

# Reasons, Dispositions, and Value

Aaron P. Elliott

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss an objection to Buck-Passing (BP) accounts of value, such as Reasons Fundamentalism. Buck-Passing views take value to be derivative of or reducible to reasons. The objection is that since there can be value in possible worlds in which there are no reasons, value must not be ontologically derivative of reasons. Thus, BP is false. In this paper, I show that by accepting a dispositionalist revision, BP can allow such worlds while maintaining that reasons are interestingly prior to value, and without having to adopt any controversial metaphysics. I show this by exploring the debate over the nature of dispositions, identifying the diverse resources BP can appeal to. The paper proceeds as follows. I first explain BP. Next, I discuss a few versions of the challenge, settling on what seems to be the strongest form. Following this, I show that on many accounts of dispositions, while we should accept that particular instances of dispositions are prior to their particular manifestations, we should also accept that there is a sense in which dispositions are dependent on their manifestations. This provides BP with resources to respond to the challenge: BP can accept a dispositional revision, without committing to a theory of dispositions. Finally, I will respond to two objections. The first is about whether there are dispositions with impossible manifestations, contrary to my thesis that dispositions depend on their manifestations. The second is about whether there could be value where it would be impossible for that value to give reasons.

Before beginning, there is a methodological point to address about how much must be shown in order to vindicate BP as a contending metaethical view. To show that it is coherent I need only show that there is some consistent position on which value is ontologically derivative of reasons. While this would technically be enough to respond to the objection in its strongest form, showing *only* this much should be cold comfort to the Buck-Passer. Instead, success for this

argument comes in degrees: the wider the range of metaphysical views compatible with BP, the more successful. Thus, my aim is to show how neutral BP can be. But complete neutrality is not attainable. For starters, we are constrained by what the Buck-Passer would accept (we aren't concerned with neutrality on the primitiveness of value), but this is not surprising. But at other points BP may be forced to make certain commitments, or more likely, forced to accept a disjunction of sets of commitments. But this is acceptable, and as mentioned above, the more disjuncts the better. At the end of this paper, I will assess how accommodating BP can be.

## 2. Buck-Passing

Buck-passing accounts of value take value to be derivative of reasons. To be valuable is to have certain features that provide reasons to respond in certain ways. The central commitment is to the *“Positive thesis* — for X to be good is for X to have properties that give us reason to have a certain pro-attitude towards X,”<sup>1</sup> though views in this family may also hold other peripheral commitments. They may reduce reasons to some other normative element (such as virtue or ought-explanations) or they may take reasons to be normatively primitive. They may propose a naturalist reduction of reasons, or endorse non-naturalism. They may hold that value does not provide reasons (the negative thesis), and they may accept metaphysical quietism. Some, e.g. Schroeder<sup>2</sup> and Parfit (circa 2011),<sup>3</sup> reject the “negative thesis” (that “goodness itself is never reason providing — that is, the fact that X is good is never a reason to care about X”<sup>4</sup>); for instance, Parfit says that value can give “derivative reasons.”<sup>5</sup> Schroeder rejects non-naturalism,

1. Stratton-Lake 2013, 77.

2. Schroeder 2007, 81.

3. Parfit 2011, 31 and 38. Parfit later (2017, 211) accepts the negative thesis in light of arguments from Stratton-Lake (2017, 82–95).

4. Stratton-Lake 2013, 77.

5. For example, the badness of an outcome could give a reason not to perform it, but this reason would not *count in addition to* the reason not to perform it

advocating a reduction of reasons to what promotes desires. Scanlon<sup>6</sup> and Parfit, on the other hand, argue for non-naturalism. Scanlon accepts metaphysical quietism, but others do not.

There is some ambiguity about whether BP is supposed to be a conceptual thesis or a metaphysical thesis. Schroeder explicitly states that he is talking about analysis of properties, not concepts, and so is expressing a view about metaphysical reduction or constitution.<sup>7</sup> Scanlon at times indicates properties rather than concepts, but at others he is less clear. Stratton-Lake talks about properties. Parfit sometimes talks in terms of concepts, and sometimes he talks about properties and facts about reasons. As such, we can present two versions of the view. One version is the Weak View, which holds that value and related concepts (e.g. goodness) are to be understood in terms of, or reduced to, the concept of reason. This view is silent on any relations between properties. The other is the Strong View, which holds that value and related *properties* (e.g. goodness) are metaphysically reducible to reasons. Priority of concepts may be interesting and important, but I expect people to agree that metaphysical priority is more interesting, since it is less likely to be a contingent linguistic fact.<sup>8</sup>

Before starting, I should quickly address the attractions of the view, to show why it is a position worth saving from the objection. BP has two

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given by the fact that the action would cause pain. Because the normative importance of the badness is inherited from the pain, the reasons that it can supply borrow their strength from the reasons-from-pain, so they cannot “collaborate” as considerations for or against a given action.

6. Scanlon 1998, 17; 97; see also Scanlon 2014, 34.

7. Schroeder 2007, 64 and 72.

8. There are different ways to think about concepts, and one way has conceptual connections entail metaphysical connections. On this view of concepts, if the “Strong View” is false, the “Weak View” must also be false by modus tollens (and so switching the monikers would be better). But this is not the sense of concepts employed here. The Weak View involves conceptual priority in the way that “atomic” is conceptually prior to “sub-atomic.” This does not entail that the atomic is metaphysically prior to the sub-atomic, and is (correctly) compatible with the reverse metaphysical priority. Of course, someone who accepts the Strong View may also accept the Weak View, but they need not, and I will treat them as alternatives.

main advantages.<sup>9</sup> First, it establishes a clear connection between the evaluative and the narrowly normative (or the deontic). BP explains why and how value is relevant to how we ought to behave. Second, it resolves certain metaphysical and epistemological problems that there would otherwise be for value properties. BP establishes how mind-independent value could exist and allows us some epistemic access to mind-independent value.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. The Challenge

The spirit of the challenge is that it is in some way incoherent to hold that value is metaphysically dependent on reasons. This objection can be found in various strengths. Perhaps the earliest version is due to Dancy.<sup>11</sup> He suggests that goodness, say, cannot be derivative of reasons because reasons are more polyadic properties than goodness. If goodness were ontologically dependent on reasons, Dancy suggests, we would expect it to be at least as polyadic (if not more so) as reasons. But since goodness is less polyadic, we should not take it to be ontologically dependent on reasons.

The reason for supposing that goodness is less polyadic than reasons is that reasons belong to, are *for* individuals. There are no reasons hanging around waiting for someone to have them. If the situation generates a reason for action, it must allot that reason to someone.... [But] something can be good or bad without a specification of an agent.<sup>12</sup>

9. Lang 2008, 473.

10. Of course, this is assuming that we can address the similar problems for reasons. Even for those who find these problems intractable for reasons, there is at least a consolidation of the metaphysical and epistemic problems into one place.

11. Dancy 2000.

12. Dancy 2000, 170.

The idea here seems to be that reasons must be more complex in structure (more polyadic) because they are or involve relations to agents as responders, but for something to be good intuitively does not require that there be anyone related to it. So, reasons must include at least one additional relatum that goodness does not include.

However, this version of the objection is lacking. If value is either a second-order property (as the early Buck-Passing views held), or a relation where one relatum is reasons, we need not suppose that value would have to be more polyadic than reasons. Taking Scanlon's original formulation, if value is the second-order property of having some other property that gives reasons to respond in some way, then value itself could be fairly simple: it is the property of having a property (that stands in a relation to reasons). No matter how complex reasons are, value could be both derivative of reasons and be as simple as we would like. Value could be a monadic property of the bearer: having some property or other that gives reasons. Or it could be a dyadic relation between the bearer and the specific reason-giving property. Alternatively, it could be a three-place relation between the bearer, the specific property and the reasons given. But even if we accept a more complicated version, there is no need for us to include all the relata involved in reasons as a part of the value relation. That is, we don't need to build into value argument places for agents or actions, despite these being components of reasons.

By analogy, take the relation "x is a father to y." This is a two-place relation, involving one specific parent and one specific child. What do we say about the seemingly monadic property "is a father"? There are various available treatments. We could say, following the spirit of Dancy's argument, that the monadic property could not be derivative of the relation because it is less polyadic. I find this implausible. Instead we could take it to be a two-place relational property, a relation between the bearer and the relation "is a father to." Or, we could take it to be a monadic, second-order property of being the x-place relatum of an instance of the "father to" relation. On both treatments, "is a father" is clearly derivative of "father to,"

even though it is on one treatment less polyadic. But importantly, even if we construe “is a father” as a relation, there is no reason to include the relata of “father to” (specifically the child) as a relatum for “is a father.” Similarly, there is no reason to think that value must be at least as polyadic as reasons, or that the relata for reasons must also be included as relata for value.

An alternative treatment would have “is a father” be a less polyadic *predicate* referring to the same *property* as “is a father to.”<sup>13</sup> I am not compelled by this alternative, but regardless of whether this treatment is correct, the analogy would take “is valuable” and “is a reason for” to be predicates expressing the same property. So long as the property referred to is the one involving reasons, this would be a nominalism about value, and BP is vindicated. This would not resolve the larger issue, as the subsequent version of the objection would still apply to this view — we still would, seemingly felicitously, predicate value to worlds without reasons. For the rest of the paper, I will assume that value predicates refer to distinct properties that I hope to show are derivative of reason-properties.

Stratton-Lake extracts from Dancy’s expressed concern with polyadicity a more troubling concern about the intuitive independence of value from reasons. He writes

... For although the property of being good is not a relation according to [BP], it is a property that depends on a relation, and the concern is that this relation makes the goodness of objects depend upon the presence of certain things in an implausible way. The reasons that figure in [BP] necessarily include reference to some agent or another.... But the goodness of something seems to have no reference to agents. (2013, 91)<sup>14</sup>

13. This was suggested to me by Jennifer McKittrick.

14. We can see Dancy alluding to this in the passage quoted above. “... Something can be good or bad without a specification of an agent” (2000, 170).

To demonstrate this problem, Stratton-Lake invites us to consider a possible world in which there are no rational agents and an animal is suffering an agonizing death.<sup>15</sup> Because there are no agents, there is no one for the suffering to provide reasons to. Instances of relations depend on their relata, and since reasons are relations, there are no reasons in this world. Nevertheless, the suffering itself is still disvaluable. This case allows us to see that the real issue isn’t the polyadicity of the properties, but the intuitive ontological independence of value from reasons: if there can be value or disvalue in a world without reasons, it looks as if value is not in fact ontologically dependent on reasons. But, as BP requires that value be ontologically dependent on reasons, it must be false.

Note, for discussion further on, that the independence appealed to with this thought experiment is what we might call “modal-existential” independence.<sup>16</sup> Entity X is modal-existentially independent of entity Y if and only if it is possible for X to exist at a world in which Y does not exist. By contrast, “one thing X will [modal-existentially] depend upon another Y just in case it is necessary that Y exists if X exists.”<sup>17</sup> Whenever X modal-existentially depends on Y, without Y also modal-existentially depending on X, Y is modal-existentially prior to X. For example, a child modal-existentially depends on her parents, since it is necessary that her parents exist if she exists.<sup>18</sup> And because this dependence is not reciprocal in this case (the parents could exist without the child), the parents are modal-existentially prior to their child. Stratton-Lake’s version of objection takes reasons to be the more primitive normative entity only if reasons are modal-existentially prior to all other normative entities. But since value is modal-existentially

15. Stratton-Lake 2013, 93.

16. I use this terminology to facilitate the upcoming comparison to Kalderon’s views on ontological dependence relations between sight and seeing, and other capacities and their exercise (Kalderon forthcoming).

17. Fine 1995, 70.

18. This is on the assumption of essentiality of origins, following Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. But the example here (and below) is merely illustrative.

independent of reasons, reasons cannot be the more primitive normative element, and therefore BP is false.

This version of the objection is too strong because it does not acknowledge the possibility of retreat to the Weak View.<sup>19</sup> Because there could be value in a world without reasons, BP could only amount to the conceptual thesis that constitutes the Weak View; reasons could only be conceptually prior to value.<sup>20</sup> Implicit in this is the idea that the supporters take themselves to be advancing a stronger position, or that we should attempt to revise our concepts in light of this evidence for ontological independence. Either way, being forced to the Weak View is supposed to be a loss for BP. So, this is the version of the objection that I will focus on. The challenge for the BP is to accommodate the following claims:

Strong View: Value properties are metaphysically dependent on, or reducible to, reasons;

No Reasons: There are possible worlds which contain value but no reasons.<sup>21</sup>

As a final note, I take this challenge to apply even to Scanlon's metaphysical quietist view. While he denies that there are interesting ontological questions to ask about the normative domain, this question is about relations between elements of the normative domain. Thus, it

19. The version of the objection sensitive to this move was presented to me in conversation by Christian Coons.
20. This challenge may be a contingent one, depending on what is actually valuable. If autonomy is the only thing of value, then there could not be value without reasons, because there could not be autonomous agents without there also being reasons. But the general methodology for metaethics is to be neutral across first-order normative debates, so we will take the challenge as robust.
21. This possible worlds talk is supposed to be compatible with the right way of understanding possible worlds talk, whatever that is. This will be discussed later when assessing how controversial the metaphysics must be to accommodate both of these claims.

seems to be an apt challenge for any version of the view that does not completely reduce (or eliminate) normative metaphysics to normative talk or attitudes (which would be to say that there could only ever be the conceptual fundamentality).

#### 4. Dispositionalist Solutions

The goal is to provide an account on which reasons are metaphysically prior to value, despite it being possible for value to exist without any reasons, while remaining as metaphysically neutral as possible. We can accomplish this best by taking value to be a dispositional property, a disposition to provide reasons:

(DBP) For X to be valuable is for X to have a disposition to provide reasons (in the right way).<sup>22</sup>

But there is controversy over the nature of dispositions. Some analyze dispositions in terms of true counterfactuals, and take this analysis as a reduction or elimination of dispositions. Others take the counterfactual analysis to be a failed project and treat dispositions as a class of properties. In order to remain as neutral as possible, I will attempt to show that on a broad range of views about how to understand dispositions, we find the resources to take reasons as prior to value.

The basic thesis is this: while we should accept that *particular instances* of dispositions are modal-existentially prior to their manifestations (the disposition instance can exist without manifesting), we should also accept that the *kind* of disposition instantiated could not exist if that *kind* of manifestation were not possible. This means the possibility of the manifestation *type* is a necessary condition of

22. This view will be quite different from the views called "Dispositional Accounts of Value" entertained by Smith, Lewis and Johnston (1989). These authors all place the disposition in the agents, treating X as valuable if and only if it relates to the manifestations of our relevant dispositions in the right way. Perhaps Johnston's account is the closest to my view (1989, 162).

the possibility of the disposition *type*.<sup>23</sup> For example, this vase being fragile is modal-existentially prior to its breaking, because the vase could be fragile without its fragility manifesting while there could not be a manifestation of fragility if the vase were not fragile. On the other hand, the possibility of *breaking* (as a kind) is a necessary condition on there even being a disposition of *fragility* (as a kind). If it weren't metaphysically possible for things to break, then it wouldn't be metaphysically possible for things to be fragile. Thus, *fragility* depends on *breaking*, but not the reverse.

If value is a disposition to produce reasons, we would expect the same sort of structure. There could be instances of value without instances of reasons, but *value* (the type of disposition) could not be possible were *reasons* impossible (or more properly, the type of manifestation *giving reasons*, which itself requires the possibility of reasons). Since reasons are in this way prior to value, there is a sense in which value is metaphysically dependent on reasons, despite there being *instances* of value that are modal-existentially prior to *instances* of reasons. To this end, I will show that disposition types are indeed dependent on manifestation types on a wide range of views about dispositions (and so a Buck-Passer won't have to pick).

Of course, if disposition types depend on their manifestation types, they should similarly depend on their triggering condition types.<sup>24</sup> Triggering conditions are the conditions in which a disposition typically manifests. For instance, *fragility* will also depend on the kind *being struck*. This additional dependence will not be relevant to the Buck-Passer, in terms of responding to the Value Without Reasons challenge. Nevertheless, accepting DBP will require a Buck-Passer to consider the conditions in which a given value disposition manifests by providing reasons. I will not attempt an analysis of the triggering conditions for value

23. Until evaluating the degree of neutrality of this view at the end of the paper, I will not discuss the nature of properties. As such, I will shift language between kinds and types, and perhaps other terminology. I am not trying to take on any commitments in doing so, especially not on the interchangeability of these terms in their strict technical senses.

24. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the suggestion to make this clearer.

for two reasons. First, Buck-Passers will disagree about the conditions under which agents are given reasons, so any analysis I provide would be overly committing. Second, specifying triggering conditions does not help address the challenge at hand. Nonetheless, I will make a few short points about triggering conditions. First, some (e.g. Scanlon, 2014) take reasons to be a four-place relation: fact *f* counts in favor of agent *a* x-ing in circumstances *c* (Cf<sub>axc</sub>), and such circumstances would be a start on establishing triggering conditions. Second, triggering conditions will help Buck-Passing pluralists distinguish between different types of value that manifest in similar reason profiles. Third, examining triggering conditions may help in resolving other objections to Buck-Passing, such as the Wrong Kind of Reasons problem (though my hunch is that further dispositional resources will be required here).

The Value Without Reasons challenge naturally invites revisions that involve some modal characterization or other, so in that respect my proposal would not be novel (and may be overly committing).<sup>25</sup> For example, Dancy reports that Parfit suggested a revision that takes value to be "having features that are potentially reason-giving."<sup>26</sup> The purpose of my paper is not to break ground by offering a modal proposal. Instead, the aim is to show that a modal proposal can be adopted without worrying about the specific details of how it is supposed to work. If I am right, a Buck-Passer can adopt DBP without having to commit to a particular theory of dispositions.<sup>27</sup> By doing the metaphysical due diligence all at once here, my goal is to show that the Buck-Passer doesn't have to.

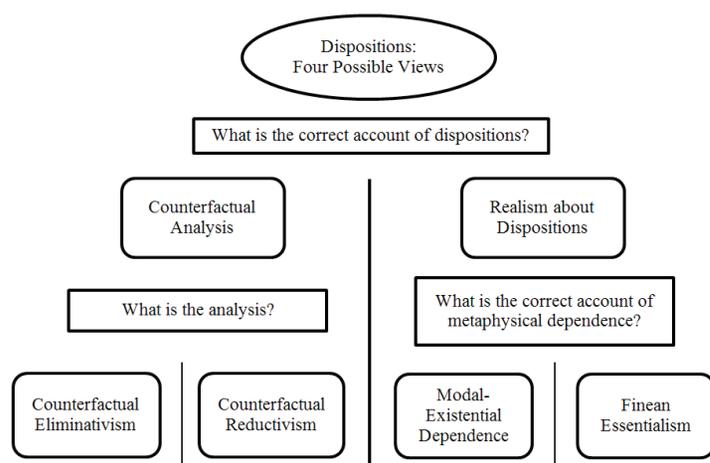
This section will proceed by considering a series of "choice points"

25. Thanks to Nicholas Laskowski for pressing me to respond to this.

26. Dancy 2000, 171. Dancy rejects this proposal because "anything could potentially give reasons." This response won't be a good objection to my proposal. As a response to Parfit, it probably turns on taking "potentially" to mean "possibly," but dispositional terms don't have that same implication. E.g., not all things that could possibly/potentially break are fragile.

27. Perhaps other metaethical commitments will push towards a particular view, but that will be separate from what is required to resolve the Value Without Reasons challenge.

that a theory of dispositions would have to take, and will show that each account of dispositions ending a branch on the decision tree should take disposition types to be dependent on their manifestation types. The choice points are represented on the table below.<sup>28</sup> The first choice divides views between counterfactual analysis views of dispositions and realist views about dispositions. Each of these views has a second choice point to produce what I take to exhaust the options (at the relevant level of specificity for the arguments here). I will assess the resulting four views in succession.



28. The divisions here may not cleanly map onto everyone's understandings of how to categorize different philosophers' positions. For instance, I would consider Armstrong to be a Counterfactual Eliminativist because he holds that dispositional properties are identical to their *categorical* causal bases, and that dispositional terms introduce "a verbal distinction that cuts no ontological ice" (Armstrong 1973, 15). But an anonymous referee takes Armstrong's account of "basic universals and laws of nature" to group him into Realism about Dispositions. Whether or not I apply the standard divisions, the ones used here are the ones relevant to the Buck-Passer. See also note 47 for another example of why Armstrong is a counterfactual eliminativist on my taxonomy.

### A. Counterfactual Analysis<sup>29</sup>

#### i. Counterfactual Eliminativism

One way to accept the Counterfactual Analysis is as an Eliminativism. This view removes dispositional properties from our ontology, and takes all talk of dispositions to be a convenient way of talking about counterfactuals. When we say, "the vase is fragile," we mean simply, "if the vase were struck, it would break." If value were a dispositional term, on this understanding, reasons would (trivially) be more primitive because value wouldn't be a genuine property. And since value terms would merely be convenient ways of talking about reasons, reasons would be conceptually prior to value. This doesn't *quite* preserve the Strong View, since it rejects that value properties are dependent on reasons as an implication of rejecting value properties outright. But in terms of the dialectic, this preserves the spirit of the metaphysical version of Buck-Passing.

#### ii. Counterfactual Reductivism

But another way to take the Counterfactual Analysis is as a Reductivism. While dispositions are genuine properties, they are reducible to certain second-order properties involving counterfactuals, such as the property of having a certain counterfactual true of you, or having the relevant other properties that make the counterfactual true.<sup>30</sup> We would take the vase to have the property of being fragile, but construe fragility either as having properties that make it true that "if

29. Alternative modal solutions that don't explicitly appeal to dispositions should be considered versions of one of the two following views, because they will appeal to some counterfactual and will have to involve the same treatment as what follows.

30. A classic example of this view can be found in Lewis 1997. A more contemporary treatment, dealing thoroughly with many more recent objections, can be found in Choi 2008.

the vase were struck, it would break,” or as the property of having the counterfactual true of it.<sup>31</sup>

On Counterfactual Reductivism it is easy to support the claim that manifestation types are prior to disposition types. These accounts explicitly reduce dispositions to the possibility of their manifestation. Counterfactuals are propositions about what would be the case if some condition were met. Counterfactuals can be true even when the conditions aren’t met, and so it can be true that if the vase were struck, it would break, even if the vase is never struck. So, there can be instances of fragility without instances of breaking. But since there could not be a true counterfactual about anything breaking, if *breaking* weren’t possible, there could not be *fragility* if *breaking* weren’t possible, as *fragility* depends on the counterfactuals.<sup>32</sup>

This point may be clearer when made about *magnetizability*, since its manifestation, *being magnetic*, is a property, while *breaking* is an event. If it weren’t possible for anything to be magnetic, it wouldn’t be possible for anything to be magnetizable. If, for all objects, it was not possible that they be magnetic, then there could be no true counterfactual that said: under conditions C, this object would become magnetic. As such, no object could have this counterfactual true of it, and no object could have properties that made this counterfactual true of it. Why can’t the relevant counterfactuals be true? Suppose the antecedent conditions were met. What then? Would the vase break? Would the nail become magnetized? No, because the event-type *breaking* and the

31. This second option may be better construed as a relational property involving a counterfactual than as a second-order property. But the spirit of the reduction is the same.

32. Here I mean *non-vacuously true* counterfactuals. A counterfactual with an impossible antecedent is true, even if the consequent is impossible. But such vacuously true counterfactuals are not relevant here. At issue are dispositions like fragility where the conditions of manifestation, being struck, are possible. We are not considering counterfactuals with impossible antecedents, like being a round square, because Counterfactual Reductionists shouldn’t consider these proper dispositions. Since a similar problem arises for realist theories of dispositions, later in the paper I respond to the objection that there are dispositions with impossible manifestations (which would require necessarily never being triggered).

property *magnetic* are impossible by stipulation. Thus, on both ways of understanding the Counterfactual Analysis account of dispositions, manifestation types are prior to disposition types.

### iii. Relation to Buck-Passing Views

This picture closely resembles the way that Scanlon already characterizes value: “the purely formal, higher-order properties of having some lower-order properties that provide reasons of the relevant kind.”<sup>33</sup> Scanlon here characterizes value as a second-order property, though not as a modal one. It preserves the spirit of the view if we instead say that value is the second-order property of having other properties that make the counterfactual “X would provide reasons in circumstances C” true.<sup>34</sup> Thus, with this picture of dispositions, BP can accommodate the Strong View and No Reasons. There could be worlds with instances of true counterfactuals about providing reasons without there being any reasons.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, reasons are prior to value, because reasons are prior to true counterfactuals about providing reasons. On this account, there could not be value if reasons were impossible. But note that this does not mean that, say, pain or friendship could not exist if reasons were not possible. The relevant non-normative properties could still exist; they just wouldn’t be able to (even potentially) provide reasons. This is similar to the story about *magnetizability*. If *magnetism*, and thus *magnetizability*, were not possible, this would mean, not that no iron objects could exist, but that those objects could not have the dispositions *magnetic* or *magnetizable*.

33. Scanlon 1998, 97.

34. Scanlon’s language is ambiguous between talking about property instances actually providing reasons, and universals whose instances tend to provide reasons. Compare: fragility is the purely formal higher-order property of having lower-order properties that cause the bearer to break when struck. Because it’s not clear which Scanlon meant, I’ll treat the dispositional version of his view as a modification.

35. Any alternative modal revision that uses counterfactual language rather than explicitly dispositional language can be taken to be a version of my view, taking this particular commitment.

*B. Realism about Dispositions*

DBP is not committed to the Counterfactual Analysis of dispositions for a response to the challenge. I will now show that on views that take dispositions to be properties in their own right, manifestation types are still prior.<sup>36</sup> This will not be shown as easily as above. When dispositions reduce to counterfactuals, it is fairly intuitive that what is possible is metaphysically prior to what dispositions there are. But when we are realists about dispositions, it seems more plausible that what is possible is dependent on what dispositions there are (making the dispositions ontologically prior). If this is the case, then it wouldn't just be that instances of dispositions are prior to instances of manifestations, but that kinds of dispositions are prior to kinds of manifestations. In addition to the fragility of the vase being prior to the breaking of the vase, *fragility* itself accounts for *breaking*, and *magnetizability* accounts for *magnetic*. If this is the case, dispositions are prior to manifestations, and realism about dispositions is incompatible with DBP.

But we don't need to accept this. To show that realism about dispositions can accept the priority of manifestations to dispositions, I will discuss two kinds of metaphysical dependence and priority. The first is Finean Essentialism, that we should understand dependence in terms of relations between essences. To show this I will present an argument from Kalderon that perceptual capacities depend on their exercise, and show how the points apply to dispositions generally.<sup>37</sup> Then, because we don't all accept essentialist metaphysics, I will show how the alternative of modal-existential dependence also supports the priority of manifestations to dispositions.

*i. Essentialist Dependence*

One way of understanding metaphysical dependence employs the idea of the essence of a thing, or what it takes for a thing to be the

36. For a paradigm expression of a dispositional realist view, see Bird 2005. See also Mumford 2006.

37. Kalderon, forthcoming. All page numbers refer to the manuscript draft available from PhilPapers: <https://philpapers.org/rec/KALEPA-2>.

thing it is.<sup>38</sup> With this sort of dependence we can distinguish between the dependence of the singleton set {Socrates} on Socrates, and the dependence of Socrates on {Socrates}. {Socrates} exists in all and only the worlds in which Socrates exists. Thus, {Socrates} and Socrates are modal-existentially interdependent, and so in this sense neither is prior to the other. But many think that there is an important dependence of {Socrates} on Socrates that is not reciprocated. Because what it is to be {Socrates}—the essence of {Socrates}—is to be a set containing only Socrates as a member, and so {Socrates} depends on Socrates. But what it is to be Socrates (that is, his essence) does not include being a member of any sets, and so Socrates does not depend on {Socrates}.<sup>39</sup> Whenever X essentially depends on Y, but Y does not essentially depend on X, Y is essentially prior to X. This means that Socrates is essentially prior to {Socrates}, because what it is to be {Socrates} is dependent on Socrates but not the other way around. Contrast this to the relation between being a parent and being a child. We said before that particular parents are (modal-existentially) prior to their children. But the kind *parent* and the kind *child* (in the genealogical sense, not in the age sense) are essentially interdependent, since what it is to be each one involves the other.

Kalderon offers an argument that perceptual capacities as kinds essentially depend on their exercise kinds, despite particular exercises modal-existentially depending on capacity instances. Kalderon acknowledges the obvious truth that "sight enables the subject to see. If the subject lacked sight, the subject could not see the scene in front of them."<sup>40</sup> This illustrates that the exercise of a particular capacity depends on that capacity. This is modal-existential dependence as discussed earlier: entity X (e.g. the exercise) modal-existentially

38. We should not understand "what it takes for a thing to be the thing it is" to imply that *that* thing would be a different thing if its essence were changed. For example, we shouldn't think that the singleton {Socrates} would be a different set, say the null set, were Socrates not to exist.

39. See Fine 1995; see also Correia 2008.

40. Kalderon forthcoming, 6.

depends on entity Y (e.g. the capacity) if and only if it is possible for X to exist at a world in which Y does not exist. Since the particular exercises of a capacity modal-existentially depend on the instance of the capacity, the capacity instance will be modal-existentially prior to its exercise provided that the capacity does not modal-existentially depend on its exercise. Since it is certainly possible for someone to be sighted while never actually seeing, there can be sight without seeing, but never seeing without sight. Thus, it seems that sight is prior to seeing.<sup>41</sup>

But, despite instances of seeing being dependent on instances of the capacity sight, *sight* itself depends on *seeing*. As Kalderon writes:

Having the capacity for sight is a way for a subject to be. And what it is to be that way is to have the potential to undergo episodes of seeing. This is not the modal-existential dependence of sight on seeing, that would be inconsistent with the modal-existential priority of sight. Rather sight *ontologically depends* on seeing in that what it is to possess that capacity depends on what it is to undergo an episode of seeing. The individuation of capacities by their exercise is a manifestation of the ontological dependence of the former upon the latter.<sup>42</sup>

“Ontological dependence,” as used here, just means “essential dependence.” It is the idea that when what it takes for one thing to be the thing it is involves a second thing (or, what it takes to be that second thing), thing one is essentially dependent on thing two.

*Sight* essentially depends on *seeing*, so *seeing* would be essentially prior if it is the case that *seeing* does not essentially depend on *sight*

41. While this applies to perceptual capacities, it may not be true for every capacity. Perhaps the capacity to play the piano needs to be exercised to persist, and perhaps one needs to play the piano in order to acquire the capacity in the first place. So, in such a case there is modal-existential *interdependence* between the capacity and its exercise. Kalderon forthcoming, 8.

42. Kalderon forthcoming, 10.

(otherwise they would be interdependent). Kalderon suggests that “not only does sight ontologically [essentially] depend upon seeing, but seeing is ontologically [essentially] prior to sight. This is plausibly an instance of a more general metaphysical principle, the ontological [essential] priority of the actual over the potential.”<sup>43</sup> Kalderon means that as a general principle, actualities are more primitive than potentialities for those actualities.<sup>44</sup> The idea is that for any potentiality, its being (its essence) wholly consists in the potential for some actuality. But we shouldn’t think that in general the essence of an actuality consists in part in being the actualization of a potentiality. What it is to see is not to be an actualization of the capacity for sight, despite modal-existentially depending on sight.

The same considerations about essential dependence allow us to show how disposition types depend on their manifestation types. What it is to be disposition D involves its distinctive manifestation M. As noted above, we shouldn’t say that what it is to be disposition D *wholly* consists in its manifestation M, because dispositions are individuated by their triggering conditions as well. Furthermore, manifestation types are not essentially dependent on disposition types, because what it is to be M does not involve disposition D. This entails that manifestation types are essentially prior to disposition types in the same way that Socrates is essentially prior to {Socrates}. And this holds despite the modal-existential priority that disposition instances may have over the instances of their manifestations, just as the essential priority of Socrates over {Socrates} holds despite their modal-existential interdependence.

To illustrate this, *breaking* is essentially prior to *fragility* since what it is to be fragile is to have a certain potential to break (under certain conditions), but what it is to break (as an event-kind) does not involve

43. Kalderon forthcoming, 11.

44. This is employing the Aristotelian language of potentialities and actualities, not the (related) modal notions of actual and possible. The actuality of speaking French is more primitive than the (actual) potential to speak French, which is more primitive than the potential to potentially speak French (i.e., the potential to learn French).

*fragility*. *Magnetic* is essentially prior to the disposition *magnetizability*, since what it is to be magnetizable is to have the potential to become magnetic, but what it is to be magnetic does not involve *magnetizability*. Similarly, if value is a disposition to provide reasons, then what it is to be valuable is to have a certain potential to provide reasons. But we need not take what it is to be a reason to involve value. Thus, even on a realist picture of dispositions, reasons could be ontologically prior to value. By taking essential priority to be the important sense of metaphysical priority (as we do with an essentialist metaphysics), DBP can accommodate both the Strong View and No Reasons.

#### ii. Modal-Existential Dependence

Since not everyone supports this sort of essentialist metaphysics, it is best not to commit DBP to it, and so I will shortly consider a realist view that rejects essentialism. Essentialism aims to give an account of metaphysical dependence that rules out the counterintuitive cases that come with accounts that derive metaphysical dependence from formal relations between modal profiles (i.e. using modal-existential dependence). Socrates and {Socrates} have the same modal profile, but intuitively metaphysical dependence is asymmetrical in this case. The empty set is a necessary entity, but it is counterintuitive that all contingent entities are metaphysically dependent on it (or that all other necessary entities are mutually dependent with it). These cases don't worry everyone to the same extent, and so many are not moved to essentialism. But even if we don't accept an essentialist metaphysics, the alternative account of metaphysical dependence (modal-existential dependence) will arrive at the same result where disposition-types depend on manifestation-types.

Dispositions are modal properties, on both the realist and reductionist accounts. It is their intrinsic modal character that makes modal-existential dependence complicated when it comes questions of priority for both reasons and dispositions. Their modal nature, their relation to what is possible, requires us to look to something other than dependence of variability across possible worlds in isolation. When

using modal-existential dependence as a test for metaphysical priority, we consider the distributions of the relevant entities across modal space (i.e., which worlds those entities are in) and look to see whether X is in every world where Y is, whether X existing is an implication of Y existing. If this is the case, we take X to be an ontological requirement for Y, as there can't be Y without X. This may work well for particulars and for non-modal properties, but it is problematic for distinctly modal properties, properties that have modal ontological implications.

The methodology that employs modal-existential dependence infers metaphysical dependence from ontological implication. For non-modal properties, their ontological implications will be within their same world.<sup>45</sup> For instance (supposing a naïve-realist view of color for simplicity), being extended is an ontological implication of being colored, as everything colored is extended, and so being colored metaphysically depends on being extended. But when the ontological implications of a property extend into other possible worlds, this same methodology should lead us to incorporate those implications into whatever we say about metaphysical dependence. The vase is fragile; a thing being fragile has the implication of the possibility of it breaking; the possibility of something breaking has the implication that *breaking* exists (or is possible). So, the vase being fragile metaphysically depends on (the possibility of) *breaking*.

There are a few objections to this modal-existential version of realism about dispositions in particular. First, we might be concerned that all properties would be dependent on all properties, or on necessary properties, given this framework.<sup>46</sup> But we are supposed to be considering models of alternative complete modal spaces. Intuitively, *fragility* can obtain in a modal system without *redness*, and so *fragility* doesn't have to depend on *redness* just because both

45. I suppose non-modal properties will also have *some* modal implications, though not in the same way as modal properties. I am trying to contrast intrinsically modal properties and their intrinsic implications with non-intrinsically-modal properties and their intrinsic implications.

46. Thanks to Alexander Dietz for bringing this to my attention.

obtain in the actual complete modal space. But *fragility* cannot obtain in a modal system without *breaking*. We can either make this same move for necessary properties (they may not have to be in all *fragility* models), or we can borrow the move from standard modal-existential dependence and exclude trivial implications and rule out universal dependence on necessary properties this way.

It is not a serious objection to deny that we can read metaphysical dependence off ontological implication, because denying this is to deny that modal-existential dependence is relevant to metaphysical dependence, as it is primarily an ontological-implication relation. Those who do want to deny that ontological implication entails metaphysical dependence will most likely fall into the essentialist camp addressed earlier (or some similar hyperintensionalism). Neither is it a serious objection to deny that there are any properties that have special modal implications in the way that I'm characterizing dispositions.<sup>47</sup> This is just to deny realism about dispositions, in which case we must characterize modal properties through some counterfactual analysis as considered above.

### *iii. Relation to Buck-Passing Views*

Versions of Buck-Passing that allow value to give derivative reasons (by rejecting the negative thesis), like Parfit's view before 2017, are probably best accommodated by dispositional realist solutions rather than counterfactual analysis solutions.<sup>48</sup> We can compare this with the debate about the causal efficacy of dispositions: does the fragility of the vase play a causal role in its breaking when it gets struck, or do the properties that serve as the basis for the disposition do all the causal work? Some say the disposition plays no causal role.<sup>49</sup> This is a first step towards the Counterfactual Analysis account discussed above,  
47. C.f. Armstrong 1997, 79.

48. Parfit 2011, 39. It is irrelevant for my purposes that Parfit has in fact revised his views to accept the negative thesis. Whether or not the best version of BP accepts the negative thesis is also irrelevant. What matters is that there is a view of dispositions that can make sense of the metaphysics of rejecting the negative thesis, and Parfit circa 2011 serves only as a model of such a view.

49. See, for instance, Prior, Pargetter and Jackson 1982.

since if the dispositions are causally irrelevant, there is less motivation to take them as properties in their own right. But others allow that dispositions can play a causal role.<sup>50</sup> One way to allow this is to point out that this is just another case of overdetermination.

Now, this way of looking at it seems quite compatible with Parfit's view. We can draw an analogy between providing derivative reasons and the causal overdetermination. When the fragility itself is the only thing considered, this is causally sufficient for the vase to break when struck, but the disposition doesn't contribute anything in addition to what the basis of the disposition causally contributes. In terms of providing reasons, the value is normatively sufficient when considered on its own, but the disposition doesn't contribute anything in addition to what the basis of the disposition normatively contributes.

## 5. Objections

### *A: Dispositions Objection: Impossible Manifestations?*

If manifestations are metaphysically prior to dispositions (as kinds), then for every instantiated disposition (kind), there must be a possible world in which its manifestation type is exhibited. But someone might object that some manifestation types are impossible. If this were the case, then manifestations could not be prior to dispositions, as what is impossible could not be prior to what is actual or possible. Correia provides the following case:

Suppose that God and Satan are both such that it is impossible that they fail to exist. Also suppose that each of them is such that necessarily, He has intrinsic powers which would automatically make Him the master or the universe if nothing external prevented those powers from being realized. Suppose finally that due to certain intrinsic features God necessarily has in addition, His

50. See McKittrick 2005.

existence excludes that anyone or anything else but Him be the master of the universe, so that it is impossible that both God exist and anyone or anything else but him, e.g. Satan, be the master of the universe. It then follows that it is impossible that Satan should be the master of the universe.<sup>51</sup>

Satan necessarily has a disposition that necessarily never manifests, so we have the worry that this disposition does not metaphysically depend on its manifestation.

There are some problems with this case as described. First, it seems that God and Satan share the disposition to be the master of the universe. If this is correct, then the manifestation type *is* manifested—not by Satan, but by God. We can correct this by stipulating that Satan has a unique disposition, one whose manifestation is impossible. This will be no mean feat, depending on how exactly we individuate the dispositions. Suppose that Satan uniquely had the disposition to destroy the world, which is then masked by God's dispositions. Would this manifestation be impossible? That depends. Is the disposition in question the coarse disposition of destroying some X? If so, then *that* disposition is manifest somewhere in modal space. But even if dispositions were individuated so coarsely, this would respond to the case but not the problem.

The complete solution is to point out that Correia uses this case to support a conception of essence that is not derivative of modal-existential dependence, and it is this very notion of (Finean) essence that was used by Kalderon to show that *seeing* is metaphysically prior to the capacity of *sight*. As such, it is no problem that there is no possible world in which Satan destroys the world, because possibility as discussed here is not fine-grained enough to deal with these sorts of claims about essences. Just as it is part of Satan's essence that He is disposed to destroy the world if unopposed, it is the essence of the

51. Correia 2007, 67.

disposition *destroy the world if unopposed* that it manifests as *destroying the world*. This is what it is to be that disposition, and so the disposition is essentially dependent on *destroying the world*. The viability of this response is provided by the resources of Correia's case. To deny appeal to this conception of essence is to deny that the case was possible in the first place, because Satan could not have that disposition essentially.<sup>52</sup>

#### B. Buck-Passing Objection: Impossible to Pursue Value

Fitting Attitude accounts of value are very similar to Buck-Passing accounts. Both reduce value to some other normative element. Fitting Attitudes accounts analyze value as the fitting objects of certain attitudes, e.g. what is good is what it is fitting to favor or pursue. Against these accounts, Bykvist offers an objection similar to the one I've been discussing.<sup>53</sup> It might be objected that Bykvist develops a stronger version of the No Reasons challenge that DBP cannot handle.<sup>54</sup> His objection begins with a case similar to Stratton-Lake's wounded animal case. Consider the case of

There being happy egrets but no past, present or future agents (i.e. beings who intentionally bring something about). This is a good state of affairs that it is not fitting to intentionally bring about, for the simple reason that it is logically impossible to intentionally bring it about that there is no present, past or future agent who brings anything about.<sup>55</sup>

52. Other cases have been suggested to me, some incorporating stronger senses of impossibility, such as "Hobbes has the disposition to square the circle." But these cases seem to be a trick of language. Surely Hobbes only had the disposition to *try* (and try hard) to square the circle. Since there is nothing that it is like to be *squaring the circle*, there could be nothing whose essence so depended on *squaring the circle*.

53. Bykvist 2009.

54. Thanks to Chris Howard for pointing me to this version of the No Reasons challenge.

55. Bykvist 2009, 5.

This is purportedly stronger because we have a good state of affairs that not only *doesn't* involve, but *couldn't* involve, any agents, because by stipulation it includes the lack of agents. And since *this* state of affairs couldn't involve any agents, *it* couldn't provide any reasons. There could be similar states of affairs that provide reasons, ones with happy egrets and agents, but those states of affairs are different ones. Since *this* state of affairs couldn't provide any reasons, it doesn't make sense to say that this good state of affairs is disposed to provide reasons.

There are a few things to say here. In this case, all the value comes from the happiness of the egrets. It's important to notice that in this way, the case is no different than Stratton-Lake's (the polarity of the value is switched, but that's a mere artifact). The crucial difference is what they identify as (dis)valuable. Stratton-Lake focuses on the property of the animal—the suffering—being disvaluable and the provider of reasons, whereas Bykvist focuses on the total state of affairs—there are happy egrets and never agents—as valuable. The first thing to notice is that this difference makes it seem that there's more of a problem here than there is. In the egrets case, it's the happiness that would provide the reasons, and so it's the happiness that is good and the provider of reasons.

Bykvist discusses something like this response, in terms of a revised Fitting Attitudes account that holds that what is fitting to favor is only what is basically good, not what is derivatively good (where what is derivatively good is something complex that is good in virtue of having a part that is independently good).<sup>56</sup> He objects that this is too radical of a revision for Fitting Attitudes accounts of value, because it is highly intuitive that derivative goods often warrant us favoring them, such as “situations, outcomes, lives, and perhaps even whole possible worlds.”<sup>57</sup> The point is that things that are good because of their parts are still good, and however we analyze value must accommodate

56. Bykvist 2009, 10. This idea of derivative value is independent from commitment to derivative reasons.

57. Bykvist 2009, 10.

this. To adapt this objection to the reasons Buck-Passing account, we should say that derivatively good complex states often give us reasons. But a reasons Buck-Passing account, especially a dispositional version, has the resources to respond to the analogical point.

Compare this to other cases of basic dispositions being incorporated into a larger complex. A pane of glass is fragile, and a bookcase made from panes of glass is also fragile. It isn't just that the parts of the bookcase are fragile; the complex shares the disposition as well. So, some complexes share the dispositions of their components, and if a complex state of affairs is good because of its basically good components, this means that it shares the disposition to provide reasons.

However, not all complexes share the dispositions of their components. For example, a complex object constituted by a pane of glass encased in lead is not fragile. Nevertheless, the glass encased in lead—the glass itself, not the complex composed of both the glass and the lead—is fragile despite the immense difficulty of breaking it. This is because the lead serves as a mask for the glass's fragility.<sup>58</sup> The complex involving a disposition and its mask will not share that disposition. But appealing to masks in the egrets case is not a solution. It doesn't help to say that the absence of agents masks the disposition of the egrets' happiness to provide reasons. It may do this, but that only helps preserve the claim that the happiness is good. But it doesn't allow us to explain how the complex state of affairs is good but cannot provide reasons. The complex of lead-encased glass does not have a masked disposition of fragility, precisely because of the way that the lead masks the fragility of the glass.

But some complexes where one part of the complex prevents the manifestation of a disposition of another part still share in that

58. The disposition of an entity is “masked” when the entity can be put into the triggering conditions without the disposition manifesting. This is distinct from the disposition being “finked,” when the disposition is removed in the presence of the triggering conditions rather than manifesting, because the disposition is still considered present. Masks are also called antidotes, and dispositions can be “finkishly added,” not just finkishly removed.

disposition. It depends on the way that other components prevent the disposition from manifesting. An anti-gravity machine constructed largely out of glass is still fragile, even if it creates a strong field that makes it impossible for any other objects to get close, let alone strike the machine. The anti-gravity field doesn't mask the fragility of the glass, because that would require that the glass potentially enter the triggering conditions and for fragility to fail to manifest. Instead, the field prevents the glass from entering the triggering conditions at all. In this kind of case, the triggering is blocked rather than the manifestation being masked.

This is the way that the dispositionalist Buck-Passing account can respond to Bykvist's case. One part of the state of affairs provides the disposition to provide reasons, and the other part makes it impossible for the state of affairs to be in the circumstances where that disposition would be triggered. But since it still has the disposition, it still is good. This example becomes an instance of the previous objection: it is an unmanifestable *instance* of a manifestable disposition *type* (and we can explain exactly why).<sup>59</sup> But as we saw above, that is not a problem.

59. An anonymous referee asks whether "this might be better characterised as a case of a finkish disposition—if human agents were present (which is surely part of the stimulus), it would remove the very property that is the basis of the disposition."

I contend that this case isn't best described as involving the finkish loss of the disposition for a couple of reasons. Having human agents present doesn't remove the disposition from the state of affairs in the triggering conditions, as would happen if this were a finkish case. Assuming the addition of human agents, those agents are given reasons to favor the state of affairs that they find themselves in. Furthermore, instead of eliminating the disposition from the state of affairs, it actually eliminates that very state of affairs, replacing it with a *similar* state of affairs with a similar disposition. (It's not quite the same disposition because it manifests as providing reasons to promote a different state of affairs—one with human agents in it.) This is because it is a necessary component of the state of affairs in question that agents never have and never will exist. It would be impossible for such a state of affairs to be in the conditions for triggering the disposition to provide reasons.

However, there is a dissimilarity between the anti-gravity machine case and the happy egrets case. The anti-gravity machine blocks the disposition from its triggering conditions while preserving the disposition. The happy egrets case blocks the disposition from its triggering conditions by "destroying" the entity with the disposition and the disposition both. So, there is a way that this

What's more, this is an advantage for Buck-Passing views over Fitting Attitudes accounts, since reasons are contributory and can come from discrete parts of a broader state of affairs. As discussed above, Fitting Attitudes accounts must hold that if a state of affairs is valuable, then there is a pro-attitude that is fittingly directed at that *whole* state of affairs, not just at some of its parts (a narrower state of affairs).<sup>60</sup> If the state of affairs 'there are happy egrets and never agents' is valuable, then it is fitting to favor that whole state of affairs—not just the narrower state 'there are happy egrets.' Because the attitudes have to be fittingly directed at the whole of whichever state of affairs is valuable, it's not clear how to construct a solution analogous to what DBP can accept.

Further, it's not obvious to me that employing the instance-kind distinction—as was required for DBP to maintain the right direction of priority—is as naturally compatible with Fitting Attitudes accounts as with Buck-Passing accounts. I don't see how saying that the state of affairs 'there are happy egrets and never agents' is an impossible-to-favor instance of a fitting-to-favor kind of state of affairs can both help resolve the problem and respect the spirit of the Fitting Attitudes account. But this requires more exploration.

My response to Bykvist's version of the objection might force the Buck-Passer to commit to an account of dispositions, but only if the counterfactual analysis cannot independently respond to the problems of masks, mimics, and finks.<sup>61</sup> If the counterfactual analysis cannot resolve these objections, it is a ruled-out view and not an option for

case resembles finking. This difference might allow us to consider the happy egrets case to be a new sort of "hyper-fink," but I think it is more helpful for it to be grouped into blocking cases, since the defining characteristic seems to be the impossibility of the disposed entity to be in the triggering conditions.

60. C.f. Bykvist 2009, 10 n. 17. "It will not do to say that what entails something basically good and nothing basically bad should be favoured *for the sake of its good parts*, since what is favoured for the sake of its parts is still favoured (i.e. intentionally brought about, pursued, or desired)."

61. For a thorough treatment of these issues, see Choi 2008.

the Buck-Passer in the first place. In this case, the only option would be to adopt a dispositional realist view.<sup>62</sup>

It still might be insisted that I haven't considered the strongest version of this objection. Bykvist moves to a different example that does not involve a complex built-in part out of something that is basically valuable.

It should also be noted that it seems coherent, but perhaps not plausible, to ascribe *basic* value to state of affairs that exclude there being any agents, believers, or pleasure-takers. Perhaps some extreme environmentalists who value 'desert landscapes untouched by humans' would accept this. An FA-account of the revised sort would have to say that such an axiology is conceptually confused.<sup>63</sup>

Under the relevant revisions, we cannot say that there is a disposition element combined with a masking element, because the state of affairs is stipulated not to be derivatively valuable. But there are other features of the case that make a similar response possible. First, as described, the untouched desert landscape doesn't include the fact that no agents have ever existed. So, the fact that it is untouched could give me a reason to leave it untouched, or to protect it from being despoiled.

Second, it's not clear that this case can be revised to include a kind of basic value that is *in principle* unable to give reasons, as would be required, since we've seen that the relevant sense of priority is between kinds. If the value is beauty, then other instances of beauty provide reasons and the case doesn't cause problems. If it's some other form of value, it wouldn't be enough for it to be unique to pristine environments, since that could be dealt with by my first response.

62. Since other modal solutions not explicitly appealing to dispositions would be incorporated into the counterfactual analysis, all modal solutions besides the dispositional realist version would be ruled out as well.

63. Bykvist 2009, 11.

Instead, it would have to be a value unique to possible worlds without agents. But while Bykvist is correct in pointing out that there is some implausibility to ruling out in principle the basic value of pristine environments (whether or not this would be part of an axiology we would want to adopt independently of a Buck-Passing account), it does not seem implausible to reject that there is a special kind of basic value of possible worlds in which there never are agents.

## 6. Assessing Metaphysical Neutrality

The challenge was to render the following two claims compatible:

Strong View: Value properties are metaphysically dependent on reasons;

No Reasons: There are possible worlds which contain value but no reasons.

I have not only shown that these claims can be made compatible, but that there are several avenues for doing so by appealing to different theories of dispositions. But since success is proportional to degree of metaphysical neutrality, I want to end by discussing which metaphysical positions may have been closed off in the reconciliation.

The dispositionalist solution is largely neutral to the nature of dispositions, as there are multiple viable options on both sides of the realist/reductionist debate. There may be some difficulty accommodating pan-dispositionalism, the view that every property is a dispositional property. If disposition types depend on their manifestations, and all manifestations involve some dispositions, then we might be lead to a regress of ontological dependence.<sup>64</sup> But this problem is independent of DBP.

64. See Armstrong 2005, 314. See also Mumford and Anjum 2011, 5ff. Armstrong charges that if all properties are dispositions, causation becomes a regress of one disposition after another. Mumford and Anjum retort that this is not a regress, but progressive change. However, if all properties are dispositions, then A will depend on its manifestation B, which will depend on its

Next, one might worry that DBP must be committed to transcendent universals, possibilism, or both, and that it could not accommodate immanent universals or actualism.<sup>65</sup> I think it will suffice to show that DBP can accommodate any plausible actualist view of immanent universals, since if DBP is compatible with this it will be compatible with any other combination. When discussing modal properties, as discussed above, we are obliged to look at modal space as a whole. When we do this, the immanent view says that only the universals instantiated somewhere in modal space exist. This doesn't strike me as a problem, but instead as exactly what any view should say. But even with this, we are not committed to possibilism. Actualists have their mechanisms for reducing or translating talk of possible worlds and modal space into talk of sets of propositions, or uninstantiated world properties (though this one loses the immanent view). Whatever it is they do in general is what is to be done here. However, if this does (surprisingly) remove the option of realism about dispositions, this strikes me as more of a problem for actualism than for Buck-Passing, as actualism would be incompatible with realism about dispositions regardless of the status of DBP. Even so, that wouldn't be problematic for my proposal, since a Buck-Passer committed to immanent actualism would simply be committed to a Counterfactual Analysis version of DBP.

Finally, there is the issue of tropes versus universals. This is where DBP might have to rule out views. If trope theory is true, then what it is to be a universal is to be a privileged collection of tropes; what it is to be *this* universal is to be the collection of *those* tropes. That is, tropes (property instances) would be more primitive than universals. If the instances are more primitive than the universal, then it seems more likely that we should take the failure of priority-of-reasons instances

manifestation C, etc., and the regress is off and running. The other option would be circularity, where the system of dispositions would all be mutually dependent. This may be compatible with Bird's view, where the essence of a disposition is given by its place in the pattern of manifestation relations. See Bird 2007, ch. 6: "The regress objection," 132–146.

65. Or, perhaps, just the wrong combinations.

over instances of value to be a more serious problem. But this raises a similar consideration as actualism. If realism about dispositions requires dispositions to be dependent on manifestations, despite the reverse priority of instances, then trope theory had better have a way to accommodate this. Whatever way this ends up being would be one that is suitable for Buck-Passing, since we saw that realism about dispositions is suitable for DBP.

So, Buck-Passing accounts of value do not have to take on any inordinate metaphysical commitments to be a coherent view. DBP can hold that reasons are importantly prior to value while allowing the possibility of there being value without reasons by taking value to be a disposition to provide reasons. But beyond this, DBP does not have to take a position on whether dispositions are real or reduce to counterfactuals, whether universals are immanent or transcendent, or on actualism versus possibilism. In light of this, DBP does not require any metaphysically controversial views, and it is a strong proposal for responding to the No Reasons challenge.

The focus of this paper was to respond to a specific objection to Buck-Passing accounts, and to evaluate the metaphysics required to give this response. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address any further strengths that DBP might have, so I want to flag here that this view might also bear other fruits. Looking forward, DBP brings along many interesting resources for exploring other issues for Buck-Passing accounts, and for providing a metaphysical basis for other commitments. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic dispositions could be used to explain the metaphysical connections and similarities between final and instrumental value, while still maintaining the important distinction.<sup>66</sup> The Wrong Kind of Reasons problem may be resolved with this same mechanism, or by appeal to masks, mimics, or finks.<sup>67</sup>

66. McKittrick 2003.

67. I would like to give additional thanks to Teresa Bruno, Preston Werner for comments on earlier drafts, and audiences at the Rocky Mountain Ethics

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