

The Wrong Kind of Value

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Introduction

According to the ‘buck-passing’ (BPV), or ‘fitting attitudes’, account of value, something is valuable just in case there are reasons (or it is fitting) to have a pro-attitude toward that thing. Versions of this account can be traced back at least as far as Brentano who said

We call a thing *good* when the love relating to it is correct. In the broadest sense of the term, the good is that which is worthy of love, that which can be loved with a love that is correct.¹

The theory was recently revived by T. M. Scanlon’s endorsement of it in his *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 regard to it²

And

...being good, or valuable, is not a property that itself provides a reason to respond to a thing in certain ways. Rather, to be good or valuable is to have other properties that constitute such reasons. ...this account...takes goodness

¹Brentano (1969). Franz Brentano. Others who have endorsed similar accounts are Rawls, McDowell, Chisholm, W.D. Falk, Wiggins, Gibbard, and Elizabeth Anderson. For a short but very useful history of this kind of value analysis, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen *The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Attitudes and Value*, in *Ethics*, vol. 114 (April 2004), pp 391-423.

² Scanlon (1998), p. 95.

and value to be non-natural properties, namely the purely formal, higher-order properties of having some lower-order properties that provide reasons of the relevant kind.³

BPV has generated quite an impressive amount of philosophical activity over the past ten years. This is in no small part due to Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen's (2004) discussion of the so-called 'wrong-kind of reason' (WKR) problem that supposedly attends the theory.⁴ Since BPV identifies value with having reason-giving properties, a consequence of the theory is that the following bi-conditional holds between value and reasons:

X is valuable if and only if X has properties (other than being valuable) which give us reason to have some pro-attitudes toward X.⁵

WKR concerns the right-to-left implication of the biconditional above. There seems to be cases where we can have reasons for having pro-attitudes toward things that lack value altogether. The standard example in the literature is that an evil demon will inflict harm on you unless you form a pro-attitude toward something (a saucer of mud) which is completely devoid of value. In this case it seems we all have a reason to form a pro attitude toward the saucer of mud, yet the saucer of mud is, *ex hypothesi*, not valuable. The problem is that the reason we have for forming a pro-attitude toward the saucer of mud in this case is *of the wrong kind* as far as BPV is concerned, and the challenge is to provide a principled way of distinguishing the right sort of reasons from the wrong sort. This has turned out to be surprisingly difficult to do.

Whether or not this particular problem can be solved is not the concern of this paper. However, in section 2, I will address what can, arguably, be seen as another species of WKR. This problem is known as the 'partiality problem' and it arises out of the 'special' relation we stand in to those who are important to us. I will argue that this problem can

³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴ Cf. Hieronymi (2005); Danielson and Olson (2007); Lang (2008); Olson (2004), (2009); Piller (2006); Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2006); Skorupski [online resource]; Stratton-Lake (2005); Parfit (2001);

⁵ In what follows I will omit 'other than being valuable' although this is always implicit.

be solved but in section 3 I turn to an altogether different problem also arises out of another relational concern - the relation we stand in to ourselves and our attitudes. This problem, which I will call the 'exclusion problem' is not so easily solved. In fact, I will not offer a solution to it, but I hope that by articulating the problem I will bring to the discussion something that has not yet received much attention. Before I do any of this I will explain in more detail what BPV is and what its (alleged) attractions are.

1. The buck-passing account of value: pros and cons

To start with, it is unclear whether BPV should be understood mainly as a theory about the semantics of value terms or as a theory of the metaphysics of value as such. As we have seen, at one point Scanlon says 'To *call* something valuable is to *say* that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.' (My italics.) A page later he says 'to *be* good or valuable *is* to have other properties that constitute...reasons.' (My italics.) I think BPV is more plausibly construed as a theory of the metaphysics of value. If proponents of BPV were putting it forward as theory about the meaning of 'good' and its comparative 'better' they would be in effect be accusing people like Bernard Williams of conceptual error. In his discussion of the 'hard case' wife beater in his famous paper 'Internal and External Reasons'⁶ Williams agrees that it would be better if the man treated his wife differently, yet he denies that there is reason for the brute to change his behaviour. A charge of conceptual error on Williams' part seems mistaken here. Rather, it's much more plausible to claim that he is substantively mistaken about the wife beater's reasons. In this paper I will treat BPV as, primarily, a theory of what value consists in, i.e. as a metaphysical theory.

Speaking somewhat loosely, we can say that there are many different kinds of value: final value, instrumental value, contributory value, and symbolic value are the most familiar (there may well be others). BPV is primarily a theory about *final* value.⁷

⁶ Williams (1995), p. 35.

⁷ It is widely accepted these days that final value and intrinsic value are not the same thing. The distinction between final and instrumental value is a distinction between the ways in which something can be valuable: for its own sake or for the sake of something else. Intrinsic value, on the other hand, should be contrasted with extrinsic value. This distinction concerns the 'location' of value: something is intrinsically valuable if and only if its value-making properties are wholly internal to it. Otherwise it is extrinsically valuable.

To be finally valuable is to be valuable *for its own sake*. According to BPV, then, an object is finally valuable if and only if it has properties that give us reason to favour that object for its own sake. For something to be bad, or negatively valuable, is for that thing to have other properties (other than being bad) that give us reason to disfavour it.

I am using the term ‘object’ here as a mere place-holder for that which bears value, whatever that may be (physical objects, states of affairs, persons, events etc.). Likewise, ‘favour’ and ‘disfavour’ are place-holders for whatever pro- or con-attitude that is appropriate. It is easy to see how BPV would account for the other types of values.

Importantly, BPV analyses value in terms of *reasons*, or in terms of the properties that give us these reasons. So what are reasons then? This is not an easy question to answer I shall not try to do so either, but I need to say a few things about reasons. Many philosophers believe that the concept of a reason is basic in the sense that it cannot helpfully be analysed in terms of, or reduced to, some other concept or concepts. John Skorupski, for instance, writes: ‘The concept of a reason seems fundamental to all thought. It is *pervasive* - actions, beliefs, and feelings (i.e. sentiments) all fall within its range; it is *primitive* - all other normative concepts are reducible to it and no other normative concept has that status....’⁸ Scanlon famously begins his book by saying

I will take the idea of a reason as primitive. Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to be to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favour of it. “Counts in favour how?” one might ask. “By providing a reason for it” seems to be the only answer.⁹

Scanlon’s characterisation of a reason as a consideration that counts in favour of something has been widely accepted and here I will follow orthodoxy – with a slight

Since people sometimes tend to conflate intrinsic and final value I will use these terms interchangeably unless otherwise stated.

⁸ Reference needed.

⁹ *Op. Cit.*, p. 17. John Broome disagrees. He says: ‘Reasons are undoubtedly important, but normativity has other important features, and our preoccupation with reasons distracts us from them.’ Broome thinks that ‘ought’ is the central, or basic, normative concept. (See his 2004.) Jonathan Dancy disagrees with both Scanlon and Broome. He argues that reasons and oughts form a local holism; that we cannot helpfully elucidate the concept of a reason without invoking the concept of ought and vice versa – neither is basic. See his (2004).

modification: the reason *relation* is the favouring relation. Its' relata are (at least) facts, agents, and actions or attitudes: The fact that *F* gives agent *A* a reason to ϕ ; or, the fact that *F* favours *A*'s ϕ -ing.¹⁰ Normative reasons are not specific to the practical sphere (i.e. to action or intention). There are also reasons to believe certain things and to feel in certain ways. In all three cases the reasons relation holds between (at least) facts, agents, and actions or beliefs or feelings.¹¹ Goodness, or value, on the other hand, does not seem to be relational in this way. On the face of it, a Stradivarius violin, for example, if it is valuable is just that – valuable – not valuable *for* someone. This sounds like bad news for the buck-passer. As Jonathan Dancy has pointed out:

...goodness has fewer places...than reasons do. Now if this is true, it cannot be correct to define goodness as the presence of reason-giving features. For the presence of reason-giving features will have more places in it, so to speak, than the goodness has.¹²

I believe this is an important source of criticism and I shall return to it in due course.

So what is the attraction of BPV then? Well, there is at least one feature of it that has gained near universal acceptance. This is the idea is that value, or goodness, is what we might call *normatively epiphenomenal*. An object's value does not provide us with reasons for forming pro-attitudes toward it – rather, it is the properties that *make* the object valuable that provide us with reasons to form pro-attitudes toward the object. If the Mona Lisa is valuable *because* it is beautiful, it is its beauty that gives us reason to appreciate it, to admire it, to protect it from fires and thieves etc. It is not the case, on this view, that the beauty of the painting first makes the painting valuable, and then the value of the painting give us reason to form a pro-attitude toward it. I take it this is the main

¹⁰ 'Fact' here is again merely a place-holder for that which plays the grounding, providing, instantiating (etc.) role in the reasons relation. It may be that things other than facts – construed as true propositions – play this role.

¹¹ It may well be that, for maximum specification, it should also include such things as times and degrees of strength.

¹² Dancy (2000), P. 42.

reason the theory is called a ‘buck-passing’ account: it passes the ‘reason-giving buck’ from the value of an object to the properties that make the object valuable.¹³

Scanlon argues that this is a consideration that speaks heavily in favour of BPV. However, the idea that value is normatively epiphenomenal is not essential to the analysis of value in terms of reasons. It is perfectly coherent, although perhaps in the end not plausible, to maintain that although value should be understood in terms of having reason-giving properties, value is itself also a reason-giving property. Maybe it could be argued that value should be identified with having properties that give us reasons *of some specific kind* and to distinguish these reasons from the reasons that are generated by the value itself. However, I am perfectly happy to accept that value is normatively epiphenomenal in the sense just described; and even if it is not, it will not make much of a difference to what I will be arguing in this paper.

An undoubted attraction of BPV is its catholic spirit. As Scanlon puts it:

We value many different kinds of things, including at the least the following: objects and their properties (such as beauty), persons, skills and talents, states of character, actions, accomplishments, activities and pursuits, relationships, and ideals. To value something is to take oneself to have reasons for holding certain positive attitudes toward it and acting in certain ways in regard to it. Exactly what these reasons are, and what actions and attitudes they support will be different in different cases.¹⁴

The sort of response that is called for will vary from object to object; in some cases there will be reasons for us to admire the object, in others there will be reasons to respect it, to promote its existence and flourishing, to desire it and so on. It is no doubt a good feature of BPV that it allows that different kinds of objects can be valuable, but in this respect it has, as far as I can see, no advantage over ‘objective list theories’ advocated by, for

¹³ If the value of objects provide reasons in *addition* to the properties that make objects valuable (e.g. beauty), then there would a kind of ‘double counting’ of the reasons we have for forming a pro-attitude toward the valuable object: one reason (or set of reasons) stemming from the value of the object, and one reason (or set of reasons) stemming from the properties that make the object valuable. But this kind of double counting seems implausible. Better to conclude then, that the value of an object does not provide reasons. Roger Crisp has called this the *Redundancy Argument*. See Crisp (2005).

¹⁴ *Op. Cit.*, p. 95.

instance, James Griffin.¹⁵ Indeed, we might ask why we should identify value with having reason-giving properties rather than with those properties that ground the relevant reasons. Suppose we ask ‘Which properties ground reasons (of the right kind) for forming pro-attitudes?’ and the answer turns out to be properties A, B, C, D.... Why then not conclude that to be valuable just is the second-order property of having first-order property A, or B, or C, or D...? It is of course true that these properties also ground reasons for forming pro-attitudes, but why should this be included in the analysis of value? Either way, I take BPV’s ability to accommodate a wide range of quite diverse values (and for that matter, a wide range of types of value-bearers) to be a good thing – something that counts in its favour – and leave it at that.

Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen claim that another attractive feature of BPV is that it ‘demystifies’ value. As they put it:

...an important advantage of the “fitting-attitudes” analysis...is that it removes the air of mystery from the normative ‘compellingness’ of values. There is nothing strange in the prescriptive implications of value ascriptions if value is explicated in deontic terms.¹⁶

Two remarks are needed here. First, and this is a bit of an aside, are terms like ‘fitting’ and ‘reasons’ really deontic terms? What is the mark of a deontic term? An evaluative term? A normative term? I certainly don’t know how to sort all relevant terms into one of these three categories, but I take it that terms like ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are paradigmatically deontic terms (as is ‘duty’). ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ are evaluative, and ‘reason’ and ‘ought’ are what we might call *narrowly* normative (since there is a sense in which all these terms are normative). Second, and more importantly, it is far from clear that BPV demystifies anything. Is it really the case that, say, reasons are less metaphysically queer than values? Perhaps the explication of value in terms of reasons renders the prescriptive implications of value less mysterious because reasons are prescriptive (or normative) if anything is, but what remains mysterious to many people

¹⁵ (1986) *Well-being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹⁶ *Op. Cit.*, pp. 391-2.

(and I suspect this is their real complaint about values) is prescriptivity, or normativity, *itself*. Some facts, apparently, give, provide, or ground reasons for us to do various things (believe, feel, and act presumably). According to BPV these are the same facts that make objects, states of affairs, and people valuable. Which mystery, exactly, has been removed?

In a recent paper Jonas Olson says that yet another advantage of the theory is that it ‘establishes and explains the intimate tie often thought to hold between values and attitudes.’¹⁷ I’m not sure what Olson has in mind here, but it’s hard to see what sort of tie that would be. If it’s some sort of normative tie, then the connection is not so much *explained* by BPV as merely as statement of BPV itself. If, on the other hand, the connection is psychological – roughly, that those who judge something to be valuable tend for the most part to have pro-attitudes toward that thing – this connection seems more readily explained by, say, evolutionary psychology than by BPV. Nor does it seem like the connection, if there is one, could be conceptual either as we saw in the case of Williams and the wife beater. Much more can of course be said for and against BPV at this general level, but in the remainder of this paper I will focus on a particular, more substantive so to speak, problem for BPV.

2. The partiality challenge

BPV is not merely an account of absolute values, according to which

X is valuable if and only if X has some property which give us reason to have some pro-attitudes toward X,

it is also a theory about betterness. Betterness is obviously a comparative, and as I see it, there are two ways of fitting this comparative into BPV: it either slots into the normative component or it slots into the response component. On the first alternative, if we assume for simplicity that both X and Y have positive value,

¹⁷ Olson, *forthcoming*. 'Fitting Attitude Analyses of Value and the Partiality Challenge', p. 4. Forthcoming in *Moral Theory and Practice*.

X is better than Y if and only if X has some property, p, which gives us reason to favour X, and Y has some property, p*, which gives us reason to favour Y, and the strength of the p-provided reason to favour X is greater than the strength of the p*-provided reason to favour Y

or something to that effect. The alternative (again assuming both X and Y are positively valuable) is, roughly,

X is better than Y if and only if X and Y have properties such that they give us reason to favour X more than Y (or to prefer X over Y).

I have to make two admissions straight away. First, it may well be the case that we can construct examples in which the two alternatives will yield different results. This would of course show that they're not extensionally equivalent. Second, whichever version is better, it may require quite a bit of tweaking in order to be fully satisfactory. For instance, it is consistent with the second version that X and Y also have another property gives us reason to favour Y more than X. This suggests, perhaps, that betterness should be relativised to what Ruth Chang calls a 'covering value'.¹⁸ Be that as it may, for the purposes of this paper I will stick with the latter version since this seems to be the one most frequently referred to in the literature. For brevity I will omit all property talk unless context necessitates otherwise.

According to the BPV version chosen, then, if two things, A and B (objects, states of affairs etc.), are of equal value we have reason to favour them equally (i.e. to be indifferent between them). Suppose I can bring about either

$A = [\text{Alfred is happy to degree } N]$

or

$B = [\text{Boris is happy to degree } N]$

¹⁸See Chang (2002).

where the two are equally deserving of happiness. Since Alfred's happiness is no more or less valuable than Boris' *A* and *B* are equally good states of affairs. BPV would tell us that there is reason to be indifferent between them. Intuitively, however, if I stand in some sort of special relation to Alfred (such as being a friend, relative, or trustee or whatever) but not to Boris, who is a total stranger, I have reason to favour *A* over *B*. According to BPV, then, since I have reason to favour *A* over *B* this implies that *A* is more valuable than *B*. But *ex hypothesi* *A* and *B* are of equal value.

An initial response to this problem might be follow Ewing and argue as follows: Considered as such, *A* and *B* are equally good and thus merit equal favour, but it doesn't follow that the more inclusive states of affairs

$C = [\text{Alfred is made happy to degree } N \text{ by me}]$

and

$D = [\text{Boris is made happy to degree } N \text{ by me}]$

are equally good. Hence it doesn't follow that I am required to be indifferent between *C* and *D*. This may be true as far as it goes, but what if the relevant choice is between

$C = [\text{Alfred is made happy to degree } N \text{ by me}]$

and

$E = [\text{Boris is made happy to degree } N \text{ by Boris' friend}]?$

By parity of reasoning, *C* and *E* are of equal value, yet, as Olson points out, 'to the extent that the partiality challenge has force in the first place it will certainly seem that [we] ought to, or is at least permitted to, favour [C] more than [E].'¹⁹

It might be tempting for defenders of BPV to introduce the idea of agent-relative value at this point. Following Nagel we can define something as having agent-relative value if and only if there is reason to favour that thing and the ground of that reason

¹⁹ See Olson (forthcoming), pp. 12-15. The rest of this section relies heavily on Olson's excellent discussion of the problem.

contains ineliminable reference to the agent for whom it is a reason.²⁰ Something is agent-neutrally valuable, then, if and only if the ground of the relevant reasons do not contain such ineliminable reference to the agent for whom they are reasons. So in the case we've been looking at, the thought is that the happiness of Alfred, my friend, is just as valuable as the happiness of Boris, the stranger, *considered as such* – that is without reference to the fact that Alfred is my friend. This of course implies that I have reason to favour equally Alfred's happiness and Boris' happiness. If we think nonetheless that there is reason for me to favour Alfred's happiness (because he is my friend) over Boris' happiness because Alfred is my friend, the ground for this reason will thus make ineliminable reference to me and must therefore be an agent-relative reason.

According to BPV, since reasons, at least of the right kind, imply value and since I have reason to favour Alfred's happiness more than Boris' happiness, it follows that Alfred's happiness is more valuable than Boris'. But as we have already seen, since Alfred's and Boris' happiness are equally agent-neutrally valuable it must be the case that it is better, *relative to me* (i.e. that it is agent-relatively better) that I favour Alfred's happiness more than Boris'.

Although the introduction of agent-relative value allows BPV to meet the partiality challenge, many philosophers feel deeply uneasy about the idea of agent-relative value. As Mark Schroeder puts it:

...it is highly controversial whether there is even such a thing as agent-relative value in the first place. [Some philosophers] have contested that no one has ever successfully made such a distinction in a theory-neutral way. Moreover, even if there is such a distinction, relativizing "good" to agents is not sufficient to deal with all intuitive cases of constraints, because common sense allows that you ought not to murder, even in order to prevent *yourself* from murdering twice in the future. In order to deal with such cases, "good" will need to be relativized not just to agents, but to *times*. Yet a further source of difficulties arises for views according to

²⁰ Nagel (1986). How one should best understand the distinction between the agent-neutral and the agent-relative is a matter of some controversy. For a very useful discussion of this, see Mike Ridge (2005). I hope that use of the distinction is consistent with the best way of understanding it.

which “good” in English is used to make claims about agent-relative value in a context-dependent way; such views fail ordinary tests for context-dependence, and don't always generate the readings of sentences which their proponents require.²¹

For many philosophers then, the philosophical cost of introducing agent-neutral value in order to save BPV is simply too high. I will shortly suggest that we should indeed refuse to pay this price.

A particular problem highlighted by many of these philosophers is the problem concerning the comparison, or balancing, of agent-neutral and agent-relative values against each other. But as Olson points out, it should be no harder to balance agent-neutral and agent-relative values than to balance agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons. It is of course very hard to say exactly how reasons should be balanced or weighed against each other. It is common in this connection to appeal to an analogy with mechanical weighing – like when using a pair of kitchen scales – where each pan represents an option and the objects that go into the pans are reasons. The analogy only goes so far of course. As John Broome notes:

For one thing, it often seems inappropriate to associate a reason with anything so precise as a number to represent its weight. Secondly, although we can aggregate together the weights of several reasons, to aggregate them simply by adding up also often seems inappropriate. So-called ‘organic’ interactions between reasons often mean that their aggregate effect differs from the total of their weights.²²

Although it is undoubtedly difficult to figure out a satisfactory way to weigh agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons (i.e. to assign proper weights to these reasons), it should nonetheless in principle be possible. But, Olson claims, even if we do figure out how to do this, a remaining worry is that there we

²¹ Schroeder (2008).

²² *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

lack a proper term for the kind of betterness involved when an agent's agent-relative reasons to favour some state of affairs more than another outweigh agent-neutral reasons (or vice versa) not to do so, [and this] indicates that prior to theorizing there is no such notion of betterness; any such notion would simply be an ad hoc theoretical artefact of FA analyses. This indicates, one might argue, that there is something fundamentally wrong with the FA analysis—at least with versions of FA that analyse (agent-neutral and agent-relative) value in terms of (agent-neutral and agent-relative) *oughts* or *reasons*.²³

A satisfactory solution to the partiality challenge, then, should meet at least the following criteria: First, it maintains the spirit of BPV. Second, it accommodates our strong intuition that our relations to our near and dear ones provide us with agent-relative reasons; and it does so without introducing agent-relative value. Third, it allays our fears about that the lack of a proper term for the betterness resulting from the weighing of agent-relative and agent-neutral values. Fourth, it leaves pretty much everything else as it should be. I think there is an obvious candidate theory close to hand.

Suppose we restrict the buck-passing of account value to agent-neutral value only. It would then read

BPV*

X is valuable if and only if and only if there is reason to favour X and the ground of that reason does not contain ineliminable reference to the agent for whom it is a reason.

The thought here is that there are both agent-neutral and agent-relative *reasons*, but only agent-neutral *value*. On BPV* we cannot infer from reasons *simpliciter* to value. We can

²³ *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

however infer from agent-neutral reasons to value and vice versa, but we deny that agent-neutral reasons entail value.

How does BPV* satisfy the first desideratum? Well, clearly this modified version of BPV is still recognisably a buck-passing or fitting attitude account of value. Value is still being analysed in terms of reasons for, or fittingness of, pro-attitudes. We can still maintain that what it is for something to be valuable is for it to have properties that give us (agent-neutral) reasons for forming a pro-attitude toward it. The account is still very much in the spirit of Brentano, Broad, and Ewing et. al. and there is no reason to suppose that any of them would have any serious objections to it. Second, it implies *mutatis mutandis* that the situations we encountered previously, $A = [\text{Alfred is happy to degree } n]$ and $B = [\text{Boris is happy to degree } n]$, are equally good, *and* it is compatible with the idea that I, being a friend of Alfred's, has (agent-relative) reason to favour $C = [\text{Alfred is made happy to degree } n \text{ by me}]$ over $E = [\text{Boris is made happy to degree } n \text{ by Boris' friend}]$ – again, without thereby having to concede that C is in any way better than E . Third, there is no need to worry about the lack of a term for the betterness involved in the weighing of agent-relative and agent-neutral values for the simple reason that no such betterness is involved. If anything, the opposite is true: the thoughts that ‘prior to theorizing there is no such notion of betterness’ and ‘any such notion would simply be an ad hoc theoretical artefact of FA analyses’ *support* BPV*. It could even be argued that it is our tacit, pre-theoretical acceptance of something like BPV* which *explains* thoughts like these. Lastly, not only is BPV* silent about such terms as ‘ought’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, (as we would expect from a theory about *value*) it says nothing about how agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons should be weighed against each other as this is something that properly belongs to a theory of *reasons*.

It should also be pointed out that BPV* takes care of a worry expressed by Jonathan Dancy. He says:

Deontologists have suggested in one way or another that there are duties, and so reasons, that are not value-involving. An action can be one's duty even though doing it has no value and its being done generates nothing of value. [...] The buck-passing view rules this out in advance. To have

value is to have reason-giving features, we are told, and since this is an identity statement it goes both ways. So to have reason-giving features is to be of value. So the deontological view expressed above is ruled out in advance of any significant debate.²⁴

The mistake here lies in the thinking that there is two-way traffic between reasons *simpliciter* and value when this is only true of agent-neutral reasons and value.

According to BPV* To reconstruct Dancy's argument:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Deontology claims both | 1. All duties entail reasons, and
2. Some duties do not entail value. |
| BPV | 3. All value entails reasons and all reasons entail value.
So,
4. All Reasons entail value (from 3).
5. All duties entail value (from 1 and 4)
6. Contradiction (2 and 5).
So,
7. BPV rules out deontology. |

It is of course obvious how BPV* avoids this conclusion. It rejects the second conjunct in (3). Without it the argument simply doesn't go through.

An objection to this account might be that there is an annoying lack of symmetry here. Agent-relative reasons stand to agent-relative values as agent-neutral reasons stand to...what? I don't think we should be too bothered about this lack of symmetry, especially if we remind ourselves that the reason-giving properties are, after all, the lower-order properties that value supervenes on and not the other way round. For those who are in the business of trying to explicate agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons in terms of value, this lack of symmetry may indeed be troubling.

Does this mean that by accepting this theory we will have to concede that sometimes we ought not do what is best? Well, that depends on what we take the best to

²⁴ Dancy (2000), p. 41.

be. On the one hand it might be thought that the best is that which has most value. If that is so, than on this account it is perfectly possible that we sometimes ought not do what is best. On the other hand, it sounds very natural to say that the best course of action at any given point is simply the one we have most reason (and thus, arguably, what we ought all things considered) to do. But since this is so, it is perfectly possible to maintain that there will never be a case where what you ought to do and what's best come apart.

3. The exclusion problem

I turn now to another problem that also stems from relational considerations. I will try to show that the special relation we stand in to ourselves will create a problem for the theory. More specifically, the problem arises out of an asymmetry between first- and third-person perspectives. To set up the problem it will be useful to say something about a similar problem recently highlighted by Krister Bykvist who has recently argued that BPV should be rejected as a reductive account of value because there are some valuable things that are not such that it is fitting to form a pro-attitude toward them.²⁵ Importantly, he explicitly states that his argument trades on the assumption that it must be at least logically possible to actually form a pro-attitude toward that which it is, supposedly, fitting to form a pro-attitude toward. Cast in terms of reasons the thought is that it must be at least logically possible to actually form a pro-attitude toward that which we, supposedly, have a reason to form a pro-attitude. Bykvist says this is uncontroversial, and I agree with him. If, like I said earlier, the reasons relation is the counting-in-favour-of relation, it's hard to see how a consideration can genuinely *favour* some attitude (or action) that is *logically* impossible to form or (perform).²⁶ I will say a little more about this later. Consider first the following state of affairs – which Bykvist calls a ‘solitary good’:

²⁵ Bykvist (2009).

²⁶ Bykvist says there may be *instrumental* reasons to seek and pursue impossible objects, if someone offered you a large amount of money to do so, say. But I think even this thought can be resisted if the seeking and pursuing in question is what we might call a *de re* pursuit. I'm not sure about this, but it seems to me that since there are no impossible objects (pace Meinong) there is, necessarily, no such object which is such that it is being sought or pursued – even mistakenly and/or irrationally. This plausibly entails, I think, that it is impossible to (try to) seek and pursue impossible objects. Having said that, there may be a *de dicto* understanding of this kind of pursuit which makes it possible.

There are happy egrets but no past, present, or future agents (i.e. beings who intentionally bring something about).²⁷

This, Bykvist maintains, is a good state of affairs which it would not be fitting to bring about on account of its being impossible to bring about a state of affairs in which no past, present, or future agent brings anything about.

An immediate reaction to Bykvist's example might be to suggest that the past, present, and future absence of agents is not really relevant to the value of the happy egrets. What is valuable is either their happiness or the state of affairs *that there are happy egrets*. The absence of agents seems neither here nor there. So a possible response to this problem would be to distinguish between basic and non-basic (or non-derived and derived) final value and claim that BPV should be concerned with basic value only. As Bykvist explains:

Roughly, the basic intrinsic values are the axiological 'atoms' that have intrinsic value in a wholly non-derivative way.... Other things have intrinsic value only in so far as they involve these atoms. Using this distinction, one could argue that there being happy egret has basic *positive* value, whereas there being no believers, and there being no pleasure-takers all have basic *neutral* value.²⁸

However, Bykvist says, this would have the unfortunate implication that many of the things we think are apt for intrinsic value – situations, outcomes, lives and whole possible worlds – would not be potential bearers of intrinsic value if their value is non-basic (i.e. derivative). In a footnote he says:

It will not do to say that what entails something basically good and nothing basically bad should be favoured *for the sake of its good parts*,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

since what is favoured for the sake of its parts is still favoured (i.e. intentionally brought about, pursued, or desired).²⁹

I think Bykvist has a real target here, but it may turn out that some clever argument will show that final or intrinsic value is always non-derived, basic value. It might therefore be interesting to see if we can find cases of non-derivatively valuable objects that put pressure on buck-passing analyses of value. I think it is very plausible that there are such objects. In the remainder of this paper I will present and discuss some examples of this.

Since we are social creatures it is not surprising that one of the most common targets for our evaluations are persons. One of the most familiar value-making, or value-enhancing properties of persons are virtuous character traits. For example, being trustworthy is typically, though perhaps not necessarily, a good-making feature. Likewise, being funny, clever, and caring are all virtues that make their possessor better for having them. All things being equal, the more virtues a person possess the better we think of her. Vices of various kinds are of course bad-making features of the persons who have them – these things confer negative value on people. The more vices a person has the worse we think of her. Character traits aren't the only things confer or add value to people of course. Various achievements, experiences, goals, and ambitions are all plausible examples of things that can confer or add value to persons. For some of these value-making traits it may have to be the case that other such are present in order for them for be genuinely value-making or value-adding. There really is not limit to the amount of complexity we should be willing to countenance here. However, and this is the problem for buck-passing analyses of value, some of these value-making or value-adding virtues are by their very nature such that it is impossible for the possessor to have a positive attitude toward him- or herself in virtue of possessing them. Let us look at a specific example.

Modesty (Blaise)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10n17.

Miss Blaise is an admirable person. What makes her admirable is her many virtues: she is kind, courageous, witty, and clever. She naturally and spontaneously performs kind and courageous acts without any ‘superfluous’ moral thoughts couched in ‘thin’ terms. All these character traits contribute to making her a good and admirable person which we all have reason to admire her for. On top of this, Miss Blaise is also extremely modest about having these qualities: she never brags about them or talks about them; in fact, she never even thinks about them. This is surely *another* reason to admire her, a reason *in addition* to the reasons grounded in her kindness, courage, and wit. According to the standard buck-passing picture, Miss Blaise has several properties that make her valuable and that give us reason to admire her. In addition to having these virtues she is modest. We all have reason to think better of Miss Blaise on account of her modesty. Does Miss Blaise *herself* have a reason to form a pro-attitude (say, admiration) toward her own modesty? It would seem not. Having a pro-attitude toward one’s own modesty seems impossible. Could we really make sense of someone who, say, admired themselves on account of their own modesty? It is not merely that Miss Blaise is modest with respect to her courage and wit etc., she is a thoroughly self-effacing person in that she has no positive attitudes whatsoever toward her own admirable qualities. But if it *is* impossible to have a pro-attitude toward one’s own modesty it is hard to see how there can be reason to have such an attitude.

It may be objected that Miss Blaise *does* have a reason to admire herself on account of her modesty, but she *ought* not do so since *actually* doing so would make it the case that she is no longer modest. If there is a reason for her to admire herself on account of her modesty, this reason, it seems, will *always* be outweighed as long as she remains a modest person. Can we make sense of such necessarily outweighed reasons? If there are such reasons there must also be other reasons that guarantee that the first set of reasons are always outweighed. Furthermore, in the case we’re considering, the ground for these defeating reasons can’t be merely contingently connected with Miss Blaise’s modesty for if they were there would be no guarantee that the ‘modesty reason’ will always be defeated. What sort of reasons could provide such a guarantee? Some sort of modesty-preservation reason? That just sounds too bizarre to be worth considering. If she really has a reason to admire herself on account of her modesty, it must be possible

that admires herself. But if she admires herself she is no longer modest in the requisite sense.

Another objection might be that it *is* possible for Miss Blaise to admire herself on account of her modesty. She may have forgotten that she is Modesty Blaise. She might then admire herself under some description like ‘Willie Garvin’s best friend’ while being unaware that she uniquely satisfies this description. This sounds too desperate an attempt to save the theory to be taken seriously. Surely a sensible buck-passing account of value should not claim that a necessary condition for the instantiation of value is the possibility that we might be radically mistaken about our own identity? The relevant attitude must, it seems, be capable of being held not only *de re* but *de se* as well.

There may be another way in which is possible for Miss Blaise to have the relevant attitude. The thought here is that we must keep in mind what Miss Blaise is supposed to admire. She is not supposed to admire her own modesty; rather she is supposed to admire *herself* and maybe this is possible? Well, no...not in this case. Although it’s perfectly possible to admire oneself on account of, say, one’s courage, one cannot admire oneself on account of one’s courage *and remain modest* – in the sense of modest that is necessary for this example to work.³⁰

Miss Blaise’s modesty is undoubtedly a property of hers that we have reason to admire. Is this an agent-relative reason or an agent-neutral reason? That question should be easy to answer: would the specification of the ground of the reason make ineliminable

³⁰ At this stage I cannot resist bringing up a related, issue (which no doubt merits a separate discussion) which expresses a worry about the possibility of certain inflation (conflation?) problem here. Consider the following line from a novel by Kingsley Amis (which I have borrowed from Richard Moran (1993), p. 584) which

concerns a married man with family, who at one point in the story spends an evening at a nightclub with another woman he knows from work. As he sneaks back home after the encounter, he describes himself in his guilty reflections as “feeling a tremendous rakehell, and not liking myself much for it, and feeling rather a good chap for not liking myself much for it, and not liking myself at all for feeling a rather good chap.”

What should the buck-passer say about this case? The man’s infidelity is something which gives him (and us) a reason to form a negative attitude toward him. However, he regrets what he has done and feels ashamed – that is, he has an attitude he is warranted in having. Is it a good thing that he feels ashamed of himself on account of his infidelity? Well, we would certainly think better of him if he feels ashamed than if he doesn’t. (Think about how we would feel about him if he showed no signs of remorse whatsoever.) In other words, does the fact that he feels ashamed give him reason to have a pro-attitude toward himself on account of his feeling ashamed? If it does, are we not looking at the possibility of a potentially infinite reasons (and thus value) inflation here? It certainly is an interesting case.

reference to the agent for whom it is a reason? If the answer is yes, the reason is an agent-relative one, if the answer is no, it's an agent-relative reason. Well, it seems obvious that you and I have reason to admire Miss Blaise and the correct specification of the ground for this reason does not contain an ineliminable reference to either of us. So it must be an agent-neutral reason. Well, it can't be *entirely* neutral either since Miss Blaise does not have this reason. What should we say about reasons whose scope essentially *exclude* some agents? All agents, *except* Miss Blaise, have a reason to admire her. And, importantly, this exclusion is not due to some *deficiency* on her part; on the contrary, her exclusion from this reason is a necessary condition for us having reason to admire her. I presume there is some way of making this reason agent-neutrally respectable. Perhaps we should restrict the domain of agents (to whom the reason applies) to those who can – in the relevant sense – form the attitude in question.

For those who are not convinced about this case – for instance, those of you who think that admiring oneself is compatible with being modest – I will offer two other examples of similar ‘excluding’, self-effacing reasons. I should say in advance that these examples are a bit far-fetched, but this, I think, says more about my limited imagination than about the genuine possibility of such cases.

Ignorance

Igor is a terrible chap: he doesn't know when his loving, caring mother's birthday is. We all have reason to frown on Igor's ignorance; he really should know better. This is a textbook case of culpable ignorance. What makes things even worse, however, is that Igor has never reflected on the fact that he doesn't know when his mother's birthday is. He is ignorant about his ignorance. He has noticed that his mother tends to look very unhappy for several days, sometimes weeks, at the beginning of the summer each year, but he's never attached much importance to it. This fact about Igor makes him even more obnoxious and it provides us with an additional reason to deplore him. Does the fact that he is ignorant about his ignorance give *Igor* a reason to deplore himself? It would seem not. In order for Igor to deplore himself on account of being ignorant of the fact that he doesn't know when his mother's birthday is he would have to be aware of the fact that he doesn't know when his mother's birthday is. But if he is aware of the fact that he doesn't

know when his mother's birthday is he's no longer deplorable for being ignorant about his lack of knowledge.

Deception

Duncan showed great courage and took the witness stand against the mafia hit man. The mob are out to get Duncan and his family. Scores need to be settled and nothing will stand in their way. Since it's a very complicated situation, there is only one way for Duncan to save himself and his family: he must convince not only the mafia but his family as well that he is no longer alive. Figuring out how to do this is very difficult indeed, but Duncan soon hatches a brilliant plan to convince everyone that he's dead. He executes the plan perfectly and saves his own life as well as the lives of his family. This is an extraordinary feat – a great accomplishment. Most people would have failed miserably and a massacre would have ensued. There is every reason for Duncan to feel proud of himself on account of his accomplishment. Does his accomplishment give his family (not to mention the mob) a reason to feel proud of Duncan? Well, it is certainly possible for his family to feel proud of Duncan but not so on account of his accomplishment. They *couldn't* feel proud of him on account of his accomplishment because if they did he wouldn't have accomplished tricking them into believing that he's dead.

4. Conclusion

Let us go back to case of Miss Blaise. I assume that it is possible that Miss Blaise could be the last person on earth and still be modest. She would still be a better person for being modest even if there is no one else around. Since this is a valuable property of hers, buck-passing accounts must allot that reason to someone. Miss Blaise is the only one left and it can't, as we've already seen, be allotted to her. Miss Blaise is a better person on account of having a property, modesty, which is such that, in this case, no one has a reason to form a pro-attitude toward. What should buck-passers say about this case? Clearly they must say something. Perhaps they should follow Derek Parfit's lead. Dancy reports Parfit as having suggested that '[a] weaker form [of the buck-passing

view] understands having value, not as a reason-giving features, but as having features that are potentially reason-giving.³¹ One problem with this reply, according to Dancy, is that identifying value with having merely *potentially* reason-giving features ‘enfeebles’ the buck-passing account. As he puts it ‘Something which has no value at all might well have features that would, in certain circumstances, ground reasons.’³² But maybe this only shows that we need to restrict the relevant circumstances. In the case of the solitary Miss Blaise, the relevant counterfactual seems to be that there be other agents around. Miss Blaise is a better person on account of having a property, modesty, which is such that were there agents around, this property would provide them with a reason to form a pro-attitude toward Miss Blaise. Given holism about value however, this may not be entirely satisfactory either. Holists about value believe that some considerations act as *enablers* for other considerations to be value-making without thereby being value-making themselves. Now, holism about value (and reasons) is a rich and complex doctrine that can’t be defended here (especially at this stage of the essay), but suffice to say that it is rapidly gaining in popularity among value theorists. If holism about value is correct, it might well be that we can come up with a cases where the absence of other agents is an enabler (or the presence of other agents is a disabler) for a particular consideration to be non-derivatively value-making. If, in addition, the value in such that it is impossible to have a pro-attitude toward the bearer of it (like in the cases above), the buck-passers will have a real problem on their hands. Let me end by reinforcing a point made earlier. Some authors have claimed that if there are no agents, there are no reasons; reasons must be allotted to agents. The interesting thing is that in the case of solitary Miss Blair there *is* an agent around – and possibly a fully virtuous one at that – who, through no cognitive or conative deficiency – is incapable of forming a pro-attitude toward something we all agree is of value.

³¹ Dancy (2002), p, 43.

³² *Ibid.*

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