Rowland, Richard. *The Normative and the Evaluative: The Buck-Passing Account of Value.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 256. $70.00 (cloth).

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The attempts to understand goodness in terms of normative notions such as ought, reasons, rationality, fittingness etc. go at least back to Kant, who thought that good is what determines the will of rational agents (Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* [1785], 4:413]. Even if such views have always been popular, more recently the debates concerning them have started from the second chapter of T.M. Scanlon's *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998). There, Scanlon introduced and defended the so-called 'buck-passing' account (hereafter the BPA) according to which for something to be good is for it to have some more basic properties that provide us reasons to have certain positive attitudes towards it and to behave in certain valuing ways with regard to it (ibid., 96–7).

Scanlon's account was intensively debated in the 2000s. Several powerful objections were put forward, different responses to them were explored, and many consequences and applications were investigated. In 2009, I was asked to write a short overview article on the debate (Jussi Suikkanen, "Buck-Passing Accounts of Value," *Philosophy Compass* 4/5 [2009]: 768–779). Given the amount of material available and its somewhat chaotic nature, this was almost an impossible task. I could only conclude that the "account would certainly deserve a careful book-length treatment which we still currently lack" (ibid., 777).

Today, after 10 years of waiting, my plea has finally been answered with Richard Rowland's *The Normative and the Evaluative – the Buck-Passing Account of Value*. I'm delighted to report that it is exactly the kind of book I was calling for. Perhaps it is good that the book was not written earlier – time has given Rowland the benefit of crucial critical distance from the earlier debates. This has resulted in an excellent book and a forceful defence of the buck-passing account. It is rich and sophisticated in argumentation, it masters the vast literature on the topic, it provides powerful objections to the alternatives and compelling responses to objections, and it even applies the view to new domains. For these reasons, this is the book to read for anyone interested in understanding how the evaluative, normative and moral realms are connected to one another. After this high praise, in the rest of this review, I want to first outline the structure of Rowland's book and then make two critical observations.

Chapter 1 formulates Rowland's preferred version of the BPA. According to it, what it is for something to be non-instrumentally good simpliciter just is for it to have properties that provide normative reasons for us to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes in response to it (such as attitudes of desiring and admiring) (7). It also outlines some of the main motivations of the view, applies it to different thin evaluative properties, and clarifies its main elements.

Chapters 2 and 3 argue against the first of the BPA's main competitors – the value first view according to which normative reasons for pro-attitudes can be understood in terms of value. Chapter 2 first argues that these views threaten to be incompatible with plausible first-order normative views. For example, many deontological views entail that, even if the outcome of pushing a man from the footbridge to prevent a trolley from killing five is good, you have sufficient reasons both not to desire that outcome and not to push the man (25). Yet, if what you have reasons to desire just were a matter of what outcomes are good, that kind of views

would be ruled out (28–9). To avoid this problem, the value first theorists could formulate more complicated agent-relative notions of value, but Rowland argues that those are either purely theoretical *ad hoc* constructs or to be accounted for in terms of normative reasons in which case value cannot be prior to reasons (sec. 2.3.2).

Chapter 3 argues that the value first accounts of practical reasons should be rejected because these accounts of practical reasons cannot be a part of a plausible unified account of all normative reasons as there are no plausible accounts of reasons for belief in terms which beliefs it is good to have (42). It could be suggested that these reasons could be understood either in terms of the value of having beliefs that are supported by evidence (49) or in terms of the instrumental value certain beliefs have *qua* improving the probability of our desires being satisfied (51). Yet, according to Rowland, the former view cannot make sense of the cases in which we know that some information is some evidence for a given belief even if we also know that our evidence-base overall does not support that belief (50). Here we have a defeated reason for a belief even if having that belief cannot have value as a belief that is supported by the evidence we have. Likewise, the latter, instrumental view fails to give us any reasons to believe many true propositions because by not having those beliefs we can get more of what we desire (51).

Chapters 4 and 5 argue against the second competitor view – the no priority view according to which value and reasons claims are either equally good paraphrases of one another or claims about wholly distinct properties. Chapter 4 argues that these views cannot explain the striking correlations between reasons and value (sec. 4.1) nor the fact that an object's goodness never provides us with reasons to have pro-attitudes towards it (sec. 4.2). It also claims that the BPA is more parsimonious too (sec. 4.4). Likewise, Chapter 5 argues that

neither the value first nor the no priority views can explain what is common to different kinds of evaluative properties, from the good simpliciter to attributive goodness and the good for. The buck-passers, in contrast, can understand all these values in terms of *who* has the relevant reasons for the pro-attitudes (79). In the case of the good simpliciter, this is everyone; in the case of good for, those who have reasons to care about the object (81); and in the case of attributive good, those who have reasons to have pro-attitudes towards the members of a certain kind generally (91).

Chapters 6–9 respond to the most powerful objections to the BPA. Chapter 6 argues that the so-called 'wrong kind of reasons problem' can be either dissolved (we don't have a reason to admire the demon who threatens to punish us if we don't admire him because it would be impossible to respond to that reason) (sec. 6.2) or solved (wrong kind of reasons for the purposes of the BPA are the ones based on the additional consequences of having the relevant pro-attitudes) (sec. 6.6). Chapter 7 provides two responses to the solitary goods objection. Rowland argues that, in understanding good things no one is present to admire, we can either rely on our own 'transworld' reasons to prefer certain possibilia over others (sec. 7.1) or on counterfactuals concerning towards what we would have reasons to have pro-attitudes if we were in certain circumstances (sec. 7.3). Chapter 8 shows that the BPA is compatible with the traditional ways of drawing the distinction between consequentialist and deontological views of right and wrong (149) and it doesn't automatically end up resolving the debate in favour of consequentialism (148). Finally, Chapter 9 argues that thick concepts are not a problem for the BPA either. This is because: (i) if thick concepts are either non-evaluative concepts or evaluative concepts that cannot be reductively analysed, then no BPA of them is required (160–1), and (ii) if they are evaluative concepts that can be analysed in terms of a thin value

element and a non-evaluative content, then a BPA of the thick concepts can be given by reducing the former element into reasons (164).

Chapters 10 and 11 finally formulate BPAs of moral and other normative concepts than reasons. According to Rowland's buck-passing account of moral wrongness, what it is for an action to be wrong is for it to be the case (i) that the agent has sufficient reasons to do the action and (ii) that she also has reasons to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes towards her making amends if she does the action (175). Chapter 11 finally argues against the recent attempts to make sense of normative reasons in terms of oughts and fittingness and recommends that we should go the other way – understand these notions in terms of reasons. So, an ought consists of there being sufficient reasons to do an action (196) and for an attitude to be fitting just is for there to be reasons to have that attitude that are not provided by the additional consequences of having it (215).

Above, I have merely provided the bare bones of the content of Rowland's excellent book, which is rich in detail. It is full of clarifications, further objections and responses to them, discussions of alternatives, and so on. Rather than going into these details, in the rest, I want to focus instead on just two more general criticism that do not undermine the fact that we have good reasons to have pro-attitudes towards the book.

Firstly, I am concerned about the fact that Rowland explicitly states that the BPA is completely neutral with respect to all metaethical views and all first-order views of what has value (1–2). In fact, his central methodological principle is that it is a strike against a view if it conflicts with some plausible first-order view (22). This raises the question of why anyone should care about whether the BPA is true. After all, it has no consequences at all in

metaethics or normative ethics but rather it only makes a narrow claim about how to understand the connection between different evaluative and normative notions. Thus, pretty much all we can use the account to explain is our inferences from value to reasons (ch. 4) and what is common to different evaluative notions (chs. 3 and 5). So, if you are interested in these things, the BPA is for you, but otherwise, well, "who cares?" someone might say.

For this reason, it would be much better for the buck-passers to reject the first-order neutrality of the view. They should note that there are both (i) facts about towards what we have reasons to have pro-attitudes and (ii) more and less plausible views of what these facts are. Because of this, the buck-passers should argue that their view is in conflict with most views of what is good (some of which are even quite plausible), and that their view can help us to discover what the correct view is. We can now approach the question of what is good from the perhaps more tractable question of what reasons there are. The reason we should care about the BPA therefore is that it helps us to find out what things are good, something we all care about.

Secondly, I am also concerned about the general reliance on arguments from exclusion. They are employed at two levels. Firstly, on the general level, the argument for the BPA is that the two other alternatives – value first and no priority views – are more problematic (99). Secondly, the arguments against those alternatives often consist of introducing some *prima facie* plausible principle (such as that, when an object is good, there are usually reasons to have pro-attitudes towards it (57)) and then trying to show that no formulation of the general alternatives is compatible with that principle. However, arguments from exclusion only work if we have captured the whole logical space and if every alternative has been definitely ruled out. Yet, both of those things are difficult to do: philosophers are brilliant at expanding the

logical spaces and we end up with so many different alternatives that there is no room to exclude all of them convincingly. Let me illustrate.

Consider an analogical debate concerning truth and meaning. Here too there is a striking correlation: if two sentences mean the same, they must also have the same truth-conditions. How should we explain this? Tarski first showed that we can define what it is for the sentences of an object language to be true if we rely on certain assumptions about what those sentences mean in the meta-language (Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in his *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956]). Davidson famously turned the previous around. He argued that we should rather take truth to be primitive and then use Tarski's machinery for formulating a theory of truth for a language for giving an account of meaning (Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 134). Yet, it became clear that there is a third alternative – the no priority view. On this view, truth cannot be reduced to meaning nor meaning to truth but rather both notions can merely be elucidated by describing their interconnected locations in the conceptual space in which we naturally find our way about (John McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998], 7).

Consider then the analogical view about value and reasons. It would not try to reduce value to reasons or reasons to value but rather take the inferences we are licenced to make from value to reasons and reasons to value to be in part constitutive of what goodness and reasons are. The problem is that Rowland never considers views like this – for him the no priority views must either take reasons and value claims to be mere paraphrases of one another or claims about wholly independent properties (55). Yet, his arguments against the other versions of the

no priority view just do not seem to have any force against the previous suggestion. The sketched proposal is just as good as the BPA in explaining the striking correlations between reasons and value, in unifying the evaluative and the moral, and so on. After all, it can accept Rowland's own buck-passing bi-conditionals (i.e., different versions the claim: an object is non-instrumentally good iff it has properties that provide us certain kind of reasons to have pro-attitudes in response to the object) and, instead of reductively, read these as descriptions of the constitutive conceptual connections between the evaluative and normative concepts that locate these terms at the same level in the network of practical language. This view also has other advantages. For example, it can live with the idea that our solutions to the wrong kind of reasons problem are circular: in order to find out what kind the relevant kind of reasons are – the reasons that determine whether an object is good, we can and must rely at least to some extend on our prior views of value.

As a consequence, even if Rowland makes as good of a case as possible for the BPA, I'm not sure he successfully shows that it is the view we should accept.

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