



EXPLAINING REASONS:
WHERE DOES THE BUCK STOP?

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Explaining Reasons: Where Does the Buck Stop?

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IT WOULD BE GOOD IF I could finally knock this paper into shape. That gives me a reason to sit down and work on it. Or is it the other way around? Is it that I have a reason to get on with it and that is why it would be good to do so? According to the buck-passing account of value, it is the latter: Something is good because it gives us a reason. The reverse view has it that one has a reason for doing things because doing so would be good in certain respects. The buck-passing account offers an explanation of the close relation of values and reasons: of why it is that the question whether something that is of value provides reasons for action is not “open.” Being of value simply is, its defenders claim, a property that something has in virtue of its having other reason-providing properties. The buck-passing view combines various virtues: First of all, it offers an explanation of the close connection between values and reasons for actions. Yet the account of reasons for actions that it proposes need not make any reference to values. Furthermore, in at least one of its versions, it is a reductive account of values in the sense that it does not appeal to evaluative properties in explaining value. According to reductive buck-passing accounts, values are to be explained neither in terms of evaluative properties, nor by reference to our (perhaps suitably corrected) attitudes. Rather, so the suggestion goes, we can explain value in terms of non-evaluative, natural properties that provide reasons for those attitudes. But unlike rational attitude theories of value¹, which some regard as the historical predecessors of buck-passing², the buck-passing account is not amenable to the project of developing a metaphysical reduction of normative properties. The reduction it offers is an intra-normative one: After all, the explanation of values is in terms of reasons for actions.

The generic idea of buck-passing is that the property of being good or being of value does not provide reasons³, but it is other properties that do. There are, however, various versions of the account which differ in their

¹ As developed by Brentano (1889), and later on by some British philosophers in the first half of the 20th century, most notably Ewing (1947). More recently D. Lewis (1989) and E. Anderson (1998) continued the work, to name but a few.

² For an instructive overview of the history of rational attitude theories see Dancy (2000) and Rabinowicz / Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004).

³ Throughout the paper I will use “provide reasons” as follows: A property *provides* a reason, iff it *is* a reason when instantiated, e.g. the property of being cruel provides a reason iff the fact that an action is cruel is a reason (against it, in this case).

understanding of those “other properties.” Briefly, they are the following ones:

- (BP-1) x is of value (is valuable or good in a certain respect), iff it has other non-normative, natural properties that provide reasons for actions.
- (BP-2) x is of value, iff it has either (a) other evaluative or (b) non-normative, natural properties that provide reasons for actions. There are instances of both (a) and (b).
- (BP-3) x is of value (is good), iff it has other evaluative properties that provide reasons for actions, but goodness itself is not a reason.⁴

In this paper I am going to explore all three versions of the view. I will begin with explaining the buck-passing account in greater detail, and then investigate T. M. Scanlon’s arguments for it (in section I). In section II I will offer an argument, which, I believe, raises serious doubts about a central presupposition of buck-passing in two of its versions (BP-1 and BP-2), namely that non-evaluative properties are reason-giving. Finally I argue that the third version, BP-3, is also unlikely to succeed (in section III).

Let me issue a warning: All three versions of the buck-passing account have at times been ascribed to Scanlon. There is some textual evidence to do so in each case, but not enough to exclude any of them. Be that as it may, my main interest is not in interpreting Scanlon. All three propositions are interesting in their own right, and worth thinking about. So I will keep all of them in play without claiming that one or the other is Scanlon’s “true” or even current position. Scanlon’s discussion of buck-passing is extremely terse, but it has the merit of forcing us to consider the various possibilities. The important point is that we now have various interesting, but mutually incompatible, articulations of the buck-passing view on the table.

I. Buck-passing

(1) The original account (= BP-1)

The “buck-passing account” (96) is T. M. Scanlon’s label for his own account of values which is captured in the following sentence:

⁴ Possibly, Scanlon intended to defend (BP-2) all along, or he started out with (BP-1) and then moved to (BP-2). (BP-3) finds the least support in Scanlon’s text. There also is the suggestion that “is of value” should be interpreted in such a way that it cannot be replaced by “is valuable or good in a certain respect.” This opens a further avenue:

(BP-4) x is good (or valuable – in a “formal” sense, or as a “higher order property”), iff it has other evaluative or non-normative properties that provide reasons for actions.

Pekka Väyrynen discusses this suggestion in his paper “Resisting the Buck-Passing Account of Value” (forthcoming).

...being valuable is not a property that provides us with reasons. Rather, to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it. (96)⁵

What makes it a “buck-passing account” is “holding that it is not goodness or value itself that provides reasons but rather other properties that do so” (97). So it passes the buck from values to the other properties which provide reasons. Scanlon explains that those other properties that provide us with reasons are “natural” or “non-normative” properties (96). The claim, as Scanlon expresses it, appears to be conceptual or semantic: “to call something valuable is to say...” [my emphases].

Yet, it seems clear that there is a metaphysical claim involved as well: For it to be true that something is valuable, it has to have certain non-normative properties which “provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.” Metaphysically speaking, the use of the concept of value has true applications only if there are appropriate natural properties and reasons, but it does not presuppose the existence of values. The buck-passing account offers a metaphysical and even a conceptual reduction of values; yet, it explains values in terms of reasons. So, it is not – and is not intended to be – a reductionist account of all normative concepts.⁶

Scanlon illustrates his view by giving the following examples:

...the fact that a resort is pleasant is a reason to visit it or recommend it to a friend, and the fact that a discovery casts light on the causes of cancer is a reason to applaud and to support further research of that kind. These natural properties provide a complete explanation of the reasons we have for reacting in these ways to things that are good and valuable. It is not clear what further work could be done by special reason-providing properties of goodness and value, and even less clear how these properties could provide reasons. (97)

Here there are the “natural” and “non-normative” properties of being pleasant or of casting light on the causes of cancer, which give us reasons of various kinds regarding those things that instantiate the properties.⁷

There is a *prima facie* difficulty with this idea since according to a common philosophical understanding being reason-giving *just is* being norma-

⁵ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1998.

⁶ Throughout the paper I will assume that being evaluative is one way of being normative.

⁷ Scanlon generally claims that all reasons are reasons for “judgment sensitive attitudes” (1998: 18-22). There is no difference between theoretical and practical reasons in this regard. What we call “practical reasons” or “reasons for action” are typically reasons for intending something, whereas the core case of theoretical reasons are reasons for believing that *p*. In formulating the buck-passing account, Scanlon talks of “reasons for behaving in certain ways.” This might be a slip of tongue, and should at any rate be understood as reasons for judgment sensitive attitudes (typically those that are associated with practical reasons).

tive. How can non-normative properties be reason-giving then? In formulating the position Scanlon relies on an intuitive way of distinguishing normative from non-normative properties. This in itself may not be a problem. But it follows that if buck-passing is correct we will have to re-think the common theoretical understanding of normativity.

(2) *The next stage (= BP-2)*

Jay Wallace in his discussion of Scanlon's book⁸ raises an obvious doubt:

To say that a resort is "pleasant," for instance, is a way of adverting to the distinctively positive qualities of experience that are enjoyed by a visitor to the resort. It is not merely an evaluatively neutral description of the natural properties of the resort or of the experiences induced by the resort in its visitors, and this is what makes it appropriate to think of pleasure itself as a concrete category of evaluation. (448)

Wallace suggests that instead of maintaining that values cannot provide reasons, Scanlon's point might have rather been that the "abstract" property of being good does not provide reasons, whereas "concrete" evaluative properties might well do so. Hence, he suggests passing the buck in explaining reasons only from "abstract" goodness to more concrete values, but not from values to non-normative, natural properties. Scanlon's reply⁹ to this suggestion reads as follows:

I agree with Wallace's reinterpretation of my "buck-passing" account of value. My thesis was that goodness is not itself a property that provides reasons, not that the underlying properties that do this are always natural properties, and I should not have written in a way that suggested this. He is quite right that more specific evaluative properties often play this role. (513)

The quote suggests a modified version of the buck-passing account. The correct view, Scanlon now says, is a hybrid one: Both natural and evaluative properties can provide reasons. If something has properties (of either kind), which give us reasons, it is good – but goodness itself does not give us reasons. Let me call this the *modified* or the *hybrid* view (or BP-2) which differs from the original one in that it endorses a broad understanding of the reason-providing properties.¹⁰ I will now investigate Scanlon's arguments in favor of buck-passing.

⁸ R.J. Wallace (2002), "Scanlon's Contractualism" contribution to a symposium on T. M. Scanlon's *What We Owe to Each Other*, in *Ethics* 112, 429-470.

⁹ T. M. Scanlon (2002), "Reasons, Responsibility, and Reliance: Replies to Wallace, Dworkin, and Deigh," in *Ethics* 112, 507-528

¹⁰ Possibly this was Scanlon's view all along, and the discussion with Wallace merely served to bring it out more clearly. At any rate, Scanlon confirms that this is his current

(3) Scanlon's arguments for buck-passing

Scanlon makes the case for buck-passing in two stages. His arguments purport to show that buck-passing must be true because the only alternatives to it are quite implausible. If being good is a reason, then it either is the only reason, or it is an additional reason – so goes the general assumption that seems to underlie the argument as a whole. In the first part (hereafter: “first argument”), he argues that it is not an additional reason; in the second (hereafter: “second argument”), that it is not the only one. Together, the theses established by the first and second argument are deemed to be necessary and sufficient for buck-passing.

First argument. Scanlon claims that we need not invoke the property of being good in order to explain our reasons, but only natural properties such as being pleasant or casting light on the causes of cancer. That the cancer research is good or valuable, Scanlon maintains, would surely not give us any *further* reason to support it in addition to the fact that it casts light on the causes of cancer. Adducing the property of being valuable in the explanation of our reasons is like putting in a fifth wheel that does not pull any weight. Hence, the suggestion that being good, rather than providing us with reasons, is explained by the fact that we have reasons, which are in turn provided by other properties. Goodness therefore is not an additional reason.¹¹ Let me call this the *explanation argument*. As you probably noticed, the argument is presented in terms of the original – not the modified – account, which is unsurprising since its formulation pre-dates the revision. The next question is therefore how does the modification affect the argument. Remember, the modified view claimed that some of the reason-providing properties, like being pleasant, are evaluative properties (and not non-normative, natural ones). What then is the relation of goodness and *other* evaluative properties, like being pleasant? Surely, goodness itself is also an evaluative property. But couldn't we nonetheless claim that there is no role to be played by goodness in explaining our reasons? All we need to refer to in order to explain our reasons are the more specific evaluative properties. The thesis would then be that something is good, if and only if it has other evaluative (and / or non-evaluative) properties that give us reasons. I will investigate this suggestion below.

position in a later publication, saying: “...although the properties of actions that make them worth performing are in some cases evaluative properties, this is not always the case. Ordinary natural properties of actions can also be reasons for performing, or not performing them.” In Stratton-Lake (ed.), *On What We Owe to Each Other*, Blackwell 2004: 127.

¹¹ “[The] natural properties [of being pleasant or casting light on the causes of cancer] provide a complete explanation of the reasons we have for reacting in these ways to things that are good and valuable. It is not clear what further work could be done by special reason-providing properties of goodness and value, and even less clear how these properties could provide reasons.” Scanlon 1998: 97

Second argument. Scanlon claims that it is a “source of support for a buck-passing account...that many different things can be said to be good or to be valuable, and the grounds for these judgments vary widely. There does not seem to be a single, reason-providing property that is common to all these cases” (97f). If we assume, as Moore did, that goodness is a simple property, then it cannot be a reason. Even in those cases where goodness figures as a candidate reason, it is not the only reason, but there is a plurality of properties that explain the fact that something is good and they provide us with reasons. (And as the *explanation argument* has already shown, goodness is not a further reason in addition to them.) Let’s call the second argument the *argument from pluralism*. And again the question is how the argument is affected by the revision. If there is a plurality of evaluative properties that provide us with reasons, the question becomes what is the role of goodness within a pluralistic understanding of values. I will address this question below (in section III). To be sure, Scanlon’s observation shows that goodness as G. E. Moore understands it – as a simple property – does not explain our reasons.

II. Against buck-passing (BP-1 and BP-2): Can non-evaluative properties provide reasons?

I now want to develop an argument that will show why buck-passing in both of its versions (the original and the modified view, or BP-1 and BP-2) is unlikely to succeed.

According to the *modified view*, it does not matter whether natural or evaluative properties provide reasons, as long as we understand that goodness does not. It grants that being pleasant is an evaluative property, but nothing much turns on that. But the difficulty with the original buck-passing account is not only that it ignored (and, in cases like pleasant, perhaps misinterpreted) many evaluative properties. There is a difficulty in claiming that non-evaluative properties can provide reasons at all, and that difficulty affects the modified account as well. Or so I will argue. Thus, in this section I will not deal with the generic idea of buck-passing directly – the idea that goodness does not provide reasons – but with an assumption that is shared by the first two versions of the account: that non-normative, natural properties do provide reasons (either exclusively, according to BP-1, or among others, according to BP-2).

I will start with some observations about pragmatics and context (paragraph 1), then take a closer look at the role of specific evaluative properties, such as being pleasant, in explaining reasons (paragraph 2), and thirdly explore the possibility of non-evaluative properties providing reasons (paragraph 3). The concluding fourth paragraph of the argument works out some differences between my view and buck-passing.

1. *Pragmatics.*

Virtually anything can be cited as a reason in appropriate circumstances. Amy asks Bert, "Why did you leave last night's party in such a hurry?" "Because it was almost midnight," Bert replies. "Ah, yes, of course..." says Amy, apparently satisfied with the answer. Is the fact that midnight approaches Bert's reason for leaving the party then? After all, it provides a satisfactory answer to a question that was inquiring for the reason. But it does not seem that being whatever time can in itself provide a reason for doing anything. If we were to specify Bert's reasoning in a more complete way, it might go something like this:

1. Bert has promised to be home at 12:30 at the latest.
2. There is no available transportation that will get him home in less than half an hour.
3. Bert has reason to make sure that he leaves at midnight.
4. **It is almost midnight now.**

Bert concludes that he will leave the party now. If Amy knows some of the other facts – (1) would suffice – she may be able to fill in or guess at the missing bits, and (let's stipulate) this is why she is satisfied with the answer. So she actually received all that was needed to understand why Bert left the party.

But what exactly is his reason to leave? Is it the conjunction of (1), (2), (3) and (4)? We could perhaps call all of (1), (2), (3) and (4) parts of his complete reason for forming the intention to leave. However, it would not be very helpful to do so. After all, each of (1) to (4) could be mentioned as a reason in an appropriate context, but even taken together they may not form a complete reason. (1) and (2) are sufficient for (3) only if Bert's promise is valid, for instance. I did not introduce the example to legislate whether a certain consideration may or may not be called a reason, but to show that many features which can be cited as reasons are not, taken by themselves, reasons for doing anything. This is surely true of (2) and (4). They can, however, figure as premises (like (1), (2) and (4)) or as derivative steps (like (3)) in a chain of reasoning. The point of the example is to illustrate that whenever a consideration such as (4) – which by itself is not a reason to do anything – is cited as a reason, there are further considerations in the background that make it that, in the given circumstances, it may well be called a reason. It does not matter much whether we claim that Bert's reason for leaving the party is *really* just (1), and (2) and (4) are part of the circumstances, or switch it around, and regard (4) as Bert's reason for leaving, but only in circumstances which contain also (1) and (2). The everyday use of the notion of a reason is very versatile and open-ended, and calling any of the properties mentioned in the propositions above a reason is not offending against the normal use of the term. But if (4) is a reason for leaving the party in these circumstances because of Bert's

promise to be home at a certain time, it must be a reason to do so, whenever these circumstances obtain. This, I believe, simply follows from the ordinary understanding of reasons.¹² In the given circumstances, (4) can be regarded as Bert's reason for leaving. Taken by itself, however, (4) is not a reason for doing anything.

Facts that are frequently cited as reasons are often of this kind: The propositions that express them do not state the complete reason, but rather mention some feature that is salient because of what is of interest in the communication situation. They can, however, successfully answer a question about reasons, provided it was asked by someone who is aware of the broader context. The answer presupposes a background of shared knowledge. While the quest for a reason can be successfully answered by mentioning virtually any kind of property of an action or just any feature of the situation, this observation does not vindicate the claim that non-normative properties can be reason-giving. It leaves the possibility that the cited properties figure as reasons only in circumstances which contain normative or evaluative properties that make it the case that they are reason-giving. I mention this perhaps trivial sounding claim because it will be relevant later.

2. *The Conceptual Link.*

Pragmatics aside, how can evaluative properties explain reasons? Before I address the question whether non-evaluative properties provide reasons – which is the crucial presumption of BP-1 and BP-2 that I am going to challenge – it will be useful to first explore the option that the modified account adds to the original one: that specific evaluative properties provide reasons (but “being of value” or “being good” does not).

As Scanlon notes, it is part of our conceptual understanding of values that they provide reasons. More specifically, he writes that a person who does not understand that certain actions and attitudes are (in-)appropriate with regard to something that is of value, does not understand the value of the thing itself.

Having recordings of Beethoven's late quartets played in the elevators, hallways, and restrooms of an office building... would show a failure to understand the value of music of this kind. What I am suggesting is not that this would show a lack of respect for this music, but rather that it shows a lack of understanding of what one should expect from it, and in what way it is worth attending to.¹³

¹² Understanding reasons as universal in this sense is compatible even with particularism. I suspect, however, that not all of what I say in this section is. Discussing particularism in any detail leads way beyond the ambit of this paper.

¹³ Scanlon 1998: 100.

A person who understands the value of a work of art will understand that its value provides reasons for attending to it in certain ways, but not in others. Those reasons are provided by the evaluative features of the music itself: They are non-derivative reasons. A reason is non-derivative if its being a reason need not be determined by there being other reasons and its relation to them. (This leaves space for the possibility that if there is a reason to ϕ , there may always necessarily be a reason to ψ without the reason to ψ deriving from the reason to ϕ . If you have a reason to lend your car to your neighbor (say), you may also have a reason to make sure that it is in good working condition. But the reason for lending the car does not derive from the reason for making sure that it works, or the other way around. After all, you have reason to look after your car because of your own safety, and not just because of your neighbor's.) The claim which I will call "the conceptual link" is this:

The Conceptual Link. The (even partial) understanding of any evaluative concept requires understanding some of the non-derivative reasons that the evaluative property that the concept refers to provides.¹⁴

Note that the *Conceptual Link* thesis is readily available to buck-passing versions BP-2 and BP-3¹⁵ (and, as the quotation above shows, Scanlon himself appears to subscribe to it), except that the buck-passer denies that it applies to the most general property of being good or being of value itself. I will therefore not rely on it with regard to being good or being of value until the final section (section III) when I will explain why it applies to that property as well. While being consistent with buck-passing, the thesis is shared by philosophers who do not accept any version of the buck-passing account.¹⁶ Being common ground among both defenders and opponents of buck-passing I will not argue for the thesis but take it as my starting point. However, some clarifications may be useful. As mentioned, I will discuss the implications of the thesis only with regard to the modified account and its claim that specific evaluative properties provide reasons (whereas goodness does not).

But, you may object, the reasons which are provided by the properties of an artwork (say) are conditional reasons, i.e. they are reasons to attend to it only for a person who in fact enjoys a certain kind of music. Does

¹⁴ Just to remind the reader, "properties providing reasons" should be understood according to the definition in footnote 3 above. Also, "reasons" is to be read as "practical reasons" or "reasons for actions."

¹⁵ BP-1 is silent regarding the thesis, since it does not address the relationship of evaluative properties (other than goodness) and reasons.

¹⁶ Joseph Raz, for example, chooses a formulation which is strikingly similar to Scanlon's, "We cannot understand what is of value in a party without understanding what it is a reason for, that is, when one has reason to go to one, and how one behaves at a party." Raz 2001: 164f.

not that make them derivative reasons, because there would not be a reason to attend to the music if there were not a reason to enjoy oneself?

As an objection to the *Conceptual Link*, the claim incorporates two steps: (1) the reasons for attending to something which is of value are conditional reasons, and (2) they are derivative reasons in virtue of being conditional. I will investigate these steps in turn.

Does Beethoven's music provide only conditional reasons? If I do not care about classical music, if I get nothing out of listening to it, I hardly have a reason to put myself through the ordeal of sitting through a concert (say). Yet, a person who loves this music may well have such a reason. Is "enjoying the music" a condition for having a reason to attend to this kind of music in the first place? There is some plausibility to this, as it accommodates some of the ways in which we reason about values. If someone hates a certain kind of activity, there often seems little point in making her do it. In what way is the ability to enjoy oneself in doing something a condition of having a reason? It is, I will suggest, not a condition in the normal sense in which there may be conditions on having reasons. If there will be frost tonight, I have a reason to bring in the pot plants from my back garden. The occurrence of frost is a condition on having a reason to bring in the plants.¹⁷ But enjoyment during a concert is not quite like this. It is not in the same sense that if I will enjoy myself, I have reason to go to the concert. After all, I may enjoy myself during the concert because I like watching other people or because I brought some popcorn. But this is not the relevant kind of enjoyment. The value of the music provides me with a reason to go to the concert only if I enjoy myself in listening to the music. But, if so, it seems that rather than the enjoyment being a condition of the reason to go, it is part of what I have reason to do: I have reason to listen to the music *in a certain way*, namely with enjoyment. The adverbial construction brings to the fore that enjoyment is, in this case, only a qualification of the relevant kind of listening and not an independent condition. The reason provided by the value of the music is a reason for a certain kind of listening. Unlike the overnight frost which occurs whether or not I keep my plants in the back garden, the relevant enjoyment at the concert is not any enjoyment that may occur whether or not I listen to the music, but only the enjoyment *in listening* to it. Therefore, the reason in question is an unconditional reason to listen to the music with enjoyment, and not a conditional reason after all. But if it is an unconditional reason, it clearly is not a derivative one.

¹⁷ This formulation is not quite accurate (and I use it merely as a matter of convenience), since it rather is the disjunct of a great number of conditions that is a condition on the reason: If there is frost, or a hurricane, or scorching sunlight... etc. This conditional reason itself is a specification of the (possibly) unconditional reason to protect my plants from destruction.

But possibly there are other conditions. Perhaps I have a reason to prevent the destruction of an artwork (say) only if I know (or at least could have known) that there is a threat that it may be destroyed. But while being conditional, the reason to prevent the destruction does not derive from my knowledge nor does it appear to derive from any other reason. Thus, conditional reasons are not *ipso facto* derivative ones. Being derivative is a special case of being conditional,¹⁸ and there is no reason to assume that all (or even any) of the reasons that are provided by evaluative properties are derivative ones.

The upshot of this discussion is that understanding something which is of value requires understanding at least some of the non-derivative reasons for action that it provides. Thus, there is a conceptual link between understanding values and understanding reasons, which allows us to explain how evaluative properties provide reasons: *the conceptual understanding of these properties is of them as being reason-giving*. A person who does not understand why there are reasons not to be cruel (say) does not understand the concept of cruelty. If the property that “cruel” refers to can be instantiated at all, then there are reasons not to be cruel.

The *Conceptual Link* also helps with the pragmatics example above since it explains which features of the circumstances make it the case that there is a reason to act in certain ways: If the circumstances include evaluative (or normative) features which are necessarily reason-providing, the structure becomes clear, and we begin to understand why “it is almost midnight now” can be Bert’s reason for leaving the party. It derives from his reason to keep his promise, which in turn will be explained by the value of promise-keeping.

There is a common way of specifying some of the reasons that are provided by evaluative properties: They provide reasons, first, for preserving whatever has the property, and preventing its destruction, and, occasionally, and secondly for choosing it or seeking it out. Hence, there are some general descriptions of the reasons that evaluative properties provide. Knowing in this general and vague way which reasons certain evaluative properties provide is a matter of understanding (even partially) the evaluative concepts that refer to those properties.

3. *Normative Significance*.

Thus far, the buck-passer of the BP-2 variety can agree (I hope). But the buck-passing account rests on a further presupposition. Both BP-1 and BP-

¹⁸ In the sense that there is a derivative reason R_1 only on the condition that there is a further reason R_0 from which it derives. But of course, if the condition is satisfied, i.e. if R_0 exists, then R_1 – while being conditioned by R_0 – is no longer a conditional reason. E.g. I have a reason to mend your bicycle if I promise to do so. This is a derivative reason. But once I have actually promised to do so, I have a reason to act accordingly – and this reason is not a conditional reason. It is of the form “R (ϕ),” not “if p, R (ϕ).”

2 require that non-evaluative properties too are reason-giving. If they are, can we come up with a similar explanation how and why they are? Is it part of the conceptual understanding of some, if not of all, non-evaluative properties that they are reason-giving too? Surely, not all properties provide non-derivative reasons for actions. The initial discussion about the pragmatics of citing certain considerations as reasons has already shown that: even though they can be cited as reasons in certain circumstances, they are not by themselves reasons. But possibly there are some non-evaluative (non-normative) properties that do provide non-derivative reasons. Take as an example Scanlon's proposed reason for admiring or fostering a research project "because it sheds light on the causes of cancer." As opposed to being pleasant, "shedding light on the causes of cancer" is a non-evaluative property. Does it provide a reason? We could again tell a story about pragmatic considerations and circumstances like the following: If someone did not quite understand why "casting light on the causes of cancer" makes a research project admirable, we could go on explaining: "Don't you see, cancer is a terrible illness – and basically everything that promises progress towards curing it is in that respect a good thing" – thereby making explicit the evaluative aspects of the example, which are normally implicitly understood. But we could not proceed explaining, "Don't you understand? The research was conducted by a team of three people" – which, let's stipulate, is another of its non-evaluative features. That will not help to dispel the puzzlement. Generalizing from this, we could then say: Whenever non-evaluative properties are cited as reasons, they are reasons in the instant circumstances because those include some evaluative features. This analysis of the example would take it to be another case where the consideration cited is not by itself a reason, but figures as a reason only in conjunction with evaluative features which form part of the circumstances. But this move seems less obvious and less convincing here than it was in the party example above. Furthermore, the generalized claim would be warranted only if we had reason to believe that non-evaluative properties cannot provide reasons except when this is due to the presence of some evaluative feature. But this, precisely, is the question – and nothing said so far allows answering it.

In what follows I want to explore the possibility that some, if not all, non-evaluative properties provide reasons. Let's call this kind of non-evaluative properties, borrowing a term of Parfit's, "normatively significant properties"¹⁹ – just to distinguish them from reason-providing properties in the more general sense, which includes evaluative or normative ones as well. Normatively significant properties are those that provide reasons without being normative. Supposedly, "jumping into the canal as the only way to save my life"²⁰ (for example, when the building is on fire) is such a

¹⁹ D. Parfit, "Reasons and Motivation," 1997: 124.

²⁰ Ibid.

property. It provides me with a reason to perform any action that has this property.

At first blush it may seem odd to say that reason-providing properties can be non-normative. As mentioned earlier, on a common understanding of normativity, being reason-providing *is* being normative. But the puzzlement dissolves once we allow for a distinction between “being a reason” and “being a reason for”: reasons understood as reason-providing properties and reasons as the relation of there being a reason for a person to do something (in the case of reasons for action). Ordinary language does not always distinguish between the two. But the distinction helps to understand why normatively significant facts may well be natural, non-normative ones. The fact that something has a normatively significant property is one of the *relata*. But it is the relation of “being a reason for” that is normative (and, possibly, irreducibly so). This suggestion allows us to make sense of the idea of being a realist about reasons without assuming that reason-providing properties need to be normative. The distinction is sound and useful. But of course it does not settle the question whether non-normative (non-evaluative) properties provide reasons. It only helps to understand in which sense they do, if they do.

Do they provide reasons then? How about the example? If I had a strong or even conclusive reason to commit suicide, the fact that jumping into the canal would be the only way to save my life would then be a reason *against* any action which has this property. If I have *a* reason to commit suicide, but also a reason to stay alive, the fact that jumping is the only way to save my life would count both in favor and against jumping at the same time. This paradoxical sounding implication may make it doubtful that “jumping...” by itself is a reason. What we are missing here is the possibility of explaining how a normatively significant property provides reasons in the way that the *Conceptual Link* made possible explaining how evaluative properties do.

Nevertheless, calling “jumping into the canal as the only way to save my life” normatively significant seems adequate in a different sense:²¹ After all, the situations where this property will not be highly relevant in deciding what to do are extremely rare. It sticks out as the one feature of the situation that matters most to most people. By contrast, the time of day is in general a very insignificant feature of the circumstances, and becomes relevant only in very circumscribed situations (as in my pragmatics example).

This contrast between Parfit’s example and the pragmatics example is easily explained. Being alive is the most fundamental condition for having reasons in the first place. Continuing one’s life is in most cases a condition of being able to comply with one’s reasons, such as reasons to pursue one’s projects and relationships (provided they are worth pursuing). As Bernard

²¹ Different from the one with which I introduced the term above as referring to non-normative, yet reason-providing properties.

Williams pointed out,²² some reasons to pursue one's goals or projects are conditional reasons in the sense that they are reasons for specific actions only *if one happens to be alive* at the relevant time. But a person may also have goals or projects that provide her with reasons to stay alive in order to pursue them. If so, and if a person has any reasons (other than reasons to commit suicide), at least some of them may *ipso facto* be reasons to stay alive, as a condition of complying with them. Only a person who not only has a reason to commit suicide, or even a conclusive reason to do so, but *no reason whatsoever* to continue with her life, will have no reason to jump. In other words: Everyone who has *any* reason to continue living (however forceful her reasons for not doing so may be) has a reason to jump.²³ This is why "jumping..." is normatively significant: Almost everyone will at least have *a* reason to do so. There are other facts which are normatively significant in a similar sense, such as the availability of food and shelter as conditions of staying alive.

But if this is right, then the difference between the pragmatics example and normative significance is not a principled one. Just as "leaving the party now as my only way to get home in time" provides a reason only on the condition that I have a reason to get home at a certain time, "jumping into the canal as the only way to save my life" provides a reason on the condition that I have reason to continue my life. What makes "jumping..." normatively significant is that it is a default assumption that the condition is satisfied: We will always assume that a person has reason to jump, unless there is firm evidence to the contrary. Another difference is that "jumping..." will appear relevant to anyone who thinks about the reasons pertinent to deciding what to do in the situation in question. "Jumping..." – unlike "it is almost midnight" – is significant without presupposing shared knowledge about any specific features of the situation. It does, however, presuppose common knowledge about human life and the role of reasons within it. The upshot of this is that normatively significant properties by themselves do not provide reasons. Like pragmatic considerations, they are at best derivative reasons or aspects or parts of a more complete reason.

Assume that I am wrong about this. Assume that normative significance cannot be understood on the analogy with stating some propositions as reasons when there is shared background knowledge of further reason-providing considerations. We are then left with the claim that certain properties provide reasons, where this cannot be explained by the *Conceptual Link*, since they do not provide reasons in all circumstances. But can

²² Bernard Williams, 1973: 85. Joseph Raz proposes a similar distinction without using the framework of internal reasons that Williams presupposes (2001: 106).

²³ Maybe this gets the psychology of wanting to commit suicide all wrong, because a person who does want to do so, may typically think that she has no reason whatsoever to continue with her life. But I hope to evade this objection in talking of reasons to commit suicide, rather than a desire to do so.

we explain when there is a reason to jump and when there is not without adverting to the evaluative properties that continuing one's life instantiates? I take this to be the challenge that a defender of the claim that non-evaluative properties provide reasons has to answer.

She may of course refuse to do so, insisting that certain facts just are reasons, and there is nothing more that can be said. But while explanations may come to an end, it seems quite unsatisfactory to stop at a point where we have properties that sometimes provide reasons and sometimes do not. It should be possible to explain why and when it is the one or the other. But if the buck-passer tries to do so, she may run into a regress.

She may claim that "jumping..." provides a reason only in appropriate circumstances. Hence, the circumstances determine what it is a reason for, and whether it is a reason for or against certain kinds of actions. But how do the circumstances do this?

- a) One possibility is the one that I proposed: The circumstances are relevant because they include certain evaluative properties.²⁴ E.g., the circumstances might include that the person has reason to continue with her life because it is well worth living.
- b) Another possibility is that the circumstances settle the case, not because they include evaluative properties, but rather further non-evaluative ones.

Obviously, in order to defend that non-evaluative properties provide reasons, one has to rely on (b) alone.²⁵ Let's assume that the non-evaluative features *F* and *G* are part of the circumstances which determine whether a person (call her Claudia) has a reason to jump. Let *F* be that her long-term relationship broke up, *G* that she lost her job on the very same day, and *P* (as before) that jumping into the canal is the only way to save her life. Does Claudia have a reason to jump? There seems no way to answer the question (yet). Might *P* in the presence of *F* and *G* *not* be a reason? Possibly. If so, there would be no reason to jump whenever *P*, *F* and *G*. But now imagine that Claudia's relationship was an abusive one, and that she was continuing her job despite the fact that the work was boring, repetitive and

²⁴ David Sussman suggested an alternative to me: It is not, or need not be, evaluative properties that settle the case, but rather (valid) practical principles. This opens a new avenue that I cannot explore here. It would require explaining what principles are and how they are different and independent from values.

²⁵ I am here relying on what I believe I have shown in the "pragmatics" section of the argument: that there is no deep distinction between reasons and certain features of the circumstances. Citing a non-evaluative property as a reason, but only if evaluative properties are part of the circumstances, as proof that non-evaluative properties do indeed provide reasons, is a way of cheating: We could just as well cite the evaluative property as the reason and regard the non-evaluative ones as part of the circumstances. And, in any case, the non-evaluative properties will only be derivative reasons which are made thus by the evaluative ones, as explained above.

badly paid, only because the relationship had been wearing her out to the point that she simply could not muster the effort of applying for a more rewarding job. In this case, while she may have contemplated not to jump in the absence of F and G , it seems that their presence ensures that she has a reason to jump. However, it is not the conjunction of P , F and G that settles the question whether Claudia has a reason to jump, but the further (evaluative) facts that her relationship was abusive and her work unrewarding. But if P in circumstances which contain F and G were a reason to jump, it would have to be the very same reason, whenever P is present in conjunction with F and G . In other words, it is necessarily the case that P (in those circumstances) is a reason to ϕ . It follows that P , if F and G , is not a reason. However, if present together with a more complex combination of features of the circumstances, P may be a reason. Yet, we would again have to appeal only to non-evaluative properties, and leave out that Claudia's relationship was abusive and her work unrewarding. But, in this case, the further circumstances are likely to do no better than F and G . They would once again fail to establish that P is a reason to ϕ , provided C_1 , C_2 , ... C_n obtain. I will spare the reader the exercise of going through the example over and over again to show this, and hope that she will grant me that it is easy enough to imagine that any combination of non-evaluative circumstances will fail the universality test. As mentioned above, the universality requirement, as I understand it, is an extremely modest one that even a particularist can accept: namely that a property P which provides a reason in a given set of circumstances C must provide the very same reason, whenever P is present in C .

The problem is not an epistemological one. It is not how we *know* whether a certain feature counts in favor of or against an action in a given situation. This problem can be solved if we are justified in assuming that some specification of the circumstances is complete, in the sense that nothing else matters. While such an assumption is fallible, it may still be warranted, and therefore a person who believes that she has a reason to ϕ because she considered all the relevant aspects of her situation would be justified in her belief (which may well be true).

But the problem with the metaphysical picture itself remains. To avoid confusion, my claim is not that P cannot be a reason in C , just because it would not be a reason in *other* circumstances, nor that the circumstances would have to be understood as parts of the reason. The claim is that, if P is a reason to ϕ in C , it is always a reason to ϕ in C . But for any set of non-evaluative circumstances C and any non-evaluative property P , it seems to depend on further circumstances whether or not P is a reason. Thus, there is inductive evidence that no normatively significant property P in a given set of non-evaluative features of the circumstances will constitute a reason for action. The root of the problem is that any non-evaluative con-

sideration can be cancelled as a reason. Note that the point is not that the reason to jump (say) must not be defeated by other reasons, but that there are no canceling conditions present which prevent “jumping...” from being a reason to jump in the first place – after all, it may also be a reason against jumping or no reason at all.

This problem does not arise for evaluative properties. If an action is actually cruel (say) then there are no canceling conditions of there being a reason against it. If there is a canceling condition, e.g., if a cruel-looking action is in fact a necessary measure carried out in a somewhat rough way, the right conclusion to draw is not that cruelty does not provide a reason in this case, but that the action was not cruel. If an action is cruel, its cruelty is always a reason against it.

However, the inductive argument would be refuted if there were non-evaluative properties that necessarily provide the same reason whenever they are instantiated. After all, the assumption that they do not rests only on observations about particular examples. But there is at least one property which may not be of this kind, and could therefore provide a counterexample: being in pain. “Being in pain” – some claim – is as a non-evaluative property. Yet, it provides a reason against any action which involves it. Or does it? Trying to understand what pain is is notoriously riddled with perplexities. On some understanding of it there will be no necessary connection with reasons at all, as when one regards it as a functional state which explains certain kinds of avoidance behavior.²⁶ The requisite kind of behavior will hardly in all cases be a response to a reason. But even if it were, pain understood as a functional state could not *be* the reason.²⁷ After all, the functional state is just the disposition that underlies the behavior. It seems plausible, however, that pain is not a functional state in this sense, but an essentially phenomenological, experiential property. Unless a person experiences pain, she is not in pain (but obviously, functional states need not be phenomenological ones²⁸). If so, there may be a necessary connection of pain as an experiential state with reasons, which is explained by the kind of experience it is. In this paper, I cannot even begin to argue for any particular account of pain. I just want to illustrate how, on an experiential understanding of pain, it may be plausible to think that of it as necessarily reason-giving. (If it is not, pain is not a counterexample to my argument anyway.) But we need a richer description of the relevant experience to make the case. I believe that the claim is persuasive if we focus on enduring, severe pain. I am going to argue that pain of this kind is necessarily reason providing (leaving it open whether pain in general is). Pain (of the relevant kind) seems (in part) to be an experience of losing control: A person in severe pain may be unable to control her behavior, as

²⁶ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

²⁷ I argue for this in greater detail in Heuer 2004.

²⁸ For an argument for this claim, see M. Smith, 1994: 104-111.

well as the direction of her thoughts, and may be aware of changes in her moods and character. If the experience of severe pain were *inter alia* an experience of losing control in these ways, then it would seem plausible that there is *ipso facto* a reason to avoid it: It is the experience of ceasing to be an autonomous agent. Exploring what pain actually is leads way beyond the ambit of this article. However, at least on one plausible understanding of it, pain (or pain of a certain kind) always provides a reason to avoid it, which is explained by the experience it consists in.

Is pain, in this sense, a counterexample to my claim? I am inclined to reply that pain (of the relevant kind) *is* an evaluative property, because it is subject to the *Conceptual Link* thesis: Understanding what pain (of the relevant kind) is requires understanding that the property referred to provides reasons to avoid or prevent it. But if pain is for this reason an evaluative property, we have to interpret the *Conceptual Link* as not only a necessary, but also as a sufficient condition for determining evaluative properties: Not only is it necessary that understanding a concept which refers to an evaluative property requires understanding reasons, but if understanding a concept requires understanding reasons, the property it refers to is an evaluative one.

It seems to me that this may well be a good way of explaining the concept of an evaluative property, provided of course that we understand the relevant reasons as non-derivative reasons. It would, for instance, provide an answer to Rabinowicz's and Rønnow-Rasmussen's worry about "wrong reasons":²⁹ The worry arises because the buck-passer seems to be committed to regarding anything that has properties which provide reasons as valuable. But that seems plainly false. That certain properties are evaluative (and that something that has those properties is valuable in that regard) if and only if it is a conceptual truth that they provide non-derivative reasons for actions is not, in the same way, open to counterexamples (I think).

4. Values explain reasons

Is there much of a difference between accepting buck-passing and rejecting it then? After all, the buck-passing account, in its original version, is that something is of value if it has a property (other than being of value) that provides reasons. My claim is that something is of value if it is part of the conceptual understanding of a property that it instantiates that this property provides non-derivative reasons. This sounds like a qualification, rather than a rejection.

As far as the logical relations between "being a reason" and "being of value" are concerned this may well be right. The difference between buck-passing and the view I envisage lies elsewhere. Both my proposal and the

²⁹ Rabinowicz / Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004.

buck-passing view have it that reasons and values are closely related. As quoted above, Scanlon acknowledges that we cannot understand values without understanding the reasons they provide. So far, I discussed this claim as if it were about a necessary co-extension (as of course in part it is). But we may ask, why are reasons and values so related? As opposed to the buck-passer, I believe that values explain reasons in the following sense: It is only an aspect of an evaluative property, such as being pleasant (say), that it provides reasons. There are other aspects to it, some of them phenomenological, or perhaps dispositional. It is those aspects of the property that explain why they are reason-giving. It is because of what pain or cruelty are (or are experienced as, in the case of experiential properties) that we have reason to avoid them. But according to the buck-passing view, nothing explains reasons. There being a reason is simply the same property as being of value. Thus, on the buck-passing view, facts about reasons end up being “brute” in a certain sense. There is nothing further to be said about why we have them. As opposed to this, it seems to me that being a reason is only an aspect of being of value, and it is in virtue of the other aspects of the property that there is a reason.

The argument of this section provides an indirect refutation of buck-passing: At least two of its versions rely on the claim that non-normative properties provide reasons for actions. If this is false, so are BP-1 and BP-2. But the argument does not attack the generic idea of buck-passing that goodness or being of value does not explain reasons, but only other properties do. I will address buck-passing in this sense directly in the following section.

III. Passing the buck from goodness to other evaluative properties (BP-3)

The argument of the previous section counts against both versions of Scanlon’s buck-passing account, the original and the modified one. If non-evaluative (non-normative) properties do not provide reasons for actions, the original account is false, and the broad view that the modified account suggests is misleading. While the disjunction in BP-2 could of course be true even if there are no non-normative properties that provide reasons, the claim reduces in effect to BP-3. We may therefore consider as a third version of the buck-passing account that reasons are generally provided by specific evaluative properties –but, again, goodness itself does not provide any reasons.

Let’s have a closer look at this further version of the buck-passing account. It brings to the fore a question – which the modified version al-

ready invited – namely: What is goodness, as opposed to specific evaluative properties?³⁰

When explaining why I spent my vacation at a particular resort, I could refer to my reasons in the most general way by simply stating that it has some good features. If pressed to explain further, I may proceed to specify its good (or pleasing) qualities, such as the mild weather and the beauty of the landscape, etc.

One usage of good then is the following: It refers to the most general evaluative property of which the more specific ones, like being pleasant, are instances. The proposed third version of the account would be the following (adapting Scanlon's original formulation):

To call something *good* is to say that it has other *evaluative* properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.

Can there be a buck-passing account for goodness as the most general property in this sense?³¹ In order to address this question, it will be useful to make the meaning of specification as a relationship between properties explicit. I suggest the following definition:

If E , F and G are variables for properties, then F specifies G iff

- 1) necessarily all F s are G s, but
- 2) possibly some G s are not F s, and
- 3) if a G is not an F , then necessarily there it is some E such that necessarily all E s are G s, but possibly some G s are not E s.³²

³⁰ Some people use the terms abstract / concrete here. The abstract / concrete contrast suggests that there is a difference in kind, whereas the general / specific contrast notes a difference in degree. A common way of using the contrasting pairs is the following: Abstract / concrete cuts across goodness and other evaluative properties, so that goodness and pleasantness are abstract properties, whereas the resort's goodness and its pleasantness are concrete instantiations of those. If so, the abstract / concrete distinction is unsuited to describe the relation of goodness to other evaluative properties. The general / specific distinction, however, captures it quite well.

³¹ Frances Kamm suggested the following rejection of this form of buck-passing to me: A person can sometimes choose things simply in virtue of their goodness, without being aware of what it consists in. ("Can you get me a present for my neighbor?" – "Yes, what do you want?" – "I don't care, as long as it is a good one.") This seems to show that goodness itself is a reason for choosing (or can plausibly be invoked as such a reason). The buck-passer is committed to the view that it is always *other properties* which provide the reason. While not denying that there are such other properties which explain goodness in every case, the person in the example believes that she has correctly identified a reason without being aware of those properties. The buck-passer cannot allow for this possibility. I am somewhat unsure about this rejection of buck-passing, and since I believe that there is a different one, I will not rely on it.

³² This definition echoes the conditions for determination suggested by Stephen Yablo in his "Mental Causation," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (1992), 245-280, except that he does not have the third condition.

Having a specifying property F is a way of being G . For example, being cruel specifies being bad. That is, the things that are cruel are necessarily bad, whereas it is possible to be bad without being cruel – but not without having *some* more specific property. If an action has the specifiable property of being bad, it must be bad in a certain respect. It need not be cruel, but if not cruel it must be bad in some other way (say, humiliating).

If this is the right way to understand specification of general properties, it follows that the properties which specify goodness have to be evaluative ones all the way down, since everything that is a specification of goodness is necessarily good, but in a specific way.³³

There are, of course, explanations of the fact that something has an evaluative property which are not specifications. There may for instance be explanations of being pleasant that do not attempt to determine the way in which something has to be good in order to be pleasant, but rather explain it by referring to the underlying properties that pleasantness supervenes on. These properties would presumably be non-evaluative ones. Specification is the mode of explanation that preserves the evaluative and reason-giving character of the fact being explained.

Does the explanation of specification enable us to answer the question whether goodness itself provides reasons? Or will it turn out to be the last, but successful contender for buck-passing? I will answer this question presently, but begin by discharging a debt that I incurred in section I.

³³ Scanlon may have a different contrast between goodness and other evaluative properties in mind than the one that I am going to investigate now. Perhaps there is a difference in kind between goodness as a “higher-order,” “purely formal” property and evaluative properties such as pleasantness. It has been suggested that Scanlon argues that there is no more content to saying of something that it is good or valuable than that it is on the positive side in practical deliberation or evaluation. It is for this reason that being good is treated as a formal property – i.e. as not substantive, and so not capable of giving reasons. With regard to goodness, the question whether or not there is a reason to act is not open, because it merely sums up the result of deliberation that there is such a reason. But if this were to be Scanlon’s point, there would seem to be various problems with it: (1) If there is anything to what I wrote in section II, the question whether there is a reason isn’t “open” with regard to other evaluative properties as well – that precisely is the *Conceptual Link* claim; (2) it doesn’t follow that evaluative properties which are subject to the *Conceptual Link* claim are not substantive; (3) the suggestion may be that the use of good as a “merely formal” property presents an overall judgment, as in “despite its shortcomings it was overall a good performance.” Goodness in this sense is a complex property but not, I believe, a “purely formal” one: the overall goodness consists in the presence of certain specific evaluative features, their relations to one another and, presumably, to other features which distract from the value of the thing. However, overall goodness is not a specifiable property as it is *not* entailed by any one specific property, such as pleasantness. It does not satisfy the first condition of specification. The question would then be whether the properties that are referred to in overall judgments are reason-giving. I am not going to address this question here (but intend to do so in a different paper). In this paper I understand goodness as the specifiable property of being good in a certain respect.

Above I postponed the question how Scanlon's arguments work out once we move on from the original to the modified account. Since I have argued in section II that the modified account is untenable, I will now answer the question with respect to the proposed third version of the buck-passing thesis, namely that we can pass the buck from goodness to other evaluative properties. The arguments give rise to three questions: (1) Is the first one sound?; (2) is the second one sound?; and (3) do they together entail the truth of buck-passing?

As you remember, the first argument, *the explanation argument*, claimed that the resort's goodness does not provide a further reason in addition to its pleasantness. If being good is a general evaluative property of the resort, and its pleasantness is one of the ways in which it is good, this should come as no surprise. That the resort is good or of value does not add anything to its being pleasant, because that it is pleasant implies that it is good (in a certain respect). It follows from the first condition of the definition above. Therefore, if interpreted as in BP-3, Scanlon's claim that being good does not provide a further reason in addition to being pleasant is true. We can give a sufficient explanation of practical reasons in terms of specific evaluative properties without invoking goodness itself – and doing so would not add anything. So the answer to the first question above is "yes," the argument is sound.

How about the second argument, *the argument from pluralism*? Its point was that there is a plurality of reason-giving properties. Goodness could therefore not be the only reason. If goodness is a general way of referring to various evaluative properties, the claim is correct. After all, the *Conceptual Link* discussion showed that specific evaluative properties necessarily provide reasons. Thus, the answer to the second question too is "yes", the argument is sound.

Thus the observations that fuel Scanlon's arguments are correct: Being good provides neither a further reason, in addition to more specific evaluative properties, nor is it the only reason. But does this underwrite a buck-passing account, i.e., does it amount to showing that being good is not a reason at all? The answer to this third question will be "no": the two arguments do not entail buck-passing. Here is why:

The suggestion that there can be a buck-passing account in this sense relies on the assumption that a consideration that is neither a further reason, nor the only reason, is not a reason at all. But is this the right test to apply?

Take the following example: (1) My reason to go to Stoppard's "Jumpers" is that it will make for an entertaining evening. (2) More specifically, my reason is that the play promises to be funny and amusing. (3) Even more specifically, my reason is that the play is witty in its use of language, and sharp and clever in portraying a philosopher's vanities and weaknesses. Given (3), should we conclude that I do not have a reason to go to the

play because it would make for an entertaining evening, i.e., that (1) is not a description of my reason? After all, (1) is neither a further reason in addition to (3), nor is it the only reason, since there are (2) and (3) as well? If we conclude that (1), which seems a good and obvious reason, is not a reason after all, because it fails the further-or-only-reason test, the same will hold for (2). But most likely, it will also hold for (3), assuming that it is possible to come up with a further specification of the reason described in (3). Hence, this line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that none but the most specific description of a reason refers to any reason at all, assuming, as may well be false, that there is an end to specification. If, on the other hand, there is no end to specification, it will be impossible to determine any reason whatsoever. But this quite obviously flies in the face of our common understanding of reasons. Alternatively, we might abandon the further-or-only-reason test.³⁴ And since it was the only obstacle to accepting that goodness or being of value provide reasons, it seems to follow that goodness – as the most general evaluative property – provides a reason just as much as “entertaining” does in (1).³⁵ Thus, the final contender for buck-passing fails as well. Therefore, the buck-passing account of values ought to be rejected in all of its versions. It also follows that we should accept the *Conceptual Link* thesis in its unrestricted form in which it applies to all evaluative properties – specific and general ones alike.

Conclusion

Buck-passing accounts of value attempt to explain being of value or being good in terms of other reason-providing properties. I argued that there are at least three versions of the buck-passing account and that none of them succeeds. The first two versions, which explain being of value in terms of either non-normative properties or non-normative and evaluative properties which provide reasons, both need to defend the claim that non-normative properties do indeed provide reasons for actions. Discussing the possibility of non-normative, but normatively significant properties, I argued that doing so faces severe, and possibly insurmountable, difficulties. The third version of the buck-passing account which explains being of value – the most general evaluative property – in terms of more specific evaluative properties that are reason-providing, remained unpersuasive as well. Once we understand the relation between general and specific proper-

³⁴ Dancy (2000: 166f) seems to endorse this test, when he discusses buck-passing as concerned with the question whether an action's goodness provides a further reason for it.

³⁵ I adapted an argument of Stephen Yablo's (1992: 257ff.) about the causal relevance of determinables here. A remaining difference between “good” and “entertaining” is that the fact that something is good does not tell which reasons there are, but only that there are some. “Good” needs to be specified in order to understand which reasons there are. “Entertaining,” even without further specification, provides a reason to attend the performance (etc).

ties as a difference in degree, there is no space for a reduction of the one kind of properties to the other. In section II I sketched an alternative account of the relation between reasons and values, which is based on a thesis that I called the *Conceptual Link* and the claim that values are not just co-extensive with reasons, but explain them. I hope that my brief sketch will seem promising, and warrants further development – even if not in the context of this paper whose main aim is critical.³⁶

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