

Having reasons

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Received: 16 August 2006 / Accepted: 24 March 2007 / Published online: 28 July 2007
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Abstract What is it to *have* a reason? According to one common idea, the *Factoring Account*, you have a reason to do *A* when there is a reason for you to do *A* which you *have*—which is somehow in your possession or grasp. In this paper, I argue that this common idea is false. But though my arguments are based on the practical case, the implications of this are likely to be greatest in epistemology: for the pitfalls we fall into when trying to defend the Factoring Account reflect very well the major developments in empiricist epistemology during the 20th century. I conjecture that this is because epistemologists have been—wrongly—wedded to the Factoring Account about *evidence*, which I conjecture is a certain kind of reason to believe.

Keywords Reasons · Subjective · Objective · Bernard Williams · Epistemology · Evidence · Basing

When someone has a ticket to the opera, that is because there is a ticket to the opera, and it is in her possession—she *has* it. Similarly, if one has a golf partner, this can only be because there is someone who is a golf partner, and one *has* him. But here, it is not like there are people out there who have the property of being golf partners, and one is in your possession. Rather, being a golf partner is simply a relational property, and the golf partner you have—your golf partner—is simply the one who stands in the *golf partner of* relation to *you*. So *has* talk can be confusing. Because of cases like that of the opera ticket, it suggests possession. But in many cases *has* talk works more like talk about having a father or having a golf partner. This paper, however, is not about *has* talk in general. It is about a relation that philosophers now typically pick out by talking about the *reasons* that someone *has*, and by corollary the relation that epistemologists pick out when they talk about the *evidence* that someone *has*.

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There is a natural view that treats these cases on the model of the opera ticket: reasons you have are, independently of you, reasons, and moreover, you *have* them. Similarly, according to the corresponding view in epistemology, evidence you have is, independently of you, evidence, and moreover, you *have* it. I call this the *Factoring Account*. The Factoring Account gains its force both from comparison to the opera ticket case *and* from specific features of the paradigm examples which get us thinking about having reasons and having evidence in the first place. But as I will argue in this paper, the Factoring Account is wrong. In the relevant sense, reasons you have are not things which are, independently of you, reasons, and which moreover, you *have*. There are simply two *reason* relations at stake, in either of which you can count as *having* a reason, but only in the pleonastic sense in which you can have a father or a golf partner. The implications of this conclusion are, I think, rather important, and are far from being fully assimilated. In the final part of the paper I will assemble some circumstantial evidence that failure to draw it has played a large role in shaping the development of views about the epistemology of perception, and hence about epistemology in general.

There are four parts to the paper. In part 1 I distinguish the relation philosophers intend to pick out by talk about the reason which someone *has*, explain why we have to be careful about such talk, and illustrate why it is nevertheless a natural way of speaking, and leads naturally to the Factoring Account. But the Factoring Account has two major commitments. In any case in which it seems that there is a reason someone has to do something, whatever is the *reason* that she *has* must be just that: (1) a reason for her to do it, and (2) one that she *has*. So in part 2 I discuss Bernard Williams' gin-and-tonic case in considerable detail, and show that our intuition that Bernie has a reason to take a sip cannot be explained by the Factoring Account. First, good candidates for what the reason might be that Bernie has to take a sip are not, also, good candidates for being reasons *for* Bernie to take a sip. And second, even if they were, there is no unified story about what the *having* relation might be, such that we can treat all cases of having reasons as involving the same *having* relation.

So, I conclude, the Factoring Account is false. But what is true instead? In part 3 I offer the view that there are simply two cross-cutting *reason* relations at stake—the *objective* reason relation and the *subjective* reason relation, and the data give us no good reason to suspect that either is a *restriction* on the other, as the Factoring Account proposes. But this does not mean that they are unrelated. On the contrary, there are at least three initially plausible theories about how they might be closely related. Finally, in part 4 I turn my attention to the role of the concept of *having evidence* in the development of 20th-century empiricist epistemology. The problems confronted by empiricist epistemology in the last century and eventually leading to the development of epistemological externalism and disjunctivism in the philosophy of mind, I suggest, mirror exactly the problems about how to account for Bernie's reason to take a sip. I offer the conjecture that this is because evidence *is* reasons, and hence having evidence just is having reasons. The problems, in both cases, arise in the non-veridical case, and are caused in the same perfectly predictable ways. The only significant twist, I suggest, is that in the epistemological case the worries have arisen in particular in the case of perception. But *modulo* that very significant twist, I suggest that getting rid of the Factoring Account plausibly ought to change the way that we think about epistemology.

1 Having reasons

Philosophical talk about what reasons you *have* is in some ways natural, and so there are natural ways of making the distinction we need using ordinary language. But as I'll

illustrate, the terminology used to make the distinction does not, in ordinary language, *robustly track* the philosopher's distinction. The view I will be defending can easily explain why not. With that in mind, allow me to start by clarifying what I will *not* be meaning by talk about *X having* a reason to do *A* in the relevant sense. I do *not* mean to distinguish Ronnie from Bradley: Ronnie likes to dance, but Bradley highly dislikes dancing. Unbeknownst to either, there is going to be dancing at the party tonight. This fact (that there will be dancing at the party—not that neither knows this), in some intuitive sense, is a reason for Ronnie to go to the party, but not a reason for Bradley to do so. It *counts in favor* of Ronnie's going there, but not of Bradley's going there. A fully informed and beneficent bystander would take it into account in advising Ronnie to go to the party, but not in advising Bradley to do so. We'd expect finding it out to move Ronnie, but not Bradley to go there. These are the kinds of phenomena that seem to go together with saying that something is a reason for someone to do something, a sense that I will later distinguish as the *objective* sense of "reason".

One way of rephrasing the claim that it is a reason for Ronnie but not for Bradley is to say that it is one of Ronnie's reasons but not one of Bradley's. Or, rephrasing again, it is a reason that Ronnie has but not a reason that Bradley has. This case is like the case of having a father or having a golf partner. It is not that Ronnie counts as *having* this reason because it is a reason that he in some way possesses—on the contrary, as stipulated, Ronnie knows nothing about the fact that there will be dancing at the party tonight. In this case, it counts as a reason that Ronnie has to go to the party, simply because Ronnie is the person to whom it stands in the *reason for* relation. These ways of pleonastically rephrasing the original claim about reasons are valid in ordinary language, and moreover are harmless, *so long as* they do not lead to confusion. But they do not give us the sense in which someone can *have* a reason that is at stake in the Factoring Account.

The sense in which an agent can *have* a reason in which I will be interested is the sense in which Ronnie contrasts not with Bradley, but with Freddie. Freddie, like Ronnie, likes to dance. But Freddie, unlike Ronnie, knows that there will be dancing at the party tonight. Since Freddie, like Ronnie, likes to dance, the fact that there will be dancing at the party tonight is, as for Ronnie, a reason for him to go there. But in some sense or other, Freddie, unlike Ronnie, *has* this reason, since he knows about it, and Ronnie does not. This second sense of "has a reason" is the one I will later distinguish as the *subjective* sense of "reason".

Several features of Ronnie's case motivate thinking that the difference between him and Freddie is highly relevant to his relation to the reason for him to go to the party. For one thing, we can reasonably expect that unless something else comes up, Freddie will go to the party, or at least be motivated to. But we can't expect any such thing from Ronnie, unless someone lets him know about the dancing. We could also reasonably criticize Freddie for not going to the party, assuming that nothing else came up—what could he have been thinking, to not go (all other things being equal)? But if Ronnie doesn't show up for the party, he can hardly be to blame, unless he is to blame for being ignorant about the party in the first place. And most relevant, if Ronnie *does* happen to go to the party, we can't say that the reason that he went there was that there would be dancing there. If Freddie, on the other hand, goes to the party, we *can* say that the reason for which he went there was that there would be dancing. He could still go there for some *other* reason, *instead*, of course, but Freddie *unlike* Ronnie is at least in a *position* to go to the party for that reason. So though the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for both Ronnie and Freddie to go there, only Freddie is in a position to go there *for* this reason.

For all of these reasons, it looks like the difference between Freddie and Ronnie is highly relevant, so let us stipulate that we shall say that Freddie *has* this reason to go to the party, but Ronnie does not. The following table illustrates the differences between Ronnie and Bradley, and between Ronnie and Freddie, which seem to call for saying that there is a reason for both Ronnie and Freddie, but not Bradley, to go to the party, but that this is a reason that only Freddie, and not Ronnie, *has* (Table 1).

Having, it *seems*, is an epistemic relation that one bears to reasons for one to do something. If there are reasons for one to do something of which one is not aware, one can't be reasonably expected to do these things, reasonably criticized for not doing them, or do these things *for* those reasons. This much is true. On the face of it, this is because to *have* a reason to do something, something else must happen, over and above there being a reason for one to do it. One must also *have* this reason. So says the *Factoring Account* of the *having reasons* relation. According to the Factoring Account, *having* a reason, in our 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*. The idea, to revert to the distinction cashed out in terms of the *objective* and *subjective* senses of "reason", is that the subjective reason relation is merely a *restriction* on the objective relation. Based on the data we have examined so far, this is a natural thing to say. This is *especially* so if we use the "*has a reason*" terminology in distinguishing between Freddie and Ronnie, but there is more to say in its support than that it proceeds from trying to treat Freddie's case on the model of the opera ticket—it does look like Freddie satisfies all of the criteria that Ronnie does, plus more. So it is natural, if we restrict our attention to cases like Freddie's, to see the relation he stands in as a *restriction* of the relation Ronnie stands in.

2 The reason Bernie has to take a sip

But the Factoring Account, as obvious as it sounds, raises some interesting puzzles when we start to think about cases in which an agent has false beliefs. Take the case of Bernie, who is standing around at a cocktail party, holding a glass that he believes to contain the gin and tonic for which he has just asked his hostess, but which in fact is full of gasoline.¹ There is a reason for Bernie to set his glass down without taking a sip—namely, that it is full of gasoline. What better reason to avoid taking a sip could there be? But this is not a reason that Bernie *has*, in the sense we've articulated, for he is unaware of it, just as Ronnie is unaware that there will be dancing at the party tonight. But Bernie, unlike Ronnie, has a positive—even reasonable—belief that his glass contains gin and tonic. Question: does Bernie *have*—in our sense—a reason to take a sip?

We know a couple of straightforward things about Bernie. He's just asked the hostess for a gin and tonic, so he must have wanted one. Since he thinks that his glass contains gin and tonic, we can reasonably expect, unless something else comes up, that he'll take a sip.

¹ The case, of course, comes from Williams (1981). Let me make clear, however, that Williams himself did not distinguish between objective and subjective reasons, nor even between normative and motivating reasons. Before Williams wrote there was a common false presupposition that "Humean" accounts of reasons could only account for subjective reasons, and not for objective reasons. Williams originally used the gin-and-tonic case in order to demonstrate that Humeans *can* account for objective reasons. But Williams' account is designed to account for *both* objective and subjective reasons, under a single unified account. I don't believe there is any such category of thing, *reason*, such that objective and subjective reasons are two sub-varieties of reasons. So I am drawing conclusions based on careful consideration of Williams' case that he would not himself endorse.

Table 1

BRADLEY	RONNIE	FREDDIE	
No	Yes	Yes	The fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for _____ to go there. _____ <i>has</i> this reason to go to the party.
No	No	Yes	
1. Does it <i>count in favor</i> of his going to the party? 2. Would a fully informed and beneficent bystander take it into account in advising him to go? 3. Would it move him to go, if he were aware of it?	1. Can we reasonably expect him to go? 2. Can we reasonably blame or criticize him for not going? 3. If he goes to the party, can we say that he went for this reason?		

(Or at least he would start to—one might think that the fumes would inform him otherwise as soon as he had it under his nose.) Moreover, if nothing else comes up, we can reasonably criticize his deliberation and motivation if he is *not* moved to take a sip. Since he doesn't even realize that it's full of gasoline, what could possibly be going on in his head for it to make sense for him not to take a sip? And most tellingly, if he does take a sip, we don't think that he did it for no reason at all. On the contrary, we think that there was a reason *for which* he took a sip. These are all of the earmarks that we distinguished earlier of having a reason to do something. So surely Bernie *does* have a reason to take a sip.

But I'll now argue that no candidate for what the thing is, which is the reason Bernie has to take a sip, could be both a reason *for* him to take a sip, and a reason that he *has*, in the same sense in which Freddie but not Ronnie *has* the reason to go to the party. Since we already have a case in which there is a reason for someone to do something which he doesn't *have*, I'll eventually take it that this case completes the argument that there are simply two cross-cutting senses of the word "reason" at stake—the sense in which Ronnie, but not Bradley, has a reason to go to the party, and the sense in which Freddie, but not Ronnie, has a reason to go. This is the distinction between *objective* and *subjective* senses of the word, "reason".²

2.1 That Bernie believed that it contained gin and tonic—1 the reason

What, then, is the reason that Bernie has to take a sip? When Bernie does take a sip, and we ask why he took a sip, what answer is it correct to give? The kind of answer that we find it appropriate to give to this question is to say that Bernie took a sip because *he believed* that the glass contained gin and tonic. *That*, we intuitively think, was his reason for taking a sip. Suppose that this is right. In order to test whether this is consistent with the Factoring Account, we need to know two things. First, whether it is a reason *for* him to take a sip, and second, whether he stands to it in the right relation to *have* it.

² It is not, however, a distinction between two kinds of reason; see footnote 1.

Is the fact that Bernie believes that his glass contains gin and tonic a reason for him to take a sip? To answer this, we should compare it with Ronnie and the fact that there will be dancing at the party tonight. If a fully informed and beneficent bystander were to tally a list of pros and cons of Ronnie's going to the party tonight, the fact that there will be dancing there would make it into the pros column. If Ronnie were to find out that there will be dancing at the party, we'd expect this to move him to go there. Do either of these considerations apply in Bernie's case?

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.

2.2 That Bernie believed that it contained gin and tonic—2 having it

Even ignoring these considerations, the Factoring Account is still in trouble when it comes to Bernie's case. It is this kind of trouble that I take to be the most interesting. For now we must ask whether Bernie stands in the proper *having* relation to the fact that he believes that his glass contains gin and tonic. We know, from looking at the difference between Freddie and Ronnie, that at least sometimes, in order to *have* a reason in our sense, one must stand in some kind of epistemic relation to it—believing, perhaps. So if the *having* relation is univocal, in our sense, then it turns out that Bernie does not have the fact that he believes that his glass contains gin and tonic as a reason to take a sip *at all*, unless he is *aware* of this belief. This leaves the Factoring Account with a dilemma. Either it must say that Bernie does not have a reason to take a sip at all, unless he has this second-order belief about his own beliefs, or it must adopt a *disjunctive* account of having—allowing that though *having* a reason sometimes requires standing in an epistemic relation to it, at other times it does not.

Saying that Bernie must have such a second-order belief in order to have a reason to take a sip sounds suspicious. For suppose that Bernie has no such belief. Can't we still reasonably expect him to take a sip? After all, he believes that it contains gin and tonic. Surely whether that is true or not doesn't change how things will work inside his psychology. Can't we still criticize him for *not* taking a sip, if he does not? Wouldn't it be strange, if nothing else came up, for him to have asked for a gin and tonic, think that he had gotten one, and then not even take a sip? And surely we can still say, if he does take a sip, that he did so for a reason. Now it may be that second-order beliefs about our first-order beliefs are easy to come by. But that doesn't change the fact that our judgments about what we can reasonably expect Bernie to do, what we can reasonably criticize him for not doing, and when we can say that he has acted for a reason do not seem to be sensitive to whether he has such a second-order belief or not.

But saying that the *having* relation is fundamentally disjunctive, sometimes being an epistemic relation but other times not being an epistemic relation at all, does not seem to fare too well, either. Why should it be that *having* reasons can play an interesting explanatory role in helping us to understand when it is reasonable to expect someone to act, reasonable to criticize her for not acting, and possible to say that she has acted for a reason, if there is nothing interestingly unified about the relation—because in some cases to have a reason you must stand in some epistemic relation to it, such as believing, but in other cases it need only be true?

Moreover, and importantly, it looks like the theorist who makes this move is falling prey to the ambiguity in “having” that we have already noted. We noted that in one sense of “having”, if there is a reason for someone to do something, then it follows automatically that it is a reason that she has. According to the view that the fact that Bernie believes that his glass contains gin and tonic is a reason for him to take a sip, and he does not have to believe that this is so in order to *have* it, Bernie *has* this reason to take a sip just because it is a reason *for* him to take a sip. But that is how the pleonastic sense of “has” works. Let us not be misled by the fact that (granting that the fact that Bernie has this belief is a reason for him to take a sip) there is a sense in which he “has” it, into thinking that he thereby *has* it in the stronger sense in which Freddie *has* a reason to go to the party and Ronnie does not.

2.3 Bernie’s belief itself—1 the reason

We’ve just been considering the most obvious candidate for what the reason is that Bernie *has* to take a sip, in our sense. This candidate was the one given by the most obvious answer to the question, “why did Bernie take a sip?” asked after Bernie does, in fact, take a sip. We’ve seen that it neither bears the earmarks of a reason *for* Bernie to take a sip, nor does Bernie stand to this fact in the same kind of relationship that he stands in to other reasons that he has, as when Freddie *has* the reason to go to the party but Ronnie does not. It looks to neither be a good candidate for a reason *for* Bernie to take a sip, nor if it were, a good candidate to be one that Bernie *has*. So if the Factoring Account is correct, the reason that Bernie has to take a sip must be something else.

An alternative candidate for what to say the reason that Bernie has to take a sip is, is that it is not the *fact* that Bernie believes his glass to contain gin and tonic, but Bernie’s belief *itself*. After all, if I ask, “what is Bernie’s reason to take a sip?” and you say, “he believes that his glass contains gin and tonic,” you are mentioning this belief. So perhaps it is the reason that Bernie has to take a sip. But this answer about what the reason is that Bernie has, I claim, reduces immediately to the first kind of answer. To see this, we need only to begin to answer the question whether Bernie’s belief is a reason *for* him to take a sip, as the Factoring Account claims that it must be.

Is Bernie’s belief that his glass contains gin and tonic a reason for him to take a sip? To answer this question, we have to take a general look at what kinds of things can be normative reasons. On the face of it, any kind of thing can be appropriately cited as a normative reason for someone to do something. The height of the Empire State Building is a reason not to jump off. Obesity is a reason to eat well and exercise regularly. Bas van Fraassen is a reason to study philosophy of science at Princeton University. Schrödinger’s wave equation is a reason for physics students to study partial differential equations and for the non-mathematically inclined to stay out of physics. All of these things, in as diverse of ontological categories as they fall, can be appropriately cited as reasons. So what are

reasons? Are they properties, either tropes or universals? People? Places, abstract objects, numbers, or diseases?

A simple observation simplifies things considerably. Every time that we can cite one of these things as a reason for someone to do something, there is a fact or true proposition lying in the neighborhood which we might just as easily have cited. If you've asked me what reason you have not to jump off of the Empire State Building, and I've pointed out its height and you remain undecided whether to jump off, you're not going to be swayed if I tell you that the fact that the Empire State Building is so high is also a reason not to jump off. In some sense or other, you don't feel that I've given you a new reason at all. Similarly if I've pointed out obesity as a reason to eat well and exercise regularly, and then go on to claim that the fact that eating well and exercising regularly can stave off obesity is a reason to engage in them. And likewise for all of the other cases. In every case, I claim, we can find a fact or true proposition which we can cite equally well, by saying either that the fact that p is a reason to do A or that one reason to do A is that p . But it's not the case that we can always find a person, or a place, or a property, which we can naturally cite just as well. 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. And we've already considered this response on behalf of the Factoring Account.

2.4 Bernie's belief itself—2 having it

But suppose in any case that Bernie's belief were a viable alternative to the fact that he had that belief as a candidate for the reason that Bernie has to take a sip. It still can't be a reason that Bernie *has* in the same sense as Freddie but not Ronnie has the reason to go to the party. For if we suppose that it is, then we must suppose that it is a reason that Bernie *has* just because he is in it—or it is in his head, or whatever the relation is that holds between a person and the belief that p when the person believes that p . Likewise, we would have to suppose that Freddie's reason is his belief that there will be dancing at the party, and that he *has* this reason because he has that belief. But then what do we say about Ronnie? Do we say that Ronnie's reason to go to the party is his belief that there will be dancing there, but since he doesn't have this belief, he doesn't *have* this reason, in our sense? If he doesn't have the belief, then there is no such belief to be his reason. The only thing that we can say is Ronnie's reason is the fact that there *will in fact* be dancing there. But this isn't something that Ronnie *could* have, just by being in it, or having it in his head, or standing to it in the same relation that believers stand in to their beliefs. So even if there were a robust sense in which Bernie's reason could be his belief, we couldn't make sense of how he *had* that reason in a way that lets us treat Ronnie and Freddie as having a single objective reason which Freddie, but not Ronnie, *has*. But thinking of Ronnie and Freddie in that way is what motivated the Factoring Account in the first place.

Table 2

WHAT IS THE REASON THAT BERNIE HASTO TAKE A SIP?	Bernie Believes		Is a reason <i>for</i> him to take a sip		Is a reason he <i>has</i> to take a sip	
	Is true				Is a reason <i>for</i> him to set it down	Is a reason he <i>has</i> to set it down
<i>That the glass contains gasoline</i>	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<i>That it contains gin and tonic</i>	Yes	No	No	?	No	No
<i>That he believes that it contains gin and tonic</i>	?	Yes	No	?	No	No
<i>His belief that it contains gin and tonic</i>	No	No	No	?	No	No

2.5 That the glass contains gin and tonic—1&2

If we compare Bernie to Freddie, however, then at a first glance, we have yet another candidate for what Bernie’s reason to take a sip might be. Freddie’s reason to go to the party is that there will be dancing there. It is the same reason that is a reason for Ronnie to go to the party, but Freddie, unlike Ronnie, *has* it, in our sense. The reason that Freddie has is the *content* of his belief, not the belief itself, or the fact that he has that belief. Unfortunately, although *I* like this idea, it is not open to the Factoring Account to claim that Bernie’s reason to take a sip is the *content* of his belief that his glass contains gin and tonic. For this means that Bernie’s reason to take a sip is that his glass contains gin and tonic. In this case, this seems initially like a funny thing to say.

But worse, the Factoring View holds that the reason that Bernie has to take a sip must be a reason *for* him to take a sip, which he *has*. Now Bernie *does* seem to stand in the same kind of relation to this proposition as Freddie stands in to the fact that there will be dancing at the party. So that’s a good start. *If* it is a reason for him, perhaps it is one that he *has*, in the proper sense. But it is simply *not* the case that one reason *for* Bernie to take a sip is that his glass contains gin and tonic. On the contrary, his glass does not contain gin and tonic at all—it is full of gasoline. The fact that it contains gin and tonic would be listed by no fully informed and beneficent bystander tallying the pros and cons of Bernie’s taking a sip. It can’t make such a list, because it isn’t even a candidate. It is neither a fact nor a true proposition—it is altogether *false*. So we get no help for the Factoring Account, here.

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. Table 2 illustrates these possibilities.

3 Objective reasons and subjective reasons

A question now arises: how are we to think about *having* reasons, if the Factoring Account is incorrect? On my account, Bernie does have a reason to take a sip. Since the *having*

relation must be univocal, I take it that the thing that is his reason must be the analogue of the thing that is Freddie's reason. Since Freddie's reason is the content of his belief, I say the same thing about Bernie. The reason that Bernie *has* to take a sip is that his glass contains gin and tonic. Of course, his glass does not contain gin and tonic, which is why this is not, further, a reason *for* him to take a sip. But on my understanding, since the Factoring Account is false, this does not prevent it from being, nevertheless, a reason that Bernie *has* to take a sip. For on my understanding, being a reason for someone to do something and being a reason that she has to do it are simply two different relations.

Another way of putting the account is this: we know that Freddie and Ronnie are different in some interesting way, because this manifests itself in what we can reasonably expect them to do, what we can criticize them as irrational for failing to do, and when we can hold that they have acted for a reason. This is why we said that Freddie, unlike Ronnie, *has* the reason to go to the party. But once we notice that the relevant difference between Freddie and Ronnie is that Freddie and not Ronnie *believes* that there will be dancing at the party, why should we hold that it matters, for this difference, whether there really *is* going to be dancing at the party? If, according to our best judgments about the case, Ronnie and Freddie differ in this way whether or not there is in fact going to be dancing at the party, then we should allow that what matters for whether Freddie *has* the reason to go is not whether it is the case at all, but merely whether he believes it. Since if it is not the case, it is not a reason *for* him to go, it therefore does not matter whether it is in fact a reason *for* him to go.

Refer back to Table 2. If we judge that Bernie *has*, in our sense, a reason to take a sip, there has to be something that is the reason that he *has*. According to the Factoring Account, it has to be a reason *for* him to take a sip, *and* he has to stand to it in the same *having* relation in which Freddie but not Ronnie stands to the reason for them to go to the party. We considered three candidates for what this might be: that Bernie believes his glass to contain gin and tonic, Bernie's belief that his glass contains gin and tonic, and that his glass does contain gin and tonic. *All three* of these failed to pass the test as reasons *for* Bernie to take a sip, once we carefully distinguish our judgments about this from our judgments about whether they are the reason that Bernie *has* to take a sip. And two out of three fail the other test: Bernie need not stand in the same *having* relation as Freddie to the proposition that he believes that his glass contains gin and tonic, and he does not stand in this relation to his belief itself. So the *best* candidate for what the reason is that Bernie *has* is the proposition that his glass contains gin and tonic. There may be something *odd* about saying this, but it is clearly the best that we can do.

I hold that there is a great deal to be said about the pragmatic features of such talk about reasons, in order to explain away the odd-seeming features of this way of talking. But many of the details of this are not worth going into. Much of the oddness of saying that the reason Bernie *has* to take a sip is that his glass contains gin and tonic hangs simply on the fact that there are two relations expressed by the word "reason". If it takes a great deal of philosophical argument to finally set aside the view that there is only one "reason" relation at stake, then surely in ordinary language it would be confusing, at the least, to make a claim about what the reason is that Bernie *has* in our sense, that would not be true if understood as a claim about the reason that Bernie has in the pleonastic usage attached to the objective sense, which we distinguished in beginning.

We can also take some comfort in the following observation about ordinary language. Suppose that we ask Bernie prospectively, "if you take a sip, what would the reason be, for which you took it?" Bernie would tell us that it would be that it is a gin and tonic, and that is what he asked for. Now suppose that we point out to Bernie that the glass is actually full

of gasoline, and ask him again, “if you *had* taken a sip, what would the reason have been, for which you took it?” Now Bernie will not say the same thing. Now he will say that the reason would have been that he *believed* that the glass contained gin and tonic, and that that is what he asked for. On the face of it, something here lies in need of explanation. How could what the reason *would have been* have changed?

I hold, and Bernie is likely to agree, that what the reason would have been does not change. All that changes is how Bernie is willing to describe it. If we now point out to Bernie that earlier he said that if he took a sip, the reason would be that it is a gin and tonic, he will not, intuitively, have to allow that he was mistaken after all about what his reason would have been. All that he will have to allow, is that he was mistaken about whether his glass contained gin and tonic. Intuitively, Bernie can now insist that if he had taken a sip, his reason would have been that he believed that it was a gin and tonic, but he has not changed his mind about what his reason would have been. If this is right, then the reason why Bernie can’t now say that his reason would have been that it was a gin and tonic can’t be that this wouldn’t be, literally, what his reason would have been. It must be simply because he can’t put things in this way without implying that the glass actually does contain gin and tonic, something he now no longer believes.

I take it, moreover, that this is no drastic measure. Though it sounds funny to say that Bernie can have a reason to take a sip even though there is nothing that is a reason for him to take a sip, that is simply an artifact of the fact that we’ve set things up by talking about the difference between Freddie and Ronnie as whether they *had* the reason in question. Although there is something natural about this way of speaking, it is also highly confusing, since there is another, pleonastic, sense in which we sometimes talk about what the reasons are which someone has. But we never had to use this confusing terminology. 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.

Let us not, in making this distinction, stipulate whether objective reasons are to be understood in terms of subjective reasons, or conversely. I take it that some will hold that for there to be a subjective reason for Danny to do *A* is just for it to be the case that if Danny’s beliefs were true, holding fixed their content, there would be an objective reason for him to do *A* (or something closely along these lines). But others will want to hold that for there to be an objective reason for Danny to do *A* is just for it to be the case that if Danny believed the truth, holding fixed otherwise the truth, there would be a subjective reason for him to do *A*. And as I understand Jonathan Dancy’s view, he holds that there is a *common cause* explanation of why things are objective or subjective reasons—*strictly speaking*, Dancy claims, there is only one *reason* relation, but reasons play one role when they are the case, and another when they are believed to be the case.³ I prefer the first of

³ “If we do speak in this way, of motivating and normative reasons, this should not be taken to suggest that there are two sorts of reason, the sort that motivate and the sort that are good. There are not. There are just two questions that we use a single notion of a reason to answer” Dancy (2000, p. 2). Yet Dancy allows that there are good reasons that fail to motivate because agents don’t *have* them, and allows that not all reasons that agents *have* and which motivate them are *good* reasons. So despite his denials, he *does* seem to believe in two senses of “reason”. I infer that what he really means by saying that there are not “two sorts of reason” is that though there *are* two senses of “reason”, they are closely related by being different manifestations of *reasons*—a *third* relation which is the common denominator between normative and motivating reasons. Dancy has assented to this characterization of his view in personal conversation.

these views, but we should have a way of making the distinction that does not presuppose any of these three views, and we can do that simply by looking at the cases of Ronnie, Bradley, Freddie, and Bernie, as I have done, and carefully demonstrating which relations we mean to pick out. This is not the place to adjudicate the further, substantive, question which of these three theories about their interrelationship is correct.

4 Empiricist epistemology and perception

If we accept the Factoring Account, Bernie's case gives us some choices. If we observe the similarities between Bernie's situation and Freddie's and therefore accept that Bernie does have a subjective reason to take a sip, we have to say what it is. The obvious answer, that it is that he believes that it is a gin and tonic, suffers from two major flaws—this neither looks to be a *good* reason for Bernie to take a sip, nor to be something that he *has* in the same way as Freddie has *his* reason to go to the party. On the second point, we can take one of three views. We can insist, contrary to our intuitions about the case, that Bernie does, in fact, need to believe that he believes that it is a gin and tonic in order to have a reason to take a sip, if it is not really a gin and tonic, but only needs to believe that it is a gin and tonic, if it really is. Or we can insist, contrary to our intuitions, that Freddie has to believe that he believes that there will be dancing at the party tonight, and hence that Freddie's subjective reason, *like* Bernie's, is a fact about what he believes, rather than a fact about the party. Or finally, we can insist that Bernie can *have* this reason without being aware of it—and hence that the *having* relation is fundamentally disjunctive (since we're agreed that Freddie *can't* have *his* reason without being aware of it—or else there would be no difference between Ronnie and Freddie). The options are essentially the same if we take the view that Bernie's reason is his belief itself. Finally, if we want to cling to the Factoring Account, and realize that the best candidate for Freddie's reason is the *content* of Freddie's belief, we have to give up on the idea that Bernie has a reason to take a sip after all—since the consideration which he *has* is not, in fact, true.

This progression of views about Bernie's case should be familiar from the development of 20th-century epistemology, as I'll exhibit shortly. But here is how to draw the connection: if knowledge and justification require evidence, it is not simply any old evidence—it must be evidence that you *have*. 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*. Evidence you don't have can be *relevant* to whether you count as knowing, but the interesting evidentialist claim is that to know that *p*, you must, at a minimum, *have* some evidence that *p*.⁴

So just as there was a natural Factoring Account to be had about subjective reasons in the practical domain, there is a natural Factoring Account to be had about subjective evidence in the epistemic domain. And moreover, though as I've just illustrated we *do* have a concept of *objective* evidence—evidence that is out there, of which you are not yet aware—it is clearly *subjective* evidence which is of *direct* import for the epistemology of justification. So on the face of it, we should predict that the Factoring Account would be well-placed to affect epistemologists' views about justification and knowledge, since those seem to depend directly on the notion of subjective evidence.

⁴ At the very least, the evidentialist will also claim that you must *base* your belief on this evidence that you have. So to the extent that *having* turns out to be a fundamentally disjunctive relation, so will the *basing* relation, along with all of the important work that it is supposed to do for epistemological theory.

But before I draw out what these implications are, I have to make one final crucially important observation. In the practical domain, objective normative reasons are clearly *relational*. Reasons are reasons *for agents*. True, there are some reasons, like the fact that murder is wrong, that are reasons *for any* agent not to murder. But there are others, like the reason for Ronnie to go to the party, that are reasons for only some agents.⁵ And so *both* objective and subjective practical reasons are relational. I can talk about “Ronnie’s reasons” and intend to pick out the considerations that are objective reasons for Ronnie or I can talk about “Ronnie’s reasons” and intend to pick out the considerations that are subjective reasons for Ronnie—ones he *has*.

But in the epistemic case, on conventional views there are no cases like Ronnie’s. On conventional views, what counts as evidence can’t vary from agent to agent, but is everywhere the same. So in the epistemic case, talk about “Ronnie’s evidence” or “Ronnie’s reasons” can all be unambiguously read as talk about subjective evidence. 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.

I’ll now illustrate this point by tracing a schematic version of the developments in 20th-century empiricist epistemology, tracing them out as a reflection of the exact same problems that came up for us when we tried to account for Bernie’s case within the confines of the Factoring Account. The analogue of Bernie’s case that has been central to epistemology, however, has just one twist. It is the case of basic perceptual justification on the basis of non-veridical perceptions. The natural *pretheoretical* view to take about such cases is that in the absence of defeating evidence, non-veridical perceptions as of *p* can contribute, defeasibly, to justification for believing that *p*, even though they can’t lead to knowledge that *p*. So if justification requires having evidence, the natural question to ask is, what is the evidence, which is had? The natural, most obvious answer, is that it is that it perceptually seems to you that *p*. And this led empiricist epistemologists in the first half or more of the 20th century into their two hardest problems. The first is to explain why the fact that it seems to you that *p* counts as good evidence that *p*, since it is easy to see not only that this evidence is perfectly consistent with $\sim p$, but that it is easy to imagine possibilities in which there is *no* connection between how things seem to you perceptually and how they are.

And second, just as we did in considering Bernie’s case, empiricists confronted the hard problem of explaining how it was that you counted as *having* such evidence. Do you really have to believe that it perceptually seems to you that *p*? That seems wrong—whether or not you insist that you also have to have beliefs about your perceptions even in veridical cases. And anyway, what could possibly justify *that* belief—is it infallible? Incorrigible? Default justified for some other reason?⁶ So some epistemologists decided that you didn’t have to have this evidence in the same kind of way as you have to have evidence for inferentially justified beliefs. They said that for *this* kind of evidence, you could have it just by its being

⁵ See Schroeder (2007).

⁶ For example, Russell (1959), Ayer (1955), Lewis (1946) and Chisholm (1957).

true, even though other kinds of evidence you have to *believe*.⁷ But that view wasn't comfortable, either, because it didn't allow for any interesting unified sense in which you have to *have* evidence—in some cases, you have to *believe* it, and in others, it simply has to be *true*. And this fundamental disjunctive feature in the treatment of what it is to *have* evidence ramifies into a disjunctive treatment of what it is to *base* a belief on evidence, and thus into a disjunctive treatment of justification and knowledge—it acknowledges pressure to treat the basic case *differently*, with no deep story about what the basic case and other cases have in common that explains why they are cases of the same kind of thing—justification.

And at that point, the latter disjunct looked very different from old ideas about inferential justification of beliefs. In fact, it looked sufficiently different that philosophers who were anxious to provide a unified *explanatory* account that would subsume *all* cases of justified belief, both perceptual and inferential, rather than merely describing our intuitions about when people are justified, were willing to give up on the idea that it was fruitful to think about justification as requiring having evidence at all. And that was the beginning of the program of externalism in epistemology—unlike evidentialism, which couldn't give a satisfactory unified story about what it was to *have* evidence anyway, externalism had great prospects to give a unified treatment of all cases of justification. Most significantly, one of the big early stimulants to externalism was the idea that in order to get evidentialism to work, we were going to have to appeal to a basic case in which evidence justified just by being *true*, and *without* you having it in the same way as in other cases. So early externalists held that that amounted to externalism about the basic case, anyway, and merely aspired to generalize on it.⁸

And finally, some empirically minded epistemologists realized what had gone wrong with early 20th-century empiricism: it was focusing on the *wrong candidate* for what the evidence *is*, that you have when you have perceptual evidence for your beliefs. When it perceptually seems to you that *p*, they said, your evidence is not that it perceptually seems to you that *p*, but rather *that p*.⁹ But these philosophers still could not get over the Factoring Account. How could *that p* be reason for you to believe that *p* unless it *were true*? So these philosophers gave up on the idea that non-veridical perceptions can justify beliefs, after all, and went further, to conclude that veridical and non-veridical perceptions must be different *kinds* of mental state, since only one is able to play this justificatory role, and they became disjunctivists in the philosophy of mind. Since they couldn't find a good candidate for what your evidence is to believe that *p* in the non-veridical case, they gave up on the idea that you had evidence after all, rather than giving up on the Factoring Account.¹⁰

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

⁷ For example, Pollock (1974). This option is now prominently defended by Conee and Feldman (2004).

⁸ See especially Armstrong (1973, pp. 157–161) on this point.

⁹ McDowell (1994).

¹⁰ McDowell (1994).

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.

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*.

In order to accept this answer, we would have, at least, to defend its two main premises: (1) that *perceptual seemings*, like *beliefs*, are ways of *having* reasons. And (2) that the fact that *p* counts as evidence that *p*. These two premises would obviously require substantial defense, which I won't undertake to develop, here. For now, it is enough for me to have given reason to suspect that the Factoring Account *may* have played some important role in the development of 20th-century empiricist epistemology, to have argued that it is nevertheless false, and to have warned against several misleading features of talk about reasons, both epistemic and practical.

Acknowledgements Special thanks to Ned Block, Jim Pryor, Barry Lam, Gideon Rosen, Early Conee, Jeff Speaks, Mark Johnston, and the members of the Princeton University graduate student dissertation seminar, for helpful or stimulating comments or discussion.

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