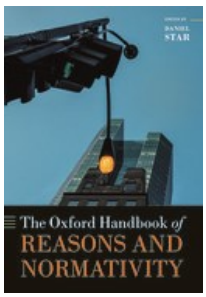

The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity

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CHAPTER

13 Reason Fundamentalism and What Is Wrong With It

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Abstract

Is there a fundamental feature of normativity, to which other features can be reduced? One defensible view is that the fundamental feature is the relation that holds between a person and *F*-ing when the person has reason to *F*. ("*F*" stands for any verb phrase, such as "run for the bus" or "hope for relief" or "believe Kampala is in Ghana.") Another defensible view is that the fundamental feature is the relation that holds between a person and *F*-ing when the person ought to *F*. The popular view that the fundamental feature of normativity is the property of being a reason is not defensible, since that property can be reduced to either of the two relations I described. I argue that the second of these views —"ought fundamentalism"—is more credible that the first—"reason fundamentalism"—because it is more faithful to our ordinary normative concepts.

Keywords: ought, reason, reasons, agent-relativity, pro tanto reasons, pro toto reasons, Nagel, Parfit, Scanlon, metaphysics of normativity

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13.1 Introduction

During the last half-century, a dogma has grown up in the philosophy of normativity: the dogma of the primacy of reasons or "reasons first." One part of it is the metaphysical view that reasons are the fundamental element of normativity. Normativity is "the domain of reasons," to use John Skorupski's (2010) illuminating phrase, and "the normativity of all that is normative consists in the way it is, or provides, or is otherwise related to reasons," as Joseph Raz puts it (1999: 67). This chapter opposes this part of the dogma. I shall argue that reasons are not the fundamental element of normativity. Indeed, I shall argue that they are not a fundamental element of normativity at all.

In this chapter, I speak of normative reasons only. The count noun "reason" has several uses. For instance, we might say "The reason Elise is hurrying is that she is late for dinner." This is to say that Elise's hurrying is explained in a particular way by the fact that she is late for dinner. The particular way is, roughly, that the explanation passes through her rational faculty. Philosophers call facts that explain a person's behavior in
p. 298 this way "motivating reasons." We sometimes even use "reason" to refer to a mere mechanical ↳ cause. For instance, we say "The reason for that banging is that the main bearing is failing." But in this chapter, the count noun "reason" always refers to a normative reason, and never to a motivating reason or cause.

The view I oppose is that reasons are metaphysically fundamental *within normativity*. The issue is whether reasons can be reduced to something else normative. I am not concerned with whether normativity itself can be reduced to non-normative features of the world. The view that it cannot is given the name "reasons fundamentalism" by T. M. Scanlon in *Being Realistic About Reasons*. "Normative fundamentalism" would have been a more accurate name for it, since *Being Realistic About Reasons* explicitly does not defend the view that reasons are fundamental within normativity.[1] This chapter is not about reasons fundamentalism in Scanlon's sense.

The view that reasons themselves are fundamental elements of normativity can be quickly dismissed, and I do not think many philosophers really hold it. Many reasons are natural facts. For example, the fact that apple-pips contain cyanide is a reason not to eat too many of them. Natural facts are not features of normativity at all, so they cannot be fundamental elements of it. What many philosophers think is that the *property* of being a reason is the fundamental element of normativity. This is one version of the view I call "reason fundamentalism."[2] It is not the best version, and I shall argue in section 13.6 that it is mistaken.

Reasons are not features of normativity, and nor is any other thing, so far as I can tell. There are no normative things nor (I shall explain in section 13.2) is there any normative stuff. The metaphysical domain of normativity is a domain of properties and relations only. Things can have normative properties and stand in normative relations to each other. For example, it can be the case that a particular person ought to do an act of a particular sort. But the things—the person and the act in this case—are not themselves normative.

This chapter is about what normative properties are metaphysically—specifically ontologically—fundamental in normativity. It is not about what things are explanatorily fundamental. Compare the property of being a fertilizer. This is the property of causing plants to grow faster. So the property of being a fertilizer is metaphysically reducible to other properties and relations including causation, being a plant, and growing. These properties and relations are metaphysically more fundamental than the property of being a fertilizer. But causation itself goes in the opposite direction: a fertilizer (not the property of being a fertilizer) causes plants to grow more quickly. Similarly, in sections 13.6 and 13.8 I shall argue that the property of being a reason is the property of explaining the obtaining of other particular normative
p. 299 relations. So the property of being a reason is metaphysically reducible to the relation of explanation ↳ together with these other normative relations. It is therefore metaphysically less fundamental than the other relations. But explanation goes in the opposite direction: a reason (not the property of being a reason) explains the obtaining of more fundamental relations.

That the property of being a reason is the fundamental element in normativity is not the best version of reason fundamentalism. A substantial part of this chapter (much of sections 13.2–13.7 and 13.9) is taken up with developing what is the best version. Although I shall eventually reject reason fundamentalism, I intend this work to be a constructive contribution to it. Reason fundamentalists fix their attention on reasons. But the property of being a reason can easily be shown not to be fundamental. The property they should take to be fundamental is the property something has when there is reason for it. Unfortunately, there is no convenient English name for this property. It may be merely this lack of a name that causes reason fundamentalists to focus on reasons instead.

Roughly in parallel (in sections 13.2–5 and 13.8), I shall develop an alternative view in which ought is the fundamental element in normativity. ("Ought" as I use it throughout this chapter has its central, final, all-things-considered, normative meaning: see Broome 2013: ch. 2.) I call this view "ought fundamentalism." It too is a view about what is fundamental within normativity and not a view about the metaphysical status of normativity itself. The parallels between ought and reason need to be drawn out, since they are obscured by the very different grammars of "ought" and "reason" in English.

In section 13.10 I shall argue against reason fundamentalism on the grounds that it is not faithful to our normative concepts, and in section 13.11 I shall conclude in favor of ought fundamentalism. We should accept that ought is fundamental and reason is not.

This is a stronger conclusion than simply rejecting reason fundamentalism. Reason fundamentalism is the view that reason is the only fundamental element of normativity. If there turned out to be two fundamental elements of normativity—reason and ought, say—reason fundamentalism would be false. But I shall show in sections 13.8 and 13.9 that reason can be successfully reduced to ought. The arguments justify the stronger conclusion that ought fundamentalism is true.

Reason fundamentalism is one component of the dogma of the primacy of reasons. Other components are the view that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons, and the view that reasoning is a response to reasons. I think these are mistaken accounts of rationality and reasoning, and I have opposed them in my book *Rationality Through Reasoning* (2013). They draw support from reason fundamentalism, and rejecting reason fundamentalism helps to undermine them.

A last preliminary note. I use "normative" in a sense that excludes the evaluative. This chapter is not concerned with the relation between the normative and the evaluative. Whether the good is prior to the right or the right prior to the good is not a question for this chapter.

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13.2 The Reasoned Property and the Oughted Property

Suppose there is reason for the lights to come on at dusk. This is to say that the state of affairs consisting in the lights' coming on at dusk has a particular normative property. English has no convenient predicate to express this property, so I shall introduce the artificial predicate "reasoned." "The lights' coming on at night is reasoned" means just the same as "There is reason for the lights to come on at dusk." I shall sometimes call the property of being reasoned "the reasoned property." (In common English, "reasoned" means something else, of course.)

You might think "reasonable" is a common English equivalent to "reasoned," but it is not. Suppose there is reason for the lights to come on at dusk, but also much stronger reason for them not to. Then their coming on at dusk is not reasonable, although it is reasoned.

When I wrote "There is reason for the lights to come on at dusk," I used the mass noun "reason" in the course of ascribing the property of being reasoned to a state of affairs. This use of the mass noun is unavoidable in common English, but it can be misleading. Read literally, the mass noun "reason" should refer to stuff of some sort. Read literally, "there is reason" asserts that this stuff exists, just as "there is water in the lake" asserts that stuff of a particular sort exists in the lake. But the existence of the abstract stuff "reason" is metaphysically dubious, and we need not be committed to it just by using the expression "there is reason."[3] This expression is merely the means we have in common English of saying that something is reasoned, in the absence of a natural predicate. It commits us to the existence of the property but not the stuff. One merit of the artificial predicate "reasoned" is that it does not misleadingly suggest the existence of reason-stuff.

Suppose next that the lights ought to come on at dusk. (I mean this ought to be normative; perhaps it is dangerous if they do not come on.) Then the state of affairs consisting in the lights' coming on at dusk has a different normative property. English has no convenient predicate to express this property either, so I shall introduce the artificial predicate "oughted." "The lights' coming on at dusk is oughted" means just the same as "The lights ought to come on at dusk." I shall sometimes call the property of being oughted "the oughted property."

The reasoned property and the oughted property are properties of states of affairs, which may be actual or merely possible. What about constructions based on an infinitive, such as "There is reason to believe dinosaurs were warm-blooded"? Do these ascribe the property of being reasoned to whatever is denoted by
p. 301 the infinitival clause—in this case "to believe dinosaurs were warm-blooded"? I think not; I take them to
↳ be elliptical. I take the dinosaur sentence to mean "There is reason for you to believe dinosaurs were warm-blooded," or "There is reason for everyone to believe dinosaurs were warm-blooded," or something like that. In my artificial language: "Your believing dinosaurs were warm-blooded is reasoned," or "Everyone's believing the dinosaurs were warm-blooded is reasoned," or something like that.

13.3 The Reasoned-for Relation and the Oughted-for Relation

Next suppose Caroline has reason to visit the bank. Then Caroline's visiting the bank stands in a particular normative relation to Caroline. I describe it using the artificial dyadic predicate "reasoned for." I say: Caroline's visiting the bank is reasoned for Caroline. I shall sometimes call this "the reasoned-for relation."

The sentence "Caroline has reason to visit the bank" contains the mass noun "reason." Read literally, this sentence implies the existence of some reason-stuff. But again, using the expression "has reason" need not commit us to the existence of such stuff. It is simply a way of saying in common English that the reasoned-for relation obtains between a state of affairs and a person. It commits us to the relation, not the stuff.

When Caroline has reason to visit the bank, the reason is commonly said to be "agent-relative" to Caroline. "Agent-relative" is a useful term, but inaccurate in some applications. For example, Caroline might have reason to believe the bank is closed, but Caroline is not an agent of her beliefs, so it would be inaccurate to call the reason "agent-relative." Furthermore, to say the reason is agent-relative is too unspecific in one respect. It gives no hint about the nature of the relationship that the reason bears to the agent. I prefer to say the reason is "owned" by Caroline. We could also say it "applies" to Caroline. These terms are metaphorical, but at least they hint at the nature of the relationship.

The previous paragraph contains the count noun "reason." "The reason" in that paragraph refers to a particular obtaining of the reasoned-for relation—a trope, as philosophers call it. In "The red in that photo is an artefact of the lens," "the red" similarly refers to a trope. But the count noun "reason" more commonly refers to something quite different, which I shall define in sections 13.6 and 13.8. To narrow the opportunities for confusion, from here on I shall not use this count noun for a trope. Instead, I shall sometimes have to use ungainly phrases such as "an obtaining of the reasoned-for relation."

There is more than one way to report in common English an obtaining of the reasoned-for relation. I used the sentence "Caroline has reason to visit the bank," which makes it very explicit that Caroline is the owner. But I could instead have said "There is reason for Caroline to visit the bank." This sentence can have the same meaning implying ownership. However, the latter sentence can alternatively mean simply that
p. 302 Caroline's visiting the bank has the monadic property of being reasoned. Fortunately, ↳ the two different meanings are registered in the sentence's grammar. When the sentence means that the reasoned-for relation obtains, so ownership is implied, it can be parsed {There is reason}{for Caroline}{to visit the bank}. When it means that the monadic reasoned property obtains, it can be parsed {There is reason for}{Caroline

to visit the bank}. The different parsings may be distinguished by a simple test. If the sentence has the former parsing, it can be rearranged to make "For Caroline, there is reason to visit the bank" without changing its meaning. If it has the latter parsing, it cannot.

Suppose now that Caroline ought to visit the bank. This probably means that Caroline's visiting the bank stands in a particular normative relation to Caroline. I describe it using the artificial dyadic predicate "oughted for." I say: "Caroline's visiting the bank is oughted for Caroline." I shall sometimes call this "the oughted-for relation."

When Caroline's visiting the bank is oughted for Caroline, the ought may be said to be "agent-relative" to Caroline. I prefer to say it is "owned" by Caroline. "The ought" here refers to a trope: a particular obtaining of the oughted-for relation. Since the count noun "ought" is already artificial, and we have no other use for it, there is no risk of confusion in using it this way. I shall do so.

Unfortunately, the sentence "Caroline ought to visit the bank" is ambiguous. It probably means that Caroline's visiting the bank stands in the dyadic oughted-for relation to Caroline, so that the ought is owned by Caroline. But it could also mean that Caroline's visiting the bank has the monadic property of being oughted. "Ought" sentences in general have these two alternative meanings. They may or may not ascribe ownership of the ought. Compare "The lights ought to come on at dusk." This sentence probably means that the lights' coming on at dusk has the monadic property—that the lights' coming on at dusk is oughted. It almost certainly does not imply that the lights' coming on at dusk is oughted for the lights, which would mean that the lights own the ought. There appears to be no grammatical difference between "ought" sentences that ascribe ownership of the ought and those that do not. The difference is said to be marked in the deep grammar (Hacquard 2010), but there is no easy test for it. The artificial expressions "oughted" and "oughted for" cut through the ambiguity.

13.4 Type Relations

In this chapter I shall argue that reason fundamentalists should take the reasoned-for relation as fundamental and ought fundamentalists should take the oughted-for relation as fundamental. Why do I choose these particular relations? When Caroline has reason to visit the bank, a relation obtains between whatever is denoted by the infinitival phrase "to visit the bank" and Caroline. Why not take this relation to be fundamental instead?

To see why not, suppose for the sake of argument that the infinitival phrase denotes a type—in the example, a type of act. When Caroline has reason to visit the bank, the type denoted by "to visit the bank" stands in a normative relation to her. Let us call this "the type-reasoned-for relation." In general, whenever *N* has
p. 303 reason to *F*, the type denoted by ↳ "to *F*" stands in the type-reasoned-for relation to *N*. (The participle "*F*-ing" can denote this same type.)

Whenever *N* has reason to *F*, it is also the case that the state of affairs consisting in *N*'s *F*-ing stands in the reasoned-for relation to *N*. Moreover, for *F*-ing to stand in the type-reasoned-for relation to *N* just is for *N*'s *F*-ing to stand in the reasoned-for relation to *N*. So the type-reasoned-for relation can be reduced to the reasoned-for relation.

On the other hand, when a state of affairs *p* stands in the reasoned-for relation to *N*, the type-reasoned-for relation need not hold between anything and *N*, unless *p* is the state of affairs of *N*'s *F*-ing, for some type *F*-ing. So the reasoned-for relation cannot be reduced to the type-reasoned-for relation, unless, whenever *p* stands in the reasoned-for relation to *N*, *p* is the state of affairs of *N*'s *F*-ing, for some type *F*-ing. But it seems that some states of affairs might stand in the reasoned-for relation to *N* even though they do not

consist in *N*'s *F*-ing. For example, it seems that the state of affairs consisting in Caroline's bank account's being in credit might stand in the reasoned-for relation to Caroline. We might even say "Caroline has reason for her bank account to be in credit." This seems to make sense, though I admit its grammar is questionable.[4]

There might actually be no examples like this, despite appearances, but there might be some. So the reasoned-for relation is a better candidate for being fundamental than the type-reasoned-for relation. The latter is definitely reducible to the former, but the former may not be reducible to the latter.

For the same reason, the oughted-for relation is a better candidate for being fundamental than the corresponding type-oughted-for relation.

13.5 Reducing the Properties to the Relations

The coexistence of the reasoned property and the reasoned-for relation complicates reason fundamentalism, and the coexistence of the oughted property and the oughted-for relation complicates ought fundamentalism. These complications are diminished if the monadic properties can be reduced to the corresponding dyadic relations. I assume this is indeed possible.

When there is reason for something to be the case, I assume there is always someone who is responsible for its being the case. If there is reason for the lights to come on at dusk, I assume someone owns this obtaining of the reasoned property. In general, I assume that for it to be the case that *p* is reasoned is for it to be the case that, for some *N*, *p* is reasoned for *N*. This reduces the reasoned property to the reasoned-for relation.

Are there not some obtainings of the reasoned property that are agent-neutral? Would these not resist
p. 304 reduction, because no one owns them? I think that, when an obtaining ↳ of the reasoned property is agent-neutral, this normally means it belongs to everyone rather than to no one (see Broome 2013: sect. 4.5). However, I do not dogmatically rule out the possibility that there are indeed some obtainings of the reasoned property that belong to no one. Suppose there is reason for the lights to come on at dusk. Suppose this obtaining of the reasoned property used to be owned by the manager, but she has retired and not been replaced. The responsibility may now fall somewhere else, perhaps on the landowner or the government, so that they now own the obtaining of the reasoned property. But perhaps not. Perhaps the entire lighting system has deliberately and rightly been abandoned to nature. If so, it is probably now false that there is reason for the lights to come on at night. But possibly there might be circumstances in which it remains true that there is reason for the lights to come on at dusk, even though no one owns this obtaining of the reason-property. It is plausible in a case like this that "There is reason for the lights to come on at dusk" has a special meaning and does not report an obtaining of the reasoned property. It might be evaluative rather than strictly normative, for example. But I do not wish to take a stand on this, so I accept the possibility that there are genuine obtainings of the reasoned property that belong to no one.

I am working toward an argument that reason fundamentalists should recognize only the dyadic reasoned-for relation as a fundamental element in normativity. If there are indeed obtainings of the monadic reasoned property that belong to no one, they would have to recognize this monadic property as a second fundamental element. That would make little difference to the conclusions of this chapter. Given that it would make little difference, for convenience I shall continue to assume that the monadic property is reducible to the dyadic relation. If that is so, reason fundamentalists should recognize only the dyadic relation as fundamental.

The oughted property can be reduced to the oughted-for relation, but the reduction is more complicated. It can happen that the oughted-for relation obtains between one person and a state of affairs, and also obtains

between a different person and the opposite state of affairs. For example, in a litter-collecting contest, it might be that Alf ought to collect more litter than Beth, and Beth ought to collect at least as much litter as Alf, and in both cases the ought is owned. Then Alf's collecting more litter than Beth is oughted for Alf, and Alf's not collecting more litter than Beth is oughted for Beth. Some first-order deontic theories are agent-neutral and would deny that this sort of deontic opposition is possible, but we should not adopt a metaphysics for normativity that commits us to such a strong first-order theory. So let us assume the example is possible. Then we would not say "It ought to be the case that Alf collects more litter than Beth" and also "It ought to be the case that Alf does not collect more litter than Beth." Those claims seem conceptually incompatible. Given that, it would be a mistake to accept a metaphysical theory that implies both that Alf's collecting more litter than Beth is oughted and that Alf's not collecting more litter than Beth is oughted. This would take the oughted property too far from our ordinary concept of ought.

So its being the case that *p* is oughted is not the same as its being the case that, for some *N*, *p* is oughted for *N*. This does not stop the monadic oughted property from being reducible; it just requires a different
p. 305 reduction. For example, that *p* is oughted might be ↳ reducible to: for some *N*, *p* is oughted for *N*, and for no *M* is not *p* oughted for *M*. Or some other reduction might be correct.[5]

I cannot rule out the possibility that some oughts are owned by no one. For example, it may be true that lightning ought not to kill so capriciously. It is plausible that "Lightning ought not to kill so capriciously" has a special meaning, and does not report an obtaining of the oughted property. It might be evaluative rather than strictly normative, for example. But I do not wish to take a stand on this, so I accept the possibility that there are genuine oughts that belong to no one.

If there are, ought fundamentalists will have to recognize two fundamental elements: the oughted property and the oughted-for relation. Again, this would make little difference to the conclusion of this chapter. Given that it would make little difference, for convenience I shall continue to assume that the oughted property is reducible to the oughted-for relation. If that is so, ought fundamentalists should recognize only the relation as fundamental.

13.6 The Property of Being a Reason Reduced to the Reasoned-for Relation

We cannot get far with the ontology of normativity without asking what a reason is. This is a question about what is referred to by the count noun "a reason," whereas the reasoned property and the reasoned-for relation are referred to in English using the mass noun "reason." Both reason fundamentalism and ought fundamentalism need a place for reasons in their ontology.

Thomas Nagel offers a definition of a reason that is conducive to reason fundamentalism:

> Every reason is a predicate *R* such that for all persons *p* and events *A*, if *R* is true of *A*, then *p* has prima facie reason to promote *A*.[6]

This definition may at first appear circular, because the word "reason" appears in both the definiendum and the definiens. But the appearance is spurious, because "reason" is a count noun in the definiendum and a mass noun in the definiens. The clause "*p* has prima facie reason to promote *A*" describes the obtaining of the reasoned-for relation between *p*'s promoting *A* and *p*. So Nagel defines a reason in terms of the reasoned-for relation.

I assume Nagel intends this to be a "real definition"—to say what a reason is, rather than merely what "a
p. 306 reason" means. He is defining the property of being a reason, rather ↳ than a reason itself. He is saying that

the property of being a reason is the property of being a predicate *R* such that . . . . His definition reduces the property of being a reason to the reasoned-for relation.

Daniel Fogal has pointed out to me that in his writing Nagel slips capriciously between the mass noun "reason" and the count noun "a reason," so it may be only by chance that he here writes "has prima facie reason" rather than "has a prima facie reason." However, Nagel is explicitly offering a definition, and if he had made the second "reason" a count noun, it would have been hard for him to avoid the charge that his definition is circular. So it is charitable to take him at his word. Possibly he does not deserve all the credit I give him.

We anyway cannot adopt his definition as it stands. For one thing, Nagel designed it for his own purposes in *The Possibility of Altruism*, and some of its features are unsuitable for wider purposes. For example, Nagel implicitly assumes that the reasoned-for relation applies only to promoting an event, whereas actually it is much more widely applicable than that. The restriction to prima facie reason is also too narrow.

Moreover, the definition is incorrect in at least one respect: it is incorrect to say that a reason is a predicate. A predicate is a feature of language, whereas a reason is a feature of the world. We may take a reason to be a fact, as we do in saying that a reason to stay indoors is that it is raining hard, or we may take it to be the obtaining of a property, as we do in saying that the noisiness of a restaurant is a reason to eat elsewhere. But in any case, it is not a predicate.

We also need to pay attention to the conditional connection that is expressed by "if . . . then" in the definition. Nagel cannot mean the connection to be mere implication. Suppose the predicate "is an event that *p* has prima facie reason to promote" is substituted for "*R*." If we interpret "if . . . then" as mere implication, the conditional "if *R* is true of *A*, then *p* has prima facie reason to promote *A*" is tautologously true. So under this interpretation, the definition tells us that this predicate is a reason. Nagel cannot mean that. He cannot think that the fact that *p* has prima facie reason to promote *A* is itself a reason for *p* to promote *A*.

"If . . . then" sometimes expresses an explanatory connection. "If *X* then *Y*" sometimes means that, if *X*, then *X* makes it the case that *Y*, or *X* explains why *Y* is so, or *Y* is so because *X*. (I take all these to be different ways of saying the same thing.) I think this is what Nagel has in mind. For example, suppose *R* is the property of being beneficial. If *A* is beneficial, that makes it the case that there is reason for *p* to promote *A*. And Nagel would indeed think that *R* is a reason for *p* to promote *A*. So an explanatory connection fits the definition well. At any rate, whatever Nagel means, a correct definition of a reason must mention an explanatory connection.[7]

Taking all this into account, a definition in the spirit of Nagel's is:

> A reason is something that explains an obtaining of the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation.

p. 307 Remember this defines the property of being a reason. It means:

> The property of being a reason is the property of being something that explains an obtaining of the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation.

The definition can be made more specific by identifying what the reason is a reason for. In general, reasons are reasons for states of affairs. From now on in this chapter, I shall concentrate on states of affairs of a particular type: those that consist in a person *N*'s *F*-ing. (*F*-ing may be doing something, hoping for something, believing something, and so on.) This simplification allows me to formulate definitions in common English. I deviate from English only in using schematic letters.

A definition of a more specific reason is:

> A reason for *N* to *F* is something that explains why there is reason for *N* to *F*.

This is actually two definitions in one. It defines two different sorts of reason: a property-reason, which explains an obtaining of the reasoned property, and a relation-reason, which explains an obtaining of the reasoned-for relation. It does so by exploiting the ambiguous parsing of the English. The definition can be read either as

> {A reason for}{*N* to *F*} is something that explains why {there is reason for}{*N* to *F*},

which define a property-reason, or as

> {A reason}{for *N*}{to *F*} is something that explains why {there is reason}{for *N*}{to *F*},

which defines a relation-reason. I shall make shameless use of this ambiguity to save space.

I give "explain" a wide meaning. The explaining relation is simply the inverse of the because relation; I shall not try to analyze it further than that.[8] So my definition of a reason for *N* to *F* is equivalent to

> A reason for *N* to *F* is something that makes it the case that there is reason for *N* to *F*

and to

> A reason for *N* to *F* is something that provides reason for *N* to *F*.
>
> For a relation-reason only, it is also equivalent to
>
> A reason for *N* to *F* is something that gives *N* reason to *F*.

p. 308 I have defined the property of being a reason in terms of the explaining relation and either the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation. No reciprocal definition is possible. For instance, the reasoned-for relation could not be defined as what is explained by a reason, because a reason might explain all sorts of irrelevant things. The fact that it is raining might explain why you have reason to take an umbrella, and it might also explain why the streets are wet and why the cats are skulking in doorways. So my definitions are reductive: they reduce the property of being a reason to more fundamental properties or relations.

They reduce it specifically to the explaining relation and either the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation. Since I assume the reasoned property can in turn be reduced to the reasoned-for relation, I have reduced the property of being a reason to the explaining relation and the reasoned-for relation. Since the reasoned-for relation is normative, the property of being a reason is not a fundamental element of normativity.

13.7 Apparent Disagreements

Following Nagel's lead, I have given a reductive definition of the property of being a reason. It is the property of explaining an obtaining of the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation. The concept of a reason can be defined in the same way: the concept of a reason is the concept of something that explains an obtaining of the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation.

This puts me into apparent disagreement with some philosophers who apparently deny that the concept of a reason can be defined. Derek Parfit writes:

> 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 favour of" means roughly "gives a reason for." Like some other fundamental concepts [. . .] the concept of a reason is indefinable. (Parfit 2011, vol. 1: 31)

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. (Scanlon 1998: 17)

But I do not think these philosophers mean to deny what I have affirmed. I do not think they mean to say that the concept of a reason, as I have defined it, is indefinable. I think they mean to say that the concept of the reasoned-for relation is indefinable. The concept of a reason is completely different from the concept of the reasoned-for relation. For one thing, they apply to completely different things. Suppose there is reason
p. 309 for ↳ Caroline to visit the bank, and this is because she needs a loan. Then the concept of a reason—specifically of a reason for Caroline to visit the bank—applies to the fact that Caroline needs a loan. But the concept of the reasoned-for relation applies to the state of affairs of Caroline's visiting the bank. Caroline's needing a loan is completely different from Caroline's visiting the bank.

Still, the distinction between the reasoned-for relation and the property of being a reason can get lost in English. A lot can depend on how the mass noun "reason" and the count noun "reason," whose plural is "reasons," are used.

Both Parfit and Scanlon take the phrase "counts in favor of" to mean the same as "gives [or provides] a reason for." What does "a reason" mean in this phrase? It refers to something that is given or provided, not to what gives or provides—to what is explained rather than what explains. As a count noun, "a reason" must denote some thing, but neither author tells us what sort of a thing that is. My interpretation of them is that, in the phrase "gives a reason for," "a reason" denotes an obtaining of the reasoned-for relation—a trope, that is. This is a perfectly good usage. I used it myself briefly in section 13.3, but subsequently avoided it for the sake of clarity.

When Parfit writes that a fact gives us a reason for having some attitude or acting in some way, I think he means that the fact makes it the case that our having the attitude or acting in that way is reasoned for us. The fact explains an obtaining of the reasoned-for relation. Where Parfit uses the count noun, I would prefer to use the mass noun. I would say that the fact gives us reason for having that attitude or acting in that way. Alternatively, the fact makes it the case that we have reason to have the attitude or act in that way. When Parfit writes that the concept of a reason is fundamental and indefinable, I therefore take him to mean that the concept of the reasoned-for relation is fundamental and indefinable.

Whereas Parfit uses "a reason" for what is given, he recognizes that it could alternatively be used for what gives, which he takes to be a fact. He writes:

> Rather than saying that certain facts give us reasons, some people say that these facts are reasons for us. [. . .] But these people's claims do not conflict with mine, since these are merely different ways of saying the same things. (Parfit 2011, vol. 1: 32)

Nevertheless, Parfit himself is consistent in using "a reason" for what is given and not for what gives. He uses "a reason" for an obtaining of the reasoned-for relation rather than for a reason in my terminology.

Scanlon is less consistent than Parfit. He uses "a reason" both for what provides and for what is provided. The second sentence of the paragraph of his I quoted says "a reason for something [is] a consideration that

counts in favor of it." The third sentence defines "counts in favor of" as "provides a reason for." Substituting this definition into the second sentence, we get "a reason for something is a consideration that provides a reason for it." A reason provides a reason. This is definitely confusing.

Scanlon could have distinguished what provides from what is provided by using the mass noun "reason" to
p. 310 refer to the latter, as I do. I doubt he meant to put weight on his ↳ use of the count noun in that place. Had he switched to the mass noun, he would have said in effect: "a reason for something is a consideration that provides reason for it." This makes good sense. Indeed, it can serve as a definition of a reason. It is a version of my definition, which is a development of Nagel's. Scanlon narrowly misses this definition through using the count noun instead of the mass noun. He thinks his sentences go in a circle, but read this way they do not. They provide a definition of a reason. They reduce the property of being a reason to the reasoned-for relation together with explanation. On my reading, Scanlon takes the reasoned-for relation to be fundamental.

In sum, I think both Scanlon's and Parfit's view is that the reasoned-for relation, rather than the property of being a reason, is fundamental. In section 13.1, I described one version of reason fundamentalism as the view that the property of being a reason is the fundamental element of normativity. But I explained in section 13.6 that this is false, since the property of being a reason can be reduced to the reasoned-for relation together with the explaining relation. I have now attributed to Parfit and Scanlon the view that the reasoned-for relation is fundamental. The best version of reason fundamentalism is the view that the reasoned-for relation is the fundamental element of normativity.

This best version is not often clearly expressed. I think that is because common English does not provide good materials for expressing it clearly. English provides no predicate for either the property of being reasoned or the reasoned-for relation. Consequently, philosophers find themselves writing about the property of being a reason instead. They end up saying that this property is fundamental, when they should say that the reasoned-for relation is fundamental.

I think Parfit and Scanlon believe that the reasoned-for relation is fundamental in normativity, but neither provides a strong argument for this conclusion. They report that they cannot see how to reduce the reasoned-for relation to another element of normativity. In section 13.9 I shall argue that the reasoned-for relation is not fundamental by offering just such a reduction.

13.8 The Property of Being a Reason Reduced to the Oughted-for Relation

I have something else to do first. In section 13.6, I described how the property of being a reason is reducible to the reasoned-for relation and the explanation relation. This reduction belongs to reason fundamentalism. In this section, I shall present an alternative reduction that belongs to ought fundamentalism. The property of being a reason can be reduced to the oughted-for relation and the explanation relation. Crudely: reasons are reducible to ought. This reduction is more complicated.[9]

p. 311 It retains a central feature of the previous reduction: a reason is something that has an explanatory connection to a normative fact. In the previous reduction, the connection was to an obtaining of the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation. In this reduction, the connection is to what I shall call an "ought fact." An ought fact is a fact that a particular state of affairs is oughted or is oughted for a particular person, or a fact that it is not oughted or not oughted for a particular person.[10]

In section 13.6 I simplified the language by concentrating on the particular states of affairs of that consist in a person *N*'s *F*-ing. I shall do the same here. An ought fact in this case is either the fact that *N* ought to *F* or

the fact that it is not the case that *N* ought to *F*.

To reduce reasons to ought, we must divide reasons into different classes. One class is the *pro toto reasons*, which have the simple definition:

> A *pro toto* reason for *N* to *F* is something that explains why *N* ought to *F*.

As well as *pro toto* reasons, there are reasons for *N* to *F* that do not explain why *N* ought to *F*. Indeed, often there is a reason for *N* to *F* when it is not even the case that *N* ought to *F*. There might be a reason for you to go to a meeting that is outweighed by a stronger reason to have coffee with your friends instead. If so, it is not the case that you ought to go to the meeting. Reasons for *N* to *F* that do not explain why *N* ought to *F* I class as *subsidiary reasons*. A subsidiary reason for *N* to *F* plays some role in explaining why *N* ought to *F* or why it is not the case that *N* ought to *F*, but does not itself explain why *N* ought to *F*.

However, not everything that plays a part in explaining an ought fact is a reason. For example, an explanation of why Caroline ought to visit the bank may include an arithmetical fact such as the fact that $2,000 is less than $2,500. This fact might help to explain why Caroline is in debt and so ought to visit the bank, but it might not qualify as a reason for her to visit the bank.

To separate reasons from other things that play a role in explaining an ought fact, we have to pay attention to the details of the explanation. Explanations of ought facts come in various different forms. Different normative theories explain ought facts in different ways, and some theories may allow for more than one form of explanation. Not all forms of explanation have a role for subsidiary reasons, but some do. A particular category of subsidiary reason is defined by its role in one of the forms of explanation that do.

Compare the definition of a force in mechanics. In a mechanical explanation of why a body accelerates as it does, certain things play a particular role. Direction and strength are attributed to these things. They combine by the vector addition of directions and strengths, and the body's acceleration is given by their combined direction and their combined strength divided by the body's mass. That is the explanation of acceleration. Things that occupy the role I described within the explanation are defined as forces.

p. 312 Subsidiary reasons of one category are defined in a roughly analogous way, by their role in explanations of a form I call "weighing explanations." In a weighing explanation of why *N* ought to *F*, or of why it is not the case that *N* ought to *F*, certain things play a particular role. A weight is attributed to each of them. So is a "direction"; some are for *F*-ing and some are against *F*-ing. Their weights combine in some way. If the combined weight of those that are for *F*-ing is greater than the combined weight of those that are against *F*-ing, then *N* ought to *F*; otherwise it is not the case that *N* ought to *F*. That is the explanation. Things that occupy the role I described are defined as "*pro tanto* reasons."

The analogy with forces may be helpful but it is not very tight. *Pro tanto* reasons are more analogous to force-givers in mechanics, such as electric and gravitational fields, rather than to the forces themselves, which are created by these fields.

Weighing explanations call for a lot more detailed description. For one thing, we need a fuller account of the arithmetic of weights, which allows them to be combined. Among the difficulties is that weights are obviously vague and they obviously need not combine in anything like an additive fashion. I do not know whether a cogent account of weighing explanations can eventually be given. Nevertheless, it is commonly assumed in philosophy that ought facts are often explained in this way by *pro tanto* reasons. Whether or not this is a correct assumption, weighing explanations give us one category of subsidiary reasons—*pro tanto* reasons.

Weighing explanations are just one type of explanation of ought facts. Ought facts can be explained in different ways that give different roles to subsidiary reasons. An example is the account of reasons found in John Horty's *Reasons as Defaults* (2012). Horty's reasons fall into a different category of subsidiary reasons. There may be other categories too.

On the other hand, some explanations of ought facts give no role to subsidiary reasons. For example, some oughts may be explained simply by deontic rules. Take the deontic rule "Do not have contradictory beliefs." On some theories about what one ought to believe, this rule has to be set against other considerations, and might be outweighed. For example it might be outweighed if great good could be achieved by having contradictory beliefs. On these theories, the rule constitutes a subsidiary reason. But some philosophers think that the rule against having contradictory beliefs is absolute: it cannot be outweighed. The rule itself is enough to determine that you ought not to have contradictory beliefs. The rule is then a *pro toto* reason for you not to have contradictory beliefs, and there are no subsidiary reasons.

Another example is teleological explanation. A teleological explanation of what *N* ought to do assumes that there is a number of "alternatives," each good or bad to some degree. If *F*-ing is the best of the alternatives, that makes it the case that *N* ought to *F*. There is a *pro toto* reason for *N* to *F*, which is that *F*-ing is the best of the alternatives. No subsidiary reasons are involved.

True, it may be possible to turn a teleological explanation into a weighing explanation. It may be possible to treat the good and bad features of each alternative as *pro tanto* reasons for or against *F*-ing, which are weighed against each other. But a teleological explanation does not treat them that way. In a teleological
p. 313 explanation, the good ↳ and bad features of each alternative contribute, often by weighing, to determining how good or bad the alternative is. Then the goodness or badness of the alternatives determines whether or not *N* ought to *F*. *N* ought to *F* if and only if *F*-ing is the best of the alternatives. In a teleological explanation, goods are weighed, not reasons.

This section has provided a reductive account of the property of being a reason. It has explained how the property of being a reason can be reduced to the oughted property or the oughted-for relation, together with the explaining relation and whatever non-normative properties are involved in particular explanations. Since I assume the oughted property can in turn be reduced to the oughted-for relation, we have a reduction of the property of being a reason to the oughted-for relation, the explaining relation, and whatever non-normative properties are involved in particular explanations.

13.9 Ought Fundamentalism and Reason Fundamentalism

We now have all the materials we need to formulate ought fundamentalism and reason fundamentalism.

According to ought fundamentalism, the oughted-for relation is fundamental within normativity. I assume the oughted property can be reduced to the oughted-for relation, but if it cannot, it too is fundamental. The property of being a reason is not fundamental. In the way explained in section 13.8, it is reducible to the oughted property or the oughted-for relation, together with other elements that are not normative, including particularly the explaining relation. All this is enough basic material for giving a full account of normativity.

Ought fundamentalism does not need either the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation.[11] However, for anyone who wants them, they can easily be defined within ought fundamentalism. We can say that for it to be the case that there is reason for *N* to *F* is simply for it to be the case that there is a reason for *N* to *F*. This is a reductive definition of the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation in terms of the property

of being a reason. This latter property is already defined within ought fundamentalism, so we have done what is needed.

That completes my description of ought fundamentalism.

According to the best version of reason fundamentalism, the reasoned-for relation is fundamental within normativity. I assume the reasoned property can be reduced to the reasoned-for relation, but if it cannot, it too is fundamental. The property of being a reason is not fundamental. In the way I explained in section 13.6
p. 314 following Nagel, it ↳ is reducible to the reasoned property or the reasoned-for relation and the explaining relation.

Next, ought needs to be defined within reason fundamentalism. We cannot do without ought in an account of normativity; the whole point of normativity is to determine what we ought to do, ought to believe, and so on. True, the word "ought" is omitted from some recent works of normative philosophy, but other expressions stand in its place. Examples are "has conclusive reason," "has sufficient reason," or "has most reason." These terms are intended to be equivalent to "ought'; indeed, they express an implicit reduction of the ought relation to reason. How can this reduction be spelled out?

To spell it out, we must elaborate the ontology by taking the reasoned-for relation to be gradable—to have degrees. We must assume that, when *N* has reason to *F*, so that *N* stands in the reasoned-for relation to her *F*-ing, this relation may obtain more or less strongly. For example, *N* may have more reason to *F* than she has to *G*.

The modifiers "more" and "less" are here attached to the mass noun "reason." Read literally, they refer to greater or lesser quantities of the reason stuff. But they should not be read literally. We use the mass noun "reason" only as a means of referring to the reason property or relation, and using it does not commit us to there being such a stuff as reason. Adding the modifiers to "reason" commits us to different degrees of the relation, but still not to the stuff. "More" and "less" should be thought of as terms of comparison rather than terms of quantity.

Once we have degrees of the reasoned-for relation, we may define ought by specifying particular degrees of it. They are specified by adding other modifiers to "reason." Two that appear in the literature are "conclusive reason" and "sufficient reason." I start with those.

The modifiers "conclusive" and "sufficient" have an implicit argument place for some objective—something they are conclusive or sufficient for. For example, there is no such thing as conclusive evidence considered on its own. Evidence may be conclusive for one conclusion but not conclusive for another. It may be conclusive for manslaughter, say, but not for murder. What is conclusive reason supposed to be conclusive for? It can only be for ought. For *N* to have conclusive reason to *F* is for her to have reason to *F* that is strong enough to make it the case that she ought to *F*.

The modifier "sufficient" is instructive, because different authors give different meanings to "sufficient reason." This makes the implicit argument place conspicuous. Take a case where *N* must either *F* or *G*, and where she has no more reason to *F* than to *G*, and no more reason to *G* than to *F*. As Parfit uses the term "sufficient reason," *N* has sufficient reason to *F* and sufficient reason to *G*.[12] As Skorupski (2010: 38)uses the term, *N* has neither sufficient reason to *F* nor sufficient reason to *G*. The difference is that these authors are relating "sufficient" to different objectives. By "sufficient reason for *N* to *F*," Skorupski means: sufficient to
p. 315 make it the case that *N* ought to *F*. Parfit means: sufficient ↳ to make it permissible for *N* to *F*—in other words: sufficient to make it not the case than *N* ought not to *F*. Only in Skorupski's sense is "has sufficient reason" equivalent to "ought."

For *N* to have sufficient reason in this sense to *F* or for *N* to have conclusive reason to *F* is for her to have reason to *F* that is strong enough to make it the case that she ought to *F*. This defines sufficient reason or conclusive reason in terms of reason and ought. The modifiers "sufficient" and "conclusive" therefore cannot serve the purpose of reducing ought to reason.

"Most" does better. Once we have degrees of reason, we may say that *N* has most reason to *F* when *N* has more reason to *F* than she has to *G*, to *H* and so on, when *G*-ing, *H*-ing and so on are all the alternatives to *F*-ing. Then we can say that, for it to be the case that *N* ought to *F* is for it to be the case that *N* has most reason to *F*. That is to say, for it to be the case that *N*'s *F*-ing stands in the oughted-for relation to *N* is for it to be the case that *N*'s *F*-ing stands in the reasoned-for relation to *N* more strongly than *N*'s *G*-ing stands in the reasoned-for relation to *N*, or *N*'s *H*-ing stands in the reasoned-for relation to *N*, and so on for all the alternatives to *N*'s *F*-ing. This reduces the oughted-for relation to the gradable reasoned-for relation.

That completes my description of the best version of reason fundamentalism.

13.10 The Unfaithfulness of Reason Fundamentalism

Reason fundamentalism is not faithful to our ordinary concepts of ought and reason. Our ordinary concept of ought is not our ordinary concept of most reason. It is not the concept of the superlative of a gradable property. The concept of ought is simple; it does not have that structure.

One feature of our ordinary concepts is that sometimes the fact that *N* ought to *F* is explained by the balance of *pro tanto* reasons. In a case like this, there is most reason for *N* to *F*, and this fact is part of the explanation of why *N* ought to *F*. The connection between our ordinary concept of most reason and our ordinary concept of ought is an explanatory one. That there is most reason for *N* to *F* *makes it the case* that *N* ought to *F*. Not: that there is most reason for *N* to *F* *is* that *N* ought to *F*.[13]

Though our ordinary concepts of ought and most reason are not the same, they may yet have the same extension. If they do not, that puts reason fundamentalism in particularly serious conflict with our ordinary
p. 316 concepts. So do they? Are there some things ↳ that, according to our ordinary concepts, you ought to do but that you do not have most reason to do, or some things you have most reason to do when it is not the case that you ought to do them? This is most likely to happen in cases where what you ought to do is not determined by the balance of *pro tanto* reasons. So let us investigate a case of that sort.

Not everyone agrees there are such cases, but some first-order normative theories imply there are. In section 13.8 I described the evidentialist view that the deontic rule "Do not have contradictory beliefs" determines by itself that you ought not to have contradictory beliefs. It is absolute and does not need to be weighed against any contrary reasons. Let us use that example.

Suppose you can either have a particular pair of contradictory beliefs, and thereby achieve great good, or not have this pair of beliefs. The evidentialist view is that you ought not to have them. Is it also the evidentialist view that you have most reason not to have them?

On the evidentialist theory, the deontic rule makes it the case that you ought not to have these beliefs. That means it is a *pro toto* reason not to have them, as I defined a *pro toto* reason in section 13.8. The property of being a *pro toto* reason is not gradable. Nor does it have a weight in the way *pro tanto* reasons have. Given this, should we say that the rule gives you most reason not to have the contradictory beliefs? Does it give you more reason not to have them than to have them? Since it is not gradable and has no weight, it seems strange to say that it endows the state of affairs of your not having the beliefs with a gradable property, but one that automatically has a higher degree than any alternative. This strangeness shows that the concept of

most reason is best suited to cases where what you ought to do is determined by the weighing of *pro tanto* reasons.

Still, although it seems strange to apply this concept to the case of an absolute deontic rule, I do not think that doing so is entirely unacceptable. I conclude that our most ordinary concepts of ought and most reason do not have the same extension, but that our concepts can be stretched to make them do so, and the stretching is tolerable.

But the example illustrates a further strangeness. Using the concept of most reason this way gets the direction of explanation wrong. According to evidentialism, the deontic rule makes it the case directly that you ought not to have these beliefs. If, as well, you have most reason not to have them, this can only be because you ought not to have them. But according to our concepts, most reason explains ought rather than the other way round.

I conclude that the sharpest mismatch between reason fundamentalism and our ordinary concepts is over the matter of explanation. According to our ordinary concepts, most reason explains ought; according to reason fundamentalism, most reason is ought.

How far is it an objection to reason fundamentalism that it is unfaithful to our ordinary concepts? It means that either "ought" or "most reason" or both are technical terms in reason fundamentalism, with meanings different from their ordinary ones. We sometimes need to use technical terms in philosophy for the sake of precision, so this in itself is no objection. But in the philosophy of normativity especially, we should not
p. 317 stray unnecessarily from our ordinary concepts, because our philosophy has ultimately to stay ↳ in close contact with real life. Our ordinary concepts at least provide us with default criteria for judging a metaphysical theory, and we should not depart from them without good reason.

In the present case, I see no reason to depart from the ordinary concepts. In setting up the ought ontology and the reason ontology, I said little about the meanings of the oughted-for relation and the reasoned-for relation. I reduced other things to them, and demonstrated a formal parallel between them, but I said little substantive about what these two relations actually are, except that they are both normative. There might be several normative properties that we could arbitrarily identify with either of them, consistently with everything I said about them. Now we come to filling in more concrete details, and in particular to determining the connection between the two relations, we should match them as well as we can to our ordinary concepts. We have nothing else to go on.

13.11 Conclusion in Favor of Ought Fundamentalism

If there were no alternative, reason fundamentalism might be acceptable. But ought fundamentalism is a better alternative. It sticks close to our ordinary concepts. It has the merit of allowing naturally for different patterns of explanation in explaining oughts, whereas reason fundamentalism is naturally suited only to the weighing of *pro tanto* reasons. It is economical in that it has no need for the reasoned-for relation, whereas reason fundamentalism does need the oughted-for relation along with the reasoned-for relation.

I think we should therefore accept ought fundamentalism. This means giving up reason fundamentalism, and also the weaker view that the reasoned-for relation is a fundamental element in normativity. Reasons, the property of being a reason, the reasoned property, and the reasoned-for relation are none of them fundamental elements of normativity.

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Notes

1 See Scanlon (2014: 2). However, Scanlon does favor the view that reasons are fundamental in normativity. In sect. 13.7 I shall analyze the statement of this view that appears in Scanlon (1998).

2 I take this term from Fogal (2016), but my meaning is rather different from his.

3 Here I am withdrawing some of what I said in Broome (2013: sect. 4.4). I am also disagreeing with some of Fogal (2016). Nevertheless, I have been greatly influenced by that paper.

4 On the grammar, see Sæbø (2009) and the response in Fogal (2015: 41n.).

5 In "*Ought* and Moral Obligation" (1981), Bernard Williams made the opposite claim that the oughted-for relation can be reduced to the oughted property. I responded to Williams in Broome (2012, 2013: 19–20).

6 Nagel (1970: 47). On p. 48 Nagel says explicitly that this is a definition.

7 Stephen Kearns and Daniel Star deny this point in their (2008). My response is in Broome (2008).

8 There is more discussion of it in Broome (2013: 47–9).

9 It is set out in more detail in Broome (2013: sect. 4.3).

10 Thanks here to Susan Wolf.

11 They are not mentioned in Broome (2013) except in sect. 4.4, where I mention them only to set them aside.

12 Parfit (2011, vol. 1: 33). Consistently with his usual practice, Parfit actually uses the phrase "sufficient reasons" rather than "sufficient reason."

13 Hurka (2014: 75–7) provides an illuminating discussion of this point in connection with the unpublished correspondence of H. A. Prichard. Prichard appears to have accepted the concept of most reason (to use modern terminology rather than his) but rejected the concept of ought, precisely because he realized they are not the same.

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