

# Buck-Passing Accounts of Value

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## Abstract

This paper explores the so-called buck-passing accounts of value. These views attempt to use normative notions such as *reasons* and *ought* to explain evaluative notions such as *goodness* and *value*. Thus, according to T. M. Scanlon's well-known view, the property of being good is the formal, higher-order property of having some more basic properties that provide reasons to have certain kind of valuing attitudes towards the objects. I begin by tracing some of the long history of such accounts. I then describe the arguments which are typically used to motivate these views. The rest of this article investigates how some of the central details of the buck-passing accounts should be specified, and what kind of problems these views face.

## 1. *The Buck-Passing Accounts of Value*

Theories that try to explicate evaluative notions (such as *goodness*, *value*, and *excellence*) in terms of normative notions (such as *reasons*, *ought*, and *fittingness*) are today known as “buck-passing accounts of value”. At the moment, there is a lively philosophical debate about these views.

Anyone who attempts to understand what it is for things to be good seems to face two unsatisfactory options. The first one is to think that value is a simple property of its own unique kind; all one can say about this property is that it is unlike any other property. This seems to leave value so mysterious that many have questioned whether such a property could exist in the first place. The other option is to think that, when we claim that an object is good, we describe the object's basic natural properties such as being a thing that makes us happy. Such reductive views, however, clash with our basic intuition that being good must mean more than this.

The buck-passing accounts of value are appealing because they seem to offer a third way. On the one hand, they attempt to say something informative about the

nature of value and thereby to make value less mysterious. On the other hand, because the nature of value is accounted for in terms of having *normative reasons* for positive attitudes towards things, such views leave room for thinking that there is more to being good than merely having some natural properties.

The buck-passing accounts, which are sometimes also called “fitting-attitudes accounts”, have a long history. One of the first philosophers to hold such a view was Immanuel Kant. He claimed that “Practical good ... is that which determines the will by means of representations of reason, hence not by subjective causes but objectively, that is, from grounds that are valid for every rational being as such (Kant 4:413).” One first asks here what anyone who is guided by her reason could rationally will. For an object to be good, then, just is for it to be an object of that kind of reason-guided willing. Kant thus used the normative idea of what all rational beings could will on valid (namely universalisable) grounds to account for what it is for things to be good.

Similar accounts were popular between 1850 and 1950. Franz Brentano claimed that “the good is that which is worthy of love”; C. D. Broad suggested that perhaps “X is good” could mean that “X is such that it would be a fitting object of desire to any mind which had an adequate idea of its non-ethical characteristics”; and A. C. Ewing defined “good” as “fitting object of a pro attitude”.<sup>i</sup> What is common to all these views is that they specify a positive response to objects, and then claim that their goodness just consists of the fact that the relevant positive response is, normatively speaking, appropriate towards the object on the basis of the non-evaluative features of that object.

More recently Elizabeth Anderson, Roderick Chisholm, W. D. Falk, Gerald Gaus, Allan Gibbard, Shelly Kagan, Noah Lemos, John McDowell, John Rawls, David Wiggins, and many others have all put forward similar accounts.<sup>ii</sup> Yet, the most discussed buck-passing view is the one which T. M. Scanlon defended in the second chapter of his 1998 book *What We Owe to Each Other*. According to Scanlon, “to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with respect to it,” whilst “goodness and value [are] purely formal, higher-order properties of having some lower-order properties that provide reasons of the relevant kind.”

In order to see how this account works, we can begin from the positive attitudes which one can have towards objects. Having certain sets of these attitudes

towards objects counts as valuing them. To value an object, one must, for example, admire the object or intend to protect it. Perhaps one must also think that the qualities of the object provide one with reasons to react to the object in these ways.

Intuitively, when an object is good, it has some basic properties which give us reasons to react to it by adopting the previous kind of valuing attitudes towards it. In this context, reasons are considerations which count in favour of the valuing attitudes, i.e., good normative reasons. It is then suggested that the property of being good which the given object has just is the higher-order property of having some more basic properties which provide reasons for the valuing attitudes. This is sometimes called the “positive buck-passing thesis”. For example, the goodness of a chocolate bar would on this view consist of its property of having certain basic properties (such as being sweet and nourishing) which give us reasons to like the bar.

## *2. Motivating the Buck-Passing Accounts*

There are four main arguments for the buck-passing accounts of value. Such accounts are claimed to (i) be metaphysically parsimonious, (ii) explain why value itself is not a reason-providing property (i.e., explain the so-called buck-passing intuition), (iii) accommodate well the intuitions behind the so-called open question arguments, and (iv) fit the practical reasons that we think we have.

Let us begin from the metaphysical parsimony. It seems uncontroversial that we react to some objects by valuing them. We also accept that, in some cases, there are good reasons to do so (just as there are reasons to do many other things). On the buck-passing views, no other resources are required for understanding what evaluative properties are. To be good just is to have properties that provide reasons for the valuing reactions.

In contrast, many other theories posit distinct evaluative properties as a third element. They claim that objects have a separate property of value which would provide additional reasons for valuing the value-bearing objects. In this situation, it seems like a good methodological principle to prefer the buck-passing views which make fewer ontological assumptions.

Of course, it would be equally parsimonious to think (i) that value is a distinct quality of objects, and (ii) that by saying that we have reason to value an object all we mean is that the object is good.<sup>iii</sup> Such a view would be metaphysically as parsimonious as the buck-passing views if all our claims about reasons could be

reduced to claims about value. However, it is not clear whether this kind of a reduction could always be done.

The second argument for the buck-passing views is based on the so-called “buck-passing intuition”.<sup>iv</sup> When asked why one should value a given object, it is easy to list a number of its basic properties. One values a holiday resort because it has a quiet hotel, clean and sandy beaches, warm and sunny weather, recognised restaurants, and so on. Once we have listed all these properties, it seems to make little sense to add that one should *in addition* value the resort because it is *good*.

This intuition supports the idea that value itself is not a property that provides reasons for the valuing reactions. This idea is often called the “negative buck-passing thesis”. It is also where the idea of “buck-passing” comes from. The normative responsibility (“the buck”) of giving reasons for our valuing reactions is taken away from the allegedly distinct evaluative properties of objects and passed down to their more basic good-making properties.<sup>v</sup>

This negative buck-passing thesis has been claimed to support an argument for the positive thesis according to which value is the higher-order property of having basic reason-providing properties. Yet, because these two theses are logically independent of one another, it is not obvious that it does.<sup>vi</sup> Even if value weren’t a higher-order property of having reason-providing properties, it could still be some other kind of property which didn’t provide reasons for the valuing reactions. The positive buck-passing thesis can thus be false even if the negative buck-passing thesis is true.

Therefore, if true, the negative buck-passing thesis could at most provide only some indirect support for the positive account. This is because value being the property of having more basic reason-providing properties would admittedly be a nice explanation for why value itself did not provide reasons for the valuing reactions. Note also that the positive thesis could be true even if the negative thesis weren’t. It could be that the property of having basic reason-providing properties could itself be (at least derivatively) a reason-providing property.

Thirdly, the truth of the buck-passing accounts would also provide a good explanation for some of the intuitions behind the so-called open question arguments.<sup>vii</sup> These arguments are often used to argue that evaluative properties cannot be natural

properties which could be studied by empirical sciences.<sup>viii</sup> They are based on the intuitive idea that, whatever natural property we judge an object to have, we must still make a further, substantial judgment about whether that object is good. For example, even if coffee made everyone happy, there would still be a substantial question about whether it is good. If goodness were some natural property, this additional judgment would not be needed.

The buck-passing account can explain the need for the additional judgments. It entails that, in making a value-judgment, one needs to judge whether the natural properties of the object provide reasons for the valuing reactions. This would mean that mere judgments about the natural properties of the object could not suffice just like the intuitive idea above emphasises.

It must be acknowledged that there is at least one problem with this argument. The buck-passing account can only explain why there are open questions about the goodness of objects – whatever natural properties they have. Yet there seems to be identical open questions about whether some consideration is a reason – whatever the natural properties of that consideration are. Even if drinking coffee makes you happy, there is still a substantial question about whether this gives you a reason to drink coffee. The buck-passing account says nothing about the nature of the open question in this case.<sup>ix</sup> If there is a good explanation for why such questions about reasons are open questions, perhaps this explanation could also be used to explain the previous open questions about value. This would mean that there would be no need to explain the open questions about value by using the buck-passing accounts as the previous argument claimed.

Finally, Scanlon also tried to motivate his theory by attacking an alternative way of accounting for the intuitive inferential connection between *value* and *reasons* (Scanlon 79–94). Many find it intuitive to think that we have a reason to do something if and only if something of value is at stake. There seems to exist only two possible explanations for this. Either being good consists of having reason-providing properties as the buck-passing views claim, or value itself is the only property which gives us reasons to do things. People who defend the second option have, for instance, thought that states of affairs have more value the happier people are in them. The correct reaction to value understood in this way has then been taken to be to bring about as much of it as possible and by doing so also to create as much happiness as

possible. Thus, the better some state of affairs is, the more reason we have for bringing about that state of affairs.

This teleological view about value and reasons has implausible consequences. The correct way to think about friendship is not to think that friendships give rise to a distinct property of value which we should maximise by creating as many friendships as possible. Given that the teleological view seems to endorse that awkward view about our reasons, we should prefer the alternative offered by the buck-passing views. On these views, the value of friendships would consist merely of the fact that our direct reasons for being, for instance, loyal to our friends are good reasons. This would better cohere with our intuitions about what reasons we have.

This argument has its problems.<sup>x</sup> Even if one thinks that evaluative properties are not reducible to having basic reason-providing properties, one needn't think that they are reason-providing properties themselves. As a result, the opponents of the buck-passing accounts need not accept that we should merely use our friends as a means for bringing about some evaluative property that really matters.

Furthermore, even if evaluative properties themselves were reason-providing, there is no reason to assume that only happiness would be good or that the only correct reaction to value would be maximisation. One could accept that things have such evaluative, reason-providing properties not only in virtue of general happiness but also in virtue of many other basic properties. One could also think that some evaluative properties (possessed, for example, by long-lasting goods such as friendships) should be protected rather than maximised.

Thus, it is not clear whether Scanlon's original attacks against the alternative view about the relation between reasons and value succeeded.<sup>xi</sup> Yet, even if they did not, the buck-passing accounts of value seem to form a sufficiently motivated positive research-project to the nature of value. It is therefore time to investigate some of the details of these views and their problems.

### *3.1 Concepts and Properties*

First of all, what are the buck-passing accounts accounts of – evaluative concepts, properties, or both (Väyrynen 299)? The two quotes from Scanlon above suggest that they would be accounts of both evaluative concepts and properties.

This combination is understandable because, if one gives a reductive account of the meaning of a concept, one will also account for the corresponding property.

This is because synonymous terms share the same reference. For instance, given that the term “brother” means “a male sibling”, a simple substitution of synonymous terms tells us that the property of being a brother is the property of being a male sibling.<sup>xii</sup> Likewise, if “being good” means “having properties that provide reasons for the valuing reactions”, then, for the same reason, the property of being good will be the property of having reason-providing properties.

The buck-passing accounts, however, need not be presented as accounts of the meaning of the evaluative terms. They could just as well be presented solely as metaphysical accounts of the evaluative properties. This would correspond to the intuitive idea of how science tells us what water is (H<sub>2</sub>O) but not what the term “water” means.

Understanding the buck-passing views in this way has both its advantages and its problems. It would allow the buck-passers to be much more neutral about what our evaluative terms mean. The buck-passers could in this situation also accept that questions like “this object has properties that provide reasons for the valuing reactions, but is it good?” are conceptually open questions about which competent speakers can disagree.

The problem, however, is that philosophers will not be able to discover empirically that the buck-passing accounts are true in the same way as scientists discovered what water is. The metaphysical buck-passing view would thus require that one could know *a priori* substantial, non-conceptual, synthetic facts about the nature of the property of being good. Many deny that such knowledge is even in principle possible.

### 3.2 Which Attitudes?

On the buck-passing views, the value of an object consists of it having properties which provide reasons for the valuing reactions. Such views threaten to be circular. Sir W. D. Ross (279) claimed that valuing something consists of believing that the object is good. In the buck-passing framework, this would entail that both (i) our theory of value would rely on what it is to value objects, and (ii) our theory of what it is to value objects would rely on what value is. David Wiggins (189) has claimed that this seemingly viciously circular combination of views could still be informative because it makes explicit how value is related to our sentiments.

I believe, however, that the buck-passing views would be more illuminating if they could avoid the previous kind of circularity. For this reason, these views should attempt to give an account of valuing which would be conceptually independent of the evaluative properties. One reason for why it is difficult to formulate such accounts of valuing attitudes is that what counts as valuing an object seems to depend on what the object is.

For instance, it could be that valuing classical music requires being disposed to listen to it with concentration. In contrast, valuing football seems to require much more non-reflective and physically active observation of matches. Already here we see that there needn't be much in common between the attitudes and actions which count as valuing different objects.

There could still be certain general patterns of attitudes and emotions which one must be disposed to have in order to value something.<sup>xiii</sup> So, when one values something which one does not have, one usually wishes or desires to have the object, one is inclined to choose and prefer it over others, and so on. When one gets the object, one will experience pleasure and satisfaction; one will admire and cherish the object, and so on. And, finally, when one loses the object, one will feel sad and disappointed. Valued objects hold our emotive attention in this special way.

However, maybe not even such patterns of attitudes and emotions give us clear necessary and sufficient conditions for what counts as valuing. It could be that 'valuing' is a basic concept in the sense that different instances of valuing share only some of their features in the same way as the members of a family resemble one another in different ways. We could all still share a skill of using the concept correctly on the basis of the cluster of loose (non-circular) criteria elucidated above. After all, we rarely disagree about whether someone values or disvalues an object if we know enough of her behaviour. So, maybe there is nothing more to be said about the notion of valuing which grounds the buck-passing accounts.

### *3.3 The Polyadicity Problem*

The previous problems with attitudes lead to a related problem.<sup>xiv</sup> Evaluative properties such as goodness are "monadic", non-relational properties. They can be ascribed to objects merely in virtue of the objects themselves. In contrast, reasons are relational. A reason must always be a reason *for some agent* to have some attitudes or to do some actions..



The problem is that, in some cases, an object can be good even if its properties do not provide reasons for anyone. Being reason-providing requires agents for whom the reasons are provided to be present, whereas having value does not require agents to be around in the same way. As a result, the buck-passers will have to reformulate their view to state that the property of being good is the higher-order property of having some basic properties which *would* provide reasons for the valuing attitudes if there were agents around to have these attitudes.

It could be claimed that such dispositions to provide reasons in some circumstances cannot suffice for being good. Whatever object one takes, it will have some properties the having of which provides reasons for some agents to value the object in some special circumstances. To avoid this problem, it could be that the properties of the given object would need to provide reasons *by default and normally* for the valuing attitudes when there are agents around.

Krister Bykvist recently tried to ‘soup up’ this objection. He considers the value of states of affairs. He claims that having the valuing attitudes towards a state of affairs requires believing that they obtain. Consider then the state of affairs of there being happy ‘egrets’ (beings which do not have beliefs themselves) but no (past, present, or future) believers. In this case, no one could ever believe that these state of affairs obtained, and therefore no one could have reasons for valuing them. But, intuitively that state of affairs still has value.

The buck-passers can reply to this objection in two ways. First, the example requires that there could be valuable state of affairs featuring happy egrets which no one could ever believe to obtain. Not even the happy egrets could in this situation believe that they are happy. While it may be possible to be happy on occasion without being aware of it, it does not seem possible for someone to be happy without ever being aware of being happy. Either this awareness of happiness is a belief or it isn’t. If it is, then there could not be happy egrets given that egrets have no beliefs. If it isn’t, then egrets can be happy. Such an awareness of happiness that does not require having any beliefs is, however, arguably sufficient for being able to have a valuing attitude towards the happy state of affairs.

Second, in order to understand the example, we must be able to reflect what it would be like if there were happy egrets but no believers. We do this by considering a possible world which contains happy egrets but no believers. In this situation, *we*

can ask whether that egret-world has properties which give *us* reasons to value it. Do we have reasons to hope that this world would be the actual world rather than a world in which egrets are not happy? If we do, then the buck-passing view would correctly ascribe value to Bykvist's states of affairs. Note that this does not require that we have any false beliefs. To have the valuing reactions, we need not believe that the egret states of affairs actually obtains. We only need to imagine what their world is like from the perspective of our actual world about which we have real beliefs.

### *3.4 Which Evaluative Properties?*

What are the evaluative properties of which we should give a buck-passing account? Buck-passers tend to present their view as an account of only the most generic, thin, and abstract property of being good. This is the unique property which all and only good objects have no matter in which other, more specific ways they have value. One good feature of this option is that it allows saying that sometimes the more basic properties of an object which provide the reasons to value it are themselves more specific thick evaluative properties.<sup>xv</sup> Thus, an action can be good because its kindness provides us with reasons to appreciate it.

Yet, even if the buck-passers give an account only of this most abstract property of goodness, there will be familiar axiological distinctions which the view will need to be able to handle. Thus, the buck-passers would be required to defend proposals like these:

- (i) Intrinsic value = the property of having intrinsic properties (i.e., properties shared by all duplicates) which provide reasons for the valuing attitudes.
- (ii) Final value = the property of having properties (including relational ones) which provide basic, non-derivative reasons for the valuing attitudes.
- (iii) Instrumental value = the property of having properties which provide reasons for the valuing attitudes because of some end we (have reason to?) pursue.
- (iv) Being better than = the property of having properties that provide stronger reasons to value the object than the properties of the alternative.
- (v) Agent-neutral value = the property of having properties that provide reasons for an impartial spectator to value the object.
- (vi) Agent-relative value = the property of having properties that provide reasons for the given agent to value the object.

The buck-passing view could also be extended to the so-called attributive goodness which we talk about when we talk about, say, a good knife. Such a view could claim that to be a good knife is to have some properties (e.g., sharpness) which provide reasons to prefer this knife over other knives when we only take into account the function (cutting) of the objects of this kind. Likewise, something being good for an object could be accounted for in terms of what one would have reason to value if one was taking part in watching out for that object.<sup>xvi</sup>

Väyrynen has argued that it would be problematic to stop here. It could be that there is no principled way of restricting the buck-passing accounts to the generic evaluative properties. Even drawing a line between these properties and the more specific and thick evaluative properties will be difficult. Furthermore, the same arguments that motivate the buck-passing accounts of the generic goodness also seem to push towards the buck-passing accounts of the thick evaluative properties.

This means that one of the most important future projects for the buck-passers will be to formulate a plausible buck-passing account of the thick evaluative properties such as kindness, courage, cruelty, and so on. So far, this philosophical work has just not been done. We can still ask, what would a buck-passing account of a thick property such as kindness look like?

Very roughly, one could first try to specify the central natural qualities which all kind things share. Aristotle claimed that kindness requires being “helpful towards someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself, but for that of the person helped.” The buck-passing view of kindness could then claim that, as a thick evaluative property, kindness consists of both having this natural property and there being reasons to react in a certain positive ways to things (namely persons and actions) that have that property.

Now, some people have claimed that the attempts to understand thick properties along these lines would fail from the start.<sup>xvii</sup> Let me offer two reasons why I am more optimistic about the prospects of such accounts than the critics.

First, as explained above, the positive buck-passing thesis does not entail the negative thesis. This means that, contrary to what has been claimed, accepting a buck-passing account of, say, kindness is compatible with thinking that the kindness of an act is a reason to admire it. Of course, if one gives a buck-passing account of

kindness, one might have to claim that this reason derives its normative force from the more basic, natural properties of the kind acts.

Second, as the previous sketch for a buck-passing account of kindness shows, the buck-passing accounts would seem to ‘disentangle’ the thick evaluative properties. Kindness is divided up to a specific non-evaluative, natural property and to the fact that this property provides reasons for some specific valuing reactions.

However, it is not clear whether thick properties can be disentangled in this way. It has been argued that there is no unified set of natural properties which, for example, all kind actions share. This would be a problem if the buck-passing accounts of thick properties would require disentangling them. However, it is not clear whether these accounts require that.

One could instead begin from all possible tokens of kind actions. One could then, in each case, describe the distinct set of basic natural properties of the particular act which provide the reasons to react to this act-token in a certain way. The suggestion would then be that the thick property of kindness would consist of the property of having any one of the previously specified combinations of basic natural properties which each provide reasons to react to the given action in the appropriate valuing way.

Of course, this is just the beginning of a sketch of a buck-passing account of thick properties. Filling it in would require specifying what kind of valuing reactions are connected to each thick property, what kind of a semantic account of the meaning of *thick concepts* could fit this metaphysical theory, how the account could distinguish between evaluative properties which share similar reason-providing base-properties and to which resembling valuing reactions are appropriate, and so on.<sup>xviii</sup> However, before a serious attempt to give a buck-passing account of thick properties has been made, it is difficult to tell whether these and other potential problems could be solved.

### 3.5 What Kind of Reasons?

Soon after Scanlon presented his buck-passing account, it became clear that not all reasons to value an object are relevant to its value.<sup>xix</sup> This gave rise to the intensively discussed ‘wrong kind of reasons’ problem. It is a challenge for the buck-passers to specify the right kind of reasons for the valuing reactions which directly affect the value of the relevant objects. This problem is easy to illustrate with a simple example.

Imagine an evil demon which can immediately detect which valuing attitudes you have. This demon threatens to punish you unless you value it for its own sake. In this case, you have a reason to value the demon for its own sake, which means that the demon is good according to the buck-passing account. To avoid this highly counter-intuitive implication, the buck-passers would have to find some explanation for why this reason to value the demon is the wrong kind of a reason.

This challenge seems far too general (Schroeder). There will be some properties of which we cannot help but to give a buck-passing-styled account. How else could we account for properties such as being admirable, enviable, or scary than by thinking that the objects that have these properties are appropriate objects of admiration, envy, or fear?<sup>xx</sup> Yet, for all these properties, we can create wrong kind of reasons scenarios. If we do not want to change our views about these properties because of this, there must be some way of ruling out the wrong kind of reasons. Even if there is no consensus about what the best way to do this is, there has been no shortage of suggestions about how to pick out the wrong kind of reasons.

The most popular solution to this problem is to think that in the examples of the previous type one only has a “state-given” reason for trying *to get oneself to have* the attitude of valuing the demon for its own sake. After all, being in this state would help to avoid the punishment. This reason would be provided by the valuing attitude’s quality of being such as to satisfy the demon. However, this does not mean that one has an “object-given” reason, a reason given by the properties of the demon itself, *to have* that attitude.<sup>xxi</sup>

This suggests that we should formulate the buck-passing view in terms of the reasons for the valuing reactions provided by the properties of the object that are not affected by our valuing attitudes. In order to see whether an object has this specific kind of reason-providing properties, we should consider the object in circumstances in which it would not react to whether we value it or not. If the qualities of the object give reasons to value the object even in these circumstances, then we have the right kind of reasons to value the object. This way of picking out the right kind of reasons gives the right results in the demon cases. We would not have a reason to value the demon when what the demon does would not be affected by whether we value it or not. If we do not have such reasons, then this formulation of the buck-passing view will not entail that the demon is good.

There is also another, related solution. We can think of cases where the demon threatens to punish you unless you admire it for his own sake on account of his threat. In this case, the relevant reason for valuing seems to be given by a property of the object, i.e., the demon's property of punishing you otherwise. However, one could argue that this reason for having the attitude of valuing the demon for its own sake is only *a derivative reason*. After all, the properties of the demon and its threat only provide a reason to value the demon for its own sake because of the nature of suffering which I have a fundamental reason to avoid.

This suggests that the buck-passing account should be formulated in terms of final reasons which do not gain their normative significance from overtly external sources. The demon clearly lacks any properties which could provide such non-derivative reasons to value it for its own sake, and thus the buck-passing view would not entail that it is valuable.<sup>xxii</sup>

#### *4. Conclusion*

It is intriguing how much attention the buck-passing accounts of value have recently got. The basic idea of such accounts is simple; all there is to the value or goodness of objects is that these objects have features in virtue of which we should value them. Perhaps this simplicity is deceiving. What the number of objections to this kind of views shows is that the devil is in the details of how the simple buck-passing idea should be developed into a full-blown theory of all evaluative properties. Such an account would certainly deserve a careful book-length treatment which we still currently lack.

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#### *Short Biography*

Jussi Suikkanen has received a Ph.D. in philosophy from the Universities of Helsinki and Reading. He is currently a temporary lecturer in philosophy at the University of Leeds. His research interests lie in theoretical ethics widely construed. He has published articles on reasons and value, consequentialism and contractualism, and the nature of moral properties and attitudes in journals such as *Oxford Studies in*

*Metaethics, Theoria, Social Theory and Practice, Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, and Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*. He is a co-editor of the forthcoming collection of articles *Essays on Derek Parfit's On What Matters* (Blackwell). He is also currently planning a book about the relation between metaethics and normative ethics.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> See Brentano (18), Broad (283), and Ewing (258). Henry Sidgwick (110–111) and Richard Brandt (113) also defended similar views during this period.
- <sup>ii</sup> See Anderson (1–2, 17), Chisholm (52), Falk (117–118), Gaus (111, 156, 167), Gibbard (241), Kagan (60), Lemos (12), McDowell (118), Rawls (399), and Wiggins (206).
- <sup>iii</sup> In a similar fashion, Moore (18) attempted to make sense of our talk about what we ought to do in terms of what is good. The opponents of the buck-passing views can also argue against the parsimony-thesis by claiming that distinct evaluative properties are required to explain which basic properties of objects provide the reasons for the valuing reactions and when (Heuer, Väyrynen, 316–320).
- <sup>iv</sup> This intuition is described in Dancy (164), Ewing (172), and Scanlon (97).
- <sup>v</sup> In ordinary language, to pass the buck means to avoid responsibility. This expression is said to originate from poker. In this game, a knife with a buck-horn handle was allegedly passed around the table to mark whose turn it was to deal the cards.
- <sup>vi</sup> For a clear discussion, see Väyrynen 296–298.
- <sup>vii</sup> See Stratton-Lake & Hooker (sec. 1), and Scanlon (96–97).
- <sup>viii</sup> The original open question argument is in Moore (chs. 1–2). Moore claimed that two seemingly different properties are in fact one and the same property if and only if one of these properties can be correctly defined in terms of the other. He then suggested that we can test the correctness of definitions by looking at whether they give rise to open questions. For instance, being a brother and being a male sibling are the same property because being a brother can be correctly defined as being a male sibling. This is because the question ‘He is a male sibling, but is he a brother?’ is not an open question – one cannot begin to reflect on how to answer it. Moore thought that the property value could not be defined in terms of any natural property, N, because all questions of the type ‘This is N, but is it good?’ will be open questions. This is why he thought that value could not be a natural property.
- <sup>ix</sup> Notice that, if the property of being a reason can be reduced to a natural property (such as being something which makes the agent happy), then the buck-passing account entails that value too can be reduced to natural properties (despite any open questions).
- <sup>x</sup> This argument is criticised by Dancy (164), and Arneron (316–320).
- <sup>xi</sup> For better arguments against the view that value itself is a reason-providing property, see Stratton-Lake and Hooker (163–165). Stratton-Lake and Hooker (157–163) also argue against other alternative views about the relation between value and reasons which were initially ignored by Scanlon and later recognised by Dancy (163–164).
- <sup>xii</sup> The initial sentence in which the substitution is made is the self-evident claim “the property of being a brother is the property of being a brother”.
- <sup>xiii</sup> The following account is from Helm (sec. 2).
- <sup>xiv</sup> See Dancy (170–171), and Ross (52, 292).
- <sup>xv</sup> See Wallace (448).
- <sup>xvi</sup> This account has been suggested by Mark Schroeder. For criticisms of buck-passing attempts to account for being good for, see Heathwood.
- <sup>xvii</sup> See, for instance, Väyrynen (sec 4) and Crisp.
- <sup>xviii</sup> These problems are discussed in Väyrynen (319), and Crisp (82).
- <sup>xix</sup> The most thorough presentation of this problem is in Rabinowicz & Ronnow-Rasmussen.
- <sup>xx</sup> It might seem odd that it is claimed at this point that one will have to give a buck-passing account of these properties when in the previous section it was suggested that it will be difficult to give a buck-passing account of the thick evaluative properties. However, the properties of being admirable,

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enviable, or scary belong to a special class of properties. A distinguishing feature of these properties is that it is clear already from the name of the property what is the correct reaction to an object which has the given property. Being scary is directly related to things we are scared of. It is not equally obvious what the right reaction is to kind, cruel, generous, or courageous actions. Furthermore, the real thick properties seem to be both more intrinsically action-guiding (there are necessarily reasons to do or to avoid doing actions that have those properties) and the use of the concepts for these properties is guided more by the world (there are clearer naturalist criteria for what is courageous than for what is admirable). For these reasons, with the properties mentioned above, the appropriate reactions play a much more direct role in what the nature of these properties is.

<sup>xxi</sup> The distinction between object- and state-given reasons was first introduced by Parfit (21–22). It was later used to deal with the wrong kind of reasons objection in different ways by Olson (sec. 1) and Stratton-Lake (sec. 2).

<sup>xxii</sup> For some of the other solutions to the wrong kind of reasons problem, see the articles by Cook, Danielsson & Olson, D’Arms & Jacobson, Hieronymi, Lang, Schroeder, and Skorupski.

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