

## 8

# We Can Have Our Buck and Pass It, Too

C8

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C8.S1

### 8.1.

C8.P1

Imagine a curry. Suppose that the curry is spicy, warm, and nourishing. And suppose that these properties make it the case that the curry has a further property: it is good. (Perhaps it is good *qua* curry, or perhaps it is good absolutely; this does not matter for present purposes.) Now imagine that you are deliberating about whether to eat this curry, and you ask an experienced friend for advice. Your experienced friend might mention any of the foregoing considerations. She might say, “You should try it, it’s really spicy!” or, “You should try it, it’s really warm and nourishing!” or, “You should try it, it’s really good!”

C8.P2

Some people think the last of these considerations is not like the other ones. They hold that the fact that the curry is spicy, the fact that it is warm, and the fact that it is nourishing can all be reasons for you to eat it. But they hold that the fact that the curry is good cannot be a reason for you to eat it. This is because they hold that facts about the goodness of objects or states of affairs are never reasons for anyone to do anything.<sup>1</sup> On this view, facts about goodness obtain in virtue of further facts that are reasons—the facts about the features of objects or states that *make* them good—but are not

<sup>1</sup> When I speak of “reasons” in this paper, I mean objective normative reasons throughout. So, the claim that *P* is a reason to  $\phi$  should be understood to mean that *P* counts in favor of  $\phi$ -ing—regardless of whether anybody is aware of this, and regardless of whether anybody is motivated to  $\phi$  on the grounds that *P*. (Nonetheless, I think there are important relationships between the idea of an objective normative reason and those of a possessed reason and a motivating reason, which I discuss in Section 8.4.) For brevity I sometimes talk of properties as reasons, but I am happy to make the orthodox assumption that objective normative reasons are facts; all my talk of a property as a reason may be understood as elliptical for the claim that the fact that the property is instantiated is a reason.

themselves reasons. This view is called “buck-passing about goodness.” It gets its name because it “passes the normative buck” from goodness down to the features that goodness consists in.<sup>2</sup>

C8.P3 One can be a buck-passer about other properties, too. In general, to “pass the buck” with respect to a property *F* is to make two claims about *F*: first, that something’s being *F* is not itself a reason for action, and second, that *F* is instead a status that something has in virtue of our (non-*F*) reasons for action.

C8.P4 This paper concerns buck-passing about the moral rightness of acts.<sup>3</sup> A buck-passer about rightness holds that the fact that an act is (morally) right is never a reason to perform it—nor to do anything else, such as encouraging someone to perform it, resenting someone for failing to perform it, and so on<sup>4</sup>—and that our reasons are instead the act’s right-making features. Buck-passers about rightness typically remain neutral on the question of how many and which features can make acts morally right. Their claim is the metaethical claim that, whatever the right-making features are, it is these features that are our reasons to perform the relevant acts. The moral rightness of the acts is no such thing.

C8.P5 I hold that the fact that an act is morally right is a reason to perform it. I take this claim to have considerable intuitive plausibility. Intuitively, the fact that an act is morally right is a consideration that counts in favor of performing it; after all, the fact that an act is morally right surely has some bearing on whether to perform it, and presumably it does not count *against* performing it! So I think that buck-passers are wrong about this. Nonetheless, I agree with buck-passers that facts about acts’ right-making features are (also) reasons to perform the acts. On the view that I will defend here, we can have our buck and pass it, too.

C8.P6 The question of whether an act’s rightness is a reason to perform it is not an idle theoretical question. On the contrary, the claim that rightness *cannot* be a reason is used as a premise in some important arguments. Most notably, many philosophers hold that there are positive evaluative statuses that an

<sup>2</sup> Buck-passing about goodness has been the subject of much discussion. For defenses, see e.g., Scanlon (1998), Parfit (2001), Olson (2004), Suikkanen (2004), Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006), Skorupski (2010); for criticisms, see e.g., Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004), Crisp (2005), Väyrynen (2006), Liao (2009), Gregory (2014).

<sup>3</sup> For defenses, see especially Dancy (2000), Stratton-Lake (2003); cf. Darwall (2010), Bedke (2011).

<sup>4</sup> Here I will only discuss an act’s rightness being a reason to perform it, eliding the additional “or to encourage others to perform it, or rebuke them for failing to perform it, or . . .” This is just to save words and improve readability. There are some (e.g., Darwall 2010) who think that an act’s rightness can be a reason to do certain of these things, but not others. My argument applies to whatever a buck-passer thinks rightness *cannot* be a reason for.

agent and/or her action can attain only if she acts “for the right reasons.” If one holds such a view, and also assumes that rightness is not a reason—so, a fortiori, it cannot be among the right reasons—it follows that when someone does the right thing because it’s the right thing to do, she and/or her action cannot attain the relevant positive status. Thus buck-passing is used to denigrate motivation by rightness *de dicto*. For example, Julia Markovits (2010: 207) offers an argument of this form for the claim that people who are motivated by rightness *de dicto* cannot perform acts with full moral worth, and David Shoemaker (2007: 88) offers an argument of this form for the claim that such people are not full-fledged members of the moral community. If an act’s rightness is in fact a perfectly good reason to perform it, then these arguments are all unsound. That is my primary motivation for writing this paper; if the view that I defend here is correct, it shows that a family of criticisms of people who do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do are all based on unsound arguments.

C8.S2

## 8.2.

C8.P7

When buck-passers argue that facts about goodness or rightness are not reasons, they typically use a certain type of argument. The argument begins by noting that the lower-order features that make it the case that goodness or rightness is instantiated already seem like reasons; the good-making features of an object or state seem to be perfectly respectable reasons to admire it, acquire it, promote it, protect it, realize it, or perform whatever act or adopt whatever attitude is in question,<sup>5</sup> and similarly the right-making features of an act seem like perfectly respectable reasons to perform it. Buck-passers then observe that it seems redundant to take facts about goodness or rightness to be additional reasons to do these things, once the facts about the good- or right-making features have already been taken into account. Intuitively, those lower-order facts were already reason enough. The further, higher-order fact that the object or state is good, or the act is right, doesn’t seem to add anything. Since it seems redundant to take these higher-order facts to be reasons, buck-passers conclude that we should not do so. Call this *the redundancy argument*.

C8.P8

This style of argument began with buck-passing about goodness. Here is T. M. Scanlon (1998: 97):

<sup>5</sup> Some reasons are reasons to adopt attitudes, instead of or as well as being reasons to perform acts. But, for simplicity, I’ll just talk about acts. I intend for everything I say to apply *mutatis mutandis* to reasons to adopt attitudes.

- c8.P9 [T]he natural properties that make a thing good or valuable . . . provide a complete explanation of the reasons we have for reacting in these ways to things that are good or valuable. It is not clear what further work could be done by special reason-providing properties of goodness and value.
- c8.P10 To see Scanlon's point, imagine the curry again. The idea is that its spiciness, warmth, and nourishing-ness are surely reason enough to eat it, without its goodness being a further reason to eat it. To Scanlon, it seems that there is simply no point in saying that the curry's goodness is also a reason; this property seems to make no difference to an agent's normative situation, once the lower-order properties that explain its instantiation have already been taken into account. This is the idea that Scanlon expresses by saying that "it is not clear what further work could be done" by the reason-providing property of goodness.
- c8.P11 Scanlon's critics have pointed out that parallel remarks apply to his own view that an act's rightness is a reason to perform it, and wrongness a reason not to perform it. Here, for instance, is Philip Stratton-Lake (2003: 75–6):
- c8.P12 Once Scanlon has identified wrongness with his contractualist principle he must abandon his intuition that moral wrongness is reason-giving. For unless he does, he will be committed to the implausible view that the fact that some act is permitted by a principle that others could reasonably reject provides us with a reason not to do it over and above the reasons others have to reject this principle . . . [So] Scanlon should abandon his view that wrongness is a reason-providing property.
- c8.P13 This problem is not unique to Scanlon's contractualism, as we can see by considering Stratton-Lake's (2002: 15) positive view:
- c8.P14 I can see no reason why [we] cannot understand rightness as well as goodness in terms of reasons. [We]<sup>6</sup> could (and in my view should) embrace not only a buck-passing account of goodness, but also a buck-passing account of rightness. According to such an account, the fact that  $\varphi$ -ing is right is the same as the fact that  $\varphi$ -ing has properties that give us conclusive reason to do it. Similarly, the fact that  $\varphi$ -ing is wrong is the same as the fact that it has properties that give us conclusive reason not to do it.
- c8.P15 Stratton-Lake's thought is as follows. The fact that an act is right is never a brute fact, insusceptible of further explanation. It is rather a fact that obtains in virtue of further features of the act. Since they make the act right, these further features must give us conclusive reason to perform it. But then there is simply no point in saying that the act's rightness is also a reason to perform

<sup>6</sup> Scanlon writes "intuitionists" where I am writing "we." But Scanlon is an intuitionist. The things that he recommends to intuitionists are the things that he thinks are correct, and thus things that we all should do.

it, on top of the reasons provided by the right-making features—by stipulation, those reasons were already conclusive! So the act’s rightness seems to make no difference to an agent’s normative situation; to paraphrase Scanlon, it is not clear what further work could be done by taking rightness to be a reason, since the right-making features are already conclusive reasons. Stratton-Lake thus suggests that we identify the fact that an act is right with the fact that it has (other) properties that give us conclusive reason to do it, rather than seeing it as a further fact that may be a reason in its own right.

c8.P16 I have also heard it said that it is not only redundant but positively inappropriate to regard facts about goodness and rightness as reasons, in addition to facts about good- or right-making features; it has been suggested to me in conversation that this is an illegitimate form of double-counting. This thought is surely closely related to the redundancy argument. For present purposes I will construe it as a species of the redundancy argument.

c8.P17 To repeat: The redundancy argument works by taking a certain feature, observing that the facts that explain its instantiation seem like reasons, and then suggesting that it seems redundant to take the fact that the feature is instantiated to be a further reason to do the same things. Buck-passers then suggest that, since it seems redundant to take the fact about the higher-order feature to be a reason, we should not do so.

c8.P18 This argument dramatically overgeneralizes. We can see this initially by considering the features of acts that buck-passers champion: the right-making features. Whatever these features are, it is not plausible that facts about their instantiation are brute facts, unsusceptible of further explanation. For example, suppose that an act is morally right because it is fair. The act’s being fair is not then a brute fact, with no further explanation. On the contrary, whenever an act is fair, there is some explanation of why it is fair. The explanation has something to do with the act’s distributing social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds. Here, then, is a fact about the act that makes it fair (a “fair-making” fact, if you like): it distributes social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds. And this fact is not brute, either. It has its own explanation, which spells out what the grounds are. Perhaps the act is meritocratic, or perhaps it makes reparations for past injustice, or perhaps it distributes resources based on need. These are then further facts about further features of the act that make it the case that it distributes social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds. And *those* facts are not brute, either. So on we might go, spelling out a metaphysical hierarchy of features of acts that ranges from the less to the more fundamental. Parallel remarks hold for any other plausible candidate for being a right-making feature.

C8.P19 Now, consider the fact that an act distributes social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds. Is this a reason to perform it? Intuitively, the answer is “yes.” This sure seems like a consideration that counts in favor of performing the act. But, if this fair-making fact is already a reason to perform the act, then it would be redundant to take the fact that the act is fair to be a further reason to perform it. The fact that it distributes social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds is already reason enough. So the fact that the act is fair is out of the running, according to the redundancy argument; it is the lower-order fact that is the real reason.

C8.P20 But wait! Consider the fact that the act is meritocratic, that it makes reparations for past injustice, or that it distributes resources based on need. These facts also seem, intuitively, to be perfectly respectable reasons to perform the act—considerations that count in favor of performing it. But it would be redundant to take the higher-order fact that the act distributes social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds to be a further reason to perform it, once we have conceded that these facts about the grounds themselves are already reasons. So the fair-making fact is out, too, according to the redundancy argument. We spoke too soon in the previous paragraph; it is neither the right-making fact nor the fair-making fact, but actually these even-lower-order facts that are the real reasons.

C8.P21 Shall we go on?

C8.P22 This points toward a problem for buck-passers about rightness. Buck-passers hope to use the redundancy argument to show both that an act’s rightness is not a reason to perform it and that the right-making features are reasons to perform it. But it will be difficult for them to accomplish both of these aims, because facts about right-making features (such as fairness) can be made to seem redundant equally as easily as facts about rightness. The redundancy argument disqualifies these right-making features from being reasons just as much and in the same way as it disqualifies rightness itself. In other words, buck-passers’ strategy for denying that rightness is a reason undermines their positive claim that the right-making features are reasons.

C8.P23 This is already quite bad for the buck-passer. But things get worse, because the redundancy argument overgeneralizes further. It is not restricted to cases involving moral properties (like goodness and rightness). Here is a non-moral example:

C8.P24 **5-A-DAY:** In the UK in the early 2000s, there was a public health campaign to get people to eat at least five portions of fruit or vegetables each day. As a result, supermarkets now put stickers on their prepared food that say “1 of your 5-a-day!”, “2 of your 5-a-day!”, etc. Supermarkets produce stickers reporting the number of portions of fruit or vegetables in their food; if a salad contains, say, three portions of vegetables, then it is labeled with a single “3 of your 5-a-day!” sticker

rather than three “1 of your 5-a-day!” stickers. But supermarkets do not produce stickers naming the particular fruits or vegetables in their food. So, a snack pack containing one portion of apple will have a “1 of your 5-a-day!” sticker, rather than a “contains apple!” sticker. The latter are not manufactured.

c8.P25 If the redundancy argument is correct, then British supermarkets’ behavior is quite mysterious. They label a salad containing three portions of vegetables with a single “3 of your 5-a-day” sticker, ostensibly alerting customers to a reason to eat it. But the fact that the salad contains three of your 5-a-day clearly consists in the fact that it contains one of your 5-a-day, and then one more one, and then one *more* one, since that is what it is to contain three of something. And this lower-order fact is surely a perfectly good reason to eat the salad. So why produce stickers mentioning any number of portions greater than 1? Isn’t this redundant, if we already have multiple one-portion stickers? Moreover, the salad’s containing one of your 5-a-day, and then one more one, and then one *more* one may itself consist (for example) in its containing one portion each of lettuce, tomato, and cucumber. And its containing these particular vegetables surely counts in favor of eating it. Similarly, the snack pack’s containing apple surely counts in favor of eating it. So why count facts about portion numbers as reasons at all? Or, for that matter, why count facts about the presence of fruits and vegetables as reasons, rather than facts about their nutritional properties? Wouldn’t it be redundant to note that a salad contains tomato if we had already observed that it contains something rich in lycopene? And what should we say about the fact that the salad is rich in nutrients, or the fact that it is healthy? And so on, and so on.

c8.P26 Examples like this show that versions of the redundancy argument can be constructed whenever one fact that seems to count in favor of performing some act is wholly or partially constituted by another fact that also seems to count in favor of performing the same act. The redundancy argument, if correct, applies in all these cases too. But some such facts very plausibly are reasons. Indeed, some are such that it is more plausible that they are reasons than that the redundancy argument is correct. So there must be something wrong with the redundancy argument. Redundancy is rampant.

c8.S3

### 8.3.

c8.P27 Here is what I think is wrong with the redundancy argument. The argument identifies a metaphysical hierarchy wherein one fact that seems to count in favor of performing some act is wholly or partially constituted by further facts, at least some of which also seem to count in favor of performing the same act. The argument then assumes that, for each such hierarchy, at most one of the

facts can be a “real” reason. The metaphor of “buck-passing” unhelpfully encourages this way of thinking. This metaphor conjures up an image of the reason—the “buck”—originally being held by the top fact in a metaphysical hierarchy, and then being passed down to progressively more fundamental facts, until at some point the music stops and one lucky fact is left holding the buck. This suggests that if we examine each hierarchy carefully enough, we will eventually identify the special fact that holds the buck. On this view, identifying genuine reasons is like spotting Waldo in a crowd.

C8.P28 But this is silly. We need not locate the normative buck on any particular fact in a metaphysical hierarchy. Rather, we can and should say that the facts in these hierarchies can all be reasons.

C8.P29 Distinguish two views:

C8.P30 “SPECIAL FACT” VIEW: In a metaphysical hierarchy wherein some facts that seem to count in favor of performing an act are metaphysically constituted by others that seem to count in favor of performing the same act, there is always one fact that is *where the buck stops*—a special fact that bears all the normative weight.

C8.P31 “SHARE THE WEIGHT” VIEW: In a metaphysical hierarchy wherein some facts that seem to count in favor of performing an act are metaphysically constituted by others that seem to count in favor of performing the same act, it can be that all of the facts that seem to count in favor of performing the act really do count in favor of performing it. *The buck doesn't stop anywhere*. The normative weight is shared by all the facts in the hierarchy rather than resting on some particular fact.

C8.P32 Buck-passers about rightness accept the “special fact” view and hold that facts about right-making features are among the special facts. But, given that the redundancy argument dramatically overgeneralizes, the “share the weight” view is the more attractive option. Faced with metaphysical hierarchies of facts that each seem to count in favor of performing a certain act, we should abandon the project of examining them to hunt for a buck nestling on a special fact. Instead, we should embrace the possibility that most or even all of the facts that seem to count in favor of performing the act really do count in favor of performing it, and thus are genuine reasons to perform it.

C8.P33 To clarify, the share the weight view is not the view that each fact in a metaphysical hierarchy possesses  $1/n$  of the normative weight, where  $n$  is the number of facts in the hierarchy. On the contrary, it can be that two or more facts both possess all the weight. This can happen when one fact is wholly constituted by another. For example, the fact that a salad contains three of your 5-a-day wholly consists in the fact that it contains one of your 5-a-day, and then one more one, and then one *more* one. And, if it turns out that there is just one right-making feature, then the fact that an act is right wholly consists

in a single further fact—the fact that it possesses this feature. On the share the weight view, if one fact is wholly constituted by another, then they may possess the same normative weight (and thus may be equally good reasons to perform the relevant act). If the weight that they share is all of the normative weight in their metaphysical hierarchy, then they both possess all the weight.

C8.P34 Nonetheless, it does not follow from the share the weight view that *every* fact in a metaphysical hierarchy always bears all the weight. If a single fact that bears all the weight is jointly constituted by three further facts (specified at a certain level of generality), then they cannot each bear all the weight. Rather, in cases of partial constitution, the lower-order facts might each bear  $1/n$  of the total weight of the higher-order fact that they jointly constitute, where  $n$  is the number of facts doing the constituting. This can happen if they make equal constitutive contributions to the higher-order fact's obtaining. For example, the weight of the fact that a salad contains three of your 5-a-day is presumably borne equally by the facts that it contains lettuce, that it contains tomato, and that it contains cucumber. But it may also happen that some lower-order facts bear more of the total normative weight than others, in virtue of their greater constitutive contribution to the higher-order fact's obtaining. For example, suppose that the standards for curry evaluation entail that the goodness of curries depends primarily on their spiciness, with their warmth and nourishing-ness making small additional contributions. In this case, the normative weight of the fact that the curry from Section 8.1 is good does not divide equally between the facts that it is spicy, that it is warm, and that it is nourishing. Rather, the fact that the curry is spicy bears more weight than the others—and thus counts more strongly in favor of eating it.

C8.P35 Typically, then, as we move down a metaphysical hierarchy, the amount of normative weight borne by each fact is conserved (in cases of full constitution) or lessened (in cases of partial constitution). Nonetheless, there are also cases in which a lower-order fact bears more total normative weight than one of the higher-order facts that consists in it. This is because a single fact can appear in multiple metaphysical hierarchies, each of which bears some normative weight favoring a certain act. For example, suppose that Justin is deciding whether to buy flowers for his wife Emmy. Buying the flowers would make Emmy happy. This makes it the case that buying the flowers would make *someone* happy. And that higher-order fact bears some normative weight: in general, the fact that  $\varphi$ -ing would make someone happy is a reason to  $\varphi$ . But this higher-order fact bears less total weight than the lower-order fact that buying the flowers would make Emmy happy. This is because there are other higher-order facts that also consist in the fact that buying the flowers would make Emmy happy, and that bear some weight; notably, there is the fact that buying the flowers would amount to doing a nice thing for one's partner. The

quantity of normative weight favoring doing a nice thing for one's partner is greater than the amount that simply favors making *someone* (slightly) happy. And the fact that buying the flowers would make Emmy happy shares in this greater amount of normative weight, occurring slightly lower down in the relevant metaphysical hierarchy. So, the fact that buying the flowers would make Emmy happy bears more total normative weight than the fact that buying the flowers would make someone happy, since the lower-order fact occurs in multiple weight-bearing hierarchies.<sup>7</sup>

c8.P36 Here is one more point of clarification. The share the weight view does not entail that *every* fact in a metaphysical hierarchy must be a reason if *any* fact in it is a reason. Normative weight can be shared by some facts in a hierarchy, but not others. For example, in addition to making it the case (we are supposing) that an act is right, the fact that an act is fair makes true all disjunctions with the fact that the act is fair as one disjunct: the fact that the act is fair *or* fluffy, that the act is fair *or* I am wearing a hat, and so on. But, intuitively, these do not seem like reasons to perform the act. At the other end of the scale, it might be that all metaphysical hierarchies bottom out in facts about the speed and location of fundamental physical particles. But, again, these facts intuitively do not seem like reasons to do anything. Perhaps this is because they *aren't* reasons to do anything. That is possible if normative weight is shared by some of the facts in a metaphysical hierarchy, but it "tops off" and "bottoms out" at certain points. This is consistent with the share the weight view, but not entailed by it; questions about precisely which facts share which quantities of weight cannot be settled by the view itself and must be discussed separately.

c8.P37 All of this may seem strange, until we remember that parallel phenomena occur throughout metaphysics. For example, no one is surprised to learn that a statue weighing 200lb and a lump of clay weighing 200lb, laid together on a scale, jointly weigh only 200lb. Once we recognize that the statue and clay share their physical weight, in virtue of the relationship of metaphysical constitution between them, no mystery remains. Similarly, nobody is surprised to learn that a whole and the sum of its parts occupy the same physical space. But a single part does not occupy exactly the same space as the whole, just as the fact that a salad contains tomato does not bear exactly the same amount of normative weight as the fact that it contains three of your 5-a-day (*modulo* the possible contribution of other weight-bearing hierarchies—e.g., if someone loves eating tomato and so eating it constitutes doing something she loves as well as getting one of her 5-a-day). Similarly, there is nothing untoward going on when the fact that a red triangle is presented and the fact

<sup>7</sup> This example is named after Justin Snedegar, who suggested it to me. Thanks Justin!

that a scarlet triangle is presented are both causes of a trained pigeon's starting to peck (on this see Yablo 1992: 257). Once we see that determinates do not compete with their determinables for causal relevance (Yablo 1992: 257–9; cf. Swanson 2010), we can relax. My view is that, just as facts in a metaphysical hierarchy do not compete for causal relevance, nor do they compete for normative relevance. They can all be reasons.

C 8.S 4

8.4.

C8.P38 The foregoing discussion of normative weight “topping off” and “bottoming out” with certain facts in a metaphysical hierarchy invites a host of further questions. How far up, and how far down, does normative weight go? Are there any gaps? And how do we tell which facts share in which quantities of weight?

C8.P39 I doubt that there are easy answers to these questions. Indeed, I think they are properly understood not as metaethical questions, but as hard questions of first-order ethical theory. These are questions about which facts count in favor of performing which acts, and which of these facts are wholly or partially constituted by which others (such that their normative weight is shared). The task of answering such questions just is the task of doing first-order ethical theory: it is the task of figuring out what things matter morally, what the things that matter morally consist in, and which of these constituents themselves also matter morally. So, I doubt that we can say much to answer these questions while remaining first-order neutral, as I intend to do here.

C8.P40 Nonetheless, there are tests we can use to provide defeasible support for the claim that a certain fact is a reason, and thus a fact that bears some normative weight. To repeat the popular refrain: a reason to  $\varphi$  is a consideration that counts in favor of  $\varphi$ -ing. So we can provide defeasible support for the claim that the fact that  $P$  is a reason to  $\varphi$  by noting that  $P$  seems, intuitively, to count in favor of  $\varphi$ -ing. Exercises that allow us to test our intuitions as to whether  $P$  counts in favor of  $\varphi$ -ing, for some  $\varphi$ , thus help to determine whether  $P$  is a fact that bears some normative weight.

C8.P41 Here is one such test. Imagine that you initially know nothing about  $\varphi$ -ing. At this point, I assume, you have no reason to  $\varphi$  and no reason not to  $\varphi$ . There may be objective normative reasons for or against your  $\varphi$ -ing—considerations that count for or against it. But reasons that there *are* aren't always reasons that you *have*. The reasons you have to  $\varphi$  are the facts that count in favor of  $\varphi$ -ing to which you have epistemic access. Since you know nothing about  $\varphi$ -ing, there are none of those. Now imagine that your

favorite omniscient, omnibenevolent, and trustworthy interlocutor descends from the heavens and informs you that  $P$ . Ask yourself: Intuitively, now that you know that  $P$ , do you have some reason to  $\varphi$ ? If the answer is “yes,” this suggests that  $P$  is a reason to  $\varphi$ . We may call this *the isolation test*, since it asks us to imagine learning a single fact in isolation and seeing whether this seems to change our normative situation.

C8.P42 The isolation test is far-fetched; omniscient interlocutors rarely descend from the heavens, so it is unrealistic to imagine that they do. But we can imagine realistic scenarios that are close enough. We can imagine testimony from a real interlocutor, with a good track record, informing us that  $P$ . Or we can imagine cases of partial forgetting, in which we forget almost everything about  $\varphi$ -ing, but do recall that  $P$ . (Here the “testifier” is our own past self.) So long as it is possible to imagine that someone recalls or is told nothing about  $\varphi$ -ing besides the fact that  $P$ , we can ask whether this learning or recollection nonetheless seems to make a difference to her normative situation. These are versions of the isolation test.

C8.P43 The isolation test trades on a relationship between normative reasons and *possessed* reasons (i.e., between the reasons that there are and the reasons that someone has). Another test is based on a relationship between normative reasons and *motivating* reasons. When we learn of someone’s motivating reason, we can evaluate it in various ways: We can ask whether it was a good reason, and whether the action was reasonable or rational. Here we are looking for a match between motivating and normative reasons. There is a characteristic sense of mismatch accompanying the intuition that someone’s motivating reason was not a genuine normative reason for them to perform the act. For example, we may experience this sense of mismatch if we encounter someone who goes around throwing pencils at people if she dislikes the way they smell, or someone who rushes home to make a cup of tea whenever she sees a rabbit, doing so “because there was a rabbit.” These agents’ motivating reasons are not normative reasons; disliking someone’s smell is not a reason to besiege them with pencils, nor is the presence of a rabbit a reason to make tea. So, we can test our intuitions as to whether the fact that  $P$  is a reason to  $\varphi$  by imagining someone who is motivated to  $\varphi$  by the fact that  $P$  and seeing whether this elicits the characteristic sense of mismatch. Call this *the motivation test*.

C8.P44 The isolation and motivation tests can help us to figure out the contours of quantities of normative weight shared by facts in a metaphysical hierarchy. Facts that fail these tests do not bear normative weight—as is the case, for instance, for facts about fundamental physical particles and the disjunctive fact that an act is fair or I am wearing a hat. These would be odd motivating reasons, and do not seem to count in favor of performing the act when learned in isolation. But if a fact passes the isolation and motivation tests, this

is (defeasible) evidence for its being a genuine normative reason. And sometimes multiple facts in a metaphysical hierarchy all pass the tests. For example, suppose that someone learns that a certain act is the fair thing to do under her circumstances. She has intuitively learned something that changes her normative situation with respect to this act, and that would be a perfectly fine motivating reason. Moreover, the very same thing holds of her learning that the act distributes social benefits and burdens on reasonable, non-arbitrary grounds; this also changes her normative situation, and would be a perfectly fine motivating reason. These observations suggest that the two facts are both reasons to perform the act, notwithstanding the metaphysical relationship between them. I hold that this is because normative weight is shared by the facts in a metaphysical hierarchy, including these two facts.

C8.P45 I submit that the fact that an act is morally right passes the isolation and motivation tests. Here are some real-life examples:

C8.P46 **PARTIAL FORGETTING:** Efua is a vegan. The arguments for veganism are complex, requiring hard-to-find empirical information and subtle moral reasoning. But Efua has obtained this information, done this reasoning, and concluded that veganism is morally required, on multiple long dark nights of the soul. Efua has no reason to distrust her past reasoning or her past evidence-gathering, especially since she has gone over the issue many times and reached the same conclusion every time. But Efua cannot always recall all of the subtleties of the moral arguments that she has repeatedly gone over, nor all the empirical facts on whose basis she reached this verdict. Nonetheless, Efua maintains a vegan diet, and she does so because it is morally right.

C8.P47 **TESTIMONY:** Fliers containing racist messages are posted all over Evelyn's college campus. Evelyn, a first-time teacher, asks a friend with substantial pedagogical expertise and good character whether she should deviate from the syllabus to mention the fliers in class, and what she should say if so. Her friend tells Evelyn that she should ignore the syllabus and use this opportunity to encourage students to discuss strategies that they and their instructors can implement to make the campus a more welcoming place for students of color. Evelyn can tell that her trustworthy friend is well aware of the complex combination of facts that collectively make this the right thing to do. But she doesn't have time to ask her friend to explain it all. Nonetheless, she performs the intervention that her friend suggests, and does so because it's the right thing to do.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> This example is structurally similar to the famous "surprise party" example offered by Schroeder (2009), which is used to argue that the fact that there is a reason to do something can itself be a reason to do it. The share-the-weight-view supports the position that Schroeder defends in this paper.

- C8.P48 Evelyn learns and Efua remembers that a certain course of action is morally right, and they each choose to take the relevant course of action on this basis. This is all perfectly fine. Indeed, Efua and Evelyn seem intuitively to be doing a much better job of responding to reasons than the smell-pencil-thrower and the rabbit-tea-drinker—they do not seem unreasonable or irrational, and their actions make perfect sense. The fact that a course of action is morally right therefore passes the motivation test in both cases. Moreover, when Evelyn’s friend tells her that a certain intervention is morally right, this changes Evelyn’s normative situation; she goes from having no reason to perform it to having very strong reason to perform it. Similarly, if Efua forgot all her reasoning concerning veganism, and then suddenly remembered that she had repeatedly concluded that it is morally right, this would change her normative situation. So the fact that an act is right passes the isolation test, too. One clear and simple explanation of these data is that the fact that an act is morally right is a reason to perform it.<sup>9</sup>
- C8.P49 Whatever the right-making features are, I assume that they will also pass the isolation and motivation tests. In that case, I think we should say that the fact that an act possesses such a feature and the fact that it is right are both reasons to perform it. We can—and should—have our buck and pass it, too.

C 8. S 5

## 8.5.

- C8.P50 I have argued that when multiple facts in a metaphysical hierarchy each seem, intuitively, to count in favor of performing a certain act, this can be because they do all count in favor of performing it. They can all be reasons, with shared normative weight. And these metaphysical hierarchies of facts with shared normative weight can include the fact that an act is right and the fact that it possesses a certain right-making feature.
- C8.P51 What, then, of the redundancy argument?
- C8.P52 On my view, there is a kernel of truth to the redundancy argument. Redundancy intuitions do not tell us which facts can be reasons and which cannot. But they may alert us to metaphysical relationships between reasons. So, these intuitions are not completely useless or misleading. Buck-passers simply drew the wrong conclusion from them. The correct conclusion is that, when two or more reasons share some weight, we should be careful when *aggregating* them to determine the total amount of normative weight

<sup>9</sup> I grant that this is not the only possible explanation. I will discuss some alternatives in Section 8.6.

favoring each act, and we should be careful when *describing* the reasons for performing these acts to another person.

C8.P53 In deliberation about what to do, and in evaluation of our own or others' behavior, we are often interested in determining the total amount of normative weight favoring the performance of an act. This is because we want to know whether there is sufficient reason to perform it, or more reason to perform it than an alternative. When some reasons to perform the act occur in a metaphysical hierarchy with shared weight, then, we must tread carefully. It is this shared weight that we risk double-, triple-, or *n*-tuple-counting if we do not pay attention to the ways in which it is shared. But that is not because only some facts in the hierarchy are special facts that are the “real” reasons, with the rest being spurious pseudo-reasons. They can all be reasons, and it can nonetheless be the case that we must be careful in determining their aggregate weight, given the ways in which normative weight is shared among them. So, we must do the hard work of figuring out which of the cases described in Section 8.3 obtains: whether normative weight is conserved by full constitution or divided by partial constitution at each level in a hierarchy, how these divisions work, which facts occur in multiple weight-bearing hierarchies, and so on. Since reasons can share their weight, we can't aggregate them just by adding up their weights. The redundancy argument gets this right.

C8.P54 We must also be careful when describing reasons to one another. When we list reasons for doing something, we typically convey that they are metaphysically independent, such that their total weight could be determined by simple addition. If some reasons share some weight, this can be misleading. For example, it is misleading to say, “this salad contains three of your 5-a-day, and it contains lettuce, cucumber, and tomato!”—as if the salad contained six vegetables in total. This would misrepresent the total amount of normative weight favoring eating the salad. But the phenomena here are pragmatic, rather than metaphysical. Reasons that it is infelicitous to mention are still reasons. We can see this by noting that listing multiple facts in a single hierarchy as reasons can be helpful, rather than misleading, if we use language that clarifies the metaphysical relationships between them. For example, it is fine to say, “this salad contains three of your five-a-day—*namely*, lettuce, cucumber and tomato!” or, “this salad contains lettuce, cucumber and tomato—*so that's* three of your five-a-day!” By using words and phrases like “namely,” “viz.,” “that is to say,” “which makes,” and “so that's,” we avoid misleading our audience. Far from being infelicitous, this can be a particularly helpful contribution to the conversation, conveying more to our audience about the structure of normative reality than we would by mentioning one reason alone.

C8.P55 This suggests that there is another sense in which buck-passers are on to something. They are correct that it can seem redundant to mention the fact that an act is right once the right-making features have all already been taken into account. That is because all of the normative weight of the act's rightness has thereby already been considered. But this kind of redundancy cuts both ways. Either lower-order or higher-order facts in a metaphysical hierarchy can be made redundant by taking account of other facts in the same hierarchy that share all their weight. For example, it can be redundant to mention the fact that a salad contains tomato if the fact that it contains a vegetable has already been taken into account, and equally redundant to add that the salad contains a vegetable once the presence of tomato has been noted. The conversational constraint that we are under here is a constraint enjoining us to convey the total amount of normative weight favoring the performance of each act, no more, and no less. This might be accomplished by saying that an act is right, or by mentioning its right-making feature/s, or by describing the lower-order features that make it the case that the right-making features are instantiated, or by mentioning a combination of right-making features and lower-order features that together bear all of the weight, and so on. Whichever facts we choose to mention, the others will thereby be made redundant. But this is not because they stop being reasons. Rather, they are reasons whose normative weight has already been taken into account.

C8.P56 Features of our conversational context can make it more appropriate to mention certain reasons than others. For example, certain facts in a weight-bearing hierarchy can be salient because they were just discussed, or because one party to the conversation is especially interested in them. Or certain reasons can be useful to mention because they are the only facts in a metaphysical hierarchy whose normative significance the audience appreciates, meaning that the audience will underestimate the amount of normative weight favoring an act if other facts are mentioned instead. Or some reasons can be more helpful to mention than others because they hold of fewer of the agent's available acts, thereby facilitating comparison of the total amounts of normative weight favoring each of them; it is unhelpful to list reasons that are so coarse-grained that they hold of all available acts, thus failing to distinguish between them. In some contexts, one reason is particularly appropriate to mention because it is the only fact in the relevant hierarchy to which the agent under discussion has epistemic access, and thus the only one that might motivate her to act; in such contexts, mentioning other facts as her reasons can misleadingly suggest that her motivating reason is not a genuine normative reason, when in fact it is a different reason in the same hierarchy. And the list goes on. The features of conversational context that can favor mentioning some reasons over others are as many and varied as features of conversational context usually are.

c8.P57 Not all of these factors favor detail over summary. On the contrary, some factors can make it more appropriate to be succinct, focusing on higher-order facts. For example, if a hungry person must choose between a nutritious but boring salad and a delicious yet ludicrously unhealthy chip butty for lunch, then we can adequately convey the difficulty of her decision by saying, “Well, a salad would be three of her 5-a-day, but a chip butty sure is tasty!” Similarly, if a reluctant hero must choose between doing what’s right and doing what’s easy, then we can adequately convey the difficulty of her decision in precisely these terms. This level of detail is suitable for many everyday conversational contexts. So the fact that an act is morally right will often be one of the most conversationally appropriate reasons to mention in a context. And, through our mentioning it, the right-making features will be made redundant.

c8.P58 Again, this all might be surprising until we remember that similar phenomena are already well-recognized. It is well-recognized that the normative weight of a set of reasons cannot always be calculated by simple addition of their individual weights, and that context can make it inappropriate to consider certain reasons. For example, there are combinatorial effects between reasons, such that two facts that would each count in favor of an act if they obtained individually do not always do so when they obtain together (on this, see e.g., Horty 2012, Nair 2016). And there are what Joseph Raz (1990) calls “exclusionary” reasons, that is, facts whose obtaining makes the case that we ought not to take certain other reasons into account. And there are what Daniel Fogal (2017) calls “normative clusters,” where a “cluster” can include items of different metaphysical types (e.g., an event and the fact of the event’s occurrence) or facts that count in favor of performing an act taken collectively but not severally (e.g., the facts that there is dancing at a party and that Suwrial enjoys dancing), any of which we might felicitously mention by itself and call a reason. Parallel phenomena to those I have described for facts in a metaphysical hierarchy obtain for facts in a normative cluster. In short, the idea that normative weight is non-additive is not new. But the argument of this paper suggests another, hitherto underexplored, way in which normative weight is non-additive.

c8.S6

## 8.6.

c8.P59 Some alternatives to the share the weight view remain on the table.

c8.P60 One is the view that the rightness of an act is a reason to perform it, but a *derivative* one. Derek Parfit held a view like this. Discussing Scanlon’s buck-passing, Parfit (2011: 39) says the following:

c8.P61 This view needs, I think, one small revision. If some medicine or book is the best, these facts could be truly claimed to give us reasons to take this medicine, or to read

this book. But these would not be *further, independent* reasons. These reasons would be *derivative*, since their normative force would derive entirely from the facts that made this medicine or book the best. That is why it would be odd to claim that we had *three* reasons to take some medicine: reasons that are given by the facts that this medicine is the safest, the most effective, *and* the best. Since such derivative reasons have no independent normative force, it would be misleading to mention them in such a claim.

C8.P62 I accept the claim that Parfit calls “odd.” But I agree with some things Parfit says here. I agree that it is often misleading to say that there are three reasons to take the medicine, and I agree that this is because doing so elides the fact that the reasons share their normative weight, which may confuse a hapless hearer into thinking that there is more normative weight favoring taking the medicine than there really is. But, unlike Parfit, I do not think that this means that the normative force of the fact that the medicine is best “derive [s] entirely from the facts that made this medicine . . . the best.” This is just the special fact view. And I doubt that the special fact view can be coherently maintained.

C8.P63 We can see the problem for Parfit by attempting to identify the special facts in his hierarchy from which normative force supposedly “derives” (whatever this means). Parfit tells us that the fact that a medicine is the best is not one such fact. He seems to think that the special facts are the facts that the medicine is the safest and that it is the most effective. But what about some slightly lower-order facts in which these facts consist, such as the fact that the medicine is the least likely to lead to painful side-effects (which partially constitutes its being the safest), and the fact that it contains a higher dose of the active ingredient than all available alternatives (which partially constitutes its being the most effective)? Aren’t these perfectly good reasons to take it? Or, what about the slightly higher-order conjunctive fact that the medicine is the safest *and* the most effective? If you want to embark on the project of determining which of these are the special facts from which normative force “derives,” then good luck to you. I do not think that this can be done.

C8.P64 Another possible view is that higher-order facts are not themselves reasons, but each one is evidence that a certain lower-order fact obtains, which is the “real” reason. On this view, the stickers in British supermarkets, Efua’s memory, and Evelyn’s friend’s testimony do not directly inform the agents of a fact that is a reason, but merely provide them with evidence that some fact that is a reason obtains—perhaps some fact about the vegetables in the salad, or their nutritional properties, and perhaps some fact about the right-making features of Efua and Evelyn’s courses of action, or the lower-order features that constitute these right-making features.

C8.P65 As I hope is now clear, this is yet another version of the special fact view. To repeat: I think that the project of hunting for the special fact in each

metaphysical hierarchy that is the “real” reason, such that all other facts are at best evidence that the special fact obtains, is hopeless. If you want to think about whether the fact that veganism avoids promoting unnecessary suffering or the fact that it avoids promoting something cruel is Efua’s “real” reason to be vegan, or whether the fact that a salad is healthy or the fact that it contains tomato or the fact that it contains something rich in lycopene is my “real” reason to eat it, then go ahead. But I think that this would be a wild goose chase.

C8.P66 A buck-passer might try saying that it is always the most metaphysically fundamental weight-bearing facts in a hierarchy that are the “real” reasons. On this view, each buck passes down to the most fundamental facts that seem intuitively to count in favor of something, which are the special facts.

C8.P67 This is a coherent view. But it is an unappealing view. If we push the buck all the way down to the most fundamental weight-bearing facts, then we will push it to facts that are too complicated to be the objects of motivation for ordinary agents. For example, lots of ordinary people are motivated to act justly. But there are surely very few people who are motivated by (a) each person’s having the maximum degree of liberty compatible with equal liberty being granted to all and (b) social and economic inequalities’ being distributed such that they (i) are open to all under fair equality of opportunity and (ii) always benefit the least well-off, with (b) taking lexical priority over (a). Yet the most famous and influential theory of justice (Rawls 1971) says that this is what justice consists in, which entails that the fact that an act would bring about conditions (a) and (b) falls below the fact that it is just in any metaphysical hierarchy. And the fact that an act would bring about conditions (a) and (b) certainly seems to count in favor of performing it. So, if only the most fundamental weight-bearing facts are reasons and anything like Rawls’ view is correct, then someone who wants to perform an act because it is just does not count as performing it for a genuine normative reason. For her motivating reason to be a genuine normative reason, she must be motivated by a fact at least as complicated as the fact that it brings about conditions (a) and (b). But no ordinary people are motivated by this. Parallel phenomena hold for all other morally significant features—their full analyses would specify conditions that intuitively bear normative weight, but that motivate nobody. On this version of the special fact view, then, we very rarely act for genuine normative reasons.

C8.P68 This view gets even less appealing if we recall the connections between normative and motivating reasons that underpin the criticisms of motivation by rightness *de dicto* mentioned in Section 8.1. Critics of motivation by rightness *de dicto* hold that someone performs an action with full moral

worth (Markovits 2010) and is a full-fledged member of the moral community (Shoemaker 2007) only if she is motivated by facts that are genuine moral reasons. But this entails that, if only the most fundamental weight-bearing facts in a hierarchy are genuine moral reasons, then moral worth is extremely difficult to come by, and almost no one is a member of the moral community. So buck-passers' argument overgeneralizes again—this time with unexpectedly harsh evaluations of all of us.

c8.P69 The buck-passer might try to avoid such harsh verdicts by insisting that we are, in fact, motivated by the facts that are the real reasons, unbeknownst to us. But this would be a strange view of motivation. Ordinary agents who seem to act for reasons are frequently completely unaware of the most fundamental weight-bearing facts in the relevant metaphysical hierarchies. We are like Efua or Evelyn, having forgotten or never having known these facts. The buck-passer would therefore be committed to the view that it is possible for someone to be motivated by a fact to which she has no epistemic access. This is bizarre. It is very implausible that someone can be motivated by a fact of which she is completely unaware—not because it is buried deep within her subconscious, but because she has no epistemic access to it. Facts that are completely outside of our heads in this way cannot motivate us. So this strategy seems unpromising.

c8.P70 In short, buck-passers' hunt for the “real,” non-derivative reason in each metaphysical hierarchy leaves us in a pickle. We must draw implausibly sharp lines between facts at very slightly different levels of metaphysical grain, all of which pass the isolation and motivation tests, out of the (misguided) conviction that at most one of them can be a reason. To avoid a sense of arbitrariness in this task, we might try insisting that only the most fundamental weight-bearing facts in each hierarchy are the genuine reasons. But this has the equally implausible implication that very few ordinary agents ever act on genuine reasons—thus denying everyone the special evaluative statuses that buck-passers about rightness wanted to deny to people who do things because they're morally right.

c8.P71 Fortunately, though, we needn't say any of this. By embracing the view that I have defended in this paper, we can understand how multiple facts in a metaphysical hierarchy can all be reasons. Rather than passing the buck, we can share it.<sup>10</sup>

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