

Schroeder - Having Reasons

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Central claim of the paper: the 'Factoring Account' of reasons-having is false, and the historical influence of that account has led astray both practical philosophers and epistemologists

Ambiguity of 'has':

Sentence 1: 'Tina has a cat'

- saying 'there's a cat, and Tina has one' isn't redundant
- here 'has' means something like 'possesses'

Sentence 2: 'Tina has a sister Freddie'

- S2 asserts a relation between Tina and Freddie
- no implication that Tina *possesses* Freddie as one possesses a cat, rather that Tina is one relata of that *sister of* relation
- hence saying 'Freddie is Tina's sister, and Tina has her' is redundant (pleonastic): it's impossible for the former to be true and the latter false (in the relevant sense)

Lesson: 'has' talk is ambiguous, and potentially misleading.

Observation: we often talk of 'having a reason'

Question: which sense of 'have' is relevant to 'having a reason'?

Factoring Account: reasons you have are, independently of you, reasons, and moreover, you *have* them [non-redundantly] (58)

In other words, having a reason is like having a cat.

Schroeder's alternative picture:

- there are two distinct types of reason one can have, objective and subjective
- in both cases having a reason is like having a sister, but in only one is the reason also *possessed*

A case motivating the Factoring Account: there's a party tonight, and there will be dancing

	likes dancing?	knows there will be dancing at the party?
Bradley	No	No
Ronnie	Yes	No
Freddie	Yes	Yes

In one sense, Ronnie *has* a reason that Bradley does not have: the fact¹ that there will be dancing at the party²

That reason *favors* going to the party

But, Ronnie *has it* only in the sense of having a sister – he doesn't possess it as one would possess a cat

Schroeder's focus is not on the contrast between Bradley and Ronnie; he cares about the contrast between Ronnie and Freddie.

In another sense, Freddie has a reason that Ronnie lacks: Bradley knows that there will in fact be dancing, Ronnie doesn't³

Schroeder's focus is not on the contrast between Bradley and Ronnie; he cares about the contrast between Ronnie and Freddie

Factoring Account analysis of the Ronnie/ Freddie contrast:

According to the Factoring Account, *having* a reason, in our sense [the 'has a cat' sense], is a conjunctive relation. For one to *have* a reason to do A is for there to be a reason for one to do A that one *has*. (60)

Schroeder: seems like a reasonable analysis of what we've seen, but further considerations bear against the Factoring Account.

§2 – The reason Bernie has to take a sip

Case from §1 provide some prima facie support for the Factoring Account: after determining *what reasons there are*, there's a further question of *what reasons Ronnie has*

Cases involving agents with false beliefs are more problematic:

Bernie asks the server for a gin and tonic and is handed a glass. He believes the glass contains gin and tonic, but in fact it's full of gasoline.

- There exists a (objective) reason *not* to take a sip: that the glass is full of gasoline

¹ NB the reason in question is a *fact*.

² this highlights the *objective* sense of 'reason'

³ this highlights the *subjective* sense of 'reason'

- Bernie may have this reason in the pleonastic sense, but not in the possessive sense
- There's evidence that he has (in the possessive sense) reason *to actually take a sip*:
 - we expect he'll take a sip
 - we might criticize him for *not* taking a sip⁴
 - if he does take a sip, we wouldn't say he did it for *no reason*

⁴ then why did you ask for one?

But what could be both (1) a reason for him to take a sip, and (2) a reason he has (in the possessive way)?

Schroeder: nothing serves both functions

§2.1

What's Bernie's reason to take a sip?

Recall what the Factoring Account requires:

1. there exists a reason for Bernie to take a sip
2. Bernie *has* (possesses) that reason

First proposal: his reason is the fact that Bernie *believes* the glass contains gin and tonic

First problem with the proposal:

Suppose that a fully informed and beneficent bystander is tallying pros and cons of Bernie's taking a sip. He's just noted the fact that the glass is full of gasoline in the cons column. Does he now reflect, "but on the other hand, at least there's this much to say for it— Bernie *believes* that the glass contains gin and tonic"? This seems like a strange thing to say. Bernie's taking a sip is no better of an idea, just because he is in the dark. Now suppose that Bernie were to find out that he believes that the glass contains gin and tonic. Would that be the sort of thing to settle him on what to do – on taking a sip? On the contrary, Bernie would just as soon not drink gasoline, even if he believes that it is gin and tonic. When he is deliberating about what to do, what he believes matters to him only if it is an indication of how things actually are.

Neither of these characteristics of reasons for someone to act seems to be present in Bernie's case. This suggests that the fact that he believes his glass to contain gin and tonic is not itself a reason for him to take a sip. And if this is right, then it is a reason that Bernie *has* to take a sip without being a reason *for* him to take a sip. (62)

So, the fact that Bernie believes the glass contains gin and tonic can't be the reason that satisfies (1).⁵

⁵ NB this isn't necessarily a problem for the Factoring Account. Perhaps the reason is something other than Bernie's belief?

§2.2

Second problem with the proposal:

Having (possessing) has an epistemic condition: believing⁶

So, if Bernie's reason is *I believe that there's gin and tonic in the glass*, then in order to have that reason he must believe it.

⁶ maybe believing; Schroeder is hedgy on this point

Dilemma: either

1. having as your reason *I believe that there's gin and tonic in the glass* requires having the second-order belief *I believe that I believe that there's gin and tonic in the glass*
 - but we rarely have those beliefs, and they seem unnecessary
2. disjunctive account of having: sometimes there's an epistemic condition that must be met in order to have a reason, other times there isn't
 - in that case, how can the *having* relation help explain reasonable expectations of action, reasonable criticisms for inaction, action for a reason, etc...?
 - further, if 'having' is disjunctive, then isn't that just because of the two senses of the word: pleonastic and possessive? Remember: we're just trying to understand the possessive sense here.

So, the fact that Bernie believes the glass contains gin and tonic can't be the reason that satisfies (2).

§2.3

Second proposal: his reason is the belief itself

Observation: we cite many kinds of things as normative reasons: objects, properties, people, facts, etc.

Another observation: we can always rephrase citations of non-fact reasons as facts:

- the height of the Empire State Building (as a reason not to jump off) becomes: *that the Empire State Building is so great*
- Baas van Fraassen (as a reason to study at Princeton) becomes: *that BvF is at Princeton*

Lesson:

This argues for the claim that normative reasons are one of these two kinds of thing—facts, or true propositions. In doing so, it makes sense of talk about other kinds of thing being reasons—such talk is either simply elliptical for, or must at least ultimately be reducible to, talk about facts or true propositions being reasons.

All of this means that it's hard to make sense of the claim that the reason that Bernie has to take a sip is his belief as a distinct alternative from the claim that his reason is the fact that he has this belief. The natural way to make sense of the claim that his belief is a reason *for* him to take a sip, is as the claim that the fact that he believes that his glass contains gin and tonic is a reason for him to take a sip. (64)

We tried to run the Factor Analysis on facts about beliefs and it failed.

So the second proposal won't help save the Factor Analysis.

§2.4

If the reason is Bernie's belief, the (plausibly) *having* (possessing) that reason is just having the belief

Problem: now we can't make sense of there being a reason that isn't possessed

Recall: on the Factoring Account there's a single reason favoring going to the part for both Ronnie and Freddie, but only Freddie *has* (possesses) that reason

The reason that exists, for both Freddie and Ronnie, is that there will be dancing at the party

Freddie possesses that reason in virtue of believing that there will be dancing at the party

For Ronnie the reason exists, but he doesn't possess it (by the description of the case). But that's impossible given the Factoring Account and the second proposal: if the reason exists and the reason is a belief, then Ronnie has the belief, so Ronnie possesses the reason.

So, the Factoring Account together with reasons as beliefs⁷ produce results inconsistent with the case that's supposed to motivate the factoring account

⁷ together with the hypothesis that having a belief puts one in possession of that belief as a reason, which MS is assuming

§2.5

Third proposal: reasons are *contents* of beliefs, not beliefs themselves or facts about beliefs

This doesn't help the Factoring Account:

The Bernie's reason to take a sip is that there's gin and tonic in his

glass. But there isn't gin and tonic in the glass – it's gasoline! So there is no such reason that favors taking a sip.⁸

⁸ NB that one could allow false propositions to serve both roles

Broad conclusion of §2:

I know of no other candidate for what the thing might be, that is all three of the following: the reason Bernie has to take a sip, a reason for him to take a sip, and something to which he stands in the same having relation as Freddie but not Ronnie stands in to the fact that there will be dancing at the party tonight. I therefore take it that we have exhausted the possibilities, and should rightly set the Factoring Account into its grave. (65)

§3

Schroeder's positive account:

There is no single thing that is a reason for you to act and a reason that you have. There are two fundamentally different⁹ types of reasons:

⁹ fundamentally different in the sense that that they are neither identical nor two varieties of the same sort of thing (as parrots and pigeons are two types of birds)

Reason Bernie has to take a sip: that there's gin and tonic in the glass (= the content of his belief)

Reason for Bernie not to take a sip: that there's gasoline in his glass (= fact about the world)

Reason Freddie has to go to the party: that there will be dancing (= content of his belief)

Reason for Freddie to go to the party: that there will be dancing (= fact about the world)

Reason Ronnie has to go to the party: [none]

Reason for Ronnie to go to the party: that there will be dancing (= fact about the world)

Sum:

Now that we have both a case in which there is a reason that isn't had, and a case in which a reason is had that is not a reason, we can embrace the result that we merely have a distinction between two senses of the word, "reason". We can stipulate that the sense in which Ronnie but not Bradley has a reason to go to the party is the objective sense, and that the sense in which Freddie but not Ronnie has a reason to go is the subjective sense.

§4

The above was all about *practical* reasons. Let's shift to *theoretical/epistemic* reasons

Key claim about this section: epistemologists often presuppose an *epistemic* analogue to the Factoring Account. That account is false, and it distorts our thinking about evidence.

Epistemic Factoring Account: evidence that you have is, independently of you, evidence, and moreover, you *have* it¹⁰

Example:

If John told Mary that he can't stand you, that is evidence that he can't stand you. But if you don't know what John told Mary, then it's not evidence that you have.

¹⁰ this is a paraphrase of the practical factoring account from above

Important disanalogy between practical and epistemic objective reasons talk:

Practical reasons are *relational*: that there will be dancing at the party is a reason to go for Ronnie and Freddie – because they like to dance – but not for Bernie, who doesn't.

Consequence: when we talk about 'Ronnie's reasons', it's ambiguous between 'reasons that bear upon what Ronnie should do' (i.e. Ronnie's objective reasons) and 'reasons that Ronnie *has*' (i.e. Ronnie's subjective reasons)

Theoretical/ epistemic reasons – objective ones – are the same for all agents. So talk of 'Ronnie's evidence' can't reasonably be understood as talk of *objective* reasons.

Consequence of the Consequence:

This, I think, has made it particularly hard for epistemologists to see past the Factoring Account. In the practical case, as I pointed out, there is at least one relation that does *not* involve any kind of possession of things which are, independently of one, reasons: the *objective* reason relation. So that makes it easy to wonder whether talk about "having" reasons in the subjective case is similarly simply pleonastic rearrangement of talk about what is a subjective reason for whom. But in the epistemic case, there is no such direct parallel to draw. Since evidence is, on the conventional view, everywhere the same, it doesn't even make sense to talk about *someone's* evidence unless you mean the evidence that she *has*. And that makes it *hard* to get out of the trap of thinking that the Factoring Account must be true. (69; Schroeder really likes *italics*)

How failure to appreciate the consequence of the consequence warps the epistemology of perception:

Epistemic analogue of Bernie case: non-veridical perception as of p

What's the evidence in such cases?

First proposal: the evidence is: the fact that it perceptually seems you as if p

Problems:

1. why think that the fact that it perceptually seems to you as if p is evidence for p?
 - (a) problem: skeptical hypotheses
2. what's required in order to *have* that evidence? Belief that: it perceptually seems to you as if p?
 - (a) problem: we don't often have beliefs of those sorts
 - (b) problem: how are those beliefs justified?

Proposed response to (2b): *belief that is perceptually seems as if p is justified by the fact it's true that it perceptually seems as if p*

But this leads to a weirdly non-uniform theory of justification: some beliefs justified by evidence, others by facts.

Solution/ second proposal: externalism – all beliefs justified by facts!¹¹

Third proposal: the evidence is: that p

Problem: how can p be evidence if p isn't *true*?

Solution: disjunctivism – the evidence is *that p* when p is true, in other cases it's something else

NB: the problem motivating Disjunctivism is a consequence of something like the Factoring Account

Big picture lesson:

This whole dialectic, of course, is just the dialectic about Bernie's reason to take a sip, recast in the epistemological domain, and with a perceptual twist. I conjecture that this is best explained by the fact that evidence is *reasons-reasons for belief*. Reasons for action and epistemic or evidential reasons for belief, I think it is reasonable to conjecture, are not two entirely different or merely parallel kinds of thing—they are both instances of a broader *kind, reasons*. That is why the same issues arise in each domain. But it is *also* why we shouldn't let ourselves be distracted by the fact that in epistemology, the problem has mostly been discussed in the *perceptual* case, rather than the *inferential* case. What is relevant about the problem is that the psychological state which grounds the fact that the agent has a reason is non-veridical—whether it is a belief or a perceptual seeming is a further complication that only makes the epistemological case harder, when we think about it by itself.

¹¹ this account is preposterously quick – it's not for nothing that in the introduction he describes §4 as a 'conjecture'

If any of that is right, then it is intelligible to hope that the answer from the practical case may be able to help us in the epistemological case. In the practical case, we said that Bernie had a reason to take a sip because he bore the right kind of relation—*believing*—to a proposition which was *the kind of thing to be* an objective reason for him to take a sip, if true. Similarly, then, we might be able to explain the role of non-veridical perceptual experiences by saying that when it perceptually seems to Billy that p, Billy stands in the right kind of relation—*perception*—to a proposition which would have been evidence that p if it were true. *That is why*, we would say, Billy's perceptual experience grants him defeasible justification to believe that p. (70-1)