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"WE SEE A COMPLICATED NETWORK OF SIMILARITIES" – A PARTICULARISTIC RESEARCH ETHIC

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When embarking on a research project, researchers must customarily confront some ethical issues. To begin with, they may need informed consent from the participants, or research ethics permission and approval from an independent Research Ethics Committee. However, there is more to it than these legal requirements, for just complying with some pre-defined guidelines for good research practice is by no means enough. In fact, a number of ethical issues demanding a thorough reflection may emerge during the research project. Far from being neglected, such questions deserve careful attention. Research ethical dilemmas are an epistemological condition throughout the whole research process, and must therefore be constantly considered and reviewed, negotiated and renegotiated. This paper purports to categorise the ethical issues likely to arise during the course of an investigation into two main types, namely procedural and particularistic. The kind of research ethics following certain pre-established guidelines, which are typically expressed in standardized, context-independent principles of good ethical behaviour, will be labelled as procedural research ethics, while the type of research ethics ensuing from the analysis and contextual assessment of the specific dilemmas arising in practice in the particular situation studied, will be labelled particularistic research ethics.

Particularistic research ethics is theoretically anchored and reflected in Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding of ethics and especially in his concept of 'family resemblance' from *Philosophical Investigations*. With the concept of 'family resemblance', Wittgenstein emphasises that words and terms do not correspond directly with one precise definition, but instead encompass a number of broader similarities that cannot necessarily be distinguished from each other. The point is that different components of a category rarely have specific sets of characteristics in common; instead the category of the elements is characterised by overlapping properties. Thus a Wittgenstein inspired particularistic research ethics does not offer a firm and unambiguous definition, but is based on paradigmatic cases that are subsequently used for comparison. In this comparison analogue circuits are created, where similarities and differences between paradigmatic cases are analysed and compared. These cases do not necessarily have specific concrete characteristics in common, but are similar in "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing".

A distinction between these two types of research ethics reflects a theoretical construct. Both types should not be regarded as opposing alternatives, but as complementary aspects of good ethical research practices. This paper discusses the relationship between the two types in order to highlight the researcher's ongoing and continuous responsibility throughout the research process.

Keywords: research ethics, procedural, particularistic, Wittgenstein