A Comprehensive Buck-Passing Account of Value

En heltäckande version av ‘the Buck-Passing Account of Value’

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION ............................................. 3

2. ANALYSING VALUES ........................................ 5
   2.1. INTRINSIC VS. EXTRINSIC VALUE ..................... 5
   2.2. AGENT-RELATIVE VS. AGENT-NEUTRAL VALUE .......... 6
   2.3. PERSONAL VS. IMPERSONAL VALUE .................... 6
   2.4. PREDICATIVE VS. ATTRIBUTIVE VALUE ............... 8
   2.5. OTHER VALUE CONCEPTS ................................ 10
      2.5.1. FINAL VS. INSTRUMENTAL VALUE ................. 10
      2.5.2. GOODNESS SIMPLICITER .......................... 10
      2.5.3. THICK VALUE CONCEPTS ......................... 11
   2.6. SUMMARY ............................................. 12

3. ANALYSING THE BUCK-PASSING ACCOUNT .................. 13
   3.1. "X IS GOOD..." ...................................... 13
   3.2. "... IF AND ONLY IF IT HAS SOME NON-EVALUATIVE PROPERTIES..." 13
   3.3. "... THAT PROVIDE REASONS..." ...................... 14
   3.4. "... FOR THE RELEVANT AGENTS..." ................. 16
   3.5. "... FOR HAVING CERTAIN POSITIVE RESPONSES TOWARDS X" 17

4. A COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNT ................................. 21
   4.1. INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC VALUE .................... 21
   4.2. AGENT-RELATIVE AND AGENT-NEUTRAL VALUE .......... 21
   4.3. PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL VALUE .................... 22
   4.4. PREDICATIVE AND ATTRIBUTIVE VALUE ................ 22
      4.4.1. PREDICATIVE VALUE .............................. 23
      4.4.2. ATTRIBUTIVE VALUE ............................. 23

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS .................................... 25

REFERENCES .................................................. 27
1. Introduction

There is a theory in the field of meta-ethics that has received quite a lot of attention recently. It is called the Buck-Passing Account of Value (BPA, for short) and it was first put forward, at least in the form in which it is known today, by T. M. Scanlon, in his book *What We Owe To Each Other*.\(^1\) Scanlon’s idea was that “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.”\(^2\) Nowadays, it is often formalised as such: for an object to have value is for it to have some set of non-evaluative properties that provide normative\(^3\) reasons for certain positive responses towards the object.\(^4\) Standardly, the account has (implicitly, for the most part) been used as an analysis of *final* value (or predicative value, or intrinsic value, depending on the author). In this paper, my purpose is to expand on this rather limited use of the account and explore the possibilities of providing a comprehensive BPA – one that can encompass all of the types of value that are discussed by philosophers in the field of normativity, and are assumed to be central to normative theory (henceforth, ‘all types of value’). My thesis is that it is indeed possible to provide BPAs for all types of value, and in section 4, I offer candidate accounts of what I judge to be the most commonly discussed and important types of value, including those types of value that sceptics of the BPA have argued we cannot have BPAs of. My hope is that by showing that it is possible to provide BPAs for so many important types of value, I provide some evidence for the plausibility of the BPA’s eligibility as an account of all value.

There are several benefits that the BPA promises: it explains the ‘buck-passing intuition’, that whatever reasons we are given by something of (positive or negative) value, we are given by the underlying, descriptive properties of the object, rather than by its value;\(^5\) it explains why so many, widely different, kinds of things can be bearers of value;\(^6\) it provides a response to G. E. Moore’s open question argument;\(^7\) it explains

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\(^1\) Scanlon 1998, chapter 2.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 97.
\(^3\) By normative reason, I mean a consideration that is actually normatively relevant, in the sense that it really counts in favour of the response in question (or against, in the case of a good reason against a certain response)
\(^4\) See Lang 2008; Samuelsson 2013; and Väyrynen 2006, for examples.
why we always have reason for various responses wherever value is involved;⁸ and lastly, it improves theoretical parsimony (that is, it requires us to stipulate fewer primitive concepts), since it reduces the realm of the evaluative to the realm of the deontic, that is, it analyses all of the evaluative concepts like ‘good’, ‘better’, ‘bad’ and ‘worse’ in terms of deontic concepts like ‘reason’, ‘fitting’, or ‘correct’.⁹ I shall not dwell too much on any but the last of these points, for the extent to which the BPA delivers on these promises has been discussed at length elsewhere.¹⁰ I shall limit myself to claiming that the BPA is promising enough that it merits serious consideration. However, should it turn out that the BPA only can analyse some types of value, but not others, I believe we would have reason to doubt whether the BPA really is the correct analysis of any type of value at all, for the various types of value are such closely related concepts that, in my view, a correct analysis of value should encompass all of them.¹¹ This is why I consider it important for the plausibility of the BPA to show that it is capable of analysing all types of value.

In section 2, I discuss a series of types of value often mentioned in the literature, and explain the characteristics of each type, before attempting a formal categorisation of all these types of value. We will find that all good things are good in several ways – they all belong to either side in each of a series of distinctions in value. In section 3, I provide a more in-depth analysis of the BPA, and identify ways that we can tweak the various elements of the BPA so that we can distinguish different types of value from each other. In section 4, I summarise my findings in section 3 by proposing a set of BPAs for all of the types of value that I have identified, and I briefly discuss the ins and outs of each of them. In section 5, I offer some concluding thoughts and discuss what problems my suggestion could face.

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⁷ Stratton-Lake & Hooker 2006, p. 154. The open question argument is, in short, that even when we know all of the natural properties that an object X has, the question “is X good?” still has an ‘open feel’ to it.
⁸ Suikkanen 2009, p. 771.
⁹ Ibid., p. 769.
¹⁰ I recommend reading Stratton-Lake & Hooker 2006 for an exhaustive discussion on the subject.
2. Analysing Values

In order to provide evidence for the BPA’s applicability to all types of value, we must first identify all types of value. Doing so would require a book of its own, but in this section, I will attempt to identify and characterise the most commonly discussed types of value in the meta-ethical literature. As previously mentioned, my hope is that, by providing BPAs for all of the ‘big’, important types of value, I will lend some credibility to the idea of the BPA being applicable to all types of value. I will first discuss a few distinctions in value and claim that all values belong to either side of each of these distinctions. After that, I will briefly mention a few other commonly discussed types of value and explain how these fit into the distinctions I have proposed. Two preliminary points are due. First, throughout this paper, I implicitly assume that everything I say about positive value, or goodness, can be inversely applied to negative value, or badness. Second, I use the pairs of terms ‘good’ and ‘valuable’, and ‘goodness’ and ‘value’, synonymously. I also equate ‘an object that is good’ with ‘an object that has (positive) value’.

2.1. Intrinsic vs. extrinsic value

Intrinsic value has historically been one of the most discussed types of value in meta-ethical discourse, although the meaning of the term has shifted with time. Whereas it once used to mean value in and of itself, it is more common these days to use it for value that supervenes only on the intrinsic properties of an object. As such, it can be contrasted with extrinsic value, by which we mean value that supervenes on at least some extrinsic properties of the object. This distinction might be seemingly inconsequential, but because the distinction can be used to make sense of other value concepts, because it might be important for some axiologies, and because of its historical importance I will include it in my structural analysis of value.

Now, because (i) these two categories – intrinsic value and extrinsic value – are exclusive; (ii) all values supervene on at least some properties of the valuable object in question, we assume; and (iii) all properties of objects are either intrinsic or extrinsic, we can conclude that all values are either intrinsic or extrinsic in nature.

12 Korsgaard 2005.
2.2. Agent-relative vs. agent-neutral value

All values are, I will claim, either agent-relative or agent-neutral. At least, our account of value needs to be able to accommodate substantial views about value that acknowledge any or both of these kinds of value. I find it somewhat challenging to specify exactly what I mean by this distinction in a clear and formal way, but I hope that by offering several ways of putting the difference that just barely miss the mark (because each has some problems), the reader will get a good grasp of what they are aiming at. By agent-relative value, then, I mean value that only exists to some agents; or, according to some agents; or, from the perspective of some agents; or, in some agents’ universe, to borrow that childish expression; or, value that accrues to objects only in (correct) evaluations by some agents. Agent-neutral value, then, is value that exists to all agents; or, according to all agents; or, from the perspective of all agents; or, in all agents’ universes; or, value that accrues to objects in (correct) evaluations by all agents. I do not think it plausible that an object could have value that exists to zero (possible) agents; at least if we, as I do here, do not require any actual evaluation by any agents. That is to say, I consider a value to exist relative to an agent if the value would be acknowledged by the agent if the agent made a correct evaluation of the valuable object in question.

Now, since (i) these two categories – agent-relative and agent-neutral value – are mutually exclusive; and (ii) no values exist to zero (possible) agents, all values must be either agent-relative or agent-neutral.

2.3. Personal vs. impersonal value

Phrases like “it’s good for you” and “the policy is good for people with disabilities” express what is often called personal value. Regrettably, it can easily be confused with agent-relative value, but it is not the same thing (at least, not on all axiologies). Impersonal value, then, is value that accrues to objects for no-one’s sake (that is, not for anyone’s sake). Justice, for example, is impersonally good: it is enough to say that justice is good, period, without specifying any person that it is good for. However, justice can also, at the same time, be good for someone. For example, in many cases, it is plausibly good for the victim of a crime if justice is done. In cases like these, it would initially seem like we need not take a stand as to whether there is here a single
value that is both personal and impersonal at the same time, or whether there are two distinct values, one of each kind. However, I propose it more fitting to conceive of the justice as having two separate values, because if we want to be able to claim that the personal value and the impersonal value belong to different sides in the other distinctions in value, then we need to conceive of them as two separate values (although they can both supervene on the same properties). To illustrate, we might want to claim that justice being done, on many occasions, is *intrinsically, impersonally* good, while also *extrinsically, personally* good (for the victim). Therefore, if something has both impersonal and personal value, I think it better to say that there are two separate values, rather than one value that is both personal and impersonal.

Where do we draw the line, then, between personal and impersonal value? What about things that are good for several people? What if we don’t know how many people they are good for, or which people they are good for? All of those cases, I claim, are ones of personal value. As long as we identify an object X as *good for Y*, where Y denominates some group of people, even possibly of unknown size and with unknown and/or changing members, X is personally good. For example, a warm-air vent in the entrance to the university building is good for anyone (or at least most) of those who pass through there in the winter. We cannot say how many will pass through there, or who they will be, but the vent is nonetheless good for them (the example assumes). Thus, the vent is personally good.

Do note that I specified that Y needs to denominate a group of *people*, not just objects. I would not extend the concept of personal value to cover things that we say are good for the sake of some inanimate object. We wouldn’t say that what is good for the asphalt is *actually valuable* in the same sense that what is good for John is. That is, whether or not something is good for the asphalt is not normatively relevant in the same sense as whether or not it is good for John. Thus, albeit we frequently use phrases such as “that is not good for your tan line”, we don’t mean to ascribe actual value to whatever we are talking about. The group of objects for the sake of which we judge things to have personal value is most reasonably contained to people (and perhaps animals, depending on one’s view of their moral status).
To summarise then, since (i) the categories of personal value and impersonal value are mutually exclusive, and (ii) a value cannot be neither personal nor impersonal, all values must be either personal or impersonal.

2.4. Predicative vs. attributive value

Peter Geach divided uses of adjectives into predicative and attributive uses. We use an adjective predicatively when “X is an A B” can intelligibly be divided into “X is A” and “X is a B”. Conversely, we use it attributively when the division is not intelligible (because “X is A” is unintelligible). Substituting ‘good’ for A, when we use the word ‘good’ in a predicative sense, we say that we are talking about a predicative value, and when we use it attributively, we are talking about an attributive value. Judith Jarvis Thomson rejects the idea of predicative value and instead insists that an instance of goodness always is goodness in some way. As examples of ways of being good, she lists being good to eat; being good for use in hammering; being good at singing; being good in Hamlet (the play); being good as Hamlet (the Prince); and being good with children. I claim that all of these examples – all of these ways of being good – are cases of attributive value, that is, cases of an X being a good K, where the separation into “X is good” and “X is a K” is unintelligible. Thus, being good to eat, I claim, is a case of being good food; being good for use in hammering is a case of being a good hammer; being good at singing is a case of being a good singer; being good in – or good as – Hamlet is a case of being a good actor or actress; and being good with children is a case of being a good child caretaker.

Another useful way to conceive of attributive value is as various forms of excellence among some kind of objects. Johan Brännmark put this point aptly when he wrote that,

The best examples of attributive goodness all have to do with excellence, either that something is an exemplary piece of work within a particular genre or that something fulfills a certain function very

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14 Thomson 2005, p. 133.
15 Ibid., p. 134.
well, or that the defining features of a type of thing are particularly highly developed in some particular instance.\textsuperscript{16}

What, then, about predicative value? How is that best characterised? Well, it is the kind of value we talk about when we say that something is \textit{just plain good}, period. “Innocent happiness is good” would be an example of when we use it, or “justice being done is good”. We do not need a qualifier to understand the valuable object’s goodness in the same sense that we do in the case of attributive value.

It is worth noting that the attributive value of an object implies nothing about the predicative value (or other attributive values) of the object. John can be a good torturer,\textsuperscript{17} for example, without John being good in the predicative sense. In fact, it is likely that someone who chose to pursue the career of a torturer is not that good. Similarly, whether Jane is a good or bad dancer says nothing about whether or not she is predicatively good, or about whether or not she is a good writer. This is important to keep in mind: that things can have several all-things-considered attributive – positive and/or negative – values, alongside its all-things-considered predicative value, without any of them depending on the others. Note also that something could have several \textit{pro tanto} predicative values, but only one all-things-considered predicative value. That is, we might for example say that the U.S. dropping the atomic bomb was (i) \textit{pro tanto} good, because doing so shortened World War 2, thus saving lives; and (2) \textit{pro tanto} bad, because it meant killing millions; and (3) all-things-considered bad, because it probably killed more than it saved.

To summarise, then: since (i) the categories of predicative and attributive goodness are mutually exclusive, and (ii) all uses of the word ‘good’ that in a relevant way express an evaluative judgment must be either predicative or attributive, we can conclude that any value must be either a predicative value or an attributive value.

\textsuperscript{16} Brännmark 2008, p. 305.
\textsuperscript{17} This example is borrowed from Brännmark 2008, p. 307.
2.5. Other value concepts

Here I will briefly mention a few distinctions in, or types of, value that I have not so far included in my list of the important categories of values that all values belong to.

2.5.1. Final vs. instrumental value

The term ‘instrumental value’ is used in two ways, and the two senses often overlap. In the first sense, an object is said to have instrumental value if it is an exceptional instrument, or an exceptional means, towards something. Sometimes, when used in this sense, it is called “‘mere’ instrumental value”. In the second sense, an object is said to have instrumental value when it is good because of what it leads to, and, conversely, an object has final value if it is good, but not for the sake of what it leads to. It is at the end of the value chain, so to speak. For a long time, final value was equated with intrinsic value, but Christine Korsgaard’s article Two Distinctions in Goodness changed this, pointing out that intrinsic value was the opposite of extrinsic value, rather than of instrumental value. But if we recognise the difference between final value (being at the end of a value chain) and intrinsic value (being good because of intrinsic properties) and we still want to fit the final/instrumental distinction into the framework for classifying values that I have detailed thus far, then, in the first sense of the term ‘instrumental value’, it would simply be a case of attributive value (it is a good instrument), and in the second sense, it would make the most sense as a distinction within predicative value. That is, if something has predicative value that supervenes on instrumental extrinsic properties (that is, properties that detail what the object is a means for), it has instrumental value. If it supervenes on intrinsic properties or non-instrumental extrinsic properties, it is final. As far as I can tell, this distinction is fairly inconsequential.

2.5.2. Goodness simpliciter

Goodness simpliciter is the sense of ‘good’ that we utilise in sentences like “it is good that you caught the culprit”. On my view, this is simply how we (most commonly) express that a state of affairs is predicatively good. In other words, the passage is

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equivalent to “the state of affairs X where you caught the culprit is a good state of affairs”, where the clause “the state of affairs X is good” is intelligible.

2.5.3. Thick value concepts

It is quite common to hear concepts like beauty, honesty, loyalty, democracy and freedom being called ‘values’. If we were to interpret this expression literally, taking it that beauty and loyalty are their own types of value in the same sense that predicative value and agent-neutral value are types of value, then we would need BPAs of all of these ‘thick value concepts’, as they are called. However, since the list of these concepts is arbitrarily long, or at least very long, and the question of which concepts actually belong on the list often is a matter of dispute, we couldn’t hope to provide these BPAs. In fact, since which terms actually are thick values is a substantial question, it would be inadvisable for a formal account of value such as the BPA to commit to an answer to it. The best we could do would be to provide a schematic for – on demand – devising a BPA for any thick value concept, but that seems to me impossible.

Thus, if we are to succeed in the ambitious reduction of the evaluative realm to the deontic realm that the BPA aspires to perform, we must make the BPA accommodate the thick values elsewise. I propose that we conceive of each thick value concept as predicative value that supervenes on some set of properties that is part of the superset of properties that we normally associate with that term. For example, there is some set of properties \( S_{\text{BEAUTY}} \) such that if an object instantiates some of these properties to a sufficient degree, it is predicatively valuable. Doubtless, the sets of properties associated with different thick value concepts can be very similar, but the sets should be non-identical if the values are, even if we are unable to express in words the differences between the sets of properties. Thus, to provide a BPA for thick evaluative concepts, we can simply say that an object X is [thick value] if and only if X has some non-evaluative properties that are part of the set of properties associated with [thick value], upon which predicative value supervenes, that is, these properties provide reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for having certain genuine positive response(s) towards X.
2.6. Summary

We have discussed a number of distinctions in value, and I have argued that all values must always belong to either side in each of these distinctions. That is, all values are either:

- Intrinsic or extrinsic; and
- Agent-relative or agent-neutral; and
- Personal or impersonal; and
- Predicative or attributive.

Which possible permutations of value types are plausible or not will depend on which substantive view of value one subscribes to, but, formally, none of the combinations are obviously impossible. Certainly, other distinctions in value could also be identified, but I did not find any consequential enough to warrant mention here. Now that we have identified what value types we have to work with, the next step will be to find ways to characterise each of them in the terms of the concepts used in the BPA.
3. Analysing the Buck-Passing Account

Before we can formulate BPAs for all of the types of value identified in section 2, we need to explore what knobs we can turn, so to speak, in the most general formulation of the BPA, in order to create distinct accounts for the different types of value. Thus, in this section, we will look into what the key elements of the BPA are and how we can express the key differences between the different types of value in terms of these elements. Here is a general BPA template for us to work from:

\[
\text{BPA Template} \quad \text{X is good if and only if it has some non-evaluative properties that provide reason(s) for the relevant agents for having certain positive responses towards X.}
\]

Each underlined word or phrase is a point worth dwelling on. Which objects can be bearers of value? Which distinctions can we make between different kinds of properties, and which of them can be useful to our task? What distinctions can we make between different kinds of reasons? Does it matter which agents that the relevant properties provide reasons for? And finally, which responses are we interested in here? I shall look into each of these questions in turn.

3.1. “X is good…”

Seeing as the BPA is a formal account of value, we need not – and should not – take a stance on what objects (the word ‘objects’ here widely understood) can be bearers of value, on the BPA. I will simply note that it is compatible with all conceivable kinds of bearers of value, such as states of affairs and facts; inanimate objects; persons, and groups thereof; thoughts; and organic wholes. Distinctions in value bearers can however be useful in distinguishing different types of value, which is why I included it in the list of the ‘knobs’ of the BPA. For example, remember that goodness simpliciter is distinguished by being predicative value that accrues explicitly to states of affairs.

3.2. “… if and only if it has some non-evaluative properties…”

There are innumerable distinctions in properties that we can make, but the question is how many of them are useful for distinguishing different types of value. The only one
I will consider here is that between intrinsic properties and extrinsic properties, which lets us define intrinsic and extrinsic value: value that supervenes on only intrinsic properties is intrinsic value, while value that supervenes on at least some extrinsic properties is extrinsic value. We could, if we wanted, identify more categories of value, like, say, those values that only supervene on the essential properties of an object, or those that only supervene on the haecceitus properties of an object (that is, the properties that make that object that object rather than any other of its kind), but I fail to see the usefulness of these categories of value. Granted, the intrinsic vs. extrinsic distinction is also fairly inconsequential, as far as I can see, but given its historical importance, I felt that it should be acknowledged.

3.3. “… that provide reasons…”

There are two important preliminary points to be made concerning the provision of reasons mentioned in the BPA. First, the account concerns pro tanto reasons for responses, not reasons for responses all things considered. The fact that we have stronger countervailing reasons not to have the relevant responses does not mean that the object does not have value, on the BPA.

Second, on the BPA, an object does not only have value whenever some agent is actually having positive responses towards it; rather, its value supervenes on it having properties that would provide reasons for some agents in the appropriate practical situation, that is, agents that were capable of having the relevant responses, and it is precisely those agents that its properties would provide reasons for that the value exists relative to.

There are many familiar distinctions that can be made among reasons, including, but not limited to, the distinctions between internal and external reasons; motivating and normative reasons; and justificatory and explanatory reasons, but I do not see any of these distinctions map onto a distinction between types of value, and therefore I shall not dwell on them too long. The one notion out of the above that I think can be of use is that of a normative reason, which can help in providing a response to Alex Gregory,

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20 See Lenman 2009, Section 5: "Normative vs. Motivating Reasons", for a discussion on the differences between the distinctions between motivating and normative reasons on the one hand, and justificatory and explanatory reasons on the other.
who has argued that a BPA of attributive value must be circular and thus false. His argument goes as such: an object is good, on the BPA, to the extent that the relevant reasons that the object’s properties provide are weighty. The weight of a reason, in turn, is a case of attributive value, Gregory continues, because we call a weighty reason a “good reason”. Thus, attributive value is analysed in terms of attributive value, and the analysis falls into circularity. I argue, however, that when we call something a “good reason”, we mean that it is in fact a normative reason, that is, a consideration that is actually normatively relevant, in the sense that it really counts in favour of the response in question (or against, in the case of a good reason against a certain response). In one sense, then, calling something a good reason is almost redundant, because if we call something a bad reason, we mean that it is not a normative reason at all. For example, if we ask a robber-murderer why he shot another person and took his wallet, and he responds, “because I needed his money”, then when we answer “that is a bad reason”, what we really mean is “that is not a (normative) reason for shooting him”. Thus, when we use the phrase “good reason”, it reflects a judgment that the reason in question is indeed a normative reason at all, rather than that the reason has attributive value. A BPA of attributive value would then not be circular in the way that Gregory claims. However, I now have some more explaining to do. What about the weights of reasons? How are we to understand them, if not in terms of attributive value? I believe that the weight of a reason can be understood in terms of the strength of the motivation to have the relevant response that the reason is a (pro tanto) reason for having.

One important point that I will borrow from Lars Samuelsson is that if all of the reasons we are provided (by the properties of an object) for having a particular response towards an object depend on the consequences – causal or conceptual – of having that response, then the object isn’t actually valuable. Thus, in order for something to have value, it needs to have properties that give us at least some reason to have some positive response towards it that does not depend on the consequences

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21 Gregory 2013.
22 By conceptual consequences, he means such things as the consequence that my promise will be held if I do this or that, or that the last will of my dead relative will be fulfilled if I do this or that. See Samuelsson 2013, pp. 389-391.
23 In Samuelsson 2013, pp. 398-399, he included this criterion in his proposed version of the BPA in order to exclude Wrong Kind of Reason cases for predicative value, but in personal communication, he has since spoken of using this as a criterion for value of any type, and not only for predicative value.
of having that response. I will call these responses *genuine responses* and the reasons we have for these responses *genuine reasons*.

The concept of a genuine response allows us to avoid the classic Evil Demon counterexample.\(^\text{24}\) In this counterexample, an evil demon threatens to torture us unless we admire it. Clearly, we have reason to admire it, because we want to avoid being tortured, but the demon doesn’t actually have any value, predicative or attributive. Having the BPA require *genuine* responses solves this problem, since our only reason to admire the evil demon depends on the consequences of our doing so: if we admire the demon, we will avoid being tortured. Thus, our admiration of it is not a genuine response, and our having a reason to admire the demon will not cause our BPA to falsely ascribe any value to the demon.

3.4. “… for the relevant *agents*…”

Some objects may have properties that would provide reasons only for some agents (in the appropriate practical situation) to have the relevant responses. I choose to call these reasons *agent-relative reasons*, and likewise values that supervene on properties like these *agent-relative values*. Analogously, values that supervene on properties that provide *agent-neutral reasons* (that is, reasons for any agent) are *agent-neutral values*. Some authors, like Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen,\(^\text{25}\) disagree with using the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons as a basis for the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral value. However, my definition of the distinction differs from that of Rønnow-Rasmussen. He uses the notion of an agent-relative reason in the sense of a reason for some agent(s), and agent-neutral reason as a reason that just exists, but not for any past, present or future agent, and concludes that the notion of agent-neutral reasons itself seems, in his words, “to say the least, an awkward idea”.\(^\text{26}\) With this, I agree, given his definition of the notion. However, I think it more fruitful to distinguish between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons in terms of whether the properties that provide them do so for all agents or only for some, rather than whether they provide reasons for any agents or

\(^{24}\) Lang 2008 discusses multiple versions of this counterexample. Originally, it was used in Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, p. 400.

\(^{25}\) Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011, p. 139.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
for none, for the distinction I use maps neatly onto the distinction between objects that have properties that make them valuable to some agents, but not to others, that is, the distinction between agent-relatively and agent-neutrally valuable objects. Whether there is any agent-relative or agent-neutral reasons, and hence, values, at all is another – substantial – matter.

3.5. “… for having certain positive responses towards X”

The word ‘responses’ is understood very widely when used in the BPA. It can include attitudes, such as admiring or approving of, and actions, such as bringing about, trying to bring about, favouring, or promoting. There are some authors that restrict the relevant responses to attitudes, but doing so generates problems when combining the BPA with various substantial theories of value. I see no reason to limit our accepted responses to attitudes, or to any other category of responses, for that matter; at least not for the BPA in general.

Some particular responses are helpful to our project, though. I think we will find the key to defining attributive value (in terms of the concepts used in the BPA) in the response of choosing an object over another, which I take to count as a positive response for our purposes. This works particularly well for describing the relation of attributively better than, that is, by claiming that X is an attributively better K than Y is if and only if X and Y have some non-evaluative properties that would provide (genuine) reasons for choosing X over Y if we had reason to want a K. The next step, then, is to claim, as I do, that X being an attributively good K simply means that X is an attributively better K than a sufficient number of members of any group of (real or imaginary) Ks that we happen to be comparing it to. What is important to note here is that we need not compare X to any set of actual Ks; when we say that we compare it to an imaginary set of Ks, we could mean that we compare it to some standard that we have in mind for what a K is, or our expectation of a K. In fact, there need not exist any other Ks in the world for us to compare X to. We can, for example, judge whether

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27 Danielsson & Olson 2007 and Lang 2008, for example, use this formulation. Lang 2008 also attributes it to Parfit (on p. 475) and Stratton-Lake (on p. 480), but this might be an unintentional misrepresentation, considering Lang never provides any quote where these authors define the buck-passing account in terms of reasons for attitudes, rather than for responses more generally.

28 See Samuelsson 2013, pp. 392-394, for an explanation of how limiting the relevant responses to attitudes makes the BPA incompatible with consequentialism.
the first queen of the world is a good queen of the world, despite there never having been any other queens of the world before to compare her to, because we have some idea in mind of how a queen of the world is supposed to act and what she is supposed to do.

Does an X need to be a better K than most other Ks to be a good K, then? Well, technically, we could specify that the more other Ks that X is a better K than, the better (a K) X is, and if X is a better K than all other Ks, then X is the best K. Where we draw the line, then, for calling X simply a good K would be a matter of personal preference. We could then refine our account, now having it state that X is an attributively good K if it is a better K than a sufficiently large subset of the members of some group of Ks that we are comparing X to. Often, though, when we call an X a good K, we don’t compare it to any explicit group of items. Rather, we compare it to some baseline, some expectation, that we have in mind, and I believe that the expectation we most often use is the average of how good of a K that most Ks are, which means that, when we don’t have any particular set of items in mind with which to compare X, we say that X is a good K if X is a better K than the average K, which should be more or less equivalent to most Ks, assuming a normal distribution of quality among Ks.29

Something that speaks for the plausibility of this account is that, in line with intuition, whether or not an X is a good K on this account will depend on the circumstances and how good other Ks that we compare X to are. For example, if we are attacked in a kitchen and look around us for a weapon to defend ourselves with, and we find a meat cleaver, we might judge that to be a surprisingly good weapon, because it is better than the alternatives and certainly better than what we expected to find in a kitchen. Here, the group of objects we compared the meat cleaver to contains, say, a frying

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29 When discussing a BPA of attributive value, I ought at least to mention Brännmark’s (2008) scepticism towards the prospect. He argued (on page 307) that if a BPA for attributive value, similarly to the BPA for predicative value, attempts to analyse attributive value in terms of properties that provide reasons for positive attitudes, perhaps insofar as we want that kind of object, then it is false, because we should not have positive attitudes towards predicatively bad but attributively good objects, like good torturers or good nerve gas; not even if we have reason to need one. However, I do not think his criticism is a concern for my account, as I do not attempt to analyse attributive value in terms of reasons for positive responses (or attitudes), but rather in terms of preference over others of an object’s kind. My account can reconcile attributive goodness with predicative badness in cases like that of a good torturer or good nerve gas, without contradiction.
pan, a spatula and a chair, and the meat cleaver is clearly a better weapon than any of those items. We compare it to a pretty low contextual expectation. If, on the other hand, we had been standing in an armoury full of swords and guns – and a meat cleaver – we would not have judged the meat cleaver to be a very good weapon (even if it is the same meat cleaver that we previously were happy to find when we were attacked in the kitchen). Here, we compared the same object (we assume it is) to a different set of items, and its attributive value changed (because the responses, that its properties provide reason for us to have, changed). Our contextual expectation was higher in this situation than it was in the kitchen. Our account of attributive value gives the same result as our intuitions in these situations. Consider also that the attributive value of an object can change without the object itself changing, if the other objects of its kind that we compare it to change. For example, John, an archer who regularly goes to competitions and does fairly well, we will judge to be a pretty good archer. However, if John stays just as good, but all other archers become better, we will change our opinion and say that he is not that good an archer anymore. These cases support my choice to define X being a good K in terms of X being a better K than most of some group of (actual or imaginary) Ks that we are comparing it to.

The idea of defining absolute attributive goodness strictly comparatively might also gain some credibility from the definition of the attributive value itself. Remember that attributive value is distinguished (from predicative value) by the fact that we cannot make sense of the value without a reference class, that is, we cannot intelligibly extract “X is good” from “X is a good K”. Importantly, we cannot determine if X is good in the attributive sense unless we know what reference class of objects we are supposed to have in mind when evaluating X. I think this lends some credibility to the idea that we must make some kind of comparison in order to determine the attributive value of an object, and thus, that absolute attributive value needs be defined in terms of relative attributive value.

Now, the last distinction in value remaining that we have yet to analyse in terms of the concepts used in the BPA is that of personal vs. impersonal value. I think we will find the solution we seek in a distinction in responses. In his book Personal Value, Rønnow-Rasmussen defined personal value by introducing the concept of for-
someone’s-sake-attitudes\textsuperscript{30}. His idea was that personal value could be defined as value that accrues to objects that it is fitting to have a for-someone’s-sake-attitude to. These attitudes, while admittedly hard to pinpoint, he loosely describes as the kinds of attitudes we have when we value something ‘with an eye to someone’, or ‘with someone in mind’, and this is reflected in the intentional content of the attitude. I think Rønnow-Rasmussen’s concept of a for-someone’s-sake-attitude is interesting, and I see no problems with generalising the concept to for-someone’s-sake-responses. Thus, on my account, personal value can be defined as value that supervenes on properties that give us reason to have for-someone’s-sake-responses towards the valuable object in question, or, more formally put, an object is personally good if (and only if) it has non-evaluative properties that provide reasons for having positive responses towards it for someone’s (or a group of people, possibly with unknown members) sake.

What, then, about impersonal value? It seems quite natural to say that it is value that an object has if (and only if) it has properties that provide reasons for having positive responses towards it, but not for anyone’s sake, that is, not with someone in mind; or, not with an eye to someone.

\textsuperscript{30} Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011, p. 55.
4. A Comprehensive Account
In section 2, we identified various important types of, and distinctions in, value that we need to provide BPAs of. In section 3, we explored in what ways the key elements of the BPA, such as value bearers, properties, reasons, agents and responses, can be used to distinguish between the relevant types of value. Now, then, it is time to put together the comprehensive list of BPAs for all of the types of value that we have discussed. I will do this distinction by distinction and give a few comments on each account before moving on to the next. Remember that each value belongs to either side in each of the four distinctions.

4.1. Intrinsic and extrinsic value
As we saw in sections 2 and 3, distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic value is really easy: we just look at whether the properties upon which a value supervenes are intrinsic or extrinsic. Thus, without further ado:

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Intrinsic}} \]
X is intrinsically good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) intrinsic properties that provide reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for having the relevant response(s) towards X.

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Extrinsic}} \]
X is extrinsically good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) properties, of which at least some are extrinsic, that provide reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for having the relevant response(s) towards X.

4.2. Agent-relative and agent-neutral value
Just as our intuition tells us, the difference between agent-relative and agent-neutral value can be analysed in terms of agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons, understood as reasons for some agents versus reasons for all agents. We can plug this distinction into the BPA to get the following:

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Agent-relative}} \]
X is agent-relatively good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) properties that provide reason(s) for
some agent(s), but not for all agents, for having the relevant response(s) towards X.

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Agent-neutral}} \] X is agent-neutrally good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) properties that provide reason(s) for all agents for having the relevant response(s) towards X.

### 4.3. Personal and impersonal value

Following Rønnow-Rasmussen’s lead, we ascribe personal value to things that we have reason to respond towards for someone’s sake; or, with someone in mind; or, with an eye to someone.\(^{31}\) We call responses that we have in this way for-someone’s-sake-responses, and there do not seem to be any problems with simply using these in the BPA to get an account for personal value. However, to provide an account of impersonal value, instead of writing “not-for-someone’s-sake-responses”, I will (for readability) simply write that the response(s) are had for no-one’s sake. Thus, we get:

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Personal}} \] X is personally good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) properties that provide reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for having the relevant for-someone’s-sake-response(s) towards X.

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Impersonal}} \] X is impersonally good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) properties that provide reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for having the relevant response(s) towards X for no-one’s sake.

### 4.4. Predicative and attributive value

Distinguishing between predicative and attributive value is not quite as straightforward as it is in the cases of the other pairs of value types. Whereas, in the cases of the other distinctions, we could just flip a switch and invert an element in the account of the one type of value to get the account for the other type of value, in this case, we need two very different positive accounts that nonetheless hopefully catch

\(^{31}\) Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011, p. 56.
two mutually exclusive types of value. I will discuss each of them in turn. Do keep in mind that, as I mentioned in section 2.4, I consider it very possible, both (i) for an object to have several all-things-considered attributive values (possibly of different valences) apart from its predicative value; and (ii) for an object to have several pro tanto predicative values (possibly of different valences) but only one all-things-considered predicative value.

4.4.1. Predicative value

Samuelsson’s version of the BPA,\textsuperscript{32} which I have already discussed, works well as an account of predicative value. Recall that, by genuine response, I mean a response that we have reason to have regardless of the consequences of having the response. Further, we count among the consequences of having a response not only the simple causal consequences, but also, in line with Samuelsson’s reasoning, conceptual consequences, such as, for example, our having the response meaning that we fulfil a promise.\textsuperscript{33} Then, we get the following account of predicative value:

\[
\text{BPA}_{\text{Predicative}} \quad \text{X is predicatively good if and only if X has some (non-evaluative) properties that provide reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for having certain genuine positive response(s) towards X.}
\]

4.4.2. Attributive value

As discussed in section 3.5, absolute attributive goodness is best analysed in terms of relative attributive goodness (or attributive betterness), something that it is easier to give a standard BPA of. This is because, as opposed to when we judge something to be predicatively good, we always compare an object to some kind of baseline when we judge it to be attributively good. Therefore, we need an account of relative attributive value before we can have one for absolute attributive value. In these two accounts, I will consider the response of choosing an object over another (for some purpose) to count as a response towards the former, in order to make the accounts of attributive value combinable with the accounts of the other types of value. Thus, something can be, for example, agent-neutrally, attributively good, and ‘the relevant

\textsuperscript{32} Samuelsson 2013, pp. 398-399.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 389-391.
response’ is choosing the good object in question over others of its kind. Note, also, that we can judge an object to be attributively better than another even if we never actually have need for any of them. Lastly, remember that the “real or imaginary set of Ks” that we compare an X to when calling it attributively good can consist of our expectation of a K, or a mental image of how a K should be, and not only a group of actual Ks.

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Attr. (Rel.)}} \] 

\[ X \text{ is an attributively better } K \text{ than } Y \text{ is if and only if } X \text{ and } Y \text{ have some sets of (non-evaluative) properties that would provide genuine reason(s) for the relevant agent(s) for choosing } X \text{ over } Y \text{ if they had reason(s) to want a K.} \]

\[ \text{BPA}_{\text{Attr. (Abs.)}} \] 

\[ X \text{ is an attributively good } K \text{ if and only if } X \text{ is an attributively better } K \text{ than a sufficient number of members of some set of (real or imaginary) Ks.} \]
5. Concluding Remarks

I set out to show that the BPA really does live up to the promise of reducing the whole realm of the evaluative to the realm of the deontic. I wanted to do this because I consider it vital to a reductive account to be universally applicable to the subject it wishes to reduce, and so far, no work had been done to show that the BPA really does work for all types of value. In this essay, I have shown that the BPA indeed does have the tools to analyse the major types of value in the debate in terms of properties that provide reasons for responses. I have also provided a formal categorization of the various types of value and some subtypes, while remaining neutral in substantial questions about value.

I believe that I have provided sufficient reason for confidence in the BPAs applicability to all types of value, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, I have shown how several different ‘knobs’ in the BPA can be turned to represent the various types of, and distinctions in, value using the BPA. I used a distinction in value bearers to identify value simpliciter; I used a distinction in properties to analyse the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value; I used a distinction in reasons, specifically whom they are provided for, to explain the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral value; and I used a distinction in responses to make sense of the distinction between personal and impersonal value. It seems to me plausible that other types of value, that I have not mentioned here, could also be analysed using one or more of the same tools. Secondly, sceptics of the BPA have argued the most fervently against the possibility of finding BPAs of instrumental and attributive value, yet I believe myself to have succeeded in providing them. It is my hope that this will staunch most of the scepticism towards the idea of a comprehensive BPA.

There are two weaknesses I see in my proposal, as it stands. First, the account of attributive value is a bit more clunky and vague than I would have liked. While there is no harm in finding an account of the relation of better-than as well as of the status good, having to rely on an account of relative value to provide an account of absolute value feels like putting the cart before the horse, to some extent. Shouldn’t we first decide how we measure whether something is good, before we decide which of two objects is more good? However, though it may be clunky and somewhat odd, I don’t
think my method of dealing with attributive goodness is wrong per se, and the analysing of ‘good’ in terms of ‘better’ has been done before.\textsuperscript{34}

Second, I regret that, in order to truly provide an account that encompasses the whole evaluative realm, I had to take a stand in the debate as to the nature of thick value concepts. I would have preferred if my account could somehow have remained neutral in the choice between either letting them be irreducible, non-disentanglable, unique ‘values’, or reducing them to an acknowledgement of a set of properties, along with a judgment that value supervenes on the set, but as I explained in part 2.5.3, I do not see how the BPA could accommodate the former alternative; especially not without taking a stance in substantial questions. In fact, even if one has no interest in the BPA, it seems to me incredibly cumbersome for any theory of value to allow for the existence of an arbitrarily large number of distinct types of value, and I do not see why any philosopher would want to posit such a theory. But I digress.

I think the prospect of using the BPA as a method of reducing the realm of the evaluative to the realm of the deontic is very good. Even if there are other types of value that I have failed to account for here, by choice or accident, I think I have shown that it should be fairly simple to find ways of characterising any particular type of value in terms of the concepts used in the BPA. I see no conceptual barriers to accommodating any more types of value beyond those I have discussed here. Given the benefits that come with theoretical parsimony, then, along with the other benefits promised by the BPA, I think it warrants serious consideration as a candidate analysis of value.

\textsuperscript{34} Chisholm 2005.
References


