The Goals of Moral Worth[1]

1. Introduction

It's common sense that good people do the right thing for the right reasons. Turning this platitude into a plausible moral explanation requires little philosophical tinkering. In particular, many philosophers think that this platitude suggests an analysis of moral worth, the special kind of value that a morally right action has when its rightness is creditable to its agent. Just as it's common sense that good people do what's right for the right reasons, it's tempting to suppose that an act has moral worth just when and because it's done for sufficiently weighty moral reasons. Call explanations of this type, which involve only the coincidence of motivating reasons and sufficient normative reasons, matching explanations.

While matching explanations are tempting, philosophers have generally discussed them only to reject them. Although it is widely assumed that acting for the right reasons is necessary for moral worth, it is equally widely assumed that it is not sufficient. Moral worth requires not merely doing the right thing for the right reasons, according to these philosophers, it also requires doing the right thing for the right reasons *in the right way*.

This paper defends the matching explanation of moral worth. Matching explanations are susceptible to counterexample when combined with the orthodox view that every reason is numerically identical with some fact, proposition (whether true or false), or state of affairs because matching explanations depend on distinctions among reasons that facts taken as reasons

cannot provide.[2] As a result, this paper argues that the family of apparent counterexamples to the matching explanation that motivate alternative accounts of moral worth are in fact counterexamples to the view that every normative reason for action is numerically identical to some fact.

The first half of the paper shows that proponents of matching explanations can answer the apparent counterexamples by adopting a heterodox ontology of reasons inspired by ideas from Davidson (1963), which I call the Partial Constitution View (PCV). According to the PCV, reasons for action, whether normative or motivating, comprise two elements. The first is the content of a belief, a *proposition*. The second is the content of a desire, a *goal*. Given this account, it is no surprise that many have confused reasons with facts or fact-like things. The confusion is tempting because reasons are partly constituted by facts. Indeed, when the other constituents of a reason are known, the reason can be correctly identified by stating its factual constituent. But it is a mistake to suppose that the reason and the fact are one and the same because, as we will see, there is more to the substance of reasons than the facts that partly constitute them. I conclude with an account of how the orthodox view became wrongly orthodox.

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[2] Reasons are typically discussed using *that*-clauses, for example, the reason to go to the store is that we're out of milk. Facts, in this sense, are properly ascribed by that-clauses like 'that we are out of milk', in contexts that are factive. There is debate about whether *that*-clauses denote true propositions or the truth-makers of those propositions. But none of my claims will turn on the subtleties of that debate, nor on those of the debate over whether false propositions can be reasons. My arguments apply equally to all these positions. As such, when I argue that reasons can't be facts, those arguments also show that reasons cannot be propositions, either Fregean or Russellian, or states of affairs.

Here's a representative if arbitrary sample of the orthodoxy: "Reasons are facts in that they are true propositions: they are the sort of things that can be known or believed, and by which it is rational to be moved." (Setiya (2015: 450)); "Objective reasons are facts which count in favour of (or against) some response." (McHugh (2018: 160)); "For all propositions r, agents x, and actions a, if r is a reason for x to do a, that is because there is some p..." (Schroeder (2007: 29)); "... "is a reason for" is a four-place relation, $R(p, x, c, a)$, holding between a fact p, an agent x, a set of conditions c, and an action or attitude a. This is the relation that holds just in case p is a reason for a person x in situation c to do or hold a." (Scanlon (2014: 32)). It seems plain that the orthodox view is orthodox – but perhaps there's more to meets the eye with these simple quotations. Perhaps they're actually intended to express that reasons supervene or are wholly constituted by facts. But I'll assume that those quotations are straightforward.

2. The Challenge to *Right Reasons*

This paper defends the following analysis against a family of objections:

> *Right Reasons*: An act has moral worth just when and because its motivating reasons are sufficient moral reasons.[3]

Despite its appeal, the analysis is widely doubted because some facts can rationally motivate a particular action in multiple ways, not all of which are consistent with moral worth. Consider an analogy. It can be rational for both you and me to go to Wrigley Stadium because the Cubs are playing. You can go because you want to see the Cubs win and I can go because I want to see them lose. In that case, although the fact that the Cubs are playing makes it rational for each of us to go to Wrigley, it is rational for each of us to go in virtue of different goals.[4] Going to Wrigley serves both your goal of seeing the Cubs win and my goal of seeing the Cubs lose. The fact that the Cubs are playing can incline someone to go to Wrigley in many different ways, not all of which are consistent with Cubs fandom. Because our goals in going to Wrigley differ, our motives differ in an important sense. Given your goals, you're a Cubs fan. Given mine, I'm not, even though, like you, I'm moved to go to Wrigley because the Cubs are playing.

Acting with moral worth is a bit like being a Cubs fan: it depends on more than what you do and the facts that move you to do it. Moral worth, like Cubs fandom, also depends on your motives – in particular, on your goals. Just as the fact that the Cubs are playing can move Cubs fans and

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[3] Right Reasons presupposes that normative and motivating reasons can overlap. Some, e.g., Smith (1994) and Mantel (2018) reject this presupposition. I'll set aside such views. There are also well-known '*de dicto*' alternatives to this analysis. For example, Sliwa (2016) argues that knowing that an act is right and desiring to do what's right, *de dicto*, is both sufficient and necessary to act for moral worth. However, these views are unpopular given Smith's well-known accusation that a *de dicto* desire for what's right fetishizes morality and the thought that moral worth is incompatible with such fetishism. I think the debate rests on a false dichotomy between specific *de re* and *de dicto* desires for what's right. There is a third possibility, first described by Fodor (1979), according to which a *de re* desire for what's right needn't be for a specific action, but a specific *kind* of action – namely, the right kind. I briefly discuss this third possibility in footnote three of Howard (2020).

[4] I'm using 'goal' stipulatively to mean the content of non-instrumental pro-attitudes like intrinsic desires, intentions, willings, etc. In this sense, goals stand to pro-attitudes as propositions stand to beliefs. Goals may even be propositions, as I discuss below. I'll mostly speak of desires rather than pro-attitudes, but little turns on this stylistic choice. The view I defend is compatible with accounts that theorize primarily in terms of other pro-attitudes like Anscombian intentions or Kantian willings.

Cubs haters alike to go to Wrigley, the fact that giving to a certain charity helps those in need can move both altruists and egoists to donate. For example, suppose that a certain egoistic, selfish person gets a pleasurable tingle when they help others, in just the same way that jazz-lovers find pleasure in listening to jazz. The egoist can be moved to donate to charity by the fact that doing so will help a lot of people — a sufficient moral reason to donate, we may suppose. However, suppose further that this egoist cares only about her own pleasure; she is indifferent to others' needs. As a result, she does not act with moral worth when she donates – after all, her goal in donating is to feel a jolt of pleasure. The egoist's donation lacks moral worth because her goal is pleasure, not aid.[5] In contrast, when that fact moves the altruist to donate out of her intrinsic desire to help the needy, the altruist clearly acts with moral worth.

As a result, the case of the egoist present a challenge to Right Reasons. Before I discuss some sophisticated responses to this type of challenge, let me rebut some attempts to dissolve it. It is tempting to suppose that the altruist and the egoist's differing motives entail a difference in the facts that move them. This is surely true in cases where what's altruistic and what's self-interested come apart. But I've set things up such that altruism and self-interest overlap in the case of charitable donation above. As a result, the fact that motivates each agent overlaps these categories. So the same fact moves each. As a result, differences between two agents' desires do *not* entail a difference in the facts that move them to perform a particular act, for at least some acts like going to Wrigley Stadium. I'll focus on the possibility where a single fact to moves each agents to perform the same act, despite the differences in their desires.

Nevertheless, there is a kernel of truth to this response. I will ultimately argue that something nearby is true: that the altruist and the egoist's differing desires entail a difference in the *reasons* that move them. But more on that later.

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[5] We must distinguish the egoist from another character who feels pleasure when helping others, but who can act with moral worth. This second character feels pleasure when others are helped and indeed we may even suppose that this pleasure provides the motivational impetus for their aid, but this character does not aim at pleasure when aiding others; rather, their aim is to help others. In contrast, the egoist's aim is the pleasure itself. As such, the egoist's desire to aid is conditioned on feeling pleasure, whereas the second's character's desire to aid is contingent on feeling pleasure, in the senses of 'contingent' and 'conditioned' desire offered in Dreier (2000: 627).

Some may also be tempted to dissolve the challenge as follows. Distinguish two facts:

1. Giving to charity will help the needy.

2. I will be pleased by giving to charity, thereby helping the needy.

According to this response, (2) is the egoist's motivating reason, not (1). But (2) is not a moral reason. So it's false that the egoist acts for a moral reason. And if she doesn't act for a moral reason, then she doesn't challenge Right Reasons.

However, showing that (2) could be the egoist's motivating reason does not suffice to rebut the challenge to Right Reasons; rather, the response must show that, *necessarily, only* that fact could be the egoist's motivating reason. And that doesn't seem plausible. After all, when a jazz-lover is deliberating about whether to buy a jazz or classical album, they can simply attend to the fact that only one album is jazz and purchase it. They needn't attend to their love of jazz or the pleasure they will derive from listening to it. Likewise, the egoist could act for (1) rather than (2). Hence, it's possible that (1), and only said fact, is the selfish person's motivating reason. That possibility provides the challenge to Right Reasons that I'm interested to discuss.

Indeed, we should doubt that (2) could be the egoist's motivating reason if she's reasoning well. Rather than being part of good reasoning, (2) is what Schroeder (2007), drawing on Petit and Smith (1990) and Smith (1994), calls "objectionably self-regarding"; alternatively, it exhibits what Johnston (2001) calls the "pornographic attitude". According to the view shared by these philosophers, (2) does not figure in good reasoning because it misrepresents desire and its object. When I'm tired, I reach for my pillow. Even if it's rest I ultimately seek, the goal of rest needn't appear in my deliberations about how best to get my pillow. More generally, when we seek to promote our goals, according to these philosophers, our deliberation does not fixate on the fact of our desiring the goal. Such a fixation is bizarre. Rather, desires operate in the background of practical reasoning, driving us to pursue various ends without those ends appearing directly in practical reasoning. Because (2) represents a desire for pleasure, it does not figure in good reasoning, and so it does not move the egoist if she's reasoning well.

3. The Partial Constitution View

Cases like the egoist and the altruist lead many to believe that Right Reasons offers only a necessary condition on moral worth. Although the egoist does the right thing for the right fact, she does not 'treat' or 'respond' to that fact as a moral reason, which moral worth requires. In light of the case, Right Reasons must incorporate some form of sensitivity to the different ways that agents respond to reason-giving facts.

There are at least two ways to incorporate such sensitivity. One way is by making the analysis's right-hand condition more complex. We'll look at three such proposals in a moment. However, before we do, I'll roughly sketch an alternative way of making the analysis sensitive to how an agent treats a fact as a reason, which makes reasons themselves, not the analysis, more complex.

As we'll see, there's plenty of independent reason for doing so. To begin with, it's odd to think that the two baseball fans go to Wrigley for the same motivating reason. Their different goals give them different motives. Indeed, we can locate this difference using claims about reasons that advert to those goals. Because the Cubs fan, Fanny, ultimately desires to see the Cubs win, the reason why Fanny's going to Wrigley is to see the Cubs win; likewise, because the Cubs hater, Hatty, desires to see the Cubs lose. So the reason why she's going to Wrigley is to see the Cubs lose. These reasons, the ones given by the facts that move each agent and the goals they desire for their own sake, determine which individual is the Cubs fan and which is not.

Donald Davidson's well-known account of motivating reasons foregrounds these kinds of differences. According to Davidson, reasons are not facts, but pairs of psychological states, of a belief and a desire. When we say that "The reason why Fanny's going to Wrigley is that the Cubs are playing" or "The reason why Fanny's going to Wrigley is to see the Cubs win", we pick out the very same reason through one of its two parts. The first claim picks out Fanny's reason for going to Wrigley by its constituent belief, namely, the belief that the Cubs are playing. The second picks it out by its constituent desire, namely, the desire to see the Cubs win. Hatty's reason combines that very fact with a different goal. Just as Hatty and Fanny act for different reasons that overlap on the same fact, so too do the altruist and the egoist. As a result, that the

altruist acts for a moral reason provides no argument for thinking that the egoist does also. We can resist the counterexample by denying that if two individuals act for the same fact, then they act for the same reason.

There's a small hitch. Davidson's primary reasons could not be normative reasons like moral or prudential reasons. That's because there can be, for example, a moral reason to do something even if you lack the beliefs or desires that would constitute the corresponding primary reason. For example, there is moral reason not to hurt the innocent regardless of what people believe and desire. So the existence of moral reasons, but not of primary reasons, is independent from individuals' particular beliefs and desires. Normative reasons, therefore, cannot be primary reasons in Davidson's sense.

This worry is easily defused. Many of those who reject Davidson's psychologistic primary reasons think of motivating reasons as propositions instead – the contents of the beliefs that underlie action. I also propose that we think of all reasons, both motivating and normative, as contents, but not unary contents like single propositions. Rather, reasons are the contents of Davidson's belief-desire pairs: proposition- or fact-goal pairs. To illustrate, according to Davidson the egoist's primary reason is $< belief$(giving to charity helps the needy)$, desire$(to feel pleasure)$>$ and the altruist's is $< belief$(giving to charity helps the needy)$, desire$(to help the needy)$>$. I think those reasons are, respectively, $< $⟦giving to charity helps the needy⟧$, $⟦to feel pleasure⟧$ > $ and $ < $⟦giving to charity helps the needy⟧$, $⟦to help the needy⟧$ > $, dropping explicit use of the semantic valuation brackets going forward.[6] I'll call this the Partial Constitution View (PCV) of normative reasons for action, for facts only partly constitute reasons, which also include goals.

I also intend the PCV as an account of motivating reasons for action. According to the view, a proposition-goal pair is an agent's motivating reason for an action just when facts about that

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[6] Following convention, I define ⟦.⟧ as a function from fragments of a language to their contents. Doing so is a little baroque, but it allows me to remain neutral on what to-clauses denote in the context of attributions like "the reason to give to charity is to help the needy". Neutrality here avoids an orthogonal debate about whether desires are propositional attitudes.

proposition-goal pair offer a rationalizing explanation of the agent's action. The pair offers that rationalizing explanation only if the agent bears the appropriate doxastic attitude, such as belief, to the proposition and the appropriate conative attitude, such as non-instrumental desire, to the goal.

Some philosophers are quick to assert that propositions are the contents of desires. From this claim, they mistakenly conclude that the PCV is simply a version of the orthodox view. Although Campbell (2018) and Milona and Schroeder (2019) give cause to doubt that (canonical) goals are propositions, even if it were true, it is no objection to the distinctiveness of the PCV. Were goals propositions, the PCV would simply amount to the claim that reasons are pairs of propositions, one characteristically believed and one characteristically desired. What's essential about the PCV is that reasons are complex or binary contents, not simple or unary contents.

Doubtless many readers will want to understand, before I proceed, the view's account of what makes reasons moral or prudential. This is an important question, but it is orthogonal to my aim of defending Right Reasons from a prominent family of challenges. Defending Right Reasons or any of the competitors below requires explaining which reasons are moral. Supposing that defending Right Reasons using the PCV requires explaining which reasons are more confuses the question of what makes some a normative reason with the question of which things are normative reasons. What makes something a MLB baseball player is signing a MLB contract. What baseball players are is people. The PCV answers only the second question about reasons, not the first.

Indeed, because it is silent on the first question, it is compatible with a host of answers. Take your favourite story of what makes a fact (or proposition or state of affairs) a moral reason and apply it to proposition-goal pairs. There are many such stories: the PCV is obviously consistent with Scanlon and Parfit's primitivism, if not their view that reasons are facts. It's also clearly compatible with vaguely Williams-inspired internalist views that stress the connection between normative reasons and motivation. For example, Gregory (2015) defends the view that normative reasons are good bases for action. If a basis for action is a motivating reason, then Gregory's

normative reasons are a subset of the set of possible motivating reasons. Hence, the PCV offers a natural account of motivating reasons, and Gregory's view offers a natural way of extending some of those motivating reasons into normative reasons.[7] The PCV is also compatible with a value-based approach like that of Raz, Wedgwood, or Maguire; with Korsgaard or Velleman's constitutivism; with Street or Lenman's Humean constructivism; with Finlay's end-relational view; with Schroeder's hypotheticalism; etc. This is unsurprising since these philosophers are trying to answer a different question.

I am officially neutral on which such account is correct. It suffices for my purposes that the PCV is compatible with many of the leading such accounts. However, I am tempted by the view that, for example, the goals that constitute moral reasons are the goals we have most reason to desire for their own sakes, and that the facts paired with such goals, relative to an agent, are the ones on the basis of which the agent could rationally intend to pursue the goal for its own sake, but I'll not defend this view here.[8]

4. The Right Response to Reasons

I've just presented the egoist's challenge to Right Reasons and answered the challenge by proposing the PCV, which makes her normative reasons more complex than facts. I'll now contrast the PCV with some leading examples of the competing approach, which makes our responses to reasons more complex instead, highlighting its shortcomings.[9] Let me be explicit: *these criticisms are not decisive*. They show only that the best version of this approach closely

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[7] I develop this account in Howard (forthcoming).

[8] Defining reasons in terms of morally good goals and then defining good goals in terms of reasons appears viciously circular. But the goals in moral reasons are those that you have sufficient reason to desire for their own sake. Reasons for desires are reasons for sentiment. Because sentiments and feelings are not goal-directed activities in the way that action is, reasons for sentiment are not partly constituted by goals. Only reasons for action, like moral reasons, are. So there's no risk of circularity in defining reasons for action in terms of good goals and defining good goals in terms of reasons for sentiment.

[9] Lord (2018) offers a disjunctive account of acting for a reason in the face of challenges like the egoist. I criticize this approach in Howard (2019).

resembles PCV by requiring morally worthy acts to be motivated by desires for morally good goals. A more decisive objection to these views follows in the next section.

4.1 Arpaly and Schroeder

Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder propose a conceptualization condition on good will, which I take to be closely related to moral worth:

> Complete good will is an intrinsic desire for the right or good, correctly conceptualized. [...] Partial good will is an intrinsic desire for some part of the right or good, correctly conceptualized. (Arpaly and Schroeder (2013: 163))

Arpaly & Schroeder's proposal is motivated by cases like the following. Suppose that pain is identical to the brain state of c-fiber firing. Imagine an alien who finds the firing of c-fibers very unpleasant, like fingernails scraping over a chalkboard. The alien learns that donating to charity is an effective way of easing the firing of many people's c-fibers. So the alien, like the altruist, is moved to donate to charity because of the fact that donating will help the needy. But the alien, unlike the altruist, desires only to minimize c-fiber firing whereas the altruist desires to help the needy. In that circumstance, the altruist's action possesses moral worth and the alien's doesn't. According to Arpaly & Schroeder, that's because only the altruist's desires are correctly conceptualized.

The main difference between the PCV and this account lies in the desires that each requires for morally worthy action. For the former, one must desire a morally good goal. For the latter, the correct desires are "determined by normative moral theory: the concepts deployed in grasping the correct normative moral theory are the concepts through which one must intrinsically desire the right or good in order to have good will."[10] According to it, acting with moral worth requires that one's desires deploy the concepts belonging to the true moral theory or from which the true moral theory could be "trivially deduced".

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[10] Arpaly and Schroeder (2013: 164)

As other commentators have indicated,[11] this conception is implausibly demanding. There is only one true moral theory but acting with moral worth does not require endorsing it.[12] For example, imagine two individuals who are each moved to donate to charity by the fact that it will help the needy. The first, Clarice, is a contractualist. As such, the moral concepts she employs are the ones involved in principles of action that could not rationally be rejected. The second, Rhonda, is a rule consequentialist. As such, the moral concepts she employs are the ones involved in principles whose widespread acceptance would make things go best. According to Arpaly & Schroeder's condition, at most one acts with moral worth since at most one theory is true. But that is overly demanding. Acting with moral worth doesn't require making subtle philosophical distinctions between, for example, contractualism and rule-consequentialism.

The root of the trouble is that Arpaly & Schroeder's condition involves the true normative theory. Since there is only one such theory, it implies that there is only one set of concepts consistent with moral worth. But moral worth is more ecumenical. As such, we need a more ecumenical way of identifying the desires that lead to moral worth. Morally good goals, rather than correctly conceptualized desires, are more ecumenical in this sense. Both contractualism and rule-consequentialism (let's suppose) prescribe good goals. So acting on either set of goals is compatible with moral worth, even if at most one of the two theories is true.

4.2 Markovits

Julia Markovits's "Acting for the Right Reasons" begins by defending something very close to Right Reasons, but later calls on a second condition in the face of apparent counterexamples:

> We should understand [Right Reasons] as pronouncing an action morally worthy whenever the non-instrumental reasons for which it is performed coincide with the non-instrumental reasons that morally justify its performance. (Markovits (2010: 230))

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[11] See Lord (2017).

[12] The degree to which Arpaly & Schroeder's view is demanding is a function of how difficult it is to know the true moral theory. Some, such as Laskowski (2018), have argued that such knowledge is extremely difficult to acquire.

Markovits is primarily concerned with cases where the right moral facts move the agent to do what's morally right, but those facts provide only objectionably instrumental motivation. If the fact that a child is trapped in a burning building leads a selfish reward-seeker to save them, the reward-seeker does not act with moral worth for they save the child only to get a reward.[13]

Markovits's condition is too strong. A purely instrumental action is one motived only by instrumental reasons. Since purely instrumental actions are by definition not motivated by non-instrumental reasons, Markovits's condition forbids purely instrumental reasons from having moral worth. But this is false. If I give to Oxfam simply as a means of alleviating world hunger, I am purely instrumentally motivated to give to Oxfam. But my purely instrumental motivation does not rob my act of giving to Oxfam of its moral worth. So, instrumentally motivated actions can have moral worth when directed towards morally good goals like alleviating world hunger.[14]

The difference between the morally worthy Oxfam donor and the selfish reward seeker lies in their goals. Giving to Oxfam in order to alleviate world hunger involves a morally good goal; saving a child in order to get a reward doesn't. As a result, the difference between acts with and without moral worth doesn't track the difference between instrumental and non-instrumental motivation, which supervenes on differences in goals; rather, it directly tracks the difference between good and bad goals themselves.

4.3 Way

Jonathan Way (2017: 16) also offers a novel condition on acting with moral worth:

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[13] Markovits (2010: 227)

[14] An Anscombian rebuttal is available to Markovits: by donating to Oxfam, the agent isn't simply performing the action of donating to Oxfam. She's also performing the action of alleviating world hunger. And she performs that morally right action for its own sake. Consequently, she acts with moral worth when she alleviates world hunger, even if she doesn't act with moral worth when she gives to Oxfam.

This response is plausible, but it does not generalize adequately. This let us stipulate that, unbeknownst to the agent, a freak storm will cause the food purchased by her donation to be lost at sea. In that case, it will be false that she performs the action of alleviating world hunger, since the food will be lost at sea, but true that her purely instrumental donation to Oxfam possesses moral worth. Consequently, Markovits's account false predicts that donation lacks moral worth.

Matching Principles: Your ϕ-ing for reason r is creditworthy iff r is a reason to ϕ and the principle from which you ϕ matches a principle which explains why r is a reason to ϕ.

Since moral worth is a species of creditworthiness, the principle promises to offer an analysis of moral worth when it concerns moral reasons. On this view, moral worth requires acting from a principle that explains why one's motivating reason is a sufficient moral reason.

However, Matching Principles is insufficiently ecumenical. For example, it's possible for both, Peter Singer and Christine Korsgaard to act with moral worth, though they are deeply committed to conflicting but plausible (let's assume) pictures of morality. But at most one these pictures is true. This is trouble. Because Matching Principles appeals to principles that explain and because only truths explain, at most one of the two can act with moral worth since at most one of those sets of principles is true. However, this is insufficiently ecumenical. Acting with moral doesn't require settling the debate between Korsgaardian deontology and Singerian utilitarianism.

Just as Arpaly & Schroeder's explicit appeal to the true moral theory makes their view implausibly demanding, Way's tacit such appeal makes his view insufficiently ecumenical. In contrast, appealing to goals allows for an ecumenical theory of moral worth. That's because while Singer and Korsgaard's conflicting moral theories cannot both be true, their goals can each be good.

5. Responding to the Right Reasons

So there is reason to doubt the proposals of Arpaly & Schroeder, Markovits, and Way. However, my main objection against those views is that their strategy of making our notion of responding to a reason more complex fails to address the underlying problem. As I argue below, the kinds of cases thought to challenge Right Reasons also provide a second challenge the role that reasons play in weighing explanations of moral properties. However, weighing explanations do not involve claims about responding to reasons. Consequently, the proposals of Arpaly & Schroeder, Markovits, and Way do not — indeed, cannot — address this second kind of challenge.

To be clear, the advantage enjoyed by the PCV over these proposals is not that it solves two problems while theirs solves only one. Rather, it's that these two problems are two symptoms of the same underlying defect in our conception of reasons. As I'll show, the two problems are so closely related as to be generated by exactly the same kinds of cases. Consequently, solutions to only one of these problems treat a symptom but not its underlying cause, which is the mistaken but orthodox assumption that reasons are facts.

5.1 The Argument

Reasons are often thought to help us understand normative facts through so-called weighing explanations. Most normative properties that are susceptible to a weighing explanation are what I'll call *restricted* normative properties, which appeal only to a restricted subset of reasons. For example, a weighing explanation of what you should do, morally speaking, involves restricted competition between reasons, since it involves competition only amongst moral reasons.[15] More generally, a weighing explanation of a restricted normative property involves considering only the reasons relevant to that property – relevant reasons – and ignoring irrelevant ones.

Consider what happens when we ignore this restriction:

> *Moral Should**: You should, morally speaking, act in some way just when and because
> the reasons for so acting outweigh the reasons against so acting.[16]

Because *Moral Should** weighs morally irrelevant reasons, it is vulnerable to counterexample. For example, the fact that the album is a great jazz album gives the jazz-lover a reason to buy it. Supposing that there are no reasons against buying it, then there is conclusive reason to buy it; any reason trivially outweighs an absence of countervailing reasons. But it isn't your moral duty to buy the album; it's not the case that you should buy it, morally speaking.

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[15] I am bracketing complexities arising from supererogation for the moment.

[16] I'm reading this principle in a 'Reasons First' way, according to which facts about reasons explain facts about what you should do, morally speaking, and the facts about reasons are not explained by any further normative facts, such as facts about goodness, rightness, fittingness, etc.

As a result, failure to restrict *Moral Should** to only morally relevant reasons prescribes more moral duties than there are. The counterexample arises because *Moral Should** fails to distinguish moral and prudential reasons. That the album is a great jazz album gives the jazz-lover a merely prudential reason to buy it. It doesn't give a moral reason. So it must be excluded from the weighing explanation of whether they should buy the album. That is, it must be excluded from *Moral Should**:

> *Moral Should*: You should, morally speaking, act in some way just when and because the *morally relevant* reasons for so acting outweigh the *morally relevant* reasons against so acting.

Determining whether an act is morally required according to *Moral Should* therefore depends on weighing all and only the moral reasons for or against the act. If we fail to weigh all the moral reasons, we risk wrongly ignoring morally relevant considerations and inviting counterexamples. Likewise, if we fail to weigh only moral considerations, we risk wrongly attending to morally irrelevant considerations and inviting different counterexamples. *Moral Should*, then, requires us to both include all moral reasons and exclude all the non-moral reasons.

However, as we'll now see, some troublesome facts give both moral and non-moral reasons to perform a particular action. If reasons are identical to facts, then these troublesome facts must be included in *Moral Should*, because they are moral reasons, and excluded from *Moral Should*, because they are non-moral reasons, which is impossible. Just as the egoist's challenge to Right Reasons shows that some some troublesome facts can motivate a particular act in two or more ways, only one of which is compatible with moral worth, I'll now show that these troublesome facts can *favour* a particular act in both moral and non-moral ways, only one of which is relevant to *Moral Should*.

Here's the kind of troublesome fact I have in mind. Suppose that you've decided to give 100\$ dollars to charity. You can give the 100\$ to a charity called Beneficence Now! (BN) or to one called Equality Now! (EN). BN benefits the poor and starving; EN promotes equality. The scenario implies:

A. Giving 100$ to BN will benefit the poor and starving.

B. B. Giving 100$ to EN will promote equality.

Although BN and EN promote radically different goals – welfare on the one hand and equality on the other – they do the same amount of good at the end of the day. So you may give to either charity, but your charity is sorely needed, so you must give to one. Given that it is permissible to give to either, and that an act is permissible just when it is not outweighed by countervailing reasons, when there are two permissible, incompatible options, they each have the same weight:[17]

But there's more to the story. Suppose that you're the egoist from earlier. You get a pleasurable tingle whenever the needy are helped. Because of this tingle, (A) also gives you a prudential reason to give to BN. After all, doing so gives you the kind of enjoyment that others get from sports, music, food, etc. Just as the fact that the album is a great jazz album gives the jazz-lover a prudential reason to buy it, the fact that donating to BN benefits the poor and starving gives you, the egoist, a prudential reason to do it.

Now it's natural to suppose that when a fact like (A) gives both a prudential and a moral reason to give to BN, it 'gives' two distinct objects. Indeed, the PCV has this implication. But if every reason is identical with the fact that gives it, the two reasons given by (A) are identical with (A),

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[17] *Caveat*: 'weight' has some unfortunate associations when used as a metaphor for reasons' normative contribution, such as the misleading implication that two reasons to do something are always weightier than either alone. Without this disclaimer, I risk reifying those associations with the following image. Nevertheless, I think it helps to foreground the worry with identifying reasons and facts on which I wish to focus.

so they are identical with each other by the transitivity of identity. Not only is this a surprising implication, but, as I'll now show, it undermines a weighing explanation of what you morally should do.

First of all, Figure 1 is a misleading representation of the weighing explanation of what you should do if reasons are facts because it omits (A)'s prudential bearing. A reason's prudential bearing is irrelevant to what we should do, morally speaking. I'll represent that irrelevance by greying out irrelevant part of (A)'s bearing on what to do. If reasons are facts, (A) is more accurately represented as follows, which combines (A)'s moral and non-moral bearing:

Moreover, because a reason for action's weight is a function of how strongly it bears on the question of what to do, (A) has strictly more weight than (B). After all, (A) and (B)'s moral bearing on that question is equal, given that you may give either to BN or EN. However, (A) bears on the question of what to do in a second, prudential sense. Consequently, (A) bears more strongly than (B) on the question of what to do, all things considered, so it has more weight.

As a result, Figure 1 is inaccurate if the orthodoxy that reasons are facts is true. The situation is not one of parity or balance, but rather one where giving to BN outweighs giving to EN:

Given the orthodox view, the weighing explanation of what you should morally do implies that you may not give to EN since that option is outweighed. But this is inconsistent with a stipulation of the case, namely, that you may give to EN. The root of the problem is clear: the assumption that reasons for an agent to do something conflates the two reasons given by (A) into a single object. As a result, (A)'s prudential and moral bearing on what to do cannot be distinguished in the weighing explanation. But questions involving the restricted senses of 'should' depend on distinguishing reasons of different types, such as moral and prudential reasons. Moreover, (A)'s prudential bearing cannot be excluded without excluding (A) itself on this view, which distorts the weighing explanation in another way:

Excluding (A) implies that you may not give to BN, which also contradicts a stipulation of the case. In effect, (A) creates a dilemma on orthodox assumptions. Either (A) is included in the weighing explanation of what you morally should do or it's excluded. And either including or excluding the reason given by (A) creates a counterexample to the weighing explanation of the case. So the weighing explanation is false if the orthodoxy is true.

Moreover, nothing about this case depends on details particular to morality and prudence. Perhaps your country's legislature has long been dominated by the Benthamite Utilitarian Party, which has passed a series of laws such that failing to benefit the poor and starving is illegal. In that case, (A) will not be both a prudential and a moral reason to give to EN, but it will be a legal and a moral reason to give to EN, which creates similar troubles.

5.2 Objections (briefly)

Let me briefly consider some responses to this argument. A simple response quickly rebutted starts from my perhaps strange claim that facts are too coarsely grained to play reasons' role in weighing explanations. This claim is strange because facts can be made arbitrarily finely grained by iterating new conjuncts. We might think that adding extra conjuncts to (A) clears up the ambiguity between the moral and prudential reasons it gives. But there are limits to this strategy. As we've already seen, reasons figure in deliberation and sufficiently long conjunctions don't. Moreover, *even if* these complex facts give unambiguous moral and prudential reasons, that's beside the point: it's no argument for thinking that (A) *doesn't* give both moral and prudential reasons. So long as it does, the problem remains.

Alternatively, it might seem that I've overstepped my argument. I might seem to have shown only that we need to posit a new item in the reason relation, the relation that makes certain facts reasons, not that we must abandon the idea that reasons are facts. So, for example, rather than the reason relation holding only between an agent, an action, and fact, it holds between an agent, an act, a fact, and something else – perhaps a goal. According to this view, a moral and a prudential reason may be identical to the same fact but they obtain relative to different goals.

This proposal fails to preserve weighing explanations unless we add the new *relatum* to the relevant weighing explanation, in addition to adding it to the reason relation. For example, if we're adding goals to the reason relation, we must also add them to analyses like *Moral Should*; otherwise the analysis doesn't capitalize on the new distinctions drawn by mention of goals in the reason relation. But it's controversial to suppose that moral obligations (at a world, time) obtain only relative to certain goals, or indeed to anything other than agents and actions or outcomes.[18]

Some have taken this argument to show that we must weigh the weights associated with certain facts, rather than the facts themselves.[19] There are several problems with this suggestion, beyond

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[18] Finlay (2014) offers the leading defense of this controversial view.

[19] Jonathan Way, Joe Horton, and Tristram McPherson each mentioned this point on separate occasions.

its odd reification of weight — just as we measure rooms not inches and we time movies not seconds, we weigh reasons not weights. Foremost among these problems is that the suggestion undermines, rather than supports, the thought that reasons are facts. According to it, we must distinguish the moral and prudential weights exemplified by (A).

However, once weights are moral, prudential, legal, etc., facts no longer play reasons' role in the analysis — weights, properties of reasons, play it. For example, we can restate analyses in the following way without mentioning facts:

> *Moral Should***: You should, morally speaking, act in some way just when and because the moral weight for doing it is decisive.

Hence, the response undermines, rather than defends, the orthodox view. Reasons for action characteristically favour certain options in moral or prudential ways and what figure in weighing explanations. In, *Moral Should***, weights, not facts, play those roles. Hence, on this picture, facts are not reasons. They're merely the bearers of reasons, that is, of weights.

6. A Balanced Account of Reasons for Action

6.1 The Advantage of Heterodoxy

It's easy to mistake the resemblance of facts and reasons for identity. That resemblance makes the orthodoxy a natural view about the ontology of reasons. But, as I've just shown, facts cannot offer weighing explanations of the normative. Because reasons offer weighing explanations of the normative, reasons are not just facts. Why, then, is the orthodoxy orthodox?

Its principal appeal lies in its relatively unified account of the diverse ways that we attribute reasons. While philosophers normally discuss only attributions of reasons employing that-clauses, reasons-attributions found in the wild are far more varied. For example, we can say that the reason not to get rowdy in the bar is Biff the bouncer. Or, to use Schroeder's example, we can say that the reason not to jump off the Empire State Building is its height. The first attribution

appears to predicate an individual, Biff, with reasonhood. The second predicates it of a property, height. But, as Schroeder (2007: 20) contends, "in every case in which something can be cited as a reason for someone to do something, there is some fact or true proposition which can be cited equally well." This is strong evidence that facts "give us" reasons, in some sense. The question is how to make sense of this "giving" relation between facts and reasons without concluding that it is identity.

According to the PCV, a fact gives a reason when it partly constitutes that reason. That is, facts partly constitute reasons in the same way that wheels partly constitute a car or that Northern Ireland partly constitutes the United Kingdom. Although we're not likely to mistake a car for its wheels or the UK for Northern Ireland, that facts are parts of reasons explains why we might mistakenly think that reasons are just facts, especially if reasons' other parts are not obvious.

Davidson's view and the PCV bear an obvious resemblance. Unsurprisingly then, many arguments for the former also support the latter. For example, Davidson offers a nice explanation of why we often attribute reasons using that-claims, such as the reason to go on a walk is that it's good exercise, despite denying that reasons are facts. This explanation allows us to account for why reasons resemble facts enough to be mistaken for them. Davidson writes,

> A primary reason consists of a belief and a pro-attitude, but it is generally otiose to mention both. If you tell me you are easing the jib because you think that will stop the main from backing, I don't need to be told that you want to stop the main from backing; and if you say you are biting your thumb at me because you want to insult me, there is no point in adding that you think that by biting your thumb at me you will insult me. (Davidson (1963: 688))

According to him, both explicit assertions and background information help to identify a reason. Reasons could, therefore, be constituted by things other than the facts asserted as reasons, which are taken for granted and which are, to use Davidson's term, "otiose" to mention explicitly. As a result, ontologies of reasons that incorporate facts as parts are entirely consistent ordinary attributions of reasons.

The PCV implies that when a fact like (A) is associated with or gives both a prudential and a moral reason, it constitutes two, distinct reasons. The only additional assumption needed, which I develop in the next subsection, is that prudential and moral reasons are associated with different goals. In that case, when (A) is associated with a moral goal, call one 'M', it gives a moral reason: $<A, M>$. When it's associated with a prudential goal, call one 'P', it gives a prudential reason: $<A, P>$. And only when (B) is associated with a moral goal, creating $<B, M>$, does it weigh against the moral reason given by (A) in the explanation of what you morally should do. A simple illustration represents the PCV's solution:

As we've just seen, the PCV's reasons are strictly more finely-grained than the facts that give them. For example, (A) gives two reasons, $<A, M>$ and $<A, P>$, and those reasons are distinct from each other because they have different parts in the way that Ireland and the United Kingdom are distinct despite sharing Northern Ireland as a part. So we can factor out (A)'s prudential bearing from the weighing explanation of what you morally should do, as common sense allows, because it is entirely and exclusively reflected by $<A, P>$.

6.2 Independent Motivation for the Partial Constitution View

We've just seen how a fact like (A) can favour an action in multiple ways, analogously to how the belief that the Cubs are playing can motivate baseball fans to go to Wrigley in different ways. We can pick out these different ways by mention of the fans' goals, to see the Cubs win or to see them lose, for example. It turns out that the different ways a fact favours the action can also be

picked out by identifying the different goals served by the action, as named in a *to*-clause. Recall that (A) gives a moral and a prudential reason to give to BN. Because it gives these two reasons, (A) favours giving to BN in two different ways, one moral and one prudential. Strikingly, just as we can pick out the different ways the fact that the Cubs are playing can motivate Fanny and Hatty to go to Wrigley by adverting to their different goals, we can also identify the different ways (A) favours giving to BN through goals:

1. A moral reason for you to donate to BN is to help the needy.

2. A prudential reason for you to donate to BN is to feel a pleasant tingle.

3. A moral reason for you to donate to BN is to feel a pleasant tingle.

4. A prudential reason for you to donate to BN is to help the needy.

(1)-(4) offer evidence that we can distinguish between certain moral and prudential reasons using to-clauses. This is an interesting observation by itself, given that to-clauses are largely ignored in discussions about reasons, but joined with the PCV's account of how to-clauses also help identify the motive behind an action, we have evidence for the view.

These to-clause attributions of normative reasons also complete the PCV's account of reasons for action. In the previous section, I used letters to represent the goals associated with the two reasons to donate to BN given by (A). The to-clauses above show what those letters identify. (A) gives a moral reason to give to BN, $< A, M >$, and a prudential reason, $< A, P >$. The truth of (1) reveals that the goal of helping the needy is a moral goal. Giving to BN promotes the goal of helping the needy. So a moral reason given by (A) is the following, according to the PCV:

<center><Giving 100$ to BN will benefit the poor and starving, to help the needy></center>

Likewise, the truth of (2) reveals that the goal of feeling a pleasant tingle is a prudential goal. Giving to BN promotes the goal of feeling a pleasant tingle, at least in your case. So a prudential reason given by (A) is the following, according to the PCV:

<center><Giving 100$ to BN will benefit the poor and starving, to feel a pleasant tingle></center>

In sum, facts can motivate action in different ways, which are identifiable using to-clauses. Davidson's model gives us a simple explanation why that's so: to-clauses like (1)-(4) identify the second constituent of the agent's reason, which, along with the fact, is their motive for action. It turns out that facts can also favour an action in different ways, which are also identifiable using to-clauses like those in (1)-(4). It would be a striking coincidence, then, if this weren't evidence that to-clauses help to identify the second constituent of a normative reason for action when they can help us to identify the second constituent of a motivating reason for action.

As a result, the PCV's solution to the two problems is not *ad hoc*. Rather, its explanation of how various normative reasons attributions are coordinated gives it strong independent motivation. That the orthodox view is susceptible to these problems is therefore evidence that it is false. To be clear, the account I've just sketched doesn't resolve all of the outstanding questions about the PCV. In particular, I haven't answered the obvious worry that goals are ambiguous in the way the facts are, which generated the original problem, though I do so elsewhere.

A major benefit of adopting the PCV is that it allows us to understand the special value that a right act has when its rightness is creditable to its agent as the special value exemplified when their motivating reasons are good moral reasons. The challenges that have led many to doubt Right Reasons's sufficiency instead originate in false assumptions about the ontology of normative reasons. Of course, there are other challenges to Right Reasons, such as those advanced by Paulina Sliwa (2016) and her followers. However, I rebut these in Howard (2020). Consequently, it is no coincidence that the platitude with which we began, that good people do the right thing for the right reasons, is appealing: it suggests the true analysis of moral worth.

7. Conclusion

The overarching aim of this paper is not just to defend matching explanations like Right Reasons. It is also to highlight a largely ignored strategy in the philosophy of normative reasons. Most often, problems with reasons and the analyses that rely on them are met with theories of what grounds reasons' normativity. Comparatively little attention is paid to what reasons are, that

is, to their ontology, beyond debates about whether falsehoods can be reasons or whether only truths or truth-makers are reasons. But there are more options for the ontology of reasons than those countenanced by the orthodoxy. And, as I've shown, some appealing solutions to deep problems with reasons lie in those options.

Let me conclude with a potted history of reasons.[20] Discussions of motivating reasons, at least in the modern key, came first, with Davidson in 1963 in "Actions, Reasons, and Causes". Davidson's followers tended to think of motivating reasons as psychological states and, in particular, as pairs of beliefs and desires. By contrast, although it has an important antecedent in W. D. Ross's *The Right and the Good*, contemporary interest in normative reasons largely begins in 1970 with Nagel's *The Possibility of Altruism*, continuing in work by John McDowell, Joseph Raz, Stephen Darwall, and Derek Parfit in the late 70's and early 80's. These philosophers seemed to share the assumption that normative reasons were special facts.

Though it was obvious that these two conceptions of a reason were importantly related, their ontology was largely kept apart. Michael Smith's 1994 *The Moral Problem* exemplifies this bifurcated ontology of reasons. According to him, whereas normative reasons are "propositions of the general form 'A's ϕ-ing is desirable or required', [...] motivating reasons would seem to be psychological states, states that play a certain explanatory role in producing action."

Arguments from Dancy (2000), Stratton-Lake (2000), and, subsequently, Arpaly (2004), Schroeder (2007), and Markovits (2010), *inter alia*, began to make this bifurcated ontology of reasons look untenable. Surely it is possible to be motivated by a good, normative reason in the most literal and direct sense, these philosophers argued. This observation was taken to imply that normative and motivating reasons were the very same things. The assumption that normative reasons were facts, together with arguments by Dancy and that motivating reasons could not be Davidson's psychological states, led to the contemporary orthodoxy that all reasons, both normative and motivating, were facts or – at a minimum – fact-like entities such as propositions.

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[20] Fun fact: 'potted', as I've used it, comes from the expression 'potted meat', e.g., Spam. Potted meat is low quality meat. So, 'a potted history' means a low quality history. Accordingly, this history's purpose is to frame the evolution of thought about reasons in an illuminating way, not in an objective – or, indeed, a terribly accurate – way.

But facts, as we've seen, are not adequate to the task of characterizing our motives or to the task of figuring in weighing explanations.

But we took a wrong turn when trying to unify the ontology of reasons in response to Dancy, Stratton-Lake, et al. Dancy and Nagel's arguments against Davidson show that reasons are not psychological states. But Davidson's psychologism is only one element of his conception of reasons. The other element is that Davidson's reasons are complex. And on that count, I've argued that we should have sided with Davidson rather than the tradition of normative theorizing that dates back to *The Possibility of Altruism* and *The Right and the Good*. Rather than showing us that our conception of a motivating reasons needs to more closely resemble our antecedent conception of a normative reason, matching explanations require that our conception of a normative reason more closely resemble our antecedent conception of a motivating reason. Otherwise, we'll mistake the import of challenges to matching analyses like Right Reasons.

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