertification and thawing of permafrost. These changes could have a significant side effect on agricultural patterns, forestry and human health around the world. Furthermore, changes on this sort of scale could destabilise cultures and result in environmental refugees (Palmer, 1997: 57-61; Gupta, 2001: 2-3 & 12-24; Flannery, 2005: 19-26 & 44; Lovelock, 2006: 48-65; Monbiot, 2006: xi-xiii & 3-19).

The whole idea of the 'greenhouse effect' or 'global warming' is still the centre of much debate for scientists, environmentalists, politicians, the general public and of course the media. Not everyone agrees on the causes or the outcomes of global warming which has given rise to books like that of Marcel Leroux (2005), *Global warming – myth or reality? The erring ways of climatology*, which sets out to document and ultimately, perhaps, settle this debate. Others, like Ray and Guzzo (2001: 439-446), also contest the usefulness and accuracy of computer generated models to predict the future in terms of weather and climate change. They argue that the outcomes are dependent on whose models are being run. Their contention is that scientists are being irresponsible to infer what they do from the little evidence they have. They argue that at present it is not even possible to predict the weather for few days let alone centuries in advance. Predictions of the effects of global warming are still contested and some scientists argue that certain global mechanisms will counteract the effects of increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Human beings are still unsure of the results of their actions in this regard. This kind of uncertainty raises further interesting ethical problems around how to decide on what actions to take in current situations in which we are still uncertain of the degree of risk and the nature of the consequences of our actions (Palmer, 1997: 58). With regards to this debate then it seems wise to take something of a pragmatist stance like that suggested by Kate Rawles (2002: 535-534), this being that despite the fact that there is no agreement on the finer points of issues like global warming, we can nonetheless agree that things are not as good on the environmental front as they could be, and that this, at least in part, is due to human activity.

Many more environmental challenges face human beings today, and to summarise, within the last decade we have seen the advent of an increase in events like global climate change, species extinction, depletion of stratospheric ozone, destruction and pollution of wilderness areas, depletion of natural resources, deforestation, soil erosion, air and water pollution and the creation of toxic waste that will be a problem for generations to come, to name but a few. This list does not capture them all. Today, these are all subject to international negotiation and agreement and are the centre of much human concern. There

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has been a growth of concern not only for environmental issues at this grand scale but also in terms of human relationships to animals. Despite this growth in the awareness of the public and the increasing number of national and international environmental legislations and policies there is no obvious decrease in environmental problems, making this an urgent and important concern for human beings today (Singer, 1976: 1-27 & 235-273; 1993: 55-82 & 264-288; Palmer, 1997: 19-21 & 113; Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11; Hills, 2005: 1-5; DesJardins, 2006: 5-16; Lovelock, 2006: 1-14 & 48-65).

In relation to nature and animals human beings have significant decisions to make. The increased awareness of environmental problems has focussed our attention on the fact that difficult and pressing moral questions are raised by human interaction with animals and the environment. Ethical questions are raised regarding the ends that human beings should pursue, with related questions around what we value, and our place in nature. We are being pressed to ask ourselves about our duties towards animals and nature as well as entities like species. For example, it remains unclear whether or not we have duties directly to animals or whether our duties to preserve and protect them are merely in relation to duties we hold to other people (Rachels, 1995: 59-72; Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11)[6]. From the recognition of this uncertainty and real need, grew the field of environmental philosophy, a field set to solve practical problems through the use of theory and meta-theory. At the theoretical level the principal question of environmental ethics is how best to articulate and describe the value of nature. This has translated into the question of whether nature is itself directly morally valuable (inherently valuable) or whether it is merely indirectly morally valuable (instrumentally valuable) through the fact that humans need and appreciate it (Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11).

2.2 A Theoretical Need: Anthropocentrism

Certain philosophical assumptions are involved in the answers we give to the kinds of questions raised above and DesJardins (2006: 8) reasons that it is impossible to find an environmental issue that does not raise certain fundamental questions about value. A powerful illustration of the way theory can inform practice is found in the recent work of J.M. Coetzee, "Elizabeth Costello" (1999: 62-90). While not explicitly framed in these philosophical terms, Coetzee addresses the question of value. Through the fictional character of Elizabeth Costello, he highlights how the value that humankind attributes to people, as opposed to animals, has consequences for how we treat each respectively. This is highlighted specifically within the context of the ethical dilemma concerning whether we ought to eat meat. Elizabeth Costello delivers a lecture in which she suggests that it is our valuing of human reason that has come to delineate the difference between humans and animals; we are rational, self-conscious beings, animals are not. This, suggests Elizabeth Costello, led to our making categories of 'us' and 'them', allowing humankind to remain (at least in our own thinking) ethically clean, whilst treating animals in ways

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[6]   The type of questions noted here cannot be said to be new questions about human relations with animals and nature, these sorts of questions have been present throughout our recorded history. What is documented here is a shorter historical discussion, that is more manageable for the task at hand, and is taken from what has become known as environmental ethics which is an applied field in moral philosophy that has developed more recently, roughly since the work of Rachel Carson in the 60's and 70's.

that are actually morally indefensible. Through the voice of Elizabeth Costello, we are alerted to the fact that the theories we hold about what is valuable, come to shape our actions and practice.

This debate around value is captured in the philosophical literature as well. Moral theorising has typically been concerned with how we ought to behave in regard to other human beings (individuals, groups or human institutions). We can, fairly easily, make sense of the idea that we need to restrict our behaviour in terms of other persons, and there is some basis for moral agreement, even if the exact nature and extent of our obligation is debatable. With exceptions (times in history when we have taken certain groups of human beings to not be fully human; think here of Jews in Nazis Germany and Black South Africans in Apartheid South Africa) we tend to hold every human being to be worthy of moral consideration simply because she is a human being. People are held to be inherently valuable and thus value is placed on the autonomy and well-being of each human being, at least in theory, even if we struggle to bring this to practical fruition.

The typical theories of human ethics are founded on this principle of respect for persons as persons, and we hold an attitude of respect for persons as persons. This is adopted as an ultimate moral attitude and when this is done it involves the disposition to treat every person as having inherent worth or 'human dignity'. This is what Kant meant when he spoke about persons as being 'ends in themselves' and not 'a means to an end'. What goes along with this attitude is an ethical system of duties which are held to be owed to everybody and these duties form a system of conduct in which we must publicly recognise that each individual is inherently worthy as a person (Taylor, 2003: 74-84).

Our thinking about human dignity and the inherent value of human beings has underpinned all major ethical systems. This belief in human dignity and value offers a useful point from which to understand the dissatisfaction with traditional ethics that lies behind the drive for environmental ethics. The relevance of inherent human worth and human dignity lies in the powerful role it has played in traditional western moral reasoning. An idea captured in religious, philosophical and fictional literature, human dignity and our unique human capacities have come to be the rationale for humankind's privileged moral position on planet earth (Rachels, 1995: 59-72). Our western morality comes directly from this notion of human sacredness and is responsible, at least in part, for our current anthropocentric normative value structures. From this is begun a debate over intrinsic value, inherent value and the moral considerability of nature and this is, in itself, part of a larger debate over the position of anthropocentric or human-centred ethical thinking (Hargrove, 2003: 75-190; Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11; Norton, 2003: 163-174; O'Neill, 2003: 131-142; Rolston, 2003a: 143-153)

Anthropocentrism has been a central debate in environmental ethics from its conception. Most environmental ethicists have understood anthropocentrism to refer to the ethical view that prioritises the value of human interests as opposed to the interests of other beings and those who challenge this, do so by pointing to the arbitrary nature of this distinction. This debate is linked to the value debate, as highlighted in the above

discussion, as it has been noted by many environmental thinkers[7] that the kinds of attributions that have been linked to value in the past have been human centred. We thus may, and no doubt will, end up having duties and responsibilities to the natural world and its inhabitants; however, in each case these duties are based on the realisation of human values, rights and goods. Our duties to the natural world then are contingent on our duties to other people. In short we do not have a direct obligation to promote and protect the welfare of animals and natural environments (Taylor, 2003: 74-84).

Ethicists are thus driven to investigate whether nature is merely a resource to satisfy human need, with only instrumental value, or whether there could be inherent value in nature that occurs apart from the involvement of human beings (Rolston, 1988: xi-xiii & 1-44). This links to one of the central questions of ethics in general that environmental ethicists have picked up on, which is how inclusive the circle of moral consideration ought to be. Light and Rolston (2003: 1-11) note that we have tended to recognise a need to expand the boundaries of whose moral welfare deserves recognition. Illustrations of this kind of expansion of the moral circle can be seen in the liberation of slaves, the black liberation movement, and the women's liberation movement[8] and currently in the controversial animal rights movement. All of the above examples show how at some point in history the established boundaries of who was to be taken to count morally and why these where expanded. Environmental ethicists have been keen to see how far it is possible to push these boundaries beyond the human sphere, to pick out possible new entities like endangered species, old growth forests and wilderness areas as worthy of inclusion in the circle of things whose welfare must be taken into consideration in moral decisions.

Environmental ethics is the only field to produce thinkers who are determined to challenge anthropocentrism, making this a central goal for environmental ethicists. This goal is held to mark part of the distinctiveness of the field (Norton, 2003: 163-174). Light and Rolston (2003: 1-11) call this a task of 'disciplinary self-correction' a contribution that is unique for philosophers to make in response to the present environmental crisis.

Challenging anthropocentric moral views has come to many to seem the natural starting point for a sound environmental ethic and as a means of challenging a position that has led to a moral disregard for, and destruction of, nature. Many of the first papers and books published in the field by philosophers such as Arne Ness, Holmes Rolston, Richard Routley [Sylvan], Val Routley [Plumwood] and Peter Singer, target anthropocentrism of some description, either explicitly or implicitly (Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11). For example, Singer directs an attack on what he calls speciesism; the arbitrary assumption that the interests of the human species are the only interests that morally matter. The argument being that this arbitrarily excludes the interests of animals, who can and do suffer and who ought to be included in our moral consideration due to the pain/pleasure principle of utilitarianism (Singer, 1976: 1-27; 1993: 55-82 & 274-275). Richard and Val Routley (1980: 96-189) presented their worry with traditional ethical thinking in terms of

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[7]   See for example, Leopold (1949), Singer (1976), Schweitzer (2001); Rolston (2003a); and Taylor (2003), for examples of this kind of thinking.
[8]   See for example the work of Peter Singer (1976; 1993), to be discussed.

'human chauvinism', which was used to denote the idea that currently moral value is reduced ultimately to matters that are only of human concern. This chauvinist way of thinking then defines who and what counts morally, but in a way that unfairly elevates the value of human capacitates like rationality and language.

Not all environmental ethicists, however, are opposed to anthropocentric ethical thinking and Light and Rolston (2003) note that anthropocentric ethics need not have negative consequences for the natural world. For example, the anthropocentric value of aesthetics could end up counting as a reason for people to preserve nature, should nature be so aesthetically pleasing to them. It is, however, fair to note that anthropocentric approaches do obviously take human interests to trump those of nature and are thus less likely to have the power or the inclination to protect the interests of nature when those interests clash with human ones (Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11).

This debate is much more extensive than what is captured by this discussion, however, the important point to take from what is presented here, is that the current anthropocentric focus of our ethical systems is held to form part of the need for an environmental ethic. The alternative to an anthropocentric approach is often argued to be a completely new environmental ethic and a new ethic of this sort is mostly conceptualised in a principled way. The articulation of the way in which we value the natural world has implications for normative theory. It is only once we know the value of nature that we can precisely know what principles ought to govern our behaviour towards nature and animals. There is thus a clear interplay between the three possible levels of ethical concern; the meta-ethical, the normative and the practical. For example, theory is used to address practical environmental concerns like: how best to treat sentient animals; whether certain areas should be maintained as pristine wilderness areas; and whether increased moral consideration should be given to endangered species over other more common domestic types. This sort of practical concern will be solvable once it is decided what type of value the natural world possesses. Once this meta-ethical concern is addressed, certain normative theories can follow, which can then be applied to the pressing practical recognised as one of the needs for an environmental ethic.

To conclude, what comes out of this discussion is that the theoretical need for environmental ethics is seen to be solvable in generalist terms and that a solution at this theoretical level will lead to a solution at the practical level.

3. Environmental Ethics Today

3.1 Introduction: The Current Situation

Environmental philosophy presents the attempt to articulate the values that should govern our behaviour towards the environment and its inhabitants stemming from the recognition of practical and theoretical need. For the purpose of this study, it is useful to capture from this discussion the goals and tasks of environmental ethicists. The first goal is practical change in the world. The practical need which drove the development of environmental philosophy creates a strong link between environmental ethics and activism. Ultimately any theoretical work done in the field needs to keep this practical aim in mind. The goal of any environmental ethic theory should thus be not only the establishment of truth but also the ability to effect practical change and lay the foundation for the creation of effective policy and legislation around human relations to nature.

A second goal is to re-conceptualise traditional Western ethics. Here, practical change is linked to theory creation and a need to re-evaluate, what we as humans *do* hold to be important, along with what we *should* value (DesJardins, 2006: 18-22). Identified primarily as an applied ethic, environmental ethics encompasses the normative and meta-ethical as well as the practical. On the normative level, our current picture of the moral world presents with many competing theories. Examples of these being duty based theories, consequentialist theories, virtue based theories and now, particularism. Despite this theoretical diversity it is possible to draw out a common practical aim shared by each. Naturally, a normative theory is intended to be applicable to real life moral concerns. In other words, each normative ethical theory attempts to provide a framework and vocabulary with which to address practical issues of morality like, for example, abortion, animal experimentation and euthanasia. Ethical theory is intended to help us make moral judgments and decide what is right and what is wrong and in this way it provides a guide for the choices we make[9]. Clearly creating change or action in the world is one aim of normative theory and practical need has driven theory creation, making environmental ethics a highly theoretical field both at the normative and meta-ethical level (Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11).

Today, we are witness to an increased awareness of the environment and our actions and attitudes toward it, and yet environmental problems do not seem to be decreasing (Palmer, 1997: 20-21). There is still a lack of agreement, both in the academic world and in practice. Some feel completely comfortable testing medicines and cosmetics on animals for example, whilst others are literally violently against it. Yet, as Alison Hills (2005: 1-5 & 216-218) in her investigation into animal rights suggests, most of us fall somewhere in the middle. We believe that there are limits on what it is morally permissible to do to animals, but we also feel that there are noteworthy differences between human persons and animals. Many feel that these differences are significant enough to make it morally defensible for us to treat animals differently to human beings

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[9] The ideas presented here regarding what is required of an ethical theory come out of readings from Blackburn (1998: 1-4); Nuttall (2002: 1-10 & 170-212) and Warburton (2004: 39-66) who present introductory ideas on how to conceptualise the tasks of ethical thinking.

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(Hills, 2005: 3-5). We are nevertheless, uncomfortable with direct and obvious cruel action or even direct reference to cruelty. Although Hills refers specifically to sentient animals, this is no doubt true of the wider environment as well. Whilst we are happy to make use of nature and her resources to some extent, we do also feel uncomfortable with some of the results of our action like, deforestation and habitat or species loss.

One possible reason for the controversy surrounding environmental problems is that they are complex and thus difficult to understand and conceptualise clearly, and also difficult to adequately and effectively address. The problems we face today to do with animals and the natural environment are built into so many different and fundamental aspects of human living. They are a part of what we consume, for example food products, cosmetics, and plastic goods to name a few. They are thus also a part of what we produce. They are a part of where we go and how we choose to go there, so that a supposedly personal, harmless desire to spend Christmas with family in a foreign country for example, can cost the planet greatly in terms of resource depletion and pollution damage. Environmental problems also involve where we live and work and how we choose to live and work there. They involve who and what we vote for and finally perhaps most crucially, what we choose to value (Palmer, 1997: 1-7).

The complexity of environmental problems does not stop at the personal level either; it carries over to a world scale as well, involving aspects of world politics like international trade, the wealth and poverty of people and countries and the development of science, technology and health (Palmer, 1997: 1-7)[10]. These sorts of questions are not only important to academic philosophy but are also important to everyday life. Many persons today are struggling to make ethical choices in their relation to the nonhuman animals and nature. Increasingly, people are exploring actions like vegetarianism or recycling and this is significant (Pierce &VanDeVeer, 1995: 1-2). Environmental issues are pressing on a practical and everyday level and not solely as abstract philosophical debates about value. Everyday we all make decisions that affect ecological systems and individual animals.

In summary, the tasks of environmental philosophy are both practical and theoretical. Practically environmental philosophers are looking to create change in the world and address current applied environmental problems. Theoretically, they are looking to establish a moral grounding for animals and nature; an ethic that ultimately will be applied to affect change in the world. Environmental ethics arises from practical need but calls for work at the level of normative theory and meta-ethics as well. Thus environmental philosophy recognises the need for theory and practice to talk to one another and this makes environmental ethics well situated as a context in which to explore and analyse the interplay between ethical theory and ethical practice, and a good setting to explore a possible practical challenge to moral particularism.

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[10]   Examples of this kind are captured in papers like that of Peter Singer (2001) *Famine, affluence, and morality*; William F. Baxter (2001) *People or penguins: The case for optimal pollution;* and Holmes Rolston (2003b) *Feeding people versus saving nature?*

3.2 Current Normative Theories

Environmental ethics does not capture a unitary approach to values and the natural world. Rather, various attempts have been made to capture and set out an ethic that adequately governs our behaviour to the natural world. It is in fact usual for philosophers attempting to solve practical moral worries to take a particular normative stance within the field through which to address the presented case (Benson, 2000: 3-4). The following comprises a summary of some of the major ethical approaches to environmental concerns as described by Palmer (1997: 7-10 & 12-19; 2003: 15-37) in her introductory paper on environmental ethics.

3.2.1 Anthropocentric Consequentialist Approaches

Anthropocentric approaches, simply understood, are human-centred approaches. This is undeniably a broad category, under which a range of ethical approaches fall. It is possible however to characterise the general moral stance as one of seeing value in the nonhuman natural world in instrumental terms. In short, the value of nature is derived from its instrumental value to humans. The interpretation of instrumental value is open for debate however, as the natural world offers a number of different values: for example, physical, aesthetic and spiritual (Palmer, 2003: 18-19).

Despite this account of value coming in for a lot of criticism, it is important to highlight that these views do not automatically commit the holder to endorsing the exploitation of the environment. In fact, proponents of such views often argue in favour of careful management of the natural world. This kind of thinking has in fact become the basis for many international environmental policies. This, however, is done for human benefit, an important distinction to keep in mind as this is a central concern of much of the debate (Palmer, 2003: 18-19).

3.2.2 Individualist Consequentialist Approaches

Palmer suggests that these approaches fall broadly into the Utilitarian school of thought proposed by Bentham and Mill, in which the aim of ethical behaviour is that of achieving the best consequences. The way 'best' is interpreted is different for each different conception of Utilitarianism. The considered unit of ethical concern according to the Utilitarian is the individual, and so does not lend much support for environmental ethicists trying to find moral consideration for ecosystems and species. The majority of this kind of thinking is anthropocentric consequentialist, as described above (Palmer, 2003: 19-21).

A current voice of some import in the field is that of Peter Singer who is a hedonistic utilitarian. For him value is measured in terms of pleasure and pain and thus the aim of ethical behaviour is to maximise pleasure and to minimize pain. VanDeVeer holds a similar theory to that of Singer; however, he attempts to develop an approach that is more

discriminating and detailed in which pleasure and pain come to equal interests which then becomes the central point for ethical behaviour (Palmer, 1997: 13 & 43-44; 2003: 19-21).

Utilitarian ethics has been criticised for being anthropocentric as they equate value with experience. John Rodman suggests that this is using a quality that is clearly paradigmatic of humankind and yet is being used to judge other species. A further criticism comes from the fact that it is permissible to sacrifice the individual for the greater good of the many and this is just not morally acceptable from the point of view of individualist deontologists or even for that matter to many of our own standard moral intuitions. A final concern offered by Tom Regan and John Rodman is the level of subjectivity involved in the process of deciding benefits and costs to individuals. The example of meat-eating is provided, to show how complex it is to decide where the moral weight of good and bad falls, for in such cases which party is to be assigned the winning weight in terms of happiness versus suffering? The worry is that this does not challenge our existing ethics enough, for it seems plausible that these concerns will come to be solved out of human prejudice (Palmer, 1997: 14-15; 2003: 21).

3.2.3 Individualist Deontological Approaches

Individualist deontological approaches reject consequentialism, though the ethical focus remains on the individual. The central claim is that individual organisms have value in and of themselves, and this value need not be linked to the quality of the individual's experience as it must for the utilitarian. Rather, it is the organism itself that is seen as valuable. In 1978 Kenneth Goodpaster wrote an article called *On Being Morally Considerable* (Goodpaster, 2001: 112-118) which has provided the grounding for many of the ethical positions that fall under this heading. The idea is that being a living thing is a necessary and sufficient condition for moral considerability. Albert Schweitzer, Tom Regan and Paul Taylor all hold and defend some form of moral thinking of this type. There is a notable divide between these thinkers however, as some, such as Schweitzer and Taylor, hold that all morally considerable individual organisms are of equal value, whilst others like Lombardi argue for some sort of hierarchy of value (Palmer, 1997: 15-19; 2003: 21-23; Benson, 2000: 86 & 92-93). These views are criticised by holistic ethicists such as J Baird Callicott on the grounds that such views are unable to argue for the value of ecosystems and species, which is urgently needed. It also seems unable to make a distinction between domestic and wild animals and the difference in value and treatment that needs to be addressed here. Furthermore, diversity appears to be of no value because, what is of importance in this theory, is telos, or the will to live, and not the biological context (Palmer, 2003: 21-23).

3.2.4 Holistic Environmental Ethics

A holistic stance pushes for an ethical focus on whole ecologies rather than individual organisms. Under this view it is ecosystems, species and the biosphere that are of fundamental importance in ethical consideration and these theories tend to be consequentialist rather than deontological (Palmer, 1997: 15-19; 2003: 23-25). Aldo Leopold is a good example of one such thinker and his *A Sand County Almanac* is often held to be the foundational work of holistic environmental ethics. The crucial focus of this theory is that humans have a moral responsibility to whole collections of individuals and not to each individual. In these terms, hunting of individual animals can be considered morally permissible, so long as it is controlled and does not threaten the wellbeing and existence of the whole group.

Eric Katz and J Baird Callicott also fall into this school of thought. A concern that has been raised regarding a holistic ethic is that it can easily turn into a form of environmental fascism, allowing the individual to be sacrificed for the good of the community, in much the same way as with utilitarianism (Palmer, 1997: 37-38; 2003: 23-25).

3.2.5 Responses to Mainstream Environmental Ethics

Not all ethical positions within environmental ethics sit comfortably with extensions of mainstream ethics to address environmental problems. Deep ecology, first suggested by Arne Naess in 1973, ecofeminism and environmental pragmatism are thus attempts to address these new ethical demands from a divergent stance. Deep ecology is described by Arne Naess (2003: 262-274) as a movement more than a philosophy however, there are certain key features captured by this title. It was set up in contrast to 'shallow ecology' which sees people as separate from the environment with humans being the source of all value and nature and animals having only instrumental value. On the other hand, deep ecologists strive to be non-anthropocentric and a central metaphysical commitment of the deep ecologist is to the idea of holism. Holism is here understood to mean that there are no separate things; rather individuals form part of a 'web of relations'. They recognise the intrinsic value of animals and nature and the rights of individual organisms to follow their own 'evolutionary destinies' (Fox, 2003: 252-261; Naess, 2003: 262-274; Palmer, 1997: 15-17; 2003: 29-31). Ecofeminism looks at the problem in terms of the oppression and domination of nature and women by masculine values. Environmental pragmatism is an attempt to bring some of the diversity together to hasten some kind of action (Palmer, 1997: 17-19; 2003: 31-32).

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3.2.6 Summary

In summary, it is clear that environmental ethics stands as an umbrella term that captures *types* of concerns addressed rather than a specific normative approach. Broadly speaking the normative work done can be seen to be either an extension of traditional ethical theory (to address the new concerns raised by environmental concerns) or the proposal of a new environmental ethic. Principles and a principled approach are argued for and substantiated and then put to work addressing practical problems. In this context, a principled approach of some type has not been questioned. Whether the principles be traditional utilitarian or deontological ones stretched to encompass new classes of beings or new ethical principles like that we see Taylor (2003: 74-84) putting forward in his respect for life mirroring respect for persons, it is principles to which thinkers have unerringly turned. From a reading of the literature, we can see that an assumption of environmental theorists is that certain moral norms or principles (the precise content of which are still under discussion) should govern the behaviour of humankind to the rest of the natural world.

3.3 One Major Theoretical Debate: The Value Theory Debate

Currently, there are many theoretical environmental debates taking place in environmental ethics and it would be impossible to cover them all in this survey of the literature, however, one critical theoretical debate has been chosen as indicative of the nature of the theoretical work done in environmental philosophy. The aim of this discussion is not to settle this debate or even or even take a particular position within it, but rather to provide a sense of the meta-ethical assumptions taken by environmental ethicists without question. In short, whatever the content of a theoretical debate in environmental ethics the contention presented here is that it will be conducted in principled terms. The theoretical debate taken to illustrate this is that of the value of nature, a central debate in environmental philosophy that is therefore able to capture the tone of theoretical debate in the field.

3.3.1 The Value Theory Debate

Environmental ethics, though a subfield of ethics, or moral philosophy, should not be divorced from mainstream ethical theory, as in most cases, approaches to ethical concerns about the environment have come out of competing western moral theories. Furthermore, attempts to create some kind of new environmental ethic are a response to the traditional approaches and so take them as a reference point. A central move in moral philosophy and thus, in environmental ethics, is the delineating of value in the world; the move is to spell out and make a case for who, and what, deserves moral recognition. The work to be done is to lay claim to a rationally defensible criterion of moral standing. This has, arguably, been the most fundamental question in environmental ethics and has moved the focus of environmental ethicists from the pressing practical aspects of environmental concerns that started the field into the realm of the meta-ethical (Pierce & VanDeVeer, 1995: 16-22; Benson, 2000: 5-6; Palmer, 2003: 16-18).

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Over time a wide range of possible value attributers have been suggested. Examples of these are consciousness, sentience, or merely possessing a life. The chosen attributes pick out those things that need to be protected and thus it is believed the answers given to 'the value question' shape any proposed normative ethical system. Traditionally as mentioned above, accounts of value in this sense have tended to coincide with factors that are uniquely human, thus elevating persons to a higher moral status than that of the nonhuman natural world (Palmer, 1997: 10-14; 2003: 15-18).This thinking has recently come to be contested as anthropocentric, and thus, morally indefensible, by thinkers like Peter Singer (1976; 1993) and Tom Regan (2001; 2003).

The articulation of the way in which we ought to value the natural world has been seen to have implications for normative theory regarding precisely what principles ought to govern our behaviour towards nature and nonhuman animals. The kind of value we take the natural world to have, must logically inform the kind of normative theories that will be used to address practical environmental issues. The value question thus came to be of fundamental importance to determining how one should move forward with regard to our action in the nonhuman world.

The answers to the value question vary between saying that nature is indirectly morally valuable, in other words that it is valuable as the source of things that humans need, for example natural resources and saying that nature is directly morally valuable, possessing some kind of value that is not dependent on anything or anyone (Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11). This became a question of importance because if nature is directly morally considerable, it has moral value independent of persons, and then as Light and Rolston point out, our duties to protect endangered species, for example the Whooping Crane, would not be dependent on being able to describe some kind of value that the cranes might have for humankind.

The question about what we should value is linked to a concern about the origin of value. The most common distinction drawn between answers to this question is that of instrumental versus non-instrumental value. It is because it is often felt that if something has instrumental value, then the origin of that value is humankind and this is felt to potentially weaken its moral standing. Conversely, it would seem that non-instrumental value tends to point to some sort of original inherent worth, a worth that is independent of humankind and thus making it easier to defend some kind of environmental ethic independent of human valuing and needs that takes into account the environment as valuable in its own terms (Palmer, 1997: 10-11; 2003: 16-18)[11].

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[11]   Richard Sylvan (Routley) (2003: 49-50) proposed the 'last man alive' thought experiment to test our intuitions about the value of nature. The idea being that if the last man alive on earth went about destroying the natural world we would feel that something wrong was happening, even though no people are being morally harmed. The point here is that nature has value in and of itself that is not instrumental to the good of humankind.

Light and Rolston (2003: 1-11) suggest that this remains one of the key questions at issue in current ethical debates about the environment and directs much of the work of ethical theorists in the field. This is felt to be important because it is partially this difference in the origin of value that can direct the need away from an anthropocentric ethical stance toward an environmental ethic. The focus on this concern is fundamental and the answer will shape the way the normative world will look. If it turns out that value in nature is independent of human valuing, it seems logical that we would require a new moral principle, one that departs from our traditional moral views of the West which are undeniably human-centred. If nature is directly morally considerable, then what is set up is a certain kind of metaphysical picture in which our duties to nature are independent of human valuing. If, however, we say that human interest is all that gives value to the nonhuman world, then we simply need to revise and extend our existing moral traditions (Benson, 2000: 14-16; Light & Rolston, 2003: 1-11). We are asking people to extend their moral considerations to beings that are not yet held to be moral subjects. To decide that animals count morally is to force a change in behaviour. For example, depending on the kind of value we decide that animals have, and the extent to which they can suffer, we might morally have to decide that we should not practice factory farming, eat meat, or carry out experiments on animals. This is one example of how our behaviour could change if we came to change our categories of moral being due to the answer given to the value question (Light and Rolston, 2003: 1-11).

Once settled, the question of value is believed to lead to the practical worry of what sorts of principles are acceptable in terms of our behaviour to nature, moral injunctions of this type ought to follow from the conclusions drawn in the value theory debate. It is this practical side to environmental ethics that leads to some of the key debates in the area about how best to treat sentient animals, whether certain areas need to be maintained as pristine wilderness areas and whether increased moral consideration should be given to endangered species over other more common domestic types. This sort of practical concern will be informed by the type of value that is taken to exist in the natural world (Palmer, 1997: 19-20).

The importance of this debate is not uncontroversial and some have challenged the need to do this work. For example Bryan Norton (2003: 163-174) and Eugene Hargrove (2003: 175-190) claim that there are no convincing arguments for nature having inherent value and furthermore, that we don't really need value of this sort in order to adequately take moral account of nature. Their claim is that our concepts of nature as instrumentally valuable, for humankind, are adequate to extend to cover any moral needs that arise concerning our behaviour towards the environment. For thinkers like this, environmental ethics can leave the value debate alone. For them, simply expanding the view of what benefits humankind can accomplish all the moral work needed to justify a new environmental ethic. This is part of a larger debate over the status of anthropocentric or human centred ethical thinking.

The subtleties of the debate are numerous and the aim of this chapter is not to solve them or even delineate a stance – rather it is to highlight that this debate exists and has been central for many years and then point to the idea that it is tackled under the meta-ethical

assumption that ethical reasoning is principled and that what is being worked toward here is an overarching principle or principled talk derived from an account of value. In fact the whole task of the value debate seems to be to create a foundation on which to build a principled approach, with our conception of value providing the grounds on which to build and argue a case for a particular principled normative approach. Value here is taken to provide us with stable reasons for action that hold across all cases.

3.4 One Major Applied Issue: Factoring Animals into Ethical Deliberations

Again, there are many applied environmental problems and a complete survey of them is not feasible or required. I have chosen one applied problem that illustrates how environmental ethicists tend to engage with these kinds of practical tasks. Recently there has been growing concern over how we should treat animals and how we should factor them into our moral judgments. This is a broad concern that encompasses many different activities like the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the medicines we use. What ethicists seem to look for then are general moral principles that can be applied to situations of this sort. To illustrate how this has been tackled I make use of Peter Singer and Tom Regan as two central and key figures in the environmental field.

Peter Singer provides one well known illustration of a principled account of how to tackle problems like this. Singer's work is discussed in some detail later, suffice it to say, that Peter Singer makes use of utilitarian theory and the principle of equal consideration of suffering to detail how we ought to treat animals. This principle is then put to use in various contexts. He uses it to argue that we should not eat meat, and to show how we should factor animal suffering and lives into our thinking about testing cosmetics and medicines on animals, trapping them for fur and food and much more. This is a principled approach to solving this problem and is indicative of the general way in which environmental ethicists attempt to solve problems which is why it is included here. This is one example of a principled normative approach to solving this kind of practical problem.

Tom Regan (2003: 65-73) takes a different normative approach to Singer but nevertheless approaches this problem in a principled way. Regan argues for an 'animal rights' position which entails certain truths. It is a position about the rights that animals have and on this view we must recognise the prima facie rights of individual animals not to be harmed and thus not to be killed. On this view the reason we have to save individual animals is that each individual has certain valid claims. They have valid claims on their habitats for example and thus they have rights against those who would destroy said habitats. They have a valid claim on life and thus they have rights against those who would take that life for their personal gain. Regan argues that animals have inherent value and thus share with human beings a fundamental right to respect. On this account human beings are never justified in causing animal's significant pain in order to further their own interests.

This is a principled account and what Regan is arguing is that it is never right to cause significant pain to animals simply to further human interests; animals have a right not to be treated as a means to human ends. Animal liberation is the goal and 'animal rights' is

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the philosophy that lies behind this. This philosophy sees the animal's individual rights to be something that cannot be legitimately violated in the name of anything, even in the name of some collective good. Regan suggest from this an animal rights agenda with specific and concrete goals. For example he is working towards the final outcome of the end to all cosmetic and product testing on animals. The end to 'sport' hunting and trapping of wildlife and the end to capturing and training wild animals for human entertainment to name a few.

Regan and Singer both have practical goals; outcomes in the world they wish to achieve. They wish to see the end of human exploitation and cruelty to animals and, although they go about arguing for this with different normative theories they both endorse a generalist account of moral thought. From this discussion it is possible to draw out the general goals of environmental ethicists. Environmental ethicists tend to have certain moral agendas, particular outcomes they are aiming for in the world. In order to achieve these goals, they make use of moral theory. In order to achieve practical change in the world, moral theory is also used to endorse and create policy and legislation. Practical debates like that around how we ought to treat animals, illustrate the interface between theory and practice. Normative theory, often derived from certain meta-ethical arguments is applied to practical ethical dilemmas; within the various practical debates the meta-ethical and the normative come together with the applied. These general goals of theory creation and activism are carried out with the use of principles, endorsing a generalist picture of moral reasoning.

4. A Problem for Principled Approaches: The Monist/Pluralist Debate

A main focus, for many environmental ethicists, has been on arguing for and creating a new environmental ethic. The reason for this focus is that it is believed by many that a new environmental ethic will open up a path that is capable of moving beyond the limitations of our old ethics, allowing theorists to solve what currently look like intractable problems. In this sense, environmental ethicists are aware that in order to succeed, they need to challenge traditional moral beliefs (with or without the use of principles). Despite this awareness, they have so far only tended to challenge the most obvious traditional belief; the belief that humanity is the measure of all value. This is a valid and important task; however, Christopher Stone (2003: 193) envisages another more fundamental and far reaching task for environmental ethicists to undertake before they tackle this. He argues that environmental ethicists need to explore and challenge the currently accepted view of the meta-ethical realm. In other words, he sees environmental philosophy as well placed to rethink and analyse how moral philosophy ought to be done. What we have failed to do is call into question the methodology of moral philosophy. We have failed to push into the world of the meta-ethical and challenge how moral philosophy ought to be done. Instead, there has been conformity to the task of establishing, creating and defending a single overarching principle or single overarching set of principles, as seen in the utilitarian promotion of the greatest good for the greatest number or the application of Kant's categorical imperative to applied environmental concerns.

Although Stone is not situating his discussion in terms of particularism and generalism, he provides a useful way to understand the position of environmental ethics in terms of broader ethical and meta-ethical issues. Environmental ethics is obviously one field of applied ethics within the larger and encompassing field of moral philosophy. Consciously locating environmental ethics in the role of an applied field opens up space to question what is entailed by this status and one obvious point is that it creates a space in which theory and practice must speak to one another. If, for example, one is committed to using particular principles, then one must ask what is to happen if a theoretical principle fails when it comes up against practice. What does this say if anything about the principle and the theory it stems from. What is the position of practice to say anything about theory? This is an important point because it opens environmental philosophy up as a space in which to explore our meta-ethical picture as well as the relationship between theory and practice. For example, Stone is led to question the scope available for questioning these principles as they come up against real world situations and either work or fail. In other words if principles fail to work does that mean they should be scrapped? In short just what does it say about a normative theory if it fails to work in practice?

In keeping with this new focus, Stone (2003: 195-197) picks up on a point similar to that being made here, that in environmental moral debates there is a consistent but implicit agreement on the meta-ethical focus of what needs to be done. It is assumed, on the whole, that the task of the ethicist is to establish and defend a single overarching principle or group of principles. However, environmental philosophy is well placed to challenge this assumption as on the whole environmental philosophers are pushed to question traditional approaches to ethics that are limiting when applied to the natural world. They are driven to question and try to incorporate the possible value of entities like rivers, mountains and species and encounter difficulties in terms of what moral principles should be used as possible reference points for carving up the moral world into the things that are to count morally and the things that are not. For example, just what are we to take as our unit of concern, the individual ant, the anthill which is the environment for the ant, the family, the species or the habitat (Stone, 2003: 194)?

We could, for the sake of argument, suppose that it was possible to decide how to correctly carve up the units of moral concern. If we could do this we would know on what level to work but we would still face the further question of how to discharge the moral obligations that we now know we do have to these units. Using traditional anthropocentric terms often makes it impossible for environmental ethicists to rationalise the intuitions they have regarding what ought to count morally. Environmentalists then typically see beyond the traditional ethicist whose attention remains on a small group of morally salient features that come out of interpersonal relations. Only when we are called to move beyond our comfort zone to look at cases that are 'exotic' are we also then forced to look at the assumptions that underlie our ordinary morals and serve to unify them.

Stone sets out these thoughts in the context of a debate between the monist and the pluralist. For the monist there is a single body of coherent principles an example of this

being utilitarianism with the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number, or Kantian ethics and the categorical imperative. These principles can technically be used to guide the moral agent through **all** moral dilemmas to one final and correct solution. These then are forms of moral monism and on such accounts the ethicist is expected to bring their defence of the rightness of, for example, preserving a forest or protecting a laboratory animal under the same principles used to argue for obligations to family, friends and the just treatment of terrorists. Environmental ethical problems do not however lend themselves to being solved by a single principled approach (Stone, 2003: 193-202).

Despite the fact that this is not specifically to do with the debate between the generalist and the particularist there is an instructional and useful point to be drawn from this. What is significant about the work presented by Stone is that it highlights the fact that environmental ethics provides a naturally fertile setting for looking at broader issues relating to meta-ethical assumptions about moral reasoning and the relationship between theory and practice. Stone also identifies a potential problem with traditional, principled ethical approaches. He suggests solving this with moral pluralism but his concern suggests something that can be taken up by the moral particularist. Stone's work suggests that there is some room to question a principled approach and go one step further to explore the idea of moral particularism being better placed to capture a more accurate picture of the meta-ethical reality of moral reasoning. The point that Stone brings our attention to is that it is difficult to solve environmental problems because of the many different levels on which they function, and this suggests that particularism, with its account of the variability of moral reasons, might be the correct account of moral reasoning. At the very least it suggests that this is worth exploring further.

5. Conclusion

From this brief survey of the field of environmental ethics it is possible to draw out two instructional truths for the task at hand. Firstly, environmental ethics is an applied field that is motivated by genuine and urgent need, and this means that environmental philosophy is action oriented, focused on creating change in the world and influencing policy and legislation. Secondly, environmental ethics is not a purely applied field and various theoretical aims work towards practically motivated ends. Despite variability at the normative level environmental ethics presents a unified front in terms of endorsing a principled meta-ethical picture of moral reasoning. In short, a generalist approach to moral reasoning is endorsed.

Because of its practical focus, environmental ethics presents a space in which there is a clear interplay between the three levels of ethical concern; the meta-ethical, the normative and the practical and any theoretical work carried out is done not only for its own sake but also to effect practical outcomes in the world. Theory is made use of at a practical level to effect change and, as suggested by Stone (2003: 193-202), this opens up the space to investigate the relationship between theory and practice. It raises the question of to what extent and in what manner do theory and practice speak to, and influence one

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another. This makes room to look explore our meta-ethical picture of moral reasoning and challenge particularism on a practical level. One way to do this is to see if it is possible to set out an applied particularist ethic in the context of environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics sets up an implicit challenge to particularism in that applied problems are almost unanimously taken up in a principled way and this suggests that this is the correct picture of moral reasoning. However, nothing about the picture of environmental ethics painted so far appears to necessitate a principle approach. In other words, the idea that a principled approach is correct and correctly tracks moral reality is an, as yet, unfounded assumption made by environmental theorists. This does not mean that a principled approach is wrong or that it is possible to achieve the goals of environmental ethicists in a particularist way, without the use of principle. Rather, the point is simply that this is not a question that environmental theorists have asked and this now needs to be explored within the context of the debate between the moral generalist and the moral particularist.

Chapter two:

Exploring Moral Particularism

1. Introduction

The preceding overview of the field of environmental ethics, presents a particular meta-ethical picture. Until recently, this picture of moral rationality stood largely unchallenged. Ethicists working in applied ethics generally and environmental ethics specifically, have taken ethical thought and judgment to be principled in nature and codifiable to varying degrees. In fact, codifying the ethical landscape has been held as the desirable end of moral theorising. This point was illustrated in the discussion of Peter Singer and Tom Regan in chapter one. Singer and Regan present two examples of prominent environmental philosophers who, despite presenting strikingly different normative approaches, both believe that moral rationality requires a principled approach. These types of principled theories have a generalist conception of morality and though they may differ as to the specifics of the theory they have the same basic underlying metaphysical commitments. Principled approaches like those illustrated by Singer and Regan are currently the dominant accounts of moral thought, judgment and the nature of moral reasons.

Taking a generalist ethical stance implies that certain meta-physical facts hold about the way that moral reasons work and the way that ethical thinking and judgment will get done. Moral reasons on the generalist account are invariant. On this account, the features of a particular case that act as reasons for or against an action are regular in the way they behave and play the same reason giving role every time they appear. For example, if a feature made 'y' difference in case a, it must make 'y' difference in case b as well. It follows from this, that if reasons are invariant in the way they function then we ought to be able to capture them in general rules or principles. Moral principles then specify the perceived regularities that connect the non-moral features of actions with their moral properties (Hare cited in Dancy, 1993: 79-86).

Examples of the way that features are taken to function as invariant reasons abound. The commonly cited principle 'it is wrong to lie' provides one such example. The act of telling a lie is taken here to act as an invariant reason. What this means is that the feature of lying is taken to make the same negative contribution to the situation wherever it appears. Another example of invariance can be witnessed in another commonly held belief, that it is always bad to cause pain. Here the feature that plays the role of an invariant reason is the causing of pain. The property of pain is taken always to function so as to make the action worse, wrong or bad and on the face of it, it seems true that an action *is* always the worse for the pain that it causes or for being an instance of lying.

Taking reasons to be invariant in nature has implications for our conception of moral rationality. On the generalist account, moral rationality is bound by the logic of principles and this is based on the understanding that reasons are invariant. Rational thought

requires consistency, and in ethics consistency has come to be equated with taking the same feature to act as the same reason, all the time. Because moral reasons are invariant, moral judgments can be made via a comparison of cases and consistency thus involves fitting new cases into old judgments and fixing the moral relevance of a feature across cases. Moral reasons for action then are captured in general moral principles and moral judgment is executed through the application of these principles (Hare cited in Dancy, 1993: 79-86).

Consistency on this view rests in the application of principles and indeed it is felt that the very rationality of moral thought requires us to apply a principled approach. Otherwise one is able to ask oneself just what the difference is between making a moral choice and the choice of one particular kind of chocolate out of an array of possible choices. The difference is, it is thought, that in choosing morally we are required to make similar choices in relevantly similar circumstances, whereas I may choose one chocolate one day and another on another. Principles then ensure that we take this 'sameness' into account and apply consistently the general moral knowledge of invariabilities that they delineate. Furthermore, principles may help us to learn how things are morally speaking and how they must be. The rightness and wrongness of an act are difficult properties to get a handle on and it has typically been held that without moral principles there could not be a difference between right and wrong. It thus seems we have a metaphysical need for principles which are held to bestow rightness and wrongness on an action, in some way. Unless there are principles demarcating which actions are right and which are wrong, none would be right and none wrong. Furthermore, we need to follow the principles that are relevant to a particular case in order to see their effect and what it might be to discern right actions from wrong. There is a further epistemological need for principles, to identify the difference between the right action and the wrong action. There must be a discernable difference between the properties of the right actions and the properties of the wrong ones. If moral judgment is to be possible then there must, it is thought, be a set of principles that connects the moral properties to the non-moral properties (Hare cited in Dancy, 1993: 79-86).

Generalism has been the implicit underlying approach in moral philosophy and remains currently dominant. However, philosophers working in meta-ethics have recently begun to question whether morality indeed works in this principled way. Specifically, thinkers like Jonathan Dancy and John McDowell[12] have put forward a view called moral particularism. Although Dancy and McDowell put forward quite different theories, the general view of each concerns the nature of moral reasons and moral judgment and each challenges the traditional view that moral judgment must be based on principles. Particularists, like Dancy, challenge the assumption that moral judgment necessarily

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[12]   These are probably the two most prominent proponents of particularism, however, their respective particularisms take very different forms. Despite the differences in particularist theory, moral particularists are united in opposing the idea that it is possible to codify morality and any version of particularism poses an important challenge to traditional generalist conceptions of morality. Given the fact that there are different versions of particularism united by certain common goals and theories I have, as mentioned in the Introduction, chosen to look at Jonathon Dancy's version of particularism in relation to practical ethics as he is one of the most notable defenders of particularist theory. For future reference, unless otherwise stated, when I refer to particularist theory it is to Dancy's version of particularism that I am referring.

requires the appropriate application of moral principles and the recent work in meta-ethics carried out by Dancy purports to show that moral reality is such that our moral reasoning and judgment do not require principles. Particularists claim that neither requirements of consistency nor the nature of moral reasons give rise to a need for moral principles. Consistency on their account merely requires the moral judge to get it right case by case.

Particularists reject the idea of the invariant nature of reasons proposing instead that features that act as reasons are variable, functioning in new ways case by case. On the particularist picture reasons are variable, opposite to how the generalist conceives of them. Variant reasons change the way they function case by case, a feature making one sort of difference here and another sort of difference, or no difference at all, there. Whether or not a feature is relevant and the role that it comes to play as a reason is context sensitive, that is, it is sensitive to the other features present in the case.

Again we see that this particularist take on the nature of reasons affects the conception of moral rationality. Like the generalist the particularist also believes that to be rational one must be consistent however, the particularist's idea of consistency is different to that of the generalist. What is important for consistency here is the particular and present case rather than the cases of the past. The duty of the moral judge is, on the whole, to discern how things lie in the present case rather than looking back to see how the past resembles the present. For the particularist the challenge is not to fit this case into the past but rather to work out how the features of the case lie now. The particularist demand for consistency is satisfied when the moral judge gets it right case by case and is thus consistently successful (Dancy, 1993: 63-66).

There is another metaphysical point about the nature of reasons on which the generalist and the particularist tend to differ. This is not specifically a moral point, however, much of the debate between the two has been thought to hinge on the distinction of whether reasons are atomistic in the way they work or holistic. On the whole generalism tends to take it that reasons are atomistic in the way they function whilst particularists hold to the theory of holism in the way that reasons function. Holism here is the view that a feature is affected by context. Thus that a feature is a reason favouring my acting in one case need not mean that it must be a reason for my acting in another case; in fact it may turn out that it is no reason at all or a reason not to act. The role that a feature plays is thus dependent on the other features that are present in the case. No feature must necessarily make the same difference across cases. This is clearly linked to the particularist notion that features have variable relevance, whilst atomism on the other hand is the view that features carry their practical relevance around from place to place. Atomism comes in different strengths, there is full atomism (also known as single feature atomism) if a feature is a reason in one case then it must be a reason on the same side wherever it occurs so this takes features one by one. Another version of atomism is cluster atomism, this takes features in clusters and not one by one as full atomism does. On this view the separate features of the cluster can be affected by changes in features around them and thus may change their polarity, however, the polarity of the set as a whole, on this view, cannot change. The whole set is not affected in the same way as the individual features

are. Cluster atomism sits on middle ground between full atomism and full holism (Dancy, 2004: 94-95).

The picture emerging from the recent debate between generalists and particularists is of an old and entrenched way of ethical thought and judgment that has traditionally been accepted uncritically, and that is now being challenged. Broadly speaking these represent two distinct, opposing moral pictures of how to understand both the nature of moral reasons and ethical judgment, with each providing a different account of what it is to be a moral reason for action.

Given the work of the previous chapter, it seems there is a philosophical conundrum present here. On the one hand, increasingly important and pressing concerns in the environmental field, illustrated in chapter one, suggests there to be a practical need for ethical principles. This is endorsed by how we try to get liberation movements and political agendas off the ground as well as by the way in which conclusions in environmental ethics have traditionally been reached and justified through application of moral principles. When we are trying to effect ethical change as in the women's movement for example, we are required to expand our horizons of moral concern. This is usually done by examining our principles and showing how they now apply to a new class of moral beings, be it women, slaves or nonhuman animals (Singer, 1976: 1-26; 1993: 55-82). Intuitively we have gravitated toward a principled style of moral judgment in the practical world of environmental ethics. Here our intuitions are strong. The fear is that without principles we would not be able to tell right from wrong and political and theoretical change just wouldn't get off the ground. On the other hand there is the particularist claim, a meta-ethical commitment to the view that we do not need principles in order to make sound moral judgments. There are roughly three different particularist claims but all three are a challenge to this traditional conception. The most defensible account of particularism being that though there may be room for some moral principles, the rationality of moral thought and judgment do not depend on a principled approach, in other words moral principles are unnecessary. In the middle lies the view that codifying the moral landscape is undesirable; one reason for this being that it encourages the moral agent not to look carefully enough at the particular case at hand. The most extreme version of particularism is that there are in fact no defensible moral principles, in other words codifying the moral world is impossible (cf. McKeever & Ridge, 2005: 93). Part of the work that follows, is not only to determine how seriously to take the overall particularist challenge to principles, but also to determine which, if any, of the three versions of particularism is correct and defensible.

Particularism has challenged and continues to challenge the dominant ethical view and this has created a seeming conundrum. However, this challenge only creates a conundrum if ethicists are persuaded to take the particularist challenge seriously. The current picture of morality places principles at the centre and it is tempting to stubbornly hold onto the long and successful tradition of ethical philosophy carried out in a principled manner, citing the strong ethical intuition that principles simply are necessary, and that being a good moral agent means being a person of principle, as proof of the absurdity of a particularist challenge. In short, generalism is a strongly held and dominant view and as

such there needs to be a compelling reason to take the challenge raised by the particularist seriously. If we are to feel the pressure of the particularist challenge at all, there needs to be some explanation for this attack on principles. Thus it is only so far as ethicists are moved by the particularist programme that there looks to be something of a conundrum present. To feel the force of the conundrum it is necessary to be sceptical about the generalist project, and that is part of what needs to be answered here; just how sceptical do we need to be about moral principles? In this chapter I look at Dancy's version of particularist theory, setting out what one accepts if one is a particularist of this sort as well as setting out what reasons there are to hold such a theory in the face of the current dominant ethical paradigm. Particularism is suspicious of the use of principles but this suspicion needs to be explored in order to see how extensive the suspicions about principles need to be.

A debate has thus been started about the nature of moral rationality. As it turns out, there are reasons to question both the generalist and the particularist conceptions of moral rationality. One of the central aims to this chapter is however to set up the possibility that particularism is true, this being the fist step to any challenge to an entrenched philosophical position. For any kind of debate to take place particularism needs to establish itself as a possible viable alternative to the established form of moral thought, generalism. The aim of this chapter is thus to set out the particularist picture and the positive arguments for taking the particularist picture seriously and thus questioning the correctness of a principled approach to moral thought.

2. A Particularist Account of Moral Reasons

Particularism is a theory about the nature of moral reasons. Particularists hold two principle theses about the nature of moral reasons; holism in the theory of reasons (a thesis that we have already encountered) and particularism which states that the possibility of moral thought is not dependent on there being moral principles. These two theses are at the centre of the particularist account of moral rationality. Dancy's particularism is a denial of any need for principles in our moral judgment. The leading thought behind his particularism, the holism of reasons, establishes that there is variability in the way that the features of a case function as reasons, these features work as reasons case by case and are affected by context. This is unlike the generalist demand of sameness in the way that reasons function, a demand that suggests that reasons can be captured in a set of principles. Rather, for the particularist actions get to be right or wrong in a variety of ways that cannot be predicted beforehand and features can come to be morally relevant in a number of different ways. In short, particularists take holism to be a reason to reject the invariance of reasons (Dancy, 2004: 1-2, 7, 12 & 74-93).

On the particularist account, all reasons are contributory reasons. A contributory reason is a certain kind of building block, a favourer, for a moral judge to take a certain action. Dancy (2004: 15-17) describes his view of contributory reasons as follows: a case is made up of different features and some of those features are the reasons the moral agent has to favour taking one action over another. The features of the case are reasons that can

perform their role on their own, or in combination with other features of the case. Contributory reasons can and do combine, when they do however, they do so in irregular ways, and there is no rule or pattern for how they will combine and thus no guarantee that they will combine in a certain way. For example, if a feature stands as a reason for doing action x, adding another reason to do x need not necessarily improve the case for doing it. Features play the roles they do in such a way that their contribution may be strengthened by the addition of another feature that plays a similar contributory role or on the other hand, it may not. Any particular case of moral judgment can have many contributory reasons. These contributory reasons need not necessarily all work on the same side; some may work in favour of the action and some against.

All reasons on Dancy's account are contributory, however, there is still some need to talk about what there is overall reason to do in a particular case. On Dancy's view, to talk of the overall reason to perform action x, is to talk about where the contributory reasons come down in the particular case. Importantly though, an overall reason in this sense, is not a further reason to do something. Rather, it is to be understood as a verdict that states what the contributory reasons of the case provide overall reason to do. The overall reason can thus be understood to 'pass on the normative pressure that comes up from the contributory reasons below' (Dancy, 2004: 16-17). On Dancy's view contributory reasons are basic and overall reasons are explained in terms of their relation to the contributory.

As part of his explanation of, and argument for, particularism, Dancy (2004: 38-52) introduces new terminology that makes a distinction between features that play a 'favouring' or 'right-making' role directly, and those that 'enable' these features to play that role. Thus, Dancy talks of *favourers* and *enablers*. A feature that favours an action is a feature that provides reason for doing one thing rather than another. A feature that enables an action is a feature that enables a favourer to perform its reason-giving role. Each of these two terms has an opposite; the opposite of the favourer is the disfavourer and the opposite of the enabler is the disabler. The picture gets still more nuanced as Dancy sets out further roles that features can play, for example: features can come to play the role of intensifier, where they increase the reason I have to do something in a case. And again, this role has its opposite seen in the role of the attenuator. Importantly, on this account a reason consists of the features that play the favouring role. The reason I have to act is that feature, or collection of features, which favours the action while enablers, intensifiers and their opposites *do not form part of the actual reason to act.*

The particularist provides a refined picture of how reasons work and of what exactly plays the role of a reason. Because they eschew the use of principles and keep fixed on the case before them the feeling is that they are more attuned to the nuances and complexities of moral cases. For the particularist, as for the generalist, the moral person is the person who is fully sensitive to all the moral reasons in a particular case. The difference is that for the particularist being fully sensitive to the moral features does not mean having a supply of applicable principles but rather, being sensitive to the way that things are in that particular case; the aim being to work out what matters in the present case.

The above discussion outlines the particularist theory which then needs to be applied in order to show how moral judgment is carried out. What is clear is that the features of a particular situation will be relevant to what you should do in different ways; some will be the reason you have to act (favourer), others will enable that feature to play its reason giving roles, others might intensify or attenuate the reason present, and others will not be relevant at all. Furthermore, among the features that are relevant, some will be more relevant than others. Dancy (2004: 42-52) calls the relevant features 'salient features' and they stick out of the particular situation, catching the agent's attention (provided the agent is alert). Salience on Dancy's account is a practical notion. To see a feature as salient is to see it as making a difference to what we should do in a particular case. In any normal case there will usually be a number of different salient features all relating to one another in a variety of ways. A complete picture of the particular case will need to take all these features into account, seeing each feature for what it is and how it relates to all the other features of the case. This can be a complex and subtle process, for example, some salient properties in a case may only be able to be salient because of the presence of other background features. We thus need to be thorough and careful in our analysis of a situation.

A complete view like that described above will grasp the *shape* of the circumstances and so we move from salience to shape (Dancy, 1993: 111-116). Each case has a shape that comes from its properties; in the sense that properties have a practically related profile. When one comes to give a description of a situation, the shape of the various saliencies will make a difference for how one must describe it; it matters where one starts among the various properties. There will be a right place to start amongst many wrong ones.

When I give my reasons for doing some action, in these terms I am appealing to the other to see this particular situation the way that I, myself, see it. Given these terms, my appeal should be a picture of the way I see things and should be done as persuasively as possible. For Dancy being persuasive here means providing a convincing narrative. I must tell a story about the situation and this story should follow the shape that the situation actually has. It thus needs internal coherence to compel the listener to agree with my take. Success happens when the story sounds right. This captures the particularist's act of moral justification containing within it the merits and demerits of the narrative genre and this is what should guide one in the presentation of such justification. For example, as in the telling of a story, features may be mentioned in the wrong order and the correct relations between the various features of the case can be distorted and misrepresented. The results of such failings, is a story that does not make sense and consequently fails to convince the listener. This nuanced narrative style means that there will be many features in a case that do not get mentioned and many that are mentioned in only a secondary or minor role (Dancy, 1993: 111-116).

Under generalist theory describing the case is one task and arguing for it another, but for the particularist the description is part of the justification. To justify my choice is to give the reasons I see for making it and giving those reasons simply is laying out the situation. This involves starting in the correct place and moving on to describe the many salient

features in the right way. Once each salient property has been mentioned I have said enough to show how *I* see the situation and thus the reasons I found for choosing the action I did or want. If I have the analysis of the situation correct then my narrative should convince you that how I see the situation is truly how it stands (Dancy, 1993: 111-116). This description of how the particularist analysis of moral cases and reasons work becomes important in chapter six, the aim of which is to explore an attempt to use a particularist approach to an applied environmental problem.

The competent particularist moral judge brings experience of other cases which aids her ability to discern the reasons that are present in the current case. Importantly, this ability to discern the reasons present in the case does not have to be rule-based according to the particularist (a task that the particularist is set to argue for). Particularist moral judgment is not an attempt to extract rules under which new cases may be subsumed; rather it is a practical skill of discernment and knowledge of the practical importance and relevance of features that is, the kind of difference that they can make (Dancy, 1993: 63). The particularist warns that making use of principles in moral judgment is dangerous and will lead to bad moral judgments because the generalist will try to fit what to say in this case with what has been said in another relevantly similar one. This puts the generalist in danger of missing what is of importance in the current case. According to the particularist, the generalist will gloss over the detail of the particular case, forcing this present case to fit in with some long established principle. To illustrate this point, Dancy suggests that we think of a person who, when faced with facts which point to an obvious judgment, refuses to make the obvious judgment required because she cannot fit this required decision in a way that is consistent with one made previously in a relevantly similar situation. Or, Dancy points to the person who insists on making a clearly unjust decision, because again she has made a similar decision in a previous case and thus feels compelled to fit the two consistently under a principle. What this amounts to is a needless attempt to fit the decision that needs to be made in the current case with what has been said in the past and Dancy calls this action 'looking away' (Dancy, 1993: 64).

From the above discussion it is apparent that the particularist theory is a strong challenge to any form of generalist thought and the generalist is the particularist's enemy. Particularism faces a struggle in this challenge however, as principled accounts are culturally dominant. People do currently use moral principles when making moral judgments and this is so both with the ordinary person and the trained ethical philosopher. In order to successfully challenge the traditional moral view, particularism needs to provide philosophically convincing arguments to take its position seriously. Dancy argues for his account of moral reasons in two ways. First he presents us with arguments against a principled approach to morality. Second he gives positive arguments for his own picture. I explore Dancy's arguments against moral principles in the next section.

3. The Particularist Attack on Principles

Particularism questions the role of, and need for, principles in our moral judgment. The generalist and particularist pictures have been broadly set out above as a means of entry into this new debate about whether we need moral principles. It would seem from this that the particularist's first task ought to be to cast doubt on the use of principles in our moral thought. There are however two broadly different conceptions of moral principles, which means that two different forms of attack will be required to set up the particularist case against principled approaches in general.

The first conception of principles is that they are absolute in nature and the second is that principles are contributory in the way they function. Under both conceptions, reasons are taken to be invariant in the way they function. The absolute conception of principles, takes them to provide invariant overall reasons. A moral principle is a universal claim that works at the overall level. Given this conception all actions of a certain type will be wrong or right overall. The example of the principle stating that it is wrong to lie again illustrates the point. The principle 'it is wrong to lie' is an absolute reason against the action of lying and this will be the case no matter what else can be said about the action. Every action that is an instance of lying will be wrong, overall, and no other features will be able to stop this act from being wrong. Absolute principles specify a feature, or combinations of features, that always succeed in making an action right or wrong overall, wherever they occur. They specify invariant overall reasons. This kind of absolute conception of morality is captured in the subsumptive model of rationality which will, shortly, be further explained.

Contributory principles work differently to this, they specify features that will always make the same *contribution* to a case irrespective of context but they do not function at the overall level. Contributory principles are partial principles, each specifying how things are in only one certain respect. Thus, an action can have many features relevant to deciding whether to perform it or not. In any given situation there will be some features that count in favour of performing the action and some features that count against performing the action. Whether the action turns out to be right or wrong overall, is a matter of judging the balance of features at the overall level. Contributory principles do not by themselves determine what the balance of reasons will be; rather they spell out one by one the contributions of the different features of the case leaving the final decision to the moral judge. If particularism is accepted as true then there will be no room for principles of either sort.

3.1 The Particularist Attack on the Absolute Conception of Moral Principles

The subsumptive account of moral judgment holds principles to be absolute, and for this reason becomes relatively easy to undermine. On the subsumptive account moral judgment is to be understood as the subsuming of a particular case under a universal principle. Moral judgment is such that the moral judge is required to approach any new case with a set of principles with the aim of assessing, under which of these principles the new case falls. Either only a single principle must apply to each case or, if more than one principle does apply, each must point towards the same final judgment. This must be so because if it were not the case, there would still be a need for further judgment after the initial act of subsumption. In other words, the moral judge would still need to decide which principle must ultimately dominate and decide the issue, and the moral judgment would no longer be a case of subsumption. On the subsumptive account then, absolute principles have to be of a certain form; if more than one applies in a single case, they must all recommend the same action, and each principle must answer decisively, the question about what action to perform.

Dancy (1993: 109-126; 2004: 1-12) discusses three points about the nature of moral reasoning that the subsumptive approach fails to adequately address. These are raised as reasons to doubt the truth and accuracy of this approach. First, problematic for this account is the presence of moral conflict, a vital aspect of our moral lives. Given the absolute nature of principles on this view, genuine moral conflict is impossible to account for, despite the fact that we clearly do need to be able to makes sense of cases in which there are moral reasons for and against an action. Second, a problem similar to the first is the inability of this approach to make sense of moral regret. And third, the subsumptive approach is unable to provide a persuasive epistemology for how to discover the absolute principles required by this theory. I will discuss each of these points in turn.

Our experience of moral conflict is ubiquitous, and examples of cases of moral conflict abound as illustrations of this point. Think of the poor mother, forced to steal food to keep her children from starving. The fact that the act of getting the food is stealing, can be taken as some reason not to perform the action. This reason against taking the food is, however, outweighed by the need to feed her children. Here we have reasons both for and against performing the action. Although the overall decision to steal the food can be said to be right, there is still some sense to saying that we did experience genuine moral conflict in making the decision to steal the food, and take something that was not rightfully ours. There are present in this case, reasons for and against the act of stealing. Another example is that of aborting a deformed foetus. Again there are reasons on both sides and one would, if in this position oneself, most likely feel acute moral conflict. On the one hand there is the reason for the action of aborting, that the child once born will be deformed and could suffer for this its entire life. On the other hand there is the fact against the act of aborting the foetus, the fact that life at any cost is precious and the child might have a good and valuable existence despite being handicapped in some way. Of course the way that the reasons come down in this case to decide the issue will depend on a number of complex factors of the case, like the type and extent of the deformity and the consequent level of life the child is expected to have. What is clear from the example

however is that there are genuinely conflicting reasons present in cases like this. It is not a simple matter to decide what to do and there are reasons present that can make at least something of a case for each possible action. These reasons conflict and make the decision a challenging one to make (Dancy, 2004: 3-4).

Given the absolute nature of moral principles on the subsumptive picture, there is no explanation for genuine moral conflict of this kind. Those who hold to this account are forced to admit that there are in fact no conflicting reasons when making moral judgments. Any conflict that does appear in a situation must be merely apparent. This is because, on this account, reasons are captured by principles and principles are held to be absolute and decisive. It would seem then that conflict is left out by any conception of morality governed entirely by absolute principles, for if two absolute principles come into conflict then logically, one of them must be abandoned. Here moral conflict is understood as conflict between the reasons for and against an action in any given case, and there cannot be this kind of conflict if all reasons are held to be invariant and absolute. For if the reasons conflict, then the principles that specify them must be in conflict which would show one of the principles to be wrong (Dancy, 2004: 3-4).

Absolute principles cannot conflict. But, if this is so, then a fundamental aspect of our moral lives is left out. On the subsumptive account, the best explanation that can be given of moral conflict is that it is conflict within the individual over which principle applies in the particular case. There is no conflict in terms of the actual reasons of the case. This is not satisfactory however, as neither of the examples provided above, nor any others that one may otherwise think of, seem to be properly described as cases where the conflict is caused by not knowing which principle to apply. This explanation does not satisfactorily capture our intuitive sense of moral conflict. We need to be able to make sense of cases in which there are moral reasons on both sides and we are unable effectively to do this when all our moral reasons are captured in terms of absolute principles. The core point being made here is that conflict is real and if we leave it out of our moral picture, we are leaving out a real and important aspect of moral life, which is unsatisfactory (Dancy, 2004: 3-4).

The presence of moral regret presents a similar difficulty for the subsumptive approach as that of moral conflict. Moral regret is regret felt due to the fact that although I did the right thing in a particular case, I can still recognise that there are strong reasons to have done something else. Again, on the subsumptive account this important aspect of our moral lives is difficult to explain as either a single decisive principle must apply, or a number of principles must apply all pointing to the same action. This is so, as all reasons must fall on the same side, whichever action I *ought* to take, there is no reason to do another. The only reasons present are those specified by the principle or combined principles. Therefore, provided I do the right thing according to the one decisive principle or group of principles, I have no reason to do anything else, and thus have no reason to regret my action. Regret, used in this sense, is to be understood as a technical philosophical term for the proper attitude to have towards reasons that are defeated. It explains the creation of 'residual duties' and the fact that although one made the right choice in a situation there is still either something of value which this choice lacked and

another choice had, or there is something of disvalue that this choice had and another lacked. Absolute principles cannot explain this as a rational response because overall one has made the right choice. Like moral conflict, regret is a compelling feature of the moral world and if left out of a moral theory it again leaves out something that is a real and important part of the moral landscape (Dancy, 2004: 4).

Lastly, the epistemic concern that subsumption generates is about how one comes to know what moral principles exist; which principles are true and which are false. We saw that on the subsumptive account moral judgments about cases are made through the use of principles, however, it is not clear on this account how we are to arrive at these principles. Moral principles used in the making of moral judgments need to be justified or explained and it is not clear how to do this without appealing to further judgment; either this or the explanation for how we come to know them must simply stop arbitrarily at some point.

The first option looks to lead to an infinite regress as moral principles are used to make moral judgments and yet need to be founded in something themselves (further judgment); judgment then is appealed to as necessary for the founding of moral principles which are then used to make moral judgment and so on. If you need the principles to make the judgment and you need the judgment to make the principle this threatens to lead back ad infinitum unless it is possible to reach a point of 'original' and 'knowable' principles and it is not clear that there is such a point to be reached. A 'first cause' would be required to avoid an infinite regress of this kind, this being a cause that could 'actively produce' and 'account for' the principles being used to make moral judgments otherwise, we end up tracing our causes infinitely backwards (Lewis, 2006: 5-6) from judgment to principle. It is therefore not possible to extract principles from judgments made about particular cases, for that sort of judgment is the very judgment that is supposed to be based on principles. Subsumptive moral judgment needs principles from the start and principles cannot be got from further judgment as this will result in an infinite regress (Dancy, 2004: 4-5).

If the latter option is true, then we must believe some principle or set of principles to be 'ultimate principles' that we as moral agents are able to know through some method other than judgment. The epistemic challenge to subsumptive moral approaches is thus how to extract true principles with which to inform moral judgment, from particular cases, as principles of the right sort will not, remarks Dancy, simply stick out in a special way. The problem then is that on this account we cannot take principles from our judgment of particular cases because that is precisely the judgment that is based on principles (Dancy, 2004: 4-5).

In summary, subsumptive moral theory fails to provide a convincing account of our moral experience. Taking the subsumptive approach forces us to deny the existence of genuine moral conflict and regret and furthermore, denies us the presence of a plausible account of how we discover the moral principles that we take to govern our judgment. These are important aspects of moral life and the inability of the subsumptive approach to adequately address them justifies Dancy's dismissal of this account, and confirms the need to look for a better account of moral judgment.

At this point there is however no need to move directly from subsumption, a theory at one extreme of the moral spectrum, to particularism, a theory at the opposite extreme, as there remains a range of options between the two. Subsumption fails because of the kind of principles that it appeals to. The next step, then, is to work out whether a different conception of principles might avoid the problems faced by subsumption rather than to throw principles out altogether.

3.2 Problems for Contributory Principles

Difficulties arose for the subsumptive theory because of the absolute and decisive nature of principles. A more appealing account, better able to capture our moral intuitions, is one in which several principles, each giving *some* reason to act, can apply. These principles need not all point to the same decision; such an account would be a pluralist principled account and a classic example of this type of theory is that of W.D. Ross. For the Rossian generalist principles are not decisive as they are in the subsumptive account, and are contributory rather than absolute in nature. On this account, some principles may recommend action and some may not. There is thus the need for a decision to be formed regarding the action the principles are calling for at the overall level. Many features of a situation may apply to a single action on this account, some being in favour of the action and some being against it. For the Rossian, principles are the equivalent of the particularist's reasons, and Ross called these reasons principles of 'prima facie duty'. There is a principle of prima facie duty for each morally relevant feature of a case and this prima facie duty will state the polarity of the feature, that is; whether the feature counts for or against the action. Importantly, none of these principles is decisive, so the account differs from the subsumptive approach in that once the relevant principles have been applied there is still work to do. What is still required is to work out using unaided judgment what the overall required duty is. Ross called this overall duty our 'duty proper' and there is no principle to guide the making of this final judgment (Ross, 1930; Dancy, 2004: 5-7).

Rossian generalism avoids the three problems faced by the subsumptivist account. First, it allows room for reasons that are for and against an action in a particular case and can thus make sense of genuine moral conflict and regret. There can be conflict between the various principles that apply because of the contributory nature of these principles. Regret on this account, is a rational response to the presence of more than one reason (a reason here being a contributory principle) for more than one action. Although some action may be my overall duty (my duty proper) I can still have some reason to do another action. Clearly this will be a defeated reason at the overall level, but this does not remove it as a reason altogether and I can thus legitimately regret that I could not do all the actions I had some reason to do. Finally, the Rossian account also provides a plausible epistemology for prima facie principles. Ross is an intuitionist, that is, he holds with a process of intuitive induction. On Ross's account particular cases act as tests for discerning a principle. In a given case the moral judge is able to discern whether a feature is counting for or against. This moral knowledge is empirical and is drawn from the case, and as such it is initially restricted to that particular case. However, through a process of intuitive

induction the moral judge can come to see that a feature will count in the same way wherever it is found. We are able to gain knowledge of a general fact or prima facie duty and by knowing this fact we come to know a universal moral principle. We do not come to know the principle directly because it is inferred from the particular case, but this has an added advantage in that the moral judge can then use the particular case as a test for prima facie principles (Ross, 1930; Dancy, 2004: 6-7).

The particularist's rejection of Rossian generalism comes largely from their commitment to holism in the theory of reasons. They also make use of counterexamples to the Rossian assumption that features make a regular contribution, capturable by contributory principles. Dancy presses this point, calling into question whether a feature that counts in favour in one case must necessarily do so everywhere. Dancy pushes for an appropriate epistemology again, for the question remains how we are to tell from what we see case by case, that a feature will necessarily function in the same way. Thus, although Rossian generalism avoids the problems faced by the subsumptive approach, Dancy (2004: 7-8) argues that it must be rejected as an account of moral reasoning because it ultimately fails to adequately capture the nature of contributory reasons. Holism in the theory of reasons then is the main step towards particularism itself. If this view is correct then it appears, on the face of it, that Rossian generalism has the wrong picture of the nature of moral reasons.

4. Dancy's Positive Arguments for Particularism

Dancy's direct objection to the idea that general moral principles are possible comes from the theory of the holism of reasons, this being a way of capturing the point that moral life is so complex that it is impossible to codify. Thus, the leading thought behind particularism is holism in the theory of reasons. Dancy argues that holism leads to the fact that we cannot hope to find out in the particular case how a feature will function in general. This is one of the things that the generalist (of any description) wants to be able to do, and so holism suggests a problem for any generalist theory.

4.1 Dancy's Arguments for Holism in the Theory of Reasons

Dancy (1993: 60) suggests that holism in the theory of reasons has an obvious initial attraction, and can be supported by example. Take the case of pleasure: taking pleasure in something is usually held to be good, a feature that favours my doing the action. Dancy suggests, however, that the feature of pleasure can change its polarity as a reason and become a reason not to do something. His example in *Moral Reasons,* taken from Professor Hare, is that of treading on a worm (Dancy, 1993: 56). Taking pleasure in standing on a worm is a feature that makes the action, overall, worse rather than better. The initial attraction for this view is that there are many possible examples in which features change their polarity as reasons, or change from being reasons to being no reasons at all. Dancy makes use of such examples to show that features work as reasons in this way. Part of what this kind of argument is trading on, is that the examples provided demand a natural response that endorses the idea that reasons are variable in

nature. The natural thing to say in examples of this kind is that the features playing the part of reasons change their role. It is thus natural and right to say that in one case a feature is functioning as a reason in favour of doing something and in another it is functioning either as no reason at all or, as in the case of the worm, as a reason against.

Initially, Dancy builds his case for holism in the theory of reasons by example. He also builds his case for this being a natural state of affairs by linking holism in the theory of moral reasons with holism in the theory of other types of reasons. Moving from the least controversial to the most controversial Dancy leads us along with his thinking. The least controversial case of holism in the theory of reasons is found, according to Dancy, in theoretical reasons. Theoretical reasons it seems, change their polarity according to context. This is his first move because this step is one that most of us are inclined to agree with. Next, Dancy moves to ordinary practical reasons, again making use of examples and again relying on the fact that here holism is not questioned. He then moves to aesthetic and moral reasons, and again points out that the holism of aesthetic reasons is, once again, not considered controversial. The final move Dancy makes is to point out that if we are to accept that the types of reasons mentioned above work in a holistic way, it seems odd to leave moral reasons out as the only type that do not. If moral reasons are taken to work in a rule bound way this makes them unlike all other reasons, and it seems strange to say that the logic of these reasons is different from all others. This is especially so given that we are currently still unable to provide a clear account of how moral reasons differ from other reasons (Dancy, 2004: 73-78).

This argument makes it less attractive to say that the very possibility of moral judgment is tied to possessing a range of moral principles, as this ties moral reasons to functioning in an atomistic fashion. More appealing, is to suppose that moral reasons work holistically just like all other reasons, entailing that moral reasons are not dependent on the existence of generalities. Given this line of thought, it would seem that a principle based approach to ethics is inconsistent with the holism of reasons. This is a point about the basic rationality of reasons. Going back to Ross's theory which is generalist and atomistic, if holism in the theory of reasons is correct, it can be dismissed as a general account of moral reasoning because it denies the holism of moral reasons. The strength of Dancy's approach is that it is rationally appealing to think of all types of reasons as sharing a basic logic (Dancy, 2004: 73-78).

The holism of reasons does not entail that forming general rules is impossible but rather that there are no reasons to expect there to actually be any. In this case, if we did come across certain general rules, it would be, as Margaret Little (2000: 277) puts it, 'philosophically serendipitous', in short it would be a matter of sheer good luck. Particularism, writes Little, offers a radical metaphysical assertion that there is no reason to believe that there are general law-like rules with which to codify the moral landscape. Whilst still believing that there are moral answers to moral questions, particularists deny that these answers can be reached through general rules. Natural features can still be taken to make actions good and bad and an action can obtain its moral status by virtue of some of its non-moral features but the crucial point is that these features do not carry this ability in an atomistic way and may not always provide the same moral judgment.

Particularism is set to argue that there is no single moral significance that a set of features must always convey and so is grounded in holism (Little 2000: 277-285).

4.2 The Epistemological Argument for the Truth of Particularism[13]

Despite the recent particularist attack on principles, it remains true that we do currently make use of moral principles on a daily basis. Principled approaches to moral judgment remain dominant and Dancy acknowledges that this places some pressure on moral philosophers to provide a theoretical explanation of this practice. Despite the particularist challenge, there is some need for Dancy to provide an account of what is at present the dominant practice. Particularism, in its conciliatory mode, needs to provide an account of the practice of appealing to general truths and past cases in the judgment and justification of moral decisions.

In *Moral Reasons* Dancy takes this conciliatory position and provides a particularist explanation of the practice of making and justifying moral judgments through the application of moral principles. In doing so, Dancy keeps to the constraints of his particularist theory ensuring that reasons are still captured as working holistically. Dancy's explanation of the way we use moral principles is that they act as *reminders* of the sort of importance that a property can have in suitable circumstances. This is a specifically particularist understanding of principles and as such is an explanation that is not open to the generalist. This account provides an important step which Dancy takes in *Moral Reasons* as a way of providing support for particularism, as he presents this explanation of moral principles as one that overcomes a number of puzzles in moral philosophy. Because this is an account not available to the generalist, it becomes further reason to prefer a particularist over a generalist account (Dancy, 1993: 66-70).

One of the puzzles is an epistemological one that was gestured at in the discussion on the particularist attack on absolute principles. The epistemological problem is broader than this however, and it faces everyone trying to make use of principles, both absolute and contributory. Epistemologically, making use of principles is problematic because it is difficult to see how to learn that a feature necessarily repeats its relevance wherever it appears from how that feature works in a particular case. What we see in a particular case is how a feature works *in that case,* and not how it must work elsewhere. This problem is the difficulty of showing both how the truth of a moral principle is determined in a particular case and, how what is discovered in that case is to be applied as a necessary truth. There needs to be an explanation of how a moral principle can be derived from what we see in a particular case. This remains a challenging and problematic question for generalist approaches in moral philosophy. Despite this, it is precisely how we do currently apply the features of the particular case, features like lying and stealing are always taken as giving a negative contribution, whilst acts that are compassionate for example, are always taken to carry positive relevance. Awareness of this epistemological challenge puts the generalist theories in an awkward position that leaves unexplained a major move in their theory.

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[13]   This discussion is taken from Dancy's Moral Reasons (1993).

Particularism does not accept that features carry this necessary contribution, due to the particularist insistence on the holism of reasons. The epistemological point raised in the above paragraph, is one of the main reasons for the particularist insistence of holism. Because Dancy's particularist explanation of moral principles is able to address this difficulty it seems better off as a theory than the various generalist accounts. The particularist is able to solve this problem, according to Dancy, because a particular case can reveal the importance that a feature can have. For example, the fact that some act is fair can be revealed to a child through a particular case; say the dividing of sweets between siblings. Here the feature of dividing goods up fairly, between individuals, has a particular relevance that is revealed in the particular, and the importance that this feature can *sometimes* have is highlighted. Ethics, on Dancy's account is empirical, and moral principles (explained the particularist way) are learnt through particular cases. We are able to see, in the particular, the kind of importance that a property can have. If what we observe in the particular is correct there cannot be a situation in which the property could not have had the importance that it does given suitable circumstances. What we observe, if it is true, is necessarily true. Furthermore, we can still insist, in line with the particularist, that there is no possible move from the particular relevance of any feature to some necessary relevance that it *must* carry wherever it appears. This epistemological problem is easier for the particularist because the particularist wants to maintain that the results of our observation are less powerful than the generalist needs them to be (Dancy, 1993: 66-70).

4.3 Dancy's Metaphysical Argument in Favour of Particularism

Part of a further motivation for particularism, is an analysis of how moral reasons function which shows that a correct analysis of the way reasons work cannot be given by a generalist account. Dancy's next step then is to examine the nature of reasons and through this analysis he aims to show that a generalist account has errors in its theory of reasons. Once these errors are highlighted it becomes clear that generalist accounts should be questioned. Furthermore, it is Dancy's belief that a careful examination of how reasons work will lead to a particularist account. Dancy believes that contributory reasons are the basic normative notion and thus are not grounded in anything. Dancy is thus set to argue against the belief that principles are basic. On an account like this the contributory will not, and in fact cannot, be defined in terms of the overall, rather it is the overall level that should be understood in terms of the contributory (Dancy, 2004: 15-37)
Dancy's move is to show that we can't understand the contributory in the accounts available to the generalist, and that we also can't do without the contributory. This leaves particularism in a strong position as it can explain the contributory. Thus, understanding the contributory becomes a way of grounding the rightness of a particularist approach. To understand why we need to take particularism seriously Dancy attempts to show that we cannot do without the contributory, and that the contributory can only be understood in its own terms and not in relation to the general. Dancy looks at, and rejects, a list of eight possible explanations of contributory reasons explained at the overall level. In doing this he is trying to understand what it is for a reason to be relevant or significant to how to act, in the way that a contributory reason is. In order to further the case for particularism

Dancy tries to capture the role of a reason, for he believes that if this is done properly we are lead directly to a particularist account (Dancy, 2004: 17-37)

On the whole contributory reasons have been held to be grounded in principles. What this means is that they have been grounded in an account of what we have most reason to want to do. Contributory reasons are central to Dancy's account. He showed that we need some understanding of reasons as contributory if we are to make sense of things like regret and moral conflict, of course this does not rule out the idea of contributory principles but it does set up the contributory as a central and important concept that needs to be defined. As he proceeds to show how each explanation of the contributory in terms of the overall fails, for its own particular reasons, he starts to build something of a case for taking the particularist theory seriously. It turns out that not only does each attempt fail for its own particular reasons but that there is also a general reasons for why any generalist account will fail.

The first attempt is a functional characterisation of a contributory moral reason as a feature that would function as a decisive reason if it were to have been the only reason present in the case. This he called the isolation approach and Dancy objects to this on three counts, each with increasing strength. Due to limitations of space, I have chosen to represent his two strongest objections. Firstly, on this account one is trying to characterise what a feature can do when it is working in relation with others by appealing to what it can do in isolation. This, suggests Dancy, is a peculiar procedure which he likens to trying to explain the part played by a football player in a particular match as if she were the only player on the field, rather than one of many working together. Secondly, it assumes that each relevant feature could be the only relevant feature. But this is obviously not true and here Dancy appeals to examples to prove his point that there are reasons that are only reasons if there is some other reason present as well. An example cited by Dancy is that of mercy. The concept of mercy only makes sense in a context in which punishment is required. It makes no sense, suggests Dancy, to say that you were merciful to someone if there was no reason to punish them in the first place (Dancy, 2004: 18-20).

In like fashion, Dancy goes through seven further attempts to explain the contributory in terms of the overall providing specific reason for why each one fails. More interestingly, however, is that it turns out that there is a general reason for why each attempt given in generalist terms will fail (Dancy, 2004: 17-37).

Until recently it has been assumed that reasons are ought makers, which illustrates a particular kind of normative relation. Dancy's suggestion is that there are actually two different normative relations and that distinguishing between the two is crucial. The first type of relation is the right-making relation, and this is between *reasons* and the *judgment* that one ought to act. In this relation the reasons are specified and then the judgment that one ought to act is made. The second type of relation is what he calls the favouring relation, and this is between *reasons* and *action*. Here the reasons that make the action right are not necessarily mediated by any ought, and the relation is about practical reasoning oriented toward action. Here, if there is a reason to jump, I'll jump, and there

need be no 'ought-judgment' involved at all. Relations one and two are different, says Dancy. Relation one is theoretical as ought-judgments involve reasoning towards judgments that are accepted as true. This leads Dancy to reason that however practical the purpose of this judgment may be, it is still theoretical rather than practical. Relation two is practical however, being the relation between reason and action and capturing the judgment of what is to be done. The relation between reasons and action and reasons and ought-judgments will not be the same because an overall ought is not a reason, thus, any attempt to capture the contributory in terms of the overall will fail. An account of the relation between reason and action will not be found by looking at a different relation and so attempting to capture what a reason does in terms of its relation to an 'ought' is looking for an explanation in the wrong place (Dancy, 2004: 22-25).

This account of the right-making relation and the favouring relation is not however a satisfying one for why the contributory cannot be explained in terms of the overall. It is not self-evident that one can make the distinction that Dancy makes between one relation being practical and the other theoretical. If we look at the two relations in terms of what lies to the left of each, and what lies to the right of each, then it is not clear that we should accept Dancy's account of the right-making relation being purely theoretical. On the left hand side of the right-making relation lie the reasons, and on the right hand side lies what Dancy refers to as the ought-judgment. However, it is not clear that this is the correct account of what lies on the right hand side of the right-making relation, for it is just as plausible to suggest that what really lies on this side is an 'ought' and not an 'ought-judgment'. This is so, for an ought-judgment is dependent on there actually being a 'someone' around who is capable of doing the judging, yet even when such a judge is not around there can still be an ought present. An ought in this sense is practical but Dancy has been trying to show the opposite arguing that it is not practical because it is a judgment. What Dancy fails to do, is show convincingly that we should take what lies on the right hand side of the right-making relation as fundamentally an ought-*judgment* rather than an *ought*. The contention made here is that it is in fact fundamentally an ought, and not an ought-judgment.

One difference between the two relations seems to be seen in the fact that the favouring relation does not necessarily make the action right, rather this is to be taken in contributory terms with the act being favoured but not necessarily made right. The right-making relation, on the other hand, seems to make the action right and is then a peculiar instance of the favouring relation; one that can then be taken as a restricted class of favourer that makes the action right. In short, the distinction that Dancy makes here does not appear to be well thought out enough, as his right-making relation turns out to be a practical relation too[14].

The contributory can neither be understood in terms of its relation to the overall nor can it be done away with entirely but there are two further options. The first is that there are two basic notions, the contributory and the overall, with neither definable in terms of the

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[14]   I am indebted to my supervisor, Douglas Farland for getting me to think harder about this point and coming to see the difficulty that Dancy encounters here in his distinction between the right-making relation and the favouring relation.

other, or the overall 'ought' can be explicated in terms of its relation to contributory reasons. Dancy takes it that the idea of an overall 'ought' can be understood as some function of a contributory ought. This is an attractive option as it allows us to make sense of statements like 'as far as this goes you ought to do x', 'you ought to do x more than you ought to do y', 'in this respect you ought to do x' and 'what you most ought to do is not what you are most likely to want to do'. This is how we speak when making ethical judgments and statements and thus an account that captures this is in a good position. The contributory is important to our capturing correctly our ethical judgment and Dancy takes it that particularism is in the best position to capture this term correctly (Dancy, 2004: 25-37).

5. Conclusion

Particularism challenges the generalist metaphysical picture of moral rationality, leading to a conundrum. On the one hand, an exploration of the applied field of environmental philosophy suggests that we need moral principles; here the use of principles is ubiquitous. On the other hand, particularism has drawn attention to the possibility that although generalism is the dominant view, it is wrong. Given the dominance of the generalist position and the ubiquitous use of moral principles the obvious question to ask is, why adopt a particularist approach? In other words, what is there to motivate an attack on principles and convince 'hardened' generalists to begin to take the particularist challenge seriously?

Answering this question and establishing the particularist challenge as valid was part of the work of this chapter and Dancy presents enough evidence to conclude that there is at least some reason to take the particularist challenge to principled thought seriously. It is possible to conclude from this that there are compelling reasons to question principles, and principled accounts of moral reasoning and explore further whether particularism presents us with the correct picture of moral reasons.

This establishes the challenge as a serious one and sets up the context of the debate between the particularist and the generalist. However, this discussion does not give us a clear sense of whether particularism is correct or not, and it is only possible to reach a position on one side of the debate; moral particularists have a case for challenging principles. Particularist theory does not stand unchallenged itself, however, and in order to get a full picture of the state of the theoretical debate, it is necessary to explore the arguments against particularism. The task of the next chapter is thus to set out any arguments against moral particularism and then draw together the key points of the debate as a whole in order to establish an assessment of where one ought to stand regarding the correct picture of moral rationality.

Chapter three:

Theoretical Challenges to Dancy's Moral Particularism

1. Introduction

Particularism challenges the standard account of moral reasoning, raising troubling questions for these generalist conceptions of morality; however, particularism is still a controversial theory that faces its own challenges. Given the uncertainty around which of these accounts offers the correct picture of moral rationality, the next step becomes to assess how seriously we need to take the particularist attack on principles. Particularism has not been enthusiastically embraced as the new and correct picture of moral reasons, and understanding why is an important step in creating clarity on where the debate currently stands. Furthermore, it is clear that particularist theorists like Dancy, have not easily settled on a single and satisfying defence for their theory suggesting that, at the very least, there is still work to do in providing a convincing reason to take particularism as the correct account of moral reasons.

2. Theoretical Challenges to Dancy's Version of Particularism

2.1 A Challenge to Dancy's Account of Reasons

Dancy defends two core theses; holism in the theory of reasons and particularism about the possibility of moral thought. In order to defend these theses, he reflects on the nature of reasons and in so doing believes that he solves a number of puzzles in moral philosophy. In order for this to work however, his account of reasons must be correct and a recent attack by Joseph Raz (2006: 99-119) has called this into question. Raz (2006) has challenged Dancy's arguments for particularism by focussing specifically on how he fails in setting up his two core theses.

Raz begins his attack by questioning Dancy's efforts to establish the truth of holism. Part of Dancy's work to get the theory of holism off the ground was in his analysis of how reasons work, through the introduction of the new terminology of favourers and enablers[15]. Dancy makes use of one main example to illustrate this distinction which is where Raz starts his attack.

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[15]   Cross reference chapter 2, page 31, for a discussion of these terms.

1. I promised to do it. (Favourer)
2. My promise was not given under duress. (Enabler)
3. I am able to do it. (Enabler)
4. There is no greater reason not to do it. (Enabler)
5. So: I do it.

(Raz, 2006: 103)

In the example, 1 is the favourer, and 2, 3 and 4 are the enablers. The reason is equivalent to the favourer; no other feature of the situation is a part of the reason I have to act. Only feature 1, as the favourer, acts as my reason to keep my promise. There are, however, a number of ways to understand how these features could combine to provide some reason for action. For example, although 3 and 4 are clearly not a part of my reason for acting, there is some ambiguity in the case of 2. Raz thus draws out what he sees to be a problem with Dancy's identification of reason with favourer, and favourer with reason. From the example Dancy provides, it is at least possible, that both 1 and 2 favour me keeping my promise. If this is the case then a compound fact forms my reason for acting. The challenge raised by this point is that there is at least the possibility, that in this example, I have a reason that consists of both 1 and 2. If we put this thought into Dancy's terms, then I have a reason that consists of both a favourer and an enabler and it is at least a possibility that 1 and 2 together actually favour my keeping my promise (Raz, 2006: 103-107).

This is a simple yet important challenge to holism, which is central to Dancy's thesis of particularism. When introducing his analysis of reasons, Dancy spent much time establishing that what he calls enablers are not independent reasons. This is important to his case as one of the most direct attacks on his thesis of holism would be to show that enablers form a part of reasons to act. Despite the central role of holism, Dancy supports it mainly by example. Through examples like that of the promising one, Dancy analyses reasons in terms of favourers and enablers and the reader is led to accept holism in the theory of reasons. Raz challenges the obviousness of the distinction that Dancy draws between favourer and enabler, and thus challenges the fact that reasons consist only of favourers. This is important, because if we come to accept that some enabling features are actually parts of the reason we have to act, we are more likely to reject the holism of reasons.

The worry that Raz points to is that Dancy uses the thesis of holism of reasons to get his account of particularism off the ground, and this is done supposedly through a correct analysis of reasons. This analysis challenges the old principled account and leads naturally to holism, however, Dancy argues mostly by example, and Raz is challenging the success of those examples. What Dancy needs, but fails to do, is show, categorically, that enablers are not parts of reasons, or reasons on their own. Showing this is vital to the success of his argument, and yet he does little work to argue for the fact that enablers are not part of reasons, seeming to reject this possibility with little argument. It is intended that one grasp this fact through examples, as a point that is apparent upon a correct analysis of reasons. Raz successfully challenges this argument by example, calling into

question that the analysis Dancy presents is the most natural one and challenging the theory of holism about reasons. With no specific argument, other than by example, Dancy leaves little to support his central thesis of holism in the theory of reasons (Raz, 2006: 99-119).

Holism raises the question of the identity of reasons; that is of how much belongs to one reason. Raz suggests that our answer to this question of identity, will come largely from the point or role of the concept of 'a reason' and the question then becomes, does a sound account of the identity of reasons leave room for holism? Dancy implies that what makes an action right in a particular situation is only the favourer, but as discussed, Raz challenges this; it is only if the favourer is enabled that it favours and only if it favours does it make the action right. So the enabled favourer makes the action right, not the favourer by itself. Raz thus raises the point that it is possible that Dancy is failing to distinguish between the fact that makes the action right, and the account of the facts which will provide a good enough explanation in the given context. To Raz, it can be taken from Dancy's account that actions are right in virtue of the presence of both favourers and enablers, and what makes keeping the promise right in the example, is that it was freely given and so on. Raz's doubts about holism come from a view of the nature and function of reasons which seem to suggest that some of Dancy's enablers are reasons.

The above discussion shows up another problem for Dancy, this being that Dancy's explanation of reasons seems to entail that if there are reasons, they are holistic. This point can be seen if one thinks of the relation between the fact that one made a promise and the fact that one made the promise freely; if both of the stated facts turn out to be part of a single reason then holism becomes more problematic. However, if it is only the first fact that is the reason and the second that is the condition for it to be a reason then holism *is* a consequence, but it is a trivial one. On Dancy's account, reasons are reasons only if the features that are not themselves part of the reason come about, and hence we are led to holism. Raz's point is that we could, just as well, think of some of Dancy's enablers, and the absence of some of his disablers, as part of the reasons, and this would lead more easily to the rejection of holism (Raz, 2006: 108).

Raz provides a different understanding of reasons that challenges the account given by Dancy. He spells out reasons in the following way. A reason can be understood to contain various facts, each of which may actually be a 'part' of one reason, and each of which will sometimes be explicitly mentioned as a reason. In any particular situation, what gets mentioned as the reason will depend on who one is talking to at the time. The listener directs the point that is made; it is what the listener is puzzled about or interested in, that will shape the response that is made. Different facts can and may, refer to the same reason and it is possible to point to a reason by stating only part of it. Although we find that the concept of a reason does allow one to distinguish one reason from another, this has not, on the whole, been the focus of our moral talk about reasons. Instead the focus has been action oriented; looking at how the reasons combine to point in favour of a particular action. This means that the identity of separate reasons has often tended not to matter, what has mattered more has been the idea of what there is most reason to do, in a given moral situation.

The above discussion suggests that it is important to distinguish between what constitutes a reason, and what constitutes an appropriate explanation of the reason for action. Importantly, the appropriateness of an explanation will be contextual but the identity of the reason will not be influenced in the same way by what others want to know. One important consequence of this is that in giving an explanation, it does not seem that one is required to give or mention all the features/aspects of the actual reason. It is possible to look at Dancy's promising example in this way. If I am asked why I performed action x, I may respond 'because I promised to'. This can be seen as sufficient to *explain* why I did x, without necessarily being the whole reason I had to do x, which could very well include the fact that I freely promised and was not coerced. This is a damaging move for Dancy, if it turns out that Raz captures our intuitions better than he does, as Dancy builds so much on his explanation and understanding of reasons. Raz's account could undermine the intuitive pre-theoretical appeal of holism.

2.2 Holism and Moral Particularism

Moral particularists have tended to be united around the idea that morality cannot be codified. This can be spelt out in a number of different ways however, with some particularists saying that it is impossible to codify the moral landscape at all, others claiming that moral principles are not necessary, and still others simply suggesting that it is undesirable to codify the moral landscape because of the negative consequences of doing this[16]. Particularists may support one, or another, or even all three of these theses, and have tended to use holism in the theory of reasons to do so. Using holism as support for particularism is important, because it moves away from simply using examples and counterexamples as reasons to take particularist theory as correct. For example, Little (2000: 277, 279) argues that it is not enough for the particularist to keep on providing counterexamples to the principles put forward by the generalist because, just what is shown by such counter examples is precisely what is in question between the particularist and the generalist. The question at hand is whether such examples simply show the *complexity* of the moral world or whether they show the *irreducible complexity* of the moral world. For it is clear by now, that those who maintain that a principled approach is correct will interpret this complexity differently to the particularist. Those committed to principles will simply argue that such counter examples are evidence of complexity but will not be driven to go so far as to say they are evidence of irreducible complexity (Little, 2000: 279). Particularism then, stems not simply from counter examples, in fact as we have seen there have been numerous forms of attack put forward by Dancy, but one of the main and leading thoughts behind particularism is the thesis of holism in the theory of reasons.

Holism, in the theory of reasons, as an argument for the truth of particularism, does not itself stand uncontested however. Hooker (2000: 15) captures this point when he writes that particularists should not expect the committed generalist to be impressed by the argument from the holism of reasons. This thought has recently been elaborated by other

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[16]   See for example the earlier discussion on Dancy and the dangers of looking away, Chapter 2, page 33.

theorists and Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge (2005: 99-103) attack this method and contend that holism in the theory of reasons actually has very little to do with whether particularism is true or not, and thus is not situated to do the work that the particularist has tried to get it to do in support of their main thesis. The point being made is that holism in the theory of reasons does not necessarily entail particularism and McKeever and Ridge argue in a recent paper that in fact holism has very little to do with particularism. Holism can be understood in two ways but neither of which according to McKeever and Ridge do the work of supporting particularism that particularists suppose it to. Thus, even if the argument against holism already provided by Raz (2006) fails, and holism turns out to be correct, it is questionable whether the thesis of holism leads to particularism in the way that Dancy and other particularist theorists need, and use it to. The argument presented by McKeever and Ridge is as follows. The first way of understanding holism is by now familiar. Holism, understood in this way, is an account of the fact that reasons are context sensitive. The second interpretation consists of two theses. The first again being that holism is an account of the context sensitivity of reasons, and the second being that the fact that reasons are context sensitive makes them unable to be codified. McKeever and Ridge contend that the first way of understanding holism lends no support to particularism and that the second does so only because contained within it is a form of particularism. The second thesis is thus guilty of begging the question.

It is easy to argue, by example, for the thesis of holism understood in the first sense. What is in question here, however, is whether holism understood in this way leads to particularism. McKeever and Ridge argue that it does not. Furthermore, they suggest that holism, taken in this way, is compatible with a generalist view of morality. They then proceed to argue this point, through an example of a generalist codification of morality that fits with the thesis of holism of reasons. To do this, they ask us to think of the following type of utilitarian principle:

> "The fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason to perform the action if and only if the pleasure is non-sadistic. The fact that an action would promote pain is a reason not to perform the action. An action is morally right just in case it promotes at least as great a balance of reason-giving pleasures over pain as any of the available alternatives; otherwise it is wrong."
>
> (McKeever & Ridge, 2005: 96)

A statement like this is incompatible with the particularist theory that morality cannot be codified as it is a version of a utilitarian principle. This principle codifies, in purely descriptive terms, the morality of right and wrong. What is important to McKeever and Ridge's point is that the particularist wants to reject this kind of principle, and yet, holism is unable to provide a particularist critique of it. In fact, the principle that McKeever and Ridge provide actually presupposes holism in the theory of reasons; holism simply states that the status of a feature as a reason *can* depend on other features, not that it *must*. According to the principle provided here, whether the fact that an action promotes pain becomes a reason for acting or not, depends on whether the pleasure is sadistic or not, and that indicates that it is context dependent. What McKeever and Ridge set up is a case of holism in the theory of reasons, which is part of a generalist rather than a particularist

theory. This suggests that holism does not have to lead neatly to particularism as Dancy would have it do.

One form of particularist response to this is to force a much stronger form of holism. One could, for example, insist that holism means that all reasons must depend on context for their status as reasons. This is, however, a less pre-theoretically attractive way of understanding holism. This unattractiveness is not however even important, because McKeever and Ridge argue that even this stronger version of holism can be fitted into a more sophisticated form of utilitarianism. All that needs to be done is to revise the old principle to look as follows:

> "The fact that an action would promote pleasure is a reason to perform the action if and only if the pleasure is non-sadistic. The fact that an action would promote pain is a reason not to perform the action if and only if the person who will experience the pain has not consented to experiencing it. An action is morally right just in case it promotes at least as great a balance of reason-giving pleasure over reason-giving pain as any available alternatives; otherwise it is wrong."
> (McKeever & Ridge, 2005: 97-98)

Here, all reasons, those based on pleasure and those based on pain, are context dependent. Again we see a possible codification of right and wrong in purely descriptive terms, which remains consistent with the strong form of holism suggested above. McKeever and Ridge go on to say, that this point can just as easily be illustrated through a Kantian codification of morality. They hold this to be important because utilitarian and Kantian moral theories can be argued to be the most influential and interesting codifications of morality. This is important because if it is possible to think of plausible utilitarian and Kantian theories that presuppose holism, then it is hard to see how the particularist challenge that holism in the theory of reasons makes the prospect of finding moral principles bleak, can be gotten to work. Particularists have argued that if holism is true and morality does turn out to be codifiable, this will be pure chance. For example, Little (2000: 277) argues that whilst it is possible, if holism is true, that there exist moral generalities, there would be no reason to expect it. McKeever and Ridge (2005: 99) call the idea that if any moral principles did exist this would be the result of a cosmic accident, the cosmic accident thesis. If the cosmic accident thesis is true then it would be natural to be sceptical about whether there could be moral principles and thus to question the attempts of ethicists to systematically codify the moral world.

Before accepting the above conclusion however, we need to look at what, if anything, supports the cosmic accident thesis. McKeever and Ridge ague that it relies on two premises; the first being that if holism is true then it would be a cosmic accident if all moral reasons turned out to be invariant in nature; and the second being that morality is only codifiable if all moral reasons are invariant. Now if these are the only two reasons that there are to accept the cosmic accident thesis then McKeever and Ridge argue we need not, and should not, accept it. This is so, firstly because the first thesis is not obviously true and the second thesis is blatantly false, as seen in the above discussion. The person who wants to defend the idea that morality can be codified, can allow all reasons to be context dependent in the manner captured by holism, for as seen holism

itself provides no reason to presuppose that context-dependent moral reasons cannot be codified in a finite and helpful manner.

Another of the particularist challenges introduced at the start was the fact that the codification of morality is unnecessary. Again McKeever and Ridge argue against this (2005:100). They maintain that holism does not support this and to back this up they present a plausible need for principles that is supported by the theory of holism. For example, holism can be used to argue that we need to codify morality to be able to determine the reasons that are present in a particular case and what morality demands of us in a particular case. This might be so because rules provide an explicit structure to guide the moral agent in terms of what morality demands in the situation. McKeever and Ridge suggest that this can help the less 'virtuous' moral agent acquire a clearer picture of what principles guide the virtuous moral agent. A rule can help one see what morality demands in a particular case as one can take it and apply it directly to the case at hand. Furthermore, holism does not support the particularist idea that it is undesirable to codify the moral landscape. Holism says nothing about the desirability of using principles in making moral decisions and could just as well support the subsumptive model as the particularist. The only stipulation that can be taken from holism in the theory of reasons is that principles should not entail atomism, and McKeever and Ridge have shown that it is possible to have such principles. In fact, McKeever and Ridge argue that principles might actually have a positive use, helping those who are less virtuous to internalise the reasons and principles that should guide the virtuous moral agent. Mckeever and Ridge present a plausible reason for principles which is compatible with (rather than supported by) holism.

The second understanding of holism in the theory of reasons is a stronger thesis than the first. This version of holism holds that whether, and how, a feature counts as a reason, depends on context in such a way that the moral world can never be codified. This form of unrestricted holism relies on two theses. The first is holism as already discussed above and the second is that the context that affects the way features function as reasons, cannot be captured in helpful and finite terms. McKeever and Ridge argue that this second claim basically amounts to a statement of particularism itself and thus begs the question. This second claim simply is a strong form of particularism, and this means that it cannot be used to argue for particularism. Furthermore, McKeever and Ridge argue that this way of defining holism is unhelpful as it combines these two distinct theses into a 'package deal', and this makes it seem that if one accepts that reasons are context dependent then one must also accept that they are uncodifiable. It is however clear from the above discussion that this need not be the case, and that it is possible to accept the first thesis without accepting the second. This way of understanding things clouds the very questions that we are trying to clarify (McKeever & Ridge, 2005: 100-103).

It is possible for the particularist to push this point further and place pressure on the individual that wants to accept context-dependence to also accept the uncodifiability thesis but, argue McKeever and Ridge, this kind of pressure will have to be gained through example and counter example which is precisely what the argument for

particularism, from holism in the theory of reasons, was set up to avoid and improve upon.

3. The Current State of the Debate: The Available Positions

In terms of the discussion presented so far there is some reason to take the particularist challenge to principles seriously but there is also some reason to question the arguments used in favour of moral particularism and thus to question whether moral particularism does in fact present the correct picture of moral reasons. The picture so far, presents many possible conceptions of how moral reasons function; each possible conception falls along a spectrum of variability in the way moral reasons function. Some theories like particularism for example, take reasons to be completely variable in nature whilst others, the subsumptive option being one, take reasons to be completely invariant in nature. Looking through the various options provides the last step in the summary of the theoretical debate between the generalist and the particularist so far. Setting each option out, locates the various positions on a map that allows one to pinpoint how far the debate has moved and where the various strengths and weaknesses of each position lie. Very broadly, what has been done so far is to break moral theories into generalist accounts and particularist accounts, with particularism set up specifically against generalist accounts of any sort.

Breaking the picture up into such broad camps is not strictly correct however. Generalist accounts are many and varied, and each brings a different conception of how moral principles are to be understood. The subsumptive account was the first generalist theory introduced here. This way of thinking about moral reasoning has been largely discredited, and other generalist theories have thus tended to opt for more sophisticated accounts of moral principles that are able to capture the nuances of the moral world (Dancy, 2004: 3). Discrediting the subsumptive approach, led to a search for other generalist alternatives to subsumption, which failed because of the kind of principles it appealed to and not simply because it appealed to principles. The absolute and decisive nature of the principles that the subsumptivist appeals to, is what prevents them from convincingly capturing the nature of moral reasons. Thus, a different sort of principle was needed and there was a move away from the decisive and overall conception of principles to a more contributory conception.

To escape the difficulties encountered by absolute principles, there was a need for an account under which several principles could apply at once, some of which could recommend one action, and some of which could recommend another. There was thus a move to generalist theories that conceived of principles as contributory; an example of which is the theory of W.D. Ross. The main idea on this account is that one single action could have several principles involved and some could count for, and some could count against the action. On this account, reasons are still invariant but the nature of principles has changed being now contributory rather than decisive and absolute. On this account the principles still specify invariance in the way that features work as reasons but the principles themselves are no longer decisive. For generalist theories like Rossian

generalism, the moral work is not merely subsumption but also the need to recognise which principles apply to a case and what the overall moral judgment on how to act ought to be (Dancy, 2004: 5-6).

This approach is able to avoid many of the problems confronted by subsumption, but was still challenged through the epistemic worry and the thesis of holism in the theory of reasons. Dancy's main reason for rejecting Rossian generalism is that Ross asserted that reasons are invariant in nature without any argument to prove so. The particularist is set to challenge the assumption that features act as invariant reasons and so questions this approach and demands some form of proof for this assertion. Ross's position endorsed atomism rather than holism and so Dancy challenges it on these grounds. Dancy is clear that he largely takes the debate between the generalist and the particularist to depend on the rights and wrongs of the theses of atomism and holism in the theory of reasons. There are, however, as both Dancy (2004: 7) and McKeever and Ridge (2005: 99-103) note, forms of holism that do not go as far as particularism and that if one endorses holism one need not endorse the theory that the moral world is uncodifiable. In short, we can accept that reasons are context sensitive and yet still hold that it is possible and desirable to codify the moral landscape. Rossian generalism leaves us a step closer to particularism but by no means exhausts the options between generalism and particularism (Dancy, 2004: 7).

According to Dancy (2004: 8-9), Robert Brandom offers a position further on the line towards particularism, but still not quite there. Brandom does acknowledge variability in the way reasons work, to some extent, yet not in the way that Dancy wishes to. Dancy spells this difference out as follows using examples of Brandom's in order to consider the relation between different principles.
1. If you are causing someone pain, you are doing something wrong. ($p \rightarrow q$)
2. If p and the pain is a statutory punishment for a recognized offence, you are not doing something wrong. ($(p \And r) \rightarrow -q$)
3. If p& r and the punishee was unjustly convicted, you are doing something wrong. ($(p \And r \And s) \rightarrow q$)

(Dancy, 2004: 8-9)

If we make the kind of statements as those made above, regarding the role of the feature of pain (p), the question posed by Dancy is, are we holists in his sense of the word? Remember, holism for Dancy, is the thesis that a feature that has a certain effect when alone can have the opposite effect when placed within a new combination of features. The answer to this depends on what we believe to be happening in statement 2. If statement 2 is taken to mean that p stops being a reason against the action, then we are holists in the way Dancy is. Holists like Dancy, will endorse the idea that p can change its polarity like this, even if they question that it in fact does in the given example. In short, they are open to the suggestion. The feature of pain in example 1, acts as a reason to stop doing what I am doing, and yet in case 2 it appears to no longer act as this reason. This can sensibly be taken as a form of holism, but having seen how we need to interpret this in order to fit in with Dancy's version of holism it is not clear that Brandom's interpretation does this (Dancy, 2004: 8-9).

Brandom's account does not explore the role of each particular part of a combination and what Dancy establishes is that although it may be holistic in one sense, it is not holistic in the way that *he* means holism to work. The reasoning that Brandom offers here is 'non-monotonic' in that the inference is one that is reversed, or can be reversed, by adding a new consideration. For example, the fact that the pain is due to punishment for a recognised offence, means that the act of causing pain is no longer wrong. What Brandom is saying is that although a feature 'a' may speak in favour of an action and may do this alone as in case 1, features 'a' and 'b' (a + b) together, as a whole, may speak against it, as in case 2. Case 1 presents 'a' alone as the reason to do the act and in case two (a + b) together form the reason not to do the act. This is different to Dancy's claim that 'a' can speak in favour of an action when alone, and 'a', again alone, can speak against an action when present in a new combination of features. The difference is captured in the way the features combine to speak for and against the action. In Brandom's case, it is the combination of features that changes the reason I have to act, and in Dancy's case it is the feature on its own that changes, when in a new combination. Brandom's picture fails to ask and explore the way in which the particulars of any combination of features actually function (Dancy, 2004: 8-9).

Brandom's account is different to that offered by Ross and Dancy explains it as follows. Firstly, Ross would not propose principles like that of 1-3, which look to be working like decisive principles, and Ross is not in the business of using or endorsing principles such as this. In fact, Ross would argue that principles of this sort cannot be correct because, even if things stand in the case as the left hand side of the principles says they do, there could still be present in the case a stronger duty to act in some other way (Dancy, 2004: 9).

A second way to look at these principles would be as contributory rather than decisive principles. But on Ross's account contributory principles of this sort would make no sense, as what is presented by these statements, it would seem, is the fact that a feature such as causing pain (p), could ground a prima facie duty not to act, and (p) could also partly ground a prima facie duty to act. This does not fit with Ross's account of principles, which though contributory, were still invariant. Ross could only agree with statements 1-3 if 2 were understood firstly to be giving a feature that is a reason against acting, and then to be giving another feature that presents a stronger reason in favour of acting. 3 would then have to be understood as providing a second reason against acting, one that together with the reason given in 1 is strong enough to turn the judgment and make it wrong to act once more. This is not the picture that is offered by Brandom however, and so we can conclude that he has moved away from Ross's account. Brandom is one step closer to the variability that the particularist wishes to endorse but does not go far enough. His account fails to look inside the combinations of reasons, and this failure prevents him from going as far as the particularist in saying that a reason that is in favour in one case could be a reason against in another (Dancy, 2004: 9).

Shelly Kagan goes one step further than Brandom and looks inside the combinations of reasons. This leads him to challenge the additive way of treating moral deliberation. The

additive way captures our moral deliberation in terms of what Dancy calls the kitchen scales model. This is so called, because in a kitchen everything has some independent weight which it keeps; the weight of each item in the kitchen will stay the same no matter what it is weighed together with. Thus, if a number of items from the kitchen are put together on a scale, the scale will simply add all their weights up together. If this model is transposed into the world of moral reasoning it is clear that each reason for and against an action will have a certain weight (like the individual items in a kitchen) and that the moral agent must decide how to act by weighing up all the reasons for the action and all the reasons against the action. In this way the weight of all the reasons will be added together and the side that weighs the most indicates the moral decision that should be taken regarding how to act. Central to this model is the idea that the final sum on 'each side' of your decision will be equal to all the independent weights added up together (Dancy, 2004: 9-10).

Kagan's challenge is that this model is too simple. In its place he suggests a multiplicative model. On this model, the result of combining two weights is not figured by summing, but rather by multiplying them. It is clear how this differs to the additive model when one compares the sum of 2 and 1, which is three, and the product of 2 and 1, which is 2. On this picture, features of constant weight can now make a variable difference to the way things are in a particular situation. Importantly, whilst the effect of a feature may vary case by case, the actual weight of the feature remains constant. Thus, whilst this account holds there to be more variability in the ways that reasons work than the previous ones mentioned, it still does not take there to be as much variability as the particularist lays claim to (Dancy, 2004: 9-10).

4. Conclusion

There is a range of options for understanding the relation between moral thought and judgment and moral principles. On the one extreme lies the subsumptive picture of moral rationality and on the other lies Dancy's version of particularism. What the particularist has challenged is the belief in the need for invariant features in our moral thought.

What is established by the work in chapter 2 and 3 is the context of the theoretical debate between the particularist and the generalist. Particularism starts off as a challenge to a strong and firmly accepted approach to moral reasoning. This challenge then needed to be established as being worthy of taking seriously which was duly shown to be the case. We have looked at how seriously to take the particularist challenge and seen enough reason to want to explore it further and engage with it properly, in terms of its challenge to principles and so on. This provides a case for accepting that the conundrum is real rather than apparent, and thus to begin to take seriously the challenge that we can get along all right in our ethical thinking without the use of principles.

The task of chapters 2 and 3 was to sketch the available options regarding how to understand moral judgment. Despite being able to establish that there is enough reason for the generalist to take the particularist challenge seriously, it also becomes apparent

that there are theoretical misgivings on both sides. It therefore, at present, remains unclear which side has the correct picture of moral thought and judgment and the debate remains unsettled. For example, in order for particularist theory to work, there needs to be a strong distinction between enablers and favourers. The success of moral particularism depends on this distinction and yet Raz is able to show this to in fact be a controversial distinction.

Furthermore, there have been challenges to Dancy's arguments for particularism seen in the arguments discussed by Raz and McKeever and Ridge. If successful, these show that Dancy's arguments for particularism do not necessarily work. The status of the debate is still locked in a stalemate as, although Dancy's arguments for particularism are challenged there is no case actually built against the theory of particularism itself. What Raz and McKeever and Ridge do is to caste doubt on how well argued Dancy's position is, however, Dancy still has other arguments for particularism that are not undermined.

In terms of arguments in favour of particularism, Dancy still provides a case for why we cannot understand the contributory in terms of the overall, and successfully suggests possible challenges to both the subsumptive and Rossian accounts of moral thought. Furthermore, the examples that Dancy provides of invariance in the way reasons function remain and this leads one to wonder whether there are in fact any compelling general principles that particularism cannot counter by example, and if so, what they might be. In this sense the status of the particularist challenge is that although it might not be conclusively argued for, it certainly has not been shown to be necessarily wrong. The particularist position has not been shown to be incorrect or untenable as a position. The debate between the two has shifted about and it is not yet clear from the theoretical points made on each side that there is fair reason to conclude one side to have the correct moral picture.

This stalemate allows a new point of entry in the debate between the generalist and the particularist; the practical. Ethical theory does need to be practical, at least to some extent; seen in part through the discussion on environmental ethics in chapter 1. Although the place of applied ethics to speak to, and inform ethical theory is not yet established and clear, it is nonetheless apparent from applied ethics, fields like environmental ethics that take their cue from urgent and pressing practical problems in the world, that there is at least some relation and need for the two to speak to one another. Thus, although the place of ethical practice in relation to theory is not clear, and there is no agreed upon way to decide how seriously to take such an attack, two points go towards motivating for a move to a practical evaluation of particularism in this case. The first is the already explored context of environmental ethics, a field that is built around urgent practical problems, and presents a real need for ethical theory to be practical. Second is the fact that the theoretical debate is currently at a stalemate, with neither side an outright winner.

Thus there is a legitimate move to the practical because the theoretical elements of the debate are indecisive with none of the issues presented on either side being conclusive evidence one way or another. In particular, it has not been decided whether particularism provides a correct picture of the moral landscape. The idea of taking this debate away

from the level of theory to the level of practice is that because it is possible to understand the need for ethical theory to be practical, at least to some extent, it can be taken as a reduction of an ethical theory if it is not so. Given this contention, looking at particularism in an applied setting could further the debate between the generalist and the particularist. This is not a new thought with regard to particularism and thinkers like Brad Hooker have tackled particularism on practical terms. This idea sets up the task for chapter 4: to move from theoretical, to current practical challenges to moral particularism.

Chapter four:

Practical Challenges to Dancy's Moral Particularism

1. Introduction

Chapter two and three provide a picture of the state of the theoretical debate between the particularist and the generalist as it currently stands. What is evident from this picture is that the theoretical debate between the particularist and the generalist is at present inconclusive. In particular, there is no conclusive theoretical evidence to suggest that the picture of moral rationality presented by moral particularism is incorrect. Given the background work in chapter one, which presented a picture of moral theory that needed to incorporate the practical, this stalemate opens up a new practical avenue from which to assess particularist theory. On the face of it, there are certain difficulties with the application of particularism in applied ethics, and if these concerns prove true, then the generalist has a new case for challenging the accurateness of the particularist approach to moral reasoning. This new challenge would be on practical rather than theoretical grounds.

It is not difficult to make a case for the fact that moral theory has strong links to the practical. This is evidenced in the way individuals readily identify with moral issues, which are apt to elicit strong feelings in people, making them of immediate and practical concern. Simon Blackburn opens his book *Ruling Passions* (1998) by saying "Ethics is about how we live in the world" (1998: 1). This captures the action orientation of moral reasoning, a thought captured again in the fact that moral reasoning is often referred to as 'practical reasoning'. It is possible to continue along this line of thought and see the practical orientation of normative moral theory in the use it is put to. There are many competing moral frameworks in which we can try to understand moral issues, but one consistent goal is practical application. Ultimately, once a normative theory has been established as an accurate portrayal of the moral world, it is applied to real life cases. Moral theory is established as a means of working out what is wrong and right, and is aimed at aiding the moral agent in deciding on acts she will do, acts she will not do and acts that she will do, but with a sense of guilt. Blackburn (1998) goes on to list the sort of things we use moral reasoning to accomplish, examples of these being: establishing, in theory and practice, the kinds of situations that ought to be instantiated in the world and the kinds of situations that ought not to be instantiated in the world; guidance of the attitudes we hold towards ourselves and others; and the assessment of the behaviour and lives of others, either in approving or condemnatory terms. In short, ethical theory creates reason to forbid some things whilst tolerating and encouraging others (Warburton, 1992: 39-66; Blackburn, 1998: 1-4; Nuttall, 2002: 170-212).

This immediately suggests something of the attitude that it would seem intuitive and natural to take toward ethical theory, this being that it is, at least to some extent, practical in nature. The observable call for normative theory to act as a guide to the moral agent,

coupled with the fact that there are real and urgent practical moral problems in the world, creates evidence for the fact that it is not misplaced to challenge particularist theory on practical grounds. Brad Hooker (2000: 1-22) provides a point of entry into the possibilities of a practical challenge to particularist theory. Broadly, Hooker's challenge is that if particularism were to be put into practice in the world it would be detrimental to everyday moral life. Furthermore, on the face of it, we seem to run into other potential practical difficulties for the particularist as applied ethical work has consistently been carried out in principled terms and it seems it cannot easily be done, if it can be done at all, in a particularist way. If this turns out to be true it would count against the viability of particularist theory.

The thought driving the work of this chapter is that there is a theoretical stalemate between the particularist and the generalist. Furthermore, it seems, on the face of it, that we need principles when engaging in applied ethics, and that it is an accepted point that there are certain practical requirements on ethical theory. From these three points it is possible to argue that, although it is not yet clear that a practical challenge to particularism is well founded or correct, it is nonetheless an important challenge to investigate. The discussion that follows is thus an exploration of two such practical challenges to particularism.

2. A practical Worry with Particularism: Brad Hooker

Brad Hooker (2000: 1) presents a new angle from which to assess the accuracy of the particularist picture of moral thought. For the sake of argument, it is possible to set aside the matter of whether either generalism or particularism can be shown through theoretical argument to be correct, and attempt to assess each on practical grounds instead. If we accept that an ethical theory is constrained, at least to some extent, by certain practical demands then it is possible to undermine particularist theory by showing it to have negative practical consequences, these being that it would be a bad moral view for society to accept. If this challenge is shown to be correct, then it would appear to undermine particularist theory on practical rather than theoretical grounds.

Hooker sets up his practical challenge by inviting us to think about the role of a shared commitment to morality. At least one of the roles of a shared commitment, he argues, is to provide assurance to those who subscribe to it, that everyone sharing this commitment can be trusted to behave in a morally predictable way. For example, on this view, the morality shared by a community should provide assurance to each individual that she will not be robbed or attacked and that she can, on the whole, trust others within the community to keep their promises and tell the truth. One of the tasks of law and law enforcers should thus be to provide this kind of assurance. However, leaving such enforcement to external forces neglects a role of ethical theory, this being the need for the internalisation of certain moral attitudes and thus internalised policing by each individual. This is especially so in the case of acts like promise keeping and truth telling, for example. As regards moral acts such as these, it is desirable for the law not to have to get involved and rather for the internal moral commitments of each individual to ensure

moral behaviours. On Hooker's account it is important to be sure of the moral commitments of others as the knowledge that others hold firm moral dispositions adds a level of assurance and predictability to the expected behaviour of those that have them (Hooker, 2000: 16).

In summary, one of the things a shared commitment to morality should do is create defined expectations of the behaviour of others, and thus trust between the individuals of a moral community. If we accept this to be an important part of any moral theory, it then becomes important to ask how particularist moral theory, with its rejection of predictable moral generalities, fares with respect to this criterion. Hooker's claim is that adherence to moral particularism sabotages this trust. To understand this point it is necessary to remember what is distinctive about particularist moral theory. The particularist moral agent does not believe that there is any need for moral principles and at its most extreme, does not hold there to be any invariant moral reasons. Whether or not a particular feature counts as a reason, and the way it comes to count as a reason (its moral polarity) depends on the particular circumstances of the case. In contrast, the generalist believes that some moral properties will always count in the same way wherever they occur. It is the particularist adherence to the variability of moral reasons that Brad Hooker believes to undermine the applicability of particularism at the applied level. Because the particularist rejects general moral principles, she has no general rules to which she can point as a means of providing the grounding for others to form confident expectations of her behaviour. For example, there are no rules the particularist can point to as a means of determining beforehand which acts would be considered acts of cruelty and which would be considered acts of kindness.

Broadly, the focus of Hooker's challenge is that one cannot trust a particularist moral agent in the way one can trust even a committed Rossian generalist. It is this lack of trust that would create bad consequences for the practice of morality in the world. Hooker's practical challenge is thus the argument that particularism is not going to be workable as a moral theory if it is generally accepted in the world. If everyone were to become particularists, it would be difficult to form constant expectations of one another's behaviour and this would be detrimental to society. Hooker can thus be seen to be basing his practical challenge on the view that one role and purpose of ethical theory is that it be practically useful, helpful and applicable in the real world (Hooker, 2000: 20-22).

To further illustrate this challenge, Hooker sets out the following thought experiment[17]. You are to imagine a particular scenario involving a person called Patty. Patty is a committed particularist, in other words a particularist who truly lives by her commitment to particularist theory. This is the only knowledge you have of Patty as you have not had the privilege of any previous direct or indirect experience of her. You thus know nothing about her, except her commitment to particularism. Patty approaches you with a deal; if you help her harvest her crops now she will, in return, help you harvest your crops the following month. If you fail to strike this mutual deal, you will both suffer losing half your crops and this loss would drive both of you to bankruptcy. Because you are both in the same position, Patty believes you will be willing to accept her deal.

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[17]   For an account of Hooker's thought experiment see Hooker (2000: 17-21).

The crucial points of this case are drawn to the fore when you ask yourself whether or not you should make this deal with Patty. In thinking this through you must keep in mind that all you can rely on to make Patty keep her promise, is her commitment to her moral theory. In the case, as Hooker sets it out, you cannot resort to using the power of the legal system, or the power of destroying Patty's reputation in the community, as a means of making her keep her side of the deal. What you do know however, is that Patty is completely committed to behaving in accordance with her moral outlook. The crux of the question is thus whether as a particularist, her moral outlook alone if consistently applied, can provide enough assurance now, for you to feel safe to accept her proposal.

In order to answer this question, one needs to be clear on what Patty would hold to as a committed particularist. In line with particularist thought she must believe that there are no stable moral considerations. For example, the act of promising could be a reason in favour of keeping her side of the deal in one situation, but in another, her promising could change to become a reason against keeping it, or change to being no reason at all. Patty also holds that any fact can potentially be morally relevant, whether it is or not will depend on the circumstances. This means that in the future any fact could come to interfere with the moral status of the promise she made.

Because of this changeability, Hooker argues that we are lead to wonder just what Patty will think about her promise when the time comes for her to keep it; will the fact that she made a promise, be any reason to do what she promised to do, in the future. For Hooker the answer seems clear; not necessarily. As a particularist, Patty can and thus might, attach no positive moral weight to her promise when the time comes to keep it. Furthermore, she cannot counter the fears raised by this uncertainty because as a particularist, Patty cannot point to any general considerations that can establish in which situations a promise will be morally binding and in which situations it will not.

Given this kind of situation, how much could you, and how much would you, actually trust Patty? If it turns out that you could not, and would not, trust Patty, then both you and Patty are worse off than if you could and did, trust her enough to strike the deal and keep it. Hooker thinks that this thought experiment shows that given what you know about Patty you would not make the deal, because only knowing that Patty is a committed particularist does not provide enough information to assure you that you can accurately predict how she will behave. You would have to admit that you could not trust your ability to predict Patty's behaviour, and thus you would have to decline the offer of the deal.

The point made by Hooker in this thought experiment about promise making and keeping is generalisable to other moral considerations. The worrying fact about particularists, as far as Hooker argues, is that particularists believe that there are no moral generalities, if you are a particularist you are not committed to any sort of pro tanto duties or generalities. From this it can be extrapolated that you cannot, for example, extract a general moral reason for action out of the making of a promise, even if it is given fully informed, freely and is of morally innocent content. We can extend this kind of point to

content. As none of these factors are present in the case at hand, you can know that for Gerry, the act of breaking his promise will be a negative moral consideration.

This does not, however, automatically mean that Gerry will view the breaking of his promise as wrong, all things considered, because Gerry is not a moral absolutist. This leaves space for other features in the case to override the importance of keeping his promise, all things considered. In short, there are certain plausible circumstances, which if actualised, should and would make Gerry break his side of the deal. These circumstances would, however, have to be very specific and it is possible to be pretty clear on what would constitute such circumstances before making the deal. This would allow you to calculate the likelihood of Gerry keep, or breaking, his side of the bargain. An example of the circumstances that could override the importance of his promise would be if doing so would save the life or limb of someone close to him. Therefore, in order to decide whether you should make the deal with Gerry or not, the same question asked of you regarding Patty, you need to decide on the likelihood of Gerry deciding that he is morally bound to break his promise to you, so as to protect the life or limb of somebody close to him.

Given the above description of your choices, Hooker believes that one has less to worry about with Gerry than one does with Patty. Although it is not possible to be one hundred percent sure that either of them will keep their side of the deal, it is at least possible to know with Gerry that from the start he attaches stable moral weight to the act of freely making a promise with morally innocent content. With Gerry it is also known that only a limited range of factors can interfere with him keeping his side of the deal, as his general principles concerning promise making are known beforehand. Gerry will need to exercise judgment and interpretation in assessing these facts, but there are, nonetheless, known limits to what can and cannot override his promise. Patty, by contrast, does not *necessarily* attach any weight to the promise she has made. Ultimately, any fact could, in the future, come to be central to her moral analysis of whether she has reason to keep her promise or not.

In summary, given the knowledge that you have of Patty and Gerry, Hooker concludes that Gerry will be more likely to keep his promise than Patty. This is so because we know that Rossian generalists hold a number of features to count morally in the same way each time that they occur, and we also know that though they believe that any feature can be outweighed by others, this is limited to a number of known features. Neither of these two facts can be said of the particularist. The particularist rejects the belief that there are, or need be, any moral generalities and this renders the moral agent unable to form stable moral expectations about what the particularist will do, except that she will do the right thing.

Before closing this practical challenge of Brad Hooker's, it is important to note that this is not an argument about how many mistakes the particularist or the Rossian generalist is liable to make. Hooker is not claiming that as a particularist you will be led to make more mistakes in moral judgment than you would as a Rossian generalist. Rather, the challenge is that the Rossian generalist is more trustworthy in the keeping of her word than the

particularist. This point can be strengthened by comparing both the particularist and the Rossian generalist with the absolute generalist. The generalist who holds to absolute principles is even more likely than the Rossian generalist to keep her promise, making her even more trustworthy than the Rossian generalist. This point holds true even though absolutism is now commonly held to be incorrect. The absolutist would in the case presented be maximally trustworthy, though possibly not morally right in the keeping to her word (Hooker, 2000: 21-22).

This comparison implies that the plausibility of a moral theory and the amount that it makes an agent trustworthy can come apart, suggesting that Hooker's challenge to particularism is flawed. In order to rebut this line of thought, Hooker counters by pointing out that his argument does not rely on the fact that particularism gets it wrong or is often mistaken. It is thus possible to make the non-question-begging assumption that Rossian generalism and particularism are initially both equally plausible as theories, but that a collective commitment by moral agents to Rossian generalism will ultimately create more trust between strangers than a similar collective commitment to particularism. And, as Hooker sets up at the beginning, one of the things a shared commitment to morality needs to do is provide people with assurance about the behaviour of others (Hooker, 2000: 21-22).

With a particularist like Patty, it is possible to know that she is committed to making correct moral judgments and putting them into practice, case by case. What seems to be unclear is what this means her behaviour will be in the future. For example, with Patty we know at the time of making the deal what she would do, but are unsure with regards to her behaviour in the future. Hooker seems to be arguing that we cannot be sure now, what Patty will judge to be the right thing to do when the time comes for her to keep the agreement. Whilst this may indeed be true, it is not clear just how strongly this should be taken to undermine particularism as the same can be argued to hold for generalism of the Rossian type. The only difference is that on Hooker's account there is slightly more predictability for how the Rossian generalist will behave and therefore slightly more trust than there is on the particularist account (Hooker, 2000: 21-22).

3. The Role of Principles in Environmental Ethics: A Practical Concern with Particularism

3.1 Introduction

Environmental philosophers tackle a vast array of practical problems using a number of different normative theories. As discussed however, these are unified in the sense that they are all principled in nature. Peter Singer is one prominent figure in the field of environmental ethics; as such his work is well positioned to provide the basis for a case study analysis of how environmental ethicists tend to tackle practical environmental concerns. The following discussion sets out a particular practical concern of Singers, in order to explore the purpose of his work and the role that principles take in solving practical environmental issues. Peter Singer has written a number of books and papers

dealing with applied environmental issues, the following is taken mainly from his book *Animal Liberation* (1976), wherever this is not the case it shall be indicated.

3.2 A Utilitarian Approach to Environmental Problems: A Case Study of Peter Singer

Peter Singer works from a utilitarian position; from this normative stance he provides a representative example of how to go about addressing environmental issues using a principled normative theory. A broad formulation of Singer's main task in *Animal Liberation* (1976) is that it is an account of a careful and consistent examination of how humans ought to treat animals. More specifically, within this broad question are located two particular concerns, the first being a concern around whether it is morally permissible to mass produce animals in the way we currently do, as a means of providing food for humans. The second being a concern about whether it is morally permissible to use animals in experiments, and if so, under what conditions? These are two questions that Singer sets out to answer, in the process providing a current example, of the typical way of tackling environmental problems of this sort.

From his theoretical work Singer believes that we currently do discriminate against animals, and he works towards showing this to be a logical and inescapable truth. Once he feels he has successfully argued this point, it seems to follow naturally from this truth that we morally ought to change our behaviour and attitudes towards animals. Although Singer's arguments might ultimately lead to an emotional and thus behavioural change, he is clear that his ultimate justification for opposing experimentation on animals will come out of an appeal to basic moral principles and not emotion. Singer's aim is to move from an uncontroversial moral case to a more controversial one, showing how the two are similar and thus gaining support for his conclusions. He thus aims to show how certain readily accepted principles can be applied directly to the currently more controversial case in question and the logic of the matter demands that we then apply these principles to the new victims; this being demanded of us by reason (Singer, 1976: 1-26).

A good place to start in understanding Singer's case is with a hypothetical situation; a juxtaposition of two possible alternative courses of action. In the first situation you are required to ask yourself whether you would be prepared to let thousands of humans die, if it was possible to save them by performing a single experiment on a single animal. In the other, you are required to ask yourself whether you would be prepared to let thousands of humans die, if it was possible to save them by performing a single experiment on a human orphan under six months old. The crucial point to consider is what differences there might be between the animal and the six month old orphan, except for the fact that biologically one is a member of our species. If this is the only difference, which it appears to be according to Singer's reasoning, it seems we do not have a morally relevant difference (Singer, 1976: 78-83).

According to Singer the principle of 'equality of consideration' is uncovered in thinking through this hypothetical situation. This principle is displayed in the bias shown by the experimenter when she is willing to perform an experiment on an animal that she would

not perform on a six-month old human. This principle provides a guide toward an answer for how we ought to be treating and acting towards animals. Singer is pushing the idea that our attitudes towards animals are based on a history of prejudice and arbitrary discrimination. At least this is the point that Singer would wish to lead us to. Singer holds that we are practising a form of speciesism in the way that we act towards animals. This is the term used by Singer to denote a prejudiced or biased attitude that favours the interests of members of ones own species and goes against members of others. The racist, the sexist, and the speciesist all violate the principle of equality according to Singer. Since a speciesist bias, like a racist one, is unjustifiable, an experiment on animals cannot be justified unless the experiment is so important that the use of a retarded human being would also be justifiable (Singer, 1976:1-91).

Singer likens his task of changing the way we treat animals to that of a liberation movement similar to the black liberation movement, or the women's liberation movement. These he takes as characteristic examples of liberation movements in general, and makes a connection between the thinking that allowed the creation of these movements and the need to create the same thinking with regard to the current situation of animals. A liberation movement, writes Singer, calls for an end to prejudice and discrimination; that is, behaviour based on arbitrary characteristics like race, sex and now species. Singer wishes to build a case for us (humankind) to extend the basic principle of equality of consideration to animals. He makes the claim, and builds a case for the fact that there is no reason to value human suffering more than animal suffering, except the selfish desire to maintain the privileges that come with being a member of the exploiting class. This selfishness provides the reason behind our refusal to extend equal consideration to animals. This is where the move from the morally uncontroversial to the morally controversial begins to take place, and Singer draws an analogy between the animal liberation movement and others (Singer, 1976: 1-26).

Singer's conclusion is that if a being suffers, we cannot use the fact that it is not a member of our species as a legitimate moral reason to ignore its suffering. In building his case Singer asks us to think about how in the past we did, and how in the present we do, defend the case of basic human rights for slaves and women. The answer lies in the basic principle of equality[18]. The principle of the equality of human beings is a prescription of *how we should treat humans*. The kind of point Singer is wishing to reach becomes obvious when we draw an analogy between this and the attempt made by white slave owners to refuse to consider the interests of black slaves. The white racist of that time limited moral concern to their own race and thus made the suffering of a black person less morally significant than that of a white person. Through moral reasoning we have come to recognise that this move involves an arbitrary distinction that fails to properly take account of the moral facts of the situation. What Singer makes evident, is that it is the *suffering* of the individual that is morally significant, and not the *race* of the individual (Singer, 1976: 1-26).

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[18]   This principle does not require that all be completely equal and identical, or that all are treated completely equally and identically. What it does require is equal consideration for all (Singer, 1976: 2-9).

This point remains true if species is substituted for race. As Singer points out, the logic of racism is the same as the logic of speciesism. Thus, if we reject racism, consistency[19] demands that we also reject speciesism. What Singer does here is to pick out for us, the morally significant facts involved in the question he posed at the beginning. The moral basis we hold for equality among human beings is not in fact absolute equality but rather equal consideration of the interests of all human beings. It is this *principle* that Singer argues consistency requires us to extend to any animals that have interests; we may determine whether or not a being has interests by looking to consciousness. Consciousness, or at least the capacity to have a subjective experience, is a necessary and a sufficient condition for a being to have interests. Thus, a being with subjective experience, an example of which is the experience of pleasure and pain, can and does have interests in the fullest sense of the word. This is so, as a being with the experiences of pleasure and pain can, at the very least, have one interest; to experience pleasure and avoid pain. Peter Singer extracts from this the '*principle of equal consideration of interests*'. And thus finally, Singer argues that any doubt remaining regarding whether or not animals have interests, will be a doubt about whether nonhuman animals have subjective experiences like pain and pleasure (Singer, 1976: 1-26).

The rejection of speciesism does not mean that we must take the different species to be equal in terms of all their general characteristics. It is obvious, for example, that characteristics such as intelligence, physical strength or ability to communicate do differ in the various species. This difference does not matter for the application of his principle however. This is so for the same reasons it does not apply in relation to how we treat human beings, for if we did expect this exact equality in all characteristics we would have to give up the idea of human equality as well. The logic of this point is that just because one being is, for example, more intelligent than another does not entitle her to enslave, exploit or in any way disregard the basic interests of the less intelligent being. The fact that we are not all exactly equal leaves room for subtlety in the application of Singer's principle of equal consideration. Our differences allow us to take account of aspects of existence like self-awareness, intelligence and the capacity for meaningful relations with others. For whilst these aspects may not be relevant to the question of inflicting pain on other beings, they may turn out to be relevant to the question of taking life, for example, or be relevant to how we come to decide about the meeting out of pain in difficult and conflicting situations (Singer, 1976: 1-26).

Through the use of theoretical argument, Singer challenges the dominant approach to our treatment of animals. This challenge is not simply an academic exercise. Although Singer makes use of logic and argument, his mission is essentially a practical one; to change behaviour in the world. What we are led to see is the suffering that our actions cause to animals and the arbitrary way in which we justify this, making it morally important for us to change our behaviour. Singer thus puts the theoretical to practical use, moving from the principle of equal consideration of pain and pleasure to a call for reform in the world. He identifies and protests against all current major abuses of animals in the world. In short, the conclusion is that change is required of us at a personal and a societal level.

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[19]   The concept of consistency will later come to be important in evaluating an applied particularist ethic.

Singer creates awareness of the fact that change is morally required in the policies of governments, and in our own lives. Such changes will affect many different levels of action and behaviour, involving diet, farming methods and experimental procedures on animals. Furthermore, it would seem that people are morally required to change their views of wildlife, hunting and trapping and the wearing of furs, as well as various forms of entertainment, for example, circuses, rodeos and zoos. On a more personal level there is a moral requirement to create awareness amongst friends and children of the need to treat animals as sentient beings. Finally, the biggest most effective change, according to Singer, is to become vegetarian, this being the most practically effective step open to the individual moral agent to help end the killing and suffering of animals.

In effect Singer is calling for a boycott. These steps are practical ones and are essential to putting an end to cruelty and morally unjustifiable behaviour. Through the use of principles, Singer provides a call for individual moral agents to think about what they can do about the treatment of animals as well as providing a form of moral guidance regarding how to assess our behaviour in relation to animals (Singer, 1976: 171-199).

3.3 An Analysis of the Role of Principles Presented in the Case Study

From the above discussion it is possible to draw out at least three obvious intentions of Singer's work. Firstly, Singer is set to logically and consistently analyse the situation. His second and third tasks stem from this, as his analysis shows a need to change current thinking about the place and role of animals in the moral world. Changing thinking is in turn used to effect practical changes in behaviour towards animals. These seem to be his tasks, and it is clear from the discussion of Singer's work that he does make use of principles. He does not spell out why he uses principles or explain in meta-theoretical terms their role and function rather, their use and need is taken for granted. As already discussed however, this picture of moral reasoning can no longer be taken for granted. The advent of particularism as a moral theory raises questions about the use of principles, forcing theorists to question and explore the role they are playing in moral reasoning, most crucially looking to see whether the role that principles currently fill can ever be filled without them.

This new challenge to principles creates the need for a new self conscious look at the role and function that they take in the practical field. But this challenge works both ways as generalists hold the belief that it will be impossible, or at the very least problematic, to carry out practical ethics in a particularist way. However, it is not yet clear why this fact would obtain and if it must obtain, as it is unclear just what we think generalists are doing with principles that particularists cannot do without them. Part of this task then is to take specific examples of practical moral reasoning, in order to analyse how this reasoning is carried out. If we are going to use the ability of moral theories to be practical, as evidence for whether they are sound moral theories, then we need to be clear on what each is bringing to the practical that the other cannot. Once it is clear what each is bringing, the task will be to see if one offers strengths over the other, in this way showing the other to be deficient in some important practical way.

Singer starts by identifying a morally problematic area, our treatment of animals. After reasoning through this troubling case he comes to the conclusion that this is an area in which we need to effect change, both in thought and behaviour. Through a careful analysis of the current situation regarding our treatment of animals, Singer locates the need to form a boundary to mark off those beings whose interests should, morally speaking, be taken seriously. In this way he brings animals within our sphere of moral concern. Being a utilitarian, Singer's conclusions come from the general principle that it is good/right to minimise suffering. This point is illustrated in Singer's discussion of factory farming (Singer, 1976: 96-170). Here he hammers home the message that these farming practices cause large amounts of suffering and that we should, on principle, take this to be morally unacceptable. Singer comes across as passionate about affecting change in the world, and this seems to start at the level of moral reasoning. Singer thus turns to an examination of the history of Western moral thought to show where we have inherited many of our current ways of thinking about animals, their value, role and place in the world. Through this analysis he is able to locate the points at which he believes our moral reasoning about animals has gone wrong.

The material is historical but the aim in presenting it is to create change in future behaviour. Singer argues that our current practices of factory farming and experimentation on animals show the consequences of a particular way of thinking, a speciesist way of thinking. The attitudes of those who farm and those who consume what has been farmed, are a logical extension and application of the attitudes and prejudices of past reasoning with principles regarding the role and place of animals. Singer notes that the place of animals as 'things' to satisfy human desires is predictable once animals are placed outside the sphere of equal consideration (Singer, 1976: 99). Aristotle for example, regarded nature as a hierarchy in which the function of the less rational and hence less perfect beings was to serve the more rational and more perfect beings. Two strains of thought seem to have lain at the back of our thinking, one from Greece and one from Christianity, from here we get the idea that you can't sin against anything other than God. Kant also believed that we had no direct duties to animals. Animals according to this thinking were not self-conscious and were present merely as a means to an end, the end being humankind. What Singer aims to show is that despite the fact that we can trace our current speciesist thinking back to great philosophical thinkers like Aristotle and Kant we can also, through the use of logic show that these beliefs and their consequent actions in the world are arbitrary and thus morally indefensible (Singer, 1976: 202-234).

What we see from such an analysis is that certain actions flow from particular ways of thinking. If we look back in history we see a long line of reasoning about the role and place of animals. The picture that emerges is of a dogmatic and sweeping background of principles of value used to dictate general attitudes and acceptable behaviour. It thus seems natural to attack such principles of value with other similar but morally more appropriate ones. This history of thought forms Singer's basis because this is what our current thinking tends to work from. It is this thinking that needs to be overthrown, because as Singer argues it is prejudiced and arbitrary. But he needs to show this, he cannot simply state it and so he moves to past cases and the use of principles to show his analysis of the situation to be correct. Singer draws on the similarities between what we

see happening now with animals and what happened in the past with slaves and women and he draws on the principles of minimising suffering and taking all beings with interests into equal consideration. It is clear from a look at Singer's work that he consistently makes comparisons between cases drawing links between them. This adds force to his arguments because they are seen to be built on generalisable and consistent moral foundations.

Singer produces a clever piece of philosophical moral reasoning and this is done for a practical purpose; to alert human beings to their prejudices and acts of cruelty in order to change the way they treat animals. Singer's use of this moral principle first helps the moral agent rethink her moral attitudes at an overall level, and then helps the moral agent reach specific moral conclusions in challenging and conflicting practical situations. Through his reasoning we are led to accept the principle of equal consideration of interests, with the principle that it is morally right to reduce suffering in the world forming another backdrop to his thinking. If we take on board the reasoning behind the principle we take on a new way of thinking with practical applications in the world. Once we have accepted this take on value and the place of animals in our moral thinking, we are faced with certain conclusions about how animals should enter our moral deliberations regarding what actions to take in the world.

Singer's principle is relatively straightforward to apply; when an action is likely to make an animal suffer that suffering must be counted in our moral deliberations. Furthermore, it should be counted equally with a like amount of suffering felt by human beings, with the rider that this must be done insofar as rough comparisons between felt pains can be made. Singer is working on the premise that pain and suffering are bad and should be prevented or minimised, and that this should be the case irrespective of race, sex or species. How bad a pain is depends on how intense it is and how long it lasts, but the pains of the same intensity and duration are equally bad whether felt by humans or animals.

One clear role and advantage of a principled approach, is the ability of principles to aid and guide the moral agent in her thinking[20]. Principles have implication and this makes them useful to the practical ethicist. For example, it is an implication of the principle of equality that the concern we feel and show to others does not depend on the qualities and abilities they may possess. Thus, to the extent that we are compelled to accept a moral principle we are also compelled to behave in particular ways. Although they may have to be tentatively and cautiously drawn, certain practical conclusions do follow from moral principles. This appears to be one of the major reasons for principles; they allow us to draw certain wholesale answers about the moral acceptability of our actions.

Applied ethicists and allied activists are after tools for practical decision making, and Singer uses the principle of equality to provide just such a tool. The principle of equal consideration does a lot of work and comes to cover many situations, providing guidance to our moral thinking; where interests are equal they must be given equal weight. This is

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[20]   This point will be taken up again in chapter 5, pages 86-91, with regard to the concept of consistency in moral thought and judgment.

a basic moral principle that can be applied to our relations to other people, be they black or white, male or female, straight or gay. Now Singer is arguing that this can be applied to animals too. Under guidance of this principle it is taken that it is the capacity to experience suffering and enjoyment that is the requirement for whether or not to consider a being to have interests. This provides a standard by which to apply Singer's principle in the making of moral judgments. Under the guidance of this principle, enough reason is provided to conclude that our present attitudes and actions towards animals are morally unjustifiable. Furthermore, there is scope to apply this principle in a nuanced and subtle way by being aware, as Singer is, that the life of a self-aware being, who is capable of abstract thinking and future planning, who is able to take part in complicated communications and so on is more valuable than the life of a being that does not have these capacities. This is not an arbitrary distinction and thus needs to feature in our calculations of what to do, but it needs to feature in conjunction with the feature of equal consideration.

Thus according to Singer's reasoning the boundary for whose interests we come to consider with others and how, will not have an abrupt cut-off. Rather, it will function as something of a continuum. On one end will lie those beings whose possession of interests are definite and stable in our thinking, and on the other end of the continuum will lie those entities whose possession of interests is very uncertain and in fact highly unlikely and improbable. The principle of equal consideration needs to be applied with this continuum in mind so that where there is a clash between interests it can be used to help in working out between them. For example, where an interest that is almost certain clashes with one that is very uncertain it is the interest that is certain which wins out. And so in this manner our moral considerations ought to extend to all beings that have interests. According to Singer this principle is morally sound, unlike previously racist or speciesist thinking and the boundary he draws does not arbitrarily exclude any being. Furthermore, it is subtle enough to allow equal consideration to be given to two beings without being forced to treat them exactly alike or hold both of their lives as equal in value. It is possible under the guidance of this principle to recognise that the interests of some are legitimately greater than those of another and the principle of equal consideration will lead us to sacrifice the being with the lesser interests.

The fact that principles are so widely used is because they encapsulate the result of a carefully thought out ethical point in a way that is usually simple and applicable to many kinds of ethical problems and dilemmas. For example, arguing successfully for the principle that is wrong to cause the needless suffering of sentient animals has a wide appeal and is able to reach a wide audience. The particularist alternative it would seem is to face each situation with no moral guidance or consistent means of assessment. People are also able to understand the argument that leads up to the principle and this thinking can then be applied to other similar cases. For the particularist there are no general rules and for members of liberation movements this is not satisfactory. Here the drive is to make claims regarding general truths about acts that are cruel and acts that are kind, for example.

To illustrate this point it is possible to look at what conclusions regarding our treatment of animals comes out of the utilitarian principle of minimising suffering, as argued for by Singer. From the principle that it is good to minimise suffering, one can for example, argue the point that people should be vegetarian in order to stop intensive farming methods. Furthermore, by applying this principle the moral agent is given tools to rethink, in a consistent and sound way, practices like hunting for sport, the fur trade and the use of animals for entertainment. It may turn out to be difficult to make comparisons between beings and thus it may be difficult to apply Singer's principle, but as he notes, there will or at least should be, some paradigm cases with a clear answer from which to work.

Having seen something of what principles are being used to do in addressing applied environmental problems it becomes necessary to bring this back to the question of using particularism to fulfil a similar role and exploring whether anything about the role and nature of principles so far precludes the moral agent from doing applied ethics using particularist theory. The work done in environmental ethics shows it to be necessary to change both thinking and action, and that this needs to be exercised on a relatively large scale. The question then becomes, would it be difficult to push the kind of change that Singer is interested in through in a particularist way? Is the kind of task that Singer is interested in compatible with a particularist ethic?

One answer to this, the generalist's answer, is that it will be difficult to push change through case by case. For example, without a principle how are we to go about making judgments to do with the costs and benefits of our current treatment of animals. This is not a challenge regarding the fact that it could not be done, clearly one would be able to assess this kind of thing in the particular rather, it is a challenge about practicality and usefulness. Presumably viable change to the way we treat animals would have to be implemented on a large scale and it is clear how legislation and policy change could be pushed for and outlined using Singer's principle. Law professor Christopher Stone (2001) suggests that ethical thought provides a moral framework that represents what people feel they ought to do, in other words what people think is right. Law, which tends to rest on a principled way of thinking, provides the means for a society to implement theoretical ethical judgements in practice. This suggests politically and practically just how important principles seem to be to us, it seems as though we need them if our moral thinking is to have any practical power in the world. When we are trying to push through a new ethic like that seen in the women's movement we are required to expand our moral horizons and this is usually done by furthering our principles to encompass the new class be it slaves, women or nonhuman animals (Singer, 1976: 1-27). Political agendas with regard to the environment seem to need practical and applicable principles in order to enforce behaviour change, and environmental thinkers have all implicitly worked at this level. Such unanimous use of principles tends to endorse the thought that sound moral judgment and practice require a principled approach to the environment.

Part of this practical challenge can be cashed out in the current and popular debate that runs between those who are for the use of animals in scientific and medical experimentation and those who are against it. Particularism highlights the dangers and

incorrectness of the use of moral principles and further asserts that our moral judgment can operate perfectly well without such rules and generalities. This seems to be in tension with the tasks required of morality by animal rights activists. At the very least animal rights activists are looking for some form of principles to gain the humane treatment of animals. If, as Brad Hooker suggests, particularists can no longer even be sure that it is necessarily a moral evil to take the life of a human being who has not killed, threatened to kill or physically harm another human being nor asked to be killed then how are we to establish a morally acceptable level for the humane treatment of animals when this kind of moral thinking is itself still on shaky ground. We do not have the privilege of years of moral theory behind us in the environmental movement as we at least do have with the idea that it is wrong to take the life of an innocent human being so how do we hope to think about these kinds of issues properly case by case if we can't establish some kind of general argument for why these kinds of things tend to be morally negative.

The practical challenge to particularism is not that clear cut however. Because, although the presence of moral generalities might be useful, and help the cause of the animal rights movement it is not clear that there is anything essential about their presence required by applied debates of the kind discussed here. For example, it would seem to be enough to show that there is no legitimate basis for distinguishing morally between animals and humans, something a particularist can do. This together with the observations that we do currently rely on such distinctions means we can only be accidentally right, occasionally. This provides poor grounds for principled differential treatment of humans and animals. Particularism does not look to be in such bad shape as regards the work required of applied ethicists. Even if it does seem that there is more chance of persuading people to take up various moral causes using something like Peter Singer's case for speciesism, this sort of challenge can be answered[21] and need not undermine the particularist account of moral reasons.

There are a number of issues at hand here. Firstly however, from the above discussion there is little evidence to suppose that there is one definitive thing that principles are able to do, that the particularist cannot do without them. What is most obvious from the above discussion is that there is a challenge of practicality and viability against the particularist. In other words, the idea is that if we accept particularism then it will be hard to lobby for causes, get agendas off the ground and create policy and legislation. Whilst some of this may be true it is not clear how damaging this is for particularist theory and this raises a number of questions which need to be further explored.

Briefly, however, a few points can be made in response to the practical challenges presented here. The first is that the concept of a policy is separate to the concept of a principle and thus need not put us off the particularist account. Secondly, if the nature and aim of principles is redefined there could still be room for the use of 'principles' as useful tools in practical ethics. Finally, there are a number of different roles for philosophical thinking in the realm of activism which it is possible for particularism to fulfil. These points are raised here to highlight the inconclusive nature of the practical challenge to

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[21]   See the conclusion, chapter six, pages 100-105 for a discussion of how such a challenge can be successfully answered by the particularist.

particularism and the fact that they need to be further explored in chapter seven, as part of the final analysis of the implications of taking a particularist approach in applied environmental ethics.

4. The Theory/Practice Debate: A Possible Response to the Practical Challenges to Particularism

There is one obvious response to these challenges concerning the practicality of moral particularism. The objection being that the truth about moral reality is one thing, and the results of our believing that truth quite another. Given this, it is possible to grant for argument sake that accepting particularism does lead to bad moral consequences in practice and yet still hold to the view that particularism is correct. This response raises interesting questions about moral theory in terms of what it ought to be about, and what it ought to be, and is, doing. It remains to be seen whether it matters if a moral view is a bad one for society if it is in fact correct, and more fundamentally, whether a moral theory can even be right if its acceptance would be bad for society or if it is practically impossible to implement.

For thinkers like Brad Hooker and Peter Singer moral theory is pointless if it does not map onto the practical concerns of applied ethics in whatever field one may be working. Hooker (2000) is clear that intuitively a moral view does at least appear to be less attractive if a wide acceptance of it is bad for human well-being and the practice of morality. Hooker holds to a certain view of the purpose of moral theory, this being that one of its central purposes in a society is to increase the probability that people in that society will behave in mutually beneficial ways. Hooker holds to the idea that the overall plausibility of a moral theory is seriously damaged if it forces us to deny that one of the key points of morality is to increase the chances that people in society will share and conform to certain values and practices that are mutually beneficial. For Hooker ethical theory needs to be practical, in this way, as ethics is about addressing practical concerns.

From the meta-ethical perspective, this is not as clear cut, and the other side of the debate is the idea that meta-ethical theory, of which particularism is an instance, is not concerned with the practical and the useful but with the truth. Whilst it may be true that principles are useful, it may also be the case that moral judgment actually just does not need them. Meta-ethics is an attempt to theorise about theory, in other words to evaluate the status of various theories and is concerned with what is true about the moral world, not simply what is practical.

This debate is as yet undecided and is still concerned to find out which side of the debate should finally end up in charge. In other words, should the practical ethical concerns of environmental ethics trump the meta-ethical concerns about truth, or should theory trump practice? Certain fundamental questions are raised by this, for example, how damaging is it for theory if the practical implications of applying it to real world problems turn out to be severe? In short, the problem faced here is to do with the relationship between theory and practice. Understanding the dynamic of the relationship between theory and practice

is important for the way we think about doing ethical work at all three levels of moral practice and this suggests a focus for further research within the context of assessing an applied particularist ethic.

5. Conclusion

The practical requirements of ethical theory introduce a new means of assessing whether particularism provides the correct account of moral rationality. The practical challenge suggested by Brad Hooker and the worries raised by the ubiquitous use of principles in applied ethics does raise something of a concern for moral particularism, however, as with the theoretical attacks on particularist thought, it is also still unclear that these are in fact well founded. There is as yet, no clear logical necessity for moral principles and thus there is not yet a practical reason that logically necessitates that one choose a form of moral generalism over moral particularism. Principles do appear to order our moral thinking and provide quick, easy and consistent guidance for moral agents however, an analysis of this mechanism for moral thought shows nothing inherent to the nature of applied ethical work to suggest that particularism cannot be put to use on applied problems. Although making use of moral particularism would change the face of ethical reasoning, there is still no logical account present for why we may not make use of it. As there is no decisive reason not to use particularist theory in an applied setting, one way to move forward with this practical debate is to look at just what an applied particularist ethic would look like in the field of environmental ethics. By doing this it should be possible to see whether it is feasible, and further explore the consequences, for an applied field like environmental ethics, of accepting a particularist account as correct. Here the task is to look at just what it is we give up if we do environmental ethics in a particularist way.

Chapter five:

A Particularist Environmental Ethic in Action

1. Introduction

Particularism has challenged traditional generalist moral thought and the generalist's response to this challenge has been at both a theoretical and a practical level. At the practical level, generalist theorists like Brad Hooker (2000) have questioned the practical viability of particularism. A practical challenge of this sort, gains force when located within an applied field of moral philosophy like environmental ethics, a field driven by urgent practical concerns, where the presence of such practical needs and demands serves to bring to the fore the practical requirement on an ethical theory.

There is a further and implicit challenge to the particularist position found in an applied field like environmental ethics. This lies in the outward verbal commitment of environmental, and other applied ethicists, to normative ethical theories that entail the meta-ethical claim that principles really exist. This implicit commitment makes it seem as if we need principles in order to make correct moral judgments. This implicit belief in the need for principles, works with the practical concerns raised by philosophers like Brad Hooker, to present the particularist with the practical challenge that we do in fact need moral principles in the making of ethical judgments.

One way for the particularist to settle the practical challenge is to show how particularism can be used in an applied setting. Particularist's do not see a problem with working at the level of the particular and thus the aim of the following chapter is to set out an applied particularist ethic, to show that particularism can do what is necessary in a practical setting. By showing that principles are not necessary in tackling applied ethical problems the particularist goes some way to responding to the applied challenge. Naturally this picture is not uncontroversial and the applying of a particularist ethic to a practical setting, highlights some hard questions and points of tension between the particularist and the generalist. The success of the practical particularist project will turn on these points.

2. A Particularist Environmental Ethic in Action.

One urgent environmental challenge that faces humanity today is the debate over the nature and status of wilderness areas. The main question being, should they be preserved, protected and restored. Part of this debate focuses on the meaning and significance of the 'wild'[22] and looks to see if they can answer how wilderness areas ought to be valued. For

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[22] This debate tends to get caught up in the need to define what a wilderness area is. Whilst it is important to note this part of the debate, it is itself a difficult and controversial task that is a substantial but separate part of the general wilderness debate. As it does not directly affect the practical question of how we should treat wilderness areas once they are defined I will, for reasons of space, leave out an analysis of this aspect of the debate and note as J Baird Callicott does that whatever the outcome of this debate around

example, one thought is that wilderness areas ought to be valued as places that are 'pure' and completely free of human intervention. Behind this is the thought that it is this attribute of purity that places some kind of special value on the land. Here the fact that there is interplay between theory and practice is apparent in the fact that this idea of value raises further practical questions. One of these is the question of whether, if this concept of the value of wilderness is accurate, it implies anything about the place of people in the natural world, for if accurate, it seems to imply that places where people do not, and have not lived, are somehow more valuable than places where they do or have lived. This implies that certain actions should be taken. For example, it would seem to imply that it is imperative to prevent people from moving to, and using, any wild areas that are as yet untouched by humanity, in order to preserve this value (Palmer, 1997: 19-21 & 106-109).

This battle around wilderness areas also illustrates the general level at which these kinds of questions tend to get asked. Environmental ethicists are, on the whole, looking for general principles and overall arguments to shape our thought. In this case they are looking for principles to shape our thinking about wilderness areas in general, and this is meant to shape human behaviour towards wilderness areas in the particular. Up to this point in the debate between the particularist and the generalist, there is no definite reason why this work must be done using principles, it merely is, and it is thus at least plausible that worries of this kind about wilderness areas can be set up around particular cases, one example being that of Kakadu National Park in Australia, presented by Robert Elliot (1991: 284-293).

Kakadu National Park in Australia is a wilderness area that contains various different habitats of rugged woodlands, swamps, and waterways. All of these habitats support a wide variety of life and some are home to species endemic to this region. Furthermore, some of the species found here are endangered, examples of these being the Hooded Parrot and the Pig-nosed Turtle. It is a place of great beauty which is ecologically significant and has spiritual significance to the Jawoyn aboriginals. The area is, furthermore, rich in minerals like gold, platinum, palladium and uranium and naturally there is a demand for these to be mined. Mining already takes place within the Kakadu area and there is now pressure to allow more (Elliot, 1991: 284-285). The dilemma posed for the environmental ethicist and in this case for the particularist environmental ethicist is, should mining be allowed in the Kakadu National Park?

This case presents many challenging questions that need to be answered en route to making a judgment for or against mining in this area. In order to make this judgment there need to be answers to questions like, how much would it matter if our actions caused the extinction of a species? How much does it matter if our actions cause death to individual animals living in Kakadu Park? How much does it matter if humans cause widespread erosion of soil in Kakadu? How much does it matter if the mining causes the South Alligator River to become empty of life? Is it better to protect Kakadu or is it better to create increased material wealth which could improve the lives of a number of people? Is the extinction of a species an acceptable price to pay for increased employment

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definition, there will nevertheless be important wilderness areas that human beings must decide how to treat (Palmer, 1997: 106-107).

opportunities? Once answered, all of the above questions raise the further question of how much they matter. In other words, if the killing of individual animals in Kakadu does matter, how much does it matter? These all lead ultimately to the overall question of this particular case: should mining be allowed in this wilderness area (Elliot, 1991: 284-285). Normally these sorts of questions are posed at a general level and answers involve an appeal to guiding principles about how we should treat wilderness areas. The particularist approach means, however, that there can be no attempt to reach for a ready supply of principles. The particularist project is instead, to look for the morally relevant features in this particular case, in order to answer the question in the particular and build a case for some judgment, this being either that it is right to mine in Kakadu National Park and mining plans should proceed or that it is wrong to mine in Kakadu National Park and mining plans should be prevented.

There are a number of contributory reasons present in this case working from what seem to be different perspectives. The particularist needs to be sensitive to all of these in order to give a thorough and complete account of the reasons present in the case, those in favour of mining and those against it.

Firstly in this case, there is at least some reason to make a judgment to allow mining in the Kakadu National Park. The area is rich in gold, platinum, palladium and uranium, and if mined, it will produce jobs and wealth and thus increase the standard of living for many people. It would also make more readily available the mined resources thus spreading the general improvement for human beings. This reason is anthropocentric, as it focuses solely on human gains but does nonetheless favour the decision to allow mining in the Kakadu National Park.

This reason must function at a level of uncertainty, for it is not possible beforehand to calculate exactly who will benefit and what the level of benefit will be for those involved. For example, will it mean the difference in life and death through starvation and medical resources, a difference in the number of children that can be supported or will it rather represent a raise in living standard? It does not seem possible to precisely calculate this beforehand as we do not know who exactly will receive the benefits there from. Despite this uncertainly, some attempt should be made to evaluate this issue, as these features appear to provide two different reasons. Improvement of living conditions is a very different reason to issues of life and death and will combine with the other reasons present in a different way. For example, improvement of living conditions does not seem to carry as much weight against the idea of the loss of animal life as does the more basic and fundamental feature of life and death of human beings. It would seem then that a particularist engaging in this type of question would have to carry out some practical research before coming to a final decision on this question and would still have to work with a certain level of possibility and probability.

There are also a number of anthropocentric reasons that favour the judgment not to allow mining in the Kakadu National Park. Firstly, as was noted this land has spiritual meaning for the Jawoyn aboriginals. This spiritual meaning will be diminished and possibly completely destroyed if mining is allowed here. The fact that it is special to some people

in this way is a reason that favours the decision to respect this as a natural area and thus not mine this area.

Secondly, further anthropocentric reasons not to mine in Kakadu National Park stem from the way people have come to value and use the park. As a wilderness area it is therapeutic to human beings individually and in groups and it provides places of recreation and social bonding. People choose to spend time here as a means of creating family cohesiveness and to strengthen bonds between various other small groups such as friends and work groups (Nelson, 2003: 417-418 & 429-430)[23]. The varied resources offered by the wilderness space of Kakadu National Park would be diminished or possibly completely destroyed by the act of mining here and this provides further contributory reasons not to mine in the park.

Thirdly, people just do value the idea of wilderness areas like Kakadu. Some people take pleasure in the knowledge that there are wild places, of great beauty, that are undamaged by humankind. Others take pleasure in the fact that these areas house a variety of species that flourish and live free of human interference (Nelson, 2003: 432-433). Mining in this area will, at the very least, diminish this and reduce or eliminate the wildness that many need and value. The loss of this knowledge and the felt sense of the presence and existence of the wilderness in Kakadu National Park provide another contributory reason not to mine here.

Another reason not to mine in Kakadu National Park runs along similar lines to that just given, some people will be moved by the harm caused to the individual animals living in the park who will suffer pain, fear and the loss of habitat essential for their continued survival. Others will be affected by the knowledge of the loss of species in a more general abstract sense rather than worrying about the pain and fear of the individual animals. The fact that endangered species live in Kakadu Park provides a strong reason for us not to mine here[24] (Elliot, 1991: 285-286; Nelson, 2003: 430 & 432-433). As the facts of the case stand here, as the numbers of individuals of a species become scarcer, they seem to acquire higher value and in this way constitute a stronger reason not to mine here[25].

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[23]   This type of argument is one presented by Nelson (2003) in his amalgamation of arguments to preserve wilderness areas. Note that wherever Nelson (2003) is referenced in this section, I have drawn on his generalist arguments to preserve wilderness as a means of locating the reasons present in the particular case. I have then adapted his generalist arguments to a particularist way of thinking.

[24]   One point to note is that just because here we might find it bad to destroy a species it is not to say that the destruction of a species is always wrong. One species that might be considered right to make extinct could be the mosquito, for obvious reasons, though this naturally would have to be argued.

[25]   This sort of point has the tendency to read as a generalist way of putting things, but again it need not read in this fashion. Here we find that scarcity increases value, in terms of the Hooded Parrot say, but it is possible to take a particularist line with this and think of a species where scarcity might not increase its value or might increase the value of the act that makes the species even scarcer or rarer. To illustrate such a point one might do well to think of viruses or disease spreading species like the mosquito. If on the other hand it appeared to always be true that scarcity created value, then this could turn out to be a line to push against the particularist account of moral reasoning, however, I see no reason to suppose this to be the case as it seems easy to think of particularist examples to counter this suggestion.

The Land preserved in its natural state in Kakadu Park is beautiful. This beauty is appreciated by many people in many different ways. For some it is almost spiritual and transcendental, for others it is inspirational allowing for the release of creativity and for others it may prove soothing to the mind. These are just a few example of how this beauty may be experienced and appreciated. This beauty is original and cannot be replicated by human beings and is a further reason to prevent the destruction of this area. Kakadu National Park, left undamaged, can be likened to a huge art gallery and as such we have some reason to preserve it and thus not to mine here and destroy this beauty (Nelson, 2003: 419).

The feature of beauty acting as a reason in this case raises an interesting point. When this type of judgment is made in a generalist manner the feature of beauty is usually used to bestow some type of value onto the land. Usually, it is hoped that the fact of land possessing beauty will somehow be a feature that is able to provide an argument for the land possessing value of its own, value that is intrinsic to it. This would in turn strengthen its position in our moral picture and make it worth saving and protecting for its own sake. This view is strongly supported by some, Rolston (1989: 42, 44-46, 217-218 & 221) being an example, but can also be challenged. One way to do this is to argue that it is the ability to appreciate beauty rather than beauty itself, that is of value here. Without going into this generalist debate that would require some detail to fill out, it seems from the particularist point that taking a particularist stance can shift the focus of this debate about value somewhat. Taking a particularist stance seems to suggest that value is no longer the final clincher of the argument that it was thought to be. The feature of beauty, in the particularist account, simply functions as the reason it is. The fact that the land is beautiful is one reason, in this case, not to destroy it regardless of the type of value that this bestows, though later we see that value may become important in assessing the strength of the reasons present in the case.

If challenged on this point of beauty the particularist may argue for its correctness by pointing to cases where reasons function in the same way and where our intuitions are already well defined. For example, we may point to our moral intuitions around the destruction of a painting by da Vinci, or a sculpture by Michelangelo (Nelson, 2003: 419). The particularist may point to similarities in the two cases as well as establish the fact that there are no significant differences between the two. In this way we can come to see for ourselves, and come to show others, that it is correct to see the reason functioning in the way it is here. What we are losing here is something of beauty and originality each of which provides a separate reason to prevent the destruction of the pictures, or in the case of Kakadu to prevent the destruction of the land in its natural state.

This can be illustrated in the following way. Suppose a perfect copy of the Mona Lisa was to outlast the original. Its beauty is enough reason on its own to preserve the copy despite the fact that it is not an original. On the other hand, the feature of originality provides me with another reason to preserve something, again think of the Mona Lisa where its originality adds value of a different kind to that given it by its beauty. Thus, although the Mona Lisa could be replicated, and there would be enough reason given by the beauty captured in the replica to preserve it, this would not capture the point made by

the feature of originality. This being, that by copying these things of beauty we capture the beauty, but lose some of the value bestowed by the feature of originality, which is one reason I have to prevent their destruction in the first place.

One possible important difference between the two cases that the particularist needs to respond to, in order to shore up her comparison, is that a painting is the culmination of the creative process of a particular individual, which many would be unwilling to assert about a natural place like Kakadu. It is nonetheless the product of a creative process and it seems that our reason not to destroy a painting does not come specifically from the point of view of who created it, and how it was created, but rather, from the fact that it is creative and original, and that it cannot be replicated without lessening its value and losing something of its value.

Kakadu as a natural undamaged piece of land is filled with biodiversity making it potentially valuable as a place for scientific research. Although many of the benefits of areas like this are either still unknown or indirect there is possibly much potential held within them to provide human beings with goods and services. These goods and services could be medical but are not limited to this. For example, as mentioned before, it is possible that the land has therapeutic value to human beings by creating a space for healthy development of mind and a sense of meaning in the world or, it could benefit us by regulating the overall health of the planet (Nelson, 2003: 417-418). We are not yet clear on what all these benefits might be; they are, as yet, unknown, as is the harm that might be caused if destroyed, however, we do have the sense that if these wilderness areas are left alone, things go better for the world, and if tampered with, they go worse. Consequently, one reason we have not to mine here is that all things considered, we tend to believe that the natural functioning of the planet will work better if this natural area is left alone. In other words, this reason is working on the assumption that theorists hold it to be probable that the planet works better, all things considered, if certain areas are left as wildernesses.

What we can take from the above reasons is that whilst we have some reason to mine here because of the known benefits this will bring to human beings we also have reason not to mine because of the potential, but as yet unknown, benefits of the area if left as a wilderness. The difficulty with this reason, however, is to give it enough strength to overcome the known benefits of mining in Kakadu Park. This reason rests mostly on possible benefits rather than definite or even probable ones like those we know we will create by mining here.

For some, even this possibility remains a strong reason however, due to the perceived value of potential medical discoveries. Wilderness areas hold the possibility of medical resource extraction and this is currently one of the most persuasive reasons we have to preserve wilderness areas in general. Nelson (2003: 415-416) writes that about 80% of the world's medicines are derived from life forms. Wilderness areas, with lots of biodiversity, are thus a large resource for natural medicines and as wild places are developed, many species are lost and thus lost as resources for any medical use. This has been called the "Madagascar periwinkle" argument by Donella Meadows. This name is

used in reference to the rosy periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*) a plant from Madagascar. The drugs vincristine and vinblastine were both made from this plant and both help in the treatment of leukaemia. But, this reason is only forceful in terms of possibility, for once these medically useful species are known to human beings they can be cultivated in laboratories and plantations and eventually the active ingredients can be isolated and then synthesised (Nelson, 2003: 415-416). This reason gains its force by the fact that wilderness areas *may* harbour unknown beneficial species, but this is not a probable benefit in this particular case as it is rainforests, old growth forests and oceans that house the world's greatest number of species and Nelson (2003: 415-416) notes that many wilderness areas in North America and Australia are in fact not species rich rainforests or old-growth forests and Kakadu is certainly not an ocean. The Madagascar periwinkle argument therefore, does not strongly support the judgement to preserve Kakadu in its natural state.

There are other possible benefits to be derived from this area that are more probable however. One of these is the fact that unspoilt wetland areas provide benefits for us indirectly by protecting important river headways, filtering water and preventing flooding. There would have to be clear research done on this, in the particular, to ascertain its probability and nevertheless our reasons here still rest on the potential usefulness of areas like this if left undamaged[26]. As we cannot be sure of the likelihood of this 'help' coming into play, there is little reason to suppose that this reason would have the strength to outweigh the immediate benefits we can get from mining the area. Can we really therefore say that we *ought* to save this area in its natural state in case it can provide these goods later on? Although this does provide some reason to err on the side of caution, it will be hard to make this count in any sort of strong way.

The potential but unknown benefits of this area as a wilderness, also gives us some reason to preserve this area for future generations. There are possible negative effects for future generations that may not be cancelled out by current positive effects. We do not know the extent of the need and benefits derived by having the chance to partake in certain recreational and/or aesthetic enjoyment and pastimes provided by the area and we do not know the possible medical secrets and benefits that an area like this might contain. Furthermore, because we are not fully aware of the consequences of our actions in this regard it is possible that others could be affected by adverse climate changes, for example flood patterns (Nelson, 2003: 414 & 416-417).

A useful practical illustration of a particularist point made by Dancy (2004) is found in the idea of the land's value and usefulness (both definite and potential) acting as a reason to preserve it. This feature presents us with something of a puzzle, for as this case is

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[26] This sort of point encounters what threatens to be a trenchant problem. The problem being that we still need to investigate 'unspoilt' areas in order to discover their possible and probable benefits to ecosystem health etc. but this very notion of investigation threatens to undermine their status as 'unspoilt' and 'natural' wilderness areas. It seems possible, likely even, that the very methods of ascertaining the benefits of such areas will themselves cause the demise of the qualities under investigation. It is not clear whether this must be the case; it remains at least theoretically possible to research an area without 'spoiling' it's natural functioning but negotiating this would be a challenge with this implicit problem attached. Nelson (2003: 421) makes a similar point.

further explored, it will become apparent that there are two reasons in tension here. The idea of saving this land to use as a resource later is a very narrow, anthropocentric and instrumental reason for saving Kakadu as a wilderness. In fact, this feature acting as a reason to preserve wilderness, as wild, is paradoxical and self-contradictory. By definition, once this area is harvested for its various resources it will no longer be a wilderness area. If we use Kakadu National Park as a resource for goods, we can no longer really call it a wilderness. Using Kakadu for resources of any kind is simply another form of 'mining' the park. This kind of tension illustrates in practice, a point made by Dancy in theory about the way in which reasons combine. When talking about contributory reasons one of the things Dancy says is ". . . they can combine in peculiar and irregular ways, as we will see. There is no guarantee that the case for doing an action already made to some extent by the presence of one reason, will be improved by adding a second reason to it. Reasons are like rats, at least to the extent that two rats that are supposedly on the same side may in fact turn and fight among themselves; similarly the addition of the second reason may make things worse rather than better." (Dancy, 2004: 15). The point being made here is that just because two reasons appear on the same side of a case, does not mean that they must, necessarily, create a stronger case for some action. What is illustrated here, is that although there are present two reasons against the idea of mining in Kakadu Park, the reason involving saving it to use for scientific research of any kind involves appealing to the same type of moves as that of mining and therefore cannot simply be added to the reasons not to mine here that come from our concepts of respect for pristine wilderness, spiritual purity and the right of animals not to be disturbed or harmed[27].

In summary, mining here will reduce the aesthetic, recreational, ecological and research value of the land. The naturalness and spiritual connection of the place will be compromised. This anthropocentric thinking provides some of the picture of the reasons we have to mine and the reasons we have not to mine in Kakadu National Park. These anthropocentric reasons present as the most obvious moral reasons in this Kakadu case and some ethicists argue that environmental questions should only be evaluated in these terms. Examples of such thinkers cited by Elliot (1991: 285) being, W.F. Baxter and B. Norton. This is not a satisfying or full moral picture however. Taking only the reasons that affect human beings seems to be morally insensitive, and ignores the possibility of animals, plants, species and ecosystems holding a place in our moral picture. We do have a sense that animals, at the very least, ought sometimes to feature in our moral thinking, though how they ought to feature is admittedly still uncertain. In a case like Kakadu, our moral intuitions lead toward a more inclusive picture that is sensitive to moral reasons with regards to animals, plants and possibly even entities such as ecosystems.

A non-anthropocentric justification for the preservation of this wilderness area is to look directly at the animals and plants of Kakadu National park. For examples of this sort of

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[27]   This suggests an important point regarding the weighing up of reasons and the making of a final judgment between them; this being that it has looked, up until now, as if it possible to always weigh up reasons and make a reasonable conclusion between them. This may not always be the case, however. It may, in fact, be the case that there is no way of weighing different sorts of reasons. In other words, it must be allowed that incommensurability between reasons is possible.

thinking see works like that of J.M. Coetzee (1999: 62-90), Taylor (2003: 74-84) and Rolston (2003b: 451-462). The park is home to a variety of habitats and living organisms and mining in this area will damage and destroy this. Animals and plants depend on their habitats to survive. Although it is currently still difficult to articulate the value of nature and animals, there is a strong intuition, held by many, that they do need to feature in various ways in our moral decision making and that, in this case, destroying the homes and lives of these living creatures would be a moral minus and thus provide some reason not to mine. Furthermore, the recognition that the land here in its natural state is complex and cannot be replicated by human beings seems to favour our not destroying it. The uniqueness and biodiversity of this area seem to have a value of their own that is unrelated to human valuing and we would thus lose something of its value if it was destroyed, and again this is something of a moral minus. This kind of thought does still require work to ground it in a satisfactory way, however, it does not require complicated argument for most people to recognise that there is at least something of value in wild areas like Kakadu and the lives of the creatures who inhabit this area. Usually, one has merely to point to the beauty of a forest or the complexity of living organisms[28], for example, in order for individuals to agree that there is in fact some reason to preserve this (Nelson, 2003: 432).

This recognition of value is linked to the anthropocentric reason that was picked out earlier regarding the idea that the simple knowledge that wilderness areas exist is enough to make some people want to preserve them. This idea points to the fact that we recognise something of value here.[29] If challenged on just what we are recognising here, the particularist may liken this to our recognition of the value of things like artworks and ballet. Such things are valuable simply because they exist. In short, the wilderness area of Kakadu *just is* valuable, and this value *just does* provide us with some reason to prevent it being destroyed. Kakadu as a wilderness area can then join a list of other things whose worth does not rely on anything other than continued existence, and whose value is intrinsic. Here it would seem that the recognised value of nature is providing some reason to preserve and protect Kakadu, as it is. Other examples of these types of things are friends, family, children and artworks. Wild species and ecosystems, it would seem, have a value in their very existence apart from their uses to human beings. Whilst it may still prove difficult to bring these values to bear as reasons in our moral decisions, this difficulty does not mean that we may ignore them. They are present in cases like this even if we are still unsure just how to factor them in and this problem is one that is present to all ethicists working in this field, and does not face the particularist alone.

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[28]   Note that this is only in the particular and this may not always be the case for sometimes the complexity of an organism might be a reason to kill it for example if a complex alien species arrived on earth its complexity might be a reason to eradicate it quickly, or at least no reason not to as this complexity becomes a threat to our continued existence.

[29]   Whilst this recognition of value is true on the whole, this point can be more subtle. For example, it is possible to conceptualise a species that is entirely malevolent which begs the question whether all species must be intrinsically valuable and worthy of protection.

3. Weighing Up the Reasons: A Question of Value and Consistency

So far, in the discussion of Kakadu National Park we have identified the reasons at play in the particular case. Tackling this question in a particularist way and deciding whether or not to allow mining in Kakadu National Park appears, on the face of it, to be relatively straightforward. The features that act as reasons on each side of the case are easy to pick out, and it is an obvious fact of the case that there are more reasons present not to mine than there are reasons present to mine. From this it is clear that there is some reason to say that it does matter if we kill individual animals in Kakadu National Park simply to create human betterment.

Despite this seeming straightforwardness however, the moral decision is not that simple. The fact that it *does* matter if we kill animals in order to improve the life of some human beings might be clear, but we do not yet know *how much* it matters. The challenge of this case lies in working out how to weigh up the force of the various reasons here present. This case presents a genuine conflict of moral interest with no principle by which to arbitrate. Not all ethicists will automatically evaluate the strength of these reasons in the same way and thus, despite the fact that the reasons in the case have been spelt out, it remains unclear on which side of the case the judgment should come down. This leaves us, at present, unable to answer the final question of whether it is better to protect Kakadu National Park as a wilderness area or whether it is better to create increased human welfare. The present task is thus to evaluate between the reasons that function on a variety of levels and carry a variety of values.

The above discussion goes some of the way to showing the practical challenge to particularism to be unfounded however, the practical task is not complete. What becomes clear at this point is that for the particularist, once the reasons of the case are established, there is still work to do to establish how the reasons in this case 'stack up' with the others present. This needs to be accomplished in order to make a case for one action as better or worse. This task is especially challenging in the field of environmental ethics, a field that is currently questioning and pushing the boundaries of who and what is to count morally and how. Here, our intuitions differ and work needs to be done building a case for how strong the various reasons are in order to make a case for what action we finally have most reason to perform[30]. To be successful in providing guidance on how to act in this applied problem and so to fully respond to the practical challenge the particularist environmental ethicist must work value into the picture of moral reasoning.

At this point one is faced with a similar question to that asked in general terms by Peter Singer; this being how the effects of our actions on animals and the environment ought to figure in our deliberations of what to do: how much consideration ought we to give them?

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[30]   Again this assumes that the reasons present are commensurable and that it is possible to reach a reasonable conclusion regarding them. However, if it should turn out that there are reasons that are incommensurable, this will be a problem for all ethicists of all persuasions and thus does not present a problem specific to the particularist and does not affect the evaluation of particularist theory under discussion here.

This same question that Singer poses in the general can be reframed in the particular to ask instead how the effects of our actions on animals and the environment should figure in our deliberations of what we ought to do *in this case*. This is a question of how to weigh up the reasons that are present or, in other words, how to value the competing reasons for action that we have here against each other.

Singer (1976: 1-10) answers the general question posed above by arguing that it is the feature of suffering that acts as our main reason to take account of the welfare of beings and that it is the ability of the being to suffer, rather than its race or species that should and can guide us in deciding how animals and the environment ought to figure in our deliberations. It is the ability to suffer that allows us to weigh competing reasons against one another. The argument that Singer pushes is that if a being can suffer, the fact that it is not a member of our species cannot be a moral reason for not taking account of its suffering. This would be to identify the reasons at play in an inconsistent way. Singer strengthens and substantiates this point by analogy to racist arguments and shows that our thinking around animal suffering is analogous to the attempts of white slave owners to deny moral consideration to the interests of black people. Singer establishes the actions of white slave owners to be those of white racists who limit their moral concern, allowing them to see the suffering of black people as having less moral significance than the suffering of white people.

What Singer is alerting us to is the logic of racism, and the fact that the logic of racism and the logic of speciesism are the same. Thus, if we reject racism, a generalist understanding of consistency like that held by Singer demands of us that we reject speciesism. Consistency for the generalist simply means ensuring that the moral judgments made can all fit under one set of principles that remains the same (Dancy, 2004: 2). Through Singer pointing out these inconsistencies we are now more able to see such arbitrary distinctions in the future and in this case see that it is really the existence of suffering and not the race of the sufferer that is morally significant. It seems all too easy however, for human beings to lose sight of this truth and consequently to make arbitrary moral distinctions leading us to value like features inconsistently. By locating the correct features acting as reasons however, in this case suffering and not race or species, and by keeping our mode of valuing the same, we find a boundary that is not arbitrary thus keeping our ethical judgments consistent.

Avoiding being morally arbitrary is something that the particularist, like any other moral theorist, needs to do. Jonathan Dancy (1993: 63) holds that for the particularist, consistency is different and less demanding than it is for the generalist. For Dancy, consistency is simply a matter of drawing attention to the different features of the case correctly and so doing, repeatedly, in each case that one encounters. In the making of moral judgments, one is to ensure that if a different judgment is made in a different case one is able to show a difference in reasons and this is, on the whole, easy to do. In short, consistency is simply about correctly drawing attention to the different features of the case. Particularists admit then, that if something is permissible in one case and not in another there must be some difference between the two cases. For example, if it is

permissible to destroy wilderness areas in Case A but not in Case B, then there must be some difference in the features of each case acting as reasons to make this so.

The need for consistency highlighted by Singer is one that the particularist is tied to as well, even if only in the particular. For, if the argument set out is correct then there is no reason why it would not work in the particular where these same features obtain and are not defeated. A particularist could not adhere to this as a general principle, as the particularist denies the existence of any consistent moral principles like the ones Singer utilises. The particularist can however, still agree with the logic that Singer alerts us to. Thus, whilst the particularist cannot say that suffering, be it of human beings or animals, is always a moral negative, it is possible for the particularist to establish, in a particular case, that if the suffering of a human being counts in a specific way, then it would be inconsistent to discount the like suffering of animals, unless some other feature present to the case disqualifies it. In other words, there would have to be some reason present to defeat the fact that the suffering of animals ought to be taken in the same way as that of human beings, this being in order to avoid making an arbitrary discrimination. Through a commitment to the need for consistency, the particularist can argue for example, that in this case, the fact that the Pig-nosed Turtle[31] is not a member of our own species does not defeat the reasons present to take its suffering seriously as a contributory reason not to mine in Kakadu National Park. This starts to provide some way of ranking the values of the reasons for and against mining, in this case. What is clear from this is that if we correctly identify suffering as a reason to perform some action, we must be sure to pick this out consistently as a reason, where it functions in this way, being careful not to pass it over as a reason, or discount it too sharply, simply because it is the suffering of some being that is not human.

There appears to be no reason why the particularist can't point out the same moral inconsistencies and arbitrariness as Singer does without making an appeal to principles for we may point to an arbitrary distinction in a particular case. The particularist can say if we think like x here, then there is no reason, other than arbitrary prejudice, not to think the same way with y, *unless we can point to a difference of reasons*. It is the presence of the proviso, 'unless we can point to a difference of reasons' that suggests a potential weakness with the particularist account, raising a query around consistency and a problem with particularism appearing ad hoc in nature.

To understand this potential challenge it is helpful to think of one of the key features of the debates in the field of environmental ethics; value. It is this focus on value that highlights a potential problem with the particularist account of consistency. What becomes clear in the context of environmental ethics is that the evaluative outlook adopted in the final assessment of the reasons present in a case, must itself be consistent. In a case like the one presented here, we need to make sure that, as the moral decision makers, we do not shift the evaluative outlook informing both the reasons that we see as

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[31]   In terms of this case and creatures like the Pig-nosed Turtle, the discussion has mainly been around worries of extinction. Whilst extinction need not involve suffering, it seems probable that it will involve some suffering for the individual animal, not the species. Each death is most likely not to be a clinical affair and to contain at least some element of fear and/or pain.

present in the case, and the strength we recognise those reasons to have. It would be inconsistent of us to flip between modes of valuing within and between cases, unless it can be shown why we should do so.

What is not clear on the particularist account, however, is why avoiding this flipping between modes of valuing is not as easy as the particularist would have it. In other words, that consistency simply is the demand particularists say it is, and simply requires being able to point to a descriptive difference between two cases. So, for example, the particularist can respond to Singer's call of speciesism by claiming, quite rightly it would seem, that there is in fact a fundamental difference in the descriptions of the two cases. In case one, we are looking at the suffering of human beings, and in case two, we are looking at the suffering of animals. There really is a difference here, and therefore there is no inconsistency to valuing each differently and hence treating each differently. We have already allowed that there could be different levels of suffering for each, due to the added capacities of self-awareness and thought in human individuals, and this cements the possible particularist point that there is a valid difference present in a case like this.

This kind of point highlights a worry around the tendency of human beings to deceive themselves morally; a point made by John Stuart Mill (Bennett, 2005: 17). This tendency of human beings means that it is important to be able to make a charge of inconsistency against moral agents; and the question here is can the particularist do this? It appears very easy for the particularist to point to differences between cases and in this way avoid the charge of inconsistency, where perhaps such a charge would in fact be correct.

Brad Hooker raised the idea that one could challenge particularist theory on a practical level and what we can take from his discussion, and the work presented here on environmental ethics, is that there are certain practical requirements on ethical theory. One of these is to keep us honest as moral agents. The worry with particularism is that it looks to be undermining this by making it too easy to shirk the requirements of consistency. This is an important practical issue that has not yet been articulated and is thus important to attempt to cash out, in order to see whether this is indeed a worry for particularist theory. In order to do this we need to explore what weapons a generalist like Singer has against the charge of inconsistency, versus the weapons that the particularist might have. Part of this worry is to see if the particularist denies herself an important weapon; the ability to keep herself honest.

Generalists like Peter Singer, make use of principles partly to ensure that the decisions they make are not morally arbitrary. The particularist needs to do this as well, but without the use of principles. In chapter one it was shown that one focus of environmental ethicists has been to identify inconsistencies and gaps in current moral thought. This is done in order to build a case for the need to correct current moral belief systems. What is underscored by discussions and attempts of this type is that the moral picture regarding the natural world is not yet clear. This means that any ethicist working in the field of environmental ethics needs to be careful to avoid being morally arbitrary and/or inconsistent, as well as openly address worries of this type. In terms of the case presented here, the particularist needs to address how to evaluate reasons that have to do with

animals and nature as well as people. Singer pushed forward our thinking in environmental ethics in a general way through arguing and substantiating why and how animals should be taken directly into account in our moral decision making. Through his argument he goes some way to showing that they should no longer be valued as useful resources but rather, they should be valued in and of themselves and he provides a way of adjudicating between various reasons for action.

This is a robust line of argument presented by Singer who guides the moral agent through his train of thought, allowing her to see how the principle he derives is to be consistently applied. Singer provides both facts and arguments and together these make a strong case for how to ensure consistency in moral judgment. By following his argument through we can ensure, through the principle he derives, that we can be consistent in our thinking and we can ensure that this principle is consistently applied in our ethical judgment. Furthermore we can link this reasoning with other cases where similar moves have been carried out under different guises, for example racism and sexism, and we are then supplied with a principle that can be transparently applied in a consistent way.

The particularist, on the other hand, must simply locate the reasons in the particular. Whilst it is possible for the particularist to make the same moves in the particular that Singer does in the general, it is not as easy to see how to lay a charge of inconsistency against the particularist, as it is in the case of a generalist like Singer. Thus, whilst it is easily seen when moral thinking is 'dishonest' or prejudiced in the case of a generalist like Singer, it is not as clear on the particularist account. It is thus not clear how to pull the particularist up on this charge, unless the move is made on blatantly identical cases, something that is unlikely to happen in the real world. Given the loose requirements of consistency on the particularist account, it seems that we lose the ability to confront the particularist moral judge on potential points of inconsistency. This means that it will be easier for the particularist to get away with self deception and moral dishonesty.

To fully grasp this point, it is useful to look closely at how Singer makes his case for the concept of speciesism. In thinking about our justifications for testing and experimenting on animals rather than humans, Singer (1993: 110-134) addresses the kinds of points we use to do the said justifying; what we use to settle this case are usually the differences between humans and animals. Usually it will be highlighted that normal, adult, human beings have mental capacities that animals do not have and that these mean that they will suffer more than their animal counterparts would in the same situation. For example, we look at the fact that people are consciously aware of more of what is going on, and so suffer from terror and anticipation in a way that say a mouse does not. Animals, it is argued, do not anticipate their pain and suffering in the way that human beings do and this makes our suffering worse.

Whilst this point does not necessarily make it right to test on animals, it does provide us with a reason that is not speciesist to prefer to use animals over normal human adults if the experiment must be done. What is important to note about these features is that they also give us some reason to experiment on human infants, who are orphans, or other severely intellectually impaired human beings, as they also have no idea of what is going

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to happen to them. But this point does not sit comfortably with our moral intuitions. What Singer takes from this is that if we make a distinction here between animals and humans, we do so in a way that is morally indefensible and show a morally unfounded preference for members of our own species[32]. By stripping away the features that seem to make people different to animals we are handed an argument for why this move is speciesist and thus morally unfounded. Here we have a general argument and principle that Singer can look to and consistently apply in order to locate when this is happening.

Particularists on the other hand, must simply consistently locate a difference in reasons whenever a different moral judgment is made, but this is easy to do and provides no safeguard against our speciesist tendencies. Through his thinking, Singer is often confronted by morally required changes relating to our treatment of animals that are unpalatable to many. For argument sake we can grant that his moral judgments are correct. Because they come out of an already formulated and soundly grounded argument we are forced to accept them. The danger for the particularist is that she may be swayed by the initial feeling toward unpalatable truths and thus convince herself and others that it is not in fact inconsistent to reject them. For example, Singer shows that we morally ought to stop testing cosmetics and medicines on animals. This means a great number of costly and difficult changes for human beings, Singer can hold us to them however, because of previously set out logic. The particularist on the other hand, looks at the case as it stands before her, and she has to make her moral judgments case by case, given our tendency to deceive our selves morally it looks to be easy for the particularist moral agent in this situation to defend a judgment to continue such testing because there is present an immediate difference in reasons; the suffering of humans and the suffering of animals. Given that there is indeed a difference in reasons between the two cases, human versus animal suffering, the moral judge can justify a decision and it is not clear that the particularist has any weapons to challenge cases like this.

This concern could possibly create the need for particularism to make the constraint of consistency more demanding than Dancy recognises. Working in the field of environmental ethics highlights the importance of the evaluative outlook used both in locating and evaluating reasons. It may be that value comes to work on many levels in informing the way the features of a case come to lie as reasons, as seen in the above discussion, where different types of value come to bring different reasons into play in the case of whether or not to mine in Kakadu National Park. Although maintaining consistency appears to be easier for the particularist, this also seems to strip the particularist of a valuable weapon in maintaining moral honesty and allowing different positions to be evaluated. Furthermore, this can make the particularist account appear ad hoc, as decisions are made off the cuff, case by case, with an easy move to being able to justify whatever position seems beneficial to the individual.

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[32]   Although Singer's argument is appealing to those who are anti animal testing and the farming of animals for food, it is worth noting that the opponent to this view might not be as easily moved; an opponent can argue, for example, that although there is some reason to experiment on such human infants, there is still greater reason, coming from other things, not to. Singer's opponent could even go so far as to suggest that the fact that Singer's position implies that there is some reason to experiment on human infants shows it to be obviously faulty.

4. A Final Particularist Analysis of the Kakadu Case Study

Putting aside worries of consistency the particularist can still provide a reasoned account of how to evaluate between the different reasons present in the case in order to decide whether it is right to protect this wilderness area or whether it is right to create increased material wealth.

The contributory reasons to mine in this case revolved mainly around better life conditions for some human beings. It seems unlikely that a case could be made for the act of allowing mining to actually save human lives. In order to answer this concretely, a study of the demographics of those who would benefit would need to be carried out in order to provide a clear picture of the amount and type of suffering that would be alleviated if mining were to be allowed. This could then be compared with the suffering and loss created by mining to the natural world of Kakadu. Given that this is taking place in a relatively well off country it seems likely that we will mainly have to factor in human betterment rather than grassroots survival, as might have been the case in an African country for example. Kakadu is home to rare and endangered species, and this too adds force to the reasons we have not to mine here, for as something becomes rarer it becomes more valuable. Over and above the suffering and death that would be caused to living organisms in this area we can also factor in as a reason not to mine here the fact that there just is something valuable about land like this in its natural state. It is something to be valued like an artwork or a friendship for example.

In order to weigh up these reasons we need to look at how much each matters. We saw from the discussion of Singer's argument that the particularist can also show that animal suffering and life cannot be discounted completely, though we do have some reason not to count it as exactly equal to human suffering and life. Making this space for differences of this sort makes intuitive sense as there are times when species does seem to make a moral difference to how we think about and judge an action, something that Singer himself admits (Singer, 1976: 17-23). This can be seen to happen when other features come into play, and these provide scope for differentiation in the way we factor animals and nature into our moral considerations. Such considerations tend to be features and interests which not all animals have. For example we see that human beings have the capacity to develop theoretical knowledge and for rational autonomous action which, for example, the Pig-nosed Turtle does not (Elliot, 1991: 286-287). The having of such additional interests might mean that a judgment of how to act is sometimes swung in favour of human beings. Appealing to additional interests can be used as a tie-breaker to allow for a decision to be made in a close moral conflict.

For example, Elliot (1991: 287) asks us to imagine that an important medical breakthrough depends on keeping either human beings or kangaroos in a confined space. Now keeping kangaroos in a very large enclosure so that they may be studied could be argued to be morally preferable to the keeping of human beings in the same enclosure, if it threatens no other interests of kangaroos. In other words, provided they are not cruelly treated and are fed and watered and provided with enough space for them to behave naturally for kangaroos. It should be apparent that confining human beings in the same

way is not morally equivalent and is not morally acceptable due to the fact that they have interests that kangaroos do not have and that these interests would be thwarted if they were to be caged and studied.

This type of example allows us to see the need to treat equal interests equally regardless of species and allows unshared interests to open up a space for degrees of moral significance. If we had to compare the suffering of Pig-nosed Turtles with human suffering it could be possible to show that human suffering should trump that of the Pig-nosed Turtle in some circumstances due to other capacities held by human beings. For example, being aware of suffering may intensify the reason we have not to let human beings suffer, in this case. These features might provide new ways of ranking and evaluating all the reasons present in the case.

Whatever discounting is argued for, it will have to be justified, and this means we need to look closely at all the features of the case to fully address the question of how to include animals and nature in moral considerations. Animals, like humans, do seem to have interests in this case and thus in order to be consistent we ought to take them into account without necessarily ranking them equally, in other words we may be able to argue for different moral significances for animals of different kinds (Elliot, 1991: 286 & 289-293). One form that this differentiation has taken over the years has been to discount the interests of animals simply because they are the interests of animals and not human beings. But, as already seen, this is arbitrary and unjustified and it seems morally more justifiable for the particularist to argue something along the lines of Peter Singer.

Given this what decision ought we to make? Our reason to mine is that it will create human betterment, improvement and a better standard of life. The reasons we have not to mine are that mining will destroy a pristine wilderness area, which will result in the destruction of habitats essential for the survival of some animals; furthermore it will destroy a place that carries much meaning that is irreplaceable to certain human beings in terms of spirituality, beauty and conceptually as a place that remains wild and free from human intervention[33]. Whilst it is possible to argue that animal life is less important than human life what is not clear in this case is that human life is directly threatened by a decision not to mine and it is not clear that we can fairly compare human betterment against the definite loss of animal life and nature. It is difficult to sanction mining when this is weighed up against the suffering and death that would be caused to the natural world and the loss of something that it seems is just something that should be valued in its natural state. This intrinsic value seems to top the kind of instrumental value that we create from mining here. It seems difficult then to evaluate the reasons in such a way as to sanction mining in this area. The reasons so identified in this case point toward the right decision being to prevent mining from happening in Kakadu National Park. Though

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[33]   Taking cognisance of the value that some people place on 'wild' areas of this sort remaining 'wild', raises the question of what sort of cognisance the moral agent ought to take, in a case like this, of the person who naturally values exploiting and developing things to the maximum. Here one can attempt to work out a moral case for why such valuing should not be taken into account. Take it into account and attempt to arbitrate between the two values. Or accept once again, that in cases like this, there really does look to be incommensurability between some reasons.

we might be tempted not to accept this outcome, due to feelings of human self-importance this does appear, all things considered, to be the correct answer.

If one were to be challenged on this, it seems likely to be on the grounds that human interests of all sorts carry more weight, simply because they are the interests of human beings, and thus should always trump the interest of animals and nature. Due to points about value it seems likely however that ultimately an argument like that of Singer, carried out in particularist terms of course, would show this to be arbitrary and inconsistent. This judgment does not mean that it is never morally permissible to modify ecosystems by cutting down trees, flattening dunes or killing animals. Rather, whether or not it is permissible, depends on features of each case and on the differences in the moral significance within the class of the morally considerable for that case (Elliot, 1991: 292-293).

5. Conclusion

The above discussion is an admittedly rough expression of the kind of moral reasoning we might expect from a particularist given a case of this kind. This discussion is rough by necessity because, as should be clear from this discussion, the environmental ethicist (particularist or not) has much uncharted territory to cover in answering questions like whether or not to mine in Kakadu and must remain extremely morally sensitive. Whilst the particulars of the above discussion might not be one hundred percent correct or persuasive, this should not in itself undermine the fact that this shows something of how a practical particularist ethic might look and on these terms goes some of the way to answering the practical challenge to particularism.

Part of what makes this task so difficult is the presence of difficult theoretical questions of value that are not easily addressed by the particularist. The fact that these questions are difficult for the particularist should not however persuade us that particularism must be wrong. These disagreements about the value of nature and animals and the relationship between human beings and wild and natural areas have not yet been resolved. How to value these opposing features and make ethical judgments about the costs and benefits to each is not yet clear, however, this is not a problem unique to the particularist and remains one of the major challenges that many believe to face the environmental ethicist of any description. However, as I will suggest in my final chapter the question of value does raise a problem for the particularist that needs to be further explored and addressed.

Chapter six:

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Introduction

Particularism has challenged the traditional view that moral judgment must be based on principles and thus provides a new way to think about moral reasoning. Adding particularist theory to the range of options available regarding moral thought, has raised the question of whether morality does indeed work in the principled way we have traditionally taken it to. The particularist claim is that there is variability in the way that moral reasons work and this challenges the way we think about moral reasoning on a fundamental level. If correct, moral particularism has theoretical and applied implications for the way we understand and carry out moral reasoning. Naturally, generalists have responded to this challenge at both a theoretical and a practical level. The theoretical debate between the two was explored in chapter three and the conclusion drawn from this analysis is that this debate has currently reached a stalemate. In short, there is no decisive theoretical reason to prefer one account over another.

This theoretical stalemate, presented the opportunity to explore the debate between the particularist and the generalist on a practical level. A practical challenge to particularism is delivered by theorists like Brad Hooker (2000), but is less well developed than its theoretical counterpart. Particularism has not yet been extensively put into practice in an applied field and this lays it open to concerns about its practical viability. This gap opened up a new context in which to assess particularist theory. This new context was applied philosophy and the specific applied field chosen for this study was environmental ethics. The field of environmental ethics is useful as a context to explore the practical challenge to particularism as it is an applied field of ethics that attempts to address urgent practical problems and this urgency highlights the importance of the need for theory and practice to speak to one another and this offered a rich space in which to explore, on both a practical and a theoretical level, the debate between the particularist and the generalist.

The central question directing this study is can we be particularists about environmental ethics? A lot of important subsidiary points are packed into this question and the primary goal was to assess particularist theory, more specifically, to assess whether we can be particularist environmental philosophers. In other words, the aim was to explore whether or not it is possible to achieve the goals of applied environmental philosophers with a particularist moral stance. One thought motivating this new applied setting was the hope that exploring particularism in this context would further the current debate between the generalist and the particularist.

Part of answering this question involved actually seeing just what an applied particularist ethic would look like within the context of environmental ethics. This was carried out in chapter six, through the example of Kakadu National Park. Part of the goal of evaluation then was to see if an applied particularist ethic was plausible and the work done in

chapter six suggests that applying particularism to a current debate like that of Kakadu is relatively simple, though time consuming, and it was not hard to show that it can be done. Providing an example like this goes some way to answering the practical challenge levelled at particularism.

The main thrust of the work in chapter six suggests that we can conclude that it is possible to be a particularist environmental ethicist although, applying particularism in a practical context did highlight a potential problem for particularist theory in terms of it running into the danger of being or at least appearing to be ad hoc in nature. This indicates a point that needs to be further explored and addressed by particularists wishing to work in an applied field. Despite this worry, the work done so far indicates that in principle there is no reason why we should not be particularists about environmental ethics in some way similar to that discussed in the Kakadu case. In other words, there is nothing inherent to the nature of tackling applied problems to suggest that we can't apply a particularist theory as successfully as a generalist theory.

The Kakadu case was however a singular example which did not, by itself, show the full implications and consequences for environmental ethics of taking the particularist approach to be correct. If we accept the particularist picture as correct there are other possible implications for doing applied environmental ethics and these need to be assessed in order to complete a full evaluation of the plausibility of applying particularism in the environmental context. In order to do this it is useful to look at two of the key, general features of environmental ethics to come out of the discussion so far. Firstly, questions and debates around value have been seen to play a key role in current attempts to solve present day environmental problems and secondly environmental ethics has strong links to activism and is closely linked to policy, legislation and the need for change in the world. Taking a particularist approach will prove to have implications for both of these features of environmental ethics and the particularist, to be successful, will need to address these.

Finally, the context and focus of this study raises the question of the nature of the relationship between ethical theory and practice. I began with a look at the state of the theoretical debate between the particularist and the generalist and now particularism is being pulled up on its practical viability. This raises the question of how seriously we should take such a practical challenge should it prove to be correct. Clearly theory and practice must inform each other but it is not yet clear just how they do so and which if any should be seen to be dominant. The scope of this study is such that due to limitations of space I will not offer a final solution to this problem but see it as important simply to flag and briefly discuss it, as one important implication of this study that needs to be explored.

2. The Implications for Environmental Ethics of Adopting a Particularist Approach

An applied particularist ethic will be different to that to which we are used. The particularist will not make use of general principles or talk of a universal environmental ethic. So far this change has simply meant that the particularist must shift the focus of applied ethical problems and reframe them into questions about the particular. This approach appears plausible and provides a moral vocabulary and a means of working through applied problems and making moral judgments. What remains to be seen on this front, however, are the general implications of embracing a particularist approach in environmental ethics at the applied level.

2.1 Value

Environmental philosophers are unavoidably, it would seem, involved with questions of value. In the literature survey of environmental ethics carried out in chapter one, it was seen that the most notable meta-ethical debates in *academic* environmental philosophy centre on questions of value. Light and Rolston (2003: 7-10) present the idea that the overriding driving force behind environmental ethics, both at its conception and to this day, is the recognition of the need to fundamentally change how we understand the value of nature. What many environmental ethicists recognised was the apparent truth that our understanding of what to value and how to value it, has led to many of the current environmental challenges faced today. The contention is that addressing the theoretical questions of value will have major practical spin-offs. In this field, much seems to hang on the type of value different entities are held to possess. This is thought to be due to the fact that our attitudes regarding our relations to nature are influenced by the type of value we believe nature to possess. It seems that behind practical environmental challenges lie certain fundamental questions of value and part of the solution of current environmental problems is to get people to recognise that nature has value independent of human judgment. In short that nature has 'intrinsic value'. [34]

One main focus of environmental ethicists has thus been to address these questions of value through creating a principled attack on old ways of thinking about the value of nature in order to create an appropriate response to modern day issues[35]. As became apparent in chapter 5, the particularist also needs to address issues of value and this can be seen to raise a point of tension for particularist theory.

Particularism is a theory about how reasons work and the particularist relies on a distinction between the deontic and the evaluative, meaning that reasons are used by

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[34]   This idea of value being one key topic in environmental ethics comes through in many of the anthologies of writing put together, as well as many of the introductory texts on environmental ethics. The sources made use of here are DesJardins (2006: 6-8 & 12-14), Light and Rolston (2004: 1-11), Palmer (1997: 10; 2003: 16-17), Pierce and VanDeVeer (1995: 1-23). Kate Rawles (2002: 542-543) briefly mentions this topic as well however, she presents it in a slightly different light as she discusses the issues around this being taken as an important topic by *academic* environmental philosophers rather than activists and those more interested in creating immediate change.
[35]   See, for example, the work of Peter Singer as already discussed.

particularists as deontic properties and not evaluative ones[36]. Reasons designate what it is right and wrong to do in a given ethical situation and not what is good or bad, for example. Given this distinction it would seem that the particularist may consistently accept certain general claims about the nature of value despite eschewing general principles in our moral judgments of what is right and what is wrong. That makes it possible for the particularist to make general claims in a field like environmental ethics about which beings can possess value. In other words, due to this distinction the particularist may endorse certain evaluative truths and this appears to be a necessary move in the field of environmental ethics that is so dominated by questions of this sort. The particularist is less likely however to accept that value of a certain kind always acts in a predictable fashion, as reason x. For the particularist, it is likely that the way in which value comes to feature as a reason cannot be predicted before the particular case is confronted. If one were able, for example, to argue that plants and animals have intrinsic value the way this value comes to feature as a reason cannot, for the particularist, be predicted before we look at the particular situation. The fact that something has value of a particular kind will not be able to tell us how it will work as a reason in any particular case. We can however come from a general belief that nature has a certain sort of value.

On this picture value and reason may come apart in certain situations and one may recognise the value of something, say protecting a pristine wilderness area for example, but have no reason to do anything about it. This picture of value and reason coming apart is not the only option however, and does not appear as a palatable truth in the field of environmental ethics. In Practical Reality (2000: 29-31), Dancy notes this possible split between the deontic and the evaluative but also notes that in normative theory this is not uncontroversial and there is a position that holds all reasons to be founded on value. In fact, there are three possible relations between reason and value. The first is a bi-conditional that reads as follows; reason $\leftrightarrow$ value. In this case, if there is a reason present, then there is value present and if there is value present then there is a reason present. The second relation works in only one direction and reads as follows; reason $\rightarrow$ value. In this relation, if a reason is present then there is value present. The deontologist does not believe that this relation must always hold for there can be cases where a reason is present without necessarily having something of value present. The final relation also works in one direction only and reads as follows; value $\rightarrow$ reason. The relation captured here is that if value is present, then a reason is present.

What is highlighted by looking at these three possible positions is a point of tension and a potential problem for the particularist who relies on this split. The particularist picture runs counter to the general thought in environmental ethics that so much hangs on the value that different entities can be argued to possess. This question of value is troublesome for all involved in environmental ethics in various ways. As already highlighted, some of the most notable meta-ethical debates in environmental ethics occur around questions of value, where practical outcomes seem to hang on the value that is attributed to different entities. William Godfrey Smith captures this point when he writes "The philosophical task is to try to provide adequate justification, or at least clear the way

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[36] There is an exception to this, discussed by Dancy (2004: 21, 23, 24-25 & 35) where he recognises that enticing reasons may have evaluative properties.

for a scheme of values according to which concern and sympathy for our environment is immediate and natural and the desirability of protecting and preserving wilderness self-evident." (Nelson, 2003: 432).This question of value lies at the heart of environmental ethics and many ethicists who are trying to save wilderness areas and animals feel the need to prove that these entities have intrinsic value. For theorists like Godfrey Smith, the primary task of philosophers should be to ground claims of intrinsic value for animals and nature. This is in order to clarify issues around instrumental and intrinsic value so as to sort out how, when and why the intrinsic value of something like wilderness areas can trump other human claims to value and betterment. Thinkers like Godfrey Smith and Holmes Rolston argue for intrinsic value, as it seems that if we can justify the intrinsic value of wilderness areas, we can argue for and pinpoint their level of moral consideration and this immediately seems to make the preservation of wilderness a moral issue. The thought is that if one can prove wilderness areas to be intrinsically valuable then those who want to destroy them have the burden of showing that something else of great importance would be lost through leaving the wilderness area undisturbed. The burden would be to show how something of intrinsic value could be justifiably sacrificed for something of instrumental value (Nelson, 2003: 432-433).

What is suggested by this is that we tend to assume that a particular type of value must always provide a constant reason for action. In other words, this suggests that value and reason do not come apart in the way allowed for by the particularist account. One problem with the particularist account is that it does not sit well with the understanding of value held by many environmentalists (relation 3) as discussed above. If something is of intrinsic value, it seems natural that it will feature as a reason in a general way. For example, if we value something we have some reason to protect it. Yet it seems that a particularist might settle on the value that animals and nature possess without settling on the kind of reason this gives us for action.

Dancy (2004) writes that even in the realm of value everything appears to be, at least in principle, context-dependent. Dancy (2004)[37] does provide some talk of 'default reasons' or the 'default polarity' of a feature. This captures the idea that a feature may have a general tendency to act as a reason but that this could be overturned or nullified by the other features of a context. Dancy also adds that we do not even need to hold that the default contribution will be the most common. Presumably then value could be one of those features that has default polarity, but is this enough for the kind of worry concerning value and reason coming apart?

How much should we worry about the fact that value and reason may come apart on the particularist picture? The fact that it sits uncomfortably with the way things are currently held to be in environmental ethics is not reason enough on its own to discredit particularist theory completely, but it does highlight a point that needs further exploration. For many theorists it is not easy to see how value and reason can come apart and thinkers like Godfrey Smith and Rolston buy a different picture to the one being put forward here by the particularist. As noted above on pages 98-99, the relation (relation 3)

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[37]   For Dancy's discussion on default values see Dancy (2004: 184-187) and for his discussion on default reasons see Dancy (2004: 69 & 111-117).

that needs to be endorsed to get this worry off the ground is the least controversial relation and given that even deontologists can accept this, it is a plausible position and puts the worry of the environmental ethicist raised here in a strong position. The distinction made by Dancy allows value to be present with no reason to act and given that the environmental ethicist only has to endorse the truth of the least controversial relation, which goes against the point made by Dancy, her complaint against the particularist looks fairly robust.

In order to be convinced by this picture of value and reason coming apart (in the manner described by relation 3) Dancy needs to provide a convincing picture of how he claims reasons work. On his account the reason for action is enabled by some other feature present in the case. In order to think through this problem of value and reason it is worth looking at when it seems right to say that value and reason come apart. One definite situation in which they do is when we find we are unable to act in relation to the thing we value. This is the old story of 'ought implies can', and reason and action can be seen to come apart when there is 'impossibility' involved. When we are unable to do something, then we find we have no reason to do it, despite the fact that we might value it. Here, the reason given us by the presence of value is not 'enabled' on Dancy's picture and reason and value can come apart. This is an uncontroversial truth that is true for any feature acting as a reason and doesn't suggest that value changes its polarity or is in any way variable as a reason. It is an obvious truth that if I cannot do something, then I have no reason to do it, which does not undermine the thrust of the point captured by relation 3. What would be interesting and important for Dancy's position would be the provision of an example in which value is present, and I can act on that value, and yet I have no reason to. This would show the feature of value to change the reason it gives us to act in a particular way. It is, however, difficult to come up with any other convincing scenario of value and reason coming apart in a way that could show how it would be possible to have value present with no reason. This suggests a potential area for revision in the particularist theory. It might be that particularism needs to come to say more about this question of value in order to look at just what the relation is between value and reasons and thus answer this concern in a satisfactory way.

2.2 Environmental Activism

Part of what we have been working towards in this study is a picture of the consequences for environmental philosophy of accepting a particularist approach. In order to do this it is necessary to look at one central goal of environmental philosophy; activism. Thus the second focus raised by looking at particularism in the context of environmental ethics is the urgent need for environmental theory to speak to the applied side of environmental philosophy. Environmental philosophy exists because of real world problems, being an applied field of ethics it should, at least to some extent, revolve around trying to solve current, world problems and what is currently coming to the fore in the environmental literature is this need to relate theory and practice[38]. Given this need the contention made

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[38]   See for example Rawles (2002) and Light and De-Shalit (2003) who mention it directly. This drive can also be seen in the number of works actually attempting to put ethical theory into practice in the

by Rawles (2002: 535-546), Light and De-Shalit (2003: 1-27) and others is that environmental philosophy can and should aim to create change in the world. Light and De-Shalit then point out that there is thus a relationship between environmental philosophy and environmental activism and the issue is how to do environmental philosophy in a broad political and public context.

For example, activist organisations like 'Beauty without Cruelty' have links to the work done by environmental ethicists and tend to look to certain moral principles to secure the humane treatment of all sentient animals, eliminate all fur trading and stop the testing of cosmetics on animals. Change of this sort is demanded by activists who make use of philosophy to create recognition of the need for change which is then pushed through in the world. Clearly, we use ethical theory to answer questions about how we should live, and in the context of environmental ethics, the questions being asked are about our choices regarding the natural world.

What philosophers like Rawles (2002: 535-546) and Light and De-Shalit (2003: 1-27) are putting forward is the idea that environmental philosophy needs to be able to involve itself in real environmental campaigns rather than purely theoretical, abstract debates. The desire of these philosophers is to change the typical relationship between philosopher and activists, politicians and environmental advocates. To do this, philosophers need to produce arguments that are relevant to those that the environmental world is actually engaged in. The new question then becomes what should philosophers do if they want to actually have some influence and inspire activists, policymakers, politicians and the general public? How ought they to put forward their arguments so as to be taken seriously and incorporated into environmental policy?

This practical orientation highlights the need for environmental ethics to be involved in policy production. In a field like environmental ethics, legislation and policy are seen as a practical means of upholding and enforcing theoretical ethical insights gained from the philosophical analysis of our moral relation to the natural world. Examples of this kind of work are; the attempt to organise societies in such a way as to ensure that they adhere to the current understanding of the value of nature; the question of how to express the moral foundations for laws protecting individual animals and species; and the ethical bases for asserting the preservation, protection and restoration of wilderness areas (DesJardins, 2006: 17-18 & 21; Light and Rolston, 2003: 2; Palmer, 1997: 112-123 & 125-139). Hayward (2003: 109-129) discusses the current and growing recognition of the importance of ensuring the protection of the environment at the highest political level. He notes that globally more than 70 countries now have 'constitutional environmental provisions' and in at least 30 countries these take the form of environmental rights. Although now somewhat outdated, Peter Singer in Animal Liberation (1976: 96-170), refers to legislation and policy in his discussion on intensive animal farming. Whilst it is clear from this that there is a case for saying we still do not protect farmed animals enough, it is also clear that we do need the force of the law to ensure humane treatment for these farmed animals.

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environmental context, see for example, Norton (2002), Light, (2002), Watson(2002), Attfield (2003), Hartley (2003), Norton & Hannon, (2003) to mention but a few.

The call for this applied focus and the questions around how to ensure that environmental philosophy starts increasingly to talk to this practical side is not set in the context of particularism or the practical debate between the particularist and the generalist, however, the thrust of this work is important in assessing the implications and consequences of taking on board a particularist approach to environmental philosophy. Drawing attention to this increasing call for environmental philosophy to be more focused on solving real world problems suggests that this is a large part of what we ought to be trying to do as environmental philosophers. The challenge now facing environmental philosophers is to make philosophy more relevant in helping to shape and change public opinions and decisions about whether a particular view is right or wrong in relation to environmental issues. This means that the arguments of environmental philosophers need to be constructed in accessible language in order to be available to a wider audience than other academic environmental philosophers. And this then must be a criterion of focus for the particularist in environmental ethics too. With this being a new aim, it would be wrong to introduce particularism as a purely theoretical account with little practical application and this focus provides another means of assessing particularism.

At first glance these kind of practical issues seem to be generalist projects and it is not clear what the implications of the need for policy creation are for the particularist. The tendency in the past has been to undertake these practical tasks using principles and general moral truths. This point has been illustrated in the above discussion of the work of Peter Singer (1976; 1993). Singer argues that our present attitudes are based on a history of prejudice and arbitrary discrimination and then creates a case for change by challenging this ethically biased and inconsistent thinking. At this point it is possible to start noting what we lose through discarding principles. With the use of principles, Singer is able to push forward our thinking in a general way. He provides a substantiated case for why and how we should take animals directly into account in our moral decision making. Through the use of moral generalities, Singer provides a blanket means of assessing behaviour in relation to animals and this creates important implications for the *general* analysis of environmental issues. Singer forces us to take the suffering of all sentient beings seriously and changes the focus of our approach so that it is no longer anthropocentric.

Singer's well argued principles have the aim of exerting moral pressure on us to factor animals into our decision making in a new way. Baldly put, the worry is that moral prejudices and inconsistent and arbitrary thinking are easier to tackle using principles as we can use principles to draw links across cases and show where current moral thought has gone wrong, and how to correct it. Principles supply quick and easy to apply reasons for why whole classes of behaviour should change and they provide easy paths for thinking so that they can be used to get people on board for movements and changes in society. For example, from his principle of equal consideration, Singer can argue that causing suffering for reasons of taste regarding meat eating is unacceptable or, that causing suffering for appearance in the testing of cosmetics on animals is ethically unacceptable. Although the particularist can do this in particular arguments this is more laborious and less accessible than a principled attack like that launched by Peter Singer.

Part of what is lost for the environmental ethicist if principles are removed from the moral picture can be cashed out in an example. A current and popular debate in environmental ethics runs between those who are for the use of animals in scientific and medical experimentation and those who are against it. Particularism has highlighted the dangers and incorrectness of the use of moral principles and has asserted that our moral judgment is fine without such rules and generalities but this seems to be in tension with the tasks required of moral thinking by animal rights activists. At the very least, animal rights activists are looking for some form of general moral truth that can ground their call for the humane treatment of experimental animals, if not a general truth that can ground a call for the eradication of such behaviour all together. They believe it to be wrong and there is no room for moral manoeuvrability here as far as they are concerned. If one was to argue that sometimes the feature of causing pain and suffering to animals is morally right, whilst this might be true, the general cause would be waylaid and the overall message would be lost. Now it might be the case that the logic of moral reasons is set against such activists and clearly their desire for moral generalities does not show particularism to be wrong. However, it does at least suggest that there is a practical need and place for moral generalities. In a field as practically oriented and driven by urgent moral concerns this is a point then that needs to be taken seriously.

Principles do seem to give us the edge here, they are useful and they provide a practical advantage being neat, handy tools with which to point to behaviour that is good and behaviour that is bad. One potential result of being a particularist environmental ethicist then is simply the loss of an extremely useful tool for moral thought and action. In a field that is essentially practical this does give generalism an apparent edge over particularist theory. Thus, although the particularist may be able to do applied environmental ethics, part of the challenge rests in how well this can actually be accomplished. One question then is around the chances of a particularist approach being able to change entrenched ways of thinking. It would seem that our chances are greater if we can point to principles whose logic is easily explained and tracked by others and is thus easily accessible. If we take the particularist picture we also then encounter the worry that policy puts pressure on us to take a generalist view as correct over a particularist one.

If we accept a particularist picture the question is are we committed to these troubling implications for the practice of environmental ethics? The particularist needs to respond to this and it seems to me that the particularist can and that we need not see the potential practical need for principle and policy to undermine particularist theory in any serious way. Let us grant for argument sake that principles do simplify moral life and are necessary for advocating change and getting just causes off the ground. In short we can grant for the sake of argument that we do need principles in the applied setting of environmental ethics. My contention, put forward here, is that we can grant this need for policy and even principles and still accept moral particularism as correct. To understand how this could work we need to distinguish between what is being aimed for in the use of principles and policies. If we re-conceptualise the role of principles, and spell out the correct conception of policy, then particularism need not be in trouble with this practical need.

As regards the use of principles we may distinguish our aims in using principles between saying that they are in fact true and map onto moral reality or saying that they are merely useful for getting urgent practical programmes going. If we understand principles in this second way then particularists may be free to use them. One way of understanding why this might be acceptable and in fact desirable is to go back to the fact of activism. As an environmental ethicist one may be committed to an overall moral programme, for example preventing cruelty to animals, and overall this judgment is correct and things will go better if this project gets instantiated in the world. Overall then this is the aim and our moral judgments need to tend toward this. The particularist claim is that using principles will cause us to make more mistakes, more bad moral judgments, and we will get it wrong more often; however, this might not matter if we get it wrong along the way if overall we are managing to motivate for something that all things considered is a better state of affairs. This sort of act is acceptable if we know that overall some judgment is right. The importance of having an agenda that is focused on a programme for particular outcomes is clear in the context of the urgent problems facing the environment, here the bigger picture of the agenda matters more than getting it right each time. Advocating a cause is different to wanting to get each moral judgement right every time. Many environmental ethicists are activists who are committed to a programme, and this commitment may be right overall despite the fact that they may not get there moral judgments exactly right each time along the way. The global picture may have moral worth without each step needing to be argued correctly to the last detail.

Taken this way principles become useful for the establishment of policy and legislation, in order to knock our thinking into the right shape before fine tuning it. In this way, the 'handiness' of principles and general policy need not be entirely lost to the particularist ethicist. Finally, the particularist can even go as far as to endorse general policy despite holding that there are no general moral truths. Here we need to recognise that there is an explicit distinction between policy and principle and there should be no mistaken shifting between the two. We can for example endorse the judgment that we ought to do x as a policy without committing ourselves to the moral picture that x is a general moral reason. In this way particularists can be happy with policy and we don't have to let the need for policy make it seem like we need principles although they may not provide as fine tuned a picture as that given by the particularist. This suggests that in an applied setting there may still be room and need for principles and this need not be damaging to the particularist picture. Ethicists then may be committed to an overall moral programme, for example preventing cruelty to animals, and overall get their moral reasoning right through using principles, without having to get it right in each case as particularism might allow us to do. Initially in order to change action in the world it may be necessary to knock our thinking and actions into shape at an overall level rather than fine tuning it. Taking principles and policy to work in this way does solve certain practical difficulties for the particularist, however, it does also come at a cost; one that the particularist is likely to count as rather heavy. The particularist moral judge is keen to get moral judgments right case by case and the cost of making use of general policy is that it is not designed to achieve this and therefore such accuracy would be lost. Getting moral judgments right, case by case, would be sacrificed for a practical outcome or cause. This

is acceptable if one takes a consequentialist line in which 'outcome' is taken to be of chief importance but the particularist does not hold to this, and this raises the question of why and how the particularist might take the use of principle and policy, in the way suggested above, to be justifiable.

The answer to worries about costs of this sort partly depends on how important we take the practical applicability of an ethical theory to be. In other words just how much is an ethical theory undermined if it is not useful in the practical setting[39]? Another question that impacts on this is how badly it seems we need policy at all and how important it is for it to be written in a generalist way? There may be other more particularist means of generating policy for particular ethical problems as they present themselves. If this was the case it would then become important to investigate the viability of such policy. Finally, we would also need to explore the extent to which we do actually need policy and principle in the way presented by the generalist to get movements and such like off the ground. This problem of policy and principle is thus not as easily solved or addressed as it might appear on first glance and this suggests the need for further investigation; one line this could take would be to look at whether it is possible to write rules that allow for exceptions and to explore whether a particularist might be drawn to such 'rules with exceptions'[40]. In terms of the activist orientation of particularism, it is not yet certain just what the results of implementing a particularist ethic would be. And this suggests room for practical research. Here, research in terms of moral motivation may help to clarify just what the consequences would be, however, to the extent that particularism complicates the moral picture it is likely to present as a negative in terms of activism.

3. The Relationship between Theory and Practice

I have explored the challenge to particularism that it is not applicable. This was done in the context of environmental ethics. The motivating questions of this study were, firstly, can we be applied particularists and secondly, if so what are the implications for environmental ethics. Both raise the need to reflect on the relation between theory and practice. Ethics needs to be about both what is true (it needs to articulate the nature of morality) and what is practical and useful (it needs to give us accounts of how we should live and act that we can put into practice and it needs to be able to solve practical ethical problems). Furthermore, the context of environmental ethics chosen for this project recognises that there is, and should be, some relation between theory and practice although there appears to be no final agreement on the nature of this relationship. The interplay between particularism and the applied problems of environmental ethics thus raises the question about the nature of the relationship between theory and practice, and which concern, 'truth' or 'practicality', should take precedence in the articulation of an ethical stance.

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[39] This is a point that is raised again in section 3 of this chapter, pages 105-107.
[40] Thanks to my supervisor Douglas Farland for alerting me to the fact that taking policy on board in this fashion comes at a heavy cost for the particularist and thus requires further investigation.

This kind of worry concerning the relationship between theory and practice has been gestured at already in chapter four. Here the discussion centred on practical challenges to particularism but implicit in this kind of challenge from Brad Hooker (2000) and less directly from applied thinkers like Peter Singer (1993)[41], is that ethical theory is only valuable if it is of practical use. Applying particularism in the context of environmental ethics has proved profitable in terms of highlighting the significance of the need for theory to be applicable. The strength of using environmental ethics as my context is that this is a field that is working through problems that require immediate resolution in order to avoid pain and suffering, and this raises the question of whether there should be an 'advocacy component' built into our philosophical enquiry in this field (Light and De-Shalit, 2003: 1-27). Working in the context of environmental ethics highlights just how important and how much it matters for an ethical theory to be practically healthy, although it does not resolve the question of the exact relationship between theory and practice. Here the call for theory to be practical is insistent and although activists may be calling for this link, activists need not necessarily be philosophers or do philosophy and the question then remains to what extent should we take this call from them seriously.

We generally do not think of philosophy as accommodating itself to the needs of practice. In fact this would seem wrong for a philosopher to do. Generally, philosophers who work in ethics or political philosophy should only work on the question of whether something is right or wrong. Once this status is figured out it might then be the case that they should try to work out how to persuade others of the correctness of their positions, but generally we see the role of philosophy as helping to find out what is right and why it is right. In environmental ethics this is in terms of human relations to nature. In other words philosophy is seen as a search for the truth. If they see their work only in these terms however, then they run the risk of failing to have any impact on policies and practices. (Light and De-Shalit, 2003: 2-10)

There is thus a tension present here in terms of just what the determinants of good ethical theory should be. In this regard then we are looking for a way to remove our doubts on the relationship between theory and practice. One possible way to address this would be to take a line like that of John Rawls (1971: 48-51) on how ethical principles and theory should speak to the actual ethical judgments we make. Rawls makes use of 'reflective equilibrium' as the proper method of ethics. The idea capture by the term 'reflective equilibrium' is the method of testing ethical theories against actual judgments made in particular cases and then also testing actual judgments made in particular cases against ethical theories. This would be done until equilibrium was achieved. In this way Rawls believed that neither theory nor actual judgment was epistemically privileged. In principle everything remained open to being revised. Furthermore this process of reflective equilibrium was to proceed from 'considered moral judgments', that is moral judgments about which we are confident.

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[41]   This idea of ethics needing to be practical is suggested by the focus of Singer's whole book *Practical ethics* (2nd ed.) as each chapter attempts to look at an applied ethical problem but it also comes through in his preface pages vii-xiii and Chapter 1 pages 1-15.

In terms of coming to some agreement on where we should stand with regard to how ethical theory and practice should speak to one another it seems plausible and helpful to follow Rawls's idea and work from both ends. In other words we can move from the demands of ethical theory in towards the demands of ethical practice and we can move from the demands of ethical practice in towards the demands of ethical theory. In this way one can work from both ends in order to find the best description of this relationship. Here we are looking at a process of mutual adjustment of ethical theory and ethical practice and the pulls, demands and needs of each. Using reflective equilibrium one is supposed to work from what one is sure of what one knows and so one could potentially move in from the extremes of taking practice to trump theory and vice versa for it is clear that the extremes do not capture the true situation.

Working out the relationship between theory and practice will be a complex and involved task and would require extensive exploration on its own terms in order to actually make any new or valuable contribution. In terms of the goals of this study it is sufficient to note that there is this tension and uncertainty in the relationship between theory and practice. If particularism were to come up short on the practical front there would then need to be extensive work done exploring just how serious this would be for it as an ethical theory. This is important ground for further exploration. In terms of making a final decision on the correctness of moral particularism this relationship between theory and practice would need to be further analysed in conjunction with further attempted applications of particularism to applied fields of ethics. What can be concluded for the purposes of moving forward with this work is that it is necessary for a theory to be practically applicable, to some extent, possibly to quiet a large extent, as suggested by the context of environmental ethics.

4. Conclusion

The field of environmental ethics has traditionally set up a picture of moral judgment in which the right way to reason morally is to make use of moral principles. On this account the moral agent best suited to solving practical environmental problems is the moral agent with a full set of moral principles and a working knowledge of how to consistently apply them. The environmental literature shows environmental philosophers relating principles to environmental problems and attempting to act consistently within the parameters set down by these principles. This method has not, however, been a self-conscious decision and there are no specific accounts of why this is or must be. With the advent of particularism it became necessary to consciously explore this.

Particularism requires a fundamental shift in thinking. One no longer approaches a problem with an armoury of principles and moral truths. Given this shift the question explored here was can we plausibly do this in an applied setting like environmental ethics? Given what is required of an ethical theory in such an applied context the conclusion drawn is that it is plausible. In terms of the analysis carried out here, there is no logical reason why particularism cannot be applied to environmental problems and particularism can be seen to accommodate the requirements of an applied field like

environmental ethics. The discussion in chapter six showed that we can do some of what Singer does with principles, in a particularist way. Once a particular case has been worked through, the particularist can point to the way the reasons are working and can draw our attention to the actual moral features at play in a case. Working through cases with others can, in time, allow other moral agents to become skilled and morally sensitive enough to recognise, on their own, the way the reasons really work in each case. As a particularist one is still able to point to other similar cases and look at how similar features function and to the extent that they are the same and are not changed by the presence or absence of any other features one can use this to learn and change thinking.

Particularism can draw attention to the values and assumptions that we make as a society and critically explore them. Where appropriate this particularist exploration can lead to activism, first, through alerting people to the facts, and second, by changing value systems. Particularism is thus able to prompt activism by raising awareness and encouraging a critical exploration of beliefs and values. It can also legitimise activism and new policy demands through systematic justification and support in the form of reasons for a particular action in the world. Particularism, like any other ethical theory, is also able guide activism, providing a way for activists to think about what they are doing and thus preventing them from performing mindless and harmful acts. Philosophy allows our actions to be thoughtful and skilled and can help to define problems and solutions and particularism is no exception. It allows us to develop constructive thought about what will count as change for the better and like the generalist the particularist can identify assumptions, inconsistencies and arbitrary moral judgments. In this way they too can challenge and thus change our moral thinking. The particularist can get a just cause going as the generalist can, though the scope of such causes may be somewhat limited in comparison.

Moral Particularism applied to environmental problems will undoubtedly encounter moral dilemmas that are not immediately solvable but we need not be put off moral particularism by cases of genuine moral conflict that prove hard to solve. For example, there is a moral dilemma encountered in the testing of medicines on animals. On the one hand there is the chance to improve human life and health and to alleviate and prevent human pain and suffering. On the other hand, testing medicines on animals causes them pain, suffering and death. It is not clear from a particularist perspective what it is right to do in this circumstance. However, solving this kind of obvious conflict is not essential for particularist theory to be seen as practically successful because all theories face dilemmas like these. Some cases just are not yet solved; we simply do not yet have the full moral picture. What is important is that it is plausible that particularism could be put to tasks like this, which it seems plausible to say it could, in the particular.

Moral dilemmas of this sort actually suggest space for further exploring just what a particularist approach to moral thought would be like and what it would make of a case like this. The facts are straightforward and it would be interesting to see whether, when we look at the facts we actually do know how the reasons work, but just don't like what they say. For example, when we look at testing on animals, especially clear cases do present themselves in the world of cosmetics. Here it is not hard to see that the reasons

come down on the side of not testing and not causing pain and suffering to animals merely for the pleasure of how we look and yet mostly we choose to ignore this. The point is we often don't need complicated arguments to see how the reasons actually work and applying particularist theory in such contexts might expose something useful both in terms of particularist theory and environmental ethics.

If we take environmental ethics to essentially be action oriented then one final troubling point needs to be examined, this being that a philosophical approach to applied problems may end up creating disinterest and inertia rather than action. This is so because of the way it tends to feed into human psychology. Philosophy tends to focus on the fine points of a subject rather than the big picture. In philosophical debates it is the details of the debate that are important. A large part of such debates is to locate points of uncertainties in the topic and work with these. Philosophers choose to find uncertainties, asking questions about the definition of entities like nature or wilderness. This means it is difficult for environmental philosophers to stick with a big picture approach to applied environmental problems.

On the other hand, to be successful in creating change in the world one has to take the big picture. The activist, as Rawles notes, needs to have a more casual attitude to concepts and use them as if there are no conceptual questions to be asked. Activists tend to find truths where there are uncertainties and feel comfortable making assumptions and being open and flexible. To understand this contrast think about an example from environmental philosophy; for the philosopher it is important to have clear definitions for concepts like 'nature' and 'environment' and this can become a major and time consuming part of a project around these sorts of worries. An activist, on the other hand, has to be open to using these terms as if there are no conceptual questions to be asked about them. What is important for the activist is to get beyond the words in order to create change in the world. In short, for the activist action is paramount and because action tends to be motivated by simple concise accounts of a problem this is the route the activist follows.

This point is relevant to the current evaluation of particularism because the picture that emerges of an applied particularist ethic is one of a theory that is both subtle and complex. The particularist does not generalise her answer and has no convenient general moral truths to apply to tricky cases of moral judgment. The particularist approach is undoubtedly more complicated than a generalist approach and one worry with an applied particularist ethic is that it will prove irritating to those trying to implement it in the field which could enhance the paralysing effect of philosophy. This is problematic in a field where the agenda does matter and the pull of activism is partly due to the urgency of the problems themselves. In a field like environmental ethics the problems are serious and immediate, for example, as Rawles (2002: 543) points out, ours is the last decade that has a chance of preventing the complete destruction of the rainforests of the world. We simply do not have the time to solve all the philosophical problems presented by these cases in order to get it absolutely one hundred percent right, as a particularist approach might allow us to do. Action is required and it is the big picture that is important as

already noted. No complicated arguments are needed to see that there is something of value to be saved in the rainforests for example. It is clear that they do just need saving. Complicated problems tend to block action as the way forward is unclear and knotty with a number of conflicting truths coming to the fore. This can be illustrated through an example. Currently we are facing difficult decisions regarding power production. Our power needs are contributing to global warming and more sustainable ways of producing power need to be found. Tidal estuaries can be utilised to create power that does not contribute to global warming and in this sense is a positive for the planet. Utilising the estuary in this way will however destroy the habitat of a number of animals, birds and other living organisms and in this sense would be detrimental. The debate then is whether to sacrifice individuals for the good of the whole. The truth of what it is right to do in this situation is not clear and naturally there are activists on both sides of the case who are 'certain' of what is right. They tend to make use of principles to motivate action. For example, those not in favour of using these estuaries could argue along the line of the sanctity and value of all life, something like a Kantian approach to ethics transposed into the animal world, it is wrong to sacrifice the individual for the good of the whole. On the other side we might have some sort of welfare account with the good of the many trumping the good of the few. If one were to approach this in a particularist way one would have to start from scratch and try to spell out and locate the nuanced moral truth. This is not at all clear and will be hard to locate and thus the decision of what to do will be that much harder for someone involved in this task.

There is a ready response for the particularist on the charge of it being hard to implement however. This idea is captured by John Stuart Mill in his defence of utilitarian theory. The theory of utilitarianism is often blamed for human failings. It is held accountable for the difficulties that beset individuals trying to be morally conscientious. The utilitarian theory is held to be in difficulty because *people* may make use of the rule of utility to further their own interests and causes. The rule of utility can be used to make a case for doing what is in one's own best interest rather than what is right. Thus, through the application of the principle of utility people can make an exception of themselves so that when tempted to do something wrong they are able to see and justify the most utility in this act making it the 'right' thing to do. In other words the rule of utility can be used to justify actions that are not in fact correct moral judgments to be making in that situation (Bennett, 2005: 16-17).

Mill defends this by saying that it is not the only form of morality that allows for this danger; it is not alone in providing us with excuses to do wrong. Mill points out that excuses of this kind are abundantly available in all moral doctrines that recognise conflicting moral considerations in the moral world. What Mill is pushing is that it is not the fault of the moral theory but rather it is the fault of the complicated nature of human beings and the moral world. There simply are complicated cases of moral conflict where we encounter situations that are difficult and where our moral obligations conflict. Again here I refer to the case of testing medicines on animals. "These are real difficulties, knotty points both in the theory of ethics and in the practical personal matter of living conscientiously." (Bennett, 2005: 16-17)

This defence can also be applied to particularism in that although particularism may be hard to apply if it is correct and it allows us to get our moral judgments right, then that is all that can legitimately be asked of it as a theory. We may be applied particularists, and the difficulty raised by Brad Hooker, that particularism may be detrimental to our practice because it provides no guarantees and is difficult to apply, need not threaten the position of the theory.

The difficulty of applying particularism which was originally seen as a potential weakness could interestingly turn out to be a strength of the theory as well. Technically the particularist approaches environmental problems with no moral principles and will not hold any feature of a case to always act as some reason. There is thus no assumption before facing a particular problem about which way the facts will point or what kind of argument the facts will build. This might be a harder way to face moral judgments but it might also force us to get it right more often. The particularist view encourages in-depth analysis, ideally forcing the moral agent to view the case for what it is in order to be sure not to miss any moral reasons of the case due to owning some moral agenda. This could open up to the nuances of the case and this sort of readiness to see reasons is especially important in our thinking about nature and animals, a field that constantly bumps up against new sorts of reasons and interactions between reasons. The particularist seems well placed to notice these because she is looking for them. An example of this can be seen in the way in which beauty comes to factor in terms of bestowing value onto those things that are beautiful. This is an example put forward by Elliot (1991: 290-291) in his discussion about Kakadu National Park. We are kept alert to these sorts of things as particularists because we do not expect certain features to function in typical and already defined and understood ways.

This is in line with a theoretical point made by Dancy (1993: 64). According to Dancy generalism creates a tendency in us to not look hard enough at the case before us. We end up relying on a few rules and this method is too simplistic for dealing with the complicated moral world and thus particularism makes the claim that generalism will cause us to make bad moral decisions. This will be so because under generalism we try to fit what we have said in one case with what we have said in another. Dancy calls this 'looking away' and this is seen as one danger of generalism. This argument made by Dancy seems to be borne out by the practical side of particularism explored here. Applying principles to cases may end up confirming patterns of moral argument and judgment that in fact do not exist. The way we reason about things will affect the kinds of practical decisions we make, in environmental ethics this has become clear in the struggle between anthropocentric ethical thinking and non-anthropocentric thinking. The kind of value we hold to be true here does affect the kind of decisions that get made when we are faced with moral dilemmas to do with human interaction with nature. Particularism makes us reason in a new way because it takes away preconceptions about moral facts, forcing one to look at the moral facts of the case with which one is confronted.

Using particularist theory in the context of environmental ethics throws up many issues with no final solutions. Applying moral particularism could be something worth pursuing as a new line both in environmental ethics and in the furthering of the debate between the

particularist and the generalist. However, it is also possible that applying particularism to real-world problems will prove irritating, difficult and time consuming and thus hinder the activist orientation and need of environmental ethicists. One implication of the work done here is that particularism needs to be applied repeatedly in various practical settings in order to assess it at both a theoretical and a practical level. It will take consistent applications of this nature to see whether applying particularism will have any breakthroughs in terms of theory development in environmental ethics and in terms of change and policy development in the world. It is conceivable that taking a particularist stance will help to avoid some of the theoretical traps of environmental ethics.

In conclusion then, there is much scope for more work on the application of a particularist ethic. The work carried out here provides a starting point for looking at what an applied particularist ethic might look like and suggests the scope for further work regarding using particularism in an applied setting and exploring the relationship between theory and practice. Particularism, it would seem, can be applied to problems like those encountered in environmental ethics, with some qualifications. Particularist theory needs to address the questions of value raised here and spell out with greater care the constraint of consistency on the particularist theorist.

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