

## The 'default' position:

On Jonathan Dancy's use of semi-constant variables regarding reasons and values

### Abstract

In his book *Ethics Without Principles* (2004), Jonathan Dancy argues for the use of *semi-constant variables* to be included in particularism. Dancy gives an account of a *default position* that reasons and values can take - meaning that reasons and values may have an inherent status as counting for (or against) something, even though they may eventually change their polarity - thus weakening the emphasis on variability that hitherto has been strongly insisted upon in particularism.

Following Dancy, I show that the default position indeed has advantages that are attractive to particularism. However, Dancy's theory of default also face several challenges that have to be met in order for it to be useful.

I discuss the problem of an agent being mistaken about what reasons or values there are in a situation, and the problem of polarity change in reasons and values. The discussion of the latter is based upon the notion of *infinite ends*, put forth by David Bakhurst and aimed at improving Dancy's particularist account while rebutting his view on defaults.

I conclude that the most urgent objection facing the default position is a fundamentally particularistic problem, and argue that it is one that neither Jonathan Dancy's default position nor David Bakhurst's competing account of infinite ends seem to be able to fully resolve.

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