Buck-Passing about Goodness

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The 'buck-passing account' of goodness, as T. M. Scanlon dubbed it, is by now both familiar and much controverted. Saying that a thing is good, according to the buck-passer, is saying no more than that some unspecified facts constitute sufficient reason for some unspecified pro-act or attitude towards it. Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen have presented objections to this account with clarity and fair-mindedness, objections to which I shall respond in section 3.[1] But I begin with some stage-setting remarks about normativity and reasons in section 1, and then consider how to formulate the buck-passing account in section 2.

1. Buck-passing, normativity and reasons

The account appeals to those philosophers (I am one of them) who suspect that what makes normative discourse *normative* – in the broad sense of normative that contrasts with 'descriptive' – is precisely its conceptual reducibility to propositions about reasons. Since that is a quite general thesis it clearly propounds a pretty ambitious reductive programme; one can certainly defend buck-passing about goodness without subscribing to it. Nonetheless the buck-passing account would fit neatly into it, and would in turn gain some plausibility from whatever case can be made for the programme overall. So let's consider the shape of this more ambitious programme before turning to the specific case of 'good'.[2]

First, how should we characterize reasons, in the relevant normative sense? There are epistemic reasons for beliefs, practical reasons for actions, and evaluative reasons for feelings or affective states. The last of these

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[1]Scanlon, T. M. 1998, Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2004. See also Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2006.

[2] Note that the possibility of this reduction does not exclude the possibility of others: for example of reducing reason predicates to value predicates. It might be that you can reduce the normative concepts in more than one way.

Printed from: *Hommage à Wlodek. Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz.* Ed. T. Rønnow-Rasmussen, B. Petersson, J. Josefsson & D. Egonsson, 2007. www.fil.lu.se/hommageawlodek

three categories, and its separateness from the other two, is particularly important for buck-passing accounts of value, as we shall see. Each of these types of reason can be covered by three reason-predicates. (1) One can say that some particular facts are a specific reason, weaker or stronger, for a person at a time to ψ (where 'ψ' ranges over belief, actions, or feelings). (2) One can say that taking all these specific reasons into account there is more or less strong overall reason for a person at a time to ψ. And (3), one can say that some facts give a person at a time sufficient reason to ψ. Reasons are facts standing in the *reason relations* expressed by these predicates to agents and acts (taking 'act' in a broad sense that covers all actions and states with reason-sensitive intentional content).[3]

To help us think systematically about the reducibility thesis we might classify normative concepts in a fourfold way. First, there are the reason concepts just mentioned, or as one might also call them, the deliberative concepts – in that sense of deliberation in which to deliberate is to think about what reason, and how much reason, there is to feel, believe, do this or that.[4] Then the other three categories comprise deontic concepts, value concepts, and epistemic concepts, and the reducibility thesis says that these three can be reduced in various ways to the deliberative concepts. Judgements about duty, value, quality of evidence, soundness of argument, etc. all filter into the deliberative question – the question of what reason, and how much reason, there is to believe, feel or do.

The concept of a reason should not itself be regarded as deontic.[5] Deontic concepts proper involve the notions of duty, obligation, permission. True, there is a purely deliberative use of 'ought' and 'should' in which to say that you should or ought to ψ is just to say that there's uniquely sufficient reason for you to ψ. (There are similarly deliberative uses of 'right' and 'wrong') But these purely deliberative uses of 'ought' and 'should' aren't really deontic, inasmuch as the deontic notion of duty or

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[3] See Skorupski 2006, section 2. I don't think these three predicates are further reducible, but that won't matter in this paper. The concept required for the analysis of buck-passing is that of a sufficient reason.

[4] I agree with John Broome that not all practical reasoning is deliberative in this sense: there can be practical reasoning without deliberation.

[5] Pace Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2004, pp. 391 – 2, and *passi*m. So, too, the buck-passing thesis should be regarded as neutral between, for example, teleological and deontological ethics.

obligation is generally thought to involve some imperatival connotation of 'mustness'. Thus for example if I say that we ought to walk, and not waste our time hanging about for a bus, I'm not speaking deontically, because I'm not invoking that connotation of mustness; I'm not saying that we have a certain duty or obligation, or that we are bound by a rule that applies to our case.[6] To be sure, if, let us say, our objective is to get to the theatre on time, then I might say that we'll *have* to walk or that we *must* walk. But this hypothetical 'must' is not the non-hypothetical 'must' conveyed by deontic concepts.

An aspect of this non-hypothetical mustness is the feature David Brink calls 'inescapability.'[7] It necessitates irrespective of our objectives. Brink points out, following Philippa Foot, that obligations of etiquette are, in this sense, inescapable. They tell you how you must behave, irrespective of what you want. The same point holds in general for conventions determining what you must or must not do in a game, a club, on the road, etc., and for legal obligations. If you fall under the relevant convention, or belong in the relevant jurisdiction, the obligation applies to you irrespective of your objectives.

But then is this inescapable 'must' reducible to reasons? It may be legally obligatory to do something, but does that in and of itself give me any reason to do anything? Are 'legal reasons', or 'reasons of convention', just a species of *reasons*? The answer, arguably, is no. There may or may not be reason to attend to conventional obligations: that is a substantive question for practical deliberation. On the legal positivist view, the same applies to legal obligations. The same question can be raised about moral obligation; but here the debate is less clearcut. If there is a moral obligation to do something does it follow conceptually that there is reason to do it? That is subject to dispute (particularly if we emphasise the 'conceptually'). Let me point out however that even if the answer is no, it does not follow that the concept of moral obligation is irreducible to reasons. A view that has a long philosophical history connects moral obligation to blameworthiness: that is to the presence of evaluative reasons for responding with sentiments of blame. If the concept of moral obligation can be analysed in this way, that satisfies the reducibility thesis. And it also

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[6] Likewise, if I say, 'You shouldn't feel embarrassed', or 'You're quite right to be annoyed', I'm not talking about your duties.
[7] Brink, 1997, p. 255

explains the inescapability of moral obligation (assuming that your blameworthiness does not in general depend on your objectives). Finally, it is not obviously a *conceptual* truth that if there's reason to blame you for doing something, there's reason for you not to do it.[8]

Suppose we accept that there are kinds of obligation – conventional obligation, and perhaps legal obligation – that don't have any conceptual tie with either practical reasons or evaluative reasons. That leaves us with some terminological choices. We can exclude them from the realm of the deontic, we can say that not all deontic concepts are normative, or we can give up the characterization of normativity in terms of reasons. I take the first option. Deontic concepts, on my usage, are characterized by *both* normativity (reason-reducibility) *and* inescapability. That may restrict them to the realm of the moral, or more broadly, the aesthetic and ethical. In contrast, the legal positivist account of legal obligation is best seen as proposing a purely descriptive, non-normative and thus non-deontic, account of the the realm of positive law.

Whereas the sphere of deontic concepts is to be conceived narrowly for the purpose of the reducibility thesis, the sphere of value concepts should in an important sense be conceived broadly. It includes goodness and badness but also many value concepts that do not map clearly onto either. If, for example, I say that a documentary or a conversation was disturbing I may well be evaluating it, rather than just saying that it causes or is likely to cause disturbed feelings. But it's not obvious, in the absence of context, whether I'm praising it, criticizing it, or doing neither. I am simply saying that it gave reason to be disturbed about something. Whereas in a documentary that may be a good feature, a reason to admire the documentary, in a conversation it may not be. What makes an evaluative concept like 'disturbing' normative is not its connection with goodness or badness but just its conceptual connection with evaluative reasons.

Lastly, should we classify epistemic concepts as a fourth normative category, or should we distribute them among the value and deontic concepts? Epistemic deliberation certainly involves value-like and deontic-like vocabulary: good evidence, valuable evidence, what you are compelled

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[8] I do think it's a truth, and even in a sense an a priori truth. That may be more perspicuous if one considers the contrapositive: if there's no reason for you not to do it, there's no reason to blame you for doing it. See Skorupski, 1999, pp. 169 – 70.

to conclude, what you ought to admit, etc. Furthermore, what you ought to believe is both normative and inescapable – at least for those of us who are not pragmatists about epistemic reasons. (I shall come back to the point about pragmatism.) On the other hand, there are epistemic concepts which are normative but don't fit that dichotomy; consider the notions of evidence, aprioricity, warrant, probability (in a certain reading). And there is something artificial about applying the notions of value and obligation outside the sphere of feeling and action where they seem most naturally to belong.

2. Defining 'good'

But if we treat the epistemic and value spheres separately, we must recognize that the buck-passing account spans them. That is because that the term it defines, 'good', spans them. There can be good evidence, good arguments, and good reasons, as well as good policies, good performances, and so on.

An item may be good in virtue of any of the three kinds of reason – evaluative, practical or epistemic. The buck-passer aims to define 'good' completely generally, in terms of a class of acts, feelings, beliefs and actions, that we can call pro-acts, or acts of favouring. The thesis is then that '*y* is a good F' means 'there is sufficient reason to favour *y* as an F'. Of course *y* may be good as an F to varying degrees; this reflects the fact that the appropriate pro-act may itself have varying degrees. One can have more or less admiration for something, be more or less moved to belief by some evidence or arguments, etc. To say that *y* is good to such and such a degree is to say that there's sufficient reason to favour it to such and such a degree. Note that the degree qualifies the pro-act, not the reason – the reason is a *sufficient* reason, not itself a reason of degree. A good violin performance, say, is not just one that there's *some* reason to admire but one that *should*[9] be admired – to some degree. The goodness of the performance varies with the degree of appropriate admiration.

A. C. Ewing gave a well thought-out list of pro-acts – choice, desire, liking, pursuit, approval, admiration. However it is oriented solely to the

[9] This, to repeat, is the deliberative 'should'.

evaluative and practical domain.[10] Importantly, if our aim is to give a comprehensive account of 'good', which does not attend only to aesthetically and ethically salient cases, this list is still too narrow. What about good evidence, good arguments, good reasons? Good evidence for the proposition that *p* is consists of accessible facts of which there is *sufficient reason* to believe that they constitute a *specific reason* to believe that *p*. Likewise with a good argument for the conclusion that *p*.[11] So favouring some particular evidence or argument for a proposition is believing that it provides some degree of reason for believing the proposition. How good the evidence or argument is depends on the degree of reason for belief that it provides. Tentatively, then, we have the following list of pro-acts: admiring, respecting, desiring, choosing, believing to be likely on the basis of. The term 'favouring' should be understood as a disjunction of these. According to this tentative list the good is the admirable, or the respectable or respect-worthy, or the desirable, or the choice-worthy, or the credibility-conferring.[12]

With this account of acts of favouring to hand, let's turn to logical structure. Note that 'good' and 'bad' are attributive adjectives – if a thing is said to be good or bad it makes sense to ask what it's good or bad *as*.[13] A good performance is good as a performance, a good hammer is good as a hammer, a good plan is good as a plan, good evidence is good as evidence and so on. Moreover a thing can be good as an F and bad as a G. On a buck-passing account this attributive character is readily comprehensible. If I say that someone is a good athlete but a bad artist I mean, according to that account, that there is sufficient reason to admire them as an athlete and also sufficient reason to deplore them as an artist. The predicate qualified by 'good' or 'bad' will often indicate the appropriate standpoint of appraisal,

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[10] One can cavil with it even there. Is liking required as well as desire? And is approval meant to apply specifically to moral goodness? I can approve of your plans for improving the garden as well as of your character. To identify the specific attitude appropriate to *moral* goodness calls for more discussion then I have space for here; I will simply label it *respect*.

[11] The logician may use 'good argument' to refer to deductively valid arguments. If validity is understood in terms of necessary truth-preservation, the connection with reasons is indirect; via aprioricity rather than necessity.

[12] A good judge is a judge there is reason to trust: one whose verdicts are credibility-conferring.

[13]Geach, P. T. 1956.

but sometimes context will be required. Context may defeat initial appearances as to what standpoint of appraisal is in question; thus what looks like an epistemic standpoint may actually be evaluative – the argument may be good in that it's arresting, elegant, clever etc., or it may be practical – the argument is good in that it will win the contract and thus should be used, even though it's neither sound nor particularly clever.

The word 'good' also occurs in the constructions 'good for *x*', and 'the good of *x*'. How should we approach these? Saying that something is good for *x* seems to come down to saying that it conduces to the goodness of *x*, or the good of *x* (as an F). Mowing is good for a lawn in that it conduces to the goodness of the lawn *qua* lawn. Regular practice is good for violinists: it conduces to their goodness as violinists. Oiling is good for locks, in that it maintains their goodness as locks – which in this case is functional goodness, to which I'll come in a moment. In all these cases saying that *y* is good for *x* as an F is saying that *y* would effect a change in *x* which is such as to constitute sufficient reason for increased favouring of *x* as an F.

What about the good for, or the good of, persons? Some classically-influenced philosophers like the idea that the good for a person, or a person's good, is what conduces to the person's goodness as a person. I doubt whether this is what is normally meant by such phrases. 'Cod-liver is good for you' means it's good for your health: that is, it conduces to the goodness of your health. It's implicitly taken for granted that good health will conduce to your good. But it's not taken for granted that your good is your goodness *as a person*. That would make your good a matter of your virtuousness, which cod liver oil may or may not be good for. Maybe virtue is a part of or the whole of your good, but that is a substantive ethical question. So what do we mean by a person's good? At this point we enter difficult terrain. In general, I would argue, the good of a person comprises what there is sufficient (evaluative) reason for that person to desire, or what there would be such reason for them to desire if they were capable of sufficiently developed desires. Thus whether virtue is a part or the whole of your good depends on whether it is one of the things or the only thing, that there is such reason for you to desire.

That is cryptic, but suppose it's right.[14] In this case, then, the pro-act is desiring, and the reason for favouring is agent-relative. (In all the other examples we've considered so far the reasons in question have been agent-

[14] For more, see 'The Concept of a Person's Good', currently on my web site.

neutral.) Hence also the good in this case is also agent-relative: we talk of the good of, or for, *x*, and by that we mean whatever there is reason for that person, *x*, to desire. We also talk about the good of the country, the good of the club, etc. Perhaps that reduces to what there is reason for citizens of that country, or members of the club, to desire for their country or club.

A further special case to consider is that of functional uses of the word 'good'. Suppose we are considering how well an object would perform the function of Q-ing; for example how good a picnic-table this tree stump would make. What is the buck-passing account of this? An obvious suggestion is that the object's goodness as a Q-er turns on how much reason there is to choose it for Q-ing. But there may be no reason to choose it for Q-ing, even though it would make a very good Q-er, because there is no reason to Q. The question, rather, is whether if there's reason to Q then there's reason to choose the given object to Q. The goodness of y as a Q-er turns on the strength of reason to Q with y divided by the strength of reason to Q. Other things equal, the higher that number the better y is as a Q-er. And that presumably depends on the relative cost-effectiveness of Q-ing with *y*, rather than Q-ing in some other way. But note that cost-effectiveness is itself a normative notion. It is backed up by some theory of instrumentally rational choice, and there's more than one such theory on offer. That means that how good y is as a Q-er, relative to other options – for example how good this share is as an investment for one's old age – will depend one's theory of rational choice.

Finally we should note the various qualifications we can make in the way we talk about goodness. As well as asking what a thing is good *as*, we can ask in what *way* it is good *as* that. We can ask *how* good it is in some *respect*, and *how* good it is taking all relevant respects into account. I may say that the violin performance was good in respect of technical accomplishment but not so good in respect of musical sensitivity. I'm saying there's reason to admire *y as* a violin performance, in respect of its technical accomplishment, but less reason to admire it, *as* a violin performance, in respect of its musical sensitivity. These respects are criteria of goodness in a violin performance (they could be given marks, for example). So we admire *y* as an F, in respect of C: when we ask *how* good *y* is, we're asking how much it should be admired in some respect C, or how much it should be admired taking all relevant respects C into account.

There may be other matters to be considered, and the ones covered in the last few paragraphs could be delved into more deeply. But putting them together gives us the following definitions:

y is a good F (in certain respects C*, to degree d, at t) if and only if there is sufficient reason to favour y as an F (in those respects C, to degree d, as y is at t)*

The definition of 'good for x' will be

y is good for x (as an F), (in certain respects C*, to degree d, at t) if and only if y would maintain, promote, or enhance those features of x which make it a good F, or which partially constitute the good of x (as an F), (in those respects C, to degree d, as y is at t)*

The definition of the 'good of *x*' is

y constitutes the good of x (in certain respects C*, to degree d, at t) if and only if there's sufficient reason for x to desire y (in those respects C, to degree d, as y is at t)*.[15]

And the definition in the functional case, 'good Q-er' is

y is or would make a good Q-er (in certain respects C*, to degree d, at t) if and only if, if there's reason to arrange that something Qs (in those respects C, to degree d, at t), then there is a specific reason to choose y to Q (in those respects C, to degree d, at t)*

3. Objections

Two kinds of objection face the buck-passing account.[16] It may be objected in the first place that the equivalences spelt out above fail to hold. And secondly, even if the equivalences hold it may be objected that the definition gets things the wrong way round. This second kind of objection raises the question of explanatory order. If there's sufficient reason to favour *y* as an F, it says, that's *because y* is a good F. I *explain* why there's reason to favour *y* by pointing out that the reason is that it's a good F. If saying that it was good just *was* saying that there's sufficient reason to pro it, the objection runs, that wouldn't be an explanation.

'Evil demon' examples illustrate why the equivalence may be thought to fail. Suppose the violin performance is not good, but the evil demon will punish me with eternal torture if I fail to admire it. Is that not sufficient reason for me to admire it, even though it's not good? Similarly, suppose

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[15] or for the citizens, members, of *x* to desire *y* in virtue of being citizens, members.

[16] See Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2004. Also for example D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000 (especially section IV), Crisp, 2000, 2005.

that some purported evidence to the effect that *p* is not good evidence, but the evil demon will again punish me if I fail to believe that it probabilises the conclusion that *p*. Is that not sufficient reason for me to believe that it does probabilise that conclusion, even though it's not good evidence?

In replying to this objection we should distinguish between reasons to believe or feel on the one hand and reasons to bring it about that one believes or feels on the other. Thus although there is no sufficient reason for me to admire the performance, there certainly is sufficient reason for me to bring it about that I admire the performance, if I can. In other words, in this case there is reason for me to bring it about that I admire something which there is no reason for me to admire. Likewise: there is no sufficient reason for me to believe that this purported evidence to the effect that *p* probabilises that conclusion, but there certainly is sufficient reason for me to bring it about that I believe it does, if I can. Bringing about these things is undoubtedly choice-worthy, if it is possible. It is important to specify what exactly it is that is good. Neither the performance nor the evidence is good; but the policy of making oneself believe that they are good *is* good. And that is what the buck-passing definition delivers. What is good in these cases, according to the definition, is the *policy* of (trying to) do whatever I can to make myself admire the performance, or believe the evidence to be probabilising. But because we can distinguish between practical reasons on the one hand and epistemic and evaluative reasons on the other, it does not follow on the buck-passing analysis that the *performance* or the *evidence* itself is good.

Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen regard this kind of response as *ad hoc*.[17] It does not seem to me that it is. The distinction between epistemic, evaluative and practical reasons is independently based on what kind of act – belief, feeling or action – a given reason is a reason for. So the response is just an automatic consequence of identifying what exact reason relation we are discussing.[18] In the case of the violin performance, the fact that the evil demon has his evil plans is a sufficient reason for me to *do* something

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[17] Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2004, p. 412.

[18] I suspect, however, that one main reason why people reject the buck-passing story is that they don't believe there really are irreducible reasons for feeling, for affective responses. As a result, an irreducible category of ethical and aesthetic value plays, for them, the role in ethical and aesthetic cognition that irreducible propositions about evaluative reasons play for the buck-passer.

– namely, bring it about that I admire the performance, if I can. In the circumstances, that would be a very good thing to bring about. Over and above that uncontroversial point,[19] there is then the question of whether an evaluative reason relation *also* holds. Does the self-same fact about the evil demon stand in that *distinct* reason relation to me and a certain feeling of mine, namely, *admiring the performance*? The two relations are distinct, since their *relata* are distinct. And once they have been distinguished, a case needs to be made for holding that the second relation holds as well as the first.

Take the case of belief. Someone may agree that there is a difference between epistemic reasons to believe and practical reasons to make yourself believe, or bring it about that you believe – but still insist that facts about the usefulness of believing that *p* are not just a reason to make yourself believe that *p* but *also* a reason to believe that *p*. That is a substantive, and contentious, proposal in normative epistemology, which it is not *ad hoc* to reject. There seems to be nothing self-contradictory in saying that the utility of believing something – for example, that you will survive the dangerous mission – is a reason to *make* yourself believe it even though you have no reason to believe it. This point seems to me decisive against alleged pragmatic reasons to believe. But suppose that it is denied. The denier would have to have, it seem to me, an at least partly pragmatic theory of truth. A pragmatist about truth can hold that the usefulness of believing a proposition is a priori indicative of the truth of that proposition. For him, therefore, the usefulness of believing that *p* is unproblematically both a reason to believe that *p* and a reason to believe that it is true that *p*. If, in contrast, one denies that the usefulness of believing a proposition is a priori indicative of its truth, then how can this usefulness constitute, in and of itself, a reason to believe that *p*?

On closer consideration, however, we can sidestep this particular debate. Suppose we define evidence that *p* as consisting in any accessible facts that give one reason to believe that *p*. Then, on the pragmatist view, if I know that the demon will torture me unless I believe that he is God that *is* good evidence that he is God. Which leaves us with no objection to the buck-passing account of 'good evidence'. At this point the objector may seek to distinguish, among accessible facts that give one reason to believe that *p*, between those which are 'evidential' and those which are 'pragmatic'. To

[19] With which Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen agree.

me it is this distinction that seems *ad hoc*, compared to the distinction between reasons to believe and reasons to bring it about that one believes, which does equivalent work more naturally. In any case it does not undermine the buck-passing account of epistemic goodness, it just complicates it. Good reasons to believe that *p* will be reasons to believe that *p* which there is reason to favour as reasons to believe that *p*, while good evidence that p will be the special case of reasons to believe that *p* that (i) satisfy some restriction on what reasons to believe that *p* count as *evidence*, and that (ii) there is reason to favour as reasons to believe that *p.*

The same response applies to alleged pragmatic reasons for admiration. If someone holds that the usefulness of admiring *y* really *is* a reason to admire *y*, and not just a reason for bringing it about that one admires it, then he has an unusual proposal to make in the substantive theory of evaluative reasons. On what principled basis can he refrain from an equally unusual theory of aesthetic value? If I'm threatened with torture unless I admire the violin performance, then on this theory the performance now becomes distinctly valuable for me.

It may be replied that these responses beg the question, in that they presuppose the 'buck-passing' analysis of good evidence, good reason, good performance. They do presuppose it, but I don't think they beg the question. The onus of proof is on the objector. He needs to justify a difference between two kinds of epistemic or evaluative reasons, one value-based, the other not – and to show why we need it, given that all the relevant work can apparently be done by the unpuzzling distinction between epistemic or evaluative reasons on the one hand and practical reasons on the other.[20]

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[20] Wlodek Rabinowicz has put the following more complicated case to me: suppose the evil demon will punish you not only if you fail to admire the (worthless) violin performance, but also if you in any way bring this admiration about or, indeed, even if you want to have this attitude. You will avoid punishment if and only if you admire the performance without in any way bringing it about that you admire it, making yourself admire it, or even wanting to admire it.

Is this a case in which there is reason for you to admire the performance but no reason for you to admire it, or even to want to admire it? It seems to me, first, that it is not a case in which there's reason for you to admire, since (on my view) such reasons depend on the qualities of the object. Whether there's reason for you to *do* anything depends on further discussion of whether there can be reason to do something that cannot be done (make oneself admire the performance

Let us turn to the second objection. Does our definition get things the wrong way round? I can *explain* why there's reason to favour something by pointing out that it's good. I don't *explain* why it's good by pointing out that there's reason to favour it.

Although a 'wrong way round' point of this kind is often a sound objection against a proposed definition based on an equivalence, in this case I do not think it is. Note first that there may be reason to favour a thing in one way because there's reason to favour it in some other way. Thus the reason to *choose* this CD performance may be that it's the best performance – the one there's most reason to admire. However we might have reasons to choose this particular CD for reasons other than the quality of the performance: because it's cheap for example. If we're working to a tight budget the cheapest CD performance may be the best choice, even though the performance is not the best. So it has genuine explanatory force to say that there's reason to choose the CD because it's contains the best performance.[21]

In contrast, to say only

(1) There's reason to favour the performance most because it is the best performance.

has little explanatory force. It doesn't sound positively vacuous, as does saying

(2) It's the best performance because it's the one there's reason to favour most.

But I think this asymmetry arises because there can be reasons to favour a performance *other* than the fact that it is the best performance. Remember that 'favouring' covers a list of pro-acts. Hence there might be reason to favour a perfomance other than the fact that it's best *as a performance*. It might be best as a way of keeping the pigeons away, for example. So (1) does tell us something substantive, by eliminating possible

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without making oneself admire it). If one answers in the negative, then the buck-passing account will have to be formulated in terms of what there would be reason to do if it were possible to do it. For example to say that there *is* a good picnic table in some inaccessible place is to say that there *would* be reason to use it for picnicking if it were possible to do so.

[21] You might have reason to choose a CD which has a bad performance just to illustrate in your consumer survey what poor value there is on the market. In this case the bad performance is a good choice.

reasons for favouring the performance other than its quality as a performance. In contrast (2) seems to be at best a way of conveying the meaning of ‘best’.

Further, how do we explain why something is a good F? We do so by pointing out the facts about it that make it good as an F. Those are the very facts that give one reason to favour it as an F. In that sense we do explain why it's a good F by stating the reasons for favouring it as an F. While we don’t of course explain why a thing is good by simply saying *that* there are reasons to favour it, we do explain by saying what those reasons are. More generally, it is a virtue of the buck-passing view that it eliminates the middleman. Consider the following three claims:

(3) This pastime is pleasant.

(4) This is a good pastime.

(5) There’s reason to favour this pastime.

On the non-reductive view, (5) holds in virtue of (4) and (4) holds in virtue of (3). Between the pleasantness of the pastime and its goodness there is a supervenience relation, and between its goodness and favouring it there’s another relation: the reason relation. Thus we must add a further non-definitional step to (3) and (4):

The fact that this is a good pastime is a reason to favour this pastime.

And from that we get (5) by existential generalization:

(5) $(\exists x)$(x is a reason to favour this pastime).

On the buck-passing view, in contrast, it’s the pleasantness of the pastime that is the reason to favour it:

(6) The fact that this is a pleasant pastime is a reason to favour this pastime.

Hence, straightforwardly by existential generalization:

(5) $(\exists x)$(x is a reason to favour this pastime).

For the buck-passer (4) and (5) are synonymous: so they are equally deducible from (6) by existential generalization. Whereas on the non-reductive view the ‘supervenience’ relation between pleasantness and goodness is distinct from the reason relation between goodness and favouring, on the buck-passing view the supervenience relation simply reduces to the reason relation.

Obviously that still leaves us with questions about the epistemology and ontology of the reason relation itself. On the view that normativity is a matter of reasons, these *are* the basic questions in the meta-theory of normativity. But at least we no longer have to ask those epistemological and ontological questions about another supposed relation, that of

supervenience.

My conclusion is that if one clearly distinguishes and acknowledges the three basic kinds of reasons – epistemic, practical and evaluative – and looks in detail at the structure of normative explanations, or justifications, what emerges is a perfectly sound case for the buck-passing view.

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