

Accounting for Moral Conflicts

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Abstract In his recent book *The Dimensions of Consequentialism* (2013), Martin Peterson defends, amongst other things, the claim that moral rightness and wrongness come in degrees and that, therefore, the standard view that an act's being morally right or wrong is a one-off matter ought to be rejected. An ethical theory not built around a gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness is, according to Peterson, unable to account adequately for the phenomenon of moral conflicts. I argue in this paper that Peterson's defence of this claim is not convincing. Over and above this negative result, a careful assessment of Peterson's case for degrees of rightness reveals that the theoretical corridor for accounting for moral conflicts without a gradualist conception of rightness and wrongness is relatively narrow. As I show, the only way of avoiding the conclusion of Peterson's argument is to reject his conception of the 'final analysis' that an ethical theory provides, i.e. of what the theory ultimately has to say about individual acts and their normative properties. According to Peterson, such a final analysis should be seen as comprising the all-things-considered judgements yielded by the theory, and nothing else. As it turns out, the only alternative to this account that is compatible with the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness is to conceive of the final analysis as also containing judgements about morally relevant factors, or aspects, and the way in which they are normatively relevant.

Keywords Moral conflicts · Degrees of rightness · Moral factors · Moral reasons · Consequentialising · Martin Peterson

In his recent book *The Dimensions of Consequentialism* (2013), Martin Peterson attempts to work out a consequentialist ethical theory that provides enough theoretical texture to account for phenomena that traditional forms of consequentialism have often been accused of not being able to accommodate.

Peterson shares this aim with other consequentialists such as Douglas Portmore (2011), who pursue the project of 'consequentialising' non-consequentialist theories, i.e. of providing

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a recipe for designing consequentialist theories that entail the very same deontic verdicts as any given and at least minimally plausible non-consequentialist theory. In contrast to other contributions to the consequentialising programme, however, Peterson's proposal is not driven by the idea of leaving the theoretical core of standard act-consequentialism untouched and coming up with a sufficiently rich understanding of the evaluative considerations that affect how outcomes are to be ranked. Peterson's overall aim, rather, is to construct a form of consequentialism that makes theoretical room for the view that there is a plurality of morally relevant factors and that conflicts between them are a standard moral phenomenon.¹ Peterson's preferred form of consequentialism, therefore, involves a more radical departure from classical act-consequentialism than other recently developed forms of consequentialism.

The theoretical edifice Peterson offers is complex, and it involves a number of unorthodox proposals. The most controversial of these is the claim that moral rightness and wrongness come in degrees and that, therefore, the standard view that an act's being morally right or wrong is a one-off matter ought to be rejected. An ethical theory not built around a gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness is, according to Peterson, unable to account adequately for the phenomenon of moral conflicts.

As I argue in this paper, Peterson's defence of this claim is not convincing. Over and above this negative result, a careful assessment of Peterson's case for degrees of rightness also has a positive upshot. Perhaps surprisingly, it turns out that the theoretical corridor for accounting for moral conflicts without a gradualist conception of rightness and wrongness is relatively narrow. On the basis of a detailed reconstruction of what, as I see it, should be considered the core of Peterson's argument against the standard view (Section 1), I show that the only acceptable way of avoiding this argument's conclusion is to reject Peterson's conception of the 'final analysis' that an ethical theory provides, i.e. of what the theory ultimately has to say about individual acts and their normative properties. According to Peterson, such a final analysis should be seen as comprising the all-things-considered judgements yielded by the theory, and nothing else. The only alternative to this account that is compatible with the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness, as I show, is to conceive of the final analysis as also containing judgements about morally relevant factors, or aspects, and the way in which they are normatively relevant – and, thus, as also containing judgements that are to be sharply distinguished from all-things-considered moral judgements (Section 2). I then argue that Peterson has not backed up his conception of a final analysis by an argument based on premises that are neutral in the relevant dialectical context. The views about decision making presented later in his book can be read as an attempt to provide the required independent support. These views, however, are not backed up by a defensible rationale, and it is hard to see how they could be. Therefore, Peterson has not given us a sufficiently convincing reason to abandon the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness (Section 3). Even so, as I emphasise in the concluding section, Peterson is right in pointing out that ethical theories have to display a certain degree of complexity in order for them to be able to account for moral conflicts, and that theories only involving judgements about (binary) rightness and wrongness do not meet this requirement. I close by indicating why the alternative view described in Section 2 can be seen as an appropriate framework – and, indeed, a framework superior to Peterson's view – within which the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness can be embedded in order to account for moral conflicts (Section 4).

¹ To be sure, less unorthodox versions of consequentialism have room for conflicts between values. As opposed to conflicts within the evaluative domain, however, Peterson aims accounting for deontic conflicts.

Even though Peterson develops his gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness as part of his overall consequentialist theory, this conception and his argument in favour of it are independent of any consequentialist framework, which they neither presuppose nor support. The same is true of the discussion in this paper.

1

Peterson conceives of moral conflicts as situations in which two or more of several irreducible moral aspects clash, i.e. in which none of the available actions is optimal with respect to all relevant aspects. Peterson believes that one can only account for such conflicts if one accepts a gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness. Otherwise – and this is, as he believes, “[t]he most important reason for taking the non-binary account of rightness and wrongness seriously” (Peterson 2013, p. 25) – one is bound to face what he calls ‘deontic leaps’. Such a leap, according to him,

occurs if the deontic status assigned to an act does not reflect all relevant moral aspects that obtain in the situation – the ‘leap’ arises as the moral theory incorrectly ignores some moral aspect in its assignment of a deontic status to an act. [...] A deontic leap is bound to occur as you assign some binary deontic status to the available act that does not reflect the [...] moral aspects that obtain in the situation. (Peterson 2013, p. 25)

It is possible to formulate the argumentative idea at work here in a way that makes the case for degrees of rightness stronger than many would have initially thought. Moreover, the reconstruction that I am about to offer turns out to be superior to Peterson’s own official argument for degrees of rightness that he phrases several pages after the passage just quoted. From this passage, we can extract the following premise:

- (1) The deontic status that an ethical theory assigns to an action has to reflect all aspects that are morally relevant (i.e. that play a role in determining the deontic status of the action according to the theory in question).

There is not much point in disputing this. An ethical theory should ‘reflect’ (rather than ‘ignore’) all morally relevant aspects in assigning a deontic status to an action – on pain of failing as an ethical theory. Whereas this should be uncontroversial, it is not uncontroversial how exactly this requirement is to be understood. With regard to Peterson’s understanding of it, it is instructive to consider how he expresses the thought underlying premise (1) in his discussion of a case in which the fact that an act is an instance of promise-breaking is morally relevant even though another consideration is weightier. In such a case, the morally relevant fact that one has promised something should, according to Peterson, “remain visible in the final analysis” (Peterson 2013, p. 29). In view of this, the following premise captures the way that he wants us to understand the notion of ‘reflection’ involved in premise (1):

- (2) The deontic status that an ethical theory assigns to an act reflects all aspects that are morally relevant only if these aspects “remain visible in the final analysis” (Peterson 2013, p. 29).

This also seems right, given that ‘remains visible in the final analysis’ is to be understood along the lines of ‘affects what the theory ultimately has to say about the action in question’.

Premises (1) and (2) straightforwardly entail the following intermediate conclusion:

- (3) All morally relevant aspects have to “remain visible in the final analysis” (Peterson 2013, p. 29).

When it comes to assessing what this entails, much depends on how the idea of a ‘final analysis’ is fleshed out. Peterson’s thought is that a final analysis offered by some ethical theory comprises the all-things-considered deontic judgements about moral rightness and wrongness that the theory entails, and nothing else, since these judgements are, when it comes to settling what to do, the judgements that we are ultimately concerned about:

- (4) The final analysis provided by an ethical theory consists in nothing but the all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness as entailed by the theory.

It thus follows that:

- (5) All morally relevant aspects have to remain visible in the all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness.

Now, a binary conception of moral rightness and wrongness is not able to track differences between acts that are morally right, but also morally suboptimal in *some* relevant respect, and acts that are morally optimal in *all* relevant respects. Or, to phrase the same point using Peterson’s terminology:

- (6) If moral rightness and wrongness were binary properties, then all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness would not make visible all morally relevant aspects.²

(5) and (6) entail the conclusion that Peterson wants to establish:

- (7) Moral rightness and wrongness are not binary properties.

This reconstruction shows that the idea expressed in the passage quoted above can be transformed into a valid argument against the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness that is based on premises all of which are at least initially plausible and theoretically sufficiently neutral.³ In terms of neutrality my reconstruction is an improvement over

² Peterson does not explicitly state the views expressed in premises (4) and (6) of my proposal as to how his argument should be reconstructed. Even so, what I present arguably is the most charitable interpretation of his argument.

³ Moreover, the reconstruction avoids terminology that is, as far as the relevant literature is concerned, rather controversial. This is, in particular, true of Foot’s distinction between ‘evidential’ and ‘verdictive moral considerations’ (Foot 1978, p. 182) that Peterson, in his critical remarks on Ross (Peterson 2013, pp. 27–31), invokes in order to elucidate Ross’s distinction between prima facie duties and actual duties. In doing so, he takes up an earlier suggestion by Stratton-Lake (1997, p. 753) that, however, Stratton-Lake has chosen to abandon in his more recent work on the topic (Stratton-Lake 2002). For a helpful discussion and critique of Foot’s distinction, see also Dancy (2004, p. 16).

Peterson's official argument in favour of a gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness, since one of the premises of Peterson's own argument seems to presuppose that moral rightness and wrongness are matters of degree and thus cannot properly be seen as a part of a defence of this very view (Peterson 2013, p. 33).⁴

As reconstructed above, the premises entail that moral rightness and wrongness are not binary properties. Strictly speaking, a further argumentative step is necessary to get to the conclusion that moral rightness and wrongness are matters of degree. Since the focus of my discussion is the case against orthodoxy, I disregard the question as to whether such an additional argument is necessary and, if so, how it can be provided.

2

The reconstruction of Peterson's case against the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness offered above makes transparent how the notions of 'reflecting morally relevant aspects' and of a 'final analysis' provided by some ethical theory have to be understood in order for it to be possible to transform Peterson's case into a valid argument.

Premises (1) and (2) of this argument and, with them, the intermediate conclusion (3) are hard to deny. The same is true of premise (6), which states that binary all-things-considered judgements about rightness and wrongness do not make visible all morally relevant aspects. This is why those who wish to defend the standard view against Peterson's challenge should take issue with premise (4), i.e. with the view that the 'final analysis' provided by an ethical theory – i.e. what the theory ultimately has to say about individual acts – consists in nothing but the all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness as entailed by that theory. Only if this is denied is it possible to consistently reject the conclusion that moral rightness and wrongness are not to be understood as binary properties.

Given that it does not seem wise to *exclude* all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness from the 'final analysis' that an ethical theory can be expected to deliver, the most plausible option for those wishing to defend the standard view against Peterson's challenge is to explore the idea that, over and above these judgements, there are also *other* judgements that can be understood as elements of what an ethical theory says about individual actions.

A straightforward candidate for these are judgements describing the very morally relevant factors that oppose each other in cases of conflict in which there is no act that is optimal in all morally relevant respects, and the way in which these factors are relevant. A way of rejecting premise (4) and, thus, of avoiding Peterson's conclusion is to regard not only all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness, but also judgements about how actions fare with regard to different moral aspects, as part of the 'final analysis' that an ethical theory ultimately can be expected to deliver.

⁴ This is how Peterson phrases the second premise of this argument: "[a]n act is right to some non-extreme degree if and only if the agent has a verdictive reason to perform it *and* a verdictive reason to refrain from performing it" (Peterson 2013, p. 33). In commenting on it, Peterson explains that it "is a claim about how certain concepts are interrelated" (ibid.). It is, however, not meant to be backed up by "semantic observations of how people actually use very complex and abstract terms", but rather as a view about "how these terms *ought* to be used" (ibid.). Whether or not moral rightness should be understood (and, consequently, talked about) as coming in degrees, however, is precisely what is at issue here. This is why Peterson's official argument presupposes, and falls short of establishing, a gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness.

To be sure, such a category of moral judgements that are to be distinguished from all-things-considered moral judgements is not new to ethical theorising. Possible candidates for such judgements defended in the literature are judgements about *prima facie* duties (as famously introduced by Ross 1930, ch. 2), about moral factors as discussed by Kagan (1998, pp. 17–22), ‘contributory’ moral reasons (Dancy 2004, esp. ch. 2), moral aspects (Peterson 2013, pp. 8–13), etc.

What is referred to in such judgements has not always been understood in precisely the same way. Even so, the overall idea in introducing them is to help oneself to a way of consistently describing moral conflicts of the generic structure described above: there are two or more morally relevant factors that apply to all actions available in a given situation of choice, and none of these is optimal with regard to all relevant aspects. The very point of introducing judgements about moral aspects, moral factors, etc. is to be able to say that irrespective of what is true about an action on the overall or all-things-considered level of moral rightness, it is suboptimal in at least some respect (or, alternatively, optimal in all respects).

Incorporating such judgements into the final analysis provided by an ethical theory, however, is not the route that Peterson takes. According to him, the fact that an action is not optimal with regard to all morally relevant aspects has to be visible in the relevant all-things-considered moral judgement, which, thus, must not be understood in a binary way (see premise (6) in the above reconstruction).

By contrast, in the alternative view just sketched, the information about how the different available acts fare with regard to the morally relevant factors is something to be noted *over and above* whether they are morally right or wrong. Whereas the normative complexity of a situation of moral conflict, within Peterson’s framework, is accounted for by means of *one* sort of judgements (namely gradualist judgements about moral rightness and wrongness), in the alternative view it is described by *two different* sorts of judgements that are both theoretically significant and that are both required to figure in a reasonably complete description of the normative structure of the situation.

Note that, within the alternative view described here, all but one of the premises of the argument reconstructed above can be accepted. A theory involving both (binary) all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and judgements about moral factors or aspects (or whatever is your preferred terminology) can be understood such that the morally relevant factors are not ignored, but rather reflected in the all-things-considered judgements to the extent to which these, as it seems plausible to assume anyway, *depend* in their content on the relative weight of all, possibly conflicting, morally relevant aspects. More importantly, the conflicting factors remain visible in the final analysis provided by an ethical theory in a straightforward sense: they are explicitly *mentioned* in the final analysis, if we understand that analysis to comprise *both* all-things-considered *and* judgements about normatively relevant factors. This is also why both premises (1) and (2) and, with them, the intermediate conclusion (3) remain true under the alternative view sketched here.

The alternative view differs from Peterson’s account only with regard to how it understands the notion of a final analysis. In Peterson’s view, the final analysis provided by an ethical theory is the set of all-things-considered moral judgements entailed by it (see premise (4)). Precisely this assumption and, with it, the intermediate conclusion (5), is denied by defenders of the alternative view. They can, however, easily accept premise (6) since they do not consider all-things-considered moral judgements as the ones that are to make visible morally relevant factors anyway.

Defenders of the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness thus should take issue with Peterson's understanding of what he calls a 'final analysis' and require an ethical theory to yield not only all-things-considered judgements about (binary) moral rightness and wrongness but also judgements about morally relevant factors and the way in which they are relevant.

3

Both Peterson and defenders of the alternative view sketched above want those moral judgements that are part of what each consider the 'final analysis' to be relevant for decision making. They conceive of this relevance, however, in very different ways.

This is how the defender of the alternative view will describe the relation between the two different sorts of judgements that are, according to him, to be seen as elements of the final analysis, and their relevance for moral decision making: he will say that morally right acts are the ones that one ought to perform, morally speaking, and morally wrong acts are those that one ought to refrain from performing (again, morally speaking). Judgements about possibly conflicting moral aspects will, as he sees it, play a role in determining the morally right act. Once this is done, however, they do not have to be considered again when it comes to deciding how to act in the particular situation.

Consider, e.g., a situation in which there is something that you have promised to do and in which another, more important moral factor unforeseeably occurs – say, somebody is in urgent need of help, and you are the only one around able to help. Assume that you cannot both help and keep your promise and that the factor of promise-keeping is, in this situation, less weighty than the factor of helping. Then, the defender of the standard view will want to say that helping is morally right and promise-keeping is morally wrong. Even so, he would concede, helping is morally suboptimal since it is not optimal with regard to all relevant factors (since helping, in this very situation, constitutes the breaking of a promise).

With regard to determining the morally right act, the fact that the act of helping is, at the same time, an act of promise-breaking has, as it were, been adequately taken into consideration to the extent to which it, or rather its normative weight, has been compared to the weight of the fact that the act in question is one of helping. Since it has been found to have lesser weight, helping turned out to be morally right, all-things-considered.

Even so, the fact that the right act is one of promise-breaking and thus morally suboptimal remains significant in two ways in the alternative view. For one thing, even though the person helping in the described situation is not to be blamed and has no reason to feel guilty, she has reason to regret that, on pain of acting morally wrongly, she could not keep the promise. For another thing, even though in helping in the described situation, the agent does the right thing, it would generally be morally appropriate for her to explain to the person to whom she had given the promise why she did not keep it.

This is why, within the alternative view, one can make good sense of the idea that all the elements of the final analysis are relevant for moral decision making. The main reason for which Peterson disagrees with this view is that, according to him, if an act is not optimal with regard to all morally relevant aspects, then this has to show in the all-things-considered moral judgement about the act – or, to put it in the way formulated above:

- (5) All morally relevant aspects have to remain visible in the all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness.

It is because of this that Peterson believes that acts that are not morally optimal with regard to all aspects are not, to take up his terminology, ‘entirely right’ – and that, therefore, moral rightness and wrongness have to be conceived as matters of degree. And it also seems to be precisely because of this that he conceives of a final analysis as only containing all-things-considered moral judgements in the first place.

The claim that the morally relevant aspects must “remain visible in the final analysis” (Peterson 2013, p. 29), however, cannot be seen as providing independent support for (5), and the same is true of Peterson’s views that “the deontic status assigned to an act [is to] reflect all relevant moral aspects that obtain in the situation” and that a “moral theory [must not ignore any] moral aspect in its assignment of a deontic status to an act” (both quotes at Peterson 2013, p. 25). As the discussion provided above has shown, all these claims can be given plausible interpretations under which they are compatible with denying (5) and the conclusion (7) that the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness is to be rejected. The argument, therefore, is only successful if these alternatives are ruled out in advance – in which case, however, the argument would presuppose what it is meant to show.

This is why the argumentative resources that Peterson marshals in Chapter 2 of his book in defence of his gradualist conception of moral rightness and wrongness – and that I have been discussing up to this point – fall short of providing adequate support of this view. Other, independent considerations need to be brought into play on the view’s and on Peterson’s behalf. As I will now show, additional support for (5) can be extracted from the way in which Peterson conceives of the relevance of deontic judgements for decision making as discussed at length in Chapter 6 of his book. He describes “the key idea of the decision rule” (Peterson 2013, p. 117) that he develops there as follows:

[I]n a choice between acts that are somewhat right and somewhat wrong, the rational thing to do is to give the right-making features of each act their due. This, I believe, requires randomisation. For instance, if it is almost entirely right to make a donation to famine relief, whereas making a donation to medical research is right to a degree that is just a tiny bit lower, then the rational thing to do is to randomise between these acts. [...]. The general principle is that if an act is at least somewhat right (i.e., right to some degree) then it should be performed with some non-zero probability. (Peterson 2013, p. 117)

As it stands, this conception of decision making in a moral context presupposes the claim that there are degrees of rightness and, thus, cannot be marshalled to support this view. And indeed, within Peterson’s own setup it is not meant to support it. Even so, the thought behind what Peterson introduces as a ‘general principle’ in the passage just quoted can be formulated without this presupposition, and such that it can be employed to support (5) and, with it, degrees of rightness.

The thought at work seems to be that if two conflicting aspects apply to some act, then there ought to be at least some chance that the act is performed, irrespective of the relative normative weight of the conflicting aspects (which, however, plays a role in determining how much of a chance the act should be given). For example, in the case of a conflict between promise-keeping and helping that I used above, there ought to be a non-zero probability that the promise is kept, despite the greater weight of the aspect of helping. Only then is the aspect of promise-keeping ‘given its due’, as Peterson puts it.

Without presupposing degrees of rightness, the general view expressed here can thus be put as follows:

- (8) If a moral aspect is relevant for an act, then there ought to be a non-zero probability that the act is performed.

On the basis of this, the view that all morally relevant aspects have to remain visible in the all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness can be supported as follows. It is plausible to assume – and it is uncontroversial between Peterson and his opponent – that all-things-considered judgements about moral rightness and wrongness, and only these, are the ones that are directly relevant for moral decision making. If it were not the case that all morally relevant aspects are visible in these all-things-considered judgements, then it would not be guaranteed that the presence of some such aspect is of direct influence for what ought to be done.⁵ In particular, the presence of a moral aspect that is relevant for an act would not guarantee a non-zero probability that the act is performed. Therefore, premise (8) entails (5).

Whether (5) can be successfully defended with reference to (8) depends on the plausibility of this latter premise. As I will now suggest, we lack a good reason to accept (8). Or, at the very least, Peterson does not provide us with one.

It is, at least initially, highly implausible that in a case of conflict like the one described above it should be appropriate, or, as Peterson calls this, “fitting” (Peterson 2013, p. 114), to randomise over the two acts, such that it might turn out that the promise is to be kept – even though, *ex hypothesi*, helping is, in the case described, the aspect with a higher weight than promise-keeping. To be sure, the idea of randomisation makes formal and conceptual sense in the setting as described by Peterson. In order for it to actually *back up* the view that there are degrees of rightness, however, it needs to be shown that there is some kind of normative point to it. But what could be the normative point of employing a random mechanism the outcome of which might be that the act supported by less weighty moral aspects than an alternative is to be performed?

Peterson’s insistence that otherwise aspects “will not receive [their] due” (Peterson 2013, p. 25) does not help him here. Persons are the sort of entities that can demand fair treatment, that can demand to be given a fair share, that need to be given their due – but aspects are not persons and not the sort of things that we owe something to. And of course, we owe it to persons to give them their due, but whether this requires randomisation over factors that correspond to normatively relevant properties of persons or whether it merely requires properly weighing those factors is precisely what is at issue at this point of the discussion. This is why Peterson has not given us an independent reason for accepting (8).

4

Peterson offers a rich theoretical picture, the elements of which are interwoven in a number of intricate and interesting ways, and a crucial element of which is the unorthodox view that moral rightness and wrongness come in degrees. In this paper, I have offered a reconstruction

⁵ This, of course, would be compatible with the fact that all aspects are of relevance for *determining* what ought to be done, even if some might be outweighed.

and a discussion of what, as I see it, is to be considered the core of the argument that Peterson puts forward in support of this view.

As I have argued, this argument relies on a premise about how to conceive of what Peterson calls the ‘final analysis’ provided by an ethical theory that he has not managed to provide sufficiently convincing independent support for. This is why Peterson has not given us reason to abandon the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness.

It also turned out, however, that Peterson is right in stressing that in order to be able to account for a plurality of morally relevant aspects, or factors, and, with it, for moral conflict, an ethical theory needs to display a certain theoretical texture. If what Peterson calls the ‘final analysis’ offered by an ethical theory *only* contains judgements about binary moral rightness and wrongness, then it falls short of meeting this demand.

As far as the discussion provided in this paper is concerned, Peterson’s proposal of abandoning the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness in favour of a gradualist conception is not the only option. As I have argued, defenders of the standard view should embed this view into what I have referred to as an alternative account, the crucial element of which is to make not just all-things-considered-judgements about rightness and wrongness but also judgements about moral aspects, or factors, part of the final analysis of an ethical theory, i.e. part of what an ethical theory has to say about individual acts and their deontic properties.

This theoretical option, I suggest, is not only a structural alternative to Peterson’s account, the possibility of which comes into view when reflecting on a potential weakness of Peterson’s argument. Rather, it is a position that is independently attractive, since it provides a clear conceptual structure that is able to reflect our different moral concerns in the face of moral conflicts – e.g. when it comes to distinguishing what we ought to do, morally speaking, from whether there is something that we should regret not being able to do, on pain of not acting as morally required. Moreover, it promises to give us just the right sort of framework in which moral conflicts can be accounted for (as also pointed out by Dancy 2004, pp. 25–27). Locating ordinary moral conflicts on the level of moral factors makes possible a notion of moral conflict that sees a distinction between ordinary moral conflicts and moral dilemmas. On the account suggested here, moral conflicts can be seen as a standard moral phenomenon, and asserting their existence is consistent with denying the possibility of tragic dilemmas. And, finally, the proposal is not at all revolutionary. The distinction between all-things-considered judgements and judgements about moral aspects, or factors, rather, is at least implicitly contained in all sorts of otherwise substantially different ethical theories. In view of Peterson’s challenge to the standard view about moral rightness and wrongness, but also independently of that, one should not underestimate its theoretical potential when it comes to accounting for moral conflicts.

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