

The Buck-passing Account of Value

An examination of Scanlon's buck-passing account of value and competing views on the value-reasons relation

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Introduction

In this paper I will examine Scanlon's buck-passing account of value. The buck-passing account is an explanation of value in terms of reasons to account for value's apparent normative force.

First I will briefly say something about the concept of reasons in chapter I. It is important to have a basic understanding of the concept of reasons in order to be able to understand how they might be related to value, and what it means to explain value in terms of reasons.

Then, in chapter II, I will explain and examine the buck-passing account of value. First I will give a broad introduction to the buck-passing account and how it relates the deontic concept of 'reasons' to the evaluative concept of 'value'. Then I will flesh out the buck-passing account by making some additional in-depth comments about it. Once we have established what the buck-passing account exactly entails and how it relates reasons to value, I will provide an overview on alternative ways in which reasons and value could be related. Finally I will return to the buck-passing account by saying something about the arguments in favor of it.

In chapter III, I will introduce a critique that has been offered against the buck-passing account and formulate my own reply to it.

Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks about how, in my view, a revised buck-passing account is the most plausible account of the relation between value and reasons.

I. On reasons

When we speak of reasons, we speak of reasons for things. There are reasons for action (commonly called practical reasons) and reasons for belief, and there are reasons for many other things. According to Joseph Raz, reasons for action, and for belief, are the most fundamental types of reasons.¹

We often distinguish between normative reasons, explanatory reasons and motivating reasons. Explanatory reasons are reasons that explain an agent performing an action or forming a belief. Motivating reasons are reasons that motivate an agent in performing an action or forming a belief. And normative reasons are reasons that count in favor of an agent performing an action or forming a belief, regardless of whether that agent is aware of this reason. In this paper we are mainly concerned with normative reasons.

Imagine a situation where you are soundly asleep at home and a burglar climbs through the window and starts rummaging through your belongings. The situation of a burglar being in your home provides you with a normative reason to call the police, even though you are asleep and not at all aware of there being a burglar in the first place. If you wake up and become aware of there being a burglar in your house and call the police, the belief you have that there is a burglar in your house is both an explanatory as well as a motivating reason for calling the police. You are motivated to call the police because you come to believe there is a burglar in the house, and when asked why you called the police, you can explain this by referring to there being a burglar in the house. If, on the other hand, you believe there to be a burglar in the house, but actually it's just the neighbours cat that is making a lot of noise, you have a motivating and explanatory reason to call the police—after all you have the belief that there is a burglar in the house and this motivates you to call the police and explains why you do so—but you have no normative reason to call the police, since ordinarily a cat is no reason to call the police.

We might wonder why we distinguish between motivating and explanatory reasons. After all, our motivating reasons explain our behaviour, so we might consider these two types of reasons to be the same. And indeed, not everyone adheres to the threefold distinction of normative, motivating and explanatory reasons. Philosophers who do adhere to this threefold distinction argue that while motivating and explanatory reasons are different labels for the same thing, they are answers to different questions and thus using different labels is warranted.²

Furthermore, there are some cases in which (arguably) our explanatory reasons differ from our motivating reasons. Consider the following example: The explanatory reason for Don Quixote attempting to fight some windmills is the fact that Don Quixote, or rather Alonso Quixano, has lost his mind. However, the fact that Quixano has lost his mind is not something he is aware of himself and thus is not his motivating reason for fighting some

¹ Raz, Practical Reason and Norms, 15.

² Alvarez, “Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation.”

windmills. His motivating reason is that he believes these windmills to be ferocious giants.³ We could argue that Quixano's belief that the windmills are giants is also an explanatory reason for why he attempts to fight him but this does not discount the fact that Quixano has lost his mind as an explanatory reason. This shows that the concept of explanatory reasons could be understood as being broader than motivating reasons.

In this paper we are mainly concerned with normative reasons.

Both Scanlon and Parfit take reasons to be primitive. Primitive concepts are concepts that cannot be explained in terms of other concepts or notions. Scanlon writes about reasons that “[a]ny attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems ... to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favor of it. “Counts in favor how?” one might ask. “By providing a reason for it” seems to be the only answer.”⁴ Similarly, Parfit writes that “[i]f we are asked what reasons are, it is hard to give a helpful answer. Facts give us reasons, we might say, when they count in favour of our having some belief or desire, or acting in some way. But ‘counts in favour of’ means ‘is a reason for’.”⁵ The explanation of reasons being considerations that count in favor of something, attributes normative force to reasons. In this paper I will treat reasons as having normative force and leave aside further justification for this view. Furthermore, I will take reasons to be primitive, and presuppose the reader to have some understanding of what reasons are.

³ Alvarez, “Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation.”

⁴ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 17.

⁵ Parfit, “Rationality and Reasons.” 18.

II. On buck-passing

The buck-passing account of value is a theory about what “being valuable” is, and an explication of how value gets its normative force. The buck-passing account of value is the claim that value is the property of having other, reason-giving properties.⁶ According to the buck-passing account of value, to say of something that it is good, or that it has value, is an abbreviation of saying that it has reason-giving properties.⁷ This serves to explain how value can be normative: by taking value to be the property of having other reason-giving properties, we can understand the normativity of value to be inherited from these reason-giving properties.⁸

In private correspondence, Jonathan Dancy writes that the normativity of value does not seem to be the same as the normativity of ‘oughts’ or the normativity of reasons. We either have to accept that value is not normative, but related to it in a special manner, or we have to explicate the normative force of value in terms of something we already understand.⁹ In other words, the manner in which value, or the fact that something has value, is supposed to move us to adopt a certain attitude towards that thing, remains unexplained. The buck-passing account of value attempts to explain value in terms of reasons and thereby giving an account of how value can be normative.

The following example might illustrate how the normative force of value is different and less understood than the normativity of reasons. Imagine a delicious hamburger. Not only is this hamburger delicious, it is also quite healthy because the patty was made such that it has very little fat. This hamburger can be said to be good, to have value. We can point out a few reasons for why we would be inclined to adopt the attitude of wanting to eat the burger. After all, it is delicious and healthy! But it seems like the fact that the hamburger is good (qua hamburger) also might move us to want to eat this burger. But does it really? And how? More precisely, the question becomes if the goodness of the hamburger makes us want to eat the hamburger more than its deliciousness and its being healthy? The buck-passing account of value solves this problem by explaining the goodness of the hamburger in terms of its deliciousness and its being healthy.

Evaluative and deontic concepts and their relation

The buck-passing account of value is a claim about the nature of the *evaluative* concept of value and its connection to the *deontic* concept of reasons. Evaluative concepts, or axiological concepts, are concepts like “good”, “bad” and “value”. Deontic concepts, or normative concepts, are concepts like “right”, “wrong”, “ought”, “duty” and “reasons”.¹⁰ To claim that the buck-passing account is true, is to claim that the *evaluative* notion of value can be

⁶ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 97.

⁷ Parfit, “Rationality and Reasons.” 20.

⁸ Crisp, “Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck.” 81.

⁹ Dancy, email to author “Scanlon’s Buck-Passing Account of Value,” March 11, 2020.

¹⁰ Suikkanen, ‘Reasons and Value – In Defence of the Buck-passing Account’ 513.

understood in terms of the *deontic* notion of reasons. When we say that value can be understood in terms of reasons, we mean that we understand value to be the property of having other reason-giving properties.¹¹

So, when I say of P that it has the property of being good. I am saying that P has certain properties, like X or Y, which provide me with reasons to have a pro-attitude (as used by Ewing as “any favourable attitude to something”¹²) towards P. The property “goodness” should be understood as the purely formal, higher-order property of having the lower-order properties of X and Y, where X and Y are reason-giving properties.¹³¹⁴ ‘Reason-giving properties should be understood as properties that give rise to reasons to adopt a certain attitude towards something. So, in the case of a delicious hamburger, its deliciousness gives me a reason to want to eat it.

Whether these lower-order properties should be understood as natural properties depends on whether thick evaluative properties can be analysed as a combination of natural and evaluative elements.¹⁵ A thick evaluative concept is a concept that is both evaluative and descriptive. An example of a thick evaluative concept would be “kindness”. Thick concepts can be contrasted with thin concepts which are concepts that are not significantly descriptive. An example of a thin evaluative concept would be “goodness”.

If we do accept that thick evaluative properties can be divided into natural and evaluative elements, then value can be said to supervene on these natural elements.¹⁶ We can illustrate this with the following example: During the Second World War, Henry Slawik saved many lives by helping Polish refugees escape (ϕ) the nazi regime. If we could ask Slawik why he acted in the manner that he did, he might say that a state of affairs in which he helped people escape persecution by the Nazi’s (A) would be good. What this would mean, according to the buck-passing account, is that A has certain reason-giving properties, like kindness (K). Property K is a thick evaluative concept because it is both evaluative as well as descriptive. A has property K because in this state of affairs Slawik would save numerous lives. Saving numerous lives should be understood as a natural element of K; it is a description of the natural world. The reason-giving property K gives Slawik a reason to ϕ and since property K is constituted by the natural properties of A, we can understand the natural properties of A to be reason-giving. Thus we are justified in saying that the goodness of a state of affairs in which Slawik helps people escape the Nazi regime, supervenes on the natural properties of this state of affairs. We can also point towards the natural properties of that state of affairs as providing Slawik with reasons to act and help save numerous lives.

However, if we were to maintain that thick evaluative properties cannot be analysed in terms of natural and evaluative components, then the lower order properties of A on which value supervenes, should be understood to be thick evaluative properties.¹⁷ So, in the case of

¹¹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 97.

¹² Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 161.

¹³ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 97.

¹⁴ Stratton-Lake and Hooker, “Scanlon versus Moore on Goodness.” 149.

¹⁵ Stratton-Lake and Hooker, “Scanlon versus Moore on Goodness.” 152.

¹⁶ Stratton-Lake and Hooker, “Scanlon versus Moore on Goodness.” 152.

¹⁷ Stratton-Lake and Hooker, “Scanlon versus Moore on Goodness.” 152.

Slawik, this would mean that A can be understood as good because A has property K which is a reason-giving property, but because property K cannot be analysed in terms of natural and evaluative elements, we are not justified in maintaining that A has property K because of the natural properties of A. So we can also not maintain that the goodness of A supervenes on the natural properties of A.

It might be helpful in understanding the claims made by the buck-passing account of value, to turn to another, more simple example. For this example I will assume thick evaluative properties to be analyzable in terms of their natural and evaluative components.

Imagine a beautifully leather-bound book on the subject of moral philosophy. We can say of this book that it is valuable, or that it has value. When we say of this book that it has value, we are actually saying: this book has properties that are reason-giving. One of these reason-giving properties is the fact that the book is beautifully leather-bound and thus pleasing to look at. The fact that it is leather-bound means that it is pleasing to look at and gives rise to a reason to adopt a pro-attitude towards it. In this case we might have the attitude of wanting to own the book, or wanting to read it, or displaying it prominently on our book shelves. The reason we want to own, read or display the book is because it is beautifully leatherbound. So, in order to explain that the book is valuable, we refer to the fact that it has the reason-giving property of being beautifully leather-bound.

Some additional comments about the buck-passing account of value

One need not be a consistent buck-pass to be a buck-pass of value. Scanlon for example holds that whilst value, or goodness, can be understood in terms of reasons, this is not the case for the concept of rightness.¹⁸ Dancy recognises the possibility of being a buck-pass about rightness, or even a buck-pass about both value and rightness.¹⁹

It is important to recognise that according to the buck-passing account, the value of an object is not identical to the reasons provided by that object. According to the buck-passing account, value can not be reduced to reasons themselves. The relation between value and reasons is such that value can be understood as the property of having other properties that provide reasons, but only *because* these other properties are reason-giving do they give rise to value. Or in other words, a property is a good-making property *because* it is a reason-giving property. This should be distinguished from maintaining that reasons are provided by the same properties that instantiate value whilst *also* maintaining that there is no connection between value and reasons other than that they are instantiated by the same properties. What

¹⁸ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 165.

¹⁹ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 167.

is essential to the buck-passing account of value, is that *by virtue of being reason-giving properties, do these properties also give rise to value.*²⁰

Furthermore, value itself is never reason-giving according to the buck-passing view.²¹

I think the following analogy might help in understanding how exactly value is related to reasons and reason-giving properties according to the buck-passing account: A lamp has properties that make it so that it emits light, like having a closed circuit. When it is the case that a lamp is emitting light, we say of it that it is *on*. The properties that make it so that a lamp emits light are analogous to reason-giving properties and light is analogous to reasons. Just like we say of a lamp that emits light that it is *on*, we say of an object that has reason-giving properties that provide us with reasons, that it has value.

We might wonder why the buck-passing account of value is a buck-passing account at all? Why do we not speak of a reduction of value to reason-giving properties? When we say that value is the property of having other reason-giving properties²², it may seem that we mean to say that value can be *reduced* to reason-giving properties. However it would be a mistake to assume that value is identical to reason-giving properties. We say of an object that has reason-giving properties that it has value, but what needs to be avoided is the idea that value itself is a reason-giving property. The earlier analogy with the light emitting lamp might clarify this:

A lamp (object) emits light (reasons) because of its properties. We say of this lamp that it is *on* (value). If we want to explain how the lamp emits light we must refer back to its properties that make that it emits light. We cannot answer the question by referring to the lamp's *on-ness*. The same applies to value according to the buck-passing account.

As I understand it, calling the relation between value and reasons a buck-passing relation serves to establish that value inherits its normative force from reasons whilst also avoiding problems²³ that might occur when claiming that value is *identical* to reason-giving properties. The buck that is being passed is a normative buck, if you will. Rather than value being reducible to reason-giving properties, reason-giving properties ground value.

Scanlon's buck-passing account

The buck-passing account of value in contemporary philosophy can be attributed to T.M. Scanlon. As he formulates it: “[B]eing good, or valuable, is not a property that itself provides a

²⁰ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 164–65.

²¹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 97.

²² Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 97.

²³ These problems will be addressed later in “Two intuitions about reasons in favour of the buck-passing account”.

reason to respond to a thing in certain ways. Rather, to be good or valuable is to have other properties that constitute such reasons.”²⁴

Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen situate Scanlons buck-passing account in a tradition of FA-analysis(fitting-attitudes analysis) of value.²⁵ Two main constituting claims can be attributed to FA theories of value in general:

1 The evaluative can be reduced to the deontic. Value can be understood in terms of what attitude one ought to have, or have most reason to have towards something. Deontic should in this case not be understood as moral obligation, but as fittingness.²⁶

2 Value is response dependent. Value is partly determined by our attitudes towards things.²⁷

Daniel Jacobson claims in his article, *Fitting Attitude Theories of Value*, that Buck-passing accounts of value are not adherent to the second claim of value being response dependent.²⁸ Jussi Suikkanen also expresses scepticism toward the implication that Scanlons buck-passing account is an FA theory of value.²⁹

The first claim does seem to apply to Scanlon’s buck-passing account of value.

Scanlon comes to his formulation of his buck-passing account of value by arguing against two alternative views on the relation between value and reasons. If these alternative views can be rejected, the buck-passing account remains as the only available explanation of the relation between value and reasons. However, Dancy argues that Scanlon did not consider every possible alternative view, and offers two more alternatives that would have to be rejected.³⁰

The two accounts of the relation between value and reasons that Scanlon discusses can be attributed to G.E. Moore. Although Moore formulates a position on the relation between value and rightness, we can express his account in terms of a relation between value and reasons.

I will first examine the two Moorian accounts and the two alternative theories Dancy proposes before we turn to Scanlon’s buck-passing account of value.

Alternative views on the relation between value and reasons

As we mentioned before, Scanlon argues against two alternative views about the relation between value and reasons in order to establish his buck-passing account as the most probable

²⁴ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 97.

²⁵ Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, “The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value.”, 399–400.

²⁶ Jacobson, “Fitting Attitude Theories of Value.”

²⁷ Jacobson, “Fitting Attitude Theories of Value.”

²⁸ Jacobson, “Fitting Attitude Theories of Value.”

²⁹ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 515.

³⁰ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 163.

explanation of the value-reason relation. Dancy shows us that there are two other possible explanations of the relation between value and reasons that Scanlon did not account for.

Dancy identifies the two Moorian views that Scanlon argues against as follows:

The opposing views, [about the relation between value and reasons] are (1) ‘the teleological view’ and (2) ‘the view that value is a property the presence of which grounds or explains reasons’.³¹

On the two other views that Scanlon did not account for, Dancy writes:

Two further views remain unrefuted. The first is Ross’s view, ... [that] values and reasons are just utterly different, and neither can be defined in terms of the other. ... The second view that remains is one that ... supposes ... that the evaluative is distinct from the deontic, even if both sorts of properties result from the same ground.³²

The teleological view of value

The teleological view can be attributed to G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*. According to Moore, value is an abstract property “which different states of worlds have to varying degrees.”³³ Rightness is to be explained in terms of value. Moore writes:

In short, to assert that a certain line of conduct is, at a given time, absolutely right or obligatory, is obviously to assert that more good or less evil will exist in the world, if it be adopted than if anything else be done instead.³⁴

According to Moore, for an action to be right is for it to produce a state of affairs which is more valuable than if any other action was performed. When we rephrase Moore’s teleological position in terms of reasons, we get the position that a reason to ϕ means that ϕ -ing will “produce the state of the world that contains the most value”.³⁵ By contrast, the buck-passing account of value claims that a reason to ϕ is provided by some property of something (P), and the claim that P has value is simply an abbreviation of saying that P has properties that provide reasons to ϕ .

In arguing against the teleological position, Scanlon invokes a host of examples of things we have reason to do or promote. He notes that it is quite implausible to maintain that having these reasons always derives from some conception of the value of a certain state of the world. I will discuss one of the examples Scanlon gives and the conclusions he draws from it.

³¹ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 163.

³² Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 163.

³³ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 517.

³⁴ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 25.

³⁵ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 517.

Suppose we accept the claim that science and scientific knowledge are intrinsically valuable. We can attribute certain reasons to people that they might have if science is intrinsically valuable:

1. People who have the relevant skills have reasons to devote themselves to science.
2. People who devote themselves to science have reasons to try and be good scientists.
3. People who do not devote themselves to science have reasons to contribute in other ways to science e.g. by making monetary contributions.
4. People have reasons to study science, even if their understanding of it will be highly imperfect.
5. People have reasons to respect and admire science and scientists.

Now if we want to explain these reasons with the teleological view, we have to be able to point out that the state of affairs when people act on these reasons would indeed be a valuable state of affairs. The most obvious thing to point out would be that as a result of science we are able to live more comfortable, healthy and prosperous lives, but Scanlon rejects this because whilst these effects might be valuable, “they are not what people have in mind in claiming that scientific knowledge is *intrinsically* valuable[.]”³⁶

Might it be that having true beliefs about the world constitute this supposed better state of affairs then? This possibility is also not without problems according to Scanlon: “at any given time much of what science holds to be true about the most fundamental features of nature is likely to be false.”³⁷

Scanlon does concede that a teleological approach could account for reasons 3 and 5, but suggests that there is a far more plausible account which can explain reasons 1, 2 and 4. His solution is to claim that one's reasons to devote themselves to science result from the fact that we have reasons to be curious about the world³⁸ and that science is the most effective method known for attaining some understanding of the world. Studying science is a rational response to our curiosity. This would definitely account for reasons 1, 2 and 4. After all, we have reasons to be curious about the world, and adopting reasons 1, 2 and 4 are a rational response to that curiosity.

Additionally, according to Scanlon, adopting reason 3 merely because one values the results that engaging in scientific inquiry brings, does not do justice to the notion that science is intrinsically valuable. Being able to explain someone adopting reason 3 with the teleological account is not central to the question of science as intrinsically valuable.

Finally, if one adopts reason 5 solely because of the results science brings us, this would not be in line with what a practitioner of science would see as reasons to respect and admire science and scientists. From the scientists point of view, it is the fact that science is “the best

³⁶ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 91.

³⁷ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 92.

³⁸ Scanlon does not elaborate on these reasons we might have to be curious about the world. It seems to me that such reasons might be understood as resulting from the fact that being curious about the world has been conducive for our survival and success as a species i.e., being curious about the world makes one more likely to reproduce, thus one has a reason to be curious about the world.

way of inquiring into their subject[.]”³⁹ Thus, whilst adopting reason 5 might be explained in accordance with the teleological account, this also is somewhat besides the point of the intrinsic value of science.

In Scanlon’s explanation of relevant reasons to adopt a certain attitude towards science, there need not be an appeal to any notion of states of the world of more or less value. Scanlon’s explanation places value as the conclusion of our reasons, rather than it’s source. We have reasons to study science, and because of those reasons, we deem science to be valuable.⁴⁰

Another argument that can be brought to bear on the teleological account of the value-reason relation is Moore’s own open-question argument. The open question argument is an argument about whether analysing, or reducing, or defining, something in terms of something else, is correct.⁴¹ Suikkanen applies the open-question argument to the teleological account of the value-reasons relation.

Let us assume that we hold that for some state of the world to be of value means to have reasons to bring about this state of the world. Yet the question whether we really do have reasons to bring about this valuable state of the world remains meaningful. The question has an “open” feel to it, meaning that ‘having reasons’ is not contained within ‘valuable state of the world’.⁴²

With Scanlon’s objection as well as the open-question argument in mind, I reject the teleological view as a plausible account of the relation between value and reasons. Dancy supports the conclusion that the teleological view is not plausible, but offers no further explanation other than affirming that “we suppose that we cannot define reasons in terms of values, whatever the proper account of the relation between reasons and values turns out to be.”⁴³

The view that value is a (or the) reason giving property

The second view Scanlon argues against is the view that “value is a property that has the unique feature amongst all properties of being reason-providing.”⁴⁴ In other words, “being valuable, on the one hand, and being a reason for action, on the other, are separate properties - although having the former property is a necessary and sufficient condition for also having the latter.”⁴⁵

This view can also be attributed to G.E. Moore and thus we shall refer to this view as the second Moorian view.

³⁹ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 94.

⁴⁰ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 93.

⁴¹ Stratton-Lake and Hooker, “Scanlon versus Moore on Goodness.” 150-51.

⁴² Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 518.

⁴³ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 165.

⁴⁴ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 518.

⁴⁵ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 518.

The second Moorian view differs from the teleological account in the following manner: The teleological account claims an analytic connection between reasons and value, whereas the second Moorian view claims that the connection between value and reasons is synthetic *a priori*.⁴⁶ Where the teleological view claims that something being of value *means* that we have reasons to bring about that thing, the second Moorian view claims that value uniquely *is* a reason-giving property. For example, according to the teleological account, to say that a beautifully leather-bound book is of value means that we have reasons for wanting to own that book. According to the second Moorian view, we have reasons for wanting to own that book *because* it is of value; our reasons are *provided* by the value of the book.

Two objections can be made against the second Moorian view.

A first objection against the second Moorian view is that reasons being provided by value seems redundant. Consider the following example both Dancy⁴⁷ and Suikkanen⁴⁸ use: When you have a bad tooth-ache you go to the dentist. In answering the question what gave you a reason to go to the dentist, a supporter of the second Moorian view would have to say that it was something along the lines of “the value of healthy teeth, or the value of not being in pain, or the value of being able to chew properly.”⁴⁹ But appealing to some conception of value in this manner seems redundant; your decision for going to the dentist is sufficiently explained by the fact that you have a painful tooth-ache and no appeal to a reason provided by some sort of value is necessary. Additionally, in our practical reasoning, we do not refer to the value of healthy teeth, but to the fact that we have a tooth-ache in making the decision to go to the dentist. The second Moorian account not only uses values redundantly to explain reasons, but it also does not conform to our actual practical reasoning.

A second objection against the second Moorian view is that it is problematic in explaining how reasons pertain to personal relationships. If we say of friendship *simpliciter* that it is valuable we would come to have reasons to pursue friendship because friendship is valuable. But pursuing friendship because of an abstract notion of the value of friendship is utterly alien to friendship in the first place. After all, we are friends with people because these people provide us with reasons to be friends with them. The abstract notion that it would be good to have friends seems to have nothing to do with the actual practice of being friends.⁵⁰

But what other reasons might we derive from friendship *simpliciter*, other than engaging in friendships? It seems to me that there are no satisfying alternatives. A solution might be that if we adopt the second Moorian view, we have to commit ourselves to the position that friendship *simpliciter* is not valuable, only specific friendships are. But this goes counter against the common notion that friendship *simpliciter* is valuable and thus makes the second Moorian view less potent as an explanation of value.

⁴⁶ Regan, “How to Be a Moorean.” 661.

⁴⁷ Dancy, ‘Should we pass the buck?’ 164.

⁴⁸ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 521.

⁴⁹ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 521.

⁵⁰ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 522.

So, I reject the second Moorian view of value because it is redundant to hold that value is uniquely reason-giving when we seem to be informed in our practical reasoning by quite different properties, and because in personal relationships, our reasons pertaining to those relationships would be derivative and disconnected from the actual people with whom we have these relationships.

The Rossian account of the value-reason relation (or lack thereof)

Ross held that there is no connection between reasons and value because they both emerge from different kinds of properties.⁵¹ So, when we speak of the Rossian view on the value-reasons relationship, we mean the view that reasons and value are utterly distinct and emerge from different kinds of properties. His conclusion about a lack of relation between reasons and value stems from his conceptions of “acts”, “action”, and “intrinsic value”.

We have reasons to act—“to act” strictly means to initiate change for Ross—because of our relations with other people. We have reasons for acts like fulfilling promises or justly distributing goods because these acts are constitutive of our relationships. Ross attributes no motives to these types of acts. Reasons for these action-types derive from them being constitutive of our relationships; they are supposedly self-evident.⁵²

Ross shares his account of intrinsic value with Moore where value can be detected through the so-called “isolation test”. Intrinsic value, according to Moore and Ross, is an independent, non natural property attached to things “we think *ought to exist for their own sake* even in worlds in which nothing else existed.”⁵³ To ascertain that a thing has intrinsic value we employ the “method of isolation”, or “isolation test”, and ask whether a world where nothing existed other than the thing in question, would be good.⁵⁴

Acts can not have the property of value because a world consisting of mere initiations of change ought not exist for its own sake.⁵⁵

“Actions” on the other hand *can* have (instrumental) value. Actions are a type of acts (distinct from the act-types that constitute our relationships) carried out through “a certain motive”. Suikkanen explicates this more clearly than I could:

This characterization of action makes it fitting to bear the property of value. In a world where acts are carried out from certain motives, the types of motives have an effect on how the world comes to be. Certain states of affairs will actualize in the world as a consequence of these motives, and the value of these states of affairs can be assessed with the isolation test. Actions,

⁵¹ This account of the Rossian position is based on Suikkanen’s interpretation. Suikkanen deems it possible to have “overstated the lack of connection between value and reason in Ross’s account”#, citing Dancy’s remarks that Ross *did* think there was some relation between values and reasons.# However, it is not relevant right now to ascertain what exactly Ross’s actual position was, as we are mainly concerned with the position attributed to him (rather than his actual position) that reasons and value are utterly distinct and emerge from different kinds of properties.

⁵² Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 523.

⁵³ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 517.

⁵⁴ Hurka, “Moore’s Moral Philosophy.”

⁵⁵ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 523.

because they contain the motives of acts, are instrumentally valuable when they produce valuable states of affairs.⁵⁶

For certain act-types we have reasons that are provided by our relationships. Actions are valuable when “their motives are such that they ought to exist. Yet, nothing can be both valuable and reasonable.”⁵⁷ Thus, Ross concludes that there is no connection between value and reasons such that value would be reason-giving.

Suikkanen notes that the Rossian account of value is rather unintuitive. He cites a point made by Peter Railton that we can make no sense of the claim that something that has value gives us no reasons for action at all.⁵⁸ Connie Rosati notes that in ethical language there is an inherent presumption of a connection between normative concepts, such as reasons and value.⁵⁹ Considering the Rossian account runs counter to common intuitions about ethics, we have reason to doubt its plausibility.

We become even more sceptical about the Rossian account when we examine his conceptions of different act-types. As Suikkanen notes: “If acts are required by certain reasons, don’t these reasons by the same token require certain motives for which the acts are carried out (and therefore certain actions)?”⁶⁰ If we cannot maintain that acts and actions are distinct in the sense Ross argues, we have no argument for holding that value and reasons are distinct either. After all, the distinction between value and reasons was predicated on the distinction between acts and actions.

So, we reject the Rossian account of value because it seems implausible that there is no connection between reasons and value considering the notion of such a connection permeates our ethical language. Also, since the distinction between acts and actions as Ross draws it seems implausible, we have no argument for holding that value and reasons are distinct either.

The Dancyan account of value

The Dancyan account of value holds that objects can be bearers of both reasons and value, but reasons and value are nonetheless distinct properties.⁶¹ This distinction seems to go further than the conceptual distinction I noted earlier that there is no relation of identity between value and reason-giving properties. Value would, according to the Dancyan account, not be the property of having reason-giving properties, but the property of being a fitting object of pro-attitudes.⁶²

⁵⁶ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 523.

⁵⁷ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 523.

⁵⁸ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 524.

⁵⁹ Rosati, “Agency and the Open Question Argument.” 516-17.

⁶⁰ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 525.

⁶¹ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 525.

⁶² Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 525.

Both Suikkanen and Dancy himself recognize a problem with the Dancyan account of value. When value and reasons emerge from the same object, we need to explain how they are distinct but also co-extensive. Dancy does not fully concede that reasons and value always go together, but does concede that it seems like they do considering how we ordinarily talk about these concepts.⁶³

Suikkanen argues that the co-extensiveness of reasons and values does pose a serious problem for holding that they are distinct. He appeals to Blackburn's⁶⁴ argument from supervenience: If we hold that moral properties supervene on natural properties, and that moral properties can only change if the natural properties they supervene on change, "we have a case of two properties that are necessarily coextensive".⁶⁵ This co-extensiveness is seen "as a serious problem by *everyone* for those, who claim that there are two distinct sets of properties - moral and natural."⁶⁶ If this lack of explanation of the co-extensiveness of moral and natural properties is problematic for holding that they are distinct, it is also problematic for holding that reasons and value are distinct.

Another problem Suikkanen points out is that Dancy's account leads to unlikely conclusions about what valuing something consists of. As we noted before, the Dancyan account conceives of value as generated by the same properties that give rise to reasons. Value should be understood, as Dancy argues, as being fitting of pro-attitudes. Suikkanen argues that if we pursue this line of thinking, we are committed to one of three possible conclusions, all of which are implausible at best.⁶⁷

First, we could conclude that when we think of an object as being valuable, it has properties that are fitting of a certain simple, or basic, attitude. Such a pro-attitude as a result of recognizing value might have a certain phenomenological feel. But this phenomenological feel is unfamiliar to us, and thus this conclusion is questionable.⁶⁸

The second possible conclusion would be that recognizing an object as valuable would mean nothing but having the belief that the object in question is of value. This conclusion is also problematic considering it is possible to know that something is of value and yet fail to value it.⁶⁹

The third possible conclusion would be that valuing something is not a single type of attitude but consists of having a number of other, more basic attitudes towards an object that is being valued.⁷⁰ Suikkanen states that it is intuitive to hold that some of these basic attitudes would be "standing intentions" to act in certain (correct) ways when the object that is being valued is present.⁷¹ He illustrates this with the following example:

⁶³ Dancy, 'Should we pass the buck?' 172-73.

⁶⁴ Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language*, 182-189.

⁶⁵ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 526.

⁶⁶ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 526.

⁶⁷ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 527.

⁶⁸ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 527.

⁶⁹ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 527.

⁷⁰ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 527.

⁷¹ Suikkanen, "Reasons and Value" 527.

Consider a friend who claims to value classic films. Yet, in every possibility she has to watch one, she chooses to switch the channel. We would be correct in claiming that this friend does not really value the classic films, because she does not have the appropriate intentions to act.⁷²

The conclusion that valuing something consists of having a set of basic attitudes, some of which consist of standing intentions to act in certain ways is not compatible with the Dancyan account. According to the Dancyan account, value does not generate reasons which could inform us in our intentions. It is clear from the example provided by Suikanen that valuing seems to consist in responding accordingly to the reasons provided by the properties of classic films. To maintain that “it is the reaction to reasons that is constitutive of valuing something, and not reacting to the property of value”⁷³, whilst value is distinct from reasons leads to the absurd position that valuing is not a response to value.⁷⁴

Considering the objections of co-extensiveness and the implausible accounts of valuing that come with the Dancy account, I reject the Dancyan account as a plausible account of the value-reasons relation.

Two intuitions about reasons in favour of a buck-passing account of value

After having considered the four alternative views of the relation between value and reasons, we return to Scanlon’s buck-passing account of value and examine the two arguments he presents in favour of his account.

Scanlon’s first argument is that when we examine what reasons we have for adopting a pro-attitude towards something (P) that is good in a particular case, it seems to be that the natural properties that make that P is of value, are also the properties that provide reasons for adopting a pro-attitude towards P, instead of reasons being provided by P’s goodness itself. In other words:

P is good. P has natural properties (X and Y) that make that P is good. We have reasons for adopting a pro-attitude towards P. These reasons seem to be provided by X and Y, and not by the fact that P is good.

Also, it seems to be so that our reasons for adopting a pro-attitude towards a thing are explained *completely* by its good-making properties; no appeal to value is needed in this explanation.⁷⁵ Scanlon supports this by means of the following examples:

⁷² Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 527.

⁷³ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 527.

⁷⁴ Suikkanen, “Reasons and Value” 527-28.

⁷⁵ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 97.

[T]he fact that a resort is pleasant is a reason to visit it or to recommend it to a friend, and the fact that a discovery casts light on the causes of cancer is a reason to applaud it and to support further research of that kind.⁷⁶

What Scanlon is arguing is that it would be *redundant* to appeal to the value of P to explain our reasons for having a pro-attitude towards P when the natural properties of P alone seem to provide a full explanation of our reasons for having a pro-attitude towards P. Roger Crisp suggests we call this first argument of Scanlon the *redundancy argument*.⁷⁷

Scanlon's second argument is that for all things of which can be said that they are valuable, the properties that make them valuable vary widely. Also “[t]here does not seem to be a single reason-providing property that is common to all these cases.”⁷⁸ So it makes sense to conclude that since there are many different reason-providing properties in these cases, and these cases all have the same property of being valuable, the property of having value is not a reason-providing property. Subsequently, since there are many different reason-providing properties, and many different good-making properties, it makes sense to conclude that it is probable that these different good-making properties are reason-giving properties. Crisp calls this second argument of Scanlon the *argument from pluralism*.⁷⁹

It seems to be the case that the second consideration Scanlon offers is not quite conclusive since it does not establish the relation between value and reason that is claimed in the buck-passing account of value as the only possible relation; the possibility of reasons and values being distinct, but being provided by the same properties (the Dancyan account) remains as a possibility and this is not in line with the buck-passing account. As mentioned earlier: we should distinguish buck-passing from a relation where reasons are provided by the same properties that instantiate value whilst value and reasons remain entirely distinct. It is essential to the buck-passing account that *by virtue* of being reason-giving properties, do these properties also provide value.

III. Objections to the buck-passing account

Criticism from Crisp

In his article, *Value, reasons and the structure of justification: how to avoid passing the buck*, Roger Crisp argues against Scanlon's buck-passing account of value. He presents three difficulties that arise when we understand the lower-order, reason-giving properties from which value, or goodness, inherits its normativity, as non-evaluative, natural properties.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁶ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 97.

⁷⁷ Crisp, “Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck.” 81.

⁷⁸ Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 98.

⁷⁹ Crisp, “Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck.” 81.

⁸⁰ Crisp, “Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck.” 82.

solution to these three difficulties might be to understand the lower-order, reason-giving properties from which value inherits its normativity as thick evaluative properties, but this also is rejected by Crisp.

The first problem with Scanlon's buck-passing account of value that Crisp addresses is that the phenomenology of interacting with things of value does not always conform with the notion that value is the property of having other reason-giving properties. Crisp approaches this problem as follows:

There are three things we can say about what is going on when we look at a painting (Crisp uses Piero della Francesca's *Madonna* as an example, but I myself must admit to finding no beauty in this particular painting and so I would suggest Henri Gervex' *Rolla* as an alternative) and find it to be beautiful, or of value:

1. We understand the painting as an object fitting of admiration.
2. We recognize that the painting's beauty depends on its natural, non-evaluative properties.
3. Reasons for admiring the painting do *not* seem to lie in the natural properties of the painting as "these could be understood by someone with no aesthetic sense"⁸¹, but in its beauty.

What Crisp shows is that in the case of a beautiful object, reasons for having a pro-attitude towards that object seem to emerge from the object's beauty, or value, rather than from reason-giving natural properties. This runs contrary to Scanlon's buck-passing account of goodness which claims that value is *never* a property that is reason-giving itself.⁸²

The second problem for the buck-passing account of value that Crisp notes is that the buck-passing account does not allow us to properly discriminate different values. Crisp illustrates this point with an example in which he again references Piero's *Madonna*:

We want to say more about a beautiful painting than that it is beautiful. After all, calling a painting beautiful might be true, but not very informative. We might want to say about a painting that it is "beautiful because of its sublimity, delicacy, profundity, boldness, imagination, vitality, grace [or] honesty."⁸³ Since these concepts are all evaluative, we should be able to understand them with the buck-passing account as being the property of having other, reason-giving properties—these other properties being natural properties. These concepts are (partially) demarcated by the different kinds of responses they warrant. It is questionable, according to Crisp, that we can provide a satisfactory demarcation of these different concepts in terms of only their natural properties.⁸⁴ So, in the case of these different kinds of values, the buck-passing account would not facilitate analysis to a satisfactory degree.

⁸¹ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 82.

⁸² Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 82.

⁸³ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 82.

⁸⁴ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 82.

According to Crisp, a third problem for Scanlon's buck-passing account emerges if it is possible that reason-giving properties do not necessarily give rise to value.

Scanlon's buck-passing account of value can be read as a bi-conditional account of reasons and value: if P provides reasons then P is necessarily of value and vice versa. However, this is *not* how Scanlon intended his buck-passing account to be understood. Scanlon wanted to leave open the possibility of there being reason-giving properties that do *not* necessarily give rise to value.⁸⁵

If we understand lower order reason-giving properties to be natural properties, we would have to divide these in two categories that are virtually the same. In one category we would have natural properties that provide reasons, and because they provide reasons, they also give rise to value. In the other category we would have (also) natural properties that (also) provide reasons, but they do *not* give rise to value. The problem is that we are left without explanation how one type of category of properties gives rise to value, whilst the other category does not.⁸⁶ This needs to be addressed if we are to understand the buck-passing account of value the way Scanlon meant it to be understood.

An apparent solution to the three aforementioned problems for Scanlon's buck-passing account is to revise the account such that we understand the lower order properties that give rise to value to be thick-evaluative concepts, rather than their natural properties.⁸⁷ Crisp refers to this as the "revised buck-passing account".

The first problem Crisp noted with the (unrevised)buck-passing account is that the phenomenological experience of valuing a beautiful painting seems to suggest that the painting's beauty provides a reason to adopt a pro-attitude towards it, rather than its natural properties. The revised buck-passing account solves this, since we no longer maintain that natural properties are reason-giving, but that in this case "beauty" (also a thick evaluative concept) is reason-giving.⁸⁸

The second problem for the (unrevised)buck-passing account is its failure to differentiate between the different types of thick-evaluative concepts that would give rise to value but also warrant different kinds of responses. The revised buck-passing account solves this problem since the different types of thick-evaluative concepts are no longer analyzed in terms of their natural properties and can thus be used to differentiate between themselves.⁸⁹ So, the difference between, for example, delicacy and sublimity can be better understood because with the revised buck-passing account, we no longer analyze delicacy and sublimity as resulting from two potentially very similar sets of natural properties.

The third problem for the (unrevised)buck-passing account is that not all reason-giving properties would give rise to value, but it remains unclear what makes it so that some properties do, and others do not. This problem is also solved by understanding the lower

⁸⁵ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 83.

⁸⁶ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 83.

⁸⁷ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

⁸⁸ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

⁸⁹ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

order reason-giving properties that give rise to value to be thick evaluative concepts, rather than natural properties. We can now explain how certain properties give rise to value and others do not, by referring to the kind of thick evaluative property that gives rise to value and examine whether it is a property that is generally understood to be connected to value in the first place.⁹⁰ For example, being charitable could be good because being charitable is kind, and we understand kindness to be related to goodness, whereas going to the zoo would not have any value at all because going to the zoo has no properties that could be understood as connected to value.

It seems like the challenges Crisp raises for Scanlon's buck-passing account of goodness are overcome by adopting the revised buck-passing account. But according to Crisp, even this revised version of the buck-passing account fails. As he puts it, "the very notion of buck-passing is inappropriate to characterize the relation between goodness and reasons."⁹¹ Crisp draws a parallel between the structure of causal explanations and normative justifications to illustrate why passing the buck from a more general property to a more specific property does not invalidate either property being reason giving. He uses the following example:

A tank of petrol is on fire, and Arun, Belinda and Cara are standing around it. You ask for a full explanation of the fire, and Arun replies, 'Cara threw a burning object into it', while Belinda replies, at the same time, 'Cara threw a lighted taper into it'.⁹²

Crisp maintains that a buck-passing view of explanations of causality leads us to deny Arun's explanation while we would accept Belinda's, and this, he argues, would be absurd.⁹³ Similarly, it would be absurd to accept thick evaluative concepts to be reason-giving while at the same time denying value to be a reason-giving property. As Crisp understands it, both higher-order, as well as lower-order properties can be reason-giving and can substitute each other in this sense. Goodness can however not add to the reasons provided by other lower-order properties.⁹⁴ We can understand Crisp's position to be that lower-order thick properties are more descriptive than the higher order property of value, but since value is constituted by its lower-order properties they can both be understood as exerting the same normative force.

Reply to Crisp

It seems to me that Crisp's example of causal explanation is not properly analogous to the kinds of normative justification that we attempt to analyse with the buck-passing account. In

⁹⁰ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

⁹¹ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

⁹² Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

⁹³ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

⁹⁴ Crisp, "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." 84.

fact, if properly constructed, I think Crisp's example would show quite the opposite of what Crisp is arguing. In order to show this, I will reexamine his example in more detail in order to point out exactly what he gets wrong.

Crisp's example is supposed to illustrate how we analyse causal explanations. He offers an explanandum, and two possible explanans and subsequently argues that both explanans suffice in explaining the explanandum. The explanandum in this case is 'how a tank of petrol came to be on fire'(A₁). The two possible explanans are either that 'Cara threw a burning object into the petrol tank'(B₁), or that 'Cara threw a lighted taper into the petrol tank'(C₁).

B₁ and C₁ differ in terms of descriptive content. B₁ has *less* descriptive content while C₁ has *more* descriptive content and thus, Crisp argues, if we adhere to a buck-passing account of causal explanations, we would have to reject B₁ and accept C₁. But, it would be strange to accept C₁ whilst rejecting B₁ since they appear both to suffice in explaining A₁.

In summary, according to my analysis, Crisp's example has the following elements:

- Explanandum: A₁
- Explanans: B₁ (*less* descriptive content)
- Explanans: C₁ (*more* descriptive content)

The buck-passing account of value explains what kinds of properties are reason-giving. If we formulate this in the same manner as the Crisp example we get the following:

The explanandum is 'what properties provide a reason to φ' (A₂). The two possible explanans are either 'a thin value property'(B₂), or a 'thick evaluative property' (C₂). B₂ and C₂ differ, just like in Crisp's example, in terms of descriptive content. B₂ has *no* descriptive content while C₂ has *some* descriptive content. If we summarize this we get the following elements:

- Explanandum: A₂
- Explanans: B₂ (*no* descriptive content)
- Explanans: C₂ (*some* descriptive content)

As we can see, B₁ differs from B₂ in that B₂ has *no* descriptive content while B₁ has *some* (albeit less than C₁) descriptive content. This difference is quite significant. If we want to construct an example of a causal explanation that is truly analogous to normative justification, we would have to make it so that B₁ has *no* descriptive content either. Such an example might look something like this:

A tank of petrol is on fire, and Arun, Belinda and Cara are standing around it. You ask for a full explanation of the fire (A₃), and Arun replies, 'Something happened'(B₃), while Belinda replies, at the same time, 'Cara threw a burning object into it'(C₃). We analyse this example as having the following elements:

- Explanandum: A₃
- Explanans: B₃ (*no* descriptive content)
- Explanans: C₃ (*some* descriptive content)

If we formulate the example so that it is truly analogous to the kinds of normative justification we explain with the buck-passing account, we come to a quite different conclusion: It is not absurd, but quite reasonable to reject B₃ whilst accepting C₃ as an explanation of A₃. After all, ‘something happened’ does not explain how the tank of petrol came to be on fire. Similarly it is reasonable to accept thick evaluative properties to be reason-giving while at the same time denying value to be reason-giving.

I think this goes to the heart of the matter of what the buck-passing account expresses: *descriptive content is a necessary condition for reason-givingness*. As we have seen, this is also the case for explanations of causation. Something that has no descriptive content cannot function as a satisfactory explanation of how something happened.

What Crisp missed in his analogy is that goodness has *no* descriptive content whilst Arun’s explanation in Crisp’s example has *some* descriptive content. I deem it probable that his mistake arises from the phenomenon that in everyday life we *refer* to a thing being good as a reason for adopting a pro-attitude towards that thing. This raises the question: How can it both be the case that we *refer* to P’s goodness as a reason for our pro-attitude towards P, but also maintain that that goodness itself can never be reason-giving. I think that an understanding of goodness as the property of having other reason-giving properties can explain this. I also think that analysis of these types of referrals to goodness as a reason will lend further support to the buck-passing account.

Let’s take the following sentence from Crisp’s article: “The full justification for my visiting Yarmouth - that is, what constitutes or provides my reason - is that it is a good resort, viz. a pleasant resort.”⁹⁵ If we imagine Crisp telling a colleague that he went to Yarmouth because it is a pleasant resort, we can assume that his colleague will deem this a sufficient explanation of Crisp’s reasons for going to Yarmouth. Similarly, if Crisp tells his colleague that he went to Yarmouth because it is a good resort, we can also assume this to be a satisfactory explanation for his colleague. Now imagine this colleague of Crisp also going to Yarmouth, because Crisp told him it was a good resort. Imagine his surprise if it turns out this resort was not a pleasant resort at all. It turns out Yarmouth is good because it is a place that shelters thousands of civilians during air raids that happen biweekly in the area. Crisp’s colleague might tentatively come to the conclusion that in fact he did not have a reason to spend his vacation in this resort after all.

This example shows that having a reason to visit Yarmouth is dependent on its lower order properties and not its goodness. A resort that shelters innocent civilians from air raids can be said to be good, but its goodness is predicated on very different lower-order properties than we had assumed when we were told that it was a good resort.

⁹⁵ Crisp, “Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck.” 84.

What seems to happen is that when ‘P is good’, is uttered, this is understood as ‘P has features that one would expect P to have that are reason-giving’. Goodness assumes the implicit descriptive content of someone’s understanding of the goodness of P when P’s goodness is referred to as a reason for adopting a pro-attitude towards P.

In summary: The buck-passing account claims that goodness is not reason-giving, but lower-order good-making properties are. Crisp raises three objections to the buck-passing account and shows how these can be solved with a revised buck-passing account. Crisp also rejects this revised buck-passing account based on an analogy with explanations of causality. I have shown how this analogy does not quite work and is thus not a reason to reject the revised buck-passing account.

Furthermore, a common objection to the buck-passing account is that we commonly refer to P’s goodness as a reason. But if we analyze this referral to P’s goodness as a reason, we find that it is in fact a referral to implicit assumptions about lower-order properties associated with P. This is supported by the fact that if the lower-order properties of P turn out to be different than the kinds of properties commonly associated with P, it might turn out that P did not give us any reasons, despite P remaining good.

Conclusion

I have tried to outline Scanlon's buck-passing account in this research paper. I have established that the buck-passing account explains value in terms of reasons and in this way explicates how value can have normative force. The primary, and most convincing argument in favor of Scanlon's buck-passing account is that it would be redundant to refer to value—rather than referring solely to reason-giving properties—in explaining what reasons someone has in favor of something. Reason-giving properties seem to come first in the order of explanation.

Crisp shows that there are certain problems with the buck-passing account that can be solved with a revised buck-passing account. The revised buck-passing account is rejected by Crisp also, but I have shown how the analogy on which this rejection is based, does not work and actually favors a buck-passing account when accurately constructed.

What still needs more attention is a more thorough analysis of the advantages of Crisp's revised buck-passing account versus Scanlon's buck-passing account. I am not quite convinced yet that Crisp's criticism against the buck-passing account cannot be solved without resorting to a revision of the buck-passing account. For now I will have to be content with the revised buck-passing account as the most reasonable explication of the reasons-value relation.

Zoë King's article *We Can Have our Buck and Pass It, Too*⁹⁶ might be a fruitful starting point for further research to the question where exactly the buck stops, or if it stops at all. King analyses the buck-passing account as being based on a metaphysical hierarchy with value at the top. The further down you go, the more descriptive and specific we get. I think that King is fundamentally mistaken in this characterization and a refutation of her arguments could shed more light on the workings of the value-reasons relation.

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⁹⁶ King, "We Can Have Our Buck and Pass It, Too."

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