Reasons and Value – In Defence of the Buck-Passing Account

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I will defend the so-called "buck-passing" theory of value. According to this theory, claims about the value of an object refer to the reason-providing properties of the object. The concept of value can thus be analyzed in terms of reasons and the properties of objects that provide them for us. Reasons in this context are considerations that count in favour of certain attitudes towards the object. There are four other possibilities of how the connection between reasons and value might be formulated. For example, we can claim that value is a property that provides us with reasons to choose an option that has this property. I argue that none of these four other options can ultimately be defended, and therefore the buck-passing account is the one we ought to accept as the correct one. The case for the buck-passing account becomes even stronger, when we examine the weak points of the most pressing criticism against this account thus far.

KEY WORDS: practical rationality, reasons, value, buck-passing account, normative concepts, theory of action.

> "I cannot discover in the things which may be considered to be good in themselves any simple quality of goodness in addition to their non-ethical qualities and the property of being right for an appropriate agent to pursue or to produce." (Frankena 1942, 108.)

1. Introduction

It is not uncommon amongst certain philosophers to claim that moral concepts form an interrelated network, in which the meaning of each concept is determined by its relations to the

rest of the network.[1] Within such a conceptual network there seems to exist two families of concepts that differ *in kind* (Dancy 2000, 163). First, there is a group of evaluative concepts such as "good", "bad", "value", "disvalue", "worth", "excellence", and so on. The concepts in the second group are often called *deontic* or even simply normative concepts. This group includes concepts such as "right", "wrong", "ought", "obligation", "requirements", "duty", and "reasons".[2]

Even the concepts from these two distinct groups seem interrelated. It seems clear that at least some good, perhaps just that of preventing a greater evil, must be done by right actions. The objective of this inquiry is to ask what kind of connection precisely lies between these two categories of concepts. According to John Rawls: "[T]he two main concepts of ethics are those of the right and those of the good …The structure of ethical theory is, then, largely defined by how it defines and connects these two basic notions (Rawls 1971, 24)." If this is true, one might assume that close attention would have been paid to this connection between the deontic and the evaluative. This, in fact, was the case during the late 1800s and early 1900s, when philosophers such as Sidwick, Moore, Ross, Ewing and Frankena commented on the nature of this connection between these concepts.[3]

In the late 20th century however the locus of interest shifted to the question of how any moral concept could be related to descriptive concepts. It was here that the most interesting difference between different kinds of concepts was found. Such descriptive concepts were relatively easy to account for; these were the concepts that had natural properties as their counterparts in the world, the kind of properties that sciences studies. In relation to this picture, moral concepts seemed puzzling. For one, these concepts appear to refer to properties that are inherently action-guiding. These kinds of properties hardly fit in the modern scientific world-view and its restricted ontology, in which only such properties and objects are assumed to exist that are absolutely required for

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[1] For naturalist network analysis of moral concepts, see Jackson 1992, Jackson & Pettit 1995, Jackson 1998, Ch. 6, Smith 1994, 35–59.

[2] All the examples from these two families of concepts are concepts, which Williams called "thin" concepts, and they are the main interest of this inquiry (Williams 1985, 129).

[3] For Sidwick, the basic ethical concept was "ought" or "right" (Sidwick 1907, 25, 105, 111). Moore denied this, and claimed that "good" or "intrinsic value" was the basic notion, and "oughts" and "right" only derivative (Moore 1903, §17, §89). Ross argued against Moore and said that "right" and "good" are fully independent notions (Ross 1930, 8–11). Ewing and Frankena seem to, in some ways, return to Sidwick's claim that either "ought" or "right" is the basic concept, which can be used to account for "good" (Ewing 1947, 148 – 149, Frankena 1942). For a detailed overview of the historical development, see Dancy 2000.

explaining the phenomena we observe in the world. This problem, which Frank Jackson called the "location problem," started a lively debate between realists, naturalists, error-theorists, and expressivists (Jackson 1998, 1–5).[4] Participants in this debate have only rarely analyzed the connections between the various ethical concepts involved, but instead have taken some to be basic ones and just assumed that others could somehow be understood in terms of those concepts. My strategy is the opposite. I will concentrate on the interrelations that exist between the ethical concepts and try to remain neutral in the question of their connections to natural properties. I will speak of moral properties in a non-committal sense, allowing realists and expressivists to read this issue in their own ways.

I will take the concept of "value" to be the integral evaluative concept. I assume that one might just as well use "good", or any one of the others. If one prefers "the good", it would make the translation easy; objects and properties are good if and only if they are valuable i.e. have the property of value. From the normative concepts, I choose "reasons" as the operative concept, and understand "right", "ought" and "duty" to be concepts that in some way are analyzable in terms of reasons[5]. For example, a right act is generally one that is sufficiently supported by reasons. In this framework, reasons are considerations that "count in favour of" an option – but this should not be understood as a strict definition, as it might prove uninformative for those who do not immediately grasp what reasons are (Scanlon 1998, 17). The question I am hoping to answer might then be formulated like this: What exactly is the connection between value and reasons?

There has been a renewal of interest in recent years regarding this question. One focus of interest has been the so-called "buck-passing account". It is a view that T.M. Scanlon argued for in *What We Owe to Each Other* (Scanlon 1998, ch. 2). This account has its historical precedents as well as modern alternatives.[6] The overall interest in this account springs from two sources. First, it is

[4] Roughly put, realists often claim that although natural sciences do not detect action-guiding properties, they exist "humanly speaking". Naturalists maintain that moral properties are in fact natural properties and the moral concepts refer to those, while error-theorists hold that assertions made with moral concepts are systematically false, because they are assertions about properties that do not exist. Expressivists claim that the linguistic function of moral concepts is to express the attitudes of the person using them.

[5] Jonathan Dancy discusses this issue in detail in his *Ethics Without Principles* (Dancy 2004).

[6] As historic precursors the names of Brentano and Ewing are often mentioned (Brentano 1969, 18, Ewing 1947, 152, Ewing 1959, 81–122). Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Ronnow-Rasmussen review the modern literature, where somewhat similar accounts are defended, in Rabinowicz & Ronnow-Rasmussen 2003, 210–211. They list John Rawls (Rawls 1971, 399), John McDowell (1985, 118), Roderick Chisholm (1986, 52), W.D. Falk (1986, 117f), David Wiggins (1987, 206), Allan Gibbard (1990, 51, 1998, 241), and Elisabeth Anderson (1993, ch. 1) as those who have

interesting as a part of Scanlon's general contractualist theory of morality. Second, Scanlon constructs his theory of value in an illuminating way, and systematically argues against other views.

In his review of Scanlon's account, Jonathan Dancy proposed a five-fold classification of how the connection between reasons and value could be understood (Dancy 2000, 162–167). According to the first alternative, when we discuss which of our options produces the most valuable outcome we are simultaneously talking about what we have reason to do, and conversely when we say that we have reason to do something what we mean by this is that this option would bring most value to the world – this follows merely from what the concepts of value and reasons mean (this is called the first Moorean account). The second alternative is that value is a property that provides us with reasons for different actions (the second Moorean account). The third option is that value and reasonhood are separate properties with no inferential interrelations whatsoever (the Rossian account). According to the fourth account value and reasonhood are distinct properties that are still co-extensive, because they are based on the same grounding properties (the Dancyan account). And finally, the last option is that value is a property we attribute to objects with reason-providing features (the Scanlonian buck-passing account). The differences between these accounts are drastic. The first two accounts understand the property of value as a basic explanation for our reasons, and hence also ultimately for our rational actions. The third and fourth accounts both take value and reasons to be independent from one another. The last view, Scanlon's buck-passing theory, takes the properties that provide reasons to be the basis that can be used to account for what it is to be of value. Dancy claims that Scanlon successfully argues against the first two options, but does not even recognise the other remaining ones. Because of this (and the independent reasons we have for doubting Scanlon's account) Scanlon's case is weak.

This is where I begin my inquiry. First, I will briefly examine the two Moorean accounts and discuss the strong arguments against these views. Then, I will set forth arguments against the Rossian and the Dancyan accounts. I will then demonstrate how the buck-passing account can circumvent the problems that plague the other accounts, and attempt to answer the most pressing criticism that has been levelled at the buck-passing view. My own main contribution to the debate

recently defended so-called FA-analysis (FA for "fitting-attitudes") of value, which after Scanlon's work has become to be called the buck-passing account. This would imply that Scanlon's theory is a FA-theory. I am sceptical that it is. Scanlon himself merely refers to Anderson and Gaus (Scanlon 1998, 383, n. 16, Anderson 1993, Gaus 1990).

lies in my critique of Dancy's account that has so-far remained univestigated, and in attempting to provide an answer for Dancy's criticism against the buck-passing view.

2. The First Moorean Account

Historically speaking, it is appropriate to begin this discussion from G.E. Moore's early view on the connection between reasons and value (Moore 1903). Here are two revealing quotes:

> "In short, to assert that a certain line of conduct is, at a given time, absolutely right or obligatory, is obviously to assert that more good or less evil will exist in the world, if it be adopted than if anything else be done instead (Moore 1903, §17)."

> "What I wish first to point out is that "right" does and can mean nothing but "cause of a good result… (ibid., §89)"

The picture we can draw from these quotes is simple. According to Moore's view here, there is only one basic and abstract property, value, which different states of worlds have to varying degrees. Reasons are then defined in terms of this property. Thus, claims in the form of "agent A has a reason to φ" can be analyzed as having the same meaning as the claim "by φ:ing, A will produce the state of world that contains the most value". This account is a teleological theory in the true meaning of the word. Rational action can only be directed towards the production of valuable states of affairs. As a consequence, all rational action becomes purely instrumental. Rational actions are means for making the world as valuable as possible.

In this purely formal state, this account is incomplete. If we merely state that we only have reason to do acts that produce most value to the world, this cannot yet inform us of what exactly we have reason to do.[7] What this account lacks is a conception of what we mean by the concept of value. Moore is famous for arguing that the concept of (intrinsic) value refers to an independent, non-natural property of value that exists in its own right (Moore 1903, ch. 1). Moore thought that this property could be detected with the "isolation test" (Moore 1903, §70, §112, Moore 1963 [1912],

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[7] See, for example, Pettit's version of consequentialism. "…[R]ightness is determined on the basis of promotion of … values; it says nothing on what the relevant values are (Pettit 1997, 132)." Shelly Kagan also claims that a formal feature of our concept of "good" is that it refers to a property, which makes outcomes such that there is always a reason to promote them irrespective of which standards are used in determining what outcomes have this property (Kagan 1989, 60, Scanlon 1998, 80, 382–383).

39). The property of value is attached to those objects we think *ought to exist for their own sake* even in the worlds in which nothing else existed. This controversial account of value is by no means the only alternative view of what is meant by value. Perhaps more plausible would be to claim that the objects and states of affairs that are *desirable* have the property of value. Then, one could go on to analyze desirability (and therefore also value) with the help of the idea of what a more rational version of oneself would want one to desire (Railton 1986, 171–184). The important point is that when we fix the property of value, we also fix reasons in as much as we have antecedently defined reasons through the notion of value.

This particular view in which there is a very strict analytic connection between reasons and value has seemed unconvincing from the start. If it was the correct view, then one consequence would be this: when we are thinking about the value of different objects, we would by necessity be simultaneously thinking about what we have reason to do at that very moment. Another consequence would be that when we thought about the things we had most reason to do at the time, we would necessarily be then thinking about which objects and states of affairs have most value. When commenting on *Principia Ethica*, Bertrand Russell already doubted this scenario (Russell 1994 [1910]). There are obvious counter-examples, such as the ones that concern past incidents. I may, for instance, think that it might have been of value for the First World War not to have taken place, but this would not have any bearing on the practical reasons I have. G.E. Moore himself accepted that his view of the connection between reasons and value was implausible for this very reason (Moore 1942, 558). Russell can be interpreted as claiming that Moore's definition of reasons in terms of value faces similar *open question argument*, which would face any attempt to define value in terms of naturalistic properties according to Moore (Dancy 2000, 159). In this version of the classic argument, whatever value-properties (for example, the property of "ought to exist for their own sake") we take to exist in some possible state of the world, it will always be meaningful to ask whether we really have *reason* to bring about such a state of the world (Darwall 2003, 483). The open feel of this question, then, provides us with strong reason to doubt whether our talk about the value of the future states of the world necessarily means same as our talk about reasons. I hope to demonstrate how another formulation of the analytic connection, Scanlon's buck-passing theory, avoids this problem that makes Moore's original view implausible.

3. The Second Moorean Account

In order to avoid this objection and still hang on to a similar teleological connection between value and reasons, one only needs to make a small adjustment to the aforementioned theory. In fact, this is exactly what Moore did (Moore 1963 [1912], 107–108, 140). Instead of insisting that reasonhood should be *analyzed* in terms of value, one might claim that value is a property that has the unique feature amongst all properties of being reason-providing. It is a property that makes possible states of affairs such that we have reason to attempt to make them actual. Here one would be claiming that being valuable, on the one hand, and being a reason for action, on the other, are separate properties – although having the former property is a necessary and sufficient condition for also having the latter. Instead of insisting on an analytic connection between value and reasons, we are now claiming that there is a synthetic, *a priori* connection between value and reasons (Regan 2003, 661). In other words, instead of making an identity claim, we are now making merely a claim of logical equivalence (Moore 1942, 559), a claim of necessary co-variance between the properties and the direction of explanation from value to reasons.

In this account, the pivotal issue is that it seems to lead to a maximizing view of practical rationality.[8] It seems self-evident that the states of affairs that have value in the sense discussed above are to be promoted by all capable agents. Value is the feature of options through which we seem to decide which possible relevant alternatives we have reason to choose. More precisely, the property of value is the reason we use to choose some option over another. In addition, the more certain state of affairs has value, the more reason we have to endeavour to ensure that those states of affairs come true.[9] This is the traditional "maximizing" picture of practical rationality that seems unavoidable (Scheffler 1985, 414–415). In Philip Pettit's words; "when other things are equal, there can be never reason to produce less of a value than more (Pettit 1997, 128)".

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[8] Quoting Timothy Chappell: "If there is just one good, the right strategy for practical rationality seems clear … it is the maximising strategy. Monism leads naturally to maximalism (Chappell 2003, 165–166)."

[9] As an anonymous referee pointed out to me, the issue becomes more complicated, when we cannot guarantee that our actions bring about certain particular consequences that are estimated to have value. We could plausibly argue that in those circumstances it is expected value, which is the property that is reason-providing for us. However, there are also other options. I do not want to take sides here – I only wish to concentrate on simple cases, where the consequences of the actions are clear for everyone.

This theory regarding the connection between value and reasons has been widely accepted in the philosophical community. One reason for this is that it seems intuitively plausible. If we believe that something is valuable, it seems rational to act in a way that would produce as much of that thing as possible. As a general thesis about reasons however, this account has its share of problems. If we attempt to use this schema to understand our relation to the most valuable things in our lives, it distorts those values in a way that living normal, every day human life becomes impossible. Consider one of most basic things that make our lives worth living: personal relationships, such as friendship (Scanlon 1998, 88–90). According to the present theory, we should account for our choices in relation to our friends in the following way. Those possible worlds, in which there are more friendship-like relationships, are more valuable than those where there are fewer. The property of value that these worlds have in common is a reason for me to promote their existence. Therefore, it would seem to follow that I have reasons to carry out acts that have friendship as their consequence. I would hence have reason to promote friendship amongst other people, and to be a friend to as many people as I can.

Yet, the maximisation strategy that we discussed above would seem to lead to a requirement for me to make the kind of wrong choices that would make it clear to others that I am not a person to be friends with. There are instances where, by betraying my old friends, I might make a greater number of new friends. According to the maximization strategy, this would be a means to attain a world that was more valuable, because there would seem, perhaps, to be more friendship. At least, in many instances I would have to calculate whether it is better to maintain long-standing friendships, or to constantly acquire new ones. Yet, if I do this, I have not grasped what the essential tenets of friendship are. I would veritably not know enough about friendship to be able to grasp the internal rewards of maintaining friendship, and when I lack such knowledge I do not appear to be a potential good friend to others and would possibly end up being left alone. The maximization strategy as it applies to friendship is therefore self-defeating; friendship cannot be appropriately valued by maximizing.

Of course, friendship is just one example on a value that seems unfit for the strategy of maximization. There seems to be numerous other values that would be similarly unsuitable as the subjects of maximization; examples such as the value of good wine, classical music and world peace

have similarly been discussed. In addition to these problems, this version of Moore's theory of reasons and value has other problems, one of which is connected to the idea of reasonable regret (Chappell 2003, 163–164). Imagine that you are facing important choice in your life; whether to join the army and go to war, or remain home and take care of your family. Whatever choice you make, it seems reasonable to expect that you will experience a genuine loss. This would not be the case if the only ground for your choice was an assessment of which choice brings about a more valuable state of affairs compared to the other. In that case, you choose more value – so why regret?

To avoid these problems, we might effectively claim that there are several, different value properties, and that these are not properties of states of affairs, but rather properties of continued processes – and that for some values, the appropriate relationship to them does not involve maximization so much as it entails honouring value over time (Arneson 2002, 316–320).[10] These additions seem to solve the previous problems. In a situation of choice situation, one may regret that when one made some state of affairs actual for the reason of some value property which that state had, one could not at the same time produce another state of affairs that would have been endowed with another value property. The regret becomes possible because as separate properties the first type of value cannot remedy suffering a loss in the second type. In addition, one may think that the value of friendship is a property that is different from, for example, the value of pleasure; the value of friendship is a property that certain lasting relationships have, and this value is to be honoured, as opposed to be maximized. This supersedes the need for calculation, which was not appropriate regarding friends. Yet, the value-based reasons in friendship relations are to be explained with the reason-giving features of the value of friendship.

It must be remarked upon that the requirement to honour or respect those values that are inappropriate for maximization does not provide us with a unified way to relate to all objects that have different value-properties. One does not honour the value of friendship in the same way as

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[10] The concept of honouring values was first introduced by Philip Pettit (Pettit 1991). Pettit, as a consequentialist, then argued that honouring values is never a correct response to them, because one should always attempt to promote the existence of states of affairs that have value. Later on, Pettit argued that these two ways of responding to values can be reduced to promoting two different kinds of values; neutral values and relative values. Requirements for honouring a value can then be accounted for by requirements for promoting a relative value (Pettit 1997, 124–129). Relative values are such that they are intrinsically linked to the identity of the agent for whom they are values for. Despite this, I will continue to use the terminology of honouring values, because it is simpler and because the relative values helps Mooreans to make exactly the same amendments that can avoid the problems the simple account had. Both of these accounts also share the same problems that I will discuss in the end of the section about the second Moorean account.

one honours the value of good wine. These are examples of different value-properties that each provide us with different kinds of reasons for different acts and attitudes, depending on what qualities the particular property of value has.[11]

Does this improved version of the second Moorean account offer a convincing theory regarding the connection between values and reasons? Apparently not. There are two objections any defender of this account would need to clear up. First, the reason-giving force of the different value-properties appears to be redundant, and, by the same token, the value properties seem also unneeded to explain the normative force that reasons have in our practical deliberation (Dancy 2000, 164, Scanlon 1998, 96, Scanlon 2002, 343). Imagine you have a bad toothache, so you head straight off to see a dentist. What is your reason for doing this? According to the account under consideration, your reason for doing this is provided by the value of healthy teeth, or the value of not being in pain, or the value of being able to chew properly. Yet, these considerations seem redundant. You go to see a dentist for the reason that you are in pain – your tooth aches: that is your pre-existing reason. A reference to any value-property does not seem to add anything necessary to this reason nor does explain it in any way.[12] This reason appears to be sufficiently motivating and justifying in-and-of-itself. Therefore, anyone wishing to develop this account would need to carefully explain just why the relevant background values are needed in order to explain the justifying and favouring forces of the actual reasons present in our deliberation.

The second objection against this view is that it still appears to be problematic as an account of deliberation within personal relationships (Pettit 1997, 94–97). The main problem: this account provides us with an overly external and derivative connection to those actual and particular people who are our friends. On this account, we are lucky to meet people, whoever they may be, to be friends with in order for us to be able to honour the value of friendship (even if this value is relative

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[11] Notice that the plurality of value-properties seems to introduce incommensurability to our practical reasoning (Chappell 2003, 166).Value ceases to be the standard, which overarches the different options by making them measurable in one, exact sense. In many cases, all our options can be supported by reasons, which are provided by different values. Do I have reason to go to the concert or to dine with friends? Well, by following the reason to go to the concert I could honour the value of music and by dining the value of friendships, but this still leaves me undecided. There is very little to maximize in the pluralist world of different values. By maximizing one value, we can do nothing but neglect others. This problem may be solvable with an account that makes the plurality of non-maximized values still commensurable in practical reflection.

[12] In fact, references to values as reason providing properties seem to require *more* explanations in this context. They are open to so called "so what" objections. "In other words, if we can judge that A is good without judging that we have any reason to care about A, our response to instances of good might rightly be "so what?" (Stratton-Lake & Hooker 2004)."

in Pettit's sense; a value-property of friendships for the person who is involved in the particular relationship [Pettit 1997, 124–129]). These people are just means to better and more valuable states of affairs or processes, means that might be substituted with other people. This is unacceptable. It is our friends as real people who must provide us with our reasons to sustain our friendship relations, and not some abstract value of friendship. We do what we do to our friends, because they are who they are. They are reason-providing just because of the way they are. Philip Pettit, a consequentialist, thus far agrees with all this, but he goes on to say that although people should be allowed to deliberate and act on such concrete reasons as other people and their properties, the justification for acting on these reasons must come from value-properties (Pettit 1997, 159–160). For me, even speaking of some abstract values that do not function as the source of reasons but only as justifiers of our actual reasons seems to land wide off the mark. What could be the role of such justification, if we cannot be required to deliberate about it when we think about our reasons? In addition, the idea that it is justified to act on the reasons a good friend provides only in the event that there is some abstract value property of friendship remains repulsive.

4. The Rossian Account

According to the two previous sections of this paper, we have good reason to believe that all accounts that take value to be the basic concept of practical rationality face serious problems in their attempts to account for the concept of reasons with an allegedly "more basic" concept of value. That said, why assume any connection between value and reasons in the first place? W.D. Ross had reasons to doubt that such a connection existed, because in his view these concepts were both grounded on different "base" properties (Dancy 2000, 164–165, Ross 1930, 8–11). There are no objects that could possibly have both the property of value and the property of reasonhood. Hence, no inferential connection can exist between value and reasons. The following is a rough sketch of Ross's view.

In his use of the concept "act", Ross strictly meant "the initiation of change" (Ross 1930, 7). Now, whether there is a reason to perform some act depends on which act-type the act belongs to. According to Ross, it is self-evident that we have (*prima facie*) reason to carry out certain types of acts, for example those that fulfil promises, produce just distributions of goods, or return services

rendered (ibid., 19–21). The reasonableness of these act-types was as self-evident as certain basic mathematical axioms, because "the moral order expressed in these propositions" was part "of the fundamental nature of universe" (ibid., 29–30). According to Ross's view, the source of the reason-providingness of these act-types is our various natural relationships to other people (ibid., 19). We are not connected to others merely as those who experience pleasure as a consequence of their actions, but also as friends, promisees, family-members and fellow citizens. Therefore, we have the numerous relevant reasons to act in ways that are constitutive of these relationships.

Even though there can be reasons for acts in this view, Ross states that acts cannot be bearers of the property of value. The reason for this is that Ross shared Moore's account of the property of intrinsic value, which can be detected through the use of the "isolation test" (Ross 1930, ch. 4). A world consisting of acts that are mere "initiations of change" ought to exist as much as an empty world. Therefore, acts are not suitable for having the property of value. On the other hand, Ross employs a wider concept of "action", which in this sense refers to carrying out an act through "a certain motive" (ibid., 7). This characterisation of action makes it fitting to bear the property of value. In a world where acts are carried out from certain motives, the types of motives have an effect on how the world comes to be. Certain states of affairs will actualise in the world as a consequence of these motives, and the value of these states of affairs can be assessed with the isolation test. Actions, because they contain the motives of acts, are instrumentally valuable when they produce valuable states of affairs.

To sum up Ross's theory: acts can be reasonable depending on whether they conform to self-evident principles, while actions can be valuable depending on whether their motives are such that they ought to exist. Yet, nothing can be both valuable and reasonable. Therefore, connections such as "there is a reason to φ because of the value of x" cannot be correct.[13]

We must first note how unintuitive this account is. In paraphrasing H.W.B. Joseph, we might ask: why would we have reason to do anything the doing of which has no value, and does not cause

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[13] I may have overstated the lack of connection between value and reason in Ross's account (see Dancy 2000, 164). Ross also believed that whenever an act produced value it belonged to an act type, the acts of which we had *prima facie* reason to carry out (Ross 1930, 21, duty type 4).

anything that has value to be.[14] If we have a reason to do something, then at least *something* ought to have value. Peter Railton offers an intuitive point along these lines:

> "It is essential to the concept of intrinsic goodness [that is value] that nothing can be of intrinsic value unless it has a necessary connection to the grounds of action [that is reasons].... [W]e simply could not make sense of a claim that something is someone's intrinsic good if that thing could not afford that person positive grounds for action (Railton 1989, 171)."

Such views hint at a close connection between reasonhood and value as properties. This inferential relation between evaluative and normative concepts appears to be inherent in our ethical language (Rosati 2003, 516–517). Because Ross's account cannot support this, we have good reason to believe that something in his account has gone awry.[15]

I will not dwell on the problematic features of Ross' theory, but will simply point out a few of the most difficult assumptions within it. First, the lack of connection may be due to the fact that Ross adopts Moore's problematic theory of intrinsic value. Is it really the case that the things of value are those that ought to exist by themselves? Many philosophers think that normative "oughts" can be meaningful only in relation to plausible norms that guide our judgments concerning the matter. Yet, there seems to be no relevant norms that can be used to assess propositions of the form "ought to exist by themselves" (Darwall 2003, 478). We may also doubt Ross's theory of reasons for acts. Are acts really supported by reasons because they belong to an act-type that is reason-giving in a self-evident manner? In addition, we may doubt Ross's distinction between acts and action, which provides him with his two distinct ground properties. If acts are required by certain reasons, don't these reasons by the same token require certain motives for which the acts are carried out (and therefore certain actions) (Gert 2003, 65)? These are sufficient considerations for us to

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[14] The original quotation is the following: "Why ought I do that, the doing which has no value (though my being moved to do it by the consciousness that I ought, has), and which being done causes nothing to be of which has value?" (Joseph 1931, 26).

[15] Philip Stratton-Lake and Brad Hooker point towards an even more unintuitive consequence of the Rossian view: "According to the view Dancy ascribed to Ross, we could never rightly judge that some property, F, gave us reason to care about F if we judged that this thing is good in virtue of F. If, for example, we judged that some resort is good because it is pleasant, this would rule out judging that its pleasentness gives us reason to go there (Stratton-Lake & Hooker 2004)."

reasonably be sceptical towards Ross's view. Our intuitions about the connection between value and reasons set a high standard for accounts that would seek to prove these intuitions unwarranted.

5. The Dancyan Account

Let us now examine the fourth possible account out of the five, which is perhaps favoured by Jonathan Dancy[16], who aligns himself with Ross in refuting value as a concept that can be used to account for the concept of reasons. Yet Dancy differs from Ross in that his account asserts that there are objects that have *both* the property of value and the property of being a reason – in other words, these objects have both evaluative and deontic properties (Dancy 2000, 164). In Dancy's account, these two properties are considered to be distinct. The necessary, intuitive co-extensiveness is then attempted to be explained by the fact that these distinct properties always share a common ground in the same objects.

One simple example would be a valuable novel. It is easy to see that we believe that such a novel has reason-providing properties, and that it is a reason to do things. While reading this novel, we may overlook other things that we otherwise would do for a good reason, because the novel has certain properties (it is exciting or informative) that give us more reason to read it than do something else. We may also think that the book provides us with reasons to tell our acquaintances about it, to buy a copy of it for a friend, or to write a review about it. We might additionally think of value as a property that some objects have, which manifests itself as providing a fitting target for our appreciative attitudes (Ewing 1947, 148–149). Hence, the case might be that the book is of value, because it is such that it is fit for being appreciated, i.e. for being valued.

I have two arguments against this account, of which even Dancy acknowledges the first (Dancy 2000, 165). According to this account, there is always a necessary, a priori co-extension between two properties.[17] These co-extensional properties are attached to one single set of base properties. Whenever we find an object we view as a fitting target for our appreciation, we already understand that this object will provide us with reasons, and vice versa. We never have to investigate or come

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[16] Dancy comes close to accepting it in the conclusions of "Should We Pass the Buck?" (Dancy 2000, 172–173) and returns to the idea in his new book *Ethics Without Principles* (Dancy 2004, 34).

[17] For honesty's sake, it must be highlighted that Dancy does not commit himself to such an a priori necessary connection. For him, it is additional (Dancy 2000, 164, 172). If he did not accept this inclusion, he would, of course, have to somehow circumvent the strong intuitions that we have of this connection.

to learn whether an object that has value really provides us with reasons. This a priori knowledge appears to be somewhat mysterious if the only thing that could be used to explain it would be the common ground that these properties share. Because Dancy sees the properties of value and being a reason as conceptually distinct, it is hard to see how having the property of value can explain why the same objects having this value-property might also of necessity hold the other property of being a reason.

Dancy accepts that there is something within this rubric to be explained, but does not think that it poses any serious threat to his view (Dancy 2000, 165, 173). This is a mistake as the following analogy shows. Consider Simon Blackburn's argument from supervenience for his "quasi-realism" (Blackburn 1984, 182–190).[18] Blackburn begins by making several common sense claims: moral properties *supervene* or are grounded on natural properties, this connection is a necessary one, and we know it *a priori*. Without having any empirical evidence, we nevertheless know that moral properties cannot vary regardless of a variation in natural properties – they can only change in the presence of a change in the ground properties.

Consequently, we have a case of two properties that are necessarily co-extensive, and our knowledge of this is a priori. This just is Blackburn's argument against true realists, who believe there are two distinct properties "out there" in the world, moral and natural. Blackburn claims that realists cannot explain the fact that this co-extensiveness is not something we must discover by ascertaining in each case whether objects with certain natural properties indeed have certain moral properties. From the lack of explanation for this fact, Blackburn concludes that there are truly no moral properties but only projections of our attitudes. Certain naturalists have concluded from this that moral concepts do not refer to *sui generis* moral properties, but can be analysed in terms of natural concepts that refer to natural properties (Jackson 1998, 118–128). And finally, some realists have taken up the task of trying to explain how distinct properties can be necessarily and a priori co-extensive (Shafer-Landau 2003, 89–98).

My point is to highlight the fact that the necessary co-extensiveness, which we know of a priori, of two distinct properties is in this case seen as a serious problem by *everyone* for those, who claim

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[18] In short, quasi-realism is a complicated form of modern expressivism.

that there are two distinct sets of properties – moral and natural. If this problem is universally recognized in relation to Blackburn's argument, it should, contrary to what Dancy says, be thought of as amounting to a serious argument against the account, which claims that value and reasonhood are distinct and yet co-extensive properties. We deserve a good explanation, and so far Dancy has not provided one. As long as we cannot explain this mystery, I do not see how Dancy would have provided us with a convincing alternative.

The second problem regarding the Dancyan account follows from this question: Within this framework of Dancy's account, how can we understand what valuing something actually consists of? Remember that according to Dancy's account an object has certain natural features that are the ground for both the property of value and the property of being a reason. The latter property "calls for" certain beliefs about what one has reason to do, and, if one is rational, one's intentions and acts will conform to these beliefs. Yet, what does the value-property exactly "call for"? One obvious answer would be an appreciative attitude – value calls for valuation. At this juncture, it seems that we can think of this attitude in three ways. First, we might want to say that when the object is of value, the natural features of the object are such that they deserve to be the content of simple attitudes, with a certain phenomenological feel. A serious problem for this claim is the phenomenological unfamiliarity of such a feeling. Do the different attitudes we have towards each of the objects we value have one unique feel to them, and just how does this attitude *feel*? The next option would be to claim that to value something is merely to believe that the given object has the property of value, and nothing else. The problem in this suggestion is that if valuing something meant this, then, if we believed that something was valuable, we could not fail to value the same object. However, that would seem to be possible, and therefore this suggestion is a non-starter.

The third alternative would be to accept that no single attitude is required for valuing something. Instead valuing something consists of having a set of various other, more basic attitudes towards the object. It is intuitive at this point to claim that some of these attitudes of which valuing something consists of are certain "standing intentions" to act in correct ways in relevant circumstances in which the object of valuation is present (Helm 2000, 5–8). Consider a friend who claims to value classic films. Yet, in every possibility she has to watch one, she chooses to switch the channel. We would be correct in claiming that this friend does not really value the classic films,

because she does not have the appropriate intentions to act. This suggests that something has gone wrong in our account. We already came to the conclusion that value cannot be a property that provides us with reasons that our intentions could track. It is the natural features of such films that give our friend reasons to choose accordingly, and now it seems that it is the reaction to reasons that is constitutive of valuing something, and not reacting to the property of value.

The trilemma subsequently faced by someone, who holds that value and reasonhood are distinct properties, is then formed by three bad choices this person would have for explaining what valuing something consists of. According to the first option, we ought to react to value with a simple attitude with a certain phenomenological feel.[19] According to the second, valuing something is to believe that this object has the property of value. The last option would be to claim that valuing something is being appropriately responsive to reasons the object provides, instead of reacting to any value-properties it has. The first two of these options were implausible as we saw. If one then accepts the last option and still maintains that being of value is a distinct property from the property of reasonhood, then one disconnects value from valuing – and this sounds absurd. The property of value is singled out as an evaluative property that just hangs in the air, calling for nothing, not even valuing. That would be a property hard to make sense of. Whichever option one chooses here, it is very hard to make sense of valuing in the framework of value and reasonhood being distinct and yet co-extensive properties sharing a common ground. This is the second good reason to abandon Dancy's suggestion.

6. The Scanlonian Account

As I mentioned earlier, there are five possible ways in which value and reasons are (or are not) connected (Dancy 2000, 164–165). So far, I have argued against four of these five accounts, and have claimed that these accounts are questionable. While it seems that we are unable to understand value as the source of our reasons (as the Mooreans would argue), it also seems implausible to argue that there are no logical connections at all between the concepts of value and reasons. If there are such connections, then it would be problematic to argue that there are two distinct,

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[19] This would make value a highly peripheral property, of no use in our practical reflection, and therefore of no importance in our lives. This is unintuitive; value is important for us.

independent properties. If Dancy's classification fills in the logical space of possible accounts, it seems we have good reason to turn our attention to the last possible account: Scanlon's buck-passing account. Even though this option now appears to be favoured through the exclusion of the other options, there remains an important criticism against this view to be examined.

Scanlon's buck-passing account seriously takes into consideration the idea introduced at the end of the previous section. According to this conception, valuing something consists of certain standing, positive attitudes towards the object of value, including intentions to act in appropriate ways in relation to the object. To value something is essentially to understand the reasons the object provides, and subsequently to carry out the reason-judgments these reasons warrant. This makes it unnecessary to assume that there are any independent value-properties in the objects themselves. Instead, we can effectively claim that value is a higher-order property that some objects have in virtue of also having reason-providing properties (Scanlon 1998, 97). More simply put, the buck-passing account asserts that claims about the value of an object ought to be understood as claims about the reasons the object can provide, and how good or strong these reasons are in comparison with the reasons other objects can provide. The more and stronger reasons an object can provide, the more value it has.

The first observation we must make here is that the buck-passing account appears to fit the aforementioned platitudes, which connect the evaluative and deontic concepts. If value is the property of having reason-providing features, it would tautological to claim that valuable things necessarily provide reasons. In addition, this view accounts for the fact that whenever we have reason to do something, at least something must be valuable. The mere fact that there are reasons present in a situation in itself confirms that there is indeed an object present that has reason-providing features – and this means that this object must have at least some value. Furthermore, this account does not leave us in need of an explanation in the same manner as the previous Dancyan account. There are not merely two co-varying properties. Instead there is one that varies *because* the other one does.

The buck-passing account also survives Russell's open question argument, the purpose of which was to demonstrate that when we are thinking about reasons, we are not necessarily thinking about value, and vice versa. In a concrete choice situation, I might wonder whether my academic career

provides me with more reasons to continue writing this paper than my friend provides me with by urging me to go for a cup of coffee instead. Nevertheless, when I am reflecting on this, I do not need to compare the overall value of my academic career with the overall value of our friendship. That is, I am not then thinking in what circumstances these things provide reasons for me in general, or how strong these reasons usually are. In addition, when I do assess the comparative value of my career and my friendships, I need not reflect upon what I have most reason to do at any given moment. This difference between reason-judgments and value-judgments can be used to answer any possible open-question arguments against the buck-passing account.[20] The open feel of the question "Is something that contains properties that provide reasons to care about it good?" seems to speak against the buck-passing account. However, reason-judgments – even judgments about reasons for caring about an object – are local in character. They are judgments about whatever attitudes I have reason to hold within my specific circumstances. Value judgments, on the other hand, are more general judgments about all of the situations in which the features of an object provide reasons, and how numerous and strong these reasons are. Therefore, even after a whole number of reason-judgments for various attitudes and intentions have been made, the questions about the value of an object can still have an open feeling.

This account also avoids the problem of inappropriate maximization concerning the central personal relationships in our lives. We may start by examining our ideas regarding the possible reasons a certain object (a particular friend, for example) provides us with. If these are not reasons for bringing about as many of these objects as possible, and yet are strong enough reasons to act in certain ways, the object can indeed be valuable, yet not one that is valued by maximization. The buck-passing account is a pluralist theory of value in a deep sense; not only can different kinds of objects, qualities, states of affairs, persons, and acts be valuable – the way of valuing each valuable object is also different, depending on the particular reasons the object provides. In valuing things, it is of utmost importance to understand just *how* they are to be valued, and most often, like in the case of friendships, it is not by maximization (Scanlon 1998, 100).

It is also clear that this account does not alter the nature of our important relationships in a bad way. We must keep in mind that it is the specific objects or facts that are reason-providing and not

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[20] As formulated by Stratton-Lake and Hooker (Stratton-Lake & Hooker 2004).

mere value properties. In personal relationships, it is the people who are our friends and family-members who provide reasons for us. The truth of such claims as whether friendship or family life are valuable significantly depends on whether those reasons the particular persons provide are good enough reasons for each us to act the way we do in relation to people, who can be described as our friends and family-members. The strength of the reasons that different persons have in similar relationships can then be directly used in the buck-passing account to explain why things such as friendship are valuable.

The buck-passing account hence seems to be able to survive all of the problems that challenged the other accounts. Yet, at this point, it is time to turn to the most pressing objection that has been made specifically against the buck-passing account in literature thus far.[21] This is the problem of invaluable reason-providers, and non-reason-providing valuables. Contrary to the implications of the buck-passing account, there are real cases, in which reasonhood and value appear to come apart in an intuitive way (Dancy 2000, 168–169). These cases can be split into two groups: false negatives and false positives.

First, there is a class of typically trivial acts we have reasons to carry out despite the fact that we are unwilling to attribute any value to the objects providing the reasons for these acts. Jonathan Dancy imagines a case in which he promises his children that he will tie his right shoelaces before his left shoelaces on alternate weekdays, if only they promise do their homework (Dancy 2000, 168). Subsequently, one can assume that Dancy has to tie his right shoelaces first for the reason that he tied his left shoelaces first yesterday. Yet, it seems wrong to claim that tying his shoelaces yesterday had any value as such, and still it seemed to have reason-providing features in the situation.

In answering this criticism, we need to incorporate into the buck-passing account age-old division between instrumental and intrinsic value. This can be done by separating basic reasons from derivative reasons. Some objects are of intrinsic value. If that is the case, the very same objects

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[21] One serious objection against the buck-passing has already been satisfactorily replied to. For the "wrong kinds of reasons critique", see Rabinowicz & Ronnow-Rasmussen 2003, and for the reply see Olson 2004. For the "thick evaluative properties as reasons critique" see Adams 2001, 571 and Wallace 2002, 447–448, and for reply see Scanlon 2002, 513. See also Dancy 2000 and Stratton-Lake & Hooker 2004 for replies to certain problems the 'buck-passing' account may have. For the reasons of space, I will not repeat these discussions. Another issue raised by Dancy and MacLeod is how well Scanlon's buck-passing account fits his own moral theory, contractualism (Dancy 2000, 165, MacLeod 2001, 278). That however is an independent issue I need not discuss here.

which are of value will have the ultimate reason-providing features. Therefore, only objects of intrinsic value have features that can provide basic reasons. There are also objects that are only instrumentally valuable, and provide us only with derivative reasons. In this category, I would classify Dancy's act of tying his left shoelaces yesterday. The reasons that instrumentally valuable objects provide are not actually given by the objects themselves. Instead, they are brought about by other reasons, which other intrinsically valuable objects provide. With that in mind, we have reason to carry out certain trivial things because of the intrinsic value (i.e., reason-providing nature) of other, more significant, things. In our example, it is Dancy's children and their education that are ultimately reason-providing, and therefore valuable. Because Dancy has sufficient reasons to see that his children are properly educated, he has a reason to hold yesterday's tying of the left shoelaces as a derivative reason that requires some action from him today. To attribute instrumental value to tying shoelaces is not unintuitive, and thus this example is not a counter-example for the buck-passing account. We can allow that the tying of shoelaces yesterday was reason-providing, but from this it does not follow in the buck-passing account that this act would necessarily have intrinsic value.

The second problem regarding the buck-passing account involves examples in which we seem to be willing to claim that a certain object is valuable, yet there are no relevant reasons the object can provide us with. Imagine, for example, a satellite picture of a tropical tree that grows in the middle of the jungle. This tree is of a species that was thought to be extinct. In the satellite picture, we see a forest fire approaching the tree – it is about to destroy the tree. We also know that nobody is able to do anything to prevent this. Because we know this, we know that there are no reasons for anyone to do anything about it[22]. Yet, it is nevertheless plausible to claim that this tree is valuable. This example seems to summon forth a difference between the logical structure of reasons and value, and this very difference appears to offer an argument against the buck-passing view (Dancy 2000, 170–171). It almost seems as if reasons are relational in a way that value is not. Reasons are always a subject's reasons for having certain attitudes. They do not simply hang in the air and wait for

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[22] Of course, there are reasons given by the destruction of the tree, for example, to mourn. These reasons can illustrate that the tree had reason-providing features, and was therefore valuable. However, I am quite certain that with an appropriately imaginative example this escape can be closed off from the buck-passer. I thank Michael Smith for this suggestion.

someone to come along and fall under the sphere of their influence. As for value, it seems that things such as the tree in question can be valuable without the presence of anyone who is able to value the object. Because of this difference, it seems as if the buck-passing account is destined to fail.

We must now return to the original formulation of the buck-passing account: "to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it (Scanlon 1998, 96)." In this passage, the concept of value is being analyzed in terms of the higher-order property of having reason-providing features, and not in terms of actual reasons themselves. Dancy appears to think that the necessary condition for something to have reason-providing properties is that this thing actually provides reasons at the time. Likewise, in our tree example, while the tree is unable to give reasons to anyone, it does not therefore appear to have reason-providing features – and so is not inherently valuable. This last conclusion is, of course, at odds with our intuition.

There is one major fault in Dancy's argument: It is odd to think that in order for something to have reason-providing features, it must actually provide someone with real reasons. Consider this analogy: a fully functioning loudspeaker in outer-space has sound-providing features, even though it cannot provide sound in that situation. It would provide sound if there was air. Yet, all the relevant properties of the speakers that would then provide sound are already present in this situation. Therefore, the sound-providing features remain even though there is no sound coming out of the speaker. With this analogy in mind, if it is true that the property of having reason-providing features is not a function of the actual reasons in the situation (like the property of having sound-providing features is not a function of actual sound in the situation), then the property of having reason-providing features and the property value can indeed have a similar logical structure. Often, the actual reasons we detect in certain circumstances are good indicators of reason-providing features, yet when the actual reasons are lacking, as is the case with our tree example, we might just as well use certain counterfactuals to detect those features. We can ask: "If we were able to make it through the jungle to save the tree, would we have reason to do so?" in order to assess whether the tree has reason-providing features and, in the spirit of the buck-passing account, whether the tree is therefore valuable. This indicates that even when there might be a logical

difference between value and reasons, there is no such difference between value and reason-providing properties. Because it is only the latter that are used in the buck-passing account, Dancy does not have an argument here against the buck-passing account.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion of Jonathan Dancy's critical essay "Should We Pass the Buck?" on Scanlon's account regarding the connection between concepts of reasons and value stated "the buck-passing view needs more defence than it has so far received" (Dancy 2000, 172). This additional defence is something I hope to have achieved in this article. I have tried to provide arguments against all of the four alternative accounts, to show that the buck-passing account can avoid the problems of those accounts, and to answer the most pressing critique that has been presented against the buck-passing account. After this inquiry, I remain convinced as to the veracity of the buck-passing account.

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