PART II

Underdetermination in Normative Ethics

Having introduced the idea of underdetermination in science as well as outlining how it can be transferred to ethics, the time has come to investigate the state of the moral variety of underdetermination. As I explained in the Introduction, to do so, I cannot simply survey the discussion of underdetermination in ethics because the issue has been below the radar until very recently. Instead, my aim in the next three chapters is to show how certain relatively novel developments in normative theorizing can and should be understood as uncovering the phenomenon of moral underdetermination. To do so, I'll have to first portray these projects and second make the case that, *pace* the original purpose behind them, the projects are better understood in terms of moral underdetermination. I start in Chapter 3 with what is probably the most detailed and in-depth case study of moral underdetermination to date, Derek Parfit's *On What Matters*. I discuss Parfit's *convergence argument*, to the effect that the best versions of the three most prominent moral traditions agree about what we should do. I reject two interpretations of the argument's result that are suggested by Parfit himself. Instead, I outline how we can make sense of Parfit's results as a case of moral underdetermination. Chapter 4 then switches gear and asks whether there are more general considerations that indicate a more widespread form of moral underdetermination. I analyze the two recent projects of *consequentializing* and *deontologizing* that promise to produce deontically equivalent counter theories to any of their rival traditions' theories. Contrary to some of the dramatic interpretations that have been offered for these results, I argue that we should think of them in the same light as the algorithms that some proponents of scientific underdetermination have introduced to argue for more thoroughgoing forms of underdetermination. In Chapter 5, I take stock and consider the big picture for normative ethics. I assess the significance of the three projects for the case for moral underdetermination by relating them to the strategies to argue for scientific underdetermination outlined in Chapter 1. I then provide a sketch of the varieties of moral underdetermination these projects uncover. Finally, I look ahead by outlining three ways in which the study of moral underdetermination could impact normative ethics in the future.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 15:26:11, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009492454.006

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 15:26:11, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009492454.006