WE HAVE NO REASON TO THINK THERE ARE NO REASONS FOR AFFECTIVE ATTITUDES

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Barry Maguire (2018) argues that there are no reasons (of the right kind[1]) for affective attitudes.[2] 'There is no reason for your incredulous reaction to this' thesis, he claims (p. 779). In this paper, I argue that we have no reason to accept his thesis.

Maguire provides the following gloss of his argument:

> The heart of my argument is this: so-called reasons of the right kind for affective attitudes have a different nature from reasons for action. Reasons for action are *gradable*—they have weights—and they are *contributory*—they are incomplete parts of a specific kind of explanation of overall normative facts, such as facts about what you ought to do. But so-called reasons of the right kind for affective attitudes are neither gradable nor contributory. (p. 780)

In §§1-3, I examine these purported differences between reasons for action and so-called reasons for affective attitudes. In each case, I argue that the differences are exaggerated and that to the extent they obtain, they are best explained by differences between actions and affective attitudes, not between kinds of normative support. In §4, I argue that even if Maguire were correct, the extent of the threat to one of his central targets—so-called 'buck-passing' views—would remain unclear.

1. Competition

Maguire begins with a personal case about the death of his grandmother. He had multiple reactions to her passing. She was suffering greatly at her death, and believed that death would allow her to rejoin her husband. This seemed to make relief at her passing fitting. But she was also the matriarch of his family, and had a wonderful sense of humor. This seemed to make sadness at her passing fitting. Of course, these considerations did not compete with one another. It's not as though if the fitting level of relief had been identical to the fitting level of sadness, then the two would have cancelled each other out and he ought to have felt nothing at all. Rather, both sadness and relief were fitting.

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[1] All references to reasons herein are to right-kind reasons. Maguire (understandably) does not provide a precise account of the distinction, but instead distinguishes right-kind reasons from incentives, moral reasons and prudential reasons. I follow suit.

[2] All quotations from Maguire (2018).

Maguire's other cases all build on one in which your good friend Andrew gets a promotion you deserved. Maguire says that it seems fitting to feel disappointed and displeased given your deservingness, yet at the same time pleased given your friendship. In a later version of the case, Andrew's being promoted allows him to stay in his apartment, an apartment that, had he had to leave, would have gone to another good friend, Margaret. Maguire says it can be fitting to feel both pleased (for Andrew's sake) and displeased (for Margaret's).

These cases are meant to illustrate one purported contrast between reasons for action and fit-making considerations—which are widely taken to be reasons, and which Maguire takes to exhaust the so-called reasons[3]—for affective attitudes: the former *compete* to determine what one ought to do overall; the latter do not.[4] (From here, I use 'FMCs' to mean 'fit-making considerations' or 'fit-making considerations for affective attitudes', as dictated by context.)

Maguire's argument would go through, for one, if competition were a feature of reasons *per se*. But it is not. Consider a case in which I have a reason to push button A: it will save five lives. I also have a reason to push button B: it will save a sixth life. It should be clear that these reasons do not compete merely in virtue of being reasons. If I can I should simply push both! Obviously, this does nothing to suggest these are not reasons.

Reasons certainly *can* compete. They would in the above case, for instance, if I could only push one button. More generally, reasons compete when there is tension of some kind between the options they are reasons for. The most obvious kind of tension, as just illustrated, stems from options' being mutually exclusive.[5]

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[3] I simply follow him in this, though it is a substantive claim (see note 10).

[4] Competition is the first aspect of the *contributory* nature of reasons mentioned in the quotation in the introduction. Maguire connects the purported non-competitive nature of fit-making considerations to another purported feature: *strictness*. Reasons for action are *non-strict*, Maguire claims, in that they alone do not issue in an 'overall ought'; what one ought to do depends on the other reasons present. By contrast, Maguire claims, fit-making considerations are *strict*; because they do not compete, considerations that make it fitting to feel some attitude do so all on their own, issuing in an 'ought'. My arguments in this section and the next can be extended to address this claim as well (see note 11).

[5] The precise nature of the relevant sort of tension, and thus the precise conditions of competition, are beyond the scope of this paper. However, for illustrative purposes I offer one example of competition without mutual exclusion. Suppose that Bob is standing in the path of a trolley. Pushing button B will divert that trolley onto an empty side track. Five people are standing in the path of a different trolley on a third track. Pushing button A will divert that trolley onto Bob's track. You certainly *can* push both buttons. But your reason for pushing button B—it will remove the danger the first trolley poses to Bob—is arguably only a reason to do so if you *don't* push button A.

If Maguire's argument is to go through, there needs to be some tension between the agents' affective options in his cases—tension that would lead us to expect competition were the FMCs reasons. Maguire never says anything explicit about what this tension amounts to. But we know, first, that it does not stem from mutual exclusion, as Maguire accepts that it is possible to feel both attitudes in each of his cases. Second, he must be implicitly relying on some intuitive tension between the *particular* attitudes he discusses, rather than some general tension between affective attitudes. Consider: the fact that a friend you're visiting is sick makes it fitting to feel sorry for her and makes it fitting to feel worried about catching her ailment. Cases like this would do nothing for Maguire, for intuitively there is no tension here whatsoever, and so no one would ever expect the reasons for these attitudes to compete. With all this in mind, consider the following passage:

> The simplest way for considerations to compete is for one to make an attitude fitting and for another to make that very attitude unfitting. Suppose you didn't get some promotion, but your good friend Andrew did. You know that you would have deserved the promotion, but it is really good that Andrew got it. The fact that you didn't get the promotion makes it fitting to feel disappointed. The fact that your friend got the promotion makes it fitting to feel pleased. But the considerations supporting these attitudes do not compete. The fact that you didn't get the promotion doesn't make it unfitting to feel pleased, and the fact that your friend got it doesn't make it unfitting to feel disappointed. It is fitting to feel pleased and disappointed in these different respects in this case. (p. 788)

Maguire begins here by identifying the 'simplest' form of competition, which we may call *intra-option* competition: reasons for X competing with reasons against X. We may contrast this with *inter-option* competition: reasons for X competing with reasons for Y.[6] Intra-option competition is useful for Maguire because it always obtains (unlike inter-option competition, as illustrated by the button and sick-friend cases): reasons for X always compete with reasons against X because taking option X and not taking option X are always mutually exclusive.

[6] We might further distinguish inter-*attitude* competition between reasons for taking different attitudes with inter-*object* competition between reasons for taking the same attitude towards different objects. We might also distinguish inter-*level* competition between reasons for taking one attitude towards objects at different levels of description. For example, there might be competition between reasons for running, for running with a friend, for running with a friend to the park, etc. All such forms of competition are arguably possible, but are not features of reasons *per se*.

Maguire then turns to a case in which an FMC for disappointment fails to compete with an FMC for pleasure. At first glance, this looks like inter-option competition between reasons for disappointment and pleasure. Yet Maguire surely means this to be a failure of intra-option competition; why else mention it?

There are two ways to read Maguire's cases as exhibiting failures of intra-option competition. First, the cases might be read as suggesting that there are no *un*fit-making considerations for affective attitudes, only the presence or absence of fit-making ones. But if FMCs fail to compete intra-option merely because there are no unfit-making considerations for them to compete with, it is hard to see why we should conclude that FMCs aren't really reasons. If (probably: *per impossibile*) there were some action against which there were never any reasons, that wouldn't suggest that there could be no reasons *for* that action.

More promisingly, we might take Maguire to be assuming that in each of his cases, the relevant attitudes are *opposed* such that FMCs for one attitude are *ipso facto* unfit-making considerations for the other—e.g., in the case described in the passage above, that FMCs for disappointment are *ipso facto* unfit-making considerations for pleasure. Maguire says nothing to defend this claim. Nevertheless, one might find it tempting, on grounds that these particular attitudes, though not mutually exclusive, are intuitively opposed. One might thus read Maguire as follows: FMCs for disappointment and pleasure (etc.) don't compete, and thus either disappointment and pleasure are not opposing attitudes, or FMCs for these attitudes are not reasons. Given this choice, we should accept that FMCs are not reasons.

But this is a false dilemma. To see this, we need to distinguish two claims. The first is that there is tension between feeling disappointment and pleasure *full stop*. The second is that there is tension between feeling disappointment and pleasure *about precisely the same thing*. With this in mind, consider another passage:

> The fact that your friend will be able to stay in his apartment makes it fitting for you to be pleased about the promotion, but the fact that the promotion wasn't really deserved seems not to make it fitting for you to be pleased about the promotion *as such*. This is all plausible, but notice that we have again distinguished two attitudes both of which are fitting and that are perfectly compatible with each other: being pleased that he can stay in his apartment and not being pleased as such about the promotion. (p. 788)

As argued, Maguire needs to rely on some tension between pleasure and displeasure in order to generate an expectation of competition. Yet, here, Maguire seems to be claiming just the opposite: pleasure and displeasure in this case 'are perfectly compatible with each other'. The above distinction allows us to make sense of this. Pleasure and displeasure may be opposed such that it is in some way

problematic—perhaps even impossible—to feel both about precisely the same thing.[7] The fact that your friend can stay in his apartment might make it fitting to feel pleased about *this aspect* of his promotion, and therefore also make it unfitting to feel displeased about this *same* aspect of his promotion. But it is not an unfit-making consideration for feeling displeased *full stop* because, for one, it is not an unfit-making consideration for feeling displeased about the promotion *as such.* As Maguire himself makes clear, there is no tension whatsoever between taking these attitudes—opposed though they may be in this broader sense—towards different things, or even towards different aspects of the same thing.

What Maguire's cases illustrate, I submit, is not that FMCs are not reasons, but rather that the contexts in which we tend to think about reasons for action and reasons for attitudes differ, in part because actions and attitudes themselves differ. We tend to think about how we and others should act in contexts where the reasons for them compete, because actions are frequently in tension, and we need to pick one. By contrast, as Maguire's cases show, we often consider how we and others should feel in contexts where there are no relevant tensions, because we can feel many different ways about different things, or about different aspects of the same thing. In such contexts there is no reason to expect competition amongst the relevant FMCs, and therefore no reason to think they are not reasons.

2. Combination

According to Maguire, reasons *combine* to determine what option to take overall; FMCs do not.[8] Here is an example:

> You are a knight, about to face the terrible dragon. The dragon has sharp claws. She has the ability to swipe at you with the claws. She also has a look in her eye that suggests she might quite like to. Do these distinct facts about the dragon constitute distinct 'reasons' to fear the dragon? They are distinct considerations, to be sure. But intuitively they work together to constitute one source of normative support for fear at the prospect of being cut open by a swipe from the dragon. (p. 789)

[7] I grant this merely for the sake of argument. If you deny it, then Maguire loses any obvious grounds for claiming that FMCs for one are *ipso facto* unfit-making considerations for the other—a claim that, as seen above, is required to make sense of his introduction of intra-option competition.

[8] Combination is the second aspect of the contributory nature of reasons mentioned in the quotation in the introduction.

Maguire claims that, '[b]y contrast, you might have lots of distinct reasons for and against some specific action, say, running away from the dragon' (p. 789). But what matters here isn't whether you could have many reasons for running away from the dragon; it is whether the dragon's sharp claws and murderous look constitute distinct reasons for running away from the dragon. I submit that this is neither more nor less plausible than the claim that they are both reasons for fearing the dragon.

Maguire may be right that it can seem strained to claim that two considerations are distinct reasons when they are representatives of the same value—here, whatever values make the dragon to-be-feared and to-be-run-from. This helps explain the appeal of his argument. Perhaps, for each attitude, all FMCs stem from a single source of value and this masks relevant interactions between them.[9]

However, even if FMCs stem from a single value (one per attitude), there may still be clear cases of combination (and competition!). To see this, consider a variant on the dragon case. You happen upon a dragon with sharp claws and a murderous look (we may eliminate the prejudicial claim that the dragon is 'terrible'). The dragon says, 'I just want to be friends!' Are these reasons for and against running away? This is debatable; one might claim that these are merely reasons for and against *believing* that the dragon is dangerous, and it is her being dangerous that would be a reason for you to run.[10]

Settling this is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, I simply note that many would take these to be reasons for and against running away. If they are, it is clear that they *compete* to determine whether you ought to run away. And it seems perfectly possible that while neither the sharp claws nor the murderous look alone is sufficient to outweigh the dragon's claim to only be interested in friendship, *in combination* they are; you ought to run. Most importantly, this is no less plausible if we take these to be reasons for and against *fearing* her.[11]

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[9] This fits well with a number of things Maguire says. It might also explain why there are no unfit-making (as opposed to merely non-fit-making) considerations for affective attitudes, if that is indeed the case. If the relevant value is present, that makes the attitude fitting; if not, then the attitude is unfitting. This is interesting, but it doesn't suggest that FMCs don't combine. And, as with competition, it is an explanation that stems from differences between actions and affective attitudes, not between kinds of normative support.

[10] I noted above (note 3) that Maguire's assumption that FMCs exhaust the so-called reasons for affective attitudes is a substantive claim. This point is related: if the 'making' in fit-making considerations is a metaphysical relation, one might take the view that what makes it fitting to fear the dragon is (say) her dangerousness, and that indicators or expressions of that dangerousness, like her teeth and claws, are reasons for fearing her, but are not FMCs.

[11] The possibility raised here also calls into question Maguire's claim that FMCs are strict (see note 4). I have waited until now to raise this objection because the FMCs discussed in §1 arguably entail

3. Gradability

Maguire argues that reasons for action are *gradable*—i.e., have weights—while FMCs are not. True, Maguire notes, we often say things like 'You have more reason for fearing wolves than dogs'. But, he maintains, these are not really gradable reasons for an attitude; they are FMCs for a gradable attitude. That is, what the above claim *really* means is that it is fitting to feel *more fear* regarding wolves, less fear regarding dogs. The explanation he offers is that fittingness is *binary*: attitudes are either fitting or unfitting.

Certainly, fittingness is binary. But it doesn't follow that FMCs lack weight. The analogy with action is again instructive. Permissibility is binary: an action is either permissible or impermissible. Clearly it doesn't follow that reasons for action lack weight.

This doesn't mean Maguire is wrong that FMCs lack weight, only that the binary nature of fittingness doesn't settle the matter. However, the variation on the dragon case at the end of §2 does suggest that Maguire is wrong, insofar as it is plausible that the combined *weight* of the dragon's sharp claws and murderous look make it fitting to feel fear, despite her talk of friendship.

Even if one denies that those are distinct reasons, as in the case of competition the difference Maguire cites here is due to common differences between reasons and affective attitudes, not between kinds of normative support. Most actions are not gradable. I can't push button A 'a little bit'; I push it or I don't. By contrast, affective attitudes are arguably always gradable; we always feel things *to some degree*. Notice, however, that in cases where an action *is* gradable—e.g., giving to charity—we often do talk about reasons as determining how much to give, rather than whether to. There can be reasons to give or not give to charity, but there can also be reasons to give $10, $100 or $1000.

We tend to talk about the former when there is intra-option competition between reasons for and against giving to charity, or inter-option competition between reasons for giving to charity vs. for doing something else that is in tension with giving to charity. We tend to talk about the latter when it is settled that we ought to give to charity but aren't sure how much the reasons support giving. The parallel with affective attitudes should be clear. Either FMCs compete or they do not. If they do, then as in the variation on the dragon case, they *will* have weight. If they do not compete (because of the nature of affective attitudes), it is utterly unsurprising and untroubling that FMCs always support some degree of a sadness, rather than

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the presence of the relevant values—e.g., arguably it is always fitting to feel disappointed when someone gets a promotion you deserve, whereas it is not always fitting to fear something with sharp claws.

supporting sadness to some degree. They would only do the latter in contexts where their weight mattered, where they needed to be weighed *against* other considerations. Without competition, this need would never arise.

4. Implications for Buck-Passers

One of Maguire's central targets is 'buck-passing' views on which various normative phenomena are analyzed in terms of others—e.g., value is analyzed in terms of reasons, or both value and reasons are analyzed in terms of fittingness. In closing, I argue that even if Maguire were right that there are no reasons for affective attitudes, it is unclear how troubling this would be for buck-passers. Begin with the following passage:

> Sometimes we *need* to make an all-or-nothing judgement about some relatively coarse-grained question, such as whether a particular judge is admirable. Perhaps you are Chair of the Town Admiration Committee and the judge is one of the favourites for the Annual Prize. Then you do the best you can. But this is a question about reasons for action. The question is not whether it is fitting to admire the judge. The question is whether you ought to give her the prize. Lots of reasons will bear on this question: how people would react either way, whatever precedents there might be, what the Town Admiration Committee rule-book says, and so on. (p. 802)

Let's assume this is roughly correct. One point of clarification: Maguire is right that the question is not *merely* whether it is fitting to admire the judge, but many of the reasons for and against giving her the prize will be the same considerations that make it fitting or unfitting to admire her. What's more, since the prize is (in part) an *expression* of admiration, these considerations are reasons for and against giving her the prize *because* they make it fitting or unfitting to admire her. In this context, these considerations compete, combine, and have weight.

Say the fact that the judge carefully maintains consistency in her sentencing makes it fitting to admire her. This is surely a reason for giving her the prize. Again this is no coincidence: it is a reason for giving her the prize *because* it makes it fitting to admire her. As a reason for action, it will compete with other considerations, such as the admirable things her competitors have done. And it will combine with other considerations, such as the other admirable things she has done. In all of this, it will have weight.

Now consider one of Maguire's targets: a buck-passing view on which value is understood in terms of reasons for *desiring*.[12] Obviously, if there are no reasons for desiring, this view is false. But for all Maguire has said, a simple amendment might be all that's needed: perhaps we can analyze value in terms of FMCs for desiring, and these same considerations become reasons in contexts where we face questions of what to do.

Following this thought, let us close with a toy view. First, for something to be intrinsically valuable is for it to be desirable for its own sake. Second, we have reason to take actions that promote value. Now suppose safety and beauty are both desirable for their own sakes. I buy an old house. The house is beautiful, but many of its beautiful features make it unsafe. How should I feel? Perhaps these FMCs don't compete, combine, or weigh against each other. I should simply desire both to maintain the house's beauty and to make it safer, to whatever degree each desire is fitting. But now I have to decide what to do, at which point these very same considerations *do* compete, combine, and weigh against each other. Perhaps, for instance, a greater degree of desire is fitting for safety than for maintaining the house's beauty, and therefore I should renovate. This all seems perfectly sensible, well in keeping with Maguire's thesis, and it in no way challenges the spirit of the toy view in question.

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References

Maguire, Barry 2018, 'There Are No Reasons for Affective Attitudes', in *Mind* 127

[12] It is unclear whether desire is an affective attitude, but for the sake of argument I assume here that it is.