The buck passing account of value: assessing the negative thesis

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The Buck Passing Account of Value:

Assessing the Negative Thesis

Introduction

The buck-passing account of goodness (BPA) is a specific analysis of goodnesss in terms
of reasons and pro-attitudes. According to BPA to be good is roughly to have properties
that give everyone reason to have a pro-attitude towards the thing that has those
properties. This is a meta-ethical thesis so should not have any substantive implications
for first order normative theory. So whether or not it is true does not affect Parfit's views
in normative theory – his triple theory.[1] But it is an important part of his meta-ethical
view, and the central role he gives to reasons – his reasons fundamentalism.
Furthermore, Parfit deviates from Scanlon's version of BPA in an interesting way. This
revision is interesting not only because Parfit claims it makes BPA more plausible, but
also because it contributes towards a broader issue in the theory of reasons – namely the
way in which reasons "add up", and how literally we are to understand the metaphor of
the weight of a reason.

Parfit on buck-passing

In *On What Matters* Parfit endorses Scanlon's buck-passing account of value. BPA
consists of a positive and a negative thesis.

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[1] *OWM*, v. I, pp. 411-417.

The positive thesis – for X to be good is for X to have properties that give us reason to have a certain pro-attitude towards X and to act in certain positive ways towards X.[2]

Negative thesis – goodness itself is never reason-providing – that is, the fact that X is good is never a reason to have a pro-attitude, or act in certain ways, towards X.[3]

In what follows I will identify BPA with the positive thesis, and regard the negative thesis as a view that buck-passers may (arguably) either accept or reject depending on other views they hold.

I think BPA needs refining in various ways.[4] First, I do not think reasons to act should be included in the analysis. Only reasons to have pro-attitudes should (which is not to say that we typically, if not always, have reasons to act in various ways in relation to good things). Second, the reasons to have a pro-attitude must be provided by properties of, or facts about, the object to which the pro-attitude is directed. Finally, the reasons that involve goodness (the right kind of reasons) are universal – they are reasons that everyone has. But since Parfit (and others) often ignore these refinements in their discussion of BPA, I too will put them to one side in assessing his view on the matter.

Scanlon seems to assume that the negative thesis follows from the positive thesis, and on the face of it this seems right. It is hard to see how goodness could be reason providing if BPA is true, for according to BPA the fact that X is good is, crudely, the

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[2] Scanlon (1998), pp. 11 & 95.
[3] Scanlon (1998), p. 11
[4] See Stratton-Lake (2013), pp. 78-80.

existential fact that there is reason to care about X. Prima facie it is very odd to suppose

that this existential fact is a reason to care about X. It would be like supposing that the

fact that there is an argument for p is itself an argument for p.

Parfit, however, disagrees. He denies that BPA implies the negative thesis. He

writes:

> When something is in this [the reason-involving] sense good, Scanlon claims, this
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> thing's goodness could not give us reasons. Such goodness is the property of
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> having *other* properties that might give us certain reasons, and the second-order
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> fact that we had these reasons would not itself give us any reason not [sic] to act in
>
> this way.
>
> This view needs, I think, one small revision. If some medicine or book is
>
> the best, these facts could be truly claimed to give us reasons to take this medicine,
>
> or to read this book. But these would not be *further, independent* reasons.   These
>
> reasons would be *derivative*, since their normative force would derive entirely
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> from the facts that made this medicine or book the best. That is why it would be
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> odd to claim that we had *three* reasons to take some medicine: reasons that are
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> given by the facts that this medicine is the safest, the most effective, *and* the best.
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> Since such derivative reasons have no independent normative force, it would be
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> misleading to mention them in such a claim.[5]

If Parfit is right to think that the negative thesis is implausible then this seems to cause a

problem for buck-passers. If the fact that something is good is, roughly, the existential

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[5] OWM, v.1, p. 39

fact that there is reason to admire it, then it should be as counter-intuitive to suppose that goodness is reason-providing as it is to suppose that this existential fact is reason-providing. Parfit tries to get round this problem by trying to make it more plausible to accept that the fact that there is reason to admire something is a reason to admire it. He does this by claiming that the reason provided by this existential fact (which on the buck-passing account of value is goodness itself) is derivative, and thus does not add to the other reasons present. Understood in this way, he claims, buck-passers may plausibly deny the negative thesis.

I will later consider further why buck-passers might want to deny the negative thesis. Before I do that I want to get clearer on Parfit view.

Non-additive reasons

Parfit tries to avoid the apparent oddity of denying that goodness, analysed in buck-passing terms, is reason providing by claiming that the reason it provides is derivative, and consequently does not add weight to the reasons from which it is derived. In a certain way this view is quite attractive, as it means that buck-passers are not forced to claim that people are mistaken when they say, e.g., that we should read a certain book because it is so good, or that we should exercise regularly because it would be good for us.

Parfit claims three things about the reason provided by goodness, which should be distinguished.

1. Goodness is a dependent reason
2. Goodness is a derivative reason

3. Goodness is a non-additive reason.

A dependent reason is one that is not independent, and so is one that we have only when and because we have some other reason. It need not be dependent on the particular reasons on which it actually depends. A medicine might be good because it will reduce our fever, but it could be good in some other way. It might be good at relieving the pain of aching joints. So the reason provided by the fact that the medicine is good will not depend on the reason provided by the actual good-maker – the fact that it will reduce our fever. It will, however, depend on the reason provided by whatever makes the medicine good.

I'm not sure that 1 and 2 are different claims, for Parfit claims that a derivative reason is one that has no independent normative force, independent that is from the force of the reasons provided by the facts that make the medicine or the book good, and presumably this is true of a dependent reason.[6] Perhaps a derivative reason is different from a dependent reason in the sense that one reason might depend on another without being derived from it. For instance, the reason we have to feel guilty if we do not Φ is one that we have only if there is some other reason – the reason that generates the duty to Φ. So the reason to feel guilty is a dependent reason. But it is not obvious that the reason to feel guilty if we do not Φ is derived from the reason to Φ.[7]

Parfit seems to understand a non-additive reason in two distinct ways. First, he understands it as a reason that does not add to the *number* of other reasons we have to

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[6] OWM, v 1, p. 39
[7] Thanks to Alex Gregory for this example.

take the medicine, or read the book. This is suggested when he denies that the reason provided by goodness is not a further reason, and when he claims that it is odd to say that goodness is a third reason (assuming there are two good-making features that each provides their own reasons). So if there were two other reasons to take the medicine, eg, because it would lower our fever and ease our aching joints, Parfit would say that the medicine's goodness is not a third reason to take it.[8]

The second way in which he understands a non-additive reason is as one that does not add *normative force* to the other reasons present. I take this to mean that a reason is non-additive in the sense that it does not imply that we have more, or stronger reason to Φ when it is added to the other reasons to Φ. This way of understanding a non-additive reason does not commit one to the first. Although it may at first sound odd, one might think of the reason provided by goodness as a distinct, extra reason, but one that does not add normative weight to the reasons provided by the good-making features. This is the view that Mark Schroeder holds. So whereas Parfit claims that goodness is a non-additive reason in the first and second sense, Schroeder, as I understand him, maintains that it is non-additive only in the second sense.

I do not think Parfit's view can be sustained. If Parfit takes seriously the idea that goodness itself *provides* a reason – rather than say, that *there is* a reason to do what is good (which everyone can accept), or that we may carry on talking *as if* goodness is reason providing – then he cannot, I think, understand a non-additive reason in the first way. The fact that some medicine will relieve a fever and the fact that it is good are clearly distinct facts, so the reasons provided by each of these facts would be distinct

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[8] OWM, v 1, p. 39.

reasons – that is, there would be two rather than one reason.[9] This reason is not independent of the other reasons, but that is quite compatible with its being distinct from them.

If this is right, then Parfit should not say that the reason provided by goodness is non-additive in the sense that it does not add to the number of reasons provided by whatever makes the thing good. Rather he should say only that this further reason does not add weight to the reasons provided by the facts that make the thing good. If what makes the medicine good is that it will reduce my fever, then the fact that it will reduce my fever gives me a reason to take it. That the medicine is good (or best) gives me a distinct, and therefore, a second reason to take the medicine. But because this second reason is derivative, Parfit should say, the fact that there is this second reason does not mean that we have more, or a stronger, reason to take it. The reason to take the medicine provided by the fact that it will reduce our fever has the same weight or strength as this reason together with the reason provided by the fact that the medicine is good.

This revision to Parfit's view eliminates the difference between Schroeder and him on this matter. But then to sustain his view Parfit would also have to follow Schroeder by denying what Schroeder calls Additivity.

> *Additivity*: if A and B are each reasons for S to Φ, then A&B must be a better reason for S to Φ than either individually".[10]

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[9] I assume here that it is a sufficient condition for there being two different reasons to Φ that these reasons are provided by different facts.

[10] Schroeder, (2009), p….

Given *Additivity*, the fact that X is good can be a reason for me to desire X only if it adds weight to the reasons provided by the properties that make it good. But as everyone agrees, it is very implausible to suppose that the grounding properties together with the goodness they ground would be a better reason together, than the reason provided by the grounding properties alone. It is this that tends to lead buck-passers to endorse the negative thesis. But if we abandon additivity we do not need to accept the negative thesis, and this seems to be what Parfit does.

The plausibility of Additivity

But abandoning Additivity seems to generate another problem. On the face of it Additivity seems very plausible: If I am aware of one reason to Φ and you point out another reason for me to Φ, then I would now think that I have even more reason to Φ. This extra reason might be important, as it might decide the matter of whether to Φ. So if the best version of BPA forces us to abandon Additivity, that would seem pro tanto to count against BPA, even if it makes BPA better in some other way. Schroeder, however, argues that Additivity is not as plausible as it may appear at first sight. Indeed, he thinks it would make nearly all our reasons claims literally false. For this reason, he claims, we should abandon it on grounds that have nothing to do with defending BPA. Since I have argued that Parfit must also deny Additivity, it is worth considering Schroeder's argument for the rejection of Additivity.

Schroeder illustrates how Additivity would make most reasons claims false with reference to the case of Ronnie.

Ronnie likes to dance, and there will be dancing at the party, I can say both of the

following, and speak truly:

> 3 The fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie to
> go there.
>
> 4 The fact that Ronnie likes to dance is a reason for him to go to the party.

But surely, the conjunction of the fact that there will be dancing at the party and

the fact that Ronnie likes to dance weighs no more in favor of his going to the

party than either of them separately. So by Additivity, these two facts can't each

be, literally, reasons for Ronnie to go to the party. (For they are not the same

fact.)[11]

Given Additivity, only the conjunction of 3 and 4 would constitute a reason for Ronnie to

go to the party. But most of our reasons judgements do not take this conjunctive form.

So, Schroeder concludes, most of our reasons judgements would be literally false, for

they'd treat parts of a reason as themselves reasons. Of course a buck-passer could bite

the bullet on this, but Schroeder maintains, it would be better for BPA to abandon

Additivity. For Additivity would commit them to a view about the semantics and

pragmatics of ordinary statements ascribing reasons, whereas all they need be committed

to is a theory about value.

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[11] Schroeder (2009), p…

I think we can question whether Additivity has the undesirable implication Schroeder claims. First, it is not clear that 3 and 4 are not parts of a single conjunctive reason. One might quite plausibly maintain that, fully stated, Ronnie's reason to go to the party is the fact that there will be dancing at the party, and that he likes to dance. Second, if Additivity is true, then denying that 4 adds to the reason provided by 3 does not commit one to saying that the real reason must be the conjunction of 3 and 4. Indeed, Schroeder comes close to offering an alternative to the conjunctive construal when he clarifies the way in which 3 is not independent of 4. He writes:

> Intuitively, the reasons attributed by 3 and 4 are not independent, because it is only because Ronnie likes to dance that the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for him to go there.

That 4 explains why 3 is a reason does not prevent 4 from being a reason, but it leaves open the possibility that it is not, and that it has some other role—namely the role of explaining why something else (3) is a reason. If this view of this case is correct it would explain why 3 and 4 do not provide a better reason than 3 by itself, without supposing that neither 3 nor 4 are reasons, but are only parts of a single, conjunctive reason.

But perhaps this last point doesn't change things very much, for it still has it that 4 is not a reason to go to the party, whereas it is plausible to suppose that it is. So at least some of our reasons statements would turn out to be false given Additivity. But if my alternative interpretation of what is going on here is right, it would not make all reasons conjunctive, which is what Schroeder seems to think; and if it is not the case that all

reasons are conjunctive, then there is no reason to suppose that there is any systematic error in our ordinary reasons claims.

But suppose that there are similar cases to 3 and 4 that do have to be regarded as conjunctive reasons, where the facts typically cited as reasons would be only parts of reasons. Indeed, suppose that many of our reasons judgements describe the reasons they are concerned with in a non-conjunctive way. They would be incomplete descriptions of the reasons there are, for they would mention only a part of the conjunctive fact (one of the conjuncts), whereas, we are supposing, that Additivity makes all or most reasons conjunctive in form. But must we say that only those judgements which offer a complete descriptions of the relevant reasons are true? I do not think we should accept that.

This is not the case with explanatory reasons. Suppose I judge that it was Joe's resentment at being fired that is the reason why he is so hostile to company X. This is almost certainly an incomplete description of the explanation of Joe's hostility. A fuller description of the explanation might include the fact that Joe regards his sacking as unfair and undeserved given his long service to the company. It might also include facts about Joe's character, eg, that he has a stronger sense of what others owe to him than of what he owes to others, and that he is the sort of person who tends to harbour a grudge, and so finds it hard to forgive and forget, and so on. My claim that Joe's resentment at being fired is the reason why he is so hostile to company X, contains therefore only an incomplete description of this explanatory reason. A full description, one might say, would be conjunctive in form, listing all the above-mentioned facts as well as others as conjuncts. But it seems that there is no pressure on us to suppose that what I said was false simply because it does not provide a full description. Indeed it would be very odd if

there were such pressure, for we just about always under-describe the things we are talking about. If I say the red car over there is mine, I have certainly not fully described the car. I haven't said what shade of red it is, or what the make and model is, whether it is diesel or petrol, and so on. But it would be crazy to say that what I have said is literally false because I have not fully described the car, and there are countless cases like this.

Now if it is so implausible to suppose that an incomplete description of something means that what one has said about it is false, then it will be equally implausible to suppose that this is true of reasons claims in which the (conjunctive) reason is incompletely described. The fact that a reason is incompletely described in some reason statement does not make that statement false. So it is not clear at this stage that Additivity has been shown to have any implausible consequences. If that is right, then no independent case for abandoning Additivity has been made. That would be a problem for Parfit and Schroeder.

Furthermore, if Schroeder were correct about the implications of Additivity, then his objection would rebound on his own view. For (as we shall see later) he claims that it is sets of reasons that have weight rather than individual reasons, and this, I believe, is even more revisionary of ordinary discourse than he claims the principle of additivity is. One might plausibly regard some particular fact as a decisive reason against Φing, or some other fact as a good reason to Φ. I take it that when people say such things they are claiming that a certain reason is a very strong, or weighty reason against or for some course of action. If that is correct then Schroeder's proposal implies that when people say such things, what they are saying is strictly false. For on this view they are mistakenly claiming that a certain member of the set (of reasons for or against) has a property

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(weight) that applies only to the set as a whole. It is not clear, therefore, that there is a net advantage gained by abandoning additivity. It may be that this move is less revisionary in one way, but it looks like it would be revisionary in another.

The coherence of abandoning Additivity

But perhaps such a case can be made, or perhaps I am wrong to suppose that incomplete descriptions of reasons need not be regarded as false. This would still not help Parfit. It would not help, as Parfit's understanding of a reason as a consideration that counts in favour of some attitude or action, means that he cannot coherently abandon additivity.

Parfit agrees with Scanlon that for some fact, F, to be a reason for me to Φ, is for F to count in favour of me Φing. Such facts can count in favour of acts in different degrees. They can favour them strongly or weakly. The fact that by Φing I would avoid bruising my elbow and the fact that by Φing I would avoid being blinded each give me a reason to Φ, but the latter fact is a much stronger, or weightier reason to Φ than the former. This latter fact counts in favour of Φing much more strongly than the former fact. So on this view, reasons not only count in favour of certain attitudes or actions, but do so with a certain strength or weight.[12] It is because reasons have a certain weight that they

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[12] Of course one might try to abandon the idea that reasons must have a weight, but this is not something Schroeder seems inclined to do (see his Weighting for a Plausible Humean Theory of Reasons NOUS 41:1 (2007) 110–132, p.122). He abandons the view that the weight or strength of a reason is in some way proportional to the strength of the desire it explains, or how effectively it satisfies the desire it explains. For him the weight of a reason is determined by the weight they ought to have in our deliberation.
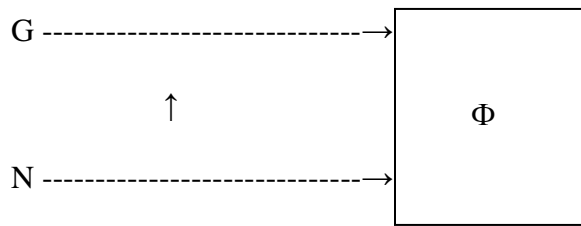
can be defeated by being outweighed by opposing reasons – that is, a reason to Φ can be defeated by a stronger, or weightier reason not to Φ, although this is not the only way in which reasons can be defeated. The same is true of reasons to believe.

So for Parfit every reason must (a) count in favour of a certain act or attitude, and (b) do so with a certain weight. That I have said that I will go to dinner with you this evening, and that going to dinner with you this evening will be very pleasant, each gives me a distinct reason to go to dinner this evening. Each fact counts in favour of going to dinner, and each does so to a certain degree. Cases like this are quite compatible with Additivity

The cases that Parfit (and Schroeder) thinks cast doubt on Additivity involve derivative reasons – the sort of reason that is provided by goodness if the buck-passing account of value is true. Derivative reasons, they claim, are non-additive reasons. But now that we have got clear on the notion of a non-additive reason, making sense of the rejection of Additivity will prove quite tricky. For now, the issue of making sense of the rejection of Additivity becomes the issue of making sense of derivative reasons being distinct from (though not independent of) the reasons they are derived from, whilst not adding to the strength of those reasons.

> If reasons are the kinds of thing to which we are supposed to pay attention in our deliberations about what to do, then stronger reasons are the ones to which we are supposed to pay *more* attention, and which we are supposed to find more *decisive*. (Ibid, p122)

Parfit's view seems to be something like the following: Suppose N is what makes X good and gives us a non-derivative reason to Φ, and G is the derivative reason provided by the goodness of X. Parfit might say that both N and G stand in a favouring relation to Φing, and that G stands in this relation because N does. So we get something like the following:

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G -------------------------------→  ┌─────────────┐
                                    │             │
                ↑                   │      Φ      │
                                    │             │
N -------------------------------→  └─────────────┘
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The arrows from left to right represent the counting-in-favour-of relation, and the vertical arrow represents the explanatory relation. But if G is a distinct reason, we have to ask what weight the reason provided by G has – to what degree does G count in favour of Φing. At first sight we seem to have two options:

(a) The derivative reason provided by G has no weight.

(b) The derivative reason provided by G has a weight, but this weight does not add to the weight of the basic reason provided by N.

According to (a) N and G each count in favour of Φing, but although N favours Φing to a certain degree (with a certain strength or weight), G favours it to no degree – that is the reason provided by G has no strength or weight. That explains why the reason provided by G does not add to the reason provided by N. The trouble is that it is very hard to see how G could count in favour of Φing, but not do so to any degree. That looks indistinguishable from its not counting in favour of Φing at all, and the claim that G doesn't count in favour of Φing at all is what is being denied.

I appreciate that the notions of strength and weight are metaphors, but they are metaphors for the idea of normative force of reasons, and illuminating metaphors at that. To say that G is a reason to Φ that is distinct from the reason to Φ provided by N, but has no weight, is to say that G is a normative reason with no normative force. To me that makes as much sense as saying that some event is a cause yet has no causal power. Labeling it a *derivative* cause wouldn't help.[13]

If then we are to make sense of the idea of distinct, non-additive, derivative reasons, we must think of them as having a weight or strength of their own, but one that does not add to the weight of the basic reason. How are we to make sense of this? Presumably the thought is that, qua derivative reason, any normative weight it has is inherited from the basic reason from which it is derived. But the metaphor of inheritance militates against the view that the basic reason retains the same weight that it passes on to its progeny. This metaphor makes sense of non-additivity, for all of the normative force

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[13] I appreciate that normative reasons are very different from causes in a variety of ways. But they are analogous in the respect that causes have a certain causal force, and normative reasons have a certain normative force.

of the basic reason is here handed over to the derivative reason. But this has the absurd result that the basic reason has no normative force. It's given it all away!

One needn't understand the metaphor of inheritance in this way. We might say that I have inherited my genes from my parents, without supposing they have lost their genes by bequeathing them to me.[14] But even here the metaphor is not illuminating, for the genes I inherit from my parents have the full range of powers that they have in my parents. But to make sense of a non-additive reason Parfit needs the derivative reason not to inherit all of the powers of the reason from which it is derived, for the grounding reason has weight of its own and the derivative reason is not supposed to inherit this.

So if Parfit is to hold onto his account of a reason as something that counts in favour of an act or attitude, then he owes us an account of how a derivative can count in favour of something without adding weight.

Weighing reasons

Perhaps the problem I have with Parfit's view stems from the fact that I think of normative weights as an amount of something, an amount that attaches to individual reasons. But weights may not be best understood as amounts, and may attach to sets of reasons rather than to individual reasons. Once again, Schoeder's views on this subject are helpful. I will not lay out the details of his account, as my main interest here is whether Parfit can make use of some key elements of Schroeder's account of weight to give sense to his view that goodness is reason-providing, whilst maintaining that this reason does not add weight to the reasons provided by the good-making facts.

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[14] Thanks to Richard Rowland for this point.

Schroeder argues that we should abandon the view of weights just mentioned, in part because it does not allow us to abandon Additivity. In its place he offers an alternative account of the weight of reasons. Schroeder has a Humean account of reasons, which Parfit would reject. But his account of the weight of reasons is not distinctively Humean[15], so as far as that goes it could be used by Parfit to give sense to his claim that goodness provides a non-additive reason.

The two relevant parts of Schoeder's view are:

1) The weight of a reason is the weight that it is correct to place on it.

2) "Strictly speaking… it is not reasons that have weights, but only sets of reasons".[16]

Correctness is determined by the balance of reasons of the right kind, and the right kind are "those which are generated by an activity, very broadly construed". [17] Parfit need not analyse correctness in terms of the right kind of reasons to give weight to reasons, or

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[15] P. 139

[16] p.126

[17] "Reply to Shafer-Landau, Mcpherson, and Dancy

Mark Schroeder", *Phlosophical Studies*, 2012, pp. 463-474, p.471. In Slave of the Passions Schroeder develops this view with reference to first-order, second-order, third-order, etc., reasons to give more weight to sets of reasons. He argues that this does not lead to an infinite regress, as such reasons are simply undercutting defeaters, and we may assume undercutting defeaters run out at some point.

accept Schroeder's account of the right kind of reasons. He may claim that correctness is indefinable, and thus basic, or offer some alternative account of correctness.

Schroeder often departs from 2, and talks as if weights attach to individual reasons. But I take it to be an essential part of his account that weights apply to sets, for it is this that allows him to suppose that some reasons added to the set add weight, whereas others do not. The ones that don't are the ones which, when added to the set of other reasons, do not imply that it is correct to give that set more weight in our deliberation. One need not assume that the individual reasons carry their weight with them for them to add weight to the set. On the view under consideration, all we need assume is that it is correct to give more weight to the enlarged set in our deliberation if the additional reason is additive, and that it is not correct to do this if it is a non-additive reason that is added to the set.

So can Parfit accept 1 and 2? Let's start with 2. Perhaps Parfit should abandon his view that individual facts count in favour of certain attitudes and acts. Perhaps he should claim, instead, that it is sets of such facts that do this, and so could be said to have a weight. But that would undermine the very claim he wants to make – namely that the fact that something is good is a reason. If only sets count in favour of certain acts and attitudes – that is, are reasons for those acts or attitudes – then the fact that something is good would not be a reason, but would be part of a reason. The reason is provided by the set of such facts.

As I argued above, such a view would not have the radical implication that most of our reasons claims would turn out false. For we could regard most people's reasons claims as incomplete descriptions of reasons, and it does not seem to me that would

imply that their claims are false. But if Parfit accepted that it is only sets of facts that provide reasons for attitudes and actions, rather than individual facts, he would be denying the very thesis he wanted to defend – namely that the fact that something is good is a reason. So he cannot accept 2.

Perhaps Parfit could maintain that weight attaches to individual reasons, but each weight is determined by the weight it is correct to give to those individual facts in our deliberation. Parfit might then say that the reason provided by goodness is non-additive in the sense that it is not correct to give weight to this in our deliberation if the good-making facts have been taken into account, but it is correct to give weight to the reason provided by goodness if those other facts have not been taken into account. In the latter case, the weight it is correct to give to goodness in our deliberation is the same as the weight it would be correct to give to the good-making facts alone.

Once again, I doubt this could be got to work with Parfit's understanding of a reason as a fact that counts in favour of some act or attitude. But even if it could work with his understanding of a reason, I think there is a fundamental problem with any such attempt to analyse the weight of reasons (or sets of reasons) in terms of the weight it is correct to give it in our deliberation. For this reason I think we should not understand the weight of reasons in this way.

The problem is that one of the reasons (or set of reasons) for some action may be excluded by an exclusionary reason. An exclusionary reason is a reason not to give any weight in one's deliberation to some reason for or against a certain act.[18] An exclusionary

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[18] See Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1975, pp.35-48.

reason does not cancel the reason it excludes. It does not imply that it is really no reason after all. Rather, the thought is that the relevant fact continues to be a reason to Φ, and may even be a very good reason to Φ, but nonetheless should not figure in our deliberation.

So, for example, the fact that a judge has ruled that some piece of evidence (E) against the accused as inadmissible, perhaps because it has been obtained in some illegitimate way, means that the jury should not give any weight to E in deciding whether the accused is guilty. But although the jury ought not to give E any weight in their deliberation, E may nonetheless be a strong reason to believe that the accused is guilty, and so will have a weight.

To make this clear, suppose that the only reason to believe that the accused is guilty is given by E, and that this evidence is stronger than the evidence in favour of innocence. If we understand weight of a reason as the weight it is correct to give it in our deliberation, then it would turn out that it is correct to give more weight to E in our deliberation, than it is to give to the reasons in favour of the accused innocence in reaching a verdict. But this is not correct. Because E is excluded from consideration, the jury ought not to give any weight to this piece of evidence in their deliberation. So it would not be correct for them to give more weight to it in their deliberation than to the the considerations in favour of his innocence. But then it would turn out that it has less weight than the reasons in favour of an innocent verdict. This has the unfortunate implication that the thought that it has more weight than the opposing evidence has been lost completely.

So this account of weight cannot account for the idea that some reason might be a very good reason to Φ - which I take to mean, a weighty, or strong reason - even though it ought not to figure in our deliberation about whether to Φ at all. Since this account of the weight of a reason (or set of reasons) cannot leave room for the idea that certain reasons to Φ ought not to figure in our deliberation about whether to Φ, this account should, I think be rejected.

There are other accounts of the weight of a reason. For example, Kearns and Starr argue that for F to be a reason to Φ is for F to constitute evidence for the belief that we ought to Φ. Evidence for p is understood in terms of the probability that p is true, and the strength of that reason is determined by the strength of that evidence – i.e., the degree to which it makes it more probable that p is true.[19] But clearly this account of weight involves buying into an account of a reason that Parfit would not, I think, accept – namely an account that defines all reasons as epistemic reasons.

Parfit's examples – being attributively best and being good for you.

In the passage cited earlier Parfit gave the example of attributive value as a plausible reason-giving fact when he claims that "if some medicine or book is the best, these facts could be truly claimed to give us reasons to take this medicine, or to read this book. But these would not be *further, independent* reasons". He also claims that the fact that something would be good for you is plausibly reason providing.

I think what we should ask is not whether the negative thesis contradicts what we would naturally say here, but whether we would persist in thinking that goodness after some Socratic questioning. This questioning would involve asking why we think this

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[19] Kearns and Star (2009), pp. 231-232

thing is good, whether the good-makers are reason providing, and whether, once we recognise these features as reason-providing, we would still be inclined to think of goodness as reason-providing. So, for example, you might initially and quite naturally cite the fact that the medicine will be good for me as a reason to take it. I ask you what makes it good for me, and you reply because it will reduce my fever. You accept that this good-maker gives me reason to take the medicine. I would suggest that, at this point, if I then asked you whether you still regarded the fact that it was good as a further reason to take it, you'd lose your inclination to say that the fact that the medicine will be good for me is also a reason to take it, for you would have acquired the (negative) buck-passing intuition. Because I think that people would lose their inclination to say that goodness is reason-giving after asking the above-mentioned questions, I do not think we should be too bothered by the fact that the negative thesis is contrary to what many people will quite naturally say prior to asking those questions.

Their intuition that goodness is reason providing would be further weakened if we could persuade them that BPA is true. For then they'd see that claiming that the fact that X is good is (roughly) the fact that there are reasons to care about X, and as I noted above, it is very implausible to suppose that this fact is reason-providing.

But what if I do not know the good-making fact, and only know that some thing is good? Surely in that situation it is plausible to say that the fact that it is good is a reason to have a pro-attitude towards it? This may well be true, and does not require us to abandon additivity. For the idea here is that there is an epistemic filter on certain practical reasons, such that certain reasons are not reasons *for me* if I do not, or cannot, know them. This may be true of basic, nonderivative reasons and the reasons derived from

them. If I am not in a position to know the non-derivative reasons (the good-maker), then the derivative reason provided by goodness may well be a reason to have a pro-attitude. But in this scenario the non-derivative is not a reason for me. Only the derivative reason is, so we need not abandon additivity. If however I know the good-maker – that is, the non-derivative reason – then the derivative reason provided by goodness is not a reason for me. This captures everything a buck-passer might want, for although both facts are reasons in the abstract, the derivative reason is only a reason for some individual if she is not in a position to know the non-derivative reason.

It may help to make this idea clear to illustrate it with an example of a derivative epistemic reason.[20] Suppose that the fact that the car is in the garage is a reason to think people are at home. And suppose that the muddy tyre tracks leading to the garage are a reason to think the car is in the garage. The tracks are a reason to believe that a car is in the garage, but because of that also seem to be a reason to think that someone is home. If we don't already know the car is in the garage, knowledge of the tracks would raise our subjective probability that there is someone in the house. But if we already know that the car is in the garage (because we looked in the window and saw it) we should not raise our credence that people are home. Knowledge of the car's being in the garage (itself a reason to think people are home) screens off the probability raising force of our knowledge of the tracks on the driveway.

If that's right it makes perfectly good sense to say that these two reasons are not additive. If you don't know through other means that there is a car in the garage, learning that there are muddy tracks leading to it raises the probability that there are people home

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[20] Many thanks to an anonymous referee for this suggestion.

and so is a reason to believe this. Learning that there is a car in the garage also raises the probability that there are people home, and so is itself a reason to believe that people are home. But if we learn that there is a car in the garage, then learning that there are muddy tracks on the driveway does not raise the probability that people are home further. It is a reason to believe that people are home, but does not add to the reason provided by the fact that a car is in the garage.

This seems to me to be a perfectly cogent model, and allows us to make sense of the idea of a distinct but non-additive reason to act. So one thing a buck-passer might say is that the fact that some medicine is good is a reason for me to take it, but only on the condition that I do not know why it is good. If I know why it is good, the fact that it is good is still a reason in the abstract, but is not a reason *for me* to take the medicine. For I know the non-derivative reason to take it, and the derivative reason is only a reason for me to take the medicine if I do not know the non-derivative reason. I think this is a perfectly respectable model, and one all buck-passers might accept. But what it allows is not quite what the negative thesis aimed to rule out – namely, that if I know why something is good its being good does not give me a reason. What I have been struggling to give substance to is the idea that the good-maker and the goodness made are each distinct reasons to act at the same time, but that the second does not add any weight to the first. The idea suggested here does not allow that these facts are reasons at the same time, but rather allows that ignorance can enable the transmission of the normative force of the non-derivative reason to the derivative reason. That fits perfectly well with the idea of a reason being a fact that counts in favour of some act or attitude.

Conclusion

I have argued that once the notion of a non-additive reason is disambiguated between denying distinctness, and denying extra weight, it becomes very hard to give a clear sense to the claim that goodness is a non-addditive reason. I considered whether Schroeder's account could support Parfit's view, but concluded that it does not, and that in any case, it has serious problems of its own. There may be some other account of weight that can make sense of this claim, but I do not know of any that Parfit could use. Without such an account, I think Parfit must give up the claim that goodness is a derivative, non-additive reason, and so should not reject the negative thesis. But he can allow the weaker thesis that ignorance of the good-making qualities can enable the fact that something is good to be a reason, but only on the condition that one is ignorant of the more basic reason.

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