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Reasons as explanations

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Abstract Can a normative reason be understood as a kind of explanation? I here consider and argue against two important analyses of reasons as explanations. John Broome argues that we can analyze reasons in terms of the concepts of explanation and ought. On his view, reasons to ϕ are either facts that explain why one ought to ϕ (what he calls "perfect reasons") or facts that play a for-ϕ role in weighing explanations (what he calls "*pro tanto* reasons"). I argue against Broome's account of both perfect and *pro tanto* reasons. Other philosophers, including Joseph Raz, analyze reasons in terms of the concepts of explanation and good. On this view, some fact is a reason to ϕ if and only if that fact explains why ϕ-ing would be good in some respect, to some degree. This view avoids the objections to Broome's view, but should be rejected since not all explanations of why ϕ-ing would be good constitute reasons to ϕ.

Keywords Reasons · Explanation · Broome · Value

Some philosophers think that the concept of a reason cannot be helpfully explained in other terms. For instance, T. M. Scanlon writes:

> I will take the idea of a reason as primitive. Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favor of it. 'Counts in favor how?' one might ask. 'By providing a reason for it' seems to be the only answer.[1]

[1] Scanlon (1998, p. 17).

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Similarly, Derek Parfit writes:

> It is hard to explain the concept of a reason, or what the phrase 'a reason' means. Facts give us reasons, we might say, when they count in favour of our having some attitude, or our acting in some way. But 'counts in favor of' means roughly 'gives a reason for'. Like some other fundamental concepts, such as those involved in our thought about time, consciousness, and possibility, the concept of a reason is indefinable in the sense that it cannot be helpfully explained merely by using words.[2]

A defense of this view of reasons consists, for the most part, in a negative enterprise: that of considering attempts to explain the concept of a reason in other terms and showing how they do not succeed.

In this paper, I consider two attempts to explain the concept of a reason in other terms—specifically, in terms of the concept of *explanation* and some other concept—and I argue that they do not succeed.[3] First, I consider John Broome's attempt to explain the concept of a reason in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *ought*. Broome aims to provide an informative analysis of reasons, according to which reasons to ϕ (where "to ϕ" is some infinitival phrase, such as "to leave the room," "to intend to leave the room," or "to believe one has left the room") are either facts which explain why one ought to ϕ (what he calls "perfect reasons") or facts which play a for-ϕ-*ing* role in weighing explanations (what he calls "*pro tanto* reasons").[4] I begin (§1) by discussing Broome's account of perfect reasons, arguing that Broome must give up at least one of two main claims in his account: either his claim that if one ought to ϕ then there is a perfect reason to ϕ, or his claim that perfect reasons are a kind of normative reason. I then consider (§2) four possible interpretations of Broome's account of *pro tanto* reasons, arguing that, depending on how it is interpreted, the account comes out to be either uninformative or false.

I then turn my attention to what I think is a more promising version of a reasons-as-explanations view, defended by Joseph Raz and others, which analyzes the concept of a reason in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *good*.[5] According to this view, some fact F is a reason for A to ϕ if and only if F explains why A's ϕ-ing would be good in some respect and to some degree. I argue (§3) that this view has some advantages over Broome's view, and avoids my objections to Broome's view. However, I argue (§4) that we should reject this view. I present three arguments designed to show that not all explanations of why A's ϕ-ing would be good in some respect and to some degree are reasons for A to ϕ. I conclude (§5) that neither of these attempts to analyze reasons in terms of the concept of explanation and some other concept is successful.

[2] Parfit (2011, p. 31). See also Parfit (2001, p. 18), for a similar statement.

[3] Another influential analysis of reasons, which I won't consider here, is the analysis of reasons as *evidence* of what one ought to do, which has been defended by Daniel Star and Stephen Kearns. See Kearns and Star (2008, 2009, forthcoming), and Thomson (2008). For criticism, see Broome (2008) and Brunero (2009).

[4] Broome (2004).

[5] See Raz (1999, p. 23).

The arguments against this second version of the reason-as-explanations view are also important for debates in ethical theory about which, if any, ethical concept is more fundamental: the concept of *a reason* or the concept of *good*. As we'll see in §3, some philosophers have defended "buck-passing" accounts which take the concept of *a reason* to be the more fundamental ethical concept, which is used to explain the concept of *good*, whereas other philosophers proceed the other way around, taking the concept of *good* to be the more fundamental ethical concept in terms of which the concept of *a reason* is explained. The arguments in §4 present some difficulties for defenders of the latter strategy. Of course, this doesn't amount to a defense of buck-passing, since it could be that neither concept can be explained in terms of the other.

Before we begin, I should make clear that this paper concerns the analysis of *normative* reasons. The normative reasons for ϕ-ing are the considerations that count in favor of ϕ-ing (the "pros"), and the normative reasons against ϕ-ing are the considerations that count against ϕ-ing (the "cons"). I won't be concerned here to analyze motivating reasons—that is, the considerations for which an agent acted and which may be cited in an explanation of that agent's actions (nor to analyze explanatory reasons—the reasons *why* something is the case—more generally). It's clear that normative reasons are separable from motivating reasons. There can be a normative reason for one to do something that one never acts upon, and hence never figures in the explanation of one's actions. And, the considerations for which an agent acts need not be ones that we would place on the list of "pros".

However, one significant advantage that an account of normative reasons as explanations would have—an advantage that would be shared by both accounts considered below—is that it would show how normative reasons and explanatory reasons are related: normative reasons are just *a kind of* explanatory reason, where what is explained is some fact about what one ought to do, or some fact about what would be good in some respect and to some degree. Other things being equal, it would be nice to have an account that renders intelligible our using the term "reason" both for explanations and for the "considerations counting in favor."[6] This suggests that it might be worthwhile to investigate whether we can successfully formulate an analysis of normative reasons (henceforth "reasons") as explanations.

1

Rather than take the concept of a reason as primitive, Broome analyzes the concept of a reason in terms of two other concepts that are (at least for the purposes of his account of reasons) themselves taken as primitives: the concepts of *explanation* and *ought*.[7] On Broome's strategy, the "key to understanding the concept of a reason is to look at how facts of a particular type are explained," namely, "facts of the form

[6] See Finlay (2006, pp. 7–8), and Finlay forthcoming.

[7] Toulmin (1950, Ch. 11) also defends an analysis of reasons according to which reasons are explanations of what one ought to do. As Schroeder (2007, pp. 35–36) notes, unlike Broome's analysis, Toulmin's analysis fails to extend to reasons that are outweighed.

that P ought to ϕ, where P stands for the name of an agent and 'to ϕ' for an infinitival phrase." Broome calls these facts "ought facts."[8]

Consider an example. Let's suppose the relevant ought fact is that Amy ought to go to the library. And let's suppose that what explains why she ought to go to the library is that the library has a book she needs to complete her assignment. In this case, the fact that the library has a book she needs is both a normative reason for her to go to the library, and a fact that explains why she ought to go to the library. In this way, the fact is also an explanatory reason: it *explains why* she ought to go to the library. In considering such cases, Broome suggests that we can define one normative sense of "a reason" in terms of explanatory reasons for ought facts:

> The non-normative 'reason' (meaning explanation) slides into the normative 'ought', yielding a normative sense of 'reason' that combines the meaning of both. In this sense, a reason for you to ϕ is defined as an explanation of why you ought to ϕ. So we have a reason defined in terms of the two notions of ought and explanation.[9]

Broome calls such reasons "perfect reasons": "A perfect reason to ϕ is defined as a fact that explains why you ought to ϕ."[10]

Perfect reasons, however, are not the only kind of normative reason. The need for a second kind of normative reason is revealed in cases in which one has a reason to ϕ yet it is not the case that one ought to ϕ, perhaps because this reason to ϕ has been outweighed. Suppose Bert has one reason to go to the party (his friends will be there) but a weightier reason to stay home instead (his assignment is due tomorrow). In this case, we cannot say that the fact that his friends will be there explains why Bert ought to go to the party, since *it's not the case* that Bert ought to go to the party. (Explanations are usually understood to be factive; if we're explaining why P is the case, then P is the case.) So, we need to introduce a second kind of normative reason to accommodate reasons like Bert's reason to go to the party.

Broome calls such reasons "*pro tanto* reasons" and notes that they play a "for-ϕ role" in what he calls "weighing explanations."[11] A weighing explanation, very roughly, is an explanation that appeals to the reasons for and against ϕ-ing and to the weights of those reasons, which are in some way aggregated to determine whether one ought to ϕ, ought not to ϕ, or neither ought to ϕ nor ought not to ϕ (as in cases where the reasons on each side equal out or are incommensurable). So, in our example, the fact that Bert's friends will be at the party plays a *for-going-to-the-party* role in a weighing explanation of why Bert *ought not* go to the party. We'll consider *pro tanto* reasons and weighing explanations in §2. But it's worth noting here that, on Broome's view, some fact could be both a *pro tanto* reason *and* a perfect reason. Returning to our earlier example, the fact that the library has the book Amy needs explains why Amy ought to go to the library, and so that fact is a perfect reason. But, Broome acknowledges, there may be a "fuller weighing

[8] Broome (2004, p. 31).

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 36–42.

explanation" of why Amy ought to go to the library which specifies the weights of the reasons for and against going to the library, and, in that fuller weighing explanation, the fact that the library has the book Amy needs would play a *for-going-to-the-library* role, and hence would be a *pro tanto* reason as well.[12] So, the presence of a weighing explanation in which some fact plays a for-ϕ role doesn't preclude that fact from also being a perfect reason.

Perfect reasons to ϕ are facts that explain why one ought to ϕ. Whenever one ought to ϕ, there is some explanation of this fact, and that explanation is a perfect reason. Broome writes:

> 'You ought to ϕ' and 'There's a perfect reason for you to ϕ' are equivalent statements. That is to say, you ought to ϕ if and only if you have a perfect reason to ϕ. If there's a perfect reason for you to ϕ, this means there is an explanation of why you ought to ϕ. Conversely, if you ought to ϕ, no doubt there is an explanation of this fact; presumably no ought fact is inexplicable. Consequently, there is a perfect reason for you to ϕ.[13]

When you ought to ϕ, there will be some fact that explains *why* you ought to ϕ, and that fact is one kind of normative reason—a perfect reason.

I'll now argue against Broome's employment of the notion of a perfect reason in his analysis of the concept of a reason. I'll argue that it's not always the case that the explanation of why one ought to ϕ is a perfect reason, if we understand a perfect reason to be a kind of normative reason. (Broome himself introduces the terminology of "perfect reasons" and is entitled to say that, by definition, any explanation of why one ought to ϕ is a perfect reason. But he introduces the terminology as part of an attempt to analyze *normative* reasons, and takes perfect reasons to be *a kind of* normative reason.) Specifically, I'll argue that in cases in which one ought to ϕ, but the explanation of why one ought to ϕ is that a number of by-themselves-insufficient reasons add up to make it the case that one ought to ϕ, there is no perfect reason to ϕ, if we take perfect reasons to be normative reasons.

Consider the case of Carla. There are two reasons for Carla to go see a certain film tonight: the film stars some talented actors, and her friend Stephanie will be there. However, neither of these considerations, by themselves, would suffice to make it the case that Carla ought to go see the film. But the two facts together do suffice to make it the case that Carla ought to go. Assume, for simplicity, that these are the only two reasons for Carla to go see the film. (Plausibly, there is an implicit "weighing explanation" here, according to which the costs of going, such as the cost of the ticket or the time spent out, wouldn't be outweighed by one of these considerations alone, but would be outweighed by both together. But remember, as we noted above, the presence of a weighing explanation doesn't rule out the existence of a perfect reason.)

What's the perfect reason in this case? Broome thinks that "if you ought to ϕ, no doubt there is an explanation of this fact; presumably no ought fact is inexplicable.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Consequently, there is a perfect reason for you to ϕ."[14] So, there is a perfect reason for Carla to go. What is it? Surely the perfect reason is not the fact that the film stars talented actors. This consideration, by itself, doesn't explain why Carla ought to go see the film. (Had Stephanie not also been there, it wouldn't have been the case that Carla ought to go. So, the fact that the film stars talented actors doesn't, by itself, explain why Carla ought to go.) Similarly, surely the perfect reason is not the fact that Stephanie will be there. (Had the movie not also starred talented actors, it wouldn't have been the case that Carla ought to go. So, the fact that Stephanie will be there doesn't, by itself, explain why Carla ought to go.) If there is no fact that explains why she ought to go, then it seems that we here have an example in which someone ought to ϕ, but there is no perfect reason for her to ϕ.

But maybe the fact that explains why she ought to go is a *conjunctive fact*: the fact that the movie stars talented actors *and* Stephanie will be there. So, on this view, this conjunctive fact constitutes Carla's perfect reason to go see the film. But is this fact also a *normative reason* for Carla to go see the film? It's clear that each conjunct (that the movie stars talented actors, that Stephanie will be there) is a normative reason for Carla to go. But should we allow that, in addition to these two normative reasons, the conjunctive fact itself constitutes a third, distinct normative reason for Carla to go? Doing so would miscount the reasons in this case: intuitively, Carla has only two reasons to go see the film, not three. Since this view would be committed to giving the wrong answer about how many distinct reasons there are for Carla to go see the film, we should reject it.

Additionally, this alleged third distinct reason does not have any independent weight. Presumably, we don't want to give up on the idea that each conjunct is a normative reason for Carla to go. Now, let's suppose that we aggregate (in some way, not necessarily additive) the weights of these two reasons for Carla to go see the film, and come to some assessment of the combined weight of these two reasons. On the view being considered, the conjunctive fact constitutes a third distinct reason. But it is hard to see how this third distinct reason would carry any weight to be *added to* the aggregated weight of the two conjuncts. Allowing this would be an objectionable form of double counting. So long as we hold onto the highly plausible idea that each conjunct is a reason, and that the weights of these reasons are in some way (not necessarily additive) aggregated, it's hard to see how the conjunctive fact *could* contribute additional weight over and above the aggregated weight of the conjuncts. Rather than admit the possibility of such weightless reasons, I think we would do better to concede that this alleged reason is not really a reason.[15]

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[15] We might be tempted to allow that this conjunctive fact is a normative reason since it could guide an agent's practical deliberations in the way that normative reasons might be thought to do so. Perhaps there's a way to model Carla's deliberations so that she proceeds from this conjunctive fact to the formation of an intention to go see the film. But this, I think, doesn't provide us with sufficient grounds for thinking that the conjunctive fact is a normative reason. We might equally well be able to model Carla's deliberation so that she proceeds from some *report about* the normative reasons for going (perhaps her belief that the combined weight of the reasons for going is greater than the combined weight of the reasons against going) to the formation of an intention to go. But surely we don't want to be forced to admit that a *report about* normative reasons is itself a normative reason, simply because it figures into her practical deliberation in this way.

Let me be clear about what I'm claiming here. I'm not denying that the facts in each conjunct (that the film stars talented actors, that Stephanie will be there) are each *part* of an explanation of why Carla ought to go. And I'm not denying that these parts of an explanation can combine together to constitute a full explanation of why Carla ought to go. And I'm not denying that each part of the explanation is itself a normative reason. Rather, what I'm denying is that the full explanation—the perfect reason—is itself a normative reason. Also, I don't mean to suggest that we shouldn't continue to employ the concept of a perfect reason to ϕ (meaning by it "a fact that explains why one ought to ϕ"). I'm simply claiming that one shouldn't think that these perfect reasons are themselves one kind of normative reason.[16] Doing so simply gives the wrong answer about how many distinct normative reasons there are for Carla to go see the film. And it commits us to the existence of weightless reasons. (Note also that I'm not suggesting that conjunctive facts cannot be reasons—of course they can! The conjunctive fact that it's raining and I'm going outside is a reason for me to take my umbrella. But, in the specific case I'm considering, in which each conjunct is itself already a normative reason for Carla to go, with weights that can be aggregated, we shouldn't think that this conjunctive fact is a third, distinct normative reason for her to go.)

Broome's appeal to perfect reasons seems attractive when we reflect on cases like that of Amy above, where some fact is both a normative reason for her to go to the library and suffices to explain why she ought to go to the library. Moreover, the appeal to perfect reasons appears attractive when we reflect on cases where an ought fact is *overdetermined*—where there are several normative reasons to ϕ, each of which provides an explanation of why one ought to ϕ. For example, suppose Darren has two reasons to go to the library: the book he needs is there, and he desperately wants to run into Amy. And suppose that each of these considerations, by itself, would suffice to make it the case that Darren ought to go to the library. Here, Broome's analysis would get things right: Darren has two perfect reasons to go to the library. The fact that the book is there and the fact that Amy might be there are each normative reasons for him to go to the library, and each provides an explanation of why he ought to go. But cases like that of Carla, in which a number of by-themselves-insufficient reasons add up to make it the case that she ought to go, pose a special problem for Broome's view. Here, what explains why Carla ought to go isn't itself, as with the cases of Amy and Darren, also a normative reason; instead it's a conjunctive fact in which *each conjunct* is a normative reason.

[16] Another option for Broome would be to allow that perfect reasons could be constituted not only by natural facts, like the fact that Stephanie will be at the film, but also by fundamental ethical principles, like the principle of utility. On this view, some non-fundamental ought facts, like the fact that Carla ought to go see the film, would be explained by fundamental ought facts, like the fact that everyone ought to maximize overall utility. This view would have an advantage in having it come out that Carla's perfect reason is normative. But it would also have a disadvantage in that this fundamental ought fact wouldn't *itself* be explained, and so Broome would have to give up or modify his claim, quoted above, that "no ought fact is inexplicable." He would have to concede that it's not the case that if one ought to ϕ, there is a perfect reason to ϕ. (Even if these fundamental ought facts *are* themselves explained in some way, surely they are not explained by a normative reason.) Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this possibility, and its limitations.

In summary, Broome here faces a dilemma: he could concede that the case of Carla is a counterexample to his claim that if one ought to ϕ, then there is a perfect reason to ϕ, since Carla ought to go see the film, but no non-conjunctive fact explains why she ought to do so. Neither the fact that the movie stars talented actors, nor the fact that Stephanie will be there, explains why she ought to go. Alternatively, Broome could insist that Carla does have a perfect reason to see the film: the conjunctive fact that the movie stars talented actors and Stephanie will be there. This conjunctive fact explains why she ought to go. But, while each conjunct is clearly a normative reason, we would be miscounting the normative reasons, and allowing for the existence of weightless reasons, if we say that *this conjunctive fact itself* constitutes a third, distinct normative reason for her to go.

2

After considering reasons like Bert's reason to go to the party, Broome concludes that "besides perfect reasons, there must be reasons in another normative sense."[17] He calls such reasons "*pro tanto* reasons" and offers the following definition, which incorporates the notion of a "weighing explanation," which we'll consider below:

> My definition is this: a *pro tanto* reason for you to ϕ is a fact that plays the for-ϕ role in a weighing explanation of why you ought to ϕ, or in a weighing explanation of why you ought not to ϕ, or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that you ought to ϕ and not the case that you ought not to ϕ.[18]

As with perfect reasons, *pro tanto* reasons are defined in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *ought*. But unlike perfect reasons, what is explained by one's *pro tanto* reason to ϕ isn't, in every case, why one ought to ϕ. It might also be why one ought not to ϕ (as when that *pro tanto* reason is outweighed) or why it's neither the case that one ought to ϕ nor that one ought not to ϕ (as when the reasons equal out or are incommensurable). Additionally, there's a further difference between perfect reasons and *pro tanto* reasons: whereas citing a perfect reason is sufficient to explain the relevant ought fact, citing a *pro tanto* reason isn't sufficient to explain the relevant ought fact; rather, the *pro tanto* reason *plays a role in* a larger weighing explanation that suffices to explain the relevant ought fact.

These weighing explanations are based on a physical analogy with weights on a scale. Consider a two-pan beam balance weighing scale, like the one Lady Justice carries. If we want to explain why the right-side-pan is lower than the left-side-pan, we would point out that the objects on the right-side-pan have a combined weight greater than that of the objects on the left-side-pan. Similarly, if we want to explain why the right-side-pan is higher than the left-side-pan, we would point out that the objects on the right-side-pan have a combined weight less than that of the objects on the left-side-pan. And if the pans equal out, we would explain this by pointing out that the combined weight of the objects on the right-side-pan is equal to the

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[18] *Ibid.*

combined weight of the objects on the left-side-pan. In the analogy, the relevant ought facts are analogous to the observations of which pan on the scale, if any, tilts higher, and *pro tanto* reasons are analogous to the objects on the pans, each carrying a weight. In a weighing explanation of the relevant ought fact, the explanation will appeal to various reasons and their metaphorical "weights" just as the explanation of the tilt of the scales appeals to the objects in the pans and their physical weights. Though he recognizes the limits to this analogy, Broome finds it to be instructive for thinking about how *pro tanto* reasons figure into explanations of ought facts.[19]

There seem to be four ways to interpret Broome's account of *pro tanto* reasons. On a first interpretation, Broome is presenting an analysis of reasons according to which reasons are defined as *considerations that play a for-ϕ role*, and then noting that they often play this role in weighing explanations. On this view, Broome's definition should be understood as:

(*PT1*) Some fact F is a *pro tanto* reason for you to ϕ iff F plays a for-ϕ role.

However, merely saying that reasons to ϕ are facts that *play a for-ϕ role* doesn't sound all that different from saying that reasons to ϕ are considerations that *count in favor of ϕ-ing*. And, more importantly, it doesn't seem to be *any more informative* than saying this. Recall that both Scanlon and Parfit were worried that we didn't have any independent grasp on what it is for a consideration to count in favor of ϕ-ing. As Parfit puts the point, "'counts in favor of' *means* roughly 'gives a reason for'." But it seems that Parfit could equally well make the same point regarding "plays a for-ϕ role" which also seems to mean roughly, "is a reason for ϕ-ing." It doesn't seem as though we're providing an analysis of reasons in terms of another concept of which we have some independent grasp.[20]

On a second interpretation, Broome is defining reasons as considerations that play a for-ϕ role *in weighing explanations*.[21] He isn't merely defining reasons as considerations that play a for-ϕ role, and then saying that they sometimes play this

[19] We need to consider the possibility of incommensurability between reasons, and the possibility that the "weight" of reasons cannot be expressed in a precise number (like a measure of kilograms or pounds), and the possibility that the combined weight of reasons may not be a simple matter of adding together the weights of individual reasons. Broome is aware that these possibilities would be neglected if weighing explanations employing *pro tanto* reasons were taken to be analogous in *every* way to the physical weighing explanations on a two-pan beam balance weighing scale. See Broome (2004, pp. 36–38).

[20] For this point, see the discussion in Kearns and Star (2008, pp. 43–44). (They also consider a possible response to this objection drawn from Broome's book manuscript and object to it.) It's also worth noting here that Broome's analysis of *perfect reasons* into two component parts—explanation and ought facts—doesn't seem vulnerable to this objection. We *do* have an independent grasp on the concept of explanation, since we employ that concept in other contexts, as when the explanandum is some non-normative fact, and an independent grasp on the concept of ought.

[21] Recall the passage cited above: "My definition is this: a *pro tanto* reason for you to ϕ is a fact that plays the for-ϕ role in a weighing explanation of why you ought to ϕ, or...." And later (p. 41) he writes: "The definition [of a *pro tanto* reason] specifies just what counting in favor of amounts to. To count in favor of ϕ is to play a particular role in an explanation of why you ought to ϕ. Counting in favor of is sometimes thought to be the basic normative notion. But it cannot be, because it is complex. It incorporates the two elements of normativity and explanation. The notion of a reason has the same complexity." These passages both suggest the interpretation that follows in the text below.

role in weighing explanations. Rather, he is defining *pro tanto* reasons in terms of the role that facts play in these explanations:

> (*PT2*) Some fact F is a *pro tanto* reason for you to ϕ iff F plays the for-ϕ role in a weighing explanation of why you ought to ϕ, or in a weighing explanation of why you ought not to ϕ, or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that you ought to ϕ and not the case that you ought not to ϕ.

But the problem here is that *PT2* is false. It's not the case that some fact is a *pro tanto* reason *only if* it plays a role in the explanation of an ought-fact. It is indeed true that we are often in the business of providing explanations, and sometimes the explanandum is a fact of the form "P ought to ϕ," and it's appropriate to give a weighing explanation employing *pro tanto* reasons. But, it's highly implausible to suggest that the context of explanation is the only context in which *pro tanto* reasons appear. Consider, for instance, the context of deliberation. Suppose I'm deciding what shirt to wear to the party, and note that one consideration counting in favor of wearing the bright orange shirt is that people would notice me. The fact that people would notice me is a *pro tanto* reason for wearing the shirt. But that fact isn't playing a role in any explanation here. It's not that we already have some ought-fact explanandum—like its being the case that I ought to wear it, or its being the case that I ought not to wear it—and this fact is brought in as part of an explanation of this ought-fact. Rather, I'm simply trying to figure out what to wear, and this fact is playing a role (a *for-wearing-it* role) in my attempt determine what to wear. Here we have an example of a *pro tanto* reason playing a for-ϕ role, but *not* a for-ϕ role in the *explanation of some ought-fact*.[22]

But perhaps there is a third way to interpret Broome's view that gets around this objection. Broome himself tells us that his talk of explanation can be equivalently expressed in terms of the concept of *making it the case*. He writes: "By 'explain' I mean the inverse of 'because,' so 'A explains B' means the same as 'B is so because A is so.' We may also say, equivalently, 'A makes it the case that B.'"[23] In light of such remarks, we could interpret Broome as analyzing *pro tanto* reasons in terms of the concepts of *making it the case* and *ought*:

> (*PT3*) Some fact F is a *pro tanto* reason for you to ϕ iff F plays the for-ϕ role in making it the case that you ought to ϕ, or in making it the case that you ought not to ϕ, or in making it the case that it's not the case that you ought to ϕ and not the case that you ought not to ϕ.

That would be a straightforward way of replacing the epistemological language of explanation with the metaphysical language of making-it-the-case, while staying as close to *PT2* as possible. Since this account of reasons is given in terms of the making-it-the-case relation, it can allow that reasons exist in both the "backward looking" context of explanation, and the "forward looking" context of deliberation.

The main problem here, however, is that the central idea in this analysis of reasons—specifically, the idea of playing a for-ϕ role in making some ought fact the

[22] This point is made in Kearns and Star (2008, p. 41).

[23] Broome (2008, p. 100).

case—is not easily understood. It seems we could parse this idea into two components: first, the idea of making some ought fact the case, and, second, the idea of doing so in a certain way: by playing a for-ϕ role. As we've already discussed, any attempt to analyze reasons merely as "facts playing a for-ϕ role" will encounter Scanlon and Parfit's worries about the analysis being uninformative. So, much rests on this first component: that *pro tanto* reasons play a for-ϕ role *in making some ought fact the case*. (I'll assume here, with Broome, that a reason can play a role in *making* some ought fact the case only if that ought fact is the case.[24])

But it's not clear that reasons always do play a role in making some ought fact the case. Let's again consider reasons that are outweighed, like Bert's reason to go to the party. Here's our question: does Bert's reason to go to the party—namely, the fact that his friends will be there—play a role in making it the case that he ought to stay home instead? On a fairly straightforward understanding of this question, we should answer, "No." After all, it would have been the case that he ought to stay home (in order to complete his assignment) even if his friends had not been at the party. (Moreover, since the fact that his friends will be at the party is a reason *not* to stay home, it *couldn't* play a role in making it the case that he *ought to* stay home—it's pushing in the other direction.) So, the fact that Bert's friends were at the party doesn't play a role in making it the case that he ought to stay home. So, *PT3* is false.[25]

However, there might also be a temptation to answer this question, "Yes." The fact that Bert's friends are at the party does make a difference to *how the balance of reasons stands*, and how the balance of reasons stands determines what Bert ought

[24] Since Broome thinks something can play a role in explaining P only if P is the case, and since the "explaining" and "making it the case" formulations are supposed to be equivalent, he would also think that something can play a role in making P the case only if P is the case.

[25] There are other possible analyses of reasons using the concept of *making it the case* and ought. Here's one: some fact F is a reason for one to ϕ if and only if F would make it the case that one ought to ϕ were there no reasons not to ϕ. This view seems plausible when applied to our example: the fact that Bert's friends are at the party would make it the case that he ought to go, were there no reasons not to go. I don't have space to consider this view here, but it's clear that much depends on how we understand the counterfactual. In the context of a debate about moral explanations, Nicholas Sturgeon (1985) observed that, in considering such counterfactuals, we can't simply hold constant the natural facts and change the normative ones. (Consider his example: "If Hitler weren't evil, then ...". To consider a world in which Hitler weren't evil, we'd have to consider a world in which his motives, intentions, and actions are vastly different from his actual motives, intentions, and actions.) If Sturgeon is right, when we consider, "if there were no reasons not to ϕ..." we'd have to imagine the natural facts differently. But problems loom, since if the facts were different, it could be that there's no reason *to* ϕ. Here's an example. As a child, I had a terrifying experience that wasn't harmful apart from the terror produced, after which an rather unsympathetic adult told me, "Whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger," suggesting that there's at least one reason to undergo a terrifying experience: it builds character. Suppose he was right; suppose that the character-building effects of being terrified constitute a reason to undergo a terrifying experience, though it's a reason that's vastly outweighed by the reasons not to do so – namely, by all those features of the experience that make it terrifying. But if we consider "if there were no reason *not* to undergo the experience" we'd have to consider a world in which there were no terrifying features of the experience, and hence a world in which there would be no such features to build character. In this example, there's a reason to have the terrifying experience (it builds character), but it need not be the case that if there were no reasons *not* to have the experience, it would be the case that I ought to. This is so because the reason *to* have the experience depends for its existence upon the existence of the reasons *not* to have it, specifically, upon the existence of the terror-inducing properties of the experience. An analysis along these lines would have to present some way of understanding the counterfactual to avoid these worries. But, as I said, I don't have space to consider such views here.

to do. So, there is a sense in which it seems right to say that the fact that Bert's friends will be at the party plays a role in making it the case that Bert ought to stay home. Consider again Broome's weighing scale analogy. The presence of some object in one of the pans will play some role in explaining why the scales have the particular arrangement that they do. And that particular arrangement of the scales is what determines whether the right side is lower, the left side is lower, or the two sides equal out. Analogously, *pro tanto* reasons make a difference to the balance of reasons, and this is what determines whether one ought to ϕ, ought not to ϕ, or neither, as in cases of a tie or incommensurability. In this way, Bert's reason to go to the party does play a role in making it the case that he ought to stay home.

If this is the way that *pro tanto* reasons play a role in making some ought fact the case, it should be explicitly reflected in our analysis of *pro tanto* reasons:

> (*PT4*) Some fact F is a *pro tanto* reason for you to ϕ iff F plays the for-ϕ role in making the balance of reasons such that you ought to ϕ, or in making the balance of reasons such that you ought not to ϕ, or in making the balance of reasons such that it's not the case that you ought to ϕ and not the case that you ought not to ϕ.

But the problem now is that, in speaking of "the balance of reasons", we are employing in the *analysans* the very concept we are supposed to be analyzing. Moreover, there isn't an obvious way of recasting this analysis to avoid making of use of the concept of a reason there, since what we're aiming to describe is that arrangement—analogous to the arrangement of the weighing scales—which determines the relevant ought fact, and there seems to be no other way to do this than to speak of the "balance of reasons." This is especially problematic since we are considering the component of Broome's analysis—that of *playing a role in making it the case that some ought fact obtains*—that was supposed to be the informative component, since, as we've seen, the other component—that of *playing a for-ϕ role*—isn't itself informative.

In summary, it seems as though Broome's account of reasons, depending on how it is interpreted, is either uninformative or false. *PT1* and *PT4* are not informative. *PT2* and *PT3* are false.

3

If we want to present an analysis of reasons as explanations, I think we would do better to analyze reasons in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *good*. We could take the concept of *good* to be the more fundamental ethical concept and use that concept, along with the concept of *explanation*, to explain the concept of *a reason*, as follows:

> (*R*) A fact F is a reason for A to ϕ if and only if F explains why A's ϕ-ing would be good in some respect and to some degree.[26]

[26] The phrase "in some respect and in some degree" is borrowed from Raz (1999, p. 23), who presents a view along these lines.

On this view, the fact that Bert's friends are at the party explains why Bert's going to the party would be good in some respect (namely, in that it would allow for valuable interaction with friends) and to some degree.[27] But the fact that he has an assignment due tomorrow explains why it would be good in another respect and to some (greater) degree for him to stay home instead. As the example shows, Bert's going to the party could be good in some respect and to some degree without being *good overall.*

This analysis is—to borrow an apt term from Jonathan Way—a *values-first* view.[28] It uses the concept of value (or, equivalently, goodness) to explain the concept of a reason. It therefore contrasts with, and isn't compatible with, the "buck-passing" account of value, which uses the concept of a reason to analyze the concept of value.[29] Of course, if you're inclined toward a buck-passing account, then *R* won't seem very appealing to you. However, if you're persuaded by the various objections presented against buck-passing, perhaps those concerning the "wrong kind of reasons" problem, then there isn't any such obstacle to your accepting an analysis along the lines of *R*.[30]

There is, of course, precedent for a value-first approach. In *Principia Ethica*, Moore took *good* to be a fundamental concept, which, though it couldn't be defined in terms of other concepts, could be used *to define* other concepts, including the concept of ought. He argued that what one ought to do was, by definition, to do what produced the most good.[31] Like Moore's view, *R* takes *good* to be a fundamental concept—or, at least, a *more* fundamental concept than the concept of a reason. But *R* also clearly differs from Moore's view. For one thing, we are analyzing the concept of *a reason,* not the concept of *ought*. For another, in speaking, in *R*, of *A*'s ϕ-ing being *good*, we need not be speaking of A's ϕ-ing as *producing the most good*. After all, it is possible (and sometimes desirable, according to non-consequentialists) to value some option even when that option doesn't produce the most good. So, *R* can remain neutral in the dispute between consequentialists and their opponents. This seems to be a virtue of the view. It is very doubtful, after all, that such substantive ethical debates will be settled by an analysis of ethical concepts, like *good*, *reason* or *ought*.[32]

It's plausible to think of the difference between consequentialism and non-consequentialism as involving different conceptions of the relationship between the

[27] "Good in some respect" includes both final and instrumental value. Bert's enjoying friendship would have final value, while his attending the party, which is a means to enjoying friendship, would have instrumental value. There are of course other senses of "good" not relevant to this view: for instance, when we speak of some particularly efficient thief as being a "good thief," or his particularly efficient act of stealing as "a good theft," we don't want to say that the efficiency of the act constitutes *a reason* for him to steal. His stealing may lack any final or instrumental value. If *R* is to get off the ground, it must be value in this sense that's relevant. Thanks to Jonathan Way for helping me clarify this point.

[28] Way, forthcoming.

[29] For an overview of the history of buck-passing analyses, and some of the advantages and disadvantages of those accounts, see Suikkanen (2009).

[30] For some papers critical of buck-passing, see Heuer (2006) and Väyrynen (2006). For discussion of the "wrong kind of reason" problem in particular, see Rabinowicz and Ronnow-Rasmussen (2004, 2006), Olson (2004), Stratton-Lake (2005), Skorupski (2007), Danielson and Olson (2007), and Lang (2008).

[31] See for instance Moore (1954, pp. 146–148).

[32] Proponents of *reasons-first* views have recognized such neutrality as a virtue of their views. For instance, in his presentation of the buck-passing account of value, T.M. Scanlon is careful to show how his account is compatible with both consequentialist and deontological views. See Scanlon (1998, pp. 98).

value of an option and the *values* (and probabilities) *of the outcomes* associated with those options. Whereas consequentialists, roughly, see the value of an option as a matter of how well it *promotes* valuable outcomes, non-consequentialists see the value of an option as being determined by something else instead, perhaps by how well that option would *honor* the values at stake (Indeed, this is just a very quick sketch of how Philip Pettit, in much greater detail, draws the distinction between consequentialism and non-consequentialism.). For example, let's suppose (borrowing Pettit's example) that what matters most in life is the enjoyment of personal loyalties. And suppose one could best promote the enjoyment of personal loyalties by engaging in journalistic and political activity related to this end, though pursuing this option would strain one's relations with family and friends. Consequentialists would think the option highly valuable, given that it is the best way to promote the valuable outcomes. But, since that option involves failing to honor the value of personal loyalties at home, a non-consequentialist might not think the option is highly valuable. Much more could be said to fill out this very rough sketch of how consequentialists and their opponents determine the value of options.[33] But even this rough sketch, borrowed from Pettit, might be a controversial way of drawing the distinction between consequentialism and non-consequentialism. I don't wish to defend this way of drawing the distinction here. I mention it only to show that there might be a way for a defender of R to speak of the value of A's ϕ-ing in a way that isn't entirely controlled by how well A's ϕ-ing *promotes valuable outcomes*. This compatibility with non-consequentialist views would provide R with an advantage over Moore's view. If R *can't* be made compatible with non-consequentialist views, then we'll have yet another reason for rejecting it.

More recent defenses of value-first views can be found in the work of Judith Jarvis Thomson and Philippa Foot, though these views are quite remote from the approach suggested here.[34] Closer to home is recent work by Joseph Raz and Stephen Finlay.[35] Before objecting to the value-first version of the reasons-as-

[33] Pettit (1991, p. 232), presents a definition of consequentialism: "Returning now to the definition of consequentialism, we can identify two propositions which consequentialists generally defend:

1. Every prognosis for an option, every way the world may be as the result of a choice of option, has a value that is determined, through perhaps not up to uniqueness, by the valuable properties realized there: determined by how far it is a happy world, a world in which liberty is respected, a world where nature thrives, and so on for different valuable properties...

2. Every option, every possibility which an agent can realize or not, has its value fixed by the values of its prognoses: its value is a function of the values of its different prognoses, a function of the values associated with the different ways it may lead the world to be."

[34] Thomson (2008) analyzes reasons as evidence of what one ought to do and then analyzes oughts in terms of evaluatives. In a different way, Foot (2003) takes what she calls "natural goodness" to be fundamental and argues that it constitutes part of practical rationality.

[35] For Raz, the "classical approach" to agency, which he defends, includes the thesis that "reasons are facts in virtue of which actions are good in some respect and to some degree." Raz (1999, p. 23). Finlay presents a semantic theory which holds that that "[t]he meaning of 'a normative reason to X for ϕ' is *a fact that would answer a query as to why X ought to ϕ/it would be good that X ϕ*." Finlay (2006, p. 8). See also Finlay forthcoming. Finlay's account, which is developed in greater detail in his unpublished book manuscript, *Confusion of Tongues*, ultimately reduces the normative to the non-normative, since the concept of a reason is understood terms of the concept of good, which itself is understood in non-normative terms – specifically, in terms of the promotion of ends.

explanations view, I'll first note several advantages it has over Broome's view, especially with regard to the objections presented above and elsewhere.

First, it holds the advantage of simplicity (whatever that's worth). Whereas Broome presents a disjunctive account—according to which reasons to ϕ are either facts which explain why one ought to ϕ (perfect reasons) *or* facts which play a role in weighing explanations (*pro tanto* reasons)—this analysis is not disjunctive. All normative reasons are accounted for *in the same way* in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *good*.[36] Of course, Broome's analysis is disjunctive for a reason: the account of perfect reasons he gives cannot extend to outweighed reasons like Bert's reason to go to the party, and so needs to be supplemented with the account of *pro tanto* reasons. But since *R* can extend to outweighed reasons, as I'll explain below, we are not similarly pushed towards a disjunctive account.

Second, *R* presents an intuitive rendering what normative reasons are. Imagine that Bert has written out a list of the pros and cons of going to the party and encounters someone who is unfamiliar with this practice. He might explain what's he doing by saying, "The facts listed in this column explain why going would be a good thing to do and the facts listed in that column explain why going would be a bad thing to do." This is a natural way of explaining what normative reasons are.

Third, the analysis of reasons easily extends to outweighed reasons. Bert's reason to go to the party (that his friends will be there) explains why going would be good, even though there are other facts that explain why going would be bad. So long as we recognize the possibility that something can be good in some respect and to some degree without being *good overall*, we can extend our analysis to outweighed reasons.[37] A pleasant vacation at an expensive resort is good insofar as it is pleasant, but bad insofar as it is expensive. And if the expense is significant enough, we would say that the vacation was good in some respect (insofar as it was pleasant) but not good overall.

Fourth, the analysis is an informative one since it appeals to two concepts (*explanation* and *good*) on which we have an independent grasp, and the concept of a reason doesn't appear anywhere in the *analysans*. It therefore doesn't encounter some of the difficulties I raised for Broome's account, on certain interpretations, in §2.

4

Jonathan Way has objected to values-first views, like *R*, by challenging the right-to-left direction of the biconditional; he points to cases in which *A* has a reason to ϕ but there would be no value in A's ϕ-ing.[38] Way's counterexamples concern reasons to

[36] Kearns and Star take this to be an advantage that their analysis of reasons (according to which reasons to ϕ are evidence one ought to ϕ) has over Broome's. See 2008, p. 45. *R* would share this advantage. Also, Schroeder (2007, pp. 35–36), has objected that Broome's account implausibly identifies two senses of "a normative reason" where it seems that there is only one. I won't discuss Schroeder's objections here. But it is clear that *R* wouldn't be subject to these objections since there is a single sense of "a normative reason" identified by *R*.

[37] Raz (1999, *ibid*).

[38] Way, forthcoming.

favor. Way asks us to consider a society in which wealth is distributed equally, but everyone in that society is poor. One reason to favor this distribution is that it is one in which wealth is distributed equally. But, Way contends, there is no value in one's *favoring* such a distribution, not even value in some respect and to some degree. I instead intend to challenge the left-to-right direction of the biconditional, by pointing to cases in which there would be value in A's ϕ-ing, but A doesn't have a reason to ϕ. I'll here present three related objections.

First, some philosophers have defended a "reason implies can" principle, according to which if A cannot ϕ, then it's not the case that A has a reason to ϕ.[39] But, of course, even if A's ϕ-ing is impossible, we can still explain what would be *valuable* about A's ϕ-ing. Even though I can't travel to Berkeley to attend today's departmental colloquium, there's an explanation of why my doing so would be valuable: my doing so would allow me to hear an excellent talk and philosophical exchange. Of course, not all philosophers endorse "reasons implies can," and, among those who do, there's room for disagreement about the particular conception of possibility to be employed in the principle. But if a version of the "reason implies can" principle is correct, then we'll have shown that R is false; it's not the case that if some fact explains why A's ϕ-ing would be valuable, then that fact is a reason for A to ϕ.[40]

Second, some philosophers have argued that a certain connection to deliberation or motivation is necessary for something to be a reason. But such a connection to deliberation or motivation *doesn't* seem necessary for something to constitute an explanation of value. Let's consider some examples. Niko Kolodny, giving expression to John Searle's slogan that "you have to be able to reason with reasons," has recently defended the following

> Generalized Internalism Requirement: That p is a reason for A to R only if it is possible for A to *reason* from the content of the recognition that p is a reason for A to R to R-ing."[41]

This requirement, he notes, is accepted by *both* internalists and externalists about practical reasons, including both Bernard Williams and Derek Parfit. Other philosophers have argued that reasons must bear some connection to *motivation*, at least motivation insofar as one is rational. For instance, Christine Korsgaard has argued that practical reasons must be "capable of motivating rational persons."[42] But it doesn't seem to be the case that a fact F can *explain the value* of A's ϕ-ing only if A is capable of reasoning from F, nor only if F would motivate A to ϕ insofar as A is rational. In other words, the constraints on reasons defended by Kolodny, Korgaard, and others don't seem to be constraints on explanations of value.

[39] For a defense of "reason implies can," see Streumer (2007). For criticism, see Heuer (2010).

[40] Broome's view wouldn't be subject to this objection, since he analyses reasons in terms of the concepts of explanation and ought. If some "ought implies can" principle is in place, then it wouldn't be the case that one ought to ϕ when ϕ-ing is impossible. So, there wouldn't be an explanation, of any sort, of why one ought to ϕ when ϕ-ing is impossible. So, there wouldn't be a reason to ϕ when ϕ-ing is impossible.

[41] Kolodny (2005, p. 548).

[42] Korsgaard (1986, p. 11).

Consider the following example introduced by Mark Schroeder, for a different purpose.[43] Nate likes successful surprise parties thrown in his honor but detests unsuccessful surprise parties, and there is a surprise party waiting for him next door that he doesn't know about. Is the fact that there's a surprise party next door a reason for him to go next door? If the above constraints on reasons are correct, it's not. His recognition of the fact that there's a surprise party in the next room wouldn't motivate him to go into the next room. Given that he detests unsuccessful surprise parties, he'd be motivated instead to stay away (He could, of course, be motivated to go next door when his friend tells him *there is* a reason to go next door but doesn't say what that reason is. But we're here concerned with whether the fact that *there's a surprise party next door* would motivate him insofar as he's rational.). Likewise, it doesn't seem as though Nate could *reason* from this fact to his going next door, given that he detests unsuccessful surprise parties. I don't see any way of characterizing his proceeding from his current desires and his belief that there's a surprise party next door to his going next door, as an instance of *reasoning*.[44] But note that there's no question here about there being in *value* in Nate's going next door; the fact that there's a surprise party next door (that will be successful) explains what's valuable about his going next door.

Third, some philosophers have denied the existence of pragmatic reasons for belief. In their view, the reasons for believing that P are exhausted by the evidence that P.[45] Alleged pragmatic reasons for belief—like the considerations Pascal presents, in his famous wager, for belief in God—are not really reasons for belief. Some of these philosophers concede that the pragmatic benefits of a belief that P may be reasons for one *to bring it about that one believes* that P, but maintain that these benefits don't constitute reasons *to believe* that P. But, of course, none of these philosophers would deny these benefits *explain what's valuable* (in some respect and to some degree) about one's believing that P. If these philosophers are right, then we have a counterexample to *R*: some fact about the merely pragmatic benefits of believing that P explains why believing that P is valuable (in some respect and to some degree) but such facts are not reasons to believe that P.[46]

It's not controversial that a belief can have pragmatic value, where this doesn't depend on the extent to which it is supported by the evidence. For instance, my belief that I'm handsome has value insofar as it promotes both my self-confidence and happiness, even when this belief isn't well-supported by the evidence. But this pragmatic value is the *wrong kind of value* for establishing a reason to believe that

[43] Schroeder (2007, pp. 165–166). Schroeder believes that the example is one in which *there is* a reason for Nate to go next door, and so he would reject these internalist restrictions.

[44] We'll assume here that there's no other desire in Nate's subjective motivational set, such as a concern to be grateful to those who went through all the trouble of organizing the party, that could combine with his belief that there's a surprise party next door, to allow for a line of practical reasoning to issue in his going next door.

[45] For an excellent recent discussion of these issues, see Shah (2006).

[46] Thanks to Daniel Star for this point. There may be a way to amend the reasons-as-explanation view to meet this objection. For instance, Stephen Finlay (forthcoming, esp. §5.) understands reasons for belief as, roughly, explanations of why believing P would promote the constitutive aim of belief – that is, the aim of believing P if and only if P is true. I won't have the space to consider this view here.

I'm handsome, if these skeptics about pragmatic reasons for belief are correct. (In contrast, the *epistemic value* of a belief's being well-supported by the evidence is the *right* kind of value for establishing a reason to believe that I'm handsome.)

Each of these three objections to *R* relies upon a controversial premise—the "reason implies can" principle, the internalist restrictions on reasons, and the denial of the existence of pragmatic reasons for belief—that I've haven't defended in this paper. Since I lack the space to provide such defenses here, I'll limit myself to observing that a number of philosophers have found them to be plausible, and if any of these three premises are correct, we have good reason to reject *R*.

Of course, one option for the defender of *R* would be to amend the view to accommodate these objections. One could say, for instance, that *A*'s reasons to ϕ are constituted only by those explanations of why *A*'s ϕ-ing is valuable (in some respect and to some degree) where *A*'s ϕ-ing is possible, *A*'s ϕ-ing bears the appropriate relation to *A*'s deliberation and motivation, and *A*'s ϕ-ing has the "right kind" of value. But this rightly strikes us as being *ad hoc*. There's no reason for introducing these modifications, other than to save the view. Nothing about the concepts of *explanation* or *value* helps explain why these restrictions on reasons should be in place. Contrast this with Broome's view, which analyzes reasons in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *ought*, and with Kearns and Star's view, which analyzes reasons in terms of the concepts of *evidence* and *ought*. They have a straightforward explanation for why these restrictions on reasons should be in place: *similar restrictions are in place for "oughts."* For instance, if some "ought implies can" principle holds, and reasons are understood in terms of what one ought to do, then it's plausible to think some "reasons implies can" principle would hold as well. Additionally, it's plausible to think that *both* "oughts" and reasons must bear some internal relation to deliberation and motivation, and that pragmatic considerations aren't relevant to determining what one ought, or has reason, to believe. In short, both Broome's view and Kearns and Star's view can explain these restrictions on reasons, since reasons are analyzed in terms of "oughts" and similar restrictions hold for "oughts."[47] But no similar explanation can be offered by the amended version of *R*.

5

In summary, I've argued against Broome's analysis of reasons in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *ought*. I've presented objections to both his account of perfect reasons and his account of *pro tanto* reasons. Against his account of perfect reasons, I've argued that he must give up either his claim that if one ought to ϕ, then there is a perfect reason to ϕ, or his claim that perfect reasons are a kind of normative reason. Against his account of *pro tanto* reasons, I've considered several ways of understanding the account, arguing that it comes out to be either

[47] The claims made here on behalf of the Kearns and Star view would not be endorsed by Kearns and Star themselves, since they reject "reasons imply can" (2009, 235–236). Nonetheless, I think this line of thought would be open to defenders of the reasons-as-evidence thesis, as well as defenders of Broome's reasons-as-explanations view.

uninformative or false. I've also considered and argued against an analysis of reasons in terms of the concepts of *explanation* and *good*. Although this analysis would have several advantages over Broome's, it ultimately cannot make sense of some plausible theses about reasons, including the "reason implies can" principle, certain motivational and deliberative restrictions on reasons, and the claims that only evidence provides reasons for believing that P.

In conclusion, neither of these attempts to analyze reasons in terms of the concept of explanation and some other concept is successful. Perhaps there is yet another version of the reason-as-explanations view that could be developed. I hope that this paper points to some problems that any such view would need to avoid. But I also think we should have increased confidence in the non-reductionist view—the view articulated in the quotations from Scanlon and Parfit at the start of this paper—when we see the difficulties facing these accounts of reasons as explanations.

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