

Reasons: Explanations or Evidence?*

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Imagine you are walking along a busy road, deep in thought, and someone suddenly pushes you over. You stand up and turn to confront the person responsible for your fall. Suppose this person tells you that he has just saved your life by pushing you out of the way of a fast-traveling bus (and suppose, if you like, that this story is confirmed by disinterested onlookers). He also tells you that he almost didn't push you and thereby save your life because he is in a great hurry to get to a meeting. You thank him profusely, and he hurriedly goes on his way. It seems that a natural way of describing what just happened in this scenario is to say that this stranger considered the reasons for and against helping you and he made a quick judgment that, given the balance of reasons in play, he really ought to save you.¹ No description of this kind would be appropriate if the person who pushed you over had simply accidentally tripped. Of course, he could appropriately say, "the reason I fell on you was that I tripped," but in saying this he would not be providing a

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1. Of course, it is possible for no weighing of reasons to occur before a person reaches out to prevent another person from being run over by a bus. Perhaps the stranger in this story is guilty of having "one thought too many"; still, other less straightforward cases could be used to make the same general point (i.e., cases where it isn't simply obvious that one reason outweighs another or that someone would be morally criticizable if they didn't act spontaneously in a particular way). According to us, responding to reasons consists in responding to evidence (concerning what one ought to do, in the case of reasons for action), and it seems clear that we often respond appropriately to evidence when we respond spontaneously (e.g., when forming beliefs via perception), so the "one thought too many" consideration does not worry us. Perhaps it should worry Broome, since it might be thought that we don't normally respond spontaneously and appropriately to explanations, unless we are responding to them *as* evidence (about which more below).

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normative justification—he would be using the word “reason” in a different way. The reasons we are primarily interested in when we do ethics are not (merely) causally explanatory reasons. Rather, we are concerned with *normative* reasons, that is, considerations that can count in favor of or justify actions. Such reasons have recently been receiving a great deal of attention.

Some writers on normative reasons take them to be basic and not capable of being explained nontrivially in other terms.² John Broome is not one of these writers. He believes that reasons are a special kind of explanation (or more accurately, parts of explanations, as we shall see). They are, roughly speaking, explanations as to why one ought to do a particular act. Broome has defended this view in an important published paper and continues to defend it in his “Reasoning” book manuscript, where it forms part of a larger account of normativity, rational requirements, and reasoning.³ We think he has a particularly interesting account of normative reasons that is heading in the right direction but that by focusing on *explanations* of ought facts he fails to provide a correct analysis of reasons.

We believe reasons are *evidence*, rather than explanations. To say that X is a reason for one to act in a particular way is, in effect, to say that X is evidence that one ought to act in that way, rather than that X is an explanation of why one ought to act in that way. In another paper, we have provided a number of positive arguments for our view, as well as responses to counterarguments.⁴ We have not previously discussed Broome’s theory of reasons, although it has clearly been an important source of inspiration for us. In this essay we critically contrast Broome’s view that reasons are explanations of ought facts with our view that they are evidence of the obtaining of ought facts. We will argue that Broome’s view suffers from a number of weaknesses that our own view does not and that the advantages it at first seems to have over our own account can be adopted by us. The reader who is merely interested in Broome’s account of reasons, rather than our alternative account of

2. See T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17; Derek Parfit, “Rationality and Reasons,” in *Exploring Practical Philosophy: From Action to Values*, ed. Dan Egonsson, Jonas Josefsson, Bjorn Petersson, and Toni Ronnow-Rasmussen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 17–39, 18, and “Climbing the Mountain” (unpublished manuscript, All Souls College, University of Oxford, 2007).

3. John Broome, “Reasons,” in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, ed. Jay Wallace, Michael Smith, Samuel Scheffler, and Philip Pettit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28–55, and “Reasoning” (unpublished manuscript, Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford, 2007).

4. Stephen Kearns and Daniel Star, “Reasons as Evidence,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), forthcoming.

reasons, should find our discussion and critique of that account helpful in itself.

Before we look further into Broome's and our accounts of reasons, it may be useful to briefly spell out the intuitive contrast between explanation and evidence. If one fact, *F*, explains another, *G*, then *F makes it the case* that *G*. *F* is *why* *G* is the case. This need not be true if *F* is merely evidence that *G*. If *F* is evidence that *G*, then *F* indicates (or at least makes it more epistemically probable) that *G* is true. *F* may play no role in bringing it about that *G* obtains. Indeed, if *F* is merely evidence that *G*, then *G* may *not* obtain, whereas if *F* truly explains *G*, then *G* must be the case. According to our view of reasons, then, what makes a fact a reason is its role in (possibly misleadingly) indicating the truth of a proposition concerning what one ought to do. According to Broome's view, what makes a fact a reason is that it *makes it the case that* an ought fact obtains (or is, at least, an essential part of a fact that makes an ought fact obtain). Given the above differences between explanation and evidence, the two accounts make very different claims about normative reasons. One interesting connection between evidence and explanation, however, seems to be this—if *F* explains *G*, then *F* is evidence that *G*. If this is right, then all facts that are reasons according to Broome's account are also reasons according to our account. In Section IV we discuss whether facts that are reasons according to our account are also reasons according to Broome's (in virtue of being evidence). One might think this will not be the case because it seems that, in general, a fact being evidence of some truth does not guarantee that it is an explanation of that truth, but it may be that it is an interesting fact about the normative realm that it provides us with exceptions to this general thesis.

We will begin by providing a summary of Broome's account of reasons (Sec. I) before outlining our own account (Sec. II). We will then be ready to investigate apparent advantages that our account has over Broome's account (Sec. III) and apparent advantages that Broome's account has over ours (Sec. IV). Finally, we will respond to two criticisms of our account (Sec. V) before concluding by looking back on what we hope we have achieved (Sec. VI).

I. REASONS AS EXPLANATIONS

Broome begins his account of practical reasons by distinguishing between *perfect* reasons and *pro tanto* reasons (for action). In some cases a particular fact will provide an explanation, by itself, as to why one ought to *F*. Other cases will involve weighing up various considerations that each function as parts of an explanation of why one ought to *F*.

Broome defines *perfect* and *pro tanto* reasons as follows (the names “RP” and “RT” are our own):

RP: A *perfect* reason for *N* to *F* is an explanation of why *N* ought to *F*.⁵

RT: A *pro tanto* reason for *N* to *F* is whatever plays the for-*F* role in a weighing explanation of why *N* ought to *F*, or in a weighing explanation of why *N* ought not to *F*, or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that *N* ought to *F* and not the case that *N* ought not to *F*.⁶

Perfect reasons are the kind of reasons that explain why one ought to act in a particular way. Broome thinks that it is important not to confuse *perfect* reasons with two other kinds of considerations: *conclusive* reasons and *canonical* reasons.⁷ Suppose you ought to visit Mr. Reed (in what follows, we are simply using Broome’s own example and summarizing his own comments). If we ask what explains this fact, it might be enough to say that he is the best dentist around. If so, this would be a correct explanation of why you ought to visit Mr. Reed and thus a *perfect* reason. Another explanation of why you ought to visit Mr. Reed (an explanation you might provide in a different context) is that you ought to visit the best dentist around. This would also be a perfect reason, but it would not compete with the first perfect reason.

A *conclusive* reason to visit Mr. Reed would be the conjunction of the fact that Mr. Reed is the best dentist around and that you ought to visit the best dentist around. This is a conclusive reason because “it is a sufficient condition for the obtaining of the fact that you ought to visit Mr Reed.”⁸ Perfect reasons are sufficient explanations for why you ought to do a particular act, but they are not sufficient conditions for the obtaining of the fact that you ought to do that act (unless they are also conclusive reasons). Even though conclusive reasons always provide sufficient conditions for the obtaining of ought facts, in any particular context where they are in play, they need not provide sufficient conditions for the obtaining of ought facts across *all* contexts. That is to say, conclusive reasons need not be *canonical*. In a context where the best dentists are very expensive and where there are many demands on one’s finances, it might be necessary to explain why one ought to visit the best dentist around. Broome does not provide an example of a canonical reason, but one might suppose that the fact that an act would be an act of torturing an innocent person merely for fun is always a

5. Broome, “Reasoning,” 59. For a similar definition, see Broome, “Reasons,” 34–36.

6. Broome, “Reasoning,” 62–63. For a similar definition, see Broome, “Reasons,” 38–39.

7. Broome, “Reasoning,” 59–60.

8. *Ibid.*, 59.

sufficient condition for the obtaining of the fact that the act ought not to be done and thus a canonical reason.

According to Broome, *pro tanto* reasons are facts that enter into weighing explanations of why one ought to act in one way or another. More precisely, they are facts that play a “for-F” role in a weighing explanation of this kind. They do not always explain why one ought to F, because it is often *not* the case that one ought to F (when the reason to F is outweighed by one or more other *pro tanto* reasons). The relevant explanations are *weighing* explanations because they “rely on [an] analogy with mechanical weighing” of the kind that is involved when we put one or more objects on a left-hand pan and one or more objects on a right-hand pan and see which way the balance tips.⁹ The final clause in RT, “or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that *N* ought to *F* and not the case that *N* ought not to *F*,” is necessary both because sometimes reasons on different sides of the scale will be exactly equal in strength and because sometimes weights on either side of the scale will not permit exact comparison (they might be said to be “incommensurate”), and in such cases neither side outweighs the other.¹⁰

Something that we think is worth noting at this point is that Broome does not provide a statement of what a reason *simpliciter* is. We now know what *perfect* reasons are meant to be, and what *pro tanto* reasons are meant to be, but what are *reasons* (for action) meant to be? It seems that the most straightforward answer to this question—an answer that purposely does not go beyond what Broome has already said—is that a reason is *either* an explanation of why someone ought to act in a particular way *or* whatever plays one of the roles in an explanation of why someone ought to act in a particular way that Broome has delineated (in RT). We can thus formulate Broome’s complete account of reasons as follows:

RD: A *reason* for *N* to *F* is *either* an explanation of why *N* ought to *F* *or* whatever plays the for-*F* role in a weighing explanation of why *N* ought to *F*, or in a weighing explanation of why *N* ought not to *F*, or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that *N* ought to *F* and not the case that *N* ought not to *F*.¹¹

Before we criticize this account of reasons through a comparison with our own account of reasons, it is important to acknowledge some of its positive features. First, this account is designed to provide us with an informative analysis of practical reasons in other terms. Second, it captures the thought that it is one of the fundamental roles of the

9. *Ibid.*, 61. Alternatively, see Broome, “Reasons,” 36.

10. Broome, “Reasoning,” 62. Alternatively, see Broome, “Reasons,” 39.

11. Note that Broome does not use this formulation himself.

practical reasons at play in any particular situation to *make it the case that* one ought to act one way or another in that situation.¹² In fact, one can safely read Broome as claiming that to explain why *N* ought to *F* just is to specify what *makes it the case that N* ought to *F*.¹³ Finally, this account of reasons provides room for there to be reasons that are not considerations that need to be weighed against each other.¹⁴

Broome thinks that it is important to allow for this last possibility, although he expresses doubts about the only two examples that he provides. The first is simply the example of rigid deontic rules. Broome is doubtful about the existence of any true rigid deontic rules, and he admits that such rules might be thought to provide us with considerations that can, in fact, feature in weighing explanations; this is because such rules can be interpreted as telling us that certain reasons have infinite weight (so that no other reasons can outweigh them). This may be awkward, but “perhaps we could live with that awkwardness.”¹⁵ Another kind of example is the view that we always have a reason not to believe contradictions; this view, when combined with *evidentialism* (understood as a view that rules out the possibility of there being any non-evidential and nonepistemic reasons for belief) would seem to give us a perfect reason not to believe contradictions that cannot be weighed against other reasons.¹⁶ Broome believes rationality requires one not to have contradictory beliefs, but he does not want to commit himself to the view that it follows from this that one ought not to have contradictory beliefs.

Given Broome’s own doubts about these examples, it is unclear that this third feature of his account is really a positive feature. Perhaps it should be discounted. As will become clear in the next section, the first positive feature (the fact that an informative analysis is provided) is one that our own account of reasons possesses. And in the third section we will question whether this is really a feature of Broome’s account—it may be that appearances are deceptive here. This leaves the second positive feature as the sole positive feature of Broome’s account of reasons that might be thought to give it an advantage over our alternative account, absent independent arguments against our own account (a significant number of which we respond to elsewhere,¹⁷ and two of which we reply to in the fifth section of the present essay). We will return to this feature in the fourth section.

12. Broome, “Reasoning,” 57.

13. Broome has confirmed this in conversation.

14. *Ibid.*, 67–69. See also Broome, “Reasons,” 42–51.

15. Broome, “Reasoning,” 68.

16. *Ibid.*, 68.

17. Kearns and Star, “Reasons as Evidence.”

II. REASONS AS EVIDENCE

We believe reasons are best analyzed in terms of evidence, rather than explanations. Our alternative analysis of reasons is summed up by the following claim:

R: Necessarily, a fact X is a reason for an agent N to F if and only if (iff) X is evidence that N ought to F .

Our analysis is meant to cover all normative reasons, especially reasons to act and reasons to believe (as well as reasons to desire, intend, feel, admire, etc.), so the F in claim R can be an act or a belief (or something else). The fact that this is a *unified* analysis is meant to be one of its advantages—on some accounts of either reasons for action or reasons for belief, it seems like it is a mere accident that the word “reason” is used in both the practical and theoretical domains. Our analysis applied solely to reasons for belief is as follows:

RB: Necessarily, X is a reason for an agent N to believe that P iff X is evidence that N ought to believe that P .¹⁸

Recall the person who pushed you out of the way of a bus in the example we provided at the beginning of the essay. A piece of evidence that this person ought to push you was the fact that a bus was bearing down on you. Furthermore, he was aware of this fact. He was also aware that a meeting that was important to him was about to start and that slowing down would make him late. This fact, it is natural to suppose, was evidence that he ought not to help you. One way of describing what he did in the moment before he acted was that he weighed the evidence that he ought to help you against the evidence that he ought not to help you and acted on his judgment that it was more probably the case that he ought to help you than that he ought not to. Another way of describing what he did is just to say he weighed the reason to help you against the reason to (continue on his way and thus) not help you. We contend that these are basically just two ways of saying the same thing.

Suppose, unbeknownst to the stranger, you have a very frail leg—a leg that is so frail that a simple push to the ground will definitely break

18. Our analysis provides distinct conceptual space for both *epistemic* reasons for belief and *pragmatic* reasons for belief. In the first case, we say, “necessarily, X is an *epistemic* reason for N to believe that P iff X is evidence that N ought to believe that P , and X is evidence that N ought to believe that P because X is evidence that P .” In the second case, we say, “necessarily, X is a *pragmatic* reason for N to believe that P iff X is evidence that N ought to believe that P , and this is not just because X is evidence that P (and it may be the case that X is not evidence that P).” See Kearns and Star, “Reasons as Evidence,” for further discussion of these principles and how they are related to the simpler principle, “necessarily, X is an epistemic reason for an N to believe P iff X is evidence that P ” (which we also accept).

it. This may be evidence that he ought not to push you over. It is not evidence that is immediately accessible to the stranger (*ex hypothesi*). Does the fact that pushing you over will break your leg provide him with a reason to not push you over? This all depends on what “provide him with a reason” is taken to mean. We believe it is useful to distinguish between reasons that there *are* and reasons that an agent *has*. If the building I am in contains a bomb that none of us knows about, then there *is* a reason for me to run out of the building (after all, I’ll die if I don’t!), but it is not a reason that I *have*. We think it is particularly interesting that the being/having distinction seems to naturally play the same role when people talk about evidence as it plays when people talk about reasons.¹⁹ When we consider the possibility that the evidence that could convict a murderer (e.g., the bloody knife that was taken from the scene of the crime) has yet to be discovered, we talk about the evidence that is out there in the world, while at other times we are concerned with the evidence that people possess.²⁰ The intuitive attractiveness of these mappings of *having a reason* to *having evidence* and *there being a reason* to *there being evidence* is something that we take to count in favor of the view that reasons are evidence.

This alternative account of reasons has a number of positive features. First, we explain what reasons are in other terms. Admittedly, this is a positive feature that our account seems to share with the explanation-based account of reasons (although we will dispute this). Second, we provide a unified account of reasons for belief and reasons for action. Broome might be able to do this too, if he extends his account to cover reasons for belief as well as reasons for action (although it is not clear that he would wish to do this). There are three positive features of our account that we believe are not features of Broome’s account: simplicity, being well-placed to explain the practical and deliberative importance of reasons, and being well-placed to explain what it is to say that reasons come with different strengths. We bring out how these are positive features of our account of reasons in the next section, through asking how our account compares with Broome’s account on each score. In the fourth section, we focus on the relation between evidence and explanation and argue that our account of reasons is better placed to sit comfortably with and make sense of this relation than Broome’s is.

19. However, we don’t wish to claim that ordinary language is always consistent on this matter. The important point is that the relevant mappings come very naturally, rather than being at all forced.

20. The reader might wish to think of the evidence that we are saying is out there in the world as simply the evidence that an ideal observer (or one’s fully informed and fully rational counterpart) would possess, thus preserving a common view that evidence is always agent-relative in some sense. This is fine with us.

Finally, in the fifth section, we reply to two objections to our account of reasons that Broome's account seems to avoid.

III. ARE REASONS EXPLANATIONS OR EVIDENCE?

In this section we argue that our account of reasons has several advantages over Broome's account: it better explains the practical role of reasons (Sec. III.A), it is the only account that can actually provide a full-blooded analysis of what it is to be a reason (Sec. III.B), and it is a more simple and elegant account (Sec. III.C). In the next section, we look at an apparent advantage Broome's account has over ours.

A

Normative reasons are important not just philosophically but also practically. Indeed, the philosophical importance of reasons is due in large part to their importance in everyday life. In what exactly does the practical importance of reasons consist? One obvious answer to this question is that people need to know the reasons they have for acting in order to work out what they ought to do. That is, reasons are our guide to what we should do. This is obviously a tremendously significant role that reasons play. Indeed, some may be tempted to say that *what it is* for a fact to be a reason is that it can play this role in helping an agent determine what she ought to do. Whether or not this is true, it is clear that reasons do play this role. Furthermore, reasons play this role *in virtue of being reasons* (at least in part). Another way of putting this is to say that it is not only reasons that are relevant in helping an agent determine what she ought to do but also the fact, for any reasons that we might consider, that these reasons are reasons.

Given this observation, we are in a position to see how well Broome's account of reasons captures the practical role of reasons. Let us first consider perfect reasons. These are facts that are sufficient explanations of normative facts. It seems likely that if a fact, X , is indeed a sufficient explanation of the normative proposition that N ought to F , then N 's knowing X will be able to help her work out that she ought to F . Prima facie, then, Broome's analysis captures this important practical aspect of reasons. Something similar applies to Broome's conception of *pro tanto* reasons. If a fact, X , plays the for- F role in a weighing explanation of what N ought to do, then X may help N figure out what she ought to do.²¹

It may seem, then, that Broome's analysis of reasons captures nicely the practical role that reasons play in deliberation. Reasons are (parts of) explanations of normative facts, and such explanations can help an

21. The situation is less clear in this case, however, as it is not obvious exactly what the for- F role is. We return to this point in Sec. III.B.

agent work out what she ought to do. However, two problems arise for Broome's account at this point. For ease of expression, let us concentrate on Broome's conception of perfect reasons. Everything we say should apply equally to *pro tanto* reasons.

The first problem arises out of the following consideration. Take any fact that is an explanation of a normative proposition and that helps an agent work out that this normative proposition is true. It seems that this explanation is playing an important practical role in helping the agent work out what she ought to do. However, that this fact is an explanation of what she ought to do (or part of such an explanation) is not what it is about the fact that helps the agent work out what she ought to do. What is important is rather that the fact is *evidence* about what she ought to do. That is why such a fact plays the practical role of helping an agent determine what to do. An agent can use a fact to help her work out what she ought to do just when this fact is evidence about what she ought to do. That the fact is an explanation of what she ought to do is not itself practically important, although this may help make clear why the fact is evidence of what she ought to do. Thus, although Broome's account of reasons as explanations may allow for reasons' having an important practical role, these reasons do not have this role in virtue of being reasons. Rather, they have this role in virtue of being evidence about what one ought to do. This is problematic because it is very plausible that reasons have this important practical role precisely because they are reasons. Broome can at best only make sense of an indirect way in which a reason's being a reason may help it play this practical role (because explanations of a fact are evidence of this fact).

The second problem is that it seems to follow from Broome's account of reasons that a person may be able to work out what he or she ought to do without considering any reasons for or against her actions whatsoever. Indeed, a person may know what she ought to do without having any knowledge of her reasons to do it. (By this we mean not only that she does not know that certain facts are reasons but that she does not even know these facts.) This is possible on Broome's view because, though explanations may help a person determine what she ought to do, facts that are not (part of) explanations may also do this (e.g., the fact that a clearly reliable book says that you ought to eat cabbage may reasonably convince you that you ought to eat cabbage, even though this fact doesn't explain why you ought to eat cabbage). An agent may then work out what she ought to do by considering only those facts that are not explanations of what she ought to do. In such a case, the agent has worked out what to do without considering any of her reasons for action.

This idea is problematic for three reasons. First, if one is attracted

to the idea that what it is to be a reason is always, at least in part, to play a practical action-guiding role, then this is incompatible with Broome's view. According to his account, reasons need not play this role. Second, even if we think that such an action-guiding role is not essential to reasons, it is clear that reasons are generally practically important. However, if agents are able to work out what they ought to do without knowing what explains what they ought to do, then reasons, as Broome conceives of them, are not a vital part of practical life. Third, it seems perfectly possible that agents who work out what they ought to do without considering facts that explain what they ought to do can be virtuous. Virtuous people surely must be aware of some of their reasons for action, however. On Broome's view, it seems that a virtuous person need not be.

It should be clear that our view of reasons does not run into either of the two problems discussed above. If reasons are evidence about what one ought to do, it is clear not only that these reasons will help agents work out what to do but that they will do so because they are reasons (as being a reason comes to the same thing as being evidence of the truth of a normative proposition). Furthermore, on our view, any fact used appropriately in deliberation that helps determine what one ought to do will count as a reason. This is because such a fact will help an agent determine what she ought to do by being evidence about what she ought to do. We conclude, then, that our account of reasons explains the practical role reasons play and the practical importance of reasons better than Broome's does.

We may characterize one difference between Broome's view and ours as follows. Our view is a forward-looking view of reasons. That is, reasons are those things that are used to figure out what ought to be done. One is first in possession of reasons to act in certain ways and then uses these to determine how one should act. Broome's view is backward looking. Typically, reasoning that concerns explanation proceeds as follows: A person knows a fact and wishes to explain it. She then infers some other fact by inference to the best explanation. By applying this to the case of normative facts, we get the following picture. We know certain normative facts which we wish to explain. We then infer other facts by inference to the best explanation. These facts are, according to Broome, the reasons we have to act. The idea that reasons are explanations does not correctly identify the role reasons play in our reasoning. The idea that reasons are evidence does. This can be shown simply by appealing to the phenomenology of deliberation. When one is trying to work out what one ought to do, one seeks reasons to act in a certain way or another. One does not seek to explain why one ought to act in one way rather than another, but one does look for evidence about what one ought to do.

B

Both Broome's account and our account are touted as being fruitful analyses of normative reasons. We now wish to cast doubt on the idea that Broome's account can really be considered a full-blooded analysis of reasons. Our account, we believe, is such an analysis.

Consider the simple view that reasons are explanations. That is, P is a reason to *F* if and only if one ought to *F* because P is true. This analysis is of *all* normative reasons (not simply perfect reasons). This simple analysis is full-blooded. That is, it analyzes one concept in terms of a separate concept that we can understand without having to understand the first concept. The concept of "explanation" (or "because," which amounts to the same thing) is used to analyze the concept "reason." The problem with this simple analysis is that it is wrong. It implies that if one has a reason to *F*, then one ought to *F*. This is because, according to this simple analysis, a reason to *F* is an explanation of why one ought to *F*. Furthermore, if one has an explanation of why one ought to *F*, one ought to *F*. There are no merely *pro tanto* reasons according to this simple analysis. It ought to be rejected.

Of course, Broome is aware of this problem. That is why his analysis of reasons is not simply that they are explanations. Some reasons are explanations (namely, the perfect reasons), but others are not explanations. In some cases, reasons to *F* are facts that play an appropriate "for-*F*" in a weighing explanation of what one ought to do. The idea is that some explanations of normative facts appeal to other facts that weigh against each other—some for certain actions, some for other actions. *Pro tanto* reasons are the facts to which explanations of normative facts appeal.

This change to the simple analysis circumvents the problem raised above. However, it is no longer clear that this new analysis of reasons is really a genuine analysis of reasons at all. In order for us to understand this analysis, we must grasp what exactly the for-*F* role that is played by certain facts is. The most natural way to characterize this role is to say that some facts count in favor of certain actions while other facts count in favor of other actions. What it is for a fact to play the for-*F* role in a weighing explanation of some normative proposition is for this fact to count in favor of *F*-ing.

If this is what Broome's analysis comes to, however, it seems clear that it is not really a substantive *analysis* of reasons. Scanlon notes that one can understand reasons as facts that count in favor of certain actions.²² He points out that when pushed to explain what it is for a fact to count in favor of a certain action, it seems the only answer we can

22. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 17.

give is that the fact is a reason to perform this action. The idea of facts counting in favor of actions cannot be understood separately from the idea of reasons for actions. Broome's account of *pro tanto* reasons seems to have the same flaw (when considered as an analysis of reasons). Unless Broome can spell out further what the for-*F* role is, independently of the idea that any fact that plays this role is a reason to *F*, then Broome has not provided us with a full-blooded analysis of reasons.

To be fair to Broome, he is well aware of this objection and provides a response to it in his "Reasoning" manuscript:

You might suspect that we could not identify the for-*F* role except through a prior understanding of counting in favour. But actually, that is not so. *The for-F role can be identified from the structure of the explanation itself.* Take a weighing explanation of why you ought to *F*. In this explanation, the things that play the role of reasons fall into two opposing groups. The explanation of why you ought to *F* is that the combined weight of those in one group is greater than the combined weight of those in the other group. Since you ought to *F*, the reasons that play the for-*F* role are evidently the ones in the group that has the greater combined weight. *In a weighing explanation of why you ought to F, the for-F role is the winning one, and that is how it can be identified.*²³

We think this response is unsatisfactory. Broome is saying we grasp that certain facts are "winning" considerations (i.e., we think of them *as* winning) and then take these considerations to be for-*F*. We wonder how the winning considerations are meant to be identified *as* winning, if not by weighing up different considerations in order to see which considerations together most strongly *count in favor of* particular actions. Why should we think we could grasp what it is for certain considerations to be *winning* without a prior understanding that facts can *count in favor of* actions?

In order to bring out what is at issue here, consider a situation where one is weighing physical objects on a pair of scales (this is in harmony with Broome's approach, "since we rely on this analogy with mechanical weighing in explaining some ought facts").²⁴ Suppose the pan on the right-hand side of the scales happens to go down. What explains why this pan goes down? The two options seem to be that the weight on the right is heavier than the one on the left and that this explains why the pan goes down on the right, and that the weight on the left-hand side is heavier than the one on the right and that this explains why the pan goes down on the right. That the second option strikes us as ridiculous is best explained by the fact that we are taking

23. Broome, "Reasoning," 64. We have added italics.

24. *Ibid.*, 61.

something important for granted here: an understanding that it is the heavier object that must be responsible for the pan going down (on whichever side it goes down). We can imagine an alien group of people being committed to a strange physics according to which the object that goes up on a pair of scales is pulling that side of the scale upward and must therefore be heavier.

Now consider normative reasons. Let us assume (for the sake of argument) that one is able to compile a list of the relevant facts and a verdict as to what one ought to do in a particular situation in just the way that Broome describes above (i.e., without relying on any understanding of *counting in favor of*). Perhaps one knows that a certain act (giving money to a charity organization, say) would help another person and slightly inconvenience oneself, and one knows one ought to do the act. Does the fact that the particular act will help another person count as the *winning* (thus, for-*F*) fact in this context, or does the fact that the particular act will inconvenience oneself count as the *winning* (thus, for-*F*) fact? We would suggest that the answer only strikes us as being obvious because we have a prior appreciation of what sorts of facts *count in favor of* what sorts of acts.

A related worry is that Broome's purported analysis of reasons does not give us an analysis of the *strength* of reasons. He seems to believe it is a brute fact that reasons simply have certain weights of some kind. What these weights are seems to be a mystery. Perhaps we should understand the idea to be that certain reasons are stronger than others. There are two options here: either weights are to be understood as *absolute* or they are to be understood as *relative*. Either way, this is another respect in which Broome fails to provide a substantive analysis of reasons.

Our view of reasons shares neither of these problems. On our view, all reasons are evidence of normative propositions. A fact is a reason to *F* just in case it is evidence that one ought to *F*. We can analyze the "counts in favor of" relation in exactly the same way. A fact counts in favor of *F*-ing just in case this fact is evidence that one ought to *F*. There is no irreducible for-*F* role that certain facts must play in our analysis of reasons.

The simplest way for us to analyze the strength of reasons is as follows. One fact is a stronger reason to *F* than another fact just in case it is stronger evidence that one ought to *F*. Again, we are able to analyze the strength of a reason in terms of a separate idea—that of the strength of evidence. Some may object that this simply replaces one mystery with another. If reasons' having irreducible strengths is mysterious, then surely so is pieces of evidence having certain strengths. This is true, however, only if the idea of the strength of evidence is brute. It is not. We may fruitfully understand the idea of a reason having a strength as follows. The strength of a piece of evidence that *P* is true is the degree

to which this evidence increases the probability that P is true.²⁵ Not only, then, is our analysis full-blooded—it also provides a fruitful way of conceiving of the strength of reasons. The strength of a reason to *F* is the degree to which this reason increases the probability that one ought to *F*. Broome’s account is not a full-blooded analysis of reasons. Nor does it provide us with an account of the strength of reasons.

C

The third main problem with Broome’s account is the following. According to Broome, there are two fundamentally different types of normative reason. He calls these *perfect* reasons and *pro tanto* reasons. As should be clear from Broome’s analysis, the property of being a perfect reason is entirely distinct from the property of being a *pro tanto* reason. Though both types of reason are facts, what makes these facts reasons is very different. This can be brought out by considering Broome’s analogy between *pro tanto* reasons and weights on a scale. We may imagine a property called “weight explanation.” In order to be a weight explanation, something must either be an explanation or have a (literal) weight (in a similar spirit to the way one might imagine a property that is the property of being green or being the number 2). This property is similar to the property of being a normative reason if Broome’s analysis is correct. Something is a normative reason if it is an explanation of a normative fact or it weighs in favor of a certain action. These properties are so different that it is tempting to interpret Broome as claiming that “normative reason” is ambiguous between them. Whether we understand Broome to be claiming that “normative reason” is ambiguous or simply that there are two very different ways of being a normative reason, this is an unattractive feature of his account. This is so for three reasons.

The first reason is that any such disjunctive analysis of a concept is less simple and elegant than a nondisjunctive analysis of a concept (compare RD and R above). Simplicity and elegance are theoretical virtues. The second is that if there are these two types of reasons, one would expect this fact to be reflected in natural language or at least in philosophical theorizing that is independent of Broome’s own analysis of reasons. However, it is not. Though both the folk and philosophers in general make various distinctions between reasons, the distinction Broome makes between perfect and what he calls *pro tanto* reasons is not among them. Third, there is good reason to think that the concept

25. For more details concerning our view about the strength of reasons, see Kearns and Star, “Reasons as Evidence.” For a detailed discussion of epistemic probability, see Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 209–37.

of a normative reason is a relatively natural concept. That is, it picks out a natural property.²⁶ If Broome's account of reasons is correct, the concept of a normative reason is not natural but, rather, made up of two related yet substantially distinct concepts. These are all reasons (pieces of evidence!) to reject Broome's view.

On our view, normative reasons are not of two fundamentally different types. All such reasons are evidence of normative facts. Our analysis thus has none of the above problems. Our analysis is simple and elegant. It does not need to introduce technical terminology that is alien to both the folk and philosophers. Finally, it says that the property of being a reason is relatively natural. It is as natural as the property of being evidence for normative propositions.

We have seen, then, that our analysis of reasons has at least three advantages over Broome's. First, Broome's analysis underestimates the practical importance of reasons. Ours does not. Second, Broome's analysis is not full-blooded. Ours is. Third, Broome's analysis posits two very different types of normative reason and is thus irreducibly disjunctive. Our analysis, on the other hand, is nondisjunctive.

IV. EXPLANATIONS AND EVIDENCE

In Section I, we said that a strength of Broome's account of reasons is that it is an account that connects reasons to oughts via "*making it the case that*." One might think that it is an important function of the things we call reasons that they determine, in some way or another, what it is we ought to do. Admittedly, the fact that Broome's account meets this desideratum, while our account does not build in any features that explicitly aim at meeting the desideratum, seems like a reason for favoring Broome's account over our own. However, things are not straightforward on this front. This is because explanation and evidence are related to each other in complex and important ways within the normative sphere. We will suggest that this creates a tension between Broome's own account of reasons and his account of *ought* (Sec. IV.B). Furthermore, we will suggest that our own account stands ready to be further developed in a way that enables it to meet the *making it the case that* desideratum. We begin with a criticism of our account that Broome and others have offered us, reflection on which actually reveals a strength of our account (Sec. IV.A).

26. By a natural property we mean a nonartificial/nongerrymandered property (we do not mean to be saying anything here about the metaethical naturalism/nonnaturalism debate).

A

Our thesis that reasons are evidence can be broken down into two claims. The first is that if there is a reason for one to *F*, then there is evidence that one ought to *F*. The second is that if there is evidence that one ought to *F*, then there is a reason for one to *F*. It is worth pointing out that the first claim alone need not worry Broome in the least. Broome can allow that reasons always provide us with evidence without needing to make any alterations to his account of reasons.²⁷ However, it seems that Broome must resist the idea that evidence that one ought to do something provides reason to do it, if his view is not going to end up collapsing into our view (and, in fact, he has told us he is opposed to the claim that if there is evidence that one ought to *F*, then there is a reason for one to *F*).

An example that Broome has provided to us (in correspondence) will help demonstrate this difference between our views. Suppose you read a reliable book that contains a claim that you ought to eat plenty of cabbage, and you didn't previously think you had any reason to eat cabbage. The book doesn't say anything about why you ought to eat plenty of cabbage, but it does provide plenty of good explanations of other things, so you trust the book on this matter.

The fact that the book says that you ought to eat cabbage is evidence that you ought to eat cabbage. This is because the book reliably indicates the truth about many related matters and thus increases one's epistemic probability in the statements it makes. Indeed, one can plausibly come to *know* that one ought to eat cabbage by reading the book (just as one can come to know that Mao Zedong died in 1976 by reading an authoritative book on the history of modern China). This would be impossible if the fact that the book said one ought to eat cabbage was not evidence that one ought to eat cabbage.²⁸ The fact that the book says that you ought to eat cabbage is not, however, (part of) an explanation

27. This is a point Broome himself has made to us in the past.

28. Of course, someone might argue that there are skeptical scenarios in which testimony does not provide evidence, but we are imagining a scenario where this is not the case. If one thinks that testimony *never* provides evidence, then an enormous portion of our beliefs, which we presently take to constitute knowledge, are not even well justified. If, instead, one is of an antirealist bent when it comes to the existence of moral facts, one might balk at the idea that one can come to know that one ought to eat cabbage (with or without testimony), but we would then be happy to offer up the weaker claim that most of us (those who don't embrace moral antirealism, at least) can each come to have a well-justified (if ultimately false) belief that one ought to eat cabbage simply by reading a book that we reasonably take to be reliable (similarly, one could form a well-justified but false belief that Mao Zedong died in 1979 by reading an otherwise reliable book on modern China). Thank you to an anonymous referee for suggesting that we clarify matters at this point in the essay.

of why you ought to eat cabbage (or why you ought not to eat cabbage). Therefore, Broome cannot accept that all evidence that one ought to do something is a reason to do it.

Indeed, Broome might push the point further. He might say that the above example not only shows that his account of reasons is incompatible with our account but is also a telling counterexample to our account. For is the fact that this book says you ought to eat cabbage really a reason to eat cabbage? We may suppose that it is not the case that you ought to eat cabbage—in fact, eating cabbage will make you very ill. One might think that considering this possibility shows it can't be right to say that the fact that the (generally reliable) book says you ought to eat cabbage provides you with a reason to eat cabbage. Many people, Broome included, would like to say that reflection on situations like this one should lead us to conclude that the mere fact that something is evidence that you ought to *F* cannot provide you with a reason to *F*. Broome writes, “to be reasons they [the facts] must explain why she ought to perform it [an action]. *Evidence that she ought to may not explain why she ought to*” (our italics added).²⁹ If a fact is not part of an explanation of what one ought to do, it is intuitively not a reason, and it seems that not all evidence concerning what one ought to do is part of an explanation of what one ought to do.

We have responded to a similar objection elsewhere.³⁰ In essence our response there proceeds as follows. Either facts such as the fact that the book says you ought to eat cabbage *are* parts of explanations of what one ought to do, or many other facts (such as the fact that cabbage helps the digestive system) are *not* parts of explanations of what one ought to do. Given this, either Broome must accept that the fact that the book says you ought to eat cabbage is a reason to eat cabbage or he must deny that the fact that cabbage helps the digestive system is a reason to eat cabbage. If he does the former, then his objection to us fails (and our accounts are compatible). If he does the latter, he is biting a bullet that we do not need to bite. To see that this really is a significant bullet to bite, simply consider how many facts that we all ordinarily

29. Broome, “Reasoning,” 60 (a very similar claim is made in Broome, “Reasons,” 36). In this section of the manuscript, Broome is talking about *perfect* reasons and *conclusive evidence*. He is here denying that even conclusive evidence can explain what we ought to do. This seems particularly odd, unless he has *fundamental* explanations in mind, but if these are the explanations he wishes to base his account of reasons on, he must be willing to bite the bullet we describe below in this section (where we introduce the distinction between fundamental and nonfundamental explanations). The fact that he is talking about perfect reasons here explains why he doesn't say “evidence that she ought to may not be at least *part* of an explanation as to why she ought to” (a claim we believe he would endorse if he were talking about reasons in general).

30. Kearns and Star, “Reasons as Evidence.”

respond to in our actual practical deliberations would turn out not to be reasons at all if Broome went this way.

You might think that this response is a bit quick. After all, why think that the fact that cabbage helps the digestive system is part of an explanation of why one ought to eat cabbage only if the fact that the book says you ought to eat cabbage is also part of such an explanation? We believe a lot turns here on what kind of explanation one has in mind. Explanations may be *fundamental* or *nonfundamental*. Explanations of normative facts may appeal to the ultimately correct moral theories (utilitarianism, Kantianism, etc.) and the properties that such theories appeal to (well-being, autonomy, etc.). If such fundamental explanations of what one ought to do are the only types of explanations that count, then the fact that cabbage is good for the digestive system would obviously not be part of an explanation of why one ought to eat cabbage. The correct explanation may instead appeal, for example, to the maximization of well-being. If Broome were to claim that only (parts of) fundamental explanations of ought facts are reasons (and we suspect that he would not ultimately want to do this), then most of the features ordinary agents take to be reasons will turn out *not* to be reasons at all.

If explanations need not be so fundamental, then the fact that cabbage is good for the digestive system can be part of an explanation of why one ought to eat cabbage. But then so can the fact that the book says you ought to eat cabbage. One would be remiss if one were to ignore the book's advice. Though the fact that the book says you ought to eat cabbage may not count greatly in favor of eating cabbage, it does so to some extent. We conclude, therefore, that our account of reasons deals with the cabbage case (and others like it) at least as well as Broome's account does, in a manner that demonstrates that our account sits comfortably with the view that reasons always at least *nonfundamentally* explain why one ought to act one way or another (i.e., always *make it the case*, in at least a nonfundamental sense, that one ought to act one way or another).

B

Let us leave these thoughts and focus on a tension within Broome's own discussion of reasons and ought in his book manuscript, "Reasoning." In one chapter of the manuscript, Broome discusses a number of views about ought and focuses at one point on an example which shows that what one ought to do is, at least sometimes, determined by evidence.³¹ This is an example that Broome takes from Derek Parfit.³² We are asked to imagine that one hundred miners have been trapped underground

31. Broome, "Reasoning," 31.

32. Parfit, "Climbing the Mountain."

and we are organizing a rescue attempt. All the miners are trapped, as a group, in either tunnel A or tunnel B. Tunnel C leads to both tunnel A and tunnel B. Suppose we have no evidence available to us as to whether the miners are in tunnel A or tunnel B, but we do know that if we go down tunnel C we will save 90 of the 100 miners. We also know that a wrong choice of A and B would lead to an outcome where none of the miners survive. As it happens, they are stuck in tunnel A. It seems that we ought not to go down either tunnel A or tunnel B but ought to go down tunnel C instead.

Broome discusses the possibility of distinguishing between a subjective ought and an objective ought, such that what we ought to do in one sense is go down tunnel C while what we ought to do in another sense is go down tunnel A, and he explicitly rejects this option.³³ Rather, he thinks there is a unitary sense of ought, at least if we are looking for “the central normative concept”; it is not appropriate to describe it as “subjective,” and it is a concept that fits with the intuition that we ought to go down tunnel C in the mine case example. The reason this ought is the central normative concept is because judgments using the concept are at the center of practical reasoning (a judgment that one ought to go down A instead of C that is taken to be correct from a “view from nowhere,” to use Nagel’s phrase, could not be such a judgment). Crucially, he concludes “the *ought* that appears in . . . prospect consequentialism is the central normative concept. . . . *It is relative to the evidence*” (emphasis added by us in the final phrase).³⁴

We think it is safe to conclude from this that Broome thinks that what one ought to do is always at least partly determined by the evidence that one has. However, we have seen that he wishes to reject the view that evidence concerning what one ought to do always provides a reason to act. We believe this is an unstable combination of views. Broome could claim that in the mine case example rescuers ought to go down tunnel C, and that this is an ought that should guide their actions, but they have no reason to go down tunnel C. This would be a very odd view. Alternatively, he could accept that not only ought they go down tunnel C, but they also have a reason to go down tunnel C, and that this reason is provided by their evidence. In order to stop short of endorsing our view, he could claim that in other more mundane cases, evidence does not provide a reason. Admittedly, there may be some

33. Broome, “Reasoning,” 33.

34. *Ibid.*, 34. What Broome here calls “prospect consequentialism” is often called “expected-value consequentialism”; it has also been called “decision-theoretic consequentialism” in a paper that contains an excellent discussion and defense of the position (for example): Frank Jackson, “Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection,” *Ethics* 101 (1991): 461–82.

wiggle room here, but it is not clear to us what kind of principled explanation could be provided for why sometimes evidence provides us with reasons and sometimes it doesn't (where this is an explanation that is consistent with the view that reasons are parts of explanations and with the view that *oughts* are evidence dependent).

When spelling out our account of reasons, we did not build in any reference to explanation or *making it the case that*. However, it seems to us that no tensions or contradictions would be created by adding the following idea to our account of reasons: the reason why facts can explain oughts is *because* they are evidence for those oughts. The attractiveness of this idea is easiest to see when we consider ought facts about beliefs. In any case where one ought to believe P, this will be *because* of the evidence that one ought to believe P. In the case of straightforward nonpragmatic reasons for belief, it will be true that one ought to believe P *because* of the evidence that P (which is itself also evidence that one ought to believe P). If evidence can explain why one ought to believe certain things, we do not see why it cannot explain why one ought to do certain things. Of course not all evidence concerning what one ought to do plays this explanatory role, because not all evidence is strong enough, relative to other evidence (i.e., when a reason is outweighed).³⁵ If evidence explains why one ought to do particular things, and pieces of evidence are always reasons (just in virtue of being evidence), then reasons explain why we ought to do particular things. If this line of thought is correct, Broome's account of reasons has lost what one might have thought was its main advantage over our account.

V. EVIDENCE, EXPLANATIONS, REASONS, AND OUGHTS

In this section we discuss two further ways in which Broome's account of reasons might seem to have an advantage over ours due to two ways that one might wish to criticize our account, in particular. We shall argue that these criticisms are not as worrying as they might first appear. With respect to the first criticism, it might in fact be the case that Broome is in a worse position than we are.

A

The following is a very plausible principle to many people: *If one ought to F, then there is a reason for one to F*. It seems impossible for it to be the case that one ought to perform an action if there is no reason at all to

³⁵ It might also be thought that some evidence is not strong enough in absolute terms.

do so.³⁶ If we accept this principle, and combine it with our view that reasons to *F* are evidence that one ought to *F*, we will find ourselves committed to the following principle: *If one ought to F, then there is evidence that one ought to F.* This claim, however, seems initially implausible. Why think that if one ought to *F* then there must be evidence that one ought to *F*? We do not generally think that if *P* is a fact, then there must be evidence that *P* is true, but this is just what we seem to be committed to with regard to ought facts. Broome's view of reasons is not committed to the existence of evidence for every ought fact and thus avoids this problem.³⁷

We first wish to argue that there is reason to believe the principle that *if one ought to F, there is evidence that one ought to F.* Recall the distinction we made in Section II between one's *having evidence* and *being evidence*. We accept that a principle that says "if one ought to *F*, then one *has* evidence that one ought to *F*" would be implausible. For example, there are cases where someone clearly ought to do something and yet, perhaps due to her own negligence, she has not collected any evidence about what she ought to do. However, given we accept that not all evidence is evidence that we *have*, we can avoid being committed to this principle. Instead, we need only accept the view that *if one ought to F, then there is evidence that one ought to F* (but we do not necessarily *have* this evidence). How plausible this idea is depends on what it takes for a fact to count as evidence (that we do not necessarily *have*). We take the commonsense view to be that a fact can be evidence even if it is unknown. Consider for example, the fact that Joe's fingerprints are on the murder weapon. This can be evidence that Joe is the murderer even if no one has yet found out this fact. We are thus not committed to the idea that *if one ought to F, then one knows some fact that is evidence that one ought to F.*

More plausibly, a fact can be evidence only if it is *knowable*. There is evidence that *P* only if someone is able to have this evidence. If this is right, then we are committed to the idea that *if one ought to F, there is some knowable evidence that one ought to F.* We believe that this idea is in fact rather plausible. If, contrary to this view, it is possible for it to be the case that one ought to *F* despite there being no knowable evidence that one ought to *F*, then it follows that it is possible for it to be the case that one ought to *F* even if it is unknowable that one ought to *F*

36. Of course, some internalists about reasons will deny this thesis (i.e., those who think that people can fail to have reasons to comply with moral requirements), but in that case the criticism we discuss in this section won't even get off the ground. See chap. 8 of Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), 190–214, for an extended discussion of the view we have in mind (which Shafer-Landau terms "moral rationalism").

37. Thank you to an anonymous referee at *Ethics* for providing this criticism.

(because, very plausibly, one can know a fact only if one is able to have evidence of this fact). But this is unattractive. If we cannot know that we ought to *F*, in what sense would we be doing something *wrong* by not *F*-ing? Just as ought implies can, ought implies at least the possibility of our knowing what we ought to do. The principle that *if one ought to F, there is evidence that one ought to F* is far from implausible, properly understood. This is further shown by the fact that, on some views of evidence, a fact *P* is evidence of itself. It is thus trivial, given such a view, that if it is a fact that one ought to *F*, then there is evidence that one ought to *F* (because the fact that one ought to *F* is evidence of itself). We wish to claim, then, that the idea that *if one ought to F, there is evidence that one ought to F* is, in fact, plausible and independently motivated.

The second point we wish to make is that a very similar criticism to that aimed at our account can be aimed at Broome's account. If Broome accepts that *if one ought to F, then there is a reason to F*, then he must also accept (given his account of reasons) that *if one ought to F, then there is an explanation of why one ought to F*. That is, he will be committed to there being an explanation for each and every ought fact. This commitment seems just as striking as our commitment to there being evidence for all ought facts. Indeed, given the plausible idea that *if X is an explanation of a fact, then X is evidence of that fact*, then Broome's view also entails that *if one ought to F, then there is evidence that one ought to F*. The above criticism of our view cannot, then, show Broome's view to be superior to ours, as the principle to which Broome's view is committed entails (given certain other highly plausible commitments) the principle to which we are committed. In contrast to this, the principle to which we are committed (assuming it is the case that *if one ought to F, one has a reason to F*), which is that *if one ought to F, there is evidence that one ought to F*, does not entail that *if one ought to F, then there is an explanation of why one ought to F*. Thus, our commitments are less strong than Broome's. Furthermore, there is good reason to doubt this latter principle. Plausibly, some ought facts are *fundamental*. If one is a utilitarian, one might think of the idea that one ought to maximize utility as fundamental. This suggests that such a moral principle has no explanation. Rather, other ought facts are explained in terms of this fundamental one. If one accepts this view, one will reject the idea that all ought facts have explanations. One must thus either reject Broome's view of reasons or the idea that *if one ought to F, there is a reason to F*. We conclude, then, that Broome's view is in fact more susceptible to a version of the original criticism than our view is.

B

Another way in which one might think that Broome's account is better than ours is the following. One may think that a fact is a reason only

if one must weigh it when considering what to do or believe. However, if one already has *decisive* evidence that some proposition P is false, then any evidence that P is true will not need to be weighed. As such, this evidence that P is true does not count as a reason to believe that P is true. Therefore, the objection concludes, not all evidence is a reason.³⁸ This criticism cannot be applied to Broome's view since, even if one has decisive evidence that P is false, there still may be a fact that plays the for-P role in an explanation of P's falsity.³⁹

We have three main replies to this criticism. First, it is clear that although someone may have decisive evidence that P is false, it does not follow that *everyone* has this decisive evidence. This being so, it is perfectly possible for someone who lacks decisive evidence that P is false to possess evidence that P is true and to weigh this evidence appropriately. Indeed, for such a person, it is uncontroversial that this evidence that P is true constitutes *a reason* to believe that P is true. Thus, it is possible for evidence that P is true to be a reason to believe that P, even if there exists decisive evidence that P is false.

Second, even if we consider only the person who has decisive evidence that P is false, we should still accept that the evidence he possesses that P is true is a reason for him to believe that P is true. Why is this? Decisive evidence for P is, roughly, evidence that is sufficient for one's knowing that P (given that one bases one's belief that P on this evidence). But even evidence for a proposition that is sufficient for knowledge of this proposition can be weighed against evidence against this proposition. If this were not the case, we would be led to Kripke's dogmatism paradox, stated by Harman as follows: "If I know that *h* is true, I know that any evidence against *h* is evidence against something that is true; I know that such evidence is misleading. But I should disregard evidence that I know is misleading. So, once I know that *h* is true, I am in a position to disregard any future evidence that seems to tell against *h*."⁴⁰

It is irrational to ignore newly received evidence or to dismiss it as misleading. One reason for this is that, even if one has decisive evidence for a proposition (and even if one knows this proposition), it does not follow that one knows that one has such decisive evidence (nor does it follow that one knows that one knows the proposition). This being so, one is not in a position to dismiss evidence for a proposition, even if one has decisive evidence that this proposition is false.

Last, if the above criticism of our view were correct—that is, if it

38. Thank you to an anonymous referee at *Ethics* for providing this criticism.

39. Furthermore, Broome doesn't accept that all reasons are suitable to be weighed, as we have seen (*perfect* reasons are exceptional in this respect).

40. Gilbert Harman, *Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 148.

were true that any evidence for P's truth cannot be a reason to believe that P when one already has decisive evidence that P is false—it would be hard to resist the idea that if one has decisive reason to *F*, then there is no reason not to *F*. After all, the same kind of reasoning that leads to the former conclusion also leads to the latter conclusion (i.e., if one's evidence that P is true need not be weighed when one has decisive evidence that P is false, then equally, if one has decisive reason to *F*, then one need not weigh anything against this reason). However, it seems clear that one *can* have reason to not *F* even if one has decisive reason to *F*. Thus, we conclude that our account of reasons can handle this criticism.

VI. CONCLUSION

It seems that a good account of normative reasons needs to sit well with at least two commonplace observations about reasons: reasons *contribute to* all-things-considered oughts, and normative reasons are essential *inputs to* successful processes of practical deliberation. In other words, reasons both make a difference to what we ought to do (i.e., they are not irrelevant when it comes to fixing the truth value of various propositions concerning what we ought to do) and they are precisely the kind of things that are suitable for providing us with guidance when we are trying to work out what it is that we ought to do. These observations go hand in hand, since processes of practical deliberation typically conclude with a judgment about what one ought to do, all things considered.

We argued (in Sec. III.A) that Broome's account of reasons does not fit together well with the second of these truisms about reasons. Our account of reasons initially looked like it might have a problem with the first of these truisms, because our account centers on evidence, and evidence doesn't generally play an active role with respect to fixing the truth. It turns out that normative facts may be very special in this respect, assuming one is inclined to accept the intuitions that lead many consequentialists to adopt an expected-value account of our moral obligations rather than an actual-value account of our moral obligations.⁴¹ These intuitions are provoked by cases like the three mine shafts case we discussed in Section IV.B, and they are independent of concerns with the truth or otherwise of consequentialism. When it comes to facts about what we ought to do, evidence may indeed play a contributory role (Sec. IV.A), and we saw that Broome himself seems to admit as much (Sec. IV.B). We also argued that Broome fails to provide a deep analysis of what it is to be a reason (Sec. III.B) and that our account is more simple and elegant than his is (Sec. III.C). Finally, we responded

41. For further arguments, see Jackson, "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism."

to a couple of criticisms of our account that it seemed appropriate to consider after our critical reflections on Broome (Sec. V), one of which we responded to by suggesting that it might actually be a problem for Broome, rather than for us (Sec. V.A).