Reasons as the Unity among the Varieties of Goodness

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Abstract. Our concepts of good *simpliciter*, good *for*, and good as a particular kind of thing must share some common element. I argue that all three types of goodness can be analysed in terms of the reasons that there are for a certain sets of agents to have pro-attitudes. To this end I provide new and compelling accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind in terms of reasons for pro-attitudes that are more explanatorily illuminating than competing accounts and that evade the objections that have been levelled at previous accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind in terms of reasons.

1. Introduction

There are several different varieties of goodness. We are discussing *Goodness of a Kind* when we say that a particular knife is a good one or that Murray is a good tennis player. When we judge that a knife is a good one we judge that it is good as a particular kind of thing, namely a knife, or good for the purpose of cutting; we do not judge that the knife is good in all ways, in a different way than as a knife, good on the whole, or good all-things-considered. *Good For* is at issue when we judge that sunlight is *good for* plants, that regular exercise and five portions of fruit and vege-tables a day is *good for* you, or *good for* ordinary human beings. When we judge that these things are good *for* plants and for humans respectively we judge that these things are conducive to plants and humans' respective goods. And it seems that there is another type of goodness: plain good-

ness or good *simpliciter*.[1] Things that are good *simpliciter* may always be good *for* someone or good as a particular kind of thing, but they are also good in a way that exceeds their goodness *for* agents and as kinds of things; they are also good in a way that is not relativized to agents or kinds of things. Friendship, beauty, and knowledge might be good *simpliciter*. The goodness of a friendship seems to outrun, or go beyond, the goodness of this friendship *for* each friend. The Nazis' having lost the war is another candidate for something that is good *simpliciter*. When we say that it's good that the Nazis' lost the war, it seems that we don't just mean that the Nazis' loss was good *for* the people who would have suffered, died, or been forced to live under the yoke of the Nazis' if they had won.[2] If we say that 'the Nazis' loss was good *for* a lot of people', it seems like we've said something different.[3]

Our concepts of these different types of goodness must have something in common. If our concepts of something being good *simpliciter*, good *for* some being, and good as a particular kind of thing had nothing in common, then 'good' would mean something *completely* different in 'friendship is good' and 'Murray is a good tennis player'. But we should not hold that 'good' means something *completely* different in these different claims. 'Good' in 'good knife', 'eating fruit and vegetables is good *for* you', and 'pleasure is good' have more in common than just sounding the same; these claims have more in common than 'bank' does in 'riverbank' and 'financial bank'. The concept of a good knife and the concept of something being good *for* ordinary humans are more closely related than the concept of a riverbank and the concept of a financial bank.[4]

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[1] Instead of good *simpliciter* some people talk about things being good absolutely, good for their own sake, or good *full stop*.

[2] See Olson (2005, pp. 34-35).

[3] Since good *simpliciter* and accounts of good *simpliciter* are not the focus of this paper I will not defend the view that good *simpliciter* is a distinct variety of goodness. One reason why we should not hold that the concept *good simpliciter* can be reduced to the concept of being good *for* a particular set of beings or being good as a particular kind of thing is that any such account would render debates in normative ethics about whether friendship, democracy, liberty, equality and punishment are good in themselves or only good *for* particular people, pseudo-debates. Rendering these debates pseudo-debates and holding that people who think that certain things are good *simpliciter* are conceptually confused might be acceptable if there are compelling arguments for the view that good *simpliciter* in particular is a strange concept or would have to refer to something deeply metaphysically puzzling. But I doubt that it can be maintained the good *simpliciter* is strange in either of these ways; see Pigden (1990), Olson (2005, pp. 34-35), and Arneson (2010).

[4] See Urmson (1950, p. 161), Hare (1952, p. 140), Ziff (1960, p. 203) and Thomson (2010, p. 756 n.2). It might seem that the different types of goodness do have something in common, namely goodness, in the same way that being blue, being red, and being green have being coloured in common. And in the same way that we do not need to give an account of what different colour properties have in common beyond being coloured, we don't need to give an account of what

However, many accounts of these different varieties of goodness cannot explain what good *for*, good *simpliciter,* and goodness of a kind have in common or how it is that these different concepts are closely related. For instance, if good *for* should be analysed partially in terms of good *simpliciter*, then it is hard to see how these two types of goodness could have anything in common with goodness of a kind, since a device could be good as a torture device without being good *simpliciter* or good *for* anyone.[5] Similarly, if good *simpliciter* and good *for* cannot be conceptually reduced to any other terms, then it is hard to see what these two types of goodness and goodness of a kind could have in common.[6]

One attractive account of good *simpliciter*, namely the buck-passing account, analyses good *simpliciter* in terms of reasons for pro-attitudes. According to the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter*,

> For X to be good *simpliciter* is for X to have features that provide normative reasons for everyone to have a pro-attitude towards X (including to admire X and to desire X).[7]

Proponents of the buck-passing account have claimed that it provides an intuitive account of good *simpliciter* that explains several necessary connections between reasons and good *simpliciter*, is ontologically parsimonious and demystifies the notion of good *simpliciter*.[8] In this paper I argue

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different types of goodness properties have in common beyond being good. But, firstly, if the different types of goodness shared merely the property of being good in common, they would share the property of being good *simpliciter* in common, which they do not. And, secondly, it seems that the relationship between the different types of goodness is not quite the same as the relationship between the different colours. Red, blue, and green seem to be the same sort of thing. But although good *simpliciter,* goodness of a kind, and good *for* seem to have something in common, or at least be structurally similar or closely related, they do not seem to obviously be the same sort of thing, or to be species of a particular genus as red, blue, and green seem to be.

[5] It might seem that a good torture device is good *for* those who own it. However, a device could be good as a torture device even if it were not good *for* anyone and even if it were impossible for it to be good *for* anyone.

[6] Some accounts, such as Ziff's interest-relative account seem to explain what the different varieties of goodness have in common. Whether such an account does explain what the different varieties of goodness have in common may come down to whether good *simpliciter* is a distinct variety of goodness, a view which I cannot argue for here. I do, however, briefly raise an objection to Ziff's view in section 4 below.

[7] See Scanlon (1998, pp. 95-98), Lang (2008), Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006, pp. 152-153), and Way (2013).

[8] See Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006), Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004, p. 400) Crisp (2005, p. 82), Suikkanen (2009, pp. 769-772), and Way (2013).

that the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* can be extended to provide illuminating accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind. And if I am right that the buck-passing account can be extended to provide illuminating accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind, then I will have shown that there is an additional reason to accept the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter*. Unlike competing accounts of the relationship between reasons and goodness, such as accounts of reasons in terms of good *simpliciter* and views according to which neither reasons nor goodness should be analysed in terms of one another, the buck-passing account explains what unifies the varieties of goodness. Namely for *X* to be good in a particular way is for *X* to have properties that provide reasons for a certain set of agents to have pro-attitudes in response to *X*.[9]

Opponents of the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* have argued that there are several problems with the account.[10] Although I believe that all of these problems can be overcome, I cannot respond to many of the objections to the buck-passing account in this paper.[11] However, opponents of the buck-passing account have argued that if a buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* holds, then buck-passing accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind must hold, but buck-passing accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind are implausible. So, a buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* does not hold.[12] By showing that buck-passing accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind are extremely plausible I show that this argument against the buck-passing account fails.

In sections 2 and 3 I motivate a new buck-passing account of good *for* and show that this account evades the objections that have been pressed against accounts of good *for* in terms of reasons by Guy Fletcher, James Griffin, Chris Heathwood, Thomas Hurka, Joseph Raz, Connie Rosati, Nishi Shah, and Susan Wolf. And in sections 4 and 5 I motivate a buck-passing account of goodness of a kind and defend this account against objections that have been pressed by Alex Gregory, Richard Kraut, Derek Parfit, and T.M. Scanlon.

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[9] This isn't an entirely new idea: Schroeder (2010) advocates this view but does not take himself to have given any arguments for analysing good *for* and goodness of a kind in terms of reasons. Skorupski (2010, ch. 4, esp pp. 82-87) also defends buck-passing accounts of all kinds of goodness. Wiggins (2009, pp. 175-176) considers this view of the unity among the varieties of goodness but rejects it; although it is not entirely clear why Wiggins rejects this view.

[10] See, most saliently, Dancy (2000), Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004), and Bykvist (2009).

[11] See, Suikkanen (2005), Lang (2008), and Way (2012) (2013).

[12] See Heathwood (2008), Gregory (2013), Brännmark (2008, pp. 306-308), and Kraut (2011, pp. 57-58).

2. A Buck-Passing Account of Good *For*

It seems to me that the following buck-passing account of good *for* is extremely plausible:

> *Buck-Passing Account of Good For (BPGF).* For *X* to be good *for S* is for *X* to have properties that provide reasons for *anyone who has reason to care about S for S's own sake* to have a pro-attitude towards *X* (such as to desire *X* or hope for *X*) *because they have reason to care about S for S's own sake.*

BPGF is an account of both instrumental and non-instrumental goodness *for S*. The difference between instrumental and non-instrumental goodness *for S* is just in the types of pro-attitudes that there are for those who have reason to care about *S* to have. If *X* is *non-instrumentally* good *for S,* then there are reasons for anyone who has reason to care about *S* to have *non-instrumental* pro-attitudes towards *X* such as to desire *X* for its own sake. If *X* is *instrumentally* good *for S*, then there are reasons for anyone who has reason to care about *S* to have instrumental pro-attitudes towards *X* such as to desire *X* as a means, that is, instrumentally. So, for example, if *S*'s having friends is non-instrumentally good *for S*, then there are reasons for those who have reason to care about *S* to want *S* to have friends for its own sake. But if *S*'s having friends is only instrumentally good *for S*, that is, if it is only good *for* S because it makes her happy for instance, then there are no reasons for those who have reason to care about *S* to want *S* to have friends for its own sake but only reasons to want *S* to have friends as a means to her being happy. I will mostly focus on non-instrumental goodness *for*.

BPGF holds, intuitively, that for *X* to be non-instrumentally good *for S* is for *X* to have features that give anyone who has reason to care for her, such as her friends and family, reasons to desire *X* for its own sake. It seems that there are reasons for us to desire that our friends and family are happy, successful, and get what they want. According to *BPGF*, happiness's being good *for* our friends and family just consists in there being these reasons for us, and those like us, to hope that our friends and family are happy.

BPGF needs some further unpacking. *BPGF* analyses non-instrumental goodness *for S* in terms of what there is reason for anyone who has reason to care about *S for S's own sake* to have pro-attitudes towards rather than just what there is reason for anyone who has reason to care

about *S* to have pro-attitudes towards. This is because some people might be said to care about *S* who do not care about *S* for *S*'s own sake and whose care for *S* is not connected to that which is good *for S* at all. For instance, I care about what people think about me. But in caring about what people think about me I need not care about what they think of me *for its own sake*. Rather, I can care about what people think about me because of my concern for myself; I can care about what people think of me merely instrumentally, for instance, because if people think ill of me, then I won't have as many friendships and will lead a less happy life.

But what is it to care about someone for their own sake? Buck-passing accounts of good *for* in terms of reasons to care are standardly held to be viciously circular because caring about *S* for *S's* own sake involves making judgments about what is good *for S* or presupposes the notion that certain things are good *for S*.[13] So *BPGF* will not provide an interesting account of good *for* unless *BPGF* can be allied with an account of what it is to care about *S* for *S's* own sake that makes sense of caring about *S* for *S's* own sake without referring to what is good *for S* or presupposing the notion of goodness *for S*. Thankfully, however, it seems to me that there is a straightforward account of what it is to care about someone for their own sake that is deeply plausible and does not presuppose the notion of good *for*. Namely,

> *Caring about S for S's Own Sake (Reason-Responsive).* For *A* to care about *S* for *S*'s own sake when *S* is a reason-responsive being is for *A* to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes towards things that (a) are essentially related to *S* and (b) are things that *S* has agent-relative reasons to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes in response to in virtue of the fact that they are *S*.[14] (Where *X* is essentially related to *S* if and only if (i) *X* requires the existence of *S*; (ii) *X* cannot persist in the absence of *S*; and (iii) *X* could not exist without being *S*'s.)[15]

This account of what it is to care about a reason-responsive being for their own sake seems extremely plausible. To care about my sister for her own sake is just to hope that she has

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[13] *Infra* note 23

[14] Or, in the case of reason-responsive beings that are not currently reason-responsive, would have such reasons to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes in response to if they were able to have pro-attitudes and were able to respond to reasons.

[15] See Fletcher (2012b, p. 5)

things that are essentially related to her and that she has special reasons to want: caring about my sister for her own sake is just hoping that she has a life full of pleasure, meaningful relationships, and achievements, and these are all things that she has special reason to want for herself and that were she to have them, would be essentially related to her.

It might seem that my understanding of what it is to care about someone for their own sake leads to counter-intuitive results. Sally has an agent-relative reason to have a non-instrumental pro-attitude towards her daughter getting into college and her daughter is essentially related to her. Suppose that Ryan does not know or care about Sally although, as her daughter's friend, he does care about her daughter getting into college. In this case Ryan cares about Sally's daughter getting into college but he does not thereby seem to care about Sally. But my account of what it is to care about someone for their own sake seems to *entail* that in caring about Sally's daughter's getting into college Ryan cares about Sally, since in this case Ryan has a pro-attitude towards something that Sally has agent-relative reason to have a pro-attitude towards and is essentially related to Sally.

However, my account of what it is to care about someone for their own sake does not entail that in caring about Sally's daughter's getting into college Ryan is thereby caring about Sally because Sally's daughter's getting into college is not essentially related to Sally. Remember that for something to be essentially related to Sally is for that thing to (i) require the existence of Sally, (ii) not be able to persist in the absence of Sally, and (iii) be something that could not exist without being Sally's. Although Sally's daughter and her daughter's going to college might fulfil conditions (i) and (iii) neither of these things fulfils (ii): Sally's daughter can continue to exist, and continue to go to college, when Sally no longer exists.

Another variant of the Sally/Sally's daughter/Ryan case may seem more problematic, however. Suppose that Ryan is Sally's daughter's friend and because of this Ryan cares about Sally's daughter's good relationship with her mother. However, Sally's daughter's relationship with Sally is something that Sally has agent-relative reasons to have pro-attitudes towards—she has reason to hope that they maintain it for instance—and is something that is essentially related to Sally. And so it seems that my account of what it is to care about someone for their own sake

entails that Ryan cares about Sally. But Ryan does not necessarily care about Sally in this case but only Sally's daughter.[16]

However, it seems to me that all this case shows is that in order to care about *S*, *A* must fulfill a further condition, that is, considering this case only shows that we need to add a further condition to the account of what it takes for *A* to care about *S* for *S*'s own sake. Namely, in order for *A* to care about *S*, *A* must care about things that are essentially related to *S* and only *S* as well as caring about things that are simply essentially related to *S*. Since Ryan only cares about things that are essentially related to Sally's mother but does not care about anything that is essentially related to Sally's mother and only Sally's mother he does not care about Sally's mother. This response might seem ad-hoc. But this is not the case. In order to care about someone you need to care about things that are just theirs, such as their health and happiness as well as caring about things that are not just theirs such as their marriage, friendships, and relationships with their children and colleagues. We might worry that there will be cases in which there is nothing that is essentially related to *S* and only *S* for *A* to care about. For instance, imagine that I am tied together with a clone and whenever I get happier or healthier my clone gets happier or healthier. However, even in this case someone could care only about me by being concerned with *my happiness* and *my health* rather than *mine and my clone's happiness and health*.

With what it is to care about someone for their own sake explained, consider *BPGF* again:

> *BPGF*. For *X* to be good *for S* is for *X* to have properties that provide reasons for *anyone who has reason to care about S for S's own sake* to have a pro-attitude towards *X* (such as to desire *X* or hope for *X*) *because they have reason to care about S for S's own sake*.

There are several reasons to accept *BPGF*. Firstly, *BPGF* has the resources to analyse what it is for something to be good *for* other living and non-living things. Being good *for* plants and animals seems in a way not unconnected to being good *for* a human: If I claim that sunlight is good *for* trees and eating healthily is good *for* humans, it seems like I'm claiming that sunlight bears a relationship to trees that is similar to the relationship that eating healthily bears to hu-

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[16] This case is different from the previous case because Sally's relationship with her mother is essentially related to her mother; it continues to exist only if her mother continues to exist.

mans. *BPGF* allows the relationship specified when we say that sunlight is good *for* trees to be similar enough to the relationship specified when we say that eating healthily is good *for* humans for *BPGF* to be intuitive and explanatorily illuminating without insisting that this relationship is too similar to be counter-intuitive.

BPGF allows for this similarity and difference through the difference between caring about a human and caring about a plant or other non-reason-responsive thing. When S is a plant, artefact, or other non-reason-responsive entity we should understand what it is to care about S for S's own sake slightly differently, namely as follows:

> *Caring about S for S's Own Sake (Non-Reason-Responsive).* For A to care about S for S's own sake when S is some non-reason-responsive entity is for A to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes towards S and for A to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes towards things that are essentially related to S because they have non-instrumental pro-attitudes towards S.[17]

If I care about a painting for its own sake, then I, for instance, admire and respect it and I want it to persist and be preserved, and/or hope that it is viewed and liked by many others, and/or hope that it is not defaced (and these things are things that are essentially related to the painting) because I admire and respect it. If I care about the palm tree in my back yard, then I have pro-attitudes towards it, for instance, I admire it, and I have pro-attitudes towards things that are essentially related to it, such as its preservation and its being healthy and strong because I admire it. If I care about tennis, then I praise it and recommend watching it to friends, and I am glad about

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[17] The clause, 'because they have non-instrumental pro-attitudes towards S' is needed because otherwise this understanding of what it is to care about non-reason responsive things would entail that I may care about a tree by admiring it and (somewhat perversely) having pro-attitudes towards its sickness and weakness, which are essentially related to it.

It might be argued that my view entails that 'care' is multiply ambiguous. Now 'care' is in one sense obviously ambiguous, since caring about someone for their own sake is extremely different from caring about something merely due to its effect on you. Furthermore, we should expect what it is to care about S to vary to some extent with the nature of S, but not to vary entirely. My account of the two types of caring about someone/something for its own sake captures this, since caring about S for S's own sake is understood in terms of pro-attitudes towards things that are essentially related to S both when S is a reason-responsive being and when S is some non-reason-responsive thing.

things that are essentially related to tennis such as the Federer-Nadal rivalry and increased government funding for tennis academies because I have pro-attitudes towards tennis in general.[18]

It might seem strange to suggest that we can care about a painting and care about tennis for these things' own sake. However, we can care about a painting and tennis in this sense. I can care about a painting and see it as having its own value or having worth in itself. In this sense my care is focussed on the painting in a way that my caring about what other people think about my paintings is not. When I care about a painting in this sense I see the painting as calling for a certain respect, as being worthy of certain responses from me. And I can care for tennis in the same way. People often scorn others for failing to respect games even if they are acting in accordance with the rules of the game. In scorning others in this way they are making clear that they see these games as, themselves, calling for and being worthy of certain attitudes and not others.

When this understanding of what it is to care for non-reason responsive things is plugged into *BPGF* it generates the right kind of results. When *S* is my palm tree, *BPGF* says that health and strength are good *for* my palm tree because people like me, who have reason to care about my palm tree for its own sake, have reasons to desire that my palm tree is strong and healthy. And when *S* is tennis, *BPGF* says that the Federer-Nadal rivalry is (or was) good *for* tennis because there are reasons for anyone who has reason to care about tennis for its own sake to be glad that there is or was this rivalry.[19]

Given this understanding of what it is to have reasons to care about things that cannot respond to reasons for their own sake *BPGF* can unify all ascriptions of good *for S*. And *BPGF*'s ability to unify all ascriptions of good *for S* is an advantage of *BPGF* over other accounts of good *for*, such as Henry Sidgwick's, Guy Fletcher's, and any other account that insists that '*X* is good

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[18] It might seem that there are some artefacts that it makes no sense to have non-instrumental pro-attitudes in response to such as, for instance, a chainsaw. But I doubt that it makes no sense to have a non-instrumental pro-attitude towards a chainsaw. The creator of a chainsaw has reason to preserve it, be proud of it, and to approve of her creation. And, for any car, in addition to its creator, there are some people who love that car, and in virtue of their desires and aesthetic sensibility have reason to admire, preserve, and praise that car.

[19] It might seem that good *for* in the case of artefacts is functional. For *X* to be good for *S*, when *S* is an artefact, is for *X* to conduce to the function of *S*. But I'm not sure that our view of all artefacts is so functional. Suppose that a painting has been created for the sole purpose of being destroyed. Would it then follow that being destroyed is good *for* the painting? It doesn't seem so.

for S’ should be analysed at least partially in terms of what there are reasons for *S* to do.[20] For such views cannot unify good *for S* when *S* is a reason-responsive being and good *for S* when *S* is not a reason-responsive being, such as a plant or tennis, because plants and tennis, as things that are not reason-responsive, cannot have reasons.

BPGF’s ability to unify all ascriptions of good *for S* is also an advantage it has over the view that good *for* in the case of humans should just be paraphrased in terms of welfare or benefit. If good *for* in the case of humans were analysed in terms of welfare or benefit, then good *for* a painting, good *for* my lawnmower, and good *for* humans could not be analysed in a unified way, since lawnmowers and paintings cannot be benefitted and do not have welfare. And it is a substantial virtue of a theory of good *for* that it can unify these uses of good *for*.[21] There must be some way of unifying or at least showing the underlying similarity between ascriptions of good *for* when applied to trees and artefacts, and good *for* when applied to humans otherwise it would be a pure coincidence that we use good *for* to refer to the relationship between sunlight and trees and the relationship between health and humans. If there were no way of unifying good *for* when applied to trees and humans, then ‘sunlight is good *for* trees’ and ‘health is good *for* humans’ would share as much in common as financial banks and riverbanks do, which only share a sound that is common to talk about both of them. But the relationship between sunlight and trees seems to share more in common with the relationship between health and humans than this.

Another reason to accept *BPGF* is that it explains why the following bi-conditional holds:

> *Bi-conditional. X* is good *for S* if and only if *X* has features that provide reasons for anyone who has reasons to care about *S* for *S’s* own sake to have a pro-attitude towards *X* because they have a reason to care about *S* for *S’s* own sake.

S’s friends and family have reasons to desire that *S* is happy if and only if happiness is good *for S*. And happiness is good *for S* if and only if her friends and family have reason to hope that *S* is happy. If stopping smoking would be good *for* me, there is a reason for those who have reason to care about me to hope that I stop smoking. For some of those who have reason to care about

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[20] See Sidgwick (1981, pp. 109-112) and Fletcher (2012b, pp. 4-5).
[21] See Fletcher (2012b, p. 10) and Rosati (2009).

me, such as my smoking friends, this reason to hope that I stop smoking might be outweighed by other reasons such as their self-interested reason to want to have someone to talk to in the smoking area on nights out. But nevertheless my smoking friends still have reason to hope that I stop smoking because they have reason to care about me. If good *for* is not analysed, but left brute, then this necessary connection is left unexplained. And *BPGF* explains this necessary connection because it analyses *X*'s being non-instrumentally good *for S* in terms of reasons for those who have reasons to care about *S* for *S*'s own sake such as her friends and family.

The ability to explain *bi-conditional* might not seem to just be an advantage of *BPGF*, however. According to *BPGF*, the left-hand side of *bi-conditional* should be analysed in terms of the right-hand side and this explains why it holds. But this bi-conditional could also be explained if the right-hand side were analysed in terms of the left-hand side; if the right-hand side were analysed in terms of the left-hand side, then reasons for anyone who has reason to care to have pro-attitudes would be analysed in terms of good *for*. But an account of reasons for anyone who has reasons to care about *S* to have a pro-attitude in terms of good *for* would not be acceptable. It would be ad-hoc to analyse these reasons for pro-attitudes in terms of good *for* but not to analyse all reasons for pro-attitudes in terms of good *for*. But not every reason for having a pro-attitude can be analysed in terms of good *for*. For instance, there might be reasons for us to admire virtuous people even if our admiring them were not good *for* us at all and their virtuous traits were not good *for* them at all either. And a formal account of reasons for pro-attitudes should not entail that there would be no reasons to admire such virtuous people in this context. So, despite first appearances only *BPGF*—and perhaps other buck-passing accounts—can explain *bi-conditional*.

BPGF also explains the subject-relativity of good *for*. What is good *for* someone seems to depend on them to a certain extent and theories of good *for* such as hedonistic and desire-satisfaction based theories are inspired by an attempt to capture this subject-relativity.[22] According to *BPGF*, what is good *for S* depends on what there are reasons for those who have reason to care about *S* for *S*'s own sake to (for instance) desire for its own sake. This seems to make what is good *for S* dependent only upon those who have reason to care about *S* for *S*'s own sake and not dependent upon *S*. But what it is to care about *S* for *S*'s own sake is partially analysed in terms of the reasons that there are or would be for *S*—see *Caring about S for S's Own Sake (Reason-*

Responsive) above—and so according to *BPGF* what is good *for S* is relative to the reasons that *S has* and to the reasons that there are for those around *S* who have reason to care about her.

A final reason to accept *BPGF* is that *BPGF* provides a way to ground and develop objective-list theories of well-being. Objective-list theories often face the following two objections: (i) that the goods on these theories' lists appear to be unconnected heaps of goods and (ii) objective-list theories seem to be *ad hoc* if no rationale can be given to rank the goods that these theories list in terms of their relative importance.[23] *BPGF* provides a way of ranking the relative importance of the goods specified by an objective list theory, namely, the stronger the reasons for those who have reasons to care about *S* to have a pro-attitude in response to a particular good, the more relatively important the good. And *BPGF* provides conditions that a good must satisfy in order to be good *for S*, namely those in *BPGF*, so it provides a way for objective-list theorists to avoid the unconnected heap objection.[24]

3. Objections to *BPGF*

The most persistent objection to buck-passing accounts of good *for* in terms of reasons to care is that they are circular because caring about someone involves making judgments about things being good *for* them; James Griffin, Nishi Shah, Guy Fletcher, Connie Rosati, and Thomas Hurka have all argued against Stephen Darwall's well-known account of good *for* in terms of reasons to care on this basis.[25] However, *BPGF* is not circular because it is combined with deeply plausible

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[23] Fletcher (2012b, p. 8)

[24] These last two advantages are also advantages of Fletcher's (2012b) locative analysis of good *for*. I have already given one reason to reject Fletcher's account, namely that it cannot unify good *for* when applied to humans and good *for* when applied to tress. Another problem with Fletcher's account is that it entails that nothing can be good *for S* without being good *simpliciter* because according to Fletcher's account *X* is good *for S* only if *X* is good *simpliciter*. But a serial killer's pleasure in killing people seems no good *simpliciter* at all yet the serial killer's pleasure certainly seems good *for* the serial killer. And an account of the concept good *for* should at least accommodate the intuitive possibility, which is also entailed by hedonistic and desire-satisfaction-based accounts of what things are good *for* us, that a serial killer's pleasure could be good *for* him even if it is not good *simpliciter* at all. An analysis of good *for* should be able to remain neutral about whether a serial killer's pleasure can be good *for* him and not be good *simpliciter* at all.

[25] See Darwall (2004), Griffin (2006, pp. 428-431), Shah (2004, pp. 579-581), Fletcher (2012a, pp. 88-89), Rosati (2006, pp. 620-626), and Hurka (2006, p. 607). The same problem, or at least a similar problem, afflicts Mark Schroeder's (2008, pp. 45-48) account, unless an account of 'looking out for *S*' that doesn't appeal to *S*'s good is given, as Schroeder acknowledges.

accounts of what it is to care about reason-responsive and non-reason-responsive things for their own sake that do not make reference to, and clearly do not rely on, judgments about good *for*.

A very different objection that *BPGF* in particular is vulnerable to is that *BPGF* is implausible as an account of the concept *good for* because it is so complex: it is not plausible that we have the extremely complex idea specified in *BPGF* in mind when we classify something as being good *for S*. But I do not believe that *BPGF* is too complex to be a plausible conceptual analysis of *good for*. The idea central to *BPGF* is that for Zoë's loving relationship to be good *for* her is for there to be reasons for people like her friends and family to be glad that Zoë has it and to hope it continues because they are her friends and family. And this is a perfectly straightforward idea that is not too complex to be what is going through our minds when we hold that Zoë's loving relationship is good *for* her. It might be objected that this idea is still too complex because we do not ask ourselves whether something fulfils these criteria when we wonder whether something is good *for* Zoë; we know that Zoë's loving relationship is good *for* her much quicker than it would take us to think this through. But this is just because we take it that a certain set of things, such as money, a stable job, and a loving relationship, are good *for* us; we're so used to people talking about these things as those that we should want for ourselves that we do not wonder whether these things are good *for* us anymore. (Compare how long it takes us to figure out which of two jobs that we want would be best *for* us or whether staying where we currently are is really good *for* us.)

It might be objected that *BPGF* is really much more complex than I've just made it sound, since it refers to a complex account of what it is to care about someone for their own sake, which itself makes reference to the notion of an essential relation. But the account of what it is to care about someone for their own sake is just as simple as *BPGF*: to care about *S* for their own sake is to want things that they have reason to want and that are theirs. So, *BPGF* is not implausible as an account of the concept *Good For*.

Still *BPGF* is much more complex than a simple reduction of, for instance, 'sunlight is good *for* plants' to 'sunlight promotes plants' health'. So it seems that there is a trade-off here between simplicity and elegance and explanatory power, and it's not clear that *BPGF* with its greater complexity and explanatory power wins out against such a reduction's simplicity and elegance. But, at least conceptually, the concept *good for plants* cannot be reduced to the concept of promoting plants' health because the concept *good for humans* cannot be reduced to the concept of

promoting humans' health, since many people plausibly believe that things that do not conduce to humans' health are good *for* humans such as achieving worthwhile goals—achieving a goal that is worthwhile may indeed be bad for your health. And if *good for humans* cannot be analysed in terms of promoting humans' health, then *good for plants* should not be analysed in terms of promoting plants' health, since if *good for plants* were analysed in this way but *good for humans* were not analysed in a similar way, then there would be nothing that *good for humans* and *good for plants* have in common; but as I've argued these two concepts certainly have something in common.

Susan Wolf, Joseph Raz, and Guy Fletcher have all made a similar objection to Darwall's buck-passing account of good *for*, which is also an objection to *BPGF*. Wolf, Raz, and Fletcher claim that we all have reason to hope that those we care about act rightly and virtuously. If this is true, then according to Wolf, Raz, and Fletcher, *BPGF* entails that acting rightly and virtuously is good *for* us. But buck-passing accounts of good *for* should be neutral with regards to whether acting rightly and virtuously is good *for* us, since if a hedonistic or desire-based account of good *for* holds and we do not gain pleasure from acting virtuously or desire to act rightly, then acting rightly and virtuously is not good *for* us. And an account of good *for* should be neutral with regards to plausible first-order views about which things are good *for* us.[26]

But according to *BPGF*, *X* is good *for S* only if there are reasons for anyone who has reason to care about *S* for *S's* own sake to have a pro-attitude in response to *X because* they have reason to care about *S* for *S's* own sake. And we have reasons to have pro-attitudes towards *everyone's* acting rightly or virtuously.[27] So perhaps we don't have reasons to hope that those we have reason to care about act rightly and virtuously *because* we have reason to care about them. Rather, it's just that everyone has reasons to hope that everyone acts rightly and virtuously regardless of whether they have reason to care about everyone.

It might seem that we have additional reasons to hope that those we have reasons to care about act rightly or virtuously, regardless of whether their acting rightly or virtuously is good *for* them. However, we do not have additional special reasons to hope that those we have *reasons to care about* act rightly or virtuously. Or at least we have no reason to believe this. Firstly, for the most part we do have (additional) reasons to hope that our family don't act badly, but often this

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[26] See Fletcher (2012a, p. 87), Raz (2006 p. 413), and Wolf (2006, pp. 421-422).
[27] See Fletcher (2012a, p. 87).

is because we have reason to hope that they do not suffer for acting badly. If the right thing for my daughter to do is to sacrifice herself for others, I don't have more reason to hope that she sacrifices herself for others just because I care or have reason to care about her. Secondly, we have reason to hope that those we *in fact care for* are people of whom we can be proud. But this is because we want to be proud of those that we are associated with; we do not have reason to hope that those *we have reason to care about* are good people but rather that those *we in fact care about and are connected with* are good people. And so, we have no reason to believe that *anyone who has reason to care about S* (rather than anyone who does in fact care about *S*) has special reasons to hope that *S* acts rightly or virtuously regardless of whether *S*'s acting rightly or virtuously is good *for S*. So *BPGF* evades Wolf, Raz, and Fletcher's objection.

Chris Heathwood has argued that buck-passing accounts of good *for* encounter problems because although that which would make someone's life go best does not change over time what there is a reason for someone to prefer does change over time. Heathwood assumes that a buck-passing account of good *for S* will be in terms of reasons for *S* and uses Parfit's ingenious *My past and future operations* case to show that time bias appears to be reasonable. In Parfit's case, Chloe has *either* had an extremely painful operation in the past *or* will have a less painful operation today. But she does not know whether she has already had the extremely painful operation or is yet to have the less painful operation. There seems to be most reason for Chloe, at this time, to prefer that she has already had the extremely painful operation. For then she won't have to endure any painful operation today.[28] But Chloe's life would be better for her, considered as a whole, if she had the less painful operation today because it is better for Chloe overall if her life has less pain in it overall. So, there is a mismatch between what is best *for* Chloe and what she has most reason to prefer now. Thus, according to Heathwood, a buck-passing account of good *for* will entail that Chloe's having had the extremely painful operation in the past is better for her than her having the less painful operation today, but this is false: it would be better *for* Chloe overall if she has the less painful operation today.[29]

It seems to me that *BPGF* can circumvent Heathwood's objection. Heathwood doesn't consider buck-passing accounts of good *for S* that analyse *X*'s being good *for S* in terms of the reasons that there are for those who have reason to care about *S* to have pro-attitudes towards *X*

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[28] See Parfit (1984, pp. 165-166).
[29] See Heathwood (2008, esp. pp. 55-57).

as *BPGF* does. So, let's see exactly how Heathwood's objection can apply to *BPGF*. According to a version of Heathwood's objection revised to militate against *BPGF*,

(1) Going through the less painful operation at *T2* would be better *for* Chloe, considering her life as a whole, than her having gone through the more painful operation at *T1*

(2) But if Chloe must have either operation, and if between *T1* and *T2* she and those who have reason to care about her do not know whether she has already had the more painful operation or is going to have the less painful one, then (I) between *T1* and *T2* there is more reason for those who have reason to care about Chloe to have pro-attitudes towards her having had the more painful operation at *T1* than her having to have the less painful operation at *T2*

(3) But if (I) is true, then according to *BPGF,* having the more painful operation is better *for* Chloe considering her life as a whole or at least is better *for* Chloe considering her life as a whole between *T1* and *T2*.

(4) Given (3), *BPGF* conflicts with (1) and no plausible account of good *for* may conflict with (1)

(5) So, we should reject *BPGF*.

However, (3) does not hold because it is not the case that what determines the degree to which *X* is good *for* Chloe considering her life as a whole is the strength of reasons that there are for those who have reason to care about her at a particular time. Rather what determines the degree to which *X* is good *for* Chloe considering her life as a whole is the strength of the reasons that there are for those who have reason to care about her and are considering her life as a whole. Now we don't often take-up the standpoint of someone's life as a whole but sometimes we do; the most common times at which we consider someone's life as a whole is after they've died or before they are born. So what is best *for* Chloe is what there is most reason for, for instance, those who have reason to care about her before she is born to want for her or what those who have reason to care about her and are around after she has passed away to be glad that she had or wish that she had had if she did not have these things. So, regarding our two operations, the less painful operation is better *for* Chloe than the more painful operation because those who have reason to care about Chloe and are around before she is born have most reason to hope that she has a less painful operation than a more painful operation if she must have one or the other and because those who have reason to care about Chloe and are around after she has died

have reason to be glad that she had the less painful operation if she had it and have reason to wish that she had the less painful operation rather than the more painful operation if she had the more painful operation. More generally, Chloe's having the less painful operation is better *for* her than her having the more painful operation because those who have reason to care about her and have reason to consider Chloe's life as a whole because they have reason to care about Chloe have more reason to have pro-attitudes towards her having the less painful operation.

We don't often take-up the perspective of *S*'s life as a whole, and we don't often have reason to take up this perspective, at least we don't often have reason to take-up this perspective on *S*'s life because of the fact that we have reason to care about *S*. Much of the time rather than being concerned with *S*'s life as a whole those who have reason to care about *S* are rather concerned, or most prominently concerned, with *S*'s life from now on, and indeed this may seem to be the most fitting perspective for those who have reason to care about *S*. This seems to affect both what those who have reason to care about *S* have (more) reason to have pro-attitudes towards and what we would normally say is good *for* or better *for S*. Agents' reasons for pro-attitudes and reasonable ascriptions of goodness *for S* are both affected by the fact that they do not take-up, and do not have most reason to take-up, the perspective of *S*'s life as a whole in certain cases such as Chloe's case. In Chloe's case it might be that there is most reason for those who have reason to care about Chloe to hope that she has already had the more painful operation rather than being still to have the less painful operation when they, and Chloe, do not know whether she has already had the more painful operation or is yet to have the less painful one.[30] But similarly, it will make no sense today, when Chloe might have had a more painful operation yesterday or a less painful operation today to say 'it would be better for her if she had the less painful operation now'. Even though it would be better for Chloe considering her life as a whole to have the less painful operation today, we would not tell her that it would be better for her if she has the less painful operation now, rather than had already had this ordeal done with; we are concerned with what's good *for* her in the future now, not what's good *for* her regarding the past and future as a whole.

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[30] Although this can be legitimately questioned since rational time-bias is standardly held to be only first-personal. It is standardly held that although there might be more reason for Chloe today to hope that she has already had the more painful operation there is not more reason for those who have reason to care about her to hope for this. See Parfit (1984, pp. 181-184) and Schroeder (2010, p. 48). If time-bias is only first-personal, then Heathwood's objection does not get a grip on *BPGF* at all.

It might be objected that before she is born we do not know enough about Chloe to know exactly what will make her have a good life or that there are no reasons for those who have reason to care about Chloe before she is born or after she has died to be concerned with the possibility of her having to have either a more painful or a less painful operation. But so long as some first-order theory of good *for* holds there will be reasons for those who have reason to care about Chloe considering her life as a whole to want Chloe to have more of the things that this first-order theory of good *for* holds are good *for* us. And any plausible first-order theory of good *for* will hold that Chloe's having less pain is good *for* her. So there will be reason for those who have reason to care about Chloe considering her life as a whole to want her to have less pain in her life and in virtue of there being this reason there will be reason for them to want her to have a less painful operation rather than a more painful operation whenever she could have one or the other.[31]

A final objection to *BPGF* is that *BPGF* is insufficiently motivated in comparison to a view according to which good *for* cannot truly be analysed but is rather a primitive concept that can only be characterised in terms of the concept of benefit, which in turn can only be characterised in terms of the concept of good *for*. Such a characterisation of good *for* in terms of benefit would not have to jump through the hoops that a buck-passing account has to in order to characterise what all things that are good *for S* have in common (for any *S*). The thought here is that benefitting someone isn't a particularly perplexing or mysterious concept and since it isn't a particularly perplexing concept I haven't provided sufficient motivation for reductively analysing this concept in terms of reasons.

However, although it might be that no analysis of good *for* succeeds and that good *for* should be taken as a primitive concept, this is a position that we must be argued into rather than argued out of. This might seem wrong at least with regards to the specific analysis that I propose because it might seem that we have a better grasp on the notion of good *for* than we have on the

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[31] It might seem that this strategy of holding that what makes Chloe's life go best is what there is most reason for those who have reason to care about her and are situated before her birth or after her death to have pro-attitudes towards won't work in hypothetical cases in which there is no one around before Chloe's birth and no one around after her death. However, in these cases we can still consider the reasons that there *would be* for agents who were around before her birth or after her death or the reasons for possible agents that are around before her birth or after her death. (I discuss why appealing to such counterfactual reasons and reasons for merely possible beings is not problematic in section 5.)

notion of a normative reason, and we ought not analyse *A* in terms of *B* if we have a better grasp on *A* than *B*. However, it is only true that we ought not analyse *A* in terms of *B* if we have a better grasp on *A* than on *B* and *other things are equal*. If there are clear theoretical advantages to analysing *A* in terms of *B*, then even if we have a better grasp on *A* than *B*, we should not refrain from analysing *A* in terms of *B*. Perhaps this is not true if we have a *much better* grasp on *A* than *B*, but I seriously doubt that we have a much better grasp on the notion of something's being good *for* someone than we do on the idea of a normative reason. We talk about reasons to believe things all the time, reasons to go places all the time, and many foodstuffs come with packaging that explicitly elaborates several reasons to consume that foodstuff. And these examples of reasons talk are clearly examples of normative reason talk—the reasons on the foodstuffs are supposed to be reasons *for* eating those foodstuffs. I take these facts as evidence that we have a pretty good grasp on the notion of a normative reason as it is. And as I argued in the last section there are several distinct advantages of *BPGF* and all of these advantages are advantages that *BPGF* has over a view of good *for* according to which good *for* is a primitive unanalysable concept; not to mention that, as I argued in section 1, if good *for* is a primitive unanalysable concept, then it cannot be maintained that the close relationship that seems to hold between the different varieties of goodness in fact does hold.

So, *BPGF* is intuitively plausible, has several theoretical advantages, and can avoid all of the objections to extant buck-passing accounts of good *for*. I'll now show that there is also a buck-passing account of goodness of a kind that is independently plausible and can circumvent the objections that have been made to buck-passing accounts of goodness of a kind.

4. A Buck-Passing Account of Goodness of a Kind

According to what seems to me to be the strongest and most natural buck-passing account of goodness of a kind,

> *Buck-Passing Account of Goodness of a Kind (BPGK).* For *X* to be a good *K* is for *X* to have other properties that provide reasons for *anyone who has reason to have a pro-attitude towards a K (in general)* to have a pro-attitude towards *X because they have a reason to have a pro-attitude towards a K (in general).*

According to *BPGK*, a good knife is one that there are reasons for anyone who has reason to want a knife to want just because they have reason to want a knife.[32] Similarly a good assassin is one that anyone who has reason to want an assassin has reason to want just because they have reason to want an assassin. And Murray is a good tennis player because anyone who has reason to admire a tennis player has reason to admire him.

There are several reasons to accept *BPGK*. Firstly, *BPGK* tells us what all types of goodness of a kind have in common. This will be a reason to accept any plausible account of goodness of a kind. However, many proposed accounts of goodness of a kind are not plausible. And so there are reasons to accept *BPGK* over those accounts. For instance, the Aristotelian idea that a good *K* is a *K* that performs the function of a *K* (well) cannot plausibly account for a person's being good as a person because persons' don't seem to have any function *qua* persons. It might seem that a person's function is just whatever we have (most) reason to want in a person. But in this case the functional account of goodness of a kind reduces to *BPGK*.

Paul Ziff argued that for *X* to be good is for *X* to answer to certain interests.[33] And T.M. Scanlon has recently argued that Ziff's understanding of goodness is a plausible understanding of goodness of a kind: for *X* to be a good *K* is for *X* to answer to certain interests.[34] But this understanding of goodness of a kind does not adequately account for 'good tennis player'. A good tennis player is not one that answers to our interests in tennis or tennis players. A good tennis player would be a good one even if no one had any interest in tennis or tennis players at all.[35] Again, it might be argued that the relevant interests should be understood in terms of the reasons that there are for anyone who has reason to watch tennis or tennis players. But in this case this Ziffian understanding of goodness of a kind reduces to *BPGK*. Scanlon might claim that we should analyse 'good tennis player' in some other way. But we should assume that the concepts

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[32] We might worry that if *A* has reason to want a knife and there are only bad knives around, there is a reason for *A* to want a knife that is a bad one just because *A* wants a knife. But it is only because *A* is limited with regards to her choice of the knives that are currently in existence that *A* has reason to want a knife that is a bad one. We should think of reasons for anyone who has reason to want a knife because they have reasons to want a knife as reasons that they would have if they could have any knife currently in existence; cf. Thomson (2008, pp. 40-43).

[33] Ziff (1960, ch. 6)

[34] See Scanlon (2011, p. 445).

[35] Although the fact that tennis is a human game will mean that it is at some level connected to our interests, I doubt that this fact can furnish us with enough resources to analyse 'good tennis player' in terms of interests.

of being a good tennis player, a good knife, and a good holiday resort are structurally very similar concepts at least; these are all concepts of being good as a particular kind of thing. Even though, of course, what it specifically takes to be a good tennis player, knife, or holiday resort will be extremely different.

Judith Jarvis Thomson's account of goodness of a kind does not encounter the problem that Ziff's does. And so the fact that it can explain what unifies all types of goodness of a kind is also a reason to accept Thomson's account of goodness of a kind. According to Thomson, something is good as a K if it meets the standards set by the kind K.[36] But *BPGK* has explanatory advantages that Thomson's account does not have.

Firstly, *BPGK* explains a necessary connection between goodness of a kind and reasons. Necessarily, if X is good as a K, then there are reasons for anyone who has reason to have a pro-attitude towards a K to have a pro-attitude towards X. *BPGK* explains this necessary connection by analysing goodness of a kind in terms of reasons for anyone who has a reason to have a pro-attitude towards things of that kind. It might seem that Thomson's account can explain this necessary connection by analysing reasons for anyone who has a reason to have a pro-attitude towards things of that kind in terms of goodness of a kind. But if reasons for pro-attitudes should be analysed in terms of goodness of a kind, then all reasons for attitudes should be analysed in terms of goodness of a kind. And it seems implausible to analyse reasons for belief in terms of goodness of a kind because it seems that there are reasons for believing things that are not good as any kind of thing and that it is not good as any kind of thing to believe. For instance, the fact that there are dinosaur bones around is a reason to believe that dinosaurs once roamed the earth. But it does not seem that the fact that there are dinosaur bones around is good as a particular kind of thing.

Secondly, *BPGK* can explain why no one ever says that Harold Shipman is Britain's best serial killer. But Thomson's account cannot explain this. According to both *BPGK* and Thomson's account there is a sense in which Shipman is Britain's best serial killer since he did better according to the standards of serial killing than other serial killers (Thomson's account) and there are reasons for anyone who has reason to want a serial killer to wish that they were able to hire Shipman because he was so good at serial killing (*BPGK*). But even though Shipman is, in a

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[36] See Thomson (2008, pp. 19-21).

sense, Britain's best serial killer on both accounts, *BPGK* can explain why no one says this whilst Thomson's account cannot.

Most people do not want to claim that there are reasons to have positive attitudes towards Shipman—even though there may be such reasons for those who have reason to want a serial killer. Similarly, it may be that evil dictators possess, or possessed, qualities that provide reasons to admire them but few people—who oppose what these dictators did—will hold that there are any reasons to admire evil dictators or that they are admirable in any way. It seems that people believe, perhaps correctly, that to claim that there are reasons to do awful things (at least in certain contexts) is to dignify these awful things in some way—even if there are in fact reasons to do these things. And similarly to claim that there are reasons for even a subset of people to have positive attitudes towards people who did terrible things, and in the Shipman case to have positive attitudes towards people who did terrible things *because* they were so good at doing these terrible things, is to give people who did terrible things undue praise and to show disrespect for their victims; to claim that there are reasons to have positive attitudes towards them seems to commend to some extent, and commending them at all seems inappropriate. So, if to be good as a kind of thing is understood in terms of reasons for pro-attitudes as to be good as a kind of thing is on *BPGK*, then it is clear why so few people are willing to claim that Shipman was Britain's best serial killer.

It might seem that Thomson's account can explain why so few people say that Shipman is Britain's best serial killer: no one says that Shipman is Britain's best serial killer because Shipman does well on a standard that we don't endorse or that we vehemently oppose. But people who vehemently oppose particular standards don't have a problem saying that particular things are called for according to those standards. For instance, many people oppose the punishments called for by Iranian law but are not unwilling to say that these punishments are what Iranian law requires. Similarly, many people oppose codes of honour but are not unwilling to say that particular horrific actions are called for by those codes of honour. So, Thomson's account cannot explain why few people are willing to say that Shipman is Britain's best serial killer. What perhaps explains why people are not shy about making claims about what is required according to standards that they do not endorse is that by making claims about standards we do not seem to be endorsing those standards and by saying that something does well on a particular standard we do not necessarily seem to be commending that thing. The explanation may be even more general than this, however. It might well be that in making a claim about a standard one is not thereby

making a normative claim, since standards do not, in themselves, confer any normative force, that is, provide agents with normative reasons.[37]

Regardless, Thomson's account cannot explain the necessary connection between goodness of a kind and reasons for those who have reasons to have pro-attitudes towards things of that kind in general and nor can Thomson's account explain why no one claims that Shipman in Britain's best serial killer. But *BPGK* can explain both of these facts. So there are reasons to accept *BPGK* rather than Thomson's account of goodness of a kind.

5. Objections to *BPGK*

Although *BPGK* is intuitively plausible and there are several advantages to accepting this view *BPGK* may appear to overgenerate instances of goodness of a kind. Richard Kraut claims that buck-passing accounts of goodness of a kind should be rejected because

> to say that something is a good play goes far beyond saying merely that there is some reason to see it. After all, one might have a reason to see a play because it was written by one's mother, or because one promised one's wife that one would accompany her. (Everyone might have reason to see a certain play, without its being a good play: imagine that an early work of Sophocles is discovered, and although it is dramatically weak in every respect, it nonetheless reveals information about the author that transforms our understanding of his other works.)[38]

But *BPGK* does not hold that a good play is just one that there is a reason to see or that there is a reason for everyone to see. Rather, *BPGK* holds that a good play is one that there is reason for anyone who has reason to see a play to want to see just because they have a reason to see a play. And the examples that Kraut considers are examples in which there are reasons for *only some people who have reason to see a play* to see his mother's play and Sophocles' play. There are not reasons for anyone who has reason to see a play to see these plays just because they have reason to see a play. So *BPGK* evades Kraut's objection.

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[37] Or at least, standards do not themselves provide agents with reasons that matter; see Finlay (2006).
[38] Kraut (2011, pp. 57-58)

Derek Parfit argues that we should not accept a buck-passing account of goodness of a kind because when we claim that certain things are good as a kind of thing, such as when we claim that 'ice formed on the butler's upper slopes' is a good metaphor, we do not mean to say anything about reasons.[39] So, according to Parfit, we should not analyse 'good metaphor' in terms of reasons. But often when we say that something is good as a particular kind of thing it seems that all we mean is that there are reasons to respond to it in a particular way. When we say that a resort is a good one it seems that all we mean is that there are reasons to visit it and to recommend it to others.[40] But it would be ad-hoc to provide a buck-passing account for certain types of goodness of a kind but not others, that is, for good resort but not for good metaphor. Furthermore, it seems quite intuitive to hold that in saying that a metaphor is a good one we are saying that this metaphor merits our attention if we are interested in metaphors.[41]

A similar objection, which I sometimes hear to buck-passing accounts of goodness of a kind, is that all we mean when we claim that, for instance, a lawnmower is a good one is that it mows the lawn efficiently, and so there is no motivation to analyse 'good lawnmower' in terms of reasons. So an analysis of goodness of a kind, or at least of good as a lawnmower and good as other similar kinds of things, is unmotivated. But it does not seem that we can analyse good person, good decision, good painting, good play, or good film in terms of efficiency, function, or anything non-normative. And all ascriptions of goodness of a kind seem to share something in common: they all seem to say that something is good as a particular kind of thing. So we should prefer a unified analysis of goodness of a kind to a disjunctive analysis. We should hold that although all it takes for a lawnmower in particular to be a good lawnmower is for it to mow lawns efficiently this is what makes a lawnmower such that there are reasons for anyone who has a reason to want a lawnmower to want this one.

Another worry, which T.M. Scanlon has pressed, is that buck-passing accounts of goodness of a kind undergenerate instances of goodness of a kind.[42] The worry here is simply that *BPGK* is untenable because is analyses goodness of a kind in terms of reasons for pro-attitudes. According to this objection there are kinds of things that no one has reason to have pro-attitudes

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[39] See Parfit (2011, pp. 38-39).

[40] See Scanlon (1998, p. 97).

[41] Certainly this seems as intuitive as the view, which Parfit holds, that when we claim that it's good (*simpliciter*) that the Nazis' lost the war, we are claiming that there are reasons to be glad that they lost the war.

[42] See Scanlon (2011, pp. 444-445).

towards, some because they are too evil, for instance a doomsday machine, and some because they are too trivial, for instance a dandelion root. So, according to this objection *BPGK* entails that there are no good dandelion roots because no one has reason to want a dandelion root in general and that there are no good doomsday machines because no one has reason to want one. But there are good dandelion roots and good doomsday machines. So, *BPGK* is false.

I doubt that no one has reason to have a pro-attitude towards dandelion roots at all; I'm sure dandelion lovers have reasons to have pro-attitudes towards dandelion roots. And I can imagine that people who hate everyone and all forms of life, or who do so temporarily, have some (at least subjective) reason to have a pro-attitude towards a doomsday machine even though this reason for them to have pro-attitudes towards a doomsday machine is massively outweighed by other reasons.[43]

However, even if no one had a reason to want a dandelion root or a doomsday machine this would not show that *BPGK* entails that there are no good dandelion roots or good doomsday machines. According to *BPGK*, a good doomsday machine is one that there are reasons for anyone who has a reason to have a pro-attitude towards doomsday machines has a reason to have a pro-attitude towards just because they have a reason to have a pro-attitude towards doomsday machines. Even if there is no one in this world who has reason to have a pro-attitude towards a doomsday machine, there will be people in other merely possible worlds who have reason to have a pro-attitude towards doomsday machines in general. And the scope of 'anyone' in *BPGK* covers such people. So, if there is no one for whom there is a reason to have a pro-attitude towards a doomsday machine around, and we want to figure out which doomsday machines are good ones, all we need to do is to ask, 'which doomsday machines would someone who had reason to want a doomsday machines have reason to want?'

However, this worry can be pressed a little harder if we imagine a world in which there are no rational-beings but only trees, plants, and non-rational creatures and insects. It still seems that a tree in this world can have good roots. But *BPGK* appears to entail that a tree in this world cannot have good roots since there are no beings around for whom there are reasons to have

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[43] On weak massively outweighed reasons, see Schroeder (2007, pp. 93-95).

pro-attitudes in response to this tree's roots.[44] But even though there are no beings around that have reasons to have pro-attitudes towards the tree's roots there are reasons for beings in other merely possible worlds to have pro-attitudes towards the tree's roots. There are reasons for agents or possible agents who are aware of this isolated tree to hope that its roots are ones that make it vibrant and healthy for instance. And even if we are sceptical of reasons for possible beings, the tree's good roots have features that *would* provide reasons for any agent that had reason to have pro-attitudes towards the tree to have pro-attitudes towards those roots, to be glad that the tree had those roots rather than others for instance.[45] (It might seem that the fact that *BPGK* has to appeal to counterfactual reasons or reasons for merely possible beings in order to accommodate the goodness of a tree's good roots makes *BPGK* less plausible than the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter*. However, the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* runs into the same problem with, for instance, the value of the pleasure of non-rational beings in an isolated world).[46] So good roots, and the goodness of a kind that particular things have when there are no rational agents around is no problem for *BPGK*.

Alex Gregory argues that buck-passing accounts of goodness of a kind are implausible because for a reason to ϕ R to be weighty to degree D is for R to be good as a reason to ϕ to degree D, that is, because reasons' weights should be analysed in terms of (a particular form of) goodness of a kind. And if reasons' weights must be understood in terms of goodness of a kind, then any buck-passing account of goodness of a kind is implausible because it is viciously circu-

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[44] A similar objection can be pressed against *BPGF*, namely that sunlight in this world would still be good *for* tress.

[45] To be clear, there are two views here. On the first view there *are* reasons for merely possible agents to have pro-attitudes towards the tree's roots in the actual world—such reasons are trans-world reasons. On the second view there only *would be* reasons for agents if the world were different—such reasons are intra-world reasons. The view that there are reasons for merely possible agents to have pro-attitudes towards the actual world might seem very odd. But, if this idea seems odd, this is due to the idea that there *are* reasons for merely possible beings. I do not believe that we should be sceptical of such reasons for merely possible beings though. There certainly are reasons for merely possible beings. The possible me who stayed in bed all week watching *Game of Thrones* rather than coming into the office has reason to wish that he came into the office for instance. And if there were no reasons for merely possible beings, then there could not be the proverbial possible world that is different to the actual world in just one respect, since every possible world would be different to the actual world in infinitely many respects: every possible world would contain no reasons for anyone to do anything or have any attitudes. And there are trans-world reasons, since there are reasons for me to wish that the Conservatives had not won the last UK election for instance. So, there are no grounds to be sceptical of there being reasons for merely possible beings.

[46] See Bykvist (2009, pp. 5-6), Dancy (2000, pp. 170-171), and Suikkanen (2005, pp. 532-533).

lar. If reasons' weights should be analysed in terms of goodness of a kind, then *BPGK* would be circular since *BPGK* would have to analyse *X*'s being a better knife than *Y*, for instance, in terms of there being better reasons to want *X* than *Y* if you have reason to want a knife.[47]

However, Gregory only gives two arguments for the view that reasons' weights must be analysed in terms of their goodness and I do not see that either argument establishes this.[48] First-ly, Gregory argues that talk of the weights of reasons is idiosyncratic to philosophers. But it is crucial for us to know how weighty (or how much) reason we have to do things. So, it would be incredible if everyday English didn't have a word for the weight of a reason. Gregory argues that the obvious possibility is that for *R1* to be a weightier reason to ϕ than *R2* is just for *R1* to be better as a reason to ϕ than *R2*.[49] But there is an equally obvious candidate that we could identify reasons' weights with, namely reasons' strength; a quick Google search establishes that we talk about reasons' being strong and weak all the time. And if reasons' weights should be analysed in terms of their strength rather than their goodness, then *BPGK* is not circular.

Secondly, Gregory argues that the view that reasons' weights should be understood in terms of their goodness explains why what you ought to do is what there is weightiest reason to do rather than what there is lightest reason to do. But it's not clear to me that an account of rea-sons' weights in terms of their goodness as reasons does explain why we ought to do what there is weightiest rather than weakest reason to do. Although to claim that something is good as a particular kind of thing is always to positively evaluate that thing in some sense, things that are good as particular kinds of things are often very bad in general: Harold Shipman was a great seri-al killer, but he wasn't good in general! So, the fact that doing *X* rather than *Y* is recommended by considerations that are better as *K*s than the considerations that recommend *Y* doesn't obvi-ously seem to explain why we ought to do *X* rather than *Y*. Furthermore, the most straightfor-ward explanation of why we ought to do what there is weightier reason to do rather than what there is lighter reason to do is that what we ought to do should be analysed in terms of what we have strongest reason to do or that reasons and the strength of reasons should be analysed in terms of their contribution to oughts.[50] So, Gregory's objection to buck-passing accounts of

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[47] See Gregory (2013, pp. 2-7).

[48] Gregory gives a third argument, but this is really an attack on view that to be a good reason to ϕ just is to be a normative reason ϕ.

[49] Gregory (2013, p. 4)

[50] See, for instance, Broome (2004).

goodness of a kind fails because he does not establish that reasons' weights should be understood in terms of reasons' goodness as reasons.

Finally, spurred on by Gregory's objection, we might worry that the account of 'good reason' entailed by *BPGK* is nonsensical: a good reason simply is not a reason that there are reasons to have a pro-attitude towards if one has reasons to have a pro-attitude towards a reason. But this account of 'good reason' is plausible. Suppose that I say that a political party's health policy is a better reason to vote for them than their foreign policy. According to *BPGK*, this just means that there is more reason to approve of someone voting for them on the basis of their health policy than on the basis of their foreign policy.[51] And this seems a perfectly good account of what it is to say that their health policy is a better reason to vote for them than their foreign policy. So, *BPGK*, like *BPGF*, is plausible, illuminating, and withstands many objections.

6. Conclusion

I have shown that there are many reasons to accept buck-passing accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind and that certain buck-passing accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind can evade all of the many objections that have been pressed against such accounts. And if the buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* can also be shown to evade the objections that have been levelled against it, as I assume it can be, I have not only provided new, compelling and illuminating accounts of two types of goodness, I have also shown that normative reasons are what unifies the different varieties of goodness. If a buck-passing account of good *simpliciter* holds and the buck-passing accounts of good *for* and goodness of a kind that I have defended hold, then for *X* to be good as a *K*, good *for S*, or good *simpliciter* is for *X* to have properties that provide reasons for a certain set of agents to have pro-attitudes in response to *X*. Combining the plausible buck-passing accounts of the different varieties of goodness allows us to explain what unifies the different varieties of goodness: normative reasons are the unity among the varieties of goodness.

References

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[51] Furthermore, as Gregory acknowledges, when we say that something is a 'good reason' we sometimes do just mean that it is a normative reason, or as the OED puts it, a valid reason; see also Skorupski (2010, p. 83).

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