

# *Dancy - Practical Reality*

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## Chapter 1 – Reasons for Action

The point of this chapter is to get some basic terms and distinctions on the table.

### Distinction:

*Motivating reason* ‘reasons in light of which an the agent did that action... what persuaded him to do it... his reason for doing what he did’ (1)

- my motivating reasons are a subset of the reasons that let to my action, which might also include *that I forgot our appointment, that I harbor unconscious resentments*, etc; I don’t consciously act on these grounds, so they’re not motivating reasons

*Normative reason* ‘reasons that speak in favor of [an] action... [what] make[s] actions right or wrong, sensible or unwise...’ (1)<sup>1</sup>

- Normative reasons are all *good* reasons, in the sense that they always favor the action they’re reasons *for*. There are no bad (normative) reasons.
- Still, a single situation might contain reasons favoring a diversity of incompatible actions, each of which is a good reason for doing that action

<sup>1</sup> In later work JD elaborates offers a broader account of the considerations that bear upon action and belief. In addition to reasons, this account includes amplifiers/ attenuators, and enablers/ disablers.

Question: what’s the relationship between motivating and normative reasons?

JD: we can ask questions about an agent’s motivations, and we can ask questions about the appropriateness of those actions. Two different kinds of questions, but

...this should not be taken to suggest that there are two sorts of reasons, the sort that motivate and the sort that are good [i.e. that speak in favor of acting in the relevant way]. There are not. There are just two questions that we use the single notion of a reason to answer. (2)

Puzzle: what about cases where I do something really stupid, and nothing favors my action? In that case

- there are no *normative* reasons favoring my action, but

- still, I might have been motivated by something or other, so there would be a *motivating* reason

Why that's weird:

The main awkwardness of what we have so far is that it leaves us saying that an agent can act for a reason (a motivating one) that is no reason (no good reason, that is), or that there was no reason to do what he did, even though he did it for a reason. Some motivating reasons, that is, are not good reasons. But I take this to be no more than a little local difficulty. It seems awkward because the phrase 'good reason' is pleonastic<sup>2</sup> when we are thinking normatively, and this leads us to say that a motivating reason that is no good reason is not a reason either. But we should remember that the notion of a reason is used to answer two distinct questions. The first is why someone acted, and the second is the pleonastic one of whether there were any (good) reasons for so acting. In specifying an agent's motivating reasons we answer the first question, and in that sense motivating reasons are all reasons. It is only when we have our eyes on the second question that we want to allow that a motivating reason can be no reason at all.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., since all normative reasons are good reasons, the 'good' in 'good reason' is redundant, assuming that the reason in question is a normative one.

BTM: it's not entirely clear what JD is claiming here. Are *normative reasons* and *motivating reasons* distinct from each other, but both instances of the broader category *reason*?<sup>3</sup> Or is there just one kind of thing, *a reason*, that we think of in different ways and ask different sorts of questions about? This becomes important later in the book; for now, let's just notice JD's cagey ambiguity.

<sup>3</sup> Compare: *dog* and *cat* are both instances of *mammal*.

Four further distinctions:

*Humeanism about motivation*: intentional actions are explained by beliefs and desires of the agent.<sup>4</sup>

- basic idea: I might desire X but not act because I have no beliefs about how to obtain X, and I might believe that doing Y is a means to achieving X but not do Y because I don't desire X. Neither desire nor belief are sufficient for action; both are required.
- Competing view JD has endorsed in the past is *pure cognitivism*: belief(s) can motivate action all by itself. Desire *just is* the state of being motivated, so a byproduct of this creation of motivation is the creation of desire, so any motivated action is at least *accompanied* by both belief and desire. Still, the belief is doing all the work. [More on this below.]

<sup>4</sup> Example: I flip the switch because I desire the light to come on, and I believe that flipping the switch will turn on the lights.

*Psychologism about reasons*: all of S's motivating reasons are psychological states of S<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> NB that the Humean is plausibly committed to psychologism.

- reason to doubt psychologism: stated reasons often reference putative facts about the world – I’m writing because the paper is due; I’m driving because I have an appointment across town – rather than psychological states, e.g. because the paper is due, or because I desire to have an appointment across town

*Internalism about normative reasons:* an agent A only has a good reason to  $\phi$  if, were A to know all the relevant facts, and deliberate rationally, A would be motivated to  $\phi$ .

Put differently: Suppose at  $t_1$ , A does is not motivated to  $\phi$ , and also lacks relevant facts p. At  $t_2$  A learns that p, and otherwise remains the same<sup>6</sup>. **Internalism** is the thesis that, if at  $t_2$  A has the motivation to  $\phi$ , then at  $t_1$  A has a normative reason to  $\phi$ .<sup>7</sup>

**Externalism** is the thesis that A might at  $t_1$  have had a normative reason to  $\phi$  even though learning p would not motivate her to  $\phi$ .

*Desire-based and value-based normative reasons:* normative reasons are grounded in an agent’s desires, or in values (achievement, pleasure, friendship, etc).

- NB JD’s interesting and entirely correct comment about how the *grounding* relation is much strong and more interesting than the *being a necessary condition for the existence of* relation.<sup>8</sup>
- Internalism is a thesis about what kinds of states of the agent are *necessary for the existence of* a normative reason, so it’s weaker than a claim about what grounds the existence of a normative reason

BTM: interestingly, JD seems very concerned with the grounds of *the existence of* normative reasons, but so far he’s not at all concerned with questions of *what actions those reasons support*.

#### Chapter 4 – The Theory of Motivating States

JD’s ultimate goal is to argue that motivating reasons are facts about the world, rather than states of the agent. This requires him to reject psychologism about motivating reasons, and so to reject both Humeanism and Cognitivism. Nonetheless, he want’s to first argue that Cognitivism is the most plausible version of psychologism.

So, suppose psychologism is true. Which version?

#### Humeanism<sup>9</sup>

Motivation is *constituted by* the combination of beliefs and desires

<sup>6</sup> Except for any changes to A’s desires that result from what she’s learned

<sup>7</sup> Presumably this is a version of internalism because it implies that facts about the normative reasons that I possess supervene on facts about my (potential) internal states.

<sup>8</sup> That  $2+2=4$  is a necessary condition for the existence of the chair, but it doesn’t ground that existence. (Not sure what does. Its parts? Grounding is a world unto itself.)

<sup>9</sup> NB he’s not considering the actual views of Hume here, rather the tradition that has grown up in the meantime that’s self-consciously based on Hume’s ideas.

But, there's an asymmetry, one which can be captured in a couple of ways:

1. Direction of Fit: desires are states with which the world must fit, beliefs are states that must fit the world
2. Causal asymmetry: belief is causally inert, desire is causally inefficacious; desire sets the ends, belief finds the means to those ends.

### Nagel:

Two types of desires:

*motivating desires*: desires that 'just assail us'

- example: wanting a drink of water

*motivated desires*: 'arrived at by decision, and after deliberation'<sup>10</sup>

- example: wanting to study at Rice rather than somewhere else

For Humeans, desires are the primary factor in motivation, though belief is also necessary.

For Nagel, motivated desire itself is the product of belief and deliberation. So if motivated desires have causal efficacy, it must be inherited from the beliefs. So the beliefs are the primary factor in at least some cases.

Question 1: can we be sure there aren't any non-motivating desires utilized in the deliberation producing the motivated desires? And if so, why think it's the *belief* is active/ causally efficacious?

Question 2: what role does a motivated desire play in motivating action on this picture? Is there anything left to do, after all relevant beliefs are accounted for (an in particular the beliefs that led to having the motivated desire)?

JD's objection to Nagel: the view is 'unacceptably hybrid': sometimes motivating reasons are analyzed in the Humean way (anytime the desire in question is a motivating desire), and sometimes in a totally different way (anytime the desire is a motivated desire)<sup>11</sup>

### Pure Cognitivism

The view:

1. motivating states consist only in cognitive states/ beliefs
2. to desire *just is* to be in a motivating state, so anytime one is in such as state, one has a desire

<sup>10</sup> NB that this way of drawing the distinction isn't clearly exhaustive, and for no good reason. Contrast this to the various ways of distinguishing internalism from externalism: internalism is the thesis that X, and externalism is the thesis that not-X. The latter is much likely to lead to unnecessary confusion.

<sup>11</sup> Writer's tip: if you're drawing an important distinct, don't use labels that are easy to confuse, e.g. 'motivated' vs 'motivating' reason. It's easy to keep them straight when you're really thinking about it, but on a quick read it's easy to forget which is which, or to just not pay much attention to the suffixes. General goal: write such that your reader's cognitive resources are all employed on the point you're making, none on trying figure out what your point is supposed to be given the words on the page.

3. But, desire is *not* part of what motivates

Argument:

1. The explanation of motivation must be structurally similar to the explanation of action
  - (a) For often the only thing necessary to take us from motivation to action is the absence of contrary motivation, or the fact that contrary motivations were 'weaker' than this motivation. The explanation of the action, then, will be the same as that of the motivation, together (perhaps) with the thought that competing motivations were either weaker or just absent.
2. But the desire that is necessary if there is to be action is just a motivation; and we are understanding this as a state of being motivated...rather than as what motivates.
3. That state of being motivated will itself need an explanation, and this must now be given either in terms of the supposed nature of the thing desired – which, in psychologism's terms, would be to appeal to belief to explain desire – or in terms of a further desire.
4. Either way, if motivation is to be eventually explained, it will be in terms of the (supposed) nature of that which motivates, which cannot itself be a desire and must be thought of as belief, if it is a psychological state at all.

Qualification:

Some desires, of course, cannot be explained. But if they cannot be explained, then neither can the action that, in desiring as we do, we are motivated to perform. If we cannot say why we want to do it, the fact that we want to do it offers nothing by way of explanation for the action. It merely means that we were, incomprehensibly, motivated to do this incomprehensible thing. (85)

BTM: First, in such cases, isn't there a motivated state without a belief? How is that possible on the cognitivist account?

Second, why can't such cases result in action? (Humeans would hate that, of course, as there might be no beliefs involved.)

Contrast: being motivated to dance, and being motivated to get an A in class. When you're motivated to dance, you just do it – no intermediate steps. But you get an A in class by doing other things: studying, writing good papers, etc. If 'desire sets the ends, belief finds the means to those ends', then what do I need belief for when

I can act directly for my ends, as when I just dance? Dancy seems to be seeking some further explanation for why I danced.

Points of agreement between Cognitivism and Humeanism:

1. A complete motivating state consists entirely of psychological states of the agent.<sup>6</sup>
2. Belief and desire have distinct directions of fit.
3. A desire is an 'independent existence', perhaps with its own phenomenology. It is not a logical 'shadow' of the motivating beliefs, such as, for instance, the fact that the agent is motivated by those beliefs, but a distinct psychological state co-present with the beliefs when they motivate.
4. There can be no motivation without desire.

Points of disagreement: Cognitivism holds that motivating states consist only of beliefs, whereas Humeanism holds that they are composites of beliefs and desires

Defensive moves for the cognitivist:

Argument for desires as motivated reasons (from Michael Smith):

1. Having a motivating reason is, inter alia, having a goal.
2. Having a goal is being in a state with which the world must fit.
3. Being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring.
4. Desires are motivating reasons

The conclusion is an But the conclusion is too strong. Instead it should be:

- 4' Having a motivating reason is, inter alia, desiring.

In other words, when you have a motivating reason, you have a desire. But that doesn't mean the desire *is the motivating reason*, and it's perfectly consistent with cognitivism: the motivating reasons are all beliefs, which taken together are the desiring.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This is reminiscent of the earlier distinction between the *is a necessary condition for* and the much stronger *is the grounds of* relations.

## Chapter 5 – Acting for a good reason

At this point Dancy takes himself to have established that cognitivism is the most plausible version of Psychologism about motivating reasons<sup>13</sup>

Three possible ontologies of reasons:

*Pure Psychologism* both motivating and normative reasons are psychological states

- Clarification: it's not that normative reasons are reasons due to someone's psychological states – e.g. it's not that p is a reason for S because S desires p – it's that the desiring itself is the reason.

*Pure Propositionalism* both motivating and normative reasons are contents of psychological states

- i.e. propositions; Dancy later argues they're *true* propositions: facts

*Mixed View* motivating reasons are psychological states, normative reasons are facts

Dancy rejects Pure Psychologism without much argument

Ultimate goal is to establish a version of Pure Propositionalism, so the immediate goal is to argue against the Mixed View

Why one might be (misguidedly) attracted to the Mixed View: it nicely satisfies the Explanatory Constraint:

*Explanatory Constraint*: any theory of the relation between normative and motivating reasons... [must] show that and how any normative reason is capable of contributing to the explanation of an action that is done for that reason. (101)

First version of the Mixed View: the Three Part Story

- the function of motivating reasons is to explain action
- psychological states explain action
- but (sometimes at least) facts about the world explain belief: I believe that I have hands because I have hands; you believe that Houston is in Texas because Houston *is* in Texas
- So: normative reasons help to explain motivating reasons, which explain action

<sup>13</sup> Reminder: cognitivism is the thesis that all motivating reasons are *beliefs*.

Against Pure Psychologism

Here's a bad argument *for* Pure Psychologism:

(1) A's reasons for  $\phi$ -ing was that p

can only be true if

(2) A believed that p<sup>14</sup>

so

(3) A's reason for  $\phi$ -ing was that A believed that p

First problem: the argument isn't valid<sup>15</sup>

Second problem: the conclusion is not that Psychologism is true

- *that A believed that p* is a proposition, not a psychological state
- What's needed is:

(3\*) A's reason for  $\phi$ -ing was A's believing that p

BTM: it's worth thinking about this distinction. Dancy's point is about the ontology of motivating reasons: are they mental states, facts, or something else?

Dancy's ultimate thesis is that motivating reasons are facts about the world. Defenders of (3\*) – psychologists in Dancy's sense – reject that thesis in its entirety. But defenders of (3) partially accept Dancy's thesis: they agree that reasons are facts, they just disagree about *which* facts, with Dancy holding that they're facts about the world, and (3)'ers holding that they're facts about the agent's mental states.

The distinction is significant. One might have worried that facts of any sort are the wrong sorts of things to be reasons. (3\*)'ers are in a position to raise that objection, but (3)'ers are not.

end BTM

**Three arguments against the Three Part Story:**

1. In addition to the Explanatory Constraint, any adequate theory of normative and motivating reasons must satisfy the Normative Constraint:

*Normative Constraint:* ...a motivating reason, that in the light of which one acts, must be the sort of thing that is capable of being among the reasons in favour of so acting; it must, in this sense, be possible to act for a good reason. (103)

<sup>14</sup> I've reproduced the argument as it appears in the book, but I find that presentation a bit misleading. To my eye, (1) and (2) are not separate premises; rather, there's only one premise: that (1) can only be true if (2) is true.

<sup>15</sup> Dancy has made this point above: just because A is a necessary condition for B, it doesn't follow that A is the reason for/ causes/ grounds B.



The Three Part Story fails to satisfy the Normative Constraint: here motivating reasons are mental states, while normative reasons are facts about the world, so it's impossible to act for the reasons that favor that action.

This point is sometimes obscured by the fact that an agent's beliefs are often relevant to how we evaluate *the agent* for having acted in particular ways, even if we evaluate *the actions themselves* only by reference to the facts of the case: There was no fire, so Tom shouldn't have pulled the fire alarm. Still, given his vivid hallucination of flames and smoke, I can understand why he did it.

BTM:

**\*\*\*Dancy considers a view much like this one below, so let's put of discussion\*\*\***

What to make of this argument?

What seems right: in order for an action to be rational/ right, there must some close connection between the (normative) reasons favoring that action, and the (motivating) reasons for which the agent acted

What's questionable: Dancy claims that the relation between normative and motivating reasons is the closest relation of all: identity. (He explicitly says so on p. 106). Is that really necessary?

Alternate possibility: where *p* is the fact that favors the action, and stipulating that the action is right/ rational, what's required is that the agent be motivated by a belief with content *p*.

NB: the 'is the content of' relation between normative and motivating reasons is a pretty close relation, but it's much weaker than identity, and we are allowing reasons of different ontological categories (fact, belief) so this alternate possibility does not satisfy the normative constraint. Is that a problem?

End BTM

2. We normally try to explain an action by showing that it was done for good reason,<sup>16</sup> or at least for what might reasonably have been thought to be good [i.e. normative] reason at the time. But psychological states of the agent are the wrong sorts of thing to be good reasons. A believing cannot be a good reason for acting, because a good reason for acting is a reason that favours acting, and such things, according to the three-part story, are states of the world, not psychological states of the agent. (106)

<sup>16</sup> Recall: for Dancy, explanation is the job of *motivating* reasons, and good reasons are *normative* reasons. So the first part of this sentence translates as: 'The job of motivating reasons is performed by normative reasons'.

As Dancy concedes, this is very similar to objection 1. Important

difference:

...this second criticism seems less vulnerable to the charge that it involves a certain exaggeration. There is not so much hanging on the demand for potential identity between motivating and normative reasons – at least nothing is hanging on that alone. The need for the potential identity is itself supported by the need for motivating reasons to be of the right sort to be good reasons. If only normative reasons can be good reasons, and if reasons (of whatever sort) must be able to be good or less good, then only the sorts of thing that are normative reasons can be motivating reasons. (107)

In other words, it's not essential that our explanations of action appeal to the normative reasons that do in fact favor a particular action, only that those explanation appeal to *the right sorts of things* – facts. So even when we offer failed explanations – those in terms of 'facts' mistakenly taken to support to the action (either because they're not true, or because they do not so-support), we still appeal to propositions rather than mental states.

BTM: presumably we can offer the same sort of response: it's not that the motivating reasons doing the explanation have to be *identical* to the favoring reason, merely that the content of the motivating reason must be identical to the normative reason. Any reason this explanation works less-well to objection 2 than it did to objection 1?

3. [I'm not sure what the argument is supposed to be here]

Forget the Three Part Story, consider the Content-based Accounts:

- motivating reasons are beliefs, and normative reasons are the contents of those beliefs
- those beliefs can contribute to action, since the believing comes *with* a content, and needs to do so if it is to explain anything. So it is the psychological state *plus* content that together constitute the motivating reason, and the content alone that constitutes the normative reason, if there is one. (113)

First point: such a view does not satisfy the Normative constraint: motivating reasons are psychological states, and normative reasons are their contents. Whatever we take contents to be, they are not identical to the states.

BTM: so?

Second point: we normally think of the contents of beliefs as the propositions believed. Content-based Account hold that the contents

of beliefs can be good reasons for actions. This suggests that normative reasons are propositions. But they're not.

Normative reasons are *states of affairs*, not propositions:

- it's her being ill that gives me reason to help – the actual state of the world – not something to do with a proposition

What are propositions? To families of accounts:

*propositions as sets of possible worlds*

*propositions as structured abstract objects*

On neither account are propositions the sorts of substantial bits of the world that we take to be reasons: Allen's distress; the house's being on fire; the impending collapse of American democracy

NB: it doesn't help to restrict normative reasons to *true* belief contents: the issue isn't alethic, it's ontological

Second version of the Content-Based Approach:

- motivating states are beliefs with propositional contents that represent the world as being one way or another
- normative reasons are states of affairs: the world's *being* one way or another
- a motivating reason is *good* relative to action A when it represents a genuine normative reason for doing A

NB:

- Dancy has been assuming that the Normative Constraint demands identity between belief contents and normative reasons
- he argued against the first version of the Content-based Approach by arguing that it fails to satisfy this demand.
- The second version explicitly rejects this demand for identity, asserts that something weaker is sufficient: that the propositional content of the normative reason *represent* the normative reason

Dancy's response:

My response to this version of the content-based strategy is that it simply awards itself the concept of a good motivating reason, without

really doing anything to show that it makes sense. It awards itself this prize because, given the terms of the debate, it needs to do so if it is to show a good sense in which a motivating reason can enjoy a normative status and thus get close to meeting the normative constraint (which is all that it is trying to do). But the normative status it enjoys is that of being, not a good reason, but a good motivating reason. The only good reasons, according to this strategy, are states of affairs. Motivating reasons are good motivating reasons when they represent the things that are really good reasons. And we cannot turn a good motivating reason into a good reason by simply ignoring the little word 'motivating', since the strategy involves the admission that motivating reasons, being psychological states, can never be good reasons. (119)

## Chapter 6 – As I Believe

Psychologism is false: my reason for acting cannot be my belief that p

Dancy's preferred alternative:

**Normative account:** the motivating reason is just the fact that p

Potential problems:

1. what about when p is false, but I sincerely report having acted in light of p? If the fact is absent, what's my reason
2. doesn't my belief play *some* role in explaining my action? What role is that? Surely I can't act in light of p unless I believe that p...

**Psychological Factivism:** instead of acting in light of my belief that p, or acting in light of p, I act in light of the fact that I believe that p

*Advantages:*

- I can believe that p even when p is false. So, no problem acting in light of my reason (that I believe that p) even when p is false
  - NB this does not force us to abandon the factivity of reasons: my reason is the fact that I believe that p, and I really do believe that p
- the role of my belief here is obvious: that I believe that p can't be a fact unless I believe that p

Argument against Psychological Factivism:

1. Sometimes, facts about what we believe *really are* reasons for action
2. those cases are 'quite unusual, not at all the the normal case' (124).

Examples:

that I believe that the cliff is crumbling is my reason for avoiding climbing it, because having that belief I am more likely to fall off (I will get nervous). This is a case where that I believe what I do is genuinely my reason for action, in a way that is independent of whether the belief is actually true. As I might say, whether the cliff actually is crumbling or not doesn't matter. I believe that it is crumbling, and this alone is sufficient to motivate me to stay away from it. I recognize that if the cliff were not crumbling, I would still have just the same reason not to climb it as if it were, so long as I continue to believe it to be crumbling. (124)

Someone who believes that there are pink rats living in his shoes may take that he believes this as a reason to go to the doctor or

perhaps a psychoanalyst. This is quite different from the person who takes (his belief) that there are pink rats living in his shoes as a reason to call in the pest control officer. (125)

3. '[Because] the situations of which [the reason for action is a fact about what the agent believes] is most obviously true are very uncommon ones... so that the general thesis [that motivating reasons are facts about what the agent believes] must be false as a general thesis just because of the peculiar nature of the cases which it correctly characterizes.' (125)

So, Psychological Factivism is probably false.

BTM:<sup>17</sup>

Are Dancy's descriptions of the Crumbly Cliff and Pink Rats cases really fair to the Psychological Factivist (hereafter: PF)? I would have thought that the PF would say:

- motivating reasons are beliefs (perhaps combined with desires)
- granted, when citing our own reasons for action we don't cite beliefs, we cite putative facts about the world (typically), but that's misleading: knowledgeable third-person observers cite beliefs<sup>18,19</sup>
- Diagnosis of cases:

*Crumbly Cliff 1* the cliff really is crumbly, and you don't climb it.

Motivating reason: that you believe it is crumbly.

*Crumbly Cliff 2* you believe that the cliff is crumbly, and you're worried that this belief will make you so nervous that you'd fall.

Motivating reason: your belief that you believe that the cliff is crumbly

*Pink Rats 1* you take it that there are pink rats in your shoes, and you call the exterminator.

Motivating reason: that you believe that there are pink rats in your shoes

*Pink Rats 2* you believe that there are pink rats in your shoes, so you call the psychiatrist

Motivating reason: you believe that you believe that there are pink rats in your shoes

Dancy thinks that paradigm cases where facts about beliefs – CC2, PR2 – are reasons are unusual, and for that reason we should reject PF.

<sup>17</sup> Forgive the digression – this has been bothering me!

<sup>18</sup> Do they? Even in good cases?

<sup>19</sup> NB this isn't all that different from Dancy's own position, on which we should treat 'p' and 'S believes that p' the same because they appear the same to S (to avoid Moore Paradoxicality).

But he only gets that result by assuming that the reasons in CC<sub>1</sub> and PR<sub>1</sub> are not facts about beliefs, but facts about the world.

That's tantamount to assuming that PF is false! So, Dancy's argument is question-begging (at least against the version of PF that I'm imagining).

Where does that leave us?

- Dancy's actual argument has no dialectical force against the PF
- All the work here is being done by the bare intuition that the motivating reason in CC<sub>1</sub> and PR<sub>1</sub> is a fact about the world, not a fact about belief.<sup>20</sup>

End: BTM

<sup>20</sup> Which might be the correct intuition to have! But the argument is useless.

## Defending the Normative Account from objection (2)

### Objection

2. doesn't my belief play *some* role in explaining my action? What role is that? Surely I can't act in light of p unless I believe that p...

*Being a motivating reason for action A* is just one way to contribute to an explanation of A, but there are others. In particular, a condition might contribute by being a condition that enables the motivating reason to be a motivating reason in the first place.

Example: my motivating reasons for sitting in this room and leading this discussion include: the fact that it's my job; the fact that I enjoy it; the fact that the subject matter is important and well worth getting to the bottom of, etc<sup>21</sup>

The presence of oxygen in our immediate environment helps to explain why I'm here leading the discussion, in the sense that, were the oxygen absent, I would act differently (I'd be elsewhere or dead).

Still, the fact that oxygen is present in the room is not a motivating reason for my action; it's contribution is of another sort.

Contributors of that sort are *enabling conditions*

Proposal: the fact that I believe that p<sup>22</sup> is merely an enabling condition for p to be one of my motivating reasons

Problem: it's hard to clearly distinguish between enabling conditions and reasons.

<sup>21</sup> I'm assuming with Dancy here that motivating reasons are facts, but that's inessential to drawing the distinction between reasons and enabling conditions.

<sup>22</sup> Alternately: my belief that p.

Second response: when we say 'he did it because he believe that p', what we really mean is 'he did it because of p, as he believes'

Call this the *appositional account*

Here the 'as he believes' part 'is no part of the specification of his reason, but a comment on that reason'. (120)

BTM: how is this supposed to help? Is the original objection about language at all? If not, then why a linguistic hypothesis in response? And how is this different from the enabling conditions response? Aren't we still saying that believing that p is a necessary condition for P to be a motivating reason, but the belief itself is not a motivating reason?

### Defending the Normative Account from objection (1)

Objection

1. what about when p is false, but I sincerely report having acted in light of p? If the fact is absent, what's my reason?

Let me just let Dancy state his response:

The question, then, is whether there is a way of explaining an action by laying out the considerations in the light of which the agent acted without committing ourselves to things being as the agent there conceived them to be.

I take it that the answer to this question is yes. I suggest that locutions such as

His reason for doing it was that it would increase his pension  
The ground on which he acted was that she had lied to him

are not factive. To test this, we only need to consider whether it is possible without contradiction to continue by denying that things were as the agent took them to be. Consider the following sentences:

His reason for doing it was that it would increase his pension,  
but in fact he was quite wrong about that.  
The ground on which he acted was that she had lied to him,  
though actually she had done nothing of the sort.

Neither of these sentences sounds self-contradictory to me. (132)

He goes on:

What conclusions can we draw from all this? The most general conclusion...is that there are explanations of action that do not succeed simply by laying out the agent's reasons for action in the terms that the agent would have done if asked... though some such attempts [to specify an agent's reasons for action] may involve a factive context, others do not.



The ones that do not are ones that involve a contained intensional context, such as that introduced by 'he believes that...', so that the whole can be true as an explanation, though the contained part, the thing doing the explaining, is not. There are, then, both factive and non-factive ways of laying out the considerations in the light of which the agent acted.<sup>23</sup>

If this is so, it seems to me that the difference between the factive and the non-factive cannot be of any real significance when it comes to the explanation of action. We can phrase our explanation as we like, and that is the end of the matter.<sup>24</sup> So it cannot be that the very notion of explanation drives us to the use of the phrase 'because he believed that...' in order to live up to the factive demands associated with the explanation of events. In this sense, a thing believed that is not the case can still explain an action.

It follows from this that if we do decide to use the factive turn of phrase in giving our explanation of his action, this cannot be because we are driven by the need to find a factive explanation. We do not need to do this, and there are available plenty of effectively equivalent turns of phrase that would have enabled us to do things differently. If the agent's conception of the situation is mistaken, there are some ways of explaining his action that are now ruled out. But this does not show that only factive ones are left in, forcing us towards the phrasing 'He did it because he believed that p'. If we do use the factive ones, this will be a comparatively arbitrary choice. (134-5)

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps, but note that in order to lay out the agent's reasons factively we're forced to retreat to facts about her psychology. But if those really are motivating reasons, and if motivating and normative reasons are the same, then normative reasons are also facts about her psychology. Dancy explicitly rejects that!

<sup>24</sup> What does phrasing have to do with it? We're looking for a true theory here, not offering a critique of natural language!

## Chapter 7 – Consequential Matters

In Ch. 6, Dancy contrasted two theories of motivating reasons:

*psychological factivism*: explanations of actions are all of the form *A acted because he believed that p*; normative reasons are all of the form *he believed that p*

*normative account* [Dancy :] explanations of actions are all of the form *he acted for the reason that p*; normative reasons are all of the form *p*

Both views can agree on the following:

- normative reasons are facts
- motivating reasons should be the same sorts of things as normative reasons<sup>25</sup>
- **Explanatory maxim**: ‘the true-false distinction should not be allowed to affect the form of the relevant explanation’ (138)
  - Translation: if R is the reason to act in cases where things are as the agent takes them to be, then R should also be the reason when things are not as the agent takes them to be; the truth of R is irrelevant to the explanation of action

<sup>25</sup> Not sure how to understand this claim, since Dancy does not actually require that motivating reasons are *true*, so some motivating reasons are not facts.

How to decide whether the reason is *p*, or is *that the agent believes that p*?

Psychological factivist understands the good case in terms of the bad case:

1. when the agent incorrectly believes that *p*, her reason for action is that she believes that *p*
2. the truth of *p* cannot affect the explanation of action (= the explanatory maxim above)
3. so, when the agent *correctly* believes that *p*, her reason must also be that she believes that *p*

Dancy wants to understand the bad case in terms of the good case:

- 1'. when the agent correctly believes that *p*, her reason for action is that *p*
2. the truth of *p* cannot affect the explanation of action (= the explanatory maxim above)

3'. so, when the agent *incorrectly* believes that p, her reason must also be that p

This is similar to debates about the nature of perception motivated by the Argument from Illusion:

- 1''. when the agent hallucinates that p, her reason for believing that p is her non-factive experience as of p (or perhaps: the fact that she's had such an experience)
2. the truth of p cannot affect the explanation of the belief (= the explanatory maxim above)
- 3''. so, when the agent veridically perceives that p, her reason for believing that p is her non-factive experience as of p (or perhaps: the fact that she's had such an experience)

This suggests a 'highest common factor' analysis of perceptual success: the non-factive experience common to both veridical perception and hallucination, plus some further condition independent of that non-factive experience, e.g. safety, appropriate causal relation...

Like Psychological Factivism, and unlike Dancy, the Common Factor analysis understands the good case in terms of the bad case. But not that all three arguments embrace the explanatory maxim (i.e. the shared premise 2)

Common response to arguments from illusion: reject the explanatory maxim, adopt disjunctivism

Disjunctivism about reasons explanation: A  $\phi$ -s for the reason that p iff

*either* p and that p is a reason for  $\phi$ -ing and A  $\phi$ -s in the light of the fact that p

*or* it is not the case that p, but A takes it that that p is a reason for  $\phi$ -ing, and A  $\phi$ -s in the light of his belief that p

*or* p, but that p is not a reason for  $\phi$ -ing but A takes it that that p is a reason for  $\phi$ -ing, and A  $\phi$ -s in the light of the fact that p.

Advantage of disjunctivism: allows us to avoid every saying that 'A acted in light of a reason that is no reason'.

Assuming that all normative reasons are facts,

- can identify the first disjunct with acting on the basis of a normative reason, a fact about the world

- so, it's possible to act for a reason
- can identify disjuncts 2 and 3 with acting on the basis of a belief, where that belief is not a (normative) reason<sup>26</sup>
  - so, no need to say that it's possible to act for a reason that isn't a reason

<sup>26</sup> NB: psychological factivism is consistent with the second point, not the first.

Dancy can't say that:

...the position that I tried to defend in the previous chapter is committed to the offending formulation 'in the light of a reason that is no reason'. For it wants to hold that, in such a case, it is not as if the agent acts for no reason at all, though any belief of the agent is not the right sort of thing to be that in the light of which the agent acted; and it also allows that the reason for which the agent acted is not a good reason in favour of so acting. The combination of these two views leads to the offending result [that someone could act in light of a reason that isn't a reason]. (142)

...What distinguishes my original position from that of the disjunctivists is that, for me, all motivating reasons must be capable of being good reasons; disjunctivists assert such a thing only of the reasons captured in the first and third disjuncts. With the second disjunct, that which motivates the agent is not the right sort of thing to be a good reason for acting, or a reason that favours the action done, since it is a belief of the agent's rather than the thing believed. (142)

But disjunctivists have to abandon the explanatory maxim: that the true-false distinction should not affect the form of the relevant explanation. That's bad, right?

Not in a sense that should bother any body:

- on the above interpretation of disjunctivism, the agent acts on the basis of facts, regardless of what's going on in the world, so the form of explanation is unaffected by true-false distinction
  - in that sense, no violation of the maxim
- but, the true-false distinction does matter when it comes to determining *which facts* constitute the reason explaining the action: whether it's p, or: A believes that p
  - so, in this other sense the maxim is violated
  - Dancy doesn't seem to be worried about this violation

Dancy's defense against points so far:

BTM: Dancy's defenses are somewhat surprising. He seems to take the main problem to be that he's offering a version of the argument from illusion, which leads to the subsequent discussion, which is problematic. In responses he mostly seems to be arguing that he's not really offering an argument from illusion, but doing something quite different.

I find this avenue of response surprising. Isn't the problem simply that the disjunctivist view (or the psychological factivist view for that matter) more plausible than Dancy's own normative view? And in that case, who cares how we came to be considering disjunctivism? Who cares whether his method of arguing is similar to an argument from illusion? How are his responses at all responsive?

End: BTM

Now for Dancy's defense:

1. He's not really offering an argument from illusion: if we have privileged access to our perceptual experiences (we may suppose), and if veridical and illusory cases are subjectively indistinguishable, then the reason (the experience) should be the same. That indistinguishability is essential to arguments from illusion.

Reply: Dancy's arguments about motivating reasons don't presuppose subjective indistinguishability, they rely on independent arguments. From the subject's point of view, there's no difference between  $p$  as a reason, and *I believe that p* – the latter is just a cautious restatement of the former.<sup>27</sup> Since the agent has no reason draw that distinction, neither do we.<sup>28</sup>

2. Given the higher-order account of perception, the difference between success and failure is some substantive thing in addition to the non-factive perceptual experience: safety, causal relation, etc. These additional factors are substantive in the sense that they go beyond the mere veridicality of the experience.

Reply: On Dancy's view, the only difference between the good and bad cases is whether things really are the way the agent takes them to be, so no substantive additional factor.

3. Dancy is committed to the possibility of acting in light of a reason that isn't a reason, which sounds bad.

Reply: '...we could hear the remark that he acted for a reason that is no reason as claiming simply that his action can be explained in the standard intentional way<sup>29</sup>, but that the explanation does not reveal anything to be said in favour of what he did.' (144)

<sup>27</sup> Presumably this is because of paradoxical nature of 'p, but I don't believe it'? I find this reasoning unclear.

<sup>28</sup> This middle paragraph on 143 is hard to follow. I'm not clear on the objection he's trying to rebut, and I'm not sure what the rebuttal amounts to. Any ideas?

<sup>29</sup> I.e. just as 'S believes that p' does not imply that p, we could say that 'S acts in light of reason R' doesn't imply that R really is a reason.

4. MOST IMPORTANTLY: Disjunctivism is false because it falsely claims that some motivating reasons are facts about what the agent believes. This is just a partial commitment to psychological factivism, and the partial commitment is just as problematic as the total commitment.<sup>30</sup>

### Metaphysical Difficulties

1. How can what is believed serve as a reason when it's false?

Reply:

The important point... is that in this area we can have non-factive explanations. There must be some form of words with which we can give the agent's explanation without committing ourselves to things being as the agent supposed. Whatever one takes that form to be... its existence is enough to answer this difficulty... The worry is based on the mistaken sense that whatever explains an action must be the case, i.e. that all explanation is factive. We should abandon this and allow that where someone's reason for acting is something that is not the case, that is exactly what it is— something that is not the case. There is no need to look for something else that is the case. (146-7)

BTM: Why accept that we have non-factive explanations? If the motivating reason is that A believes that p, then the reason is true, even if p is false. Both psychological factivism and disjunctivism can accommodate this claim, and psychologists's reasons aren't non-factive in Dancy's sense either (the sense of non-obtaining). Since all major opponents reject Dancy's 'main point', isn't this argument simply question-begging?

This is really disappointing – I'd love to see Dancy engage more seriously with this point.

End:BTM

2. What are these 'things believed' that are supposed to be what explain intentional actions? Are they propositions? Are they states of affairs? Are they facts? In particular, what are they when they are false – if indeed they are capable of falsehood?

Reply 1: this isn't a serious question, but I can say that they're not propositions.

Reply 2: [Dancy really has nothing to say here, he just rehearses some options that don't work out.]

BTM: Can he say any of this? In an earlier discussion of normative reasons he said

<sup>30</sup> BTM: why? Isn't the main problem with psychological factivism that it makes it impossible to act for good reasons, i.e. it makes normative and motivating reasons too dissimilar? And doesn't disjunctivism allow one to act for good reasons, as long as things are as the agent takes them to be? So what's the objection?

My first and simplest point here is that intuitively it seems to be not so much propositions as states of affairs that are our good reasons. It is her being ill that gives me reason to send for the doctor, and this is a state of affairs, something that is part of the world, not a proposition. (114)

On p. 150, in his discussion of whether *that the action would be wrong* –what he call a ‘thin motivator’ –is itself a reason, he says:

The crucial question for me has all along been whether something is the *right sort of thing* to be a reason of a certain sort. **These thin motivators are indeed the right sort of thing to be good reasons, being states of affairs.** (150, boldface added)

And since it must be possible act on the basis of good reasons – since normative and motivating reasons must be the same sorts of things – must he not also say that motivating reasons are states of affairs?

3. [tangential point about belief contents - let’s ignore it]

#### Internalism and desire-based reasons again

In Ch. 2, Dancy argues against desire-based accounts, on which *normative* reasons are grounded in desires. He’s worried that his own argument ‘..may still have seemed to amount to little more than a reassertion of the true but question-begging claim that if we have no reason to adopt the end, our adoption of the end can give us no reason to do what will subserve that end.’ (151)

The new argument seeks to show that the Desire Based Account of normative reasons is inconsistent with both Pure Cognitivism and the Normative Account.

Recall the Pure Cognitivism of Ch. 4:

1. motivating states consist only in cognitive states/ beliefs
2. to desire *just is* to be in a motivating state, so anytime one is in such as state, one has a desire
3. But, desire is *not* part of what motivates

Pure Cognitivism is a theory of *motivating* reasons and a version of psychologism.

What’s important here is that both Pure Cognitivism and the Normative Account agree that desiring *just is* the state of being motivated, which is explained in cognitive terms: believings (Pure Cognitivism)

or things believed (Normative Account). So, on both views, desires don't motivate.

Argument:

1. Suppose the desire-based account is true: normative reasons are grounded in desires
2. desires don't motivate (from Ch. 4)
3. If (desires don't motivate and normative reasons are grounded in desires), then normative reasons don't motivate – i.e. normative reasons cannot influence action
4.  $\neg(3)$
5. so,  $\neg(1)$



## Chapter 8 – How many explanations?

Main point of the book is to offer a theory of motivating reasons – a theory of what explains intentional action.

Observation: one prominent way we explain events (such as intentional action) by identifying their causes

Question: what's the relationship between the causes that explain an agent's action, and the reasons for which the agent acted? Are reasons just causes? If not, can we eliminate reasons-talk from our action explanations altogether?<sup>31</sup>

Plausibly, reasons are not causes:

- Intentional actions typically involve bodily motions. '...are we happy to think that moral and other normative facts can stand in that objective [causal] relation to facts about bodily movements [...]? Can a body be caused to move by the fact that one person owes another a favour?' (161)
- Particular problem for Dancy's Normative Account: some motivating reasons are false/ non-obtaining. How can a non-obtaining state of affairs cause anything?

But Davidson argues that we must say that reasons are causes in order to make sense of ordinary reasons-talk:

1. Often there are several reasons to act, and we act on the basis of one of them by not another
2. In such cases, something must make it the case that R<sub>1</sub> is the basis of action rather than R<sub>2</sub>
3. The only (best?) candidate is that R<sub>1</sub> is the *cause* of the action and R<sub>2</sub> isn't
4. So, reasons are causes

That's inconsistent with that we just observed about the Normative Account, so the NA is false

Two ways to understand the objection, with two responses:

*first understanding:* the appeal to causation is intended merely to *give philosophical depth* to claim that R<sub>1</sub> causes the action and R<sub>2</sub> doesn't

*response:* The general claim that the relation is causal adds no depth. Depth only comes when we can actually offer an account of how R<sub>1</sub> caused the action in question. No such account is forthcoming, so the causal account adds no depth, is a failure.

<sup>31</sup> Alternately: can we keep the talk reasons but abandon talk of causes, at least in cases of intentional action?

*second understanding:* eventually explanations bottom out in 'bare truths'.<sup>32</sup> Explanations that put off that point as long as possible are the better for it. So, an explanation on which 'R1 supports A and R2 doesn't' is a bare truth is worse than a theory that adds 'R1 causes A and R2 doesn't' as an explanation of the reasons fact. Here the causal fact is the bare truth.<sup>33</sup>

*response:* pushing back the appeal to bare truths is only an advantage when it adds theoretical depth, so this second understanding adds nothing above the first understanding

More general response: facts about the reasons for which one acted really are basic, unanalyzable facts, so offering an analysis is misguided

...the difference between those reasons for which the agent did in fact act and those for which he might have acted but did not is not... causal... [it's] just the difference between the considerations in the light of which he acted and other considerations which he took to favour acting as he did but which were not in fact the ones in the light of which he decided to do it... I suspect... that no [relevant] account is available to be given, without therefore supposing that this has any tendency to show that the relation concerned does not exist. (163)

<sup>32</sup> I'm not entirely clear what Dancy means by 'bare truth'. An unanalyzable truth?

<sup>33</sup> NB this does not require that we give any substantive, specific theory of causation.