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The Question Why and the Common Good

Grégoire Webber*

I. *Acting for reasons*

To study human acts and the practices constituted by human actions is to study persons as the sources of those acts and practices. In forming an intention to act, I (the agent) am not making a prediction of what I will do, but rather am choosing what I ought to do. My intention is not about what is now the case or what will in future be the case, but about what ought to be the case, what is to be done by me. It is knowledge of the end that I have chosen to pursue as well as the means to realise the end. When, in time, I carry out my project, I do not investigate my actions in order to understand my intention; rather, my intention is transparent to me and brings unity and intelligibility to my acts. Elizabeth Anscombe captures an important truth in her suggestion that ‘[w]hat distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not’ is that ‘they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question “Why?” is given application’.¹ The question why seeks to elicit from the acting person a *reason for the action*. What is sought is, first and foremost, an explanation: Why (for which reasons) did you, the acting person, act the way you did?

The acting person’s reply may reveal a series of more-or-less complex steps, beginning with an explanation that he acted this way in order to achieve some immediate end. (I walked to the High Street in order to purchase a book.) The immediate end is itself also susceptible to the why-question (Why did you purchase a book?), which situates the immediate end as a means to some further end. (I purchased a book in order to learn more about intentional action.) That end too is subject to the question why and so also answerable to yet another end. (I wished to learn more about intentional action in order to draft a comment for a journal symposium.) After a series of why-questions which situate ends as means to other ends in a complex of means-ends relationships, an end will be identified that is not itself subject to an ‘in order to’ reply. That end will unite the series of means-ends complexes disclosed by the previous answers to the why questions. Though provided *last* in response to questioning, that end is *first* as an answer to the foundational question: What shall I do? (Make a contribution to knowledge. Act in a spirit of academic friendship.) The end(s) identified in response to that question identify what I, the acting agent, take to be a reason (an end) not itself answerable to another end, but itself *the end* that provides unity and intelligibility to the whole series of actions that I undertake.²

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¹ Elizabeth Anscombe *Intention* (2nd edn, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) §5.

² That foundational end may not be ‘first in mind’ in the sense that the agent must deliberate on what are truly underived ends before acting. But these foundational ends will nonetheless be first insofar as the agent must accept (if only unreflectively) that the choice-worthiness of his choice must come from some

Veronica Rodriguez-Blanco's monograph, *Law and Authority under the Guise of the Good*,³ is an insightful study of intentional human action. With special reference to Anscombe's scholarship, Rodriguez-Blanco's aim is to illuminate 'the nature of human institutions such as law' (3) by reference to the wider study of human affairs, specifically the philosophy of action (practical reason, human agency) and the idea of human goods as ends of human action. With these commitments, Rodriguez-Blanco proposes to re-orient our study of general jurisprudence by maintaining a firm focus on the reasons for acting of the legal subject and (what she terms) the 'good-making characteristics' that constitute the ends of intentional human acts. Drawing on Aristotle, Aquinas, and especially Anscombe, her master thesis is that '[d]eep engagement with practical reason and practical knowledge provides the framework to understand two key features of law, i.e. normativity and authority' (3).

This comment offers two lines of inquiry for further reflection. Both are consistent with Rodriguez-Blanco's project and are true to her philosophical commitments. The first examines whether Anscombe's why-question methodology, deployed with success at several stages of the book's argument, can arrive at the book's ultimate aim: to 'fully grasp the nature of legal authority and legal normativity' (13). I offer a friendly amendment or clarification to demonstrate how it can, so long as two different ways of asking why are distinguished. The second line of inquiry is whether identifying undifferentiated 'good-making characteristics' as the end of intelligent action is a sufficiently secure foundation for developing a general philosophical understanding of law. I invite Rodriguez-Blanco to develop an account of the good that could ground not only a *reason* to comply with the law, but more forcefully a (defeasible but) *decisive* reason to do so.

II. *The Question Why*

Rodriguez-Blanco rightly and repeatedly reminds her reader that the intentions of the acting person are not 'transparent' to anyone but the agent (47-52). Others may seek to acquire knowledge of the agent's reasons for action by attempting to put themselves in the agent's position and thinking through which reasons would bring unity and intelligibility to the agent's actions. In so doing, the observers of the agent's actions will ask themselves the question they would put to the agent: Why did the agent act the way he did? The '*why-question* methodology', Rodriguez-Blanco argues, 'enables us to reflect on and elucidate the *reasons in the action* or *reasons for the action*' (28). It is what allows us, observers of another's actions, to provide a 'description of the action ... from the point of view of the person who performs the action', that is, from that person's 'deliberative point of view' (28). By asking the agent why he acted the way he did, we aim to 'elucidate the *reason* for the action' as the agent understood it (27).

The why-question methodology is sensitive to the divide insisted on by Rodriguez-Blanco between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. When deployed to

such good (such as would be brought out by a line of questioning). This in no way denies that the agent may be mistaken, ill-informed, etc.

³ Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2014. All pages references to the book are in parentheses in the text.

question agents on the reasons for their actions, the inquirer attempts to come to know the mind of the agent under study. True to the why-question methodology, the theoretical knowledge the inquirer seeks to acquire is one of 're-enactment' of the thoughts (reasons) of the agent in the mind of the inquirer.⁴ The need for re-enactment affirms Rodriguez-Blanco's insistence that the actor's intentions are not transparent for the observer and that the observer is therefore attempting to acquire theoretical knowledge of the actor's practical knowledge. The complications for the re-enactment will be lesser or greater depending on whether, with Rodriguez-Blanco, you imagine yourself in conversation with the acting person (e.g. 42: 'as described by the agent', 45: 'the description provided by the agent himself') or whether, being separated by time or otherwise, the actor is not available to you and so the then actor's 'present thought' is, for you now, 'a past thought living in' the present you inhabit.⁵ For present purposes, the difference is of no great matter. What does matter is this: the very idea of *re-enactment* highlights the break between the practical knowledge of the acting person and the theoretical knowledge that the observer seeks to acquire about the acting person's practical knowledge.

In its most straightforward sense, the why-question methodology attends to the agent's deliberative point of view. It is a retrospective methodology, inquiring into the reasons the agent had for acting the way he did. The good inquirer, concerned to acquire theoretical knowledge of the agent's practical knowledge, will not evaluate and correct the agent's reasons. She will be faithful to the agent's understanding of his actions and report the agent's reasons, even if they are confused, mistaken, misguided, unreflective, radically unreasonable, etc.⁶ The inquirer's undertaking is to provide the answer to the question why as the agent under study would answer it. Any attempt to correct errors, leaps in logic, fallacious premises, etc. is to pursue a line of inquiry different from the one that begins by putting the question why to the agent.

This methodology raises some doubts that the why-question will yield a general philosophical account of law. These doubts extend beyond the worry that the agents whose deliberative points of view are being studied may be acting on reasons that fail to award normativity to their practice. Even assuming that the agents to whom the question why is put act for good reasons, the why-question methodology is primarily designed to yield theoretical knowledge of the law *as understood by the persons under study*. The theoretical knowledge of another's practical reasons cannot yield a secure foundation for the normativity of law for anyone other than the agent under study.

However, this is not to deny the richness of asking why for investigating a general philosophical account of law. On careful examination, asking why opens up not one, but two lines of inquiry.⁷ It is here that I offer a friendly amendment or clarification, one that may amount to no more than bringing to the surface what is already present in Rodriguez-Blanco's argument. The first line of inquiry—the one just reviewed—looks to the *reasons persons had* for acting the way they did. The second—invited by the why-

⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1976] 2002) 112.

⁵ *Ibid.* 112.

⁶ Grégoire Webber, 'Asking Why in the Study of Human Affairs' (2015) 60 *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 51, 54.

⁷ *Ibid.* 66.

question—looks to *reasons themselves* and awards them centre stage, unmediated by concerns whether it is true that such reasons have been or presently are shared and held by others. In pursuing this inquiry, I, the inquirer seeking to identify those reasons, put the question why to myself rather than to others. When formulated in this self- rather than other-regarding manner, the question is no longer: Why did *you* (some third party actor) act the way you did? Rather, the question becomes: Why would *I* act this way? But this formulation is imperfect, because the question must not be formulated in such a manner as to close off the possibility of answering: I would not act this way; indeed, no one should. So the question is better reformulated another way, in a manner that leaves the act itself open: What is it right for me to do in these circumstances? How should I act? What should I decide? The key difference is not between to whom the question is being put. After all, we (any one of us) can ask (practically, normatively) ‘Why should ... ?’ of others just as much as we can of ourselves, and we can ask (descriptively, theoretically) ‘Why did ... ?’ of ourselves as much as we can of others. Rather, the key distinction is between did and should, is and ought, fact and value.⁸

My answers to these questions appeal to practical reasons in my deliberations, choices, and voluntary actions. My aim will be to understand and identify the truly good reasons for action that are available to any self-directing person. Those reasons will be identified by me, but I will think them candidates for being yours because—so far as I can judge—they are *good* reasons for me, you, and anyone else.⁹ My answers will identify what is normative and authoritative (if anything is) and so be candidates for accounting for the nature of legal authority and legal normativity (if law has either). They will be candidates in a way that the why-question, when asked of the reasons for action of *another person* and for the purposes of acquiring theoretical knowledge of *that person’s* reasons as she understood them, will not be.

The why-question methodology, in short, invites the inquirer not only to inquire into the reasons situated persons had for acting the way they did; it also invites the inquirer to reflect on what are truly good reasons for anyone to act on. Depending on which inquiry one pursues under the why-question methodology, one will be on the right or wrong side of the distinctions between ‘contemplation and action’ and between ‘outward-looking and inward-looking’ that Rodriguez-Blanco rightly commits her project to (v, see also 171-172). Only the fully normative reframing of the question why can open up the possibility of investigating a general philosophical account of law.¹⁰

III. *The Common Good*

Rodriguez-Blanco’s identification of ‘good-making characteristics’ as the end of intentional action is in line with the Aristotelian thesis that ‘[a]bsolutely and in truth the good is the object of volition’.¹¹ Affirming, with Aristotle, the difference between what is truly good and what an agent will take to be truly good, she writes that the ‘final end of the action is something, ie a state of affair[s], events, facts, objects that *seems or appears* to be good or desirable to the agent’ (46). Her argument here is

⁸ I am grateful to Charlie Webb for discussion on this point.

⁹ Ibid. 66.

¹⁰ See Webber ‘Asking Why in the Study of Human Affairs’, sec. V.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a25, cited at (52).

compelling but leaves open the question whether an undifferentiated appeal to good-making characteristics provides a sufficiently stable foundation for a general philosophical account of law. I wish to interrogate two ideas in this respect: first, whether all good-making characteristics can ground reasons strong enough to create obligations to act; second, whether the law-maker should appeal only to a sub-set of good-making characteristics. As I aim to show, both ideas invite reflections on the common good.

Rodriguez-Blanco's own methodological commitments suggest that the good that is the concern of the law-maker is not as encompassing as the good that is the concern of the members of the community as individuals. To understand the good of a community governed by law, one must come to understand the 'good-making characteristic' of such a community, an understanding achieved by asking the question why in the second, fully normative register outlined above: Why should persons associate themselves in a political community governed by law? The answer may suggest that the end of a political community delimits the scope of the good-making characteristics that are the concern of legal authorities.

In thinking through the contours of this answer, it may be helpful to recall the progression from family to neighbourhood association to political community in Aristotle, a progression not best grasped as historical, but rather as a progression in a person's practical reasoning.¹² Why should the members of a family choose to come together with other families to form a neighbourhood association? What would be their reason for doing so? One order of reasons points to how, for the family 'to contribute to the growth of its members in freedom, friendship, and all-round good, it must be liberated from the unremitting toil by all its members for material necessities'.¹³ Family members have a reason to choose a division of labour with other families. In addition, non-material goods like knowledge, friendship, and culture can be more fully participated in by members of a family if those members enter into a network of associations with their neighbours. The conditions—material and not—for personal development are better realised by associating together with one's neighbours.¹⁴

Why, in turn, would neighbourhood associations choose to come together with other neighbourhood associations to form a political community? Why not stop at the neighbourhood? Aristotle's answer points to a progression from incompleteness to completeness for the well-being of persons, for their self-determination. A family, a neighbourhood association—indeed, any community short of the political community—is incomplete and inadequate for the realisation of a person's self-determination. The political community, on Aristotle's account, is complete: it is that community of persons that has as its common pursuit to secure the encompassing set of conditions that 'enables the members of a community to attain for themselves reasonable objectives, or to realize reasonably for themselves the [good(s)], for the sake of which they have

¹² Aristotle, *Politics* I.2 1252a15-1253a29.

¹³ John Finnis *Natural Law & Natural Rights* (2nd edn, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011) 145.

¹⁴ They are not indefeasible reasons, of course. If one's neighbours are violent, free riders, etc., then one has reason *not* to associate with them.

reason to collaborate with each other as members of a political community'.¹⁵ In other words, there are good that one can participate in only by joining a political association.

In the classical tradition within which Rodriguez-Blanco situates her project, the end—the good—of a political community is labelled 'common good'.¹⁶ Though associated with Aristotle, Aquinas, and others working in the classical tradition, it is an expression appealed to by a great many philosophers, not all of whom work within the classical tradition. Without suggesting that they all appeal to the expression in the same way, Waldron,¹⁷ MacIntyre,¹⁸ Sandel,¹⁹ and, albeit only in passing and in paraphrase, Rodriguez-Blanco herself (75) all appeal to the idea of common good. One reason favouring the expression is that it signals how the law-maker's jurisdiction concerns an order of good that does not overlap, in every respect, with the good(s) that the members of the community may choose to pursue in choosing their life plans. Granting that I participate in a good in pursuing scholarship does not mean that this good-making characteristic would be open to the law-maker to direct me to pursue scholarship. The common good both directs and restricts the good-making characteristics open to the responsible law-maker.

This appeal to the common good serves another purpose, too: it allows for a stronger claim to be formulated in favour of the normativity of law than Rodriguez-Blanco's undifferentiated account allows for. She appeals to 'good-making characteristics' to account for how something that is 'external to the agent' (21)—a legal directive issued by a legal authority—can nonetheless be normative for the agent. Although Rodriguez-Blanco does not cast the challenge quite this way, it is sometimes questioned how a *reason* for action strong enough to be directive (not merely suggestive) of my action can be grounded in a *fact* as simple and straightforward as the positing of a directive by a legal authority. Rodriguez-Blanco's answer is to explain how the legal subject may 'internalise' the legal directive by an 'act of endorsement or avowal' (25) and so make 'internal' what was 'external'; that is, make into a reason what was merely a fact. By endorsing the legal directive, the agent can regard herself 'as the creator of the law, as a *legislator*' (20) because she has avowed the good-making characteristic of the directive. This idea enables Rodriguez-Blanco to explain how something 'external to the agent ... can be part of the agent through his or her engagement in practical deliberation' (21).

The argument goes some way toward but falls short of establishing the normativity of law in the rich sense that would provide an account of the obligation-imposing nature of law. No doubt, Rodriguez-Blanco is right to say that for the agent who endorses a legal directive, the good-making characteristic of that directive provides a reason for action. In this respect, the legal directive is normative for the agent. The challenge is that even for this agent who acknowledges the good-making characteristic of the legal directive, the directive does not, without more, become *obligatory*. The directive's good-making characteristic, if endorsed by the agent, will rank the legal directive's course of action as

¹⁵ Ibid. 155.

¹⁶ For e.g., Aquinas *ST IaIIae Q90*: law is an ordinance of reason for the common good.

¹⁷ For e.g., Jeremy Waldron, *Law & Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 3.

¹⁸ Alistar MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (3rd edn, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007) 151.

¹⁹ For e.g., Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009) ch 10 (Justice and the Common Good).

a course of action *open* to the agent, but—without more—that good-making characteristic cannot rank the directive’s course of action as *the course of action* that the agent ought to pursue. Why? Because goods are many and, at any one time, agents will confront a variety of courses of action open to them. Agents must choose between courses of action with good-making characteristics; the good-making characteristic of any one course of action is itself insufficient to make that course of action obligatory. As Anscombe would put the point: ‘When I do action *A* for reasons *R*, it is not necessary or even usual for me to have any special reason for doing-action-*A*-rather-than-action-*B*, which may also be possible.’²⁰ So what can identify such a ‘special reason’ for pursuing one course of action, a special reason to rank that course of action as obligatory rather than only intelligible because reasonable?

As an illustration, consider again the example at the beginning of this comment. The goods of friendship and knowledge were identified as ends served by my contribution to this book symposium; they make my decision to contribute reasonable and, in turn, intelligible to others. However, these same good-making characteristics do not make it the case that my *only* reasonable course of action was to prepare this comment. In deliberating over whether to contribute, I confronted free choice on whether to so. By choosing to devote my time and resources this way rather than another, I closed off other courses of actions which themselves had good-making characteristics as their ends. The nature of the good-making characteristics of preparing this comment did not create an obligation. The idea here is that, without more, an undifferentiated appeal to good-making characteristics will open up possibilities for intelligent choosing but will not distinguish a course of action as obligatory. The rich normativity of law as decisive in the deliberations of legal subjects requires another step in the argument if it is to succeed.

It is here that the common good identified by reference to the *reasons why* legal authority should be favoured in a political community may bring clarity. Consider this practical syllogism, which tracks Rodriguez-Blanco’s own accounts of the deliberations of the responsible community member (142):

P₁: To realise the common good, members of a political community need legal authority.

P₂: The legal authority responsible for the community has settled what is required, in part, to secure the common good by issuing *this directive*.

C: So: *this directive* provides each community member with a reason for action to play his or her part in realising the common good and the community will only be successful in securing the common good if the directive is treated as decisive by each member in settling what each is to do.

²⁰ GEM Anscombe, ‘Who is Wronged? Philippa Foot on Double Effect : One Point’ in Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (eds) *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by GEM Anscombe* (Imprint Academic, 2005) 251.

The normative weight of the conclusion turns on the syllogism's major premise, which is itself the conclusion of an argument on the normative force of the common good, an argument I have not made here. If the premise's force can be established, it provides a ground for the normativity of law, one not reliant on whether the legal subject endorses the good-making characteristic of *this* or *that legal directive*, but rather reliant on whether the legal subject endorses the good-making characteristics of *legal authority*. Now, the division between the two is not so sharp as to deny any relationship between the good of legal authority and the good-making characteristics of the directives issued by authority.²¹ But the division does emphasise that the legal subject may 'internalise' a legal directive otherwise than because the subject endorses the good-making characteristic of the directive. The legal subject need not conclude that, 'as a *legislator*' (20), she would have issued *this* directive. Perhaps the legal subject would have preferred a different course of action. Perhaps she thinks this directive ineffective and wrong-headed. But the performance of the act required by the directive need not depend on the legal subject's conclusion that the directive's end has a good-making characteristic (22); it can instead be grounded on the good-making characteristic of legal authority.

Although much of Rodriguez-Blanco's focus is on the good-making characteristics of rules (see esp. ch 2),²² she is open to the possibility that 'compliance with the authority has good-making characteristics' (73). The 'goodness of the authority' for her appears to turn less on the need for authority in a political community to secure the common good and more on how the authority's claims of moral correctness and legitimacy and the authority's compliance with the Rule of Law give rise to 'a *presumption* about the goodness of authority and its legitimacy' (142, emphasis added). I would cast the argument differently and say that the justification of authority does not give rise to a *presumption* but rather to a *reason* to act in compliance with directives issued by it. As an illustration, consider the need for authority in response to the challenges of coordination, an account that identifies not a presumption but rather a reason in favour of legal authority, a reason that may be strong enough to ground an obligation.

In many aspects of life in community, it is desirable to establish a pattern of coordinated action. Such action will achieve significant advantages (realise goods, satisfy needs) that, absent coordination, would be unattainable or unrealisable to the same degree. The desired pattern of coordination is not only between means and ends—how to realise safety on the roads, the financial sustainability of public services, the economic stability of property exchanges—but also between persons for whose good and needs coordination is sought. The coordination of means-and-ends and persons-to-persons can be contemplated by any one member independently of the others, with the more imaginative identifying a greater range of possibilities. But that independence cannot be maintained when one moves beyond contemplating different schemes to determining which scheme of means-and-ends and which roles in a scheme of persons-to-persons should be favoured, not only by oneself, but by everyone.

²¹ See Leslie Green *The Authority of the State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 42: 'Authority is thus a triadic social relation amongst a superior, a subject, and a *range of action*' (emphasis added).

²² Consider this passage (30): 'we follow legal rules, in the paradigmatic case, only because we are following the grounding reasons for actions as good-making characteristics of legal rules'.

Coordinated action is required for many of the immediate projects members of a community will choose to undertake. In these instances, the practical question confronting the community member is not aptly captured as ‘How should I act?’, but rather as ‘How should I act, *in community with others?*’ or, by bringing together the many members who will be asking that same question, the inquiry can be captured as: How should *we* act? What are we to do about promoting safety on our roads, addressing pollution in our air, and responding to emergency flooding in our town? The coordination of means-to-ends and persons-to-persons is required not only for each finite, episodic project, but also for projects carried on over time: funding our public services, promoting and maintaining emergency preparedness, securing our borders and our streets. It is this perspective on the standing feature of coordination over time in a community that begins to give shape to the deep complexity of coordinating activity in community. Desirable patterns of coordination will be many and, because many will be carried over time, there is need to coordinate each finite and ongoing coordination scheme with all of the others. The good of coordination in community reveals itself when patterns of coordination are evaluated not as a succession of isolated challenges, but as themselves requiring a pattern of coordination. The life of a community—the interaction of each one of its members with the others—is ongoing and far more complex than even the most challenging pattern of coordination taken in isolation.

The full sense of the practical question ‘How should we act?’ is not limited to a series of patterns of coordination and patterns of those patterns. The life of a community is not a succession of game-theoretical ‘coordination problems’, where (a) the desired ends are agreed, (b) the need for coordination is evident to all, and (c) the scheme of collaboration, once settled, is stable over time. Rather, in the life of a political community, (a) the desired ends are not always agreed (members of the community will identify a range of projects, commitments, and goods to be achieved by coordinated action, with competing priority rankings); (b) the need for coordination, even if only of mutual forbearance, is not always acknowledged by all (the circumstances of politics being aptly captured as ‘the felt need among the members of *a certain group* for a common framework or decision or course of action on some matter, even in the face of disagreement about what that framework, decision or action should be’²³); and, fundamentally, (c) coordinated action in one area of human activity carries over in another and not only because ends and means are often interchangeable in degrees of abstraction, but also because each pattern of coordinated action is liable to influence and destabilise other such patterns (so: in setting a pattern of coordination for the financing of a new hospital, decisions on how much from how many will carry over in evaluating how much from how many for financing roads, schools, common defense, etc). These ‘coordination of coordination’ challenges must be settled (selection of ends; the need for coordination) and held in view (the relationship of each coordination scheme with all of the others) before any one episodic or standing coordination challenge can be addressed. For these reasons amongst others, we come to understand how, ‘when it actually takes place, action-in-concert is something of an achievement in human life’.²⁴

²³ Jeremy Waldron, *Law and Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 102 (emphasis added).

²⁴ *Ibid.* 102 (footnote omitted).

The attractiveness of any one coordination scheme will not always be immediate to each and every member; not every collaborative act one undertakes will have a direct relationship to facilitating *one's own* projects, commitments, or ends. But if each member can understand herself to be a member of a community with others, she will acknowledge the direct relationship between her (and everyone's) collaboration and a state of affairs that is ordered, with each playing her and his part, with a view to achieving the various ends served by patterns of collaboration. And this order does facilitate, sometimes transparently, sometimes less so, the ability of each and every one to pursue reasonable projects and plans in community. The aim of a fair balance of burdens and benefits across persons in community facilitates the voluntary collaboration of one member in *this* scheme of coordination, where the benefits are absent or insignificant for this member as compared to the burdens, but where, in turn, in *this other* scheme of coordination, the benefits for this one member are significant and realisable only if the burdens on others are shouldered even though not offset by immediate benefits.

The need for authority, on this account, is within view for the practically reasonable community member: in all but a few cases, only authority will be available to settle, *decisively*, which coordination scheme for voluntary collaboration shall be the community's scheme. Only someone (or some body of persons) with authority will be able to select from among the range of reasonable alternatives and *decide* which is to be implemented. Perhaps clearest of all, only someone with authority can take *a view of the complex whole* to promote the fair balance of burdens and benefits across the full range of roles and responsibilities that persons in community will undertake in a vast and ambitious matrix of coordination schemes. In short, authority secures a way of settling, for each and every coordination problem (including whether something is a coordination problem), what is to be done.

On this argument, the common good may be that order of good-making characteristic that may ground not only a reason to act, but an obligation. For force of one's obligation to the common good turns, in part, on the good of community and the morality of inter-personal relations. It turns, too, on the thought that one shares in the governance of one's community by *doing one's part* and that, in doing one's part under law, one respects not the legal authority who issued the directive, but each and every member of the community served by one's actions. The complex matrix of social interdependencies grounds the defeasible *decisiveness* complying with a directive even when I regret what the directive asks of me. None of this is about where *presumptions* hold; rather, it is all about reasons and, as sketched, *decisive* reasons to act grounded in the good of community.

IV. Conclusion

Veronica Rodriguez-Blanco's *Law and Authority under the Guise of the Good* is a sophisticated book. In this comment, I have offered two lines of inquiry for further reflection: one is a friendly amendment or clarification to her methodological commitment to asking why; the other is an invitation to interrogate yet further an aspect of human affairs that will enrich our philosophical understanding of law.

Rodriguez-Blanco may reply that the second line of inquiry is, in truth, an invitation to write another book. It is and I hope she does.