

# **Acting on a Ground**

## **Reasons, Rational Motivation, and Explanation**

Magnus Frei

Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde an der Philosophischen Fakultät  
der Universität Freiburg in der Schweiz.

Genehmigt von der Philosophischen Fakultät auf Antrag der Professoren Fabian  
Dorsch, Gianfranco Soldati und Constantine Sandis.

Freiburg, den 28. Oktober 2016

Prof. Bernadette Charlier Pasquier, Dekanin

IN MEMORIAM  
FABIAN DORSCH  
(1974-2017)

## Contents

Introduction .....	6
A Brief Guide to the Main Distinctions.....	13
Part I: Reasons.....	17
1. The Notion of a Normative Reason.....	18
1.1 Facts.....	22
2. Conditions on Facts' Being Reasons.....	27
2.1 Conative Conditions.....	28
2.2 Cognitive Conditions .....	31
3. The Source of Reasons .....	33
4. Reasons as Evaluative Facts .....	35
5. Psychologism about Normative Reasons.....	40
6. Summary .....	46
Part II. Rational Motivation .....	49
1. The Principle of Rational Motivation.....	49
1.1 Neutrality With Regard to Some Contentious Issues.....	52
1.2 Grounds.....	54
1.3 What Plays the Role of a Ground?.....	55
1.4 Two Kinds of Propositionalism About Grounds.....	59
1.5 Psychologized Ways of Talking About Non-Psychologistic Grounds....	63
1.5 Reduction and Explanation .....	67
2. The Psychologism-Debate .....	71
2.1 Varieties of Motivating Reasons.....	73
2.2 Defusing the Psychologism-Debate .....	80
2.3 A Debate After All .....	84

3. Summary .....	87
Part III: Explanation.....	89
1. Non-Psychologism and the Problem Posed by Error-Cases .....	90
1.1 The Non-Psychologist's Problem.....	90
1.2 The Propositionalist's Problem .....	95
2. Dancy on Denying Veridicalism About Explanantia.....	96
3. A Separate Account for Error-Cases.....	99
3.1 Disjunctivism About Grounds .....	102
3.2 Disjunctivism about Ground-Taking .....	105
4. Giving up Explanatorism About Grounds .....	109
4.1 Three Accounts.....	113
4.2 Problems for Psychologism About Explanantia .....	120
4.3 Moving Beyond Psychologism About Explanantia.....	125
4.4 Disjunctive Motivationalism About Explanantia .....	127
4.5 Replies to Some Objections .....	130
5. Summary .....	139
Summary.....	140
Acknowledgements.....	146
Bibliography.....	148

“[E]veryone will always have the liberty to speak, as he pleases, and to apply what articulate sounds to what *ideas* he thinks fit, and change them as often as he pleases. But yet when we will inquire, what makes the same *spirit, man, or person*, we must fix the *ideas of spirit, man, or person*, in our minds; and having resolved with ourselves what we mean by them, it will not be hard to determine, in either of them, or the like, when it is the *same*, and when not.”

John Locke, *An Essay  
Concerning Human Understanding*

## Introduction

Imagine that this morning, I picked up my umbrella on my way out. It might simply be that I am in the habit of doing so: come sun, come rain, I pick up my umbrella on my way out. However, it might be that I did so because I was motivated to do so. If that was the case, we can ask what it was that motivated me to do so. As it is often put: we can ask what my *motivating reason* was. In the literature, one finds two quite different answers to that question. According to the long-time orthodoxy, call it 'Psychologism', motivating reasons are our believing something (and maybe also our desiring something). According to a view that recently has become popular, call it 'Non-Psychologism', when we specify the reasons for which someone acted, or their motivating reasons, we specify something that she believed. So, according to the Non-Psychologist, my motivating reason for picking up an umbrella will have been something I believe, say, that it is raining. According to the Psychologist, however, my motivating reason will have been my believing something (and maybe also my desiring something), say, my believing that that it is raining (and my desire to stay dry).

Non-Psychologism has a lot going for it. For what I believe can be a fact, and facts can speak in favor of actions, i.e. they can be so-called normative reasons. So, the Non-Psychologistic view allows us to conceptualize me as acting *for a normative reason*, as it allows that my motivating reason can be a normative reason. But Non-Psychologism is generally taken to be faced with a problem, at least in cases in which what the agent relevantly believes is mistaken. For it is only natural to think that when someone does something for a reason, what explains her action is the reason for which she did it. However,

as what we believe can be false, the view that motivating reasons are what we believe then seems to imply that in error-cases, falsehoods explain actions, and falsehoods do not seem to be able to explain anything, let alone actions. That is, even if Non-Psychologism, the view that motivating reasons are what we believe, initially might have something going for it, it is incompatible with two seeming truisms, namely, that motivating reasons explain actions, and that falsehoods cannot explain actions. If it was not raining this morning, it seems misleading to say that I picked up my umbrella because it was raining. For, saying that I picked up my umbrella because it was raining seems like saying that what explains why I picked up my umbrella was that it was raining. But if it is not true that it was raining, how can it be that what explains why I picked up an umbrella is that it was raining?

I am going to argue that on a certain understanding of the term 'motivating reason', Non-Psychologism is correct and insightful. Moreover, I am going to argue that on the understanding of the term 'motivating reason' under which Non-Psychologism is correct, Non-Psychologists do not have the problem that they are generally taken to have, for on that understanding, motivating reasons do not explain actions. Positively, I will argue that when someone does something for a motivating reason, in the sense at issue, what explains her action is the fact or truth that she did what she did for that motivating reason, which itself can be a falsehood. However, I am also going to argue that we should be wary of contrasting Non-Psychologistic views with Psychologistic views, in the manner in which they usually are contrasted.

My main device is the concept of acting on a ground. Someone acts on a ground, I will say, just in case she is motivated to act by something she takes to

speak in favor of so acting, and because she takes it to speak in favor of so acting. That is, something plays the role of a ground just in case it is

(a) taken by the agent to speak in favor of performing a certain course of action, and

(b) motivates her to perform that action,

where (a) and (b) are related in that

(c) what motivates the agent to do what she does motivates her because she takes it to speak in favor of so acting.

A few words on terminological matters. As many things can be said to motivate agents, I will call the sense of motivation at issue when someone is motivated by something she takes to be a reason, and because she takes it to be a reason, i.e. the sense of motivation at issue when someone acts on a ground, 'rational motivation'. I will reserve the term 'reason' for things that speak in favor of actions, i.e. for what are sometimes called 'normative reasons'. As we will see, grounds can be reasons, but it is not essential to something being a ground that it is a reason.

I divide the thesis into three parts. In the first part, I focus on the notion of a reason. Reasons, as I use the term, are what we seek to take into account in deliberation and advice. I argue that as what we seek to take into account in deliberation and advice are facts that favor actions, reasons are facts that favor actions. I give the idea that reasons are facts that favor actions so much space because the definition of the concept of a ground employs the concept of a reason. Also, as what plays the role of a ground is taken to be a normative reason, getting clear on what reasons are helps to get clear on what plays the role of a ground. I will argue that what plays the role of a ground is what we believe. And that argument stands and falls with the idea that normative



reasons are facts that favor actions. So, in the first part, I show that the idea of a fact that favors an action is highly ecumenical, in that talking about facts that favor actions (i) leaves it open whether more can be said about what it is for a fact to favor an action, and whether more can be said about what it is for an action to be favored by a fact, (ii) leaves it open why, or in virtue of what, some particular fact speak in favor of some particular action, or what the source of the normative or favoring force of facts is, and (iii) leaves it open whether some particular fact's being a reason for some particular agent to perform some particular action depends, in some way or another, on that agents cognitive and/or conative condition.

In the second part, I introduce the notion of acting on a ground, and seek to show that it is neutral with regard to a host of contentious issues. With the help of the concept of acting on a ground, and drawing on what was done in the foregoing part, I argue that what plays the role of a ground is what we believe, that Non-Psychologists are talking about grounds when they use the term 'motivating reason', and, thus, that Non-Psychologism about motivating reasons, understood as Non-Psychologism about grounds, is correct. Moreover, I argue that while Non-Psychologists are talking about grounds when they use the term 'motivating reasons', Psychologists, when *they* use that term, are talking about explanantia. However, this does not mean that the debate rests on an equivocation. For Non-Psychologists often assume that what plays the role of a ground is also what plays the role of an explanans, and as long as that assumption is in play, the debate between Psychologists and Non-Psychologists has substance. However, as I will argue in part III, we should give up that assumption.

In part II, I also briefly address the issue of reductive accounts of acting on a ground, or of being rationally motivated. A large body of work done in contemporary theory of action is concerned with the question *what it is* for someone to act, or to act on a ground, or for a reason – where to give such an account is to give an account in at least allegedly more basic or fundamental terms, like causation by mental states, or whatever it is that realizes them in a naturalistically understood world. But what I am engaged in here is neutral with regard to the feasibility and necessity of giving such an account. It is important to point this out for two reasons. First, distinguishing what I am engaged in from this other project that a large body of work is engaged in helps to clarify the project I am engaged in. Secondly, there is also a notion of ‘motivating reason’ that figures in such accounts; a ‘motivating reason’, on that usage of the term, is a psychological state (or a pair of psychological states) that figures in a reductive account of what it is to act, or to act on a ground, or for a reason.

In the third and final part, I will address what is generally taken to be the main challenge for Non-Psychologism about motivating reasons. As I said above: Motivating reasons are often taken to be what explain actions, but surely, falsehoods cannot explain actions. However, if, as the Non-Psychologist holds, motivating reasons are what we believe, say, that P, and what we believe can be false, then P can be a motivating reason despite being false. Replacing the ambiguous ‘motivating reason’ with ‘ground’, we can put the problem in terms of the following inconsistent triad:

- (i) What plays the role of a ground can be a falsehood.
- (ii) Falsehoods cannot play the role of explanantia.

- (iii) What plays the role of a ground is also what plays the role of an explanantia.

Now, as part II showed that (i) is correct, and as I take it that we cannot reasonably challenge (ii), what I think we can learn from this is that (iii) must be mistaken. However, that (iii) is mistaken does not mean that grounds play no role whatsoever in explanations. Grounds can *figure* or *feature* in explanations, without playing the role of an explanans. And on pain of not showing the action to be done on a ground, they *must* figure or feature in explanations. But what, then, does play the role of an explanans, in a case in which S  $\Phi$ 's on grounds of P? I will argue that explanantia are what I call motivation-facts, i.e. facts to the effect that some consideration played the role of the agent's ground. Further, I will argue that there are two kinds of motivation-facts. If in  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P, S is  $\Phi$ ing for a normative reason, then the fact that she  $\Phi$ ed on grounds *of that reason* is the motivation-fact that explains her  $\Phi$ ing. If, however, in  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P, S merely takes herself to be  $\Phi$ ing for a normative reason (i.e. if the ground on which she  $\Phi$ 's is not a reason, but is merely taken by her to be one), then the fact that she  $\Phi$ ed on grounds *of the believed proposition P* is the motivation-fact that explains her  $\Phi$ ing.

For one, my thesis casts new light on the debate between Psychologists and Non-Psychologists. An examination of the various senses of the term 'motivating reason' is much needed, as it helps to see what is and what is not at issue. Besides that, however, my thesis offers an independent clarification of the relation between favorers, motivators, and explanantia, and, thereby (to be bold) of rational agency. What motivates is often conflated with what explains.

Distinguishing those two things allows one to understand how favorers and motivators are related.

## A Brief Guide to the Main Distinctions

Certain distinctions, theoretical options, and labels will keep coming up. And in due course, I will have a lot to say about them. But to prepare the reader for what is coming, it seems helpful to start with a brief overview of some of the main distinctions, options, and labels.

I will distinguish the following three roles:

- (1) Speaking in favor of some course of action.
- (2) Motivating someone to perform some course of action.
- (3) Explaining why someone performed some course of action.

I will use the term 'reason' to talk about what plays the first role, the term 'ground' to talk about what plays the second role, and the term 'explanans' to talk about what plays the third role.

I will be talking in detail about all of those three roles. But especially with regard to the notion of explanation, it might be helpful to distinguish two senses of 'explaining' right at the outset. As philosophers, we give accounts or theories of things like action, or normativity, or values. And another way to put that is to say that as philosophers, we *explain* action, or normativity, or values. But this sense of 'explaining' (which one might call the philosopher's sense) should be held apart from what we do when we, as agents, *explain* why, say, Elisabeth is operating the pump, or why Donald flipped the switch, or, for that matter, why the bridge collapsed, or the car did not start. When we, as agents, explain why Elisabeth is operating the pump, we do not seek to give a *theory* of her operating the pump. Rather, we seek to *render intelligible* her doing what she did by way of bringing to light on what grounds she did so, or by way of showing in response to what reason, or with what end in view, she did so.

When I talk about ‘explaining why someone performed some course of action’, I will be talking about explaining in this second sense (which one might call the agent’s sense), albeit, of course, in my capacity as philosopher. For, of course, one can also hope to explain (in the philosopher’s sense) explanation (in the agent’s sense), that is, give a theory or an account thereof (cf. II.5, III.4).

As we will see, (2) and (3) are often run together. That is, talking about something that motivates someone to perform some course of action is often taken to be tantamount to talking about what explains why she so acted (cf. II.2.3, III.1). One main result of this thesis is that that is a mistake. Distinguishing the motivational and the explanatory role at the outset does not amount to begging the question with regard to that matter. Rather, it allows one to raise the question whether things that motivate are distinct from or identical with things that explain. So it does not beg the question – it avoids doing so.

I will also talk about Psychologistic and Non-Psychologistic accounts. It is important to make clear that there are actually two Psychologism/Non-Psychologism-distinctions. When it is asked what plays the role of an X (i.e. a reason, or a ground, or an explanans), one answer to consider is that *psychological states* are what plays that role. The first type of Psychologistic account is an account that gives such an answer. When necessary, I will highlight that that kind of Psychologistic account is at issue by terming it ‘State-Psychologism’:

(State-Psychologism about X) What plays the role of X is a psychological state.

The according Non-Psychologistic answer is that what plays the role of an X is not a psychological state, but rather, a fact, or a proposition:

(Propositionalism about X) What plays the role of X is a proposition.

(Factualism about X) What plays the role of X is a fact.

Note, however, that as I will use the term, facts are true propositions. Thus, Factualism about X is a subset of Propositionalism about X.

But once a Non-Psychologistic answer of this first kind is given, the possibility of a second type of Psychologism arises. If, for instance, one holds that what plays the role of a ground is a proposition, or that what plays the role of a reason is a fact, one can then raise the question whether the relevant kinds of facts, or propositions, respectively, are always facts or propositions *about* psychological matters. When necessary, I will signify that I am talking about that second kind of psychologistic account by qualifying the view accordingly:

(Psychologistic Propositionalism about X) What plays the role of X is a proposition about psychological matters.

(Psychologistic Factualism about X) What plays the role of X is a fact about psychological matters.

Note that I will not understand the according Non-Psychologistic view as the view that propositions, or facts, about psychological matters can *never* play the role at issue, but rather, as the view that when facts or propositions about psychological matters *do* play the role at issue, their being facts or propositions *about psychological matters* is not essential to their playing the role that they play (cf. I.5, II.4).

Finally, in part III, I will talk about Disjunctivist accounts. As I understand it, a Disjunctive account of X is an account that holds that instances of X come in two forms. For instance, one might think that we need a disjunctive account of perceptual states, according to which being in a perceptual state either puts one in a position to acquire knowledge of the facts,

or does not put one in such a position, where being in a position to acquire knowledge of the facts does not simply amount to being in a perceptual state that is such that given that some non-circular condition holds, being in that state amounts to being in a position to acquire knowledge of the facts. The according conjunctive account holds that being in a perceptual state is the same all along, but that sometimes, a certain non-circular condition is satisfied, so that being in a perceptual state amounts to being in a position to acquire knowledge of the facts. One can apply this idea also to our topic, and one can do so in diverse ways. That is, one can give a disjunctive account of reasons, or of grounds, or of explanantia; but also, say, of actions done on grounds or for reasons.

With these distinctions in hand, one could generate an unmanageable amount of theoretical options. But that is not the only reason why I will not discuss all the possible theoretical options. I take it that not all of those theoretical options are worth discussing. And thus, I will confine my discussion to those that (i) seem like at least initially plausible alternatives to the option I take to be true and for which I will argue, and to those that (ii) have some prominence in the literature.

In the introduction, I have already stated what I am going to argue for. In the light of the distinctions I have introduced, I can now say more precisely what I am going to argue for, namely, that reasons are (for the most part) non-psychological facts, that grounds are (for the most part) non-psychological propositions, and that explanantia are a special kind of facts, namely, what I will call motivation-facts, i.e. facts about what proposition played the role of a ground. Moreover, I will argue that motivation-facts come in two kinds, i.e. I will give a disjunctive account of explanantia.



## Part I: Reasons

I will employ the term 'normative reason' (or 'reason', for short) to signify whatever it is that we seek to take into account (i) when deciding what to do, and (ii) when advising others on what they are to do.<sup>1</sup> One can, of course, employ the term differently. Doing so, however, would amount to changing the topic. I will come back to that below.

Normative reasons, on the suggested usage of the term, are what we *seek* to take into account. But we do not always succeed therein. When deciding on what to do, and when advising others on what they are to do, we can take things into account that are not reasons, but that we merely *take to be* reasons. Consequently, our decisions and our advice can be flawed in precisely that respect. And importantly, if they are flawed in that respect, they are flawed by our own lights: if we retrospectively come to see that what we took into account was not a reason, we will thereby come to see that we made a certain kind of mistake (albeit not necessarily a mistake for which we are culpable).

Reasons, in the sense at issue, also seem to play a role in (iii) evaluating actions. Moreover – or so I will argue in III.4 – they play a role in (iv) explaining at least *some* actions; notably, in explaining those actions that are such that the agent is (v) *motivated* to perform them by some reason to perform them (cf. II.1, III.4). However, let me put (iii)-(v) aside for now and focus on (i) and (ii).

---

<sup>1</sup> That reasons are in the focus in deliberation is common-fare, cf. e.g. Raz (1975, pp. 15–16) and Wallace (2003, p. 432). The relation between reasons and advice is stressed e.g. by Scanlon (1998, p. 20) and Thomson (2003, p. 44).

In general, the aim of this chapter is to enable myself to talk about normative reasons without venturing too far into debated issues. I suggest that I can do that by following the standard line of taking reasons to be facts that, at least in certain circumstances, speak in favor of actions (I.1). I will defend this Factualist account of reasons by way of showing that such an understanding of reasons is neutral in many crucial respects: it is neutral with regard to whether reasons are conditioned on the conative and cognitive situation of the agent for whom they are reasons (I.2), and it is neutral with regard to what the source of reasons is (I.3). What kinds of facts are reasons? I will suggest that ordinary empirical facts can be reasons, and discuss the view that they are evaluative facts (I.4), and the view that they are psychological facts (I.5).

## **1. The Notion of a Normative Reason**

In the practical domain, normative reasons – understood in the manner just expounded, i.e. understood as what we seek to take into account in deliberation and advice – are standardly taken to be facts that *speak in favor* of actions, or facts that *make a case* (or at least part of a case) for performing a certain action (cf. e.g. Dancy, 2004a; Parfit, 2011; Raz, 1975, 1999, 2011b; Scanlon, 1998, 2014).

At least in normal cases, these facts are facts about the world around us, and not facts about our own mind. Consider, for instance, the fact that you promised to  $\Phi$ . By way of that fact, a case can be made for you to  $\Phi$ . Or take the fact that it is your mother's birthday today. In the light of that fact, there is something to be said for giving her a call, or paying her a visit; and in that sense, that fact can be said to speak in favor of your giving her a call, or paying her a

visit. Or, finally, take the fact that the building we are in is on fire. By way of that fact, a case can be made for leaving the building as fast as possible.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, there can also be cases in which, say, the fact that I believe that there are pink rats living in my shoes is a reason for me to do something, namely, to go and seek out a psychiatrist. But standardly, reasons are not such psychological facts (cf. I.5). However, as we will also see, that does not rule out that the mind of the agent whose reasons we are concerned with plays no role whatsoever (I.2).

Understood very generally, to say of a fact that it speaks in favor of an action, or that a case can be made for performing a certain action by way of pointing out that certain fact obtains, is just to say that that fact bears on the *normative status* of the action that it is a reason for. What is the relevant normative status? Is it simply the status of being *supported or favored by reasons*? Or can it be spelled out in terms of, say, the action being what one *ought* to do, or in terms of it being *good* in some sense, or in terms of it having some *value*? Or, more sophisticated maybe, is it the status of being what any well-informed rational agent, or any well-informed and fully virtuous agent, would do in such a situation? And what exactly is it for a fact to *bear* on that status? Is it just for that fact to speak in favor of performing that action, where the concept of speaking-in-favor is a primitive concept (Parfit, 2011; Scanlon, 1998, 2014)? Or is it for it to be *evidence* for believing that that action has that

---

<sup>2</sup> Of course, these examples take a stand on first-order normative issues. But it is not for no reason that the examples chosen are not examples about controversial issues, such as, say, euthanasia or abortion. The point of making those examples is not to push any particular first-order normative view, but to illustrate a structure, assuming hopefully uncontroversial first-order normative views.

status (Kearns & Star, 2009)? Or is it for it to *explain*, at least partially, why it has that status (Broome, 2004)? These are interesting and important issues. But for my present concerns, they can be left open.

Let me further clarify the relevant notion of a normative reason by discussing two quite simple objections. First, someone might object to examples like the ones given by concocting a story in which, say, someone is in a burning house, but in which that fact does not seem to be a reason for her to jump out of the window into the canal: Maybe she cannot swim and would surely drown, were she to jump out of the window into the canal; or maybe she is on the 55<sup>th</sup> floor and would certainly die, were she to jump out of the window. The same, it would seem, could be done for any other example.

That would only be an objection if the claim were that the fact that the house is on fire is a reason to jump out of the window *no matter what*, or in *all possible circumstances*. So, it would seem that in order to avoid that simple objection, we should say that reason-claims do not merely relate an agent, an action, and a fact in a manner that reveals the fact to be a reason for the agent to perform the action. Rather, we should say that they do so *only in certain circumstances*, or *only given certain conditions* (which need not imply that we can exhaustively state those conditions or circumstances). In many domains, we can distinguish between something's being or counting as something, and the conditions under which it is or counts as that thing. For instance, my kicking the ball into the net counts as scoring a goal only if I am engaged in a game of football; if I am engaged in a game of handball, my kicking the ball into the net does not count as scoring a goal. But that is not to say that part of my scoring a goal is my being engaged in a game of football. My being engaged in a game of football is a *condition* for my kicking a ball into the net being or

counting as scoring a goal, and not *part* of my scoring a goal.<sup>3</sup> In this spirit, one can distinguish between, on the one hand, facts that are reasons, and, on the other hand, the conditions under which they are reasons.

Based on considerations such as these, it has been suggested that we should take reason-claims to be four-place relations. That is, that reason-claims have the following form:

$$R(P, C, S, \Phi),$$

where P is a fact that, in circumstances C, is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  (Cuneo, 2007, pp. 62–70; Scanlon, 2014, p. 32; Skorupski, 2010, pp. 35–37).<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, a reason-claim can be *undercut* – or a reason shown to be a mere *prima facie* reason – by showing that the relevant circumstances do not obtain.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, one might object that even if the relevant circumstances do obtain, and the fact thus does speak in favor of the action, performing that action is not what the agent *ought to do*. Understood in the most natural way, that possibility is not actually an objection: It merely serves to highlight that reasons, in the sense at issue, merely have a *pro tanto* force. That is to say, they do not say that some course of action is what we have *most reason* to do, but merely, that it is what we have reason to do *to a certain extent*, namely, only to

---

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of background (or enabling) conditions, cf. Dancy (2004, chap. 3) and Schroeder (2007, chap. 2).

<sup>4</sup> Skorupski actually takes it that we can helpfully understand reason-claims to be six-place relations, where the two further relata, in his view, are *time* and *strength*.

<sup>5</sup> We might also call *prima facie* reasons ‘apparent reasons’, as they merely *appear* to be reasons. But we should note that there is something else that one might with equal justice call ‘apparent reasons’. In the example given, a reason-claim was undercut by bringing in more of the relevant background story. However, there is also another sense in which something that is presented to be a reason can be shown to merely apparently be a reason, namely, by way of showing the fact that is presented as a reason does not obtain. This is how Alvarez (2010, p. 140) employs the term ‘apparent reason’.

the extent that there are no other weightier reasons that speak against that course of action, or in favor of some other incompatible course of action. Thus, when we say that some fact is *a* reason for S to  $\Phi$ , we leave it open whether there might be other reasons against  $\Phi$ ing, or in favor of  $\Psi$ ing (where  $\Psi$ ing is incompatible with  $\Phi$ ing).<sup>6</sup>

## 1.1 Facts

I have just said that normative reasons are facts that speak in favor of actions. But what do I mean by 'fact'? As I will use the term, when S believes that P, and P is true, then what S believes is a fact. That is, as I will use the term, facts are true thoughts, or true propositions (Frege, 2003; McDowell, 1994; Strawson, 1949). And thus, by saying that reasons are facts, I am saying that reasons are true propositions (cf. e.g. Alvarez, 2010, pp. 40–44; Darwall, 1983, p. 31; Lord,

---

<sup>6</sup> I will not attempt to say how we get from a view about what speaks in favor of what to a view about what we have most reason to do. However, it seems safe to say that 'most reason' does not mean 'most reasons', that is, that it is not the case that we have most reason to do what there are most reasons for us to do. For surely, there can be many minor reasons in favor of  $\Phi$ ing (it would please A, and it would please B, and it would please C) which are trumped by one major reason against it (it would severely injure D). In fact, it is not even clear at the outset whether, on a conceptual level, the question really is the question how we get from a view about what is *a* reason for what to a view about what we have *most* reason to do. It might be that we have to start with a view about what we have *most* reason to do, and understand what we have *a* reason to do in terms of what we would have most reason to do, were things slightly different than they are. For an extensive – but partial – discussion of such issues, cf. Dancy (2004a).

2008; Scanlon, 1998, p. 57; Setiya, 2014; contrast Bittner, 2001, p. 109; Dancy, 2002, pp. 116–118).<sup>7</sup>

What is the appeal of taking reasons to be propositional? There seems to be a close connection between reasons and reasoning. That is, if  $P$  is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$ , then it seems possible that  $S$  can conclude from  $P$  that she ought to  $\Phi$ , or that were she to  $\Phi$ , she would be acting well, or doing the right thing. If we take reasons to be propositional, we can make good sense of that idea. For if reasons are propositional, it is immediately clear that they are such that we can draw conclusions from them (cf. Alvarez, 2010, p. 42). But it might seem clearly wrong that reasons are true propositions. Let me discuss a forceful objection and show how one can counter it. Let us say that Peter is the only man in the vicinity wearing red shorts. Now, the propositions

(1) Peter is drowning,

and

(2) The only man in the vicinity wearing red shorts is drowning

are clearly distinct. For one can believe (1) but not believe (2), and *vice versa*.

But it would seem that if by embedding (1) into

(3) That \_\_\_ is a reason to immediately notify the lifeguard

generates a truth, then so does embedding (2) into (3). After all, if you know that Peter is the only man in the vicinity wearing red shorts, it seems that you cannot consistently hold

---

<sup>7</sup> Some authors want to remain neutral on the issue, cf. Raz (2011d, pp. 14–16). And Scanlon, while explicitly holding that reasons are propositions, also maintains that “[w]hat is special about reasons is not the ontological category of things that can be reasons, but rather the status of being a reason, that is to say, of counting in favor of some judgment-sensitive attitude.” Scanlon (1998, p. 56) For illuminating discussions of the issue that go far beyond what I will say here, cf. Everson (2009) and Mantel (2015).

(4) That Peter is drowning is a reason to immediately notify the lifeguard,  
but deny

(5) That the only man in the vicinity wearing red shorts is drowning is a  
reason to immediately notify the lifeguard.

And the same holds *vice versa*: If you know that Peter is the only man in the  
vicinity wearing red shorts, it seems that you cannot consistently hold (5) but  
deny (4).

Moreover, it seems that (4) and (5) do not concern two different  
reasons, but one and the same reason. It is absurd to think that (4) identifies a  
reason, and that over and above the reason that (4) identifies, (5) identifies a  
further reason. There clearly is just one reason to immediately notify the  
lifeguard, one that I can impress on you either by (4) or by (5).

But if (4) and (5) are both true, and (1) and (2) are different  
propositions, and reasons are true propositions, that would seem to lead to the  
absurd result that (4) and (5) do not concern one and the same reason, but  
different reasons. And thus, it might seem that reasons are not true  
propositions (cf. Mantel, 2015, pp. 10–11).

But that follows only if the proposition that (4) identifies as a reason to  
immediately notify the lifeguard is (1), and the proposition that (5) identifies as  
a reason is (2). And there are good reasons to doubt that. After all, that the man  
who is drowning goes by the name ‘Peter’, and that he is wearing red shorts,  
does not seem to be *normatively significant* with regard to the action of  
immediately notifying the lifeguard. After all, nothing would change with  
regard to immediately notifying the lifeguard being favored, if the man  
drowning would not go by the name ‘Peter’, but by some other name, and  
likewise, nothing would change if the man drowning were not wearing red



shorts, but blue shorts, or no shorts at all, for that matter. What seems to be normatively significant, in the case at hand, would seem merely to be that a human being is drowning.<sup>8</sup> And thus, it seems that the proposition that (4) identifies as a reason to immediately notify the lifeguard is not (1), despite the overt structure of (4), but rather:<sup>9</sup>

(6) A human being is drowning.

Furthermore, it seems that (6) is also the proposition that (5) identifies as a reason to immediately notify the lifeguard, despite the overt structure of (5). So, I submit that (4) is not a straightforward instance of

(7) P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ ,

but rather, that the underlying structure of (4) is a conjunction of the following form:

(8) (Q is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ ) and R,

where 'Q' stands for (6) and 'R' stands for

(9) The man who is drowning goes by the name 'Peter'.

The same holds, I submit, for (5), *mutatis mutandis*. This is a good result. For if the proposition that (4) and (5) identify as reason is not (1) or (2), respectively, but (6), then there is nothing absurd about holding that (4) and (5) are both

---

<sup>8</sup> Compare: from *Sue owns a red sports car*, *Peter does not own a car*, and *People who own cars do not use public transport as frequently as people who do not own cars*, we can conclude that *Sue does not use public transport as frequently as Peter does*. But that the car that Sue owns is a *red sports car* is inferentially speaking irrelevant. What is inferentially speaking relevant is merely that Sue owns a car.

<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, one could say that the reason that both (4) and (5) identify is something like the value of saving a drowning man's life. However, for reasons I will come to (cf. I.4), I would prefer to say that the value of saving a drowning man's life is a candidate for what *makes* (6), i.e. the fact that a man is drowning, a reason to save his life, as opposed to *being* the reason to save his life (cf. I.3).

true, that (1) and (2) are different propositions, and that reasons are propositions. Thus, the objection is refuted.

Note, however, that that does not mean that always when a fact that is a reason is a fact about a person, the way in which the reason-statement singles out that person has no normative significance. Consider the following reason-statement:

(10) That my friend is in financial trouble is a reason for me to help him out. Here, that the person who is in trouble is *my friend* is normatively significant.<sup>10</sup> Given, at least, that it is not a moral requirement to support all people in financial trouble (at least not for people of moderate means) the proposition that (10) identifies as a reason is

(11) that *my friend* is in financial trouble,  
and not

(12) that *someone* is in financial trouble.

We could of course also construct a reason-statement that expresses what (10) expresses, but that has the structure that I claimed that (4) and (5) exhibit, namely, the structure of a conjunction. Consider, for instance:

(13) That my friend Jonas is in financial trouble is a reason for me to help him out.

While Jonas' *being my friend* is normatively significant, his going by the name 'Jonas' is not. And thus, what (13) identifies as reason is (11), and not

---

<sup>10</sup> The reason that (10) identifies is what is sometimes described as an 'agent-relative' reason, i.e. a reason that "include[s] an essential reference to the person who has it", as Nagel puts it in a classical discussion. The reason that (4) and (5) identify, however, is an 'agent-neutral' reason, i.e. a reason that "does not include an essential reference to the person who has it" (Nagel, 1986, pp. 152–153).

(14) My friend Jonas is in financial trouble,  
despite the overt appearance of (13).

I conclude that there is nothing wrong about saying that reasons are true propositions, but that we have to decide on a case-to-case basis what the reason is that a given reason-statement identifies. Of course, much more would have to be said in order to give a fully satisfying account of the pragmatics of reason-statements.<sup>11</sup> But for my purposes, this is not necessary.

## **2. Conditions on Facts' Being Reasons**

It is important to note that in saying that reasons are facts, one is not already saying that the mind of the agent for whom they are reasons plays no role whatsoever. The notion of a normative reason, as I have just introduced it, is compatible with their being conative and/or cognitive conditions on some fact's being a reason; but it is also compatible with their being no such conditions.

---

<sup>11</sup> Consider: On the face of it, if I tell you that the fact that something is happening to Peter that Sue is telling Clarissa about is a reason for you to immediately notify Jim, what I say is unintelligible. But if it is clear to both of us that what Sue is telling Clarissa is that Peter is drowning, and that Jim is a lifeguard, our statement does manage to bring to light that the fact that a man (who incidentally goes by the name of 'Peter', and whose fate is incidentally being communicated to Clarissa) is drowning is a reason for you to immediately notify a lifeguard.

## 2.1 Conative Conditions

Some have thought that some fact's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  is conditioned, in some sense, on her conative situation, i.e. on her desires, on what she cares about or subjectively values, or on her interests. That is, some have thought that all reasons are *internal* in Bernard Williams' (1980) influential sense. What is meant when it is said that all reasons are internal? The internal/external contrast is not a contrast between reasons being facts about the world around us and them being psychological states, or psychological facts. Both external-reason theorists and internal-reason theorists can (and should) agree that reasons are, at least for the most part, facts about the world around us (i.e. that they are 'external' in some other sense). The idea is also not that P's being a *reason for S to  $\Phi$*  is straightforwardly dependent on her having a *present desire to  $\Phi$* , or to bring about what  $\Phi$  will bring about. That is to say, the idea is not the very implausible idea that when, say, Susanne hits someone while driving, she has a reason to stop, give first aid, and call the ambulance only if she presently desires to help injured people, or does not want the person she hit to die. The idea that a fact's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  depends on S's conative situation is subjectivist, in that the agent's or subject's conative situation is relevant with regard to whether some particular fact is a reason for her to perform some particular action, but it is not the bold (and very implausible) claim that P is a reason for you to  $\Phi$  only if you presently desire to  $\Phi$ .

To see what the idea is, let us look at the standard argument to the conclusion that all reasons are internal. It rests on two premises. The first premise is the claim that if there are no rational means by way of which S could

be brought to be motivated by P to  $\Phi$ , then P cannot be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ .<sup>12</sup> Rational means, here, can be understood in an open fashion. A rational means by way of which I can bring you to be motivated to do what you initially were not motivated to do is, say, informing you about your factual errors. Another such rational means is pointing out inconsistencies in your principles, or commitments. Contrast rational means with various forms of manipulation, like moving rhetoric, that can also effect change. The second premise is the claim that whether S can be brought by rational means to be motivated by P to  $\Phi$  depends on her current state of mind, that is to say, that whether S can be brought by rational means to be motivated by P to  $\Phi$  depends on where S starts out. From these two premises, it follows that P's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  is conditioned on her current state of mind, but not in the straightforward and rather implausible manner mentioned above. Rather, if the two premises are true and the argument valid, it follows that P's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  is conditioned on her current state of mind in the sense that if she could not be brought by rational means from her current state of mind to being motivated by P to  $\Phi$ , then P is not a reason for her to  $\Phi$  (cf. Williams, 1980).<sup>13</sup>

I just said that the conclusion follows if the two premises are true and the argument valid. McDowell (1995) has doubted the first premise. He asks: what is wrong with moving rhetoric? Why should the fact that you can only bring the man who beats his wife to stop doing so by way of moving rhetoric

---

<sup>12</sup> Williams does not talk about 'rational means' by way of which S can be 'brought to be motivated', but rather, about a 'sound deliberative route' by way of which the agent could arrive at a state of mind sufficient for her to be motivated by P. I move from his first-personal rendering to a more dialogical rendering because I take that way of putting things to more perspicuous.

<sup>13</sup> For a collection of the main contributions (with an illuminating introduction) cf. Setiya & Paakkunainen (2012).

show that he does not have a reason to stop doing so? That is, he questions the need for the change required to be a *rational* one; after all, he urges, it is not by way of rational means that we are initiated into the ‘realm of reasons’ in the first place, so why not think that someone might only be able to come to see what she all along had reason to do only after something like a conversion.<sup>14</sup> Korsgaard (1986) and Smith (2000, pp. 164–174), in rather different fashions, have doubted the second premise. They argue that at least in principle, one can get to the state of mind required to be motivated by the reasons there are from any starting point.<sup>15</sup> It is not part of this project to determine whether all reasons are internal, i.e. psychologically conditioned. My point, here, is that whatever the truth is about this issue: both sides can agree that reasons are facts that speak in favor of some agent performing some action. For facts that are reasons, I said above, are reasons not in all possible circumstances, but only in certain circumstances. The disagreement can, thus, be understood as the disagreement whether facts about the agent’s conative condition are always part of the relevant circumstances or not (cf. Scanlon, 2014, p. 32). If all reasons

---

<sup>14</sup> One might think that it is obvious that the man who beats his wife has a reason to stop doing so, as his beating his wife is cruel and insensitive, and as it would be a good, were he to stop doing so. But Williams is happy to concede that the man who beats his wife *is* cruel and insensitive, and that it *would be* good, were he to stop doing so. In an unorthodox contribution, Stephen Finlay suggests that the disagreement might at heart actually be one about the term of a normative reason: that for Williams, the term does not signify favorers (as it does for most authors), but rather, possible “*explanation[s] of an agent’s action under the condition of the absence of false belief or ignorance*” (Finlay, 2009, p. 14; his emphasis).

<sup>15</sup> In her article, Korsgaard turns the tables on Williams. Williams argues that as reasons must be able to motivate, if S cannot be got (by rational means) to be motivated to  $\Phi$  by P, P cannot be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ . Korsgaard argues that as reasons must be able to motivate, it must be that S can (by rational means) be brought to be motivated to  $\Phi$  by P, if P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ .

are internal, then the circumstances in which P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  always include some fact about S's conative condition. If some or all reasons are external, then the circumstances in which P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  will not necessarily include some fact about S's conative situation.

## 2.2 Cognitive Conditions

As we just saw, it is a contentious issue whether some fact's being the reason that it is depends on the conative condition of the agent for whom it is a reason. It is also a contentious issue whether some fact's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  depends on the agent's *cognitive* condition; so that, for instance, some fact is ruled out as being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  by S's inability to come to know that P, or on the general inaccessibility of P. Call the view that some fact's being a reason is in some sense so conditioned Perspectivism, and the view that it is not, Objectivism.<sup>16</sup>

To see what Perspectivists and Objectivists disagree about, consider the following case:<sup>17</sup> Fred is ill. Drug A will kill him. Drug B will cure him completely. Drug C will cure him partially, and in a way that will preclude that he will ever be able to be completely cured. His doctor knows that C will cure him partially, but in a way that will preclude him ever being completely cured. And she knows that either A will kill him and B will cure him completely, or

---

<sup>16</sup> For discussions, see e.g. Kiesewetter (forthcoming), Raz (2011a), Zimmerman (2008). The two options I mention are not exhaustive. Zimmerman presents an alternative to both Objectivism and Perspectivism.

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from Jackson (1991). A structurally similar case concerning miners is discussed in Parfit (2011, pp. 150–164). Discussions of such cases often resolve around the understanding not of reasons, but of oughts.

that B will kill him and A will cure him completely. But she does not know which of the two disjuncts of the disjunctive truth that she knows is true. And there is no way in which she can find out.

Everyone agrees that if his doctor is a conscientious doctor, she will give Fred drug B. After all, it is better to be safe than sorry. But according to Objectivists, it is nevertheless the case that the fact that A will cure Fred completely is a reason for his doctor to give Fred drug A; that she is not able to learn about that fact is neither here nor there, her epistemic situation is of no import with regard to what is and what is not a reason. According to Perspectivists, however, the fact that she is not able to learn about the fact that A will cure Fred completely effectively *excludes* that fact from being a reason for her to give Fred drug A. In their view, when Fred's doctor administers drug B, she does not only act as any conscientious doctor with her level of information would act, her action is also fully in line with the reasons there are for her to act. By contrast, for the Objectivist, what the conscientious doctor does is not fully in line with the reasons there are for her to act.

The idea that reasons are facts is neutral with regard to this issue. Even if Perspectivism is the correct theory, reasons are still facts. And they are still facts about the world around us, at least for the most part. It is just that for the Perspectivists, some facts that the Objectivists holds to be reason are excluded from being reasons by the agent's cognitive situation. As facts are the reasons that they are only in certain circumstances, the issue between Perspectivists and Objectivists, similar to the issue between Internalists and Externalists, can be conceived of as the issue whether an agent's cognitive condition is always part of the circumstances in which a fact is a reason for her to do something.



### 3. The Source of Reasons

I suggested that we can helpfully conceive of reasons as facts that stand in a four-place relation, where the other three relata are agents, courses of actions, and circumstances. I also suggested that the question whether there are conative and/or cognitive conditions on facts being reasons is the question whether the circumstances in which some fact is a reason for some agent to perform some action always include that agent's conative and/or cognitive condition or not. An Internalist about reasons, for instance, is a theorist who holds that  $P$  is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$  only in circumstances in which  $S$  has it in her, in some sense or another, to be motivated by  $P$  to  $\Phi$ . A Perspectivists about reasons is a theorist who holds that  $P$  is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$  only in circumstances in which  $S$  believes, or knows, that  $P$ , or, at least, is in a position to come to believe, or know, that  $P$ . But it is one thing to ask whether the circumstances  $C$  in which  $P$  is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$  always include  $S$ 's conative and/or cognitive condition, and it is another thing to ask whether we can say anything more illuminating about *why* it is true (when it is true) that  $P$ , in  $C$ , is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$ , than just that it *is* true. Whether, that is, we can give an account or an explanation of why  $P$ , in  $C$ , is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$ . I call the question about why, or in virtue of what (if anything)  $P$ , in  $C$ , is a reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$  the question about the *source* of  $P$ 's normative significance.

However, I raise this question not in order to answer it, but in order to point out that saying that reasons are facts is neutral with regard to how (if at all) this question should be answered. In lieu of an extensive discussion, which would serve no purpose given the overall project, let me just give a brief feel of

the possibilities by broadly distinguishing two kinds of accounts of the source of reasons: *realist* accounts and *response-dependent* accounts.<sup>18</sup>

Roughly, realist accounts explain why P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  by appeal to some allegedly basic normative or evaluative fact. In the most straightforward case, the idea will be that what explains why P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  is the simple normative fact that this is so, or the obtaining of the according reason-relation. As Scanlon writes:

[C]laims about reasons can be correct or incorrect, and such claims are fundamental – not reducible to or explainable in terms of claims of other kinds. (Scanlon, 2014, p. 15)

But realist accounts might also appeal to allegedly basic facts about, say, what is of value (Raz, 2011c, pp. 75–9), or about the goodness (Foot, 2001; Thomson, 2003, 2008) of S's  $\Phi$ ing, or her S's  $\Phi$ ing in response to P, in order to explain why P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ .

In contrast to all such broadly realist accounts, response-dependent accounts seek to explain why P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  by appeal not to some allegedly basic normative or evaluative fact (i.e. a fact about something just being a reason, or about the goodness or value of acting in a certain way), but by appeal the counterfactual that S *would* treat P as a reason for her to  $\Phi$  (where 'treating' can be spelled out in various ways), *were* it the case that she were suitably different than she in fact is. Say, provided that she had all the relevant true beliefs and no mistaken beliefs and were fully rational in some to be specified sense (Smith, 2000), or provided that her 'faculty of desire' were to

---

<sup>18</sup> That is not meant to imply that this is an exclusive distinction; there may be other options not caught up in such a typology. Cf. Finlay (2010) for a helpful overview.

accord with the Categorical Imperative (Korsgaard, 1996). Here, appeal is made to an idealized notion of reason (understood as a faculty or power), or rational agency, and the reasons that apply to us non-ideal possessors of reason, or us rational agents, is determined by what our ideal counterparts treat as reasons.<sup>19</sup>

Note that independent of *constitutive* claims – i.e. claims about what constitutes the normativity of reasons – are claims about the *relations* between normative concepts or truths. That is, for instance, given that P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ , it is at least arguably the case that (i) it is a *fact* that P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ , that (ii) were S to  $\Phi$  in response to P, she would be *acting well* or be *doing something of value*, and that (iii) were S fully *rational* or *virtuous*, and were she to have all the relevant true beliefs and no false beliefs, she would treat P as a reason for her to  $\Phi$  – regardless of whether P’s reason-giving status or quality can or must be *accounted for* in terms of the concepts in play in (i), (ii), or (iii).

#### **4. Reasons as Evaluative Facts**

So far, I have presupposed that the facts that are normative reasons are ordinary empirical facts, like the fact that it is your mother’s birthday today, or the fact that it is raining. This is the view that e.g. Scanlon explicitly takes. In an exemplary passage, he writes:

The things that can be reasons are not a special kind of entity but ordinary facts, in many cases facts about the natural world. For example,

---

<sup>19</sup> Or, in the twist that Smith (1995) gives the idea (in order to avoid the so-called conditional fallacy): the reasons that apply to us non-ideal possessors of reason, or us rational agents, is determined by what our ideal counterparts would *advise* us to do.

the fact that the edge of a piece of metal is sharp is a reason for me, now, not to press my hand against it. (Scanlon, 2014, p. 30)

Later on, he remarks:

It should be noted that, although the facts that are reasons are often natural facts, normative facts can also be reasons. So, for example, the fact that the law would be unjust may be a reason for me to vote against it if I am in a position to do so. (Scanlon, 2014, p. 32)

On his view, therefore, there is no restriction on what kinds of facts can be normative reasons: both natural and normative (or evaluative) facts. I call this the 'Liberal Interpretation' of Factualism.

Not everyone is so liberal. The idea that reasons are facts is often understood more narrowly as the idea that only certain kinds of facts can be reasons, namely, that only *facts about  $\Phi$ ing having some evaluative quality* can be reasons to  $\Phi$ . Call this the 'Narrow Interpretation'. The Narrow Interpretation has many followers. Raz, for example, writes that "reasons for action consist of the fact that the action has some value" and that "reasons for action are that the actions have some value" (Raz, 2011c, p. 75) And, in a different context, that

[t]he fact that options have a certain value – that performing them is a good thing to do because of the intrinsic merit of the action or of its consequences – is the paradigmatic reason for actions. (Raz, 2001, p. 63)<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Wedgwood maintains that

---

<sup>20</sup> Raz (2001) is arguing against the view that reasons are desires. The relevant passages in Raz (2011a) are concerned with Scanlon's buck-passing thesis.

a reason in favour of a course of action is simply an intrinsically good feature of that course of action. (Wedgwood, 2009, pp. 336–337)

Thomson offers us the following biconditional:

A fact is a reason for a person to do a thing if and only if it is a fact to the effect that

his doing it would be good in a way, or

his not doing it would be bad in a way, or

his doing it would be better in a way than his doing anything else,

or

someone has a right that he do it, or ... [sic]

Leaving room for other evaluative facts to be added. ... But only other evaluative facts. (Thomson, 2003, pp. 37–8)

Leaving aside the differences in these formulations (and in the overall views of their respective authors), these are all clear expressions of the Narrow Interpretation.

The Narrow Interpretation has something to go for it. It does not seem all that controversial to say that the fact that the edge of a piece of metal is sharp is a reason for me not to press my hand against it. But crucially, it is not that fact *by itself* that favors not pressing my hand against it. The fact *by itself* can favor anything and everything – or nothing at all. It is a reason *only in suitable circumstances* (where, as we saw, these circumstances might or might not include the conative and/or cognitive situation of the agent). As Scanlon emphasizes:

Whether a certain fact is a reason, and what it is a reason for, depends on an agents circumstances. The fact that this piece of metal is sharp is a reason for me not to press my hand against it, but under different

circumstances it might be a reason *to* press my hand against it, and under still different circumstances a reason to do something else, such as to put it into the picnic basket if I will later have reason to want to cut cheese. (Scanlon, 2014, pp. 30–31)

By contrast, the fact, say, that making tasteless yokes about disappearing planes to someone whose whole family was on flight MH 370 is *cruel* is something that, one might think, *by itself* speaks against making tasteless yokes about disappearing planes to such a person. (Of course, whether it is cruel depends on the circumstances. Making such yokes to someone who is prone to a certain sort of grim humor might not be cruel. Thus, depending on the circumstances, the relevant fact might not obtain. But if it does obtain, then it is a reason, in a way, all by itself.) Likewise (and with according qualifications), the fact that eating apples is *healthy*, and the fact that pressing my hand against this sharp piece of metal will be *painful*, would seem to by themselves speak in favor of eating apples, or to speak in favor of refraining from pressing my hand against this sharp piece of metal, respectively. Evaluative facts thus seem to fare better with regard to making sense of the favoring character of reasons – provided, that is, that one takes it that reasons are, or need to be, such as to *by themselves* speak in favor of actions. As Thomson puts it, making the relevant supposition explicit:

If we suppose that a reason for a person to do a thing is *itself* something that counts in favor of his doing it, then we should limit reasons for actions to evaluative facts .... It is their being evaluative that marks these

facts as reasons for action – since it is in virtue of their being evaluative that they count in favor of an action. (Thomson, 2003, p. 38)<sup>21</sup>

But why make that supposition? As long as a proponent of the Liberal Interpretation helps herself to the idea that facts are reasons *only in certain circumstances*, and has a view about the source of facts' normative significance<sup>22</sup>, she need not be worried about the fact that facts that speak in favor of actions do not do so by themselves.

Moreover, there is one respect in which the Liberal Interpretation seems preferable over the Narrow Interpretation: The Liberal Interpretation is more ecumenical than the Narrow Interpretation. Given that when there is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ ,  $\Phi$ ing has some positive evaluative quality (that is, say, that when there is a reason for you to save Peter's life, saving Peter's life is good, at least in some respect), the Liberal Interpretation leaves it open whether what explains why some fact P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  is that  $\Phi$ ing has a positive evaluative quality, or, conversely, whether P's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  explains why  $\Phi$ ing has a positive evaluative quality. And, thus, it leaves it open whether we must account for the normative<sup>23</sup> in terms of the evaluative, or *vice versa*.<sup>24</sup> The Narrow Interpretation, however, starts out from the idea that  $\Phi$ ing has a positive evaluative quality, and tells us that that fact is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ . Thus,

---

<sup>21</sup> Heuer (2006, 7) also emphasizes that ordinary facts do not *by themselves* speak in favor of actions.

<sup>22</sup> Which in Scanlon's case is just the view that we should call off the search for such a source, cf. I.3 above.

<sup>23</sup> Understood in the narrow sense in which it contrasts with the evaluative, not in the broad sense in which it encompasses the evaluative and contrasts with the 'natural'.

<sup>24</sup> That is (to use the metaphor that gives the contemporary discussion of that issue its name), whether the 'buck' of explaining is passed from the normative to the evaluative, or *vice versa*. The term is introduced in Scanlon (1998, pp. 95–100).

it is built into the Narrow Interpretation that the evaluative explains the normative.

## 5. Psychologism about Normative Reasons

We have already seen that one can agree that reasons are facts that favor actions, but disagree about why, i.e. in virtue of what, facts are the reasons that they are. Thus, one can say that reasons are facts that favor actions, but hold that key to understanding normativity are values, or principles – or desires.

Nevertheless, it is still sometimes said that those who say that normative reasons are facts that speak in favor of actions are making a controversial claim. As for instance Whiting (2014) puts it, on the one hand, there is Factualism, according to which facts are reasons, and on the other hand, there is Psychologism, according to which reasons are mental states:

Reasons for acting are, or are given by, facts. Call this view *[F]actualism*. According to it, the fact that it is snowing might be a reason for Holly to put on winter clothes, while the fact that Maybelle is hungry might be a reason for Todd to feed her. ... Factualism contrasts with the view that reasons for acting are, or are given by, one's mental states. Call this view *[Psychologism]*<sup>25</sup>. According to it, Holly's belief that it is snowing might be a reason for her to put on warm clothes, while Todd's belief that Maybelle is hungry might be a reason for him to feed her. (Whiting, 2014, pp. 1–2)

---

<sup>25</sup> Whiting actually speaks about 'Mentalism'. In keeping with my terminology, I have replaced that with 'Psychologism'.



Note, first, that there are two contrasts in play in what Whiting says, namely, a *mental/extra-mental* contrast, and a *fact/state* contrast. And the latter contrast – between facts and states – does not seem to be particularly relevant. After all, in the situation at hand, it is not only a fact that Maybelle is hungry, it is also a fact that Todd believes that Maybelle is hungry. And likewise, not only Todd’s believing that Maybelle is hungry is a state, but also Maybelle’s being hungry is a state. What is of theoretical interest, it would thus seem, is the question whether the reason at issue ‘comes from’ Maybelle or from Todd, and not the question whether it is a state or a fact.

However, even with that clarification, it is not clear what Psychologism exactly comes down to. Here are three possibilities:

1. It is a view about the *conditions* under which something is a reason.
2. It is a view about *what kinds of facts* speak in favor of actions, namely, exclusively facts about the mind of the agent for whom they are reasons (for such an understanding of Psychologism, cf. e.g. Thomson, 2003, pp. 26–32).
3. It is the view that reasons are not things that *speak in favor of actions*, but things that do something else, say, things that *render actions reasonable* (cf. e.g. Gibbons, 2010).<sup>26</sup>

But if (1), then Psychologism is no contender to Factualism, but a claim about how to *complement* it (see I.2). For maybe, the fact that Maybelle is hungry is a

---

<sup>26</sup> Actually, Gibbons’ view oscillates between (a) the view that normative reasons are mental states that render actions reasonable, and (b) the view that what normative reasons there are for someone depends on her epistemic perspective, i.e. on her mental states (cf. I.3 above). These two views are clearly independent from one another (indeed, it is not even quite clear that they are compatible with one another). Note that (b) is a claim that readily goes together with Factualism, cf. I.2 above.

reason for Todd to give her some food only if Todd believes or knows that she is hungry, or is in a position to come to know that she is hungry. And if (2), then Psychologism is actually but a *species* of Factualism, albeit (as I will argue) a very implausible one. And if (3), then it is not clear in which sense Psychologism is in *conflict* with Factualism, other than verbally. Thus, I believe that by saying that what we seek to take into account when deciding what to do, and when advising others on what they are to do, are facts that speak in favor of actions, one is not so much making a claim about how to conceive of something that we have an *independent understanding* of, but rather, that one is thereby *introducing a topic* about which one can then make claims: for instance, as we saw, about whether what facts are reasons for some agent is *conditioned* on her motivational propensities, or about what *constitutes* facts' favoring status or quality or role (or, say, about how the reasons that there are for someone to do something are related to whether she is *justified* in doing what she does, and so on).

As I have already talked about (1) above, let me say a few words first about (3), and then about (2).

Some authors say that we should not conceive of normative reasons as facts that speak in favor of actions, but rather, as mental states that render actions reasonable. Gibbons (2010), for instance, explains that reasons are things that make actions reasonable, that what makes things reasonable are mental states, and, thus, that normative reasons are mental states. As he puts it:

My basic idea of a reason is relatively straightforward. Reasons are supposed to make things reasonable. Good reasons do what they're supposed to do. (Gibbons, 2010, p. 344)

The way he frames things, that view is *opposed* to the view that reasons are facts that speak in favor of actions. But it is hard to see that there indeed is such an opposition. After all, there is no problem in saying both that facts speak in favor of actions, and that mental states render actions reasonable. For instance, given that I want to be on the other side of the road, the fact that right now no cars are coming speaks in favor of crossing right now, and my believing that right now no cars are coming would render crossing the street right now reasonable (or would at least be among the things that render crossing right now reasonable). Note that a course of action that is rendered reasonable by your mental states need not be a course of action that is favored by the facts, and *vice versa*. For instance, if you – albeit mistakenly – *believe* that right now no traffic is coming, then crossing right now is a reasonable thing to do (at least in one sense of the term ‘reasonable’), but as traffic *is* coming, doing so is not what is favored by the facts; and if you mistakenly *believe* that traffic is coming, crossing would not be reasonable, but as no traffic *is* coming, crossing is rendered eligible by the facts as they are. And so, it would seem as if the apparently substantial issue about what reasons are boils down to the merely terminological issue about how to use the word ‘normative reason’: for things that favor actions, or for things that are capable of rendering actions reasonable.

Of course, we might have an *independent notion* of a normative reason in mind, and about *that* notion, we might ask: are normative reasons better to be conceived of as facts that favor or as mental states that render reasonable? In fact, we do have such a notion. Normative reasons, in the sense in which I am interested in, are what we seek to take into account when deciding what to do, and in advising others on what they are to do. But given that normative reasons

are things that play *that* role, it is highly implausible to think that mental states that render reasonable are serious contesters.

Let me first focus on advice. Consider: If you could choose to go for advice either to someone who would focus on what courses of action would be rendered reasonable by your mental states and advise you accordingly, or to someone who would focus on what courses of action are favored by the facts and advise you accordingly, you would – given the possibility that what is reasonable and what is favored can come apart – surely choose to go to the latter. The former would just not be giving you very good advice.

Or look at it like this: Imagine yourself advising me on when to cross the road. Your advice would be very bad advice, were you to focus on *my beliefs about the traffic*, as opposed to *the facts about the traffic*. For in order to ensure that I get safely over the street, what you have to do is focus on the traffic, and not on my beliefs about the traffic. Given the possibility that my beliefs about the traffic are mistaken, focusing on them, as opposed to focusing on the facts about the traffic, might very well fail to safely get me over the road.

Of course, if your advice is good and successful, it will *effect*, in some sense anyway, that my beliefs about the traffic line up with the facts about the traffic. For presumably, I will advise you to go now by impressing on you the fact that now, no cars are coming, i.e. by drawing your attention to the facts about the traffic, thereby bringing your beliefs in line with those facts. If that were not so, the case would be more like a case in which I issue an order for you to blindly follow. But if anything, that strengthens the point.

And think about what it is like to try to figure out what to do; say, to figure out when to cross the road. What you want to do is to get over the road safely. Clearly, what bears on when to go are facts about the traffic, and not

your beliefs about the traffic. So clearly, when seeking to figure out when to go, you'll focus on facts about the traffic, and not on facts about your beliefs about the traffic. As Simon Blackburn nicely puts it:

The last thing you want to do when you are wondering when to make your dash through the traffic ... is to take your mind off the traffic .... In fact, this may be the last thing you *ever* want to do (Blackburn, 1998, p. 254).

Now, there are cases in which what you question are not the facts about the world around you, but facts about your mental states. Consider the following case: You are in a meeting and the chairman bids all those who believe that P to raise their hands (cf. Hacker, 2009, p. 88). What you will take to bear on whether to raise your hand, in the case at issue, will not be what you believe, i.e. P, but your believing that P. For, as you see it, your reason will vary not with the facts, but with your beliefs about the facts. You will understand that if it were the case that the facts were different, but your beliefs the same, your reasons would be the same;<sup>27</sup> but that were your beliefs different, and the facts the same, your reason would be different (cf. also Alvarez, 2010, pp. 131–132; Dancy, 2002, pp. 124–125; Hyman, 1999, p. 444; Thomson, 2003, pp. 24–25). But note that also in such cases, you question your beliefs with regard to what they *favor* that you do, not with regard to what course of action they would render *reasonable*.

I believe that we can conclude that if by 'normative reasons', we mean: things that play the role of being what we seek to focus on in deciding what to

---

<sup>27</sup> Of course, you will also understand that if the facts were different, your beliefs ought to be different. But that is compatible with understanding that given that your beliefs were to remain as they are, despite the facts changing, your reasons would not change.

do, and in advising others on what they are to do, then normative reasons clearly are facts that favor, and not states that render reasonable. Even in those cases in which states (or facts about states) are what we focus on, we focus on them with regard to their role as favorers, and not with regard to their role as things that render reasonable.

## **6. Summary**

In the next part, I will be relying on the idea that normative reasons are facts that speak in favor of actions, and that the facts that are normative reasons are, at least for the most part, non-psychological facts. In this section, I have sought to render that idea plausible. By way of a conclusion, let me recount why the idea that normative reasons are psychological states, or facts about such states, is implausible.

As I explained above, the idea that normative reasons are always psychological facts seems wrong, on grounds of the fact that normative reasons, as we have been using the term here, are what are in play in advice and first-personal deliberation. For in normal circumstances, no sane advisor would advise you to do something based on considering your mental states, or those alone; and no sane agent would seek out the advice of someone whom she would know to do that. And likewise, in normal circumstances, no sane deliberator would seek to figure out what is to be done by way of considering her mental states, or those alone. The argument, note, is not an apriori argument, but an appeal to mundane examples like that when you advise others on when to cross the road, you are focused not on their beliefs about the traffic, but on the facts about the traffic (at least as you understand them to be).

If it is effective, it is effective not in that it shows us that we cannot even conceive of a rational being for whom all reasons are facts about her own mind, but merely in that it shows us that that is not how it is with us.

Given what I have said, we can distinguish the idea that normative reasons are psychological facts from some more plausible ideas. The view that normative reasons are always psychological facts is *not* the view that a fact is a reason for you to do something only if you believe that fact, or know that fact, or if you are in a position to come to believe or know it, i.e. it is not Perspectivism, the view that there are cognitive conditions on facts being reasons. It is one thing to say that the fact that, say, your child is ill is a reason for you to do something about it only if you know or believe that she is ill, or if you are in a position to be able to know or believe that she is ill. It is quite another thing to say that it is not the fact that your child is ill that speaks in favor of doing something about it, but your believing that she is ill. While the former may or may not be correct, the latter is surely false. Likewise, it is not the idea that all reasons are internal, i.e. dependent your being able to be brought (by rational means) from your present 'motivational set' to one that is such that you can become motivated by that reason. The claim that P is a reason for S to  $\Phi$  only if S has a certain desire is not the claim that that desire, or her having that desire, is the reason. Also, the idea that normative reasons are always psychological facts is *not* the view that your believing as you do opens you up to charges of irrationality, or submits you to requirements of rationality. To take up our example: It is one thing to say that if you believe that your child is ill, it is irrational for you (at least in normal circumstances) not do something about it, regardless of whether she is in fact ill or not. It is another thing to say that it is that fact about yourself, i.e. that you believe that your child is ill, that

speaks in favor of doing something about the illness of your child. While the former may or may not be correct, the latter is surely false. The noted three views are views that are rightly controversial and up to debate. But the idea that normative reasons are always psychological facts, when it is suitably distinguished from those other three views, can be put aside.



## **Part II. Rational Motivation**

This part consists of two main chapters. In the first chapter, I will introduce the notion of a ground (II.1.2). A ground, as I will use the term, is something that motivates someone to do something because she takes it to speak in favor of doing what she does (II.1.1). I will argue that propositions are what play the role of a ground (II.1.3), and, for the most part, not propositions about psychological matters (II.1.4). I will briefly address what the function of psychological vocabulary in ground-statements might be (II.1.5), and I will contrast the project I am engaged in to the reductivist project (II.1.6). In the second chapter, I will address the debate on whether motivating reasons are to be conceived of Psychologically or Non-Psychologically (II.2). I will start out by examining the various notions of a motivating reason that can be found in the literature (II.2.1). Some authors use the term to signify grounds, or a certain class of grounds. Others, however, use it to signify explanantia, or employ the term in the course of giving a reductive account of acting on a ground. I will examine whether that means that the contemporary debate about Psychologism might simply rest on an equivocation (II.2.2 and II.2.3).

### **1. The Principle of Rational Motivation**

We often take it that there is a reason for us to do something. We sometimes do what we take there to be a reason for us to do. Those two things can come together by accident. It is, however, not a plausible thought that they could only ever come together accidentally. As Michael Smith puts it at one point:

[S]upposing that the connection between what we decide to do, on the basis of rational deliberation, and what we do do, is altogether contingent and fortuitous ... is patently absurd. When we deliberate, and decide what we have a rational justification for doing, that very fact sometimes makes a difference to what we do. (Smith, 2000, p. 132)

Also, consider what our predicament would be, if our taking it that there is a reason for us to do something and our doing what we take there is a reason for us to do could only ever come together accidentally. It seems that our predicament would be that of the 'favored creature' that Kant describes in the Groundwork: If such a creature could form views about facts being reasons for her to act, this would serve it

only to contemplate the fortunate constitution of its nature, to admire this, to delight in it, and to be grateful for it to the beneficent cause, but not to submit its faculty of desire to ... guidance (Kant, 1998, 4:395)

But this is clearly not our predicament. When we do what we take there to be reason for us to do, our stance towards our action is not like the stance we might have towards our body when we delight in its being able to run a marathon, or like the stance we might have towards our liver when we are grateful that it can process the vast amounts of alcohol we consume.

So, our taking there to be a reason for us to do something and our acting accordingly can be non-accidentally related. When are they non-accidentally related in the right way? I suggest that they are non-accidentally related in the right way just in case we are motivated by the reason we take there to be. Call the principle that actions can be motivated by reasons we take there to be for us to so act the 'Principle of Rational Motivation', and call actions that are so motivated actions that are 'rationally motivated':

(The Principle of Rational Motivation) S is rationally motivated to  $\Phi$  just in case, and because, S takes it that X is a reason for her to  $\Phi$ , and  $\Phi$ 's, and is motivated to  $\Phi$  by X, due to her taking X to be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ .

Note that given what is surely plausible, namely, that S's take on X can be correct, so that X really is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ , this entails that reasons themselves can rationally motivate. Or, as we can also put it, it entails that when S is rationally motivated to  $\Phi$ , it is possible that what rationally motivates her to  $\Phi$  is a reason for her to  $\Phi$ . But as S's take can also be incorrect, not all cases of rational motivation are cases of motivation by reasons. Note also that the term 'motivation' is ambiguous, in that many different things can be said to 'motivate' in very different ways. I will say a bit more about both issue in the next section.

I take it that the Principle of Rational Motivation is, as such, not particularly contentious. For to say that S can be motivated to  $\Phi$  by what she takes to favor that she  $\Phi$ 's is, in a sense, just like saying that S can infer P from something she takes to entail that P. And, as the possibility of inferring P from something we take to entail that P is surely a datum, it also seems to be a datum that we can be motivated to  $\Phi$  by something we take to favor that we  $\Phi$ . What is contentious, however, is the question whether we can, or must, spell out what it is for an action to be rationally motivated (or what it is for someone to infer P from Q) in other, allegedly more basic terms, i.e. whether we can, or must, give a reductive account of being rationally motivated (or of inferring). I will come back to that matter below (II.1.5). First, however, I would like to say more about rational motivation. Specifically, I would like to note that the Principle of Rational Motivation is neutral with regard to a host of (other) contentious

issues, introduce the notion of a ground, and argue that grounds are to be conceived of in a Non-Psychologistic fashion.

### 1.1 Neutrality With Regard to Some Contentious Issues

(i) Above, I said that it is possible that cases in which S is rationally motivated to  $\Phi$  are cases in which she is rationally motivated by a reason, but that a case of being rationally motivated is not as such a case of being rationally motivated by a reason. Saying so much leaves it open what conditions or factors render a case in which someone is *rationally motivated by what she takes to be a reason* a case in which she *is rationally motivated by a reason* (a plausible *necessary* condition is that the agent has *knowledge* of the relevant fact, cf. Hornsby, 2008; Littlejohn, 2012, Chapter 4.5; McDowell, 2013). Moreover, it leaves it open whether one can or cannot give a non-circular account of those factors or conditions, i.e. an account that does not already, at least implicitly, presuppose the notion of being rationally motivated by a reason (for skepticism that some such account is forthcoming, cf. e.g. Hornsby, 2008; McDowell, 2013; Roessler, 2014).

(ii) According to the Principle of Rational Motivation, we can be motivated to  $\Phi$  by what we take to be a reason for us to  $\Phi$ . This leaves it open whether motivation is, or can be, a matter of supposed normative reasons alone, or whether other factors also play a crucial role in motivation; that is, it leaves it open whether taking there to be a normative reason for one to  $\Phi$  *suffices* for one to be motivated to  $\Phi$ , or whether there are other factors that are *necessary* (say, pre-existing desires, dispositions, etc.). Thus, the Principle of

Rational Motivation remains neutral with regard to what has been called the issue of judgment internalism/externalism (e.g. Darwall, 1983, p. 52).

(iii) Let me note, at this point, that *given* that there are other necessary factors, those other factors might with equal right be *called* ‘motivators’, or be *described* as ‘what motivates us’. Let us say that Sam realizes that there is something in her possession that belongs to Paul, and gives it back to him, motivated (as I would say) by what she realized, namely, that it belongs to Paul. And let us say that what Sam realizes, namely, that it belongs to Paul, motivates her to give it back to him *only because* she has a certain desire or disposition, say, the desire to be just, or the disposition of justice. We can, with equal right, say that Sam was motivated by her desire to be just, or by justice. Also, we might say that Sam was motivated by her *taking* there to be a reason to give it back to Paul. So, many things can be called ‘motivators’. That I reserve the term for supposed normative reasons is a terminological point, not a philosophical claim. That is to say, being rationally motivated to  $\Phi$  by what one takes to be a reason for one to  $\Phi$  does not, as such, exclude that other things can also be said to motivate one to  $\Phi$  (cf. also II.1.4 below for a distinction between two senses of ‘motivate’).

(iv) Accordingly, the Principle of Rational Motivation leaves it open whether taking there to be a normative reason for one to  $\Phi$  is *necessary* for motivation, or whether motivation can be in place without views about normative reasons. What it states is just that taking there to be a normative reason for one to  $\Phi$  is necessary for *rational motivating*, in the defined sense. Thus, it remains neutral on the contentious question whether all intentional or motivated actions are performed, as it is said, ‘under the guise of the good’; specifically, here, under the guise of an (at least apparent) normative reason

(e.g. Boyle & Lavin, 2010; Gregory, 2013; Raz, 2011; Setiya, 2010; Velleman, 1992). If it is not true that all intentional or motivated actions are performed under the guise of normative reasons, then what I have to say is restricted to cases in which they are so-performed; if it is true, then what I have to say is not restricted in such a manner.

(v) According to the Principle of Rational Motivation, we can be motivated to  $\Phi$  by the reason we take there to be for us to  $\Phi$ . This leaves it open how to conceive of the relevant 'taking there to be a normative reason' that is involved. It might be that taking there to be a reason for one to  $\Phi$  amounts to having a belief with the content: such-and-such is a reason for me to  $\Phi$ . Or it might be that it merely amounts to believing that such-and-such, and that taking or treating such-and-such as a reason is not a matter of the *content* of one's relevant belief (cf. Lavin, 2011; Raz, 2011d). The Principle of Rational Motivation is silent on those matters.

Given that the Principle of Rational Motivation is open enough to be innocuous in all the respects just indicated, one might very well ask if it is not just too trivial to at all discuss. Far from it: given that the Principle of Rational Motivation is open enough to be able to be accepted by all sides, it can help us understand what the many controversies in the field are controversies about, and whether they at all are controversies.

## 1.2 Grounds

The Principle of Rational Motivation states that when we take it that X is a reason for us to  $\Phi$ , it is possible that we can  $\Phi$  because we are motivated to  $\Phi$  by X, and because we take X to be a reason for us to  $\Phi$ . In order to facilitate the

upcoming discussions, I would like to introduce the term ‘ground’. When S is rationally motivated to  $\Phi$  by X, then

(a) X is taken by S to be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ , and

(b) X motivates her to  $\Phi$ ,

where (a) and (b) are related in that

(c) X motivates her to  $\Phi$  because she takes it to be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ .

In such cases, I will say that X plays the role of a *ground*; or for short, that X is a ground. And I will say that S, in  $\Phi$ ing, is acting on a ground.<sup>28</sup>

What I suggest that we call a ground is sometimes also called an ‘agential reason’ (Hacker, 2009), or an ‘operative reason’ (Scanlon, 1998, p. 19). Usually, however, it is called a ‘motivating reason’, or ‘a reason for which someone does something’ (see also II.2.1). But as we will see below, employing the term ‘reason’ (and especially the term ‘motivating reason’) in such contexts is misleading in various respects. That is why I will avoid such and other reason-employing terms and phrases when I talk about grounds.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.3 What Plays the Role of a Ground?

As I have just defined the term, ‘ground’ is the name for something that plays a certain role. So, to specify a ground on which S  $\Phi$ 's is to specify what motivates her to  $\Phi$ , due to her taking it to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing. That is, grounds are

---

<sup>28</sup> For similar usages of the term ‘ground’, cf. such diverse authors like Hyman (2015, chap. 6) and Pettit & Smith (1997, pp. 72–78).

<sup>29</sup> Many of the quotes I will give, however, employ the phrase ‘acting for a reason’, and often in order to talk about grounds (sometimes, however, in order to talk only about grounds that are also normative reasons, cf. II.2.1). When necessary, I will explicitly state that we should understand that phrase as meaning ‘acting for a ground’.

supposedly normative motivators, as one could put it. The question I now want to raise is the question: what plays such a role?

Here are some options:

(State-Psychologism About Grounds) To specify the ground on which S  $\Phi$ s is to specify a mental state of S's

(Factualism About Grounds) To specify the ground on which S  $\Phi$ s is to specify a fact S has in mind<sup>30</sup>

(Propositionalism About Grounds) To specify the ground on which S  $\Phi$ s is to specify what S believes<sup>31</sup>

I hope to have established in part I that what we take to favor actions are facts. This immediately rules out State-Psychologism About Grounds. For (as part I showed) if what we take to favor actions are facts, and (as follows from the definition given above) a necessary condition for something being a ground is that it is taken, by the agent, to favor what she is doing, then grounds cannot be mental states. For what plays the role of a ground must be able to be taken to be a fact, and mental states are not taken to be facts. For future reference, let me label that argument the Argument from the Wrong Kind, as the argument is that mental states are of the wrong ontological kind to play the role of grounds

---

<sup>30</sup> Factualists about Grounds can disagree about whether 'having a fact in mind' amounts to having a *true belief*, or whether it amounts to having *knowledge* of that fact.

<sup>31</sup> I omit one option, namely, that what plays the role of a ground is a *state of affairs* (i.e. not a true proposition, but what makes a true proposition true), where a state of affairs can play the role of a ground also if it does not exist. This surprising view is the view of Jonathan Dancy, one of the most influential Non-Psychologists (Dancy, 2002, pp. 112–120). In what follows, however, I will treat Dancy as a Propositionalist about Grounds. Exegetically speaking, this is of course not quite fair. But as far as I see, it makes no difference, systematically speaking, at least for my purposes. That is my justification for doing so.



(cf. Dancy, 2002, pp. 102-112; Darwall, 1983, p. 32; Hyman, 1999, p. 443; Stout, 2009, pp. 55–56).

This leaves us with Factualism about Grounds and Propositionalism about Grounds. Above, I said that when S  $\Phi$ 's on a ground, what plays the role of her ground is something that motivates her to  $\Phi$  because she takes it to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing. Given that what S takes to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing can be what in fact does speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing, and that things that speak in favor of actions are facts (cf. part I), it follows that it is possible that what plays the role of a ground is a fact (a fact that is a reason). But from the possibility that what plays the role of a ground is a fact (that is a reason), it does of course not follow that being a fact (and thus, *a fortiori*, being a reason) is essential to being able to play the role of a ground. What plays the role of a ground is something that the agent takes to be a reason for her to act. And while understood *de dicto*, what we take to be reasons for us to act are facts that are reasons, what is taken by us to be a reason (i.e. what we take to be a reason, understood *de re*), when we take it that some particular fact is a reason for us to act, need neither be a reason, nor need it even be a fact. Knowing that P, I can take P to be a reason for me to  $\Phi$ , even if P is not a reason for me to  $\Phi$ . For I can be mistaken about the normative significance of P. In such a case, what is taken by me to be a reason is a fact, but not a reason. And believing that P, I can take P to be a reason for me to  $\Phi$ , even if my belief is mistaken, that is, even if P is not a fact. In such a case, what is taken by me to be a reason is not even a fact, and, thus, *a fortiori*, also not a reason. In such a case, what is taken by me to be a reason is merely something that I believe, i.e. a proposition (or a consideration, as I will also put it, following established practice). And thus, for something to be able to play the role of a ground, it suffices that it is a proposition; it is not necessary that that

proposition is true, let alone that it is a reason. This shows us, in one breath, that Factualism about Grounds is false, and that Propositionalism about Grounds is true.

In part I, I said that what plays the role of a reason are true propositions, or facts. I have just said that what plays the role of a ground are propositions. This difference also comes out when we consider retrospective reactions. Let us say that at  $t_1$ , S believes that P, takes it that P is a reason for her to  $\Phi$ , and  $\Phi$ 's, where what motivates her to  $\Phi$  is P, due to her taking it to be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ . Now let us say that P is false, and that at  $t_2$ , S comes to see that P is false. Looking back, S would retreat from any claims to the effect that there was a reason for her to  $\Phi$ . She might say that at the time, she *took* there to be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ , but that (as she now sees) she was mistaken therein. But she would not say that what motivated her at  $t_1$  was not what she at the time took to be what motivated her; although she would of course concede that she had been mistaken about the *status* of what motivated her. Also, she *might* come to realize that at the time, she had been mistaken about what motivated her, but what could show her that could not be the mere fact that at the time, she was mistaken about the facts.

I believe that any lingering resistance to the idea that considerations are what play the role of grounds, in the sense defined above, is due to the idea that grounds are what explain actions and that what explains actions can only be truths. For if grounds are what explain actions, and what explains actions can only be truths, then it would seem that considerations are unsuited to be grounds, as considerations need not be truths. In the next and final part, I will address that issue, and argue that it is a mistake to think that grounds are what

explain actions. As I will argue, grounds figure or feature in explanations, but are not explanantia.

#### 1.4 Two Kinds of Propositionalism About Grounds

One might think that my dismissal of Psychologism About Grounds was too cursory. For maybe saying that mental states are grounds is just a loose way of saying that propositions about mental states are grounds. That is to say, the distinction between Psychologism About Grounds and Propositionalism About Grounds might be understood not so much as a distinction of *category*, but rather, as a distinction of *content*. This would give us the following two options:

(Psychologistic Propositionalism About Grounds) To specify the ground on which  $S \Phi$ s is to specify a proposition *about S's mind* that S believes.

(Non-Psychologistic Propositionalism About Grounds) To specify the ground on which  $S \Phi$ s is to specify a proposition *of whatever content* that S believes.

Now, I am not aware of anyone actually defending Psychologistic Propositionalism About Grounds. And that does not seem particularly astonishing. For grounds are considerations that motivate an agent to do something because she takes them to be reasons for her to so act. Hence, Psychologistic Propositionalism About Grounds is the view that we can be motivated only by (apparent) facts about our own mind. And that seems just wrong. As Michael Smith puts it, such a view

fl[ies] in the face of the facts. The considerations that motivate us are only rarely, if ever, considerations about our own psychology. (Smith, 2003, p. 151)

It is often argued that there are cases in which the considerations that motivate us are considerations about our own mind. However, that if we consider examples of such cases, we see that that cannot be how it normally is. For future reference, let me term that argument the Argument from Unusual Cases. Consider someone who wants to kill his parents. Such a person may reflect on that fact about his own psychology, conclude that he better seek out professional help, and consequentially go ahead and seek out such help. About such a person, we can say that what played the role of his ground was a consideration about his own mind. If, however, he goes ahead and kills his parents, then the considerations that played the role of his ground (if indeed his action was an action done on a ground) will have been a considerations about parents, not a consideration about his desires vis-à-vis them (cf. Anscombe, 1989, p. 381). Or consider someone who believes that there are pink rats living in her shoes. Such a person may call a psychiatrist. If that is what she does, then (among) the considerations that motivated her will have been a fact about her psychology: that she has this persistent belief that just will not go away.<sup>32</sup> But she might call an exterminator, and in such a case, there will be no considerations about her psychology among the considerations that motivated her. For what, in her view, will have spoken in favor of calling an exterminator will not have been that she *believes* that there are rats living in her shoes, but that (as she believes) there *are* rats living in her shoes (cf. Dancy, 2002, p. 125; Hyman, 1999, p. 444).

Some remarks about the Argument from Unusual Cases are in order. First, while it is most often given in terms of what one might call psychiatrist-

---

<sup>32</sup> We can debate about to what extent we still want to call the state of mind she is in a *belief*. But that is incidental to the example.

cases (cf. also Alvarez, 2016), there are also other cases that do not depend on the agent's not 'really' believing or desiring, i.e. not holding what she believes true, and not taking to be desirable what she desires. Dancy (2002, p. 124) discusses the case of someone who believes that the cliff in front of him is crumbly, and imagines that she may keep away from it on grounds of what she believes, namely, that it is crumbly, and also on grounds of her believing that it is crumbly. For it may be that she suspects that, believing as she does, she would become very nervous, were she to go near the cliff, and, thus, would be likely to misstep. Therefore, she may be motivated to keep away from the cliff not only by a consideration about the cliff, but also by a consideration about her own mind.<sup>33</sup> Also, there may be cases of what one might call indirect motivation: Someone might be motivated to do something by a consideration about her own mind, not because she takes it that her being in some particular state of mind speaks in favor of doing what she is motivated to do (as in the cases discussed above), but rather, because she takes that particular state of mind to be an *indication* that the world is in a certain way, a way that favors doing what she is motivated to do. Thomson constructs such a case:

Suppose that Charles has loved Dora for years, but his suit had always seemed hopeless. He is now suddenly struck by the thought that Dora loves him too. He concludes – from the very fact that he now believes she does – that there must have been some evidence of her love for him in her past behavior, evidence that was unrecognized by him at the time, and is still unclear to him now. (Thomson, 2003, pp. 24–5)

---

<sup>33</sup> For another non-psychiatrist case, cf. Hacker (2009, p. 88).

As Thomson observes, cases like the case of Charles seem possible, but they are surely unusual. We cannot take things generally to be like that.

Secondly, and more important than those other kinds of examples just noted, is the prevention of possible misunderstandings of the argument. One might think that *being motivated* to do something is a matter of being in certain mental states. Consequently, one might think that as being motivated is a matter of being in a certain mental state, only mental states can motivate one to act. Recall the example of the person who believes that there are rats living in her shoes. One might think that both in the case in which she seeks out professional help and in the case in which she calls an exterminator, what motivates her to perform those respective actions is a mental state: in the former case, the second-order state of believing that she believes that there are rats in her shoes, and in the latter case, the first-order belief that there are rats living in her shoes. Now, that might or might not be true. However, even if it is true, it would not show us that only considerations about one's own mind can play the role of grounds. For the sense in which considerations can be said to *motivate* is not the sense in which mental states can be said to *motivate*. Being motivated by a consideration might amount to being in a certain mental state, and consequently, that mental state can *also* be said to motivate – but when one says that mental states motivate, one evidentially is using the term 'motivate' in a different sense than when one says that propositions or considerations can motivate; motivating states (as we might call them) do not motivate because we take them to favor (cf. Dancy, 2002, p. 14; Garrard & McNaughton, 1998, p. 53; Parfit, 2011, p. 37, endnote). That is, it is one thing to say that being motivated to  $\Phi$  by X is a matter of being in certain mental states, and quite another thing to say that X can only be (a consideration about) a mental state.

Thirdly, let me note that I have all along been relying on what part I argued for, namely, that what we take to be normative reasons are, at least in normal cases, not facts about our own mind, but rather, facts about the world around us. For if it were the case that what we take to be normative reasons were only facts about our own mind, it would of course follow that what plays the role of a ground could also only be considerations about our own mind. That is, from a Psychologistic conception of normative reasons one can arrive, via the Principle of Rational Motivation, at a Psychologistic conception of grounds. But part I, I hope, has shown that normative reasons are not generally facts about our own mind.

So, of the two options distinguished in this section, we should clearly opt for the latter: for what I called Non-Psychologistic Propositionalism about Grounds. Note, however, that a Non-Psychologistic Propositionalist about Grounds does not hold that the considerations that motivate can *never* be considerations about one's own mind, she merely holds that the relevant considerations are *not restricted* to such consideration.

### **1.5 Psychologized Ways of Talking About Non-Psychologistic Grounds**

It is one thing to ask what plays the role of a ground. It is another to ask how we *talk* about agents acting on grounds. We have just seen that psychological states do not play the role of a ground, and that considerations about one's own psychological states only rarely play the role of a ground. But that does not mean that psychological vocabulary need only rarely figure in our talk about agents acting on grounds. Importantly, forms of expression that employ psychological terms are not reserved for Psychologists about Grounds. The

psychological terms in such forms of expression can be interpreted as performing other functions than referring to whatever it is that plays the role of a ground.

Given that S  $\Phi$ ed on grounds of P, it seems fine to say not only:

(1) "S  $\Phi$ ed on grounds of P",

or, with equivalent meaning (at least with regard to what S's ground was):

(2) "S  $\Phi$ ed because P",

but also to say things like

(3) "S  $\Phi$ ed because she *believed* that P".

Let me first say something about the relation between (1) and (2), and then something about the relation between (1)/(2) and (3).

(2) is a very general form of expression, instances of which are, say,

(4) "Samantha bit a policeman because she was drunk",

and

(5) "Samantha took out an umbrella because it was raining".

It is very hard to hear (4) as a way of expressing the thought that Sam took it that she was drunk, took that supposed fact to be a reason to bite a policeman, and was motivated to bite a policeman by the supposed fact that she was drunk, due to taking it to be a reason for her to bite a policeman, i.e. it is very hard to hear (4) as a manner of expressing *on what grounds* Sam bit a policeman. For it would be very odd for someone to take it that the (supposed) fact that she is drunk is a reason to bite a policeman. Most naturally, (4) is heard as a decisively non-rational explanation of why Sam bit a policeman. She was drunk, and people do all sorts of stupid things when they are drunk. (Cf. Hyman, 2015, chap. 6.3.) Things are different, however, with (5). (5) is most naturally taken as equivalent in meaning, at least with regard to what Sam's ground was, with



(6) “Sam took out an umbrella on the grounds that it is raining”.

Note that it may be that with employing (5), as opposed to employing (6), we take on an *additional* commitment, namely, a commitment to the *truth* of the consideration that functions as Sam’s ground. That is, maybe it is paradoxical to employ (5) in cases in which one thinks that it is not raining, as maybe, (5) conversationally implicates, or even implies, that it is raining (for claims to that effect, cf. e.g. Dancy, 2002, pp. 134–5; Sandis, 2013, para. 3; Smith, 1998, pp. 155–8).

Let me now turn to (3). (3) can be understood as a statement to the effect that S’s ground was a consideration about her own mind, but it need not be so understood. Using brackets to indicate the part of the statement that specifies the ground on which S  $\Phi$ ed, we can distinguish between two readings of (3), namely,

(7) “S  $\Phi$ ed because (she believed that P)”,

and

(8) “S  $\Phi$ ed because she believed (that P)”.

(7) is the mold into which the special cases discussed in the foregoing section fit. Remember, for instance, the person who sought out a psychiatrist on grounds of believing that rats are living in her shoes. About her, we can say (using the convention just introduced) that she sought out a psychiatrist “because (she believed that rats are living in her shoes)”. But let us say that she did not seek out a psychiatrist, but called Rentokill. We can still say that she did what she did “because she believed that rats are living in her shoes”, but what we thereby will be saying is that she did what she did “because she believed (that rats are living in her shoes)”.

When is it apt to employ (8), as opposed to (2), i.e. when is it apt to use the psychologizing form? I suggested above that forms of expression like (2) might commit one to the view that the ground at issue was a truth. Accordingly, (8) can be understood as a form of expression that cancels any such commitment. If that is true, then it is apt to employ (8) in cases in which one takes it that S is mistaken about P, or in which one wants to remain neutral with regard to whether P. Let us say that Sam mistakenly believes that it is raining, and on grounds of what she believes, picks up an umbrella on her way out. What I have just suggested helps explain why Sam, when questioned, would not say that she is picking up an umbrella because she believes that it is raining, but because it is raining. For Sam, of course, stands firm in her belief that it is raining; otherwise she would not pick up her umbrella on her way out. Now let us say that as soon as she steps out onto the street, she realizes that it is not raining. What I have just suggested also helps explain why retrospectively, Sam would not say that she picked up an umbrella on her way out because it was raining, but rather, that she would say that she did so because she believed (that it was raining). For now knowing that it is not raining, Sam would no longer want to take on any commitment to the effect that it is raining. It also helps explain why an onlooker who knows all along that it is not raining would say that Sam is picking up an umbrella because she believes that it is raining, and not because it is raining. Knowing all along that Sam's belief is mistaken, the onlooker does not want to take on any commitment to the effect that it is raining. The point I want to make, however, does not concern the intricacies of conversational implicatures. The point I want to make is merely that the ubiquitousness of psychological vocabulary does not imply the ubiquitousness of psychological grounds.

## 1.5 Reduction and Explanation

Above, I argued that the Principle of Rational Motivation, which we can now understand as the view that rational agents are such that they can act on considerations, is neutral with regard to a host of contested philosophical issues. I now want to note two further issues about which the Principle of Rational Motivation is neutral, namely, it is neutral with regard to the necessity and feasibility of a reductive account of acting on a ground, and it is silent on the question what explains someone's action when she acts on a ground. Having these issues on the table will be relevant in what I go on to say below.

Let me begin with the question about reduction. We can give an account of acting on a ground, in the manner in which I did it above. But once we have clarified the notion of acting on a ground, we can also raise the question whether we can (or need to) say what it is to act on a ground in other, allegedly more basic, terms. That is, we can raise the question whether a non-circular account of the form

*What it is for S to  $\Phi$  on grounds of P is \_\_\_*

is forthcoming. Reductivists (e.g. Davis, 2005; Setiya, 2007; Smith, 2000; Velleman, 2000) hold that such an account is forthcoming, and are working towards providing such an account. Davis, for instance, tells us that

[o]nce we have accepted the fact that people act for reasons, we can raise the following question: What is it to act for a reason? In particular, what is it for Mary to act for the reason that there is not enough light? She could have had any number of reasons, or none at all. What made that her reason? What made that her reason for flipping the switch rather than some of the other things she was doing? My answer in brief

is that what it is to act for a reason is for the action to result in a certain way from a belief and a (volitive) desire. (Davis, 2005, pp. 68–9)<sup>34</sup>

That is, Davis suggests (following Davidson, 1980) that we can say what it is for someone to act on grounds of some consideration in terms of her representing that consideration in a manner that is efficacious with regard to her acting as she is acting. Note, importantly, that a Reductivist account of acting on a ground that holds that, say, what it is to act on a ground is “for the action to result in a certain way from a belief and a (volitive) desire”, is, as such, silent on what plays the role of a ground. Notably, it is compatible with what I above showed to be correct, namely, Non-Psychologistic Propositionalism about Grounds. Here is Setiya:

[T]he best way to think about the belief-desire model of acting for reasons is not as the claim that our reasons for acting are really beliefs and desires, but as an attempt to say what it is to act for a reason (where the reason is a putative fact) in causal-psychological terms. It is, in effect, a reductive metaphysical account of “acting because *p*” or “acting for the reason that *p*” – *not* a rejection of that common-sense idiom. (Setiya, 2007, p. 30)<sup>35</sup>

Non-Reductivists (e.g. Dancy 2002; Hacker 2009) hold that no such account is forthcoming, and the work they do amounts to clarifying the idea of  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of *P* by *relating* it to other concepts (like, say, the concept of knowledge, or the concept of a normative reason, and so on), as opposed to *reducing* it to other concepts. Here, for instance, is Dancy:

---

<sup>34</sup> Here, ‘acting for a reason’ is to be understood as acting on a ground.

<sup>35</sup> See the foregoing note.

[T]he 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 a difference in causal role .... It is 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. This is admittedly not very informative, since we have to allow that we have offered no analysis or philosophical account of the 'in the light of' relation. I suspect, however, that no such analysis or account is available to be given, without therefore supposing that this has any tendency to show that the relation concerned does not exist. It is what it is, and not another thing; and if it cannot be analyzed, so much the worse for the more global pretensions of analysis. (Dancy, 2002, p. 163)

The Principle of Rational Motivation, as such, is neutral with regard to the issue of reduction. I will not attempt to take a stand on that issue. I take it that if what I say is acceptable, it is acceptable to both Reductivists and to Non-Reductivists, for also a Reductivist has to get clear on what she wants to reduce before she can attempt to do so.

Let me now turn to explaining. Giving an account, or a theory, of acting on a ground – whether it is a reductive or a non-reductive one – amounts to *explaining* acting on a ground, in one sense of 'explaining'. But explaining acting on a ground, in the sense of giving a theory or account of acting on a ground, is not the same thing as explaining why some particular agent performed some particular action. Giving a theory or account of acting on a ground (or of values, or normativity, or perception, or whatever) is something that we do in our capacity as philosophers. Accordingly, one might call such explanations

Philosopher's Explanations, or the sense of 'explanation' the philosophical sense. But explaining why some particular agent performed some particular action is something that we do as agents when confronted with the actions of other agents. Elisabeth is operating the pump. Donald is flipping the switch. You may wonder why Elisabeth and Donald are doing what they are doing. That is, you might want an *explanation* of their respective actions. But when you want an explanation of their respective behaviors, you will not want a theory of action, you will want to learn something that renders their actions intelligible in some respect, say, as done with a certain end in view, or as done on a certain ground. As these are the kinds of explanations that we, as agents, seek of one another, one might call such explanations Agent's Explanations, and the sense of 'explanation' the agential sense. Now, of course, as philosophers, we can also give an account or a theory of Agent's Explanations. But such account or theory (which we might call a theory of action-explanation) is something other than an account or theory of acting on a ground (which we might call a theory of action).<sup>36</sup>

Above, I introduced the notion of rational motivation, or acting on a ground, in a way that is independent of any theory of action-explanation. That is, given just what I say about rational motivation, it might turn out that what rationally motivates us is also what explains our actions, or does so under certain conditions, but it might turn out that what rationally motivates us and

---

<sup>36</sup> That is not to say that those two things might not be intimately related. Anscombe (2000), for instance, seems to have held that we can give a theory of intentional action by way of giving a theory of action-explanation. Conversely, one might hold that a theory of action-explanation needs to be informed by a theory of what it is to act intentionally. See also my remarks on Smith in II.2.1 below.

what explains our actions are two quite different things. I will come to that issue in the next part. I will argue that what rationally motivates us is not what explains our actions. But that is a substantial result. It is important to point out that no account of action-explanation is built into the notion of rational motivation. As we will see, that is one of the merits of the notion of rational motivation that I have introduced.

## **2. The Psychologism-Debate**

So far, I have introduced the concept of a normative reason, and the concept of a ground. Now, in the literature, talk about ‘motivating reasons’ (or ‘reasons for which’) abounds. A casual reader gets the impression that there is grand-scale disagreement about the nature of motivating reasons: disagreement about whether they are mental states, or maybe facts about mental states, or whether they are propositions (that are not restricted to propositions about mental states), or maybe facts (that are not restricted to facts about mental states) – proponents of the former view being called Psychologists and proponents of the latter view being called Non-Psychologists (or Anti-Psychologists). Call this the Psychologism-Debate about Motivating Reasons (or the Psychologism-Debate, for short). Here are two examples of the way in which Psychologism and Non-Psychologism are contrasted: In a typical passage (that is, in a passage typical to contemporary theorizing about reasons), Maria Alvarez tells us that

[o]n the one hand, we have the psychological conception, which says that someone’s reason for acting is her believing something. On the other hand, we have the non-psychological view, which holds that the reason is what the agent believes, not her believing it. For instance, if I

buy a magazine because I believe it contains the TV listings for the week, according to the psychological conception my reason for buying the magazine is *that I believe* (or *my believing*) that it contains the TV listings; while according to the non-psychological conception it is *that it contains the TV listings*. (Alvarez, 2010, pp. 129–30)

Similarly, James Pryor takes it that we can sensibly ask:

[I]f you're aware that your secretary plans to expose you, and you resign to avoid a scandal, what is your reason for resigning? ... Is your reason *the fact* that your secretary plans to expose you? ... Or are reasons rather *attitudes*? Are your reasons for resigning *your belief* that your secretary plans to expose you, and *your desire* to avoid a scandal? ... Or are reasons *propositions*? (Pryor, 2007, p. 217)

The stage is set in like manner by many other authors (cf. e.g. Bittner, 2001; Dancy 2002; Gibbons, 2010; Hacker, 2009; Mayr, 2011; Miller, 2008; O'Brien, 2015; Stout, 2009; Stoutland, 2007; Turri, 2009; Wiland, 2012). Who is right? Is the Psychologist right, or is the Non-Psychologist right? The problem, as I see it, is that it is not really clear what the controversy is supposed to be about. The obvious rejoinder is: it is a controversy about motivating reasons. But what I mean is: it is not clear what motivating reasons are. By this, I do not mean: it is not clear what they are *ontologically speaking*. For that is just what the controversy seems to be about: whether they are mental states, or propositions, or maybe facts. Rather, what I mean is: it is not clear what *the relevant concept* of a 'motivating reason' is. Specifically, it is not clear whether both (or all) sides are using the term 'motivating reason' to signify the self-same concept. To put it differently, it is not clear whether both (or all) sides agree on what role the things that they call 'motivating reasons' play, and then



disagree about what is best suited to play that role, or whether seemingly contradictory claims about motivating reasons are actually compatible claims about things playing quite different roles.

I will start out by distinguish various sense of the term ‘motivating reason’ that we find in the literature, and then show why one might think that Psychologists and Non-Psychologists are talking cross-purpose. I will conclude by suggesting that under the assumption that what plays the role of a ground also is an explanans, we can conceive of the debate as substantial after all.

## **2.1 Varieties of Motivating Reasons**

In part I, I talked about facts that speak in favor of actions, and I called them *reasons*. Specifically, I called them *normative reasons*. What the qualification ‘normative’ signifies is that facts that speak in favor of actions are in focus *with regard to their being what we seek to get at when thinking about what we and others should do*.

Now, some authors (e.g. Alvarez, 2010) hold that *those same favoring facts* can also be in a different kind of focus, namely, that they can be in focus when we are attempting to *explain* why someone did what she did. They say that when an agent takes a certain fact to be a reason for a certain course of action, and performs that action because she is motivated to do so by that reason, we can describe what motivates her as a ‘motivating reason’. The qualification ‘motivating’, in that usage, signifies that that fact is in focus with regard to its being caught up in the right kind of way (i.e. in the way that the Principle of Rational Motivation describes) in the agent’s exercise of rational agency. Alvarez writes:

[M]otivating reasons are true beliefs, that is, the things that we believe that are true – and since, if the belief that p is true, it follows that it is the case that p and therefore that it is a fact that p, we can also conclude that the reasons that motivate us to act are truths or facts. (Alvarez, 2010, 163)

It follows that false considerations, when they play the role of a ground, are not motivating *reasons*, although they are motivating *considerations* (or grounds, in our terminology):

[S]omeone who acts on a false belief acts for no reason ... for the false belief is not a motivating *reason* even though ... it is a motivating consideration. (Alvarez, 2010, p. 141)

'Motivating reasons', in that usage of the term, are thus a *subclass* of what I call grounds. When S believes that P, takes it that P favors that she  $\Phi$ , and is accordingly motivated to  $\Phi$  by what she believes, i.e. P, then P is what plays the role of a ground. And if the ground *is* normative reason, then – according to the terminological convention at issue – we can *call* her ground a *motivating* reason. Put in a slogan: motivating reasons are normative reasons that motivate.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Susanne Mantel tells us that the view that “[b]eing a motivating reason is being a normative reason that motivates” cannot be correct, “because an agent can act for a motivating reason without being motivated by a normative reason ... For example, I may go to the station because I mistakenly believe that my train is leaving although the station is closed. *Surely* I go to the station for a motivating reason, but this motivating reason cannot be a normative reason.” (Mantel, 2014, p. 5; my emphasis) But why is it ‘sure’ that Susanne “goes to the station for a motivating reason”? It all depends on what is meant by ‘motivating reason’. If by ‘motivating reason’, one means ‘ground’, then I go to the station for a motivating reason. There is nothing wrong with using the term like that. But there is also nothing wrong with emphasizing the ‘reason’-part in ‘motivating reason’ and reserving the term for cases in which the grounds on

Other authors – e.g. Dancy (2002) – are happy to employ the term ‘motivating reason’ more broadly. For them, *all* grounds are motivating reasons. ‘Motivating reason’, on that usage, is just another term for ground:

When someone does something, there will (normally) be some considerations in the light of which he acted – the reasons for which he did what he did. ... [N]ormally there will be, for each action, the reasons in the light of which the agent did that action, which we can think of as what persuaded him to do it. When we think in terms of reasons in this way, we think of them as *motivating*. The consideration that motivated the agent was his reason for doing what he did. ... The consideration in the light of which someone acted as he did need not have been a very good reason; what he did may have been a pretty silly thing to do, *with little or nothing actually to be said in its favour*. (Dancy, 2002, pp. 1–2; my emphasis)

‘Motivating reason’, in this usage of the term, does not so much mean ‘normative reason that motivates’, but rather, ‘motivator that motivates because it is taken to be a normative reason’. For, as Dancy says, you can act for a motivating reason even if there is “nothing actually to be said in ... favour” of doing what you are doing.

Once we are clear on the distinction between grounds and normative reasons, it does not really seem to matter how we use the term ‘motivating reason’: whether we use it interchangeably with grounds, or whether we use it only for grounds that are what they purport to be, namely, normative reasons.

---

which we act are reasons (and not just apparent reasons), and, thus, denying that Susanne goes to the station for a motivating *reason*.

However, the term 'motivating reason' is also used in (at least) two further ways. For some authors, the notion of a 'motivating reason' is the notion of an *explanantia* that is such as to explain the action by way of "making sense" of it. According to Wallace, for instance,

[t]he motivating reason – the consideration we cite in the perspective of explanation, to make sense of what the agent has already done – is the agent's seeing [a] normative consideration as counting in favor of the action performed (Wallace, 2003, p. 435)<sup>38</sup>

'Motivating reasons', as he uses the term here, are evidently not grounds. For grounds, according to how I defined the term, are what Wallace is talking about when he talks about the "normative considerations" that the agent sees as "counting in favor of the action performed". Wallace's 'motivating reasons', however, are not *what the agent sees* as counting in favor of the action performed. They are *her seeing* a normative consideration as counting in favor of the action performed. And as her seeing a normative consideration as counting in favor of the action performed is what, according to Wallace, we "cite in the perspective of explanation, to make sense of what the agent has ... done", 'motivating reasons', as he uses the term, are *explanantia* that are such as to "make sense" of actions, they are not motivators.

There is yet another sense in which the term 'motivating reason' is used. Above, I quoted Setiya, who suggests that

---

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also: "What are called 'motivating reasons' are ... explanations of action in terms of reasons in the normative sense – as I have put it, psychological explanations that render intelligible agents' normative understanding of the action they were performing." (Wallace, 2003, p. 435)

the best way to think about the belief-desire model of acting for reasons is ... as an attempt to say what it is to act for a reason ... in causal-psychological terms. (Setiya, 2007, p. 30)

Some authors – notably, Michael Smith – use the term ‘motivating reason’ to talk about the causally efficacious belief/desire-pair that figure in their account of what it is to act on a ground. Let me explain. Smith considers the situation in which he types some words. He writes:

In deciding whether or not to type these words I reflect on certain facts: that it would be desirable to write a book and that I can do so by typing these words. These are among the considerations I actually take into account in deciding what to do before I do it; they give my reasons; they constitute my rational justification. ... [T]hese considerations constitute my *normative reasons* for doing what I do, at least as these reasons appear to me. (Smith, 2000, p. 131)

Smith here seems to be talking about grounds (or anyway, about something resembling grounds) when he talks about ‘considerations one takes into account in deciding what to do’, but he does not call those considerations ‘motivating reasons’. Rather, he calls them ‘the agent’s normative reasons’, presumably because they are taken (albeit maybe mistakenly) to be normative reasons. What then about his notion of a ‘motivating reason’? As Smith sees it, what it is for S to  $\Phi$  on grounds of P is, roughly, that the following happens:

S takes P to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing  $\rightarrow$  S desires to  $\Phi$  (and has beliefs about how to go about in order to  $\Phi$ )  $\rightarrow$  S  $\Phi$ 's,

where the arrow signifies a causal relation (cf. Smith, 2000, chap 4–5). And what he calls ‘motivating reasons’ are the belief/desire-pairs that figure in the

second link of this causal chain leading from judgment to action. Thus, he writes that

[m]otivating reasons would seem to be *psychological states* that play a certain explanatory role in producing action (Smith, 2000, p. 96).

Contrast this notion of a motivating reasons with Wallace's notion. According to Wallace, psychological facts explain actions, in that they are what we (allegedly) need to know in order to *make sense* of the action. According to Smith, however, psychological states explain actions in that they are (at least part of) what *produce* actions. While Wallace is giving an account of what explains actions, Smith is giving an account of what actions are.<sup>39</sup>

The view that motivating reasons are psychological states is often credited to Davidson;<sup>40</sup> and, thus, it seems in order to say some words on his view. Notably, Davidson himself does not use the term 'motivating reason'. But he does talk about belief/desire-pairs being reasons, or 'primary reasons'. He holds that

*R* is a primary reason why an agent performed the action *A* under the description *d* only if *R* consists of a pro attitude of the agent towards

---

<sup>39</sup> However, it is a small step from an account to the effect that what actions are is: events caused by belief/desire-pairs, to an account to the effect that what explains actions, in the sense of making them intelligible, are such belief/desire-pairs.

<sup>40</sup> Here is Alvarez: "Following Davidson, most philosophers today maintain that a person's reason for acting is a combination of a belief and a desire. Belief and desire, in turn, are thought of as mental states with contents that can be expressed propositionally: Tom believes *that apples are healthy*; Henry desires *that there are eggs for breakfast*. So reasons are states of belief and desire with propositional contents. Or so it is said. ... In recent years, however, there has been growing dissatisfaction with this conception of reasons. The dissatisfaction is, I think, well founded and it calls for a wholesale rethinking of the nature of our reasons for acting." (Alvarez, 2010, p. 2)

actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that *A*, under the description *d*, has that property (Davidson, 1980, p. 5), and, famously, that

[a] primary reason for an action is its cause. (Davidson, 1980, p. 12)

But thereby, he is not talking about grounds. He does have something similar to what I call grounds in view. He writes that

[c]orresponding to the belief and attitude of a primary reason for an action, we can always construct (with a little ingenuity) the premises of a syllogism from which it follows that the action has some (as Anscombe calls it) 'desirability characteristic'. (Davidson, 1980, p. 9)

At least roughly, those *premises*, and not the belief/desire-pair, are the agent's grounds. Talking, as he does, about belief-desire-pairs causing events, thereby rendering them intentional actions, can be understood as an attempt to give a reductive account of acting on premises, or grounds.

The upshot of this little excursion is that there are (at least) three things that, in the literature, the term 'motivating reason' is used to signify:

- A. Grounds
  - a. All grounds (e.g. Dancy, 2002)
  - b. Those grounds that are normative reasons (e.g. Alvarez, 2010)
- B. Explanantia of action-explanations (e.g. Wallace, 2003)
- C. Psychological states that figure in a reductive account of what it is to act on a ground (e.g. Smith, 2000)

With this disambiguation at hand, let me return to the Psychologism-Debate.

## 2.2 Defusing the Psychologism-Debate

At the outset of this chapter, I asked: what is the Psychologism-Debate actually a debate about? What, that is, is the relevant notion of a 'motivating reason' in terms of which the debate should be framed?

Remember the two arguments I presented above: the Argument from the Wrong Kind that is directed against State-Psychologism about Grounds, and the Argument from Unusual Cases that is directed against Psychologistic Propositionalism about Grounds. Note that both arguments are arguments against a certain view about what plays the role *of a ground*: given that they are successful (and I believe that they are), they show that what plays the role of a ground is neither a psychological state, nor, at least not in general, a consideration about a psychological state. But they do not, or at least not directly, address a view to the effect that explanantia are psychological states, or facts about psychological states. Nor do they address a view to the effect that a reductive account of acting on a ground in terms of psychological states and their causal role should be given. Taking either one of those two arguments to refute either one of those two views would seem to be to commit an *ignoratio elenchi*.

Jonathan Dancy is one of the most valiant contemporary proponents of the Non-Psychologistic side of the Psychologism-Debate (indeed he might be seen as responsible, at least in part, for there being such a debate). It is noteworthy that our two arguments are among the two main arguments he gives against Psychologism. The Argument from the Wrong Kind figures in Dancy (2002, chap. 5), and the Argument from Unusual Cases figures in Dancy (2002, chap. 6). This shows that, at least as he understands the Psychologism-



Debate, it is a debate about what plays the role of a ground, i.e. about what is such as to be able to motivate an agent to  $\Phi$  due to her taking it to favor that she  $\Phi$ 's.

Many other contributions to the Psychologism-Debate also presuppose all along that both sides are talking about what plays the role of a ground when they are talking about motivating reasons. Here is, for instance, Alvarez:

In general ... what seems to me to make my action right or appropriate is what I believe, not my believing it. Consider an example. Suppose that I give my cousin some money because I believe what he tells me, namely, that he needs it to pay his rent. It would seem that what motivates me to give him the money is that he needs it: it is *that* that seems to me to make the action of giving him money right or appropriate and not *my believing* that he needs it. ... So it seems that we can conclude that a motivating reason is, typically, what the agent believes and not his believing it. And this is what the non-psychological conception says motivating reasons are. (Alvarez, 2010, pp. 131–132)

This argument presupposes that motivating reasons are things that motivate by virtue of their appearing, to the agent, to be facts that favor; it presupposes, that is, that motivating reasons are grounds. The Argument from Unusual Cases faulted Psychologism for treating unusual cases as the only kinds of cases there are. Alvarez here appeals directly to usual cases, to what kinds of things we usual take to speak in favor of, say, giving our cousins some money. If her argument is effective, it is effective only against those that are talking about *grounds*, but are denying that what plays the role of a ground can be (and for the most part is) a consideration that is not a consideration about one's own mind.

Or consider the following argument, given by Stout:

For  $R$  to be a motivating reason for  $S$  to  $\Phi$   $R$  must be  $S$ 's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing.  $S$  must  $\Phi$  in the light of  $R$ .  $R$  must be a reason or consideration that motivates  $S$  to  $\Phi$ . For any of these conditions to be the case  $R$  must be a consideration that *is taken by  $S$*  to favour  $\Phi$ -ing. For  $R$  to be  $S$ 's motivating reason for  $\Phi$ -ing,  $R$  must be taken by  $S$  to be a *normative* reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. ... [But] [i]f motivating reasons must be potentially normative reasons, it cannot be the case that normative reasons are facts about the world and motivating reasons are only ever facts about the agent's psychological state. (Stout, 2009, pp. 55-56)

Like Alvarez, Stout is talking about grounds and showing us why grounds should not be conceived of Psychologically. Again, his argument is effective only against those who are talking about *grounds*, but are denying that what plays the role of a ground can be (and for the most part is) a consideration that is not a consideration about one's own mind

We saw above, however, that when Smith, following Davidson, says that motivating reasons are belief/desire-pairs, and that when Wallace says that motivating reasons are "the agent's seeing [a] normative consideration as counting in favor of the action performed", i.e. a normative belief, they are not talking about grounds. They are talking about explanantia, or about the psychological states figuring in a reductive account of acting on a ground, respectively. What they respectively say is completely compatible with the upshot of the Argument from the Wrong Kind and the Argument from Unusual Cases, namely, that grounds are neither psychological states nor facts about psychological states.

Consider, also, that when Wallace argues against Dancy's Non-Psychologistic view, he does not do that by way of arguing that, say, it is true after all that when we think about what favors what in an efficacious way, i.e. in a way that leads to action, our thinking is directed upon our own mind, and not upon the world around us (which is something that the Psychologists about Grounds would have to say). Rather, he argues that we need an account

that allows psychological states or facts to play a role in reason *explanations* across the board (Wallace, 2003, p. 430),

that is, he seems to be faulting his Non-Psychologistic opponent for her view about *explanantia*, not for her view about *grounds*.

This does not prove that the Psychologism-Debate rests on an equivocation. Nevertheless, it does strongly suggest that while the Non-Psychologists in the debate are talking about grounds, their alleged Psychologistic opponents are talking about something else, and that there seems to be disagreement only because unfortunately, both sides use the same term, i.e. 'motivating reason' (cf. Darwall, 2003; Davis, 2005; Mantel, 2016; Sandis, 2012; Setiya, 2011).

Note also that despite all the ink spilled on arguing against Psychologism about Grounds (in its 'Statist' form, or in its 'Propositionalist' form), there is a lack of defenders of Psychologism about Grounds.<sup>41</sup> And that is no surprise. For

---

<sup>41</sup> There are only two authors I know of who are self-avowed Psychologists about *grounds*: Gibbons (2010) and Turri (2009). As far as I see, Turri holds a reductive account of acting on a ground, according to which what it is to act on a ground is for one's mental states to stand in appropriate relations (note that Turri is talking about epistemic grounds, but takes what he says to carry over also to practical grounds, i.e. grounds on which we act, and discusses views on practical grounds like Dancy's). The mistake he makes seems to be to identify something that figures in the explanandum of the reduction (grounds) with

conceiving of grounds as either psychological states, or considerations about psychological states, seems so obviously wrong. We should not be misled when someone like Smith says (as I already quoted him saying in II.2.1) that “[m]otivating reasons would seem to be *psychological states*” (Smith, 2000, p. 96). For notably, the very same author is happy to admit that (as I have already quoted him saying in II.1.4)

[the view that] the considerations that motivate ... [are] considerations about our beliefs and desires ... or considerations about our beliefs ..., as Dancy rightly points out, ... fl[ies] in the face of the facts. The considerations that motivate us are only rarely, if ever, considerations about our own psychology. (Smith, 2003, p. 151)

### 2.3 A Debate After All

But maybe that conclusion is too hasty. I have just said that the Non-Psychologists about Motivating Reasons are talking about *grounds* when they use the term ‘motivating reason’ (the kinds of arguments they give show that), but that the Psychologists, when they use the term, are talking about *explanantia* of action-explanations, or about the psychological states figuring in a reductive account of acting on a ground, respectively. I suggested that that

---

something that figures in the explanans of the reduction (mental states standing in appropriate relations). Gibbons, on the other hand, holds a psychologistic view of grounds because he holds a psychologistic view of normative reasons. In part I, I discussed why I think what he calls ‘normative reasons’ are not normative reasons in the sense at issue here throughout. In brief, what he calls ‘normative reasons’ are not what figure in deliberation and advice, rather, they are what render actions reasonable or rational. And, thus, they are not (what I call) normative reasons.

shows that the two sides of the debate most likely are talking at cross-purposes. However, that is true *only if* the proponents of the debate agree that grounds are *not* explanantia.

For if one takes it that grounds *are* explanantia, and one takes it that explanantia are, say, always facts about psychological states, then one will have a real issue with someone who holds that grounds are only very rarely (only in ‘unusual cases’) facts about psychological states. Conversely, if one takes it that grounds are considerations, and one assumes that grounds are explanantia, one will have a real issue with someone who holds that explanantia are, say, psychological states. For while considerations can be about psychological states, they are not identical with them. So perhaps, the Psychologism-Debate does not just come down to equivocation after all. Given that it is agreed upon that grounds are explanantia, it really does get off the ground.

I started this part by introducing rational motivation in a way that is independent from any account of explanation. It is more common, however, to start with the notion of explanation, and to introduce rational motivators as a special kind of explanantia. Darwall (1983), for instance, distinguishes between

- (i) reasons why someone did something, or explanantia,
- (ii) a ‘person’s reason for acting’, or a motivating reason, and
- (iii) a reason for someone to do something, or a normative (or, as he puts it, justificatory) reason.

He then suggests that we can understand (ii) with the help of (i) and (iii). As he puts it, a ‘person’s reason for acting’ is a *subset* of explanantia of actions, namely, it is an explanantia that is such as to be regarded by the agent to be a normative (justificatory) reason:

Having said something about justificatory reasons [i.e. (iii)] we are now in a position to distinguish the subset of reasons of the first kind [i.e. (i)], purely explanatory reasons, that is comprised of *agents' reasons* for having acted, reasons of the second kind [i.e. (ii)]. The notion of an agent's reason brings the idea of justificatory reasons essentially into play. Something may be somebody's reason for having acted without having been a reason for him so to have acted (a reason of the second kind without being a reason of the third kind), but it must nonetheless be a consideration that *he regarded ...* as a reason for him so to act. (Darwall, 1983, p. 32)

On this view, it is built into the very definition of a rational motivator that it explains. And if this is how the term is introduced, it is no surprise that one has the Psychologism-Debate on one's hands.

In a similar spirit, Christian Miller tells us that

Motivating reasons ... [are] considerations in the light of which an agent can deliberate, decide, and intentionally act,

and suggests that

[a] motivating reason is ... supposed to play at least two functional roles. First, it is potentially *explanatory* of an action performed by an agent ... Similarly, motivating reasons are reasons by the agent's own lights, and thus from the agent's perspective serve to implicitly *justify* the action as well as the formation of mental states which bring it about. (Miller, 2008)

As he says that what he calls 'motivating reasons' are "reasons by the agent's own lights", and that they are "considerations in the light of which an agent can ... intentionally act", it seems safe to assume that he is talking about something

that plays the role of a ground. But right at the outset, he seems also to be assuming that what plays the role of a ground also plays the role of an explanans.

As we will see in the next part, one of the foremost proponents of Non-Psychologism – Jonathan Dancy – also takes it that grounds are explanantia. Dancy holds that when someone acts on grounds of P, what explains her acting as she does is P, the consideration that plays the role of a ground. As we will also see, this further assumption is what makes his Non-Psychologistic view vulnerable in a way that a mere Non-Psychologistic view of grounds is not. In part III, I will show that it is a mistake to assume that grounds are explanantia.

The upshot is that it would be better not to say that the Psychologism-Debate rests on an equivocation, but rather, that it rests on a false assumption, namely, the assumption that grounds are explanantia.

### **3. Summary**

In this part, I introduced the notion of acting on a ground. Someone acts on a ground, I said, just in case she is motivated to do what she does by something she takes to be a reason for her to so act, where she is motivated by what she takes to be a reason for her to so act because she takes it to be a reason for her to so act. Further, I argued that what plays the role of a ground are propositions or considerations. I then turned to the Psychologism-Debate about Motivating Reasons. I argued that as long as Non-Psychologists are talking about grounds, they are quite right in maintaining that (i) what plays the role of a ground is what the agent believes, and that (ii) the things that the agent believes that are such as to play the role of a ground are not restricted to things she believes

about herself. I also argued that the Non-Psychologist stands in conflict with the Psychologist only if the Non-Psychologist assumes that what the agent believes plays not only the role of a ground, but also the role of an explanans. For those that hold that what they call 'motivating reasons' are the agent's believing something, and not what she believes, are best conceived as making a claim about explanantia, and not as making a claim about grounds. In the next part, I will show that at least one prominent Non-Psychologist, Jonathan Dancy, does indeed take it that grounds are also explanantia, and as this leads to problems, at least in error-cases, it has led some to reject Non-Psychologism as such.



### **Part III: Explanation**

According to Non-Psychologists, when someone acts on a ground, her ground is something she believes, and not her believing something, or that she believes it. Now, call cases in which the relevant belief is false error-cases. Error-cases are generally taken to pose a problem for Non-Psychologists about Grounds. For it is thought that in error-cases, the Non-Psychologists must say that falsehoods explain. In this part, I will show that error-cases only pose a problem if one assumes that grounds are explanantia (III.1). I will also show that, contrary to what is usually assumed, the problem is not specifically a problem for the Non-Psychologist; there is at least one type of Psychologist with regard to whom the self-same problem arises (III.1.2). I will argue that we should let go of the assumption that grounds are explanantia, and conclude by giving an alternative account of explanantia (III.4). Before I can draw that conclusion, however, I will have to rule out that there are other ways out of the conundrum. I will discuss whether it might not be so bad after all to say that falsehoods explain (III.2), and I will discuss two ways in which one might think that giving error-cases a special treatment might do the trick (III.3).

Let me note right at the outset that 'explanation' is throughout to be understood in what I termed the agential sense (cf. II.1.5). That is to say, the view that what plays the role of a ground also plays the role of an explanans is the view that when S  $\Phi$ s on grounds of P, P itself is what renders S's  $\Phi$ ing intelligible (more on this in III.4).

## **1. Non-Psychologism and the Problem Posed by Error-Cases**

Error-cases are generally taken to pose a problem for Non-Psychologists about Grounds. In this chapter, I will clarify wherein the problem lies. In a first step, I will show that the problem is generated by adherence to three ideas: that grounds are what one believes, that grounds explain actions, and that only truths can explain. With regard to error-cases, one cannot consistently adhere to all those three claims. I will call this the Non-Psychologist's Problem. In a second step, I will show that the Non-Psychologist's Problem is actually just a species of a more general problem: what I will call the Propositionalist's Problem. It is, thus, a mistake to think that only Non-Psychologists about Grounds should worry about error-cases.

### **1.1 The Non-Psychologist's Problem**

Let us say that a certain bridge collapsed, and that someone attempts to explain why it collapsed by saying that what explains why it collapsed is that a truck drove into one of its pillars. Even if we do not know why the bridge did collapse, we can know that the given explanation cannot be correct, if we know that, say, at that point of time, there was no truck on the road, and that, thus, it cannot be true that a truck drove into one of the pillars of the bridge. Or let us say that someone takes out an umbrella on her way out, and someone else attempts to explain why that person took out an umbrella by saying that what explains why she took out an umbrella is that it is raining. Even if we do not know why that person did take out an umbrella, we can know that the given explanation cannot be correct if we know that it is not raining. And so on. This

clearly seems to show that we take it that falsehoods cannot explain anything, neither why some event occurred (like that a certain bridge collapsed), nor why someone performed some action (like taking out an umbrella on her way out). Call the idea that a condition on explanantia is that they are truths or facts 'Veridicalism about Explanantia' (with regard to explanations of actions, which is our topic here, cf. for this e.g. Alvarez, 2010; Hieronymi, 2011; Hyman, 2015, chap. 6; Littlejohn, 2012, chap. 4.5; Sandis, 2013).

Jonathan Dancy is one of the main contemporary proponents of a Non-Psychologistic view about grounds. His view is often criticized by pointing out that it goes against common sense in breaching Veridicalism about Explanantia. Lenman, for instance, writes that

[t]he biggest headache for anti-psychologists such as Dancy ... is furnished by cases where the agent's belief is *false*. ... [I]n cases where Angus punches his boss, believing mistakenly that he has been fired, it seems quite wrong to say he so acts because he has been fired. In such a case we surely must retreat to a psychologised explanation if we are to have a credible motivating reason explanation at all. (Lenman, 2011, para. 6)

And Wallace tells us that Dancy's view leads to a

strained understanding of cases in which people do not act for good normative reasons, because (for instance) things are not in fact as they take them to be. If Peter's investment decision did not turn out to lead to an increase in his pension, then it seems to me strange and misleading to explain his action [as Dancy suggests, *mf.*] by saying: "His reason for doing it is that it would increase his pension, though as it happened it failed to do so". (Wallace, 2003, p. 430)

Indeed, Dancy himself concedes that it (allegedly) is a consequence of Non-Psychologism about Grounds that it forces one to deny Veridicalism about Explanantia. As he writes:

The explanations we give when we specify the agent's reasons for acting [...] are unusual in being non-factive. What this means is that for the explanation to be correct as an explanation, it is not required that what is offered as *explanans* in fact be the case. (Dancy, 2004b, pp. 25–26)

[A] thing believed that is not the case can still explain an action (Dancy, 2002, p. 134)

One contentious aspect of the picture that has been developed here is that something that is not the case can explain an action. (Dancy, 2002, p. 137)

Of course it is odd to suppose that on occasion a nothing (something that is not the case) can explain a something (an action that was done). (Dancy, 2003a, p. 427)

But does Non-Psychologism about Grounds really commit one to denying Veridicalism about Explanantia? I argued above that Non-Psychologism about Grounds is the correct view. But if it had the consequence that Dancy, Lenman and Wallace seem to take it to have, that should give us a pause. It should lead us to reconsider Non-Psychologism about Grounds, despite everything that was said above.

Luckily, however, Non-Psychologism about Grounds, just as such, does not commit one to denying Veridicalism about Explanantia. According to the Non-Psychologist about Grounds, when Sam mistakenly believes that, say, it is raining, the false consideration that it is raining can nevertheless be what plays the role of a ground. Even if it is not raining, she can still act on grounds of the

consideration that it is raining; she may, for instance, pick up her umbrella on her way out, on grounds of the (false) consideration that it is raining. Accepting that commits one to implausibly holding that what explains her action is the falsehood that it is raining *only if* one presupposes that the grounds on which we act are what explain our actions. We saw above that some authors call grounds 'reasons'. And it is often said that it is something like a *truism* that reasons explain actions. But even if it is a truism that reasons explain actions, on some interpretation of 'reason', it is far from clear that *grounds* explain actions, even if grounds can be called 'reasons'. However, it is precisely that view – that grounds explain actions, or 'Explanatorism about Grounds', as I will call it – that commits a Non-Psychologist about Grounds to denying Veridicalism about Explanantia.

Let us take stock. Dancy sees himself forced to give up Veridicalism about Explanantia because he adheres to both Non-Psychologism about Grounds and Explanatorism about Grounds. Lenman and Wallace take it that giving up Veridicalism about Explanantia is quite untenable, and this appears to lead them to question Non-Psychologism about Grounds. Either move makes sense only if one assumes Explanatorism about Grounds. So there is a third option, besides biting the bullet of denying Veridicalism about Explanantia, or retreating from Non-Psychologism about Grounds. If we give up Explanatorism about Grounds, we can happily hold on both to Veridicalism about Explanantia and to Non-Psychologism about Grounds. According to Alvarez, for instance,

the reason that explains why someone  $\varphi$ -ed need not be her reason for  $\varphi$ -ing,<sup>42</sup>

and, thus, according to her, it is possible

to embrace a non-psychological conception of motivating reasons and yet to reject the view that a true explanation can ever have a false explanans. (Alvarez, 2010, p. 177-178)<sup>43</sup>

We can also put it as follows. We are faced with an inconsistent triad of claims, namely,

(1) Non-Psychologism about Grounds

(2) Veridicalism about Explanantia

(3) Explanatorism about Grounds

and the question is: which of those three claims should we give up? Alvarez opts for giving up (3), Dancy opts for giving up (2), and Lenman and Wallace seem to opt for giving up (1). I will argue that we should follow Alvarez in giving up (3).<sup>44</sup> I will argue that it is wrong to say that grounds themselves explain; which, note, is not the same as saying that grounds do not play a role in explanations. I will not discuss the option of giving up (1), however, as I take it that part II has already established that (1) is correct; there would, thus, be no value in revisiting that claim again. I will, however, briefly discuss the option of giving up (2). Specifically, I will assess how Dancy seeks to make giving up (2) less untenable, and argue that he does not deliver what he promises to deliver.

---

<sup>42</sup> We can read ‘the reason that explains’ as ‘the explanans’, and ‘her reason for  $\varphi$ -ing’ as ‘the ground on which she  $\varphi$ ’s’.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. also Davis (2005); Hieronymi (2011); Hyman (2015); Sandis (2013); Setiya (2011).

<sup>44</sup> There are various things that giving up (3) could amount to, that is, various options for alternative explanantia. I will follow Alvarez in giving up (3). But I will not follow her in the alternative she opts for. Cf. III.4 below.

Note, however, that there are of course ways of tinkering with any one of the three claims that fall short of giving any one of them up outright. As we will see, one could, for instance, hedge Non-Psychologism about Grounds and argue that that view is correct only under the condition that the consideration that plays the role of a ground is a fact, and that we need a different account of grounds in cases in which that condition is not satisfied (an option discussed by Dancy, 2002). Or one could hold that grounds do explain, but only in cases in which the consideration that plays the role of a ground is a fact, and that it is only in other cases that ground and explanans come apart (cf. e.g. Alvarez, 2010; Hyman, 2015). That is to say, *disjunctive* accounts of various kinds seem possible, and will be considered.

But first, I want to show that we can give a more general formulation of the triad. Maybe somewhat surprisingly, it turns out that it is not Non-Psychologism about Grounds that is at the heart of the problem. Psychologists about Grounds, at least of a certain kind, are faced with the exact same problem.

## **1.2 The Propositionalist's Problem**

Take the example mentioned above: Sam mistakenly believes that it is raining, and on grounds of what she mistakenly believes, namely, that it is raining, she picks up an umbrella on her way out. This is problematic, in the light of Veridicalism about Explanantia and Explanatorism about Grounds, not because of *what* Sam believes, but because her belief is *mistaken*; it is problematic, that is, not because of the *content* of Sam's belief, but because of its *truth-value*. And given what is surely correct, namely, that we can be mistaken not only about the facts around us, but also about facts about our own mind, we would be

faced with the exact same problem, even if what played the role of a ground were only always considerations about our own mind (cf. Wiland, 2003). So, what is inconsistent with Veridicalism about Explanantia and Explanatorism about Grounds is not so much Non-Psychologism about Grounds, but rather, the genus which Non-Psychologism about Grounds is a species of, namely, what I called Propositionalism about Grounds. Thus, a more general formulation of our triad is as follows:

- (1) Propositionalism about Grounds
- (2) Veridicalism about Explanantia
- (3) Explanatorism about Grounds

Of course, if it is correct what I argued for in part II, namely, that the only sane option for a Propositionalist about Grounds is Non-Psychologism about Grounds, it is fine to put things as I put them above. However, the fact that psychologistic renderings of Propositionalism about Grounds are faced with the exact same problem shows why one supposed way out of the Non-Psychologist's problem is of no help. As long as you remain a Propositionalist, shedding commitment to Non-Psychologism and embracing Psychologism will not solve (or avoid) the Non-Psychologist's problem, for her problem is but a guise of a more general problem that has to do with Propositionalism.

## **2. Dancy on Denying Veridicalism About Explanantia**

One way out of the Non-Psychologist's problem is to deny Veridicalism about Explanantia. But few people are tempted by that, and for understandable reasons. For after all, it does just seem like a truism that falsehoods cannot explain. Jonathan Dancy, however, seems prepared to accept, as a consequence



of his views, that falsehoods (or non-obtaining facts, as he seems to prefer to put it) can explain actions. Above, I quoted him saying that

[o]f course it is odd to suppose that on occasion a nothing (something that is not the case) can explain a something (an action that was done).

But I cut off the sentence that follows, which reads:

But I maintain that we can live with this oddity – *or rather that it is not as odd as people make out*. (Dancy, 2003a, p. 427; my emphasis)

Here, I want to look at what he has to say that is meant to show us that giving up Veridicalism about Explanantia “is not as odd as people make out”. I will argue that what he has to say in fact merely reinforces Propositionalism about Grounds, but does nothing to show that falsehoods can explain.

Above, I introduced a scenario in which someone takes out an umbrella on her way out, and someone else attempts to explain why that person took out an umbrella by saying that what explains why she took out an umbrella is that it is raining. I said that even if we do not know why that person did take out an umbrella, we can know that the given explanation cannot be correct if we know that it is not raining. And I argued that this clearly shows that we take it that falsehoods cannot explain why someone performed some action.

Now, Dancy concedes that

(1) what explains why P is that Q

can only be true if Q; or that (1) is *factive*, like “S knows that P”, but unlike “S believes that P”. But he argues, first, that there are other ways of saying what is said in (1) that are non-factive. He considers statements of the forms:

(2) The ground on which she  $\Phi$ ed was that P.

And he tells us that as his ears tell him, it is not self-contradictory to continue statements of such a form by denying the embedded proposition they state to

be the ground. That is, to present his example, he thinks that the following statement is not self-contradictory:

The ground on which he acted was that she had lied to him, though actually she had done nothing of the sort. (Dancy, 2002, p. 132)

Secondly, he then points out that that is not surprising. As he puts it:

[T]here seems to be no reason why there should not be a way of revealing the light in which the agent saw things as a way of explaining why he did what he did, without asserting that he was right to see things that way. (Dancy, 2002, p. 133)

That seems right. For we surely can reveal “the light in which the agent saw things”, and thereby explain why she did what she did, without asserting that she “was right to see things that way”. Even if I myself do not think that it is raining, or even if I myself do not think that taking out an umbrella when it is raining is a sensible thing to do, I can certainly explain why Sam took out an umbrella on her way out by way of revealing that, as Sam saw it, it is raining, and that, as she saw it, doing so is thus a sensible thing to do; by revealing, that is, “the light in which the agent saw things”. After all, if that were not possible, then actions of agents for which, as we (i.e. those attempting to explain) see it, there are no normative reasons would be incomprehensible for us. But of course, the mere fact that, as we see it, there is no normative reason for Sam to take out an umbrella on her way out does not render her doing so unintelligible.

But even if what Dancy says is correct (and I believe it is), all it shows us is that knowing that, say, it is not raining does not suffice to rule out that Sam believed that it is raining, and that she took out an umbrella on grounds of what she believed. It does not render the idea that what explains why Sam took out

an umbrella need not be a truth any more tenable. To put it differently, what Dancy shows us ‘not to be too odd’ is that we can explain on grounds of what someone did something even if we (i.e. those that give the explanation) think that the consideration that played the role of a ground is false. We already knew that that is not particularly odd, however. What he does not show us is that it is not “as odd as people make out” to hold that falsehoods explain. That is, what Dancy says strengthens the case for Propositionalism about Grounds, but does not show that denying Veridicalism about Explanantia is tenable, or less untenable than the consideration given at the outset of this part makes it out to be.

### **3. A Separate Account for Error-Cases**

Let us (once again) say that Sam believes that it is raining, that her belief is true, and that on her way out, she picks up an umbrella.<sup>45</sup> According to a Non-Psychologist, it is possible that Sam acts on grounds of what she believes, namely, that it is raining. And holding that that is possible is compatible with joint adherence to Explanatorism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia. But now consider a counterfactual scenario, in which Sam’s belief is false, but in which all else is equal. It would seem that if actual-Sam (as I will call her) picks up an umbrella on her way out on grounds of what she believes, namely, that it is raining, then counterfactual-Sam (as I will call her) does that too, that is, that she too picks up her umbrella on her way out on grounds of what she believes, namely, that it is raining. After all, the only difference

---

<sup>45</sup> Please apologize for all the rain.

between the two scenarios is the truth-value of the relevant belief, and we have already seen that what plays the role of a ground need not be true.

Of course, if the counterfactual scenario under consideration were a different one, then things might be different. If, say, in the actual scenario, Sam values not getting wet, but in the counterfactual scenario, she positively enjoys getting wet, then it would not seem as if we could say that counterfactual-Sam acts on the same ground as actual-Sam acts. Given, at least, that our acting on the grounds on which we act is dependent, in some way or another, on what we value, there would be no basis for saying that counterfactual-Sam must be acting on the same grounds as actual-Sam is acting. But we have stipulated that the only difference between the two scenarios is the truth-value of Sam's belief that it is raining.

Someone who jointly adheres to Explanatorism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia cannot accept that counterfactual-Sam acts on the same grounds as does actual-Sam. For, for someone who jointly adheres to Explanatorism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia, saying that counterfactual-Sam acts on grounds of what she believes (namely, that it is raining) is problematic in a way that saying the same thing about actual-Sam is not. For such a theorist, the truth-value makes a difference. For if what Sam believes is false, then what she believes cannot explain her action, and, thus, it cannot be her ground. Now, as the problem arises only in error-cases, one might think that we need a special treatment for error-cases, and that what the Non-Psychologist says about veridical cases is fine as standing.

Such an approach has precedents in the theory perception. Theorists of perception sometimes argue that the mere fact that in error-cases, we cannot conceive of her who is in a perceptual state as standing in a relation to a

worldly object should not lead us to think that we cannot so conceive of the subject in veridical cases. In veridical cases, such theorists hold, being in a perceptual state *amounts to* standing in a relation to a worldly object. It is just that we need a different account for the error-case. In short, they hold that we need a *disjunctive* account of perception, i.e. that we need one kind of account of being in a perceptual state for veridical cases, and a different kind of account for error-cases.<sup>46</sup>

In this chapter, I will consider two options for someone who thinks that error-cases need special treatment. Here are the two options I will consider:

- (1) Counterfactual-Sam acts on a different ground than actual-Sam acts on
- (2) In contrast to actual-Sam, counterfactual-Sam, when she picks up an umbrella on her way out, is not acting on a ground

The first option seems attractive, at least on first glance, because it makes it possible that counterfactual-Sam's ground, just like actual-Sam's ground, is a truth, and, thus, that the noted problem no longer arises. The second option seems attractive, at least on first glance, because it simply locates the allegedly problematic case outside of the parameters in which the problem can arise: if counterfactual-Sam is not acting on a ground, then there is no falsehood that *must* explain, insofar as it is a ground, but that at the same time, and insofar as it is a falsehood, *cannot* explain. In this chapter, I will show that neither of the two options makes much sense, despite their *prima facie* attractions.

---

<sup>46</sup> I am not saying that Disjunctivism in the theory of perception is a unified account. Cf. Haddock & Macpherson (2008) for an illuminating overview of the various variants of disjunctive theories of perception that have been given.

### 3.1 Disjunctivism About Grounds

Dancy considers whether we could fall back to a Psychologistic account of grounds in order to understand error-cases in a way that is compatible with joint adherence to Explanatorism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia. In the actual case, we said, Sam's ground is *what she believed*, namely, that it is raining. Dancy considers whether we could say, about counterfactual-Sam, that her ground is *that she believes* that it is raining. He calls such an account a disjunctive theory. And as it is *grounds* that a disjunctive account is given of, we can term it 'Disjunctivism about Grounds' (cf. Dancy, 2002, pp. 138–145, 2003, p. 427, 2008, pp. 267–271; Littlejohn, 2012, p. 154; Miller 2008, p. 230; Stout 2009, pp. 58–59).<sup>47</sup>

Note that the move is actually a move away not so much from Non-Psychologism about Grounds, but rather, a move away from Propositionalism

---

<sup>47</sup> Disjunctive views are of the form: X is either Y or Z; say, that having a perceptual appearance as of a cat is either such as to put us in a position to gain knowledge that there is a cat in front of us, or that it is not such as to put us in such a position, but merely such as to not make it irrational for us to believe that there is a cat in front of us. (There are many variants of disjunctive views about perception. See the note above. Here, I am describing McDowell's 'epistemological' variant, cf. McDowell, 1982, 1986, 2013) Disjunctivism about Grounds fits the 'X is either Y or Z'-mold, at least overtly. But the more interesting feature of disjunctive theories is the claim they make about the priority of the 'good' case, namely, that we cannot account of Y in terms of Z and some further factor; say, that we cannot account for our being in a position to gain knowledge of the world in terms of its not being irrational for us to form beliefs about the world and some further factor that is such as to secure that rational beliefs amount to knowledge. It is unclear whether Disjunctivism about Grounds exhibits this further feature. That is, it is unclear whether according to Disjunctivism about Grounds, non-psychological ground are *prior* in any sense. Psychological and Non-Psychological grounds just seem to be *different*.

about Grounds (and towards Factualism about Grounds).<sup>48</sup> For what is problematic about error-cases is not *the non-psychological content* of the agent's relevant beliefs, but that the belief is *false*. It is just that in cases in which S mistakenly believes that P, i.e. in error-cases, the fact that S believes that P is a ready candidate for what alternatively might be her ground, if (due to the identification of grounds and explanantia, and the requirement that explanantia are truths) one thinks that in such a case, P cannot be her ground (cf. III.1.2 above).

On first glance at least, Disjunctivism about Grounds might seem helpful. For if counterfactual-Sam's ground is not the falsehood she believes, i.e. *that it is raining*, but rather, the truth *that she believes that it is raining*, then we can continue to maintain that grounds explain without breaching Veridicalism about Explanantia. But such a treatment of error-cases is highly implausible. For if Psychologism about Grounds is in general mistaken, then it is also mistaken if it is limited to error-cases. As Dancy writes,

[it is] impossible ... having argued against the fully psychologistic theory, to fall back on the disjunctive conception as an adequate alternative.  
(Dancy, 2002, p. 145)

Recall what is wrong about Psychologism about Grounds (cf. II.1.3). What is wrong about Psychologism about Grounds is not that considerations about one's own mind cannot be what play the role of a ground. What is wrong about Psychologism about Grounds is that considerations about one's own mind play the role of a ground only in special cases. For grounds are considerations that are taken, by her who acts on them, to be facts that are reasons to so act, and

---

<sup>48</sup> For the terms, cf. II.1.3 and II.1.4 above.

only in special cases do we take it that the reasons for doing what we are doing are facts about our own mind. It is implausible that merely changing the truth-value of actual-Sam's relevant belief turns her case into a special case. Of course, we can imagine a case in which what plays the role of a ground for Sam is the consideration that she believes that it is raining. Imagine, say, that Sam (call her 'psychotic-Sam') is on anti-psychotic drugs, and that she knows that an indication of them wearing off is that she begins to believe that it is raining. Given all that, it might be that she takes a pill, and that her ground for doing so is that she believes that it is raining. Note that if we are imaginative enough, we can even construct a case in which psychotic-Sam does something on grounds of the consideration that she believes that it is raining, and in which what she does is nothing other than *to pick up umbrella on her way out*. Maybe, say, her doctor devised some special therapy that requires taking out an umbrella always when she believes that it is raining. But the point is that merely changing the truth-value of actual-Sam's belief does not turn counterfactual-Sam into psychotic-Sam (or some figure like her).

There is also another problem for Disjunctivism about Grounds that is sometimes noted. Littlejohn (2012, p. 154) and Miller (2008, p. 230), for instance, complain that such an account implausibly portrays the agent as systematically mistaken about what her grounds are in cases in which she is mistaken about how the world is. For if we ask counterfactual-Sam on what grounds she is taking out her umbrella, she will tell us that her ground for doing so is that it is raining. But according to the Disjunctivist about Grounds, her ground is not that it is raining, but rather, that she believes that it is raining. And so, when she tells us that her ground for taking out her umbrella is that it is raining, she is mistaken about what her ground is. Note that of course there is a



sense in which agents like counterfactual-Sam *are* systematically mistaken: they are systematically mistaken about the *status* of their grounds. For counterfactual-Sam takes her grounds to be a *fact that favors* doing what she is doing. But she is mistaken therein, as it is a *mere consideration*. However, the problematic systematic mistake that Littlejohn and Miller are pointing to is not a mistake about the status, but a mistake about *what has the relevant status*. Maybe there are cases in which the agent is mistaken about what has the relevant status. Maybe someone can take herself to be acting on grounds of P, but actually, she is acting on grounds of Q; maybe, that is, self-deception is possible in cases in which agents act on a ground. But Disjunctivism about Grounds seems to imply that cases in which agents have false beliefs are always cases of self-deception, and that is implausible. The mere fact that counterfactual-Sam is mistaken about the world should not lead us to think that she is mistaken about what it is that motivates her.

Thus, I conclude that the first of the two noted options, Disjunctivism about Grounds, is not a genuine option.

### **3.2 Disjunctivism about Ground-Taking**

I now come to the second option: that other than actual-Sam, counterfactual-Sam is not acting on a ground when she picks up an umbrella on her way out. The idea is that while both actual-Sam and counterfactual-Sam take themselves to be acting on a ground in picking up an umbrella, only the former is thereby acting on a ground. The latter will merely be taking herself to be acting on a

ground, but what she does will not amount to acting on a ground<sup>49</sup> – what she does will not amount to acting on a ground, but merely to taking herself to be doing so, simply because what she believes is false. One might call such a view ‘Disjunctivism about Ground-Taking’, as it holds that when someone takes herself to be acting on a ground, she either acts on a ground, or she does not, despite taking herself to be doing so – where one thing that can make it the case that her taking herself to be acting on a ground does not amount to her acting on a ground is the mere fact that what she takes to play the role of her ground is a falsehood.<sup>50, 51</sup>

Let me, for the time being, cast the issue under discussion in terms of *motivating reasons*, instead of in terms of *grounds*. Let us say, that is, that actual-Sam picks up an umbrella on her way out, and that her motivating reason for doing that is what she believes, namely, that it is raining. This is compatible with joint adherence to Explanatorism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia. But a version of our familiar problems arise when we turn to counterfactual Sam, as counterfactual Sam’s belief that it is raining is false.

Recently, it has been suggested that the solution to this problem about motivating reasons and false beliefs is simple. All we have to do, it is said, is to

---

<sup>49</sup> The former will also be taking herself to be acting on a ground, but she will not *merely* be taking herself to be acting on a ground – she in fact will be acting on a ground.

<sup>50</sup> This comes close an alternative to Disjunctivism about Grounds that Dancy (2002, p. 145, 2008, pp. 271) discusses and dismisses.

<sup>51</sup> To make the view disjunctivist in a more interesting sense, one would have to include the claim that acting on a ground cannot be conceived of as taking oneself to be acting on a ground plus X, where X can be spelled out without already presupposing the notion of acting on a ground. That is, the idea would have to be that the ‘good’ disjunct cannot be accounted for in terms of the ‘bad’ disjunct. Given my purposes, however, I will not discuss this. Cf. note 47 above.

restrict the scope of *acting for a reason* to cases in which the agent's relevant beliefs are true. So, the idea is that it is true that only truths can explain actions, and that motivating reasons explain actions, and also that when we act for a reason, the reason for which we act is what we believe – that it is just that when the relevant belief is false, what we are doing is not *acting for a reason*. Clayton Littlejohn, for instance, introduces the following scenario:

Cooper and Leo are running down two very similar hallways in two very similar houses. There is a killer chasing Cooper and he knows it. Leo is Cooper's non-factive mental duplicate, so he believes there is a killer chasing him as well. Cooper is in the epistemically good case. Leo is in the bad case. His belief that there is a killer after him is mistaken. It seems natural to say that Cooper's reason for running down the hall was that there was a killer chasing him. (Littlejohn, 2012, p. 146)

Littlejohn asks: What should we say about Leo? He rejects the suggestion that we should say that Leo's reason for running down the hall was also that there was a killer chasing him. As he sees it, that would commit us to saying that falsehoods can explain. (As he puts it: it would commit us to saying that 'S  $\Phi$ 's because P' is non-factive, i.e. does not imply that P, and he argues that the 'linguistic evidence' shows that that cannot be correct.) He also rejects the solution of saying that Leo's reason for running down the hall was *that he believed* that a killer was chasing him. That solution is the one discussed above, and we saw why it makes no sense. He concludes that what we should do, as theorists, is "deny ... that Leo acted for a reason and that this reason explains Leo's actions" (Littlejohn, 2012, p. 154).

Littlejohn is not alone in holding that figures like Leo (who, as is stipulated, is identical in all relevant respects to Carl, who *is* acting for a reason,

save that Leo's relevant belief is false, whereas Carl's relevant belief is true) are not *acting for reasons*. Similar claims (though not always arrived at through the same kinds of considerations) are made by Alvarez (2010, pp. 141–147), Bittner (2001, p. 114), and Mele (2007, p. 104).

Now, the view that figures like Leo are not acting for motivating reasons sounds a lot like the second of the two options distinguished above: that figures like counterfactual-Sam are not acting on grounds. However, in order to see why the view that figures like Leo are not acting for reasons is not just an *elegant-seeming* solution, but that it *makes sense* as a solution, the relevant understanding of 'motivating reason' cannot be as ground. And so, as elegant as the solution seems (and maybe is), it is of no help for our problem. It will seem like a solution to our problem only for those who conflate normative reasons that motivate and grounds (something that is easily done if one uses the ambiguous term 'motivating reason'). Why can the relevant understanding of the term 'motivating reason' not be as ground? Remember what grounds are. In part II, I said that something plays the role of a ground just in case it motivates an agent because she takes it to be a reason. And I argued that propositions or considerations are what are best suited to play that role. Now, the difference between Carl and Leo is that in Carl's case, but not in Leo's case, the proposition he has in mind is a truth or fact. But with regard to the propositions they have in mind, there is no difference between Carl and Leo. Such are the stipulations in play. And so, there is no basis for denying that if Carl acts on a ground, so does Leo; it must be the case that if Carl acts on grounds of P, so does Leo.

That does not mean that the idea that figures like Leo are not *acting for reasons* does not make any sense. To the contrary, I think that that idea is quite correct – given, however, that motivating reasons (or reasons for which she

acted) are not understood as grounds, but, rather, as something like normative reasons that motivate (in fact, this seems to be presupposed by our four authors, cf. Alvarez, 2010, p. 144; Bittner, 2001, p. 114; Littlejohn, 2012, pp. 144–5; Mele, 2007, p. 117). For if motivating reasons are understood as normative reasons that motivate, then it seems not much more than trivially true that figures like Leo are *not acting for reasons*, that is, that figures like Leo are *not motivated to do what they do by normative reasons*. For normative reasons (as part I argued) are facts that favor actions. But other than Carl, Leo does not have a fact in view, for his relevant belief is mistaken. There is no killer chasing him. So, whatever it is that motivates Leo's action cannot be a fact, and, thus, cannot be a normative reason. And so he is not motivated to do what he does by a normative reason.

I said that the view that false-believing Sam is not acting on a ground has *prima facie*-attractiveness, in that it locates her outside the parameters in which the problem can arise. But if we locate true-believing Sam inside those parameters, we simply cannot locate false-believing Sam outside them. For what puts true-believing Sam inside those parameters is the mere fact that what she believes plays a certain role, namely, that it plays the role of a ground, and the truth-value of what she believes is simply irrelevant for what she believes being able to play that role.

#### **4. Giving up Explanatorism About Grounds**

If the considerations that motivate someone to do something need not be truths (Propositionalism about Grounds), but if only truths can explain actions (Veridicalism about Explanantia), then Explanatorism about Grounds – the

view that the grounds on which we act are what explain our actions – cannot be true. So, what I now am going to explore is the possibility of giving up Explanatorism about Grounds, i.e. give up the claim that grounds themselves are what explain actions.

It might seem odd to say that what motivates is not what explains. Saying that what motivates is not what explains might seem like failing to do justice to the relevance of the perspective of the agent within explanations. In Dancy's terms, it might seem like "subvert[ing] the purpose of explanation, which is to reveal the light in which the agent came to do what he did." (Dancy, 2002, p. 97) For while motivation is a first-personal phenomenon, and explaining a third-personal phenomenon, the difference between the two must not be overstated. As has often been observed, the kind of third-personal explanation at issue is an explanation that is essentially tied to the first-personal perspective, in that it displays the agent as motivated by something she takes to be a reason (Baier, 1969, p. 153; Hieronymi 2011, 422; Raz, 1975, pp. 18–19; Wallace, 2003, p. 433). However, giving up the claim that grounds themselves are what explain actions does not amount to saying that grounds play *no role at all* in explanations. We can (and should) concede that a satisfactory explanation of S's  $\Phi$ ing *must* bring to light that P motivated S to  $\Phi$ . But saying that is not the same as saying that P itself must be what explains her  $\Phi$ ing. Grounds can *figure* or *feature* in explanations, without playing the role of the explanans. As Wayne Davis puts it at one point (calling grounds 'reasons'):

We need to distinguish the claim that *actions can be explained by stating the reasons for which they are performed* from the claim that *the reasons themselves are what explain the action*. ... The statement that my reason for saving was that my son will need money for college does explain why

I saved. But it does not follow, and is not true, that my reason explains my action. (Davis, 2005, p. 57)

What I want to do, in this chapter, is to explore ways in which one can give up the idea that grounds themselves explain actions, without denying that they play some kind of role in explanations.

Note that grounds can play a role in an explanation ('feature' or 'figure' in an explanation) of S's  $\Phi$ ing only in a case in which her  $\Phi$ ing is in fact *done on some ground*. If her  $\Phi$ ing is *not* a  $\Phi$ ing that is done on some ground, then obviously, there is no ground on which she  $\Phi$ ed, and, thus, there is no ground (i.e. no consideration that plays the role of a ground) that could play any role whatsoever in an explanation of her  $\Phi$ ing. (Though mistakenly taking it that her  $\Phi$ ing was done on some ground, we might of course *attempt* an explanation in which *supposed* grounds figure.) So, what we are looking for is what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing not in *any* case in which she is  $\Phi$ ing, but only *in a case in which her  $\Phi$ ing is done on some particular ground*.

Note also that in a case in which S  $\Phi$ 's on some particular ground, explaining her  $\Phi$ ing in terms of that ground would seem to be *but one way* in which we can cast some kind of intelligibility on her  $\Phi$ ing. Given, that is, that S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P is *compatible* with her also, say,  $\Phi$ ing with some end in view, it would seem that we can cast intelligibility on her  $\Phi$ ing not only by revealing on what grounds she is  $\Phi$ ing, but also by revealing with what end in view she is  $\Phi$ ing.<sup>52</sup> For instance, when Sam takes out her umbrella on her way out and does so *on grounds of* what she believes, e.g. that it is raining, it might

---

<sup>52</sup> Teleological explanations are discussed (in widely differing ways) in e.g. Davis (2005), Sehon (2005), Smith (2000, chap. 4), Thompson (2008, pt. II), and Vogler (2002).

also be true of her that she is taking her umbrella out *in order to* stay dry. Thus, we can give an explanation of why she takes out her umbrella not only in terms of her ground for doing so; we can also give an explanation of her conduct in terms of her end. While I am happy to accept such pluralism about explanation, it is not what is at issue here.<sup>53</sup> Here, I am focusing exclusively on explanations of S's  $\Phi$ ing, in cases in which S is  $\Phi$ ing on some particular ground, that are such as to render her  $\Phi$ ing intelligible with the help of that ground. (So when I say that such-and-such is what renders S's  $\Phi$ ing intelligible, I am not saying that there is *nothing else* that renders her  $\Phi$ ing intelligible. I am just putting aside ways of rendering intelligible in which what plays the role of a ground does not figure.)

I will start out by introducing three answers one finds in the literature: Psychologism about Explanantia, Motivationalism about Explanantia, and Reasonism about Explanantia. I will then show that there are two complaints that can be made against Psychologism about Explanantia: the Incompleteness Complaint and the Insufficiency Complaint. I will then argue that while Motivationalism about Explanantia avoids the Insufficiency Complaint, it can be targeted by the Incompleteness Complaint, and that while Reasonism about Explanantia avoids the Incompleteness Complaint, it can be targeted by the Insufficiency Complaint. Based on that, I will suggest an account – Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia – that combines the respective virtues of Motivationalism about Explanantia and Reasonism about Explanantia, while avoiding their respective vices. I will finish by considering some objections against that account.

---

<sup>53</sup> For an illuminating account of such plurality, cf. Sandis (2012, chap. 5).



## 4.1 Three Accounts

In the literature, we find (at least) three accounts of action-explanation that deny Explanatorism about Grounds, while nevertheless allowing grounds to play a role in explanations.

**(a) Psychologism About Explanantia.** Dancy, we saw, maintains that the grounds on which someone acts are what explain her action. *Pace* Dancy, Hyman writes:

Stating his ground – the thing believed – is a way of explaining why he did it, and his ground need not be a fact. But when we explain an act in this way, the *explanans* is not the ground, the thing believed, but *that he believed it* – and this, by hypothesis, *is* a fact. (Hyman, 2015, p. 149)

This is an expression of the first account of explanantia I want to introduce.<sup>54</sup>

According to that view,

(Psychologism about Explanantia) what explains why S  $\Phi$ s, in a case in which S  $\Phi$ 's on grounds of P, is the fact that S believes that P.

The idea is that belief-facts explain actions in that they reveal the consideration that played the role of the ground on which the agent performed that action. That is, according to Psychologism about Explanantia, the fact that S believes that P renders her  $\Phi$ ing intelligible in that it reveals what consideration (namely, P) played the role of the ground for which S  $\Phi$ ed. As Raz put it in one of his early contributions:

---

<sup>54</sup> Hyman is a Psychologist about Explanantia only in that he takes it that belief-facts can explain actions. But, as we will see below, he also takes it that reasons can explain actions. This suggests a disjunctivist account of sorts about explanantia. For this, see below.

Reasons are those facts by which behaviour should be guided and we refer to the agent's belief in reasons in explaining intentional action because its peculiar feature is that it is an attempt, successful or otherwise, to be guided by reason. (Raz, 1978, p. 4)

As I understand him, Raz says here that belief-facts explain actions because they show us what (maybe merely supposed) reason guided, i.e. rationally motivated, the agent.

Note that Psychologism about Explanantia is not Psychologism about Grounds. The Psychologist about Explanantia is someone who subscribes to Propositionalism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia, and, thus, denies Explanatorism about Grounds. But if one denies Explanatorism about Grounds, subscribing to Psychologism about Explanantia is not tantamount to a subscribing to Psychologism about Grounds.<sup>55</sup>

Also, Psychologism about Explanantia is not the view that belief-facts explain actions in that they reveal the action to be a *causal effect* of the respective psychological state.<sup>56</sup> As we saw above, the view that actions are causal effects of psychological states is a reductive view about *what it is* to act on a ground. But Psychologism about Explanantia is a view about what explains a particular action in a way that reveals it to be *done on some particular ground*. Psychologism about Explanantia is compatible with giving a reductive account of acting on a ground, but it is not the same view. Moreover, also someone who

---

<sup>55</sup> Dancy seems to take Psychologism about Explanantia to fail because he takes Psychologism about Grounds to be false. That makes sense only if he subscribes to Explanatorism about Grounds.

<sup>56</sup> Though it often goes hand-in-hand with that view, cf. Smith (2000). Cf. also the remarks I made in II.2.1.

denies that a reductive account of acting on a ground is forthcoming can be a Psychologist about Explanantia.

I will discuss Psychologism about Explanantia as the view that facts about beliefs whose content specifies the agent's ground explain actions, for this is at the heart of Psychologism about Explanantia. Psychologists about Explanantia can disagree among themselves about whether other psychological facts – like facts about the agent's desires or normative beliefs – are also part of the explanans. For my purposes, however, I can ignore this additional complication.

Psychologism about Explanantia, in one or another form, is adhered to by, e.g., Lenman (2011), Raz (1978), Smith (2000), Wallace (2003). I do not think that it is too bold to say that Psychologism about Explanantia is something like the standard view, to the extent that there is such a thing. As I said above (II.2.3), Psychologism about Explanantia, together with the assumption that motivators are explanantia, generates the Psychologistic side of the Psychologism-Debate about so-called motivating reasons.

**(b) Motivationalism About Explanantia.** Distinct from Psychologism about Explanantia is the view that

(Motivationalism about Explanantia) what explains why  $S \Phi$ s, in a case in which  $S \Phi$ s on grounds of  $P$ , is the fact that  $P$  plays the role of a ground on which  $S \Phi$ s.

Motivationalism about Explanantia and Psychologism about Explanantia both hold that the explanans is a fact about the agent. But the former is distinct from the latter, in that it holds that the relevant agential fact is not merely a fact about the agent having the relevant consideration in mind, but rather, a fact

about, as one might put it, the agent's motivational economy, specifically, a fact about the relevant consideration being motivationally operative; hence, the name I give the view.

Here is another way of putting the difference: We can conceive of motivation in terms of a three-place relation whose relata are an agent, a consideration, and an action. For when an agent is motivated, there is always something that she is motivated to do (an action), and there is always something that motivates her (a consideration). Now, according to Psychologism about Explanantia, what figures in the explanans are *two of those relata*: the agent and the relevant consideration, the latter as being believed by the former. But according to Motivationalism about Explanantia, it is *the relation as a whole* that comprises the explanans. The explanans, that is, is conceived of as the fact that the agent is motivated to perform a particular action by a particular consideration.

Some such view can be found in Hieronymi (2011), Sandis (2012, 2013), and – in a notable shift away from his previously-held view – in Dancy (2014). At least, this is the view I glean from the following quotations:<sup>57</sup>

We can say that what explains the action is *that it was done for the reason that p*. (Dancy, 2014, p. 90; my emphasis)

We explain actions by *citing* one or more agential reasons ... But the explanation is not done by the reason cited. What is stated (implicitly or explicitly) is not the thing that the agent believed, rather, the purported fact that the person acted upon that belief. ... [W]hat does the explaining

---

<sup>57</sup> According to the terminological conventions introduced in part II, we should, in the following three quotations, read 'reason' as 'ground'. For when our authors are talking about 'reasons', what they are talking about are grounds.

is [...] the implied truth that they acted upon the belief (Sandis 2012, 107–108).<sup>58</sup>

I propose ... that we explain an event that is an action done for reasons by appealing to the fact that the agent took certain considerations to settle the question of whether to act in some way, therein intended so to act, and successfully executed that intention in action. I suggest that *this* complex fact ... explains the action by giving the agent's reason for acting. (Hieronymi, 2011, p. 421)

Note that I neither seek to show that those three authors are defending one and the same claim, nor that that claim is nothing other than Motivationalism about Explanantia. I take their respective remarks to be *inspirational* for Motivationalism about Explanantia, without committing myself to the view that Motivationalism about Explanantia is a completely *accurate representation* of their views.

**(c) Reasonism About Explanantia.** Both Motivationalism about Explanantia and Psychologism about Explanantia hold that the *notion* of a ground is distinct from the *notion* of the explanans. The third view I want to consider agrees. But other than the first two views, it is the view that while the respective *notions* are distinct, there can be conditions under which *instances* of the former notion can be identical with *instances* of the latter notion, that is, that there can be conditions under which what explains the action is identical with what plays the role of a ground. Specifically, it is the view that under the

---

<sup>58</sup> 'Belief' is to be understood in the object-sense, not in the state-sense. That is, when Sandis talks about someone "acting upon a belief", he is talking about someone acting upon *what she believes*, and not about someone acting upon *her so believing*.

condition that in  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P, S is  $\Phi$ ing for a normative reason constituted by the fact that P, what plays the role of a ground (which in such a case is a normative reason constituted by the fact that P) is what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing.<sup>59</sup> Here is Heuer:

[W]hen an agent acts for a (specific) reason that very reason is also the explanation (or at least part of the explanation) of why she did what she did. Normative or justificatory reasons and explanatory reasons are the same reasons in such a case, and not different kinds of reasons altogether. (Heuer, 2004, p. 45)

As this is the view that under a certain condition, normative reasons themselves can explain, I call it 'Reasonism about Explanantia':

(Reasonism about Explanantia) In a case in which S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of consideration P constitutes a  $\Phi$ ing in appreciation of a reason for her to  $\Phi$ , what explains her  $\Phi$ ing is that very reason.

Reasonists about Explanantia include Alvarez (2010), Bittner (2001), Heuer (2004), Hyman (2015), Raz (2011d), Stout (2009), Stoutland (2007).

As such, Reasonism about Explanantia is much narrower in scope than Psychologism about Explanantia and Motivationalism about Explanantia. The latter two talk about all cases in which S  $\Phi$ s on grounds of a consideration, the former restricts itself to cases in which S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of a consideration constitutes a case in which she is  $\Phi$ ing in appreciation of a reason for her to  $\Phi$ . So, to compete with the former two views, the Reasonist about Explanantia has

---

<sup>59</sup> In II.1.1, I said that I will have to leave it open what the conditions are under which S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P counts as her  $\Phi$ ing in response to a normative reason constituted by the fact that P. A plausible necessary condition, however, is that S *knows* that P (cf. Hornsby, 2008; Littlejohn, 2012, chap. 4.5; McDowell, 2013).

to be able to say something about the other kinds of cases too, the kinds of cases in which S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of a consideration is *just that*, and nothing more. Reasonism is, thus, naturally aligned with a disjunctive account of explanantia, according to which what plays the role of the explanans differs, depending on the truth-value of the relevant consideration. Specifically, Reasonism about Explanantia is naturally aligned with the view that Psychologism about Explanantia is the correct view for the cases that it itself does not cover.<sup>60</sup> As for instance Alvarez puts it, there are, on the one hand,

explanations whose explanantia are the agent's reasons for acting,<sup>61</sup>

and, on the other hand,

explanations whose explanantia are psychological facts about the agent ... which, to repeat, are not the agent's reason for acting (Alvarez, 2010, p. 168; cf. also Hyman, 2015, chap. 6)

This gives us the view that

(Disjunctivism about Explanantia) what explains why S  $\Phi$ s, in a case in which S  $\Phi$ 's on grounds of P, is either P, or that S believes that P; depending on whether S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P constitutes a case in which S  $\Phi$ s in appreciation of a normative reason or not.

---

<sup>60</sup> I merely say "naturally aligned", as not all Reasonists would agree that that is the correct thing to say. Some (in keeping with *one* understanding of Disjunctivism) would simply refuse to say anything positive about the 'bad' cases, cf. e.g. Bittner (2001, p. 117).

<sup>61</sup> Remember, for Alvarez, someone acts *for a reason* only if what motivates her is a reason, i.e. a fact that favors (see II.2.1 and III.3.2). Often, I had to ask the reader to read 'reason' as 'ground', as many use the term 'reason' when they talk about grounds. But Alvarez uses the term 'reason' only when she talks about reasons. When she talks about grounds, she calls them 'apparent reasons', as they are not reasons, but to the agent appear to be reasons.

Note that a Disjunctivist about Explanantia is not a Disjunctivist about Grounds. According to the Disjunctivist about Explanantia, what plays the role of a ground in the good and the bad case is the same consideration; it is just that in the good case, but not in the bad case, it is the same thing that plays the role of a ground and the role of an explanans. In what follows, I will focus, first, just on Reasonism about Explanantia. I will return to a disjunctive conception of explanantia in III.4.4.

#### **4.2 Problems for Psychologism About Explanantia**

Psychologism about Explanantia takes it that psychological facts render actions intelligible as done on a ground, insofar as they bring to light the relevant consideration, i.e. the consideration that motivated S to  $\Phi$  because she took it to be a reason for her to  $\Phi$ ; or the consideration that rationally motivated her, as I also put it. However, Psychologism about Explanantia suffers from two problems, or shortcomings. First, belief-facts can indeed be such as to bring to light the relevant consideration that rationally motivated S to  $\Phi$ . But when they do, they do not bring the relevant consideration to light *as* a rational motivator, i.e. *as* the consideration that played the role of a ground; they merely bring it to light *as* the content of a belief. So, such facts fail to be able to display the agent as *acting* on grounds of the consideration they bring to light, they only show that it is *possible* that that consideration was the one she acted on. Secondly, the idea of a *believed consideration* motivating an agent to act is dependent on the idea of a *reason* motivating an agent to act. But the Psychologist about Explanantia does not have in view the idea that *reasons themselves* can figure in



explanantia. I will discuss these two problems for Psychologism about Explanantia in reverse order.

**(a) The Incompleteness Complaint.** According to the Psychologist about Explanantia, when S  $\Phi$ 's on grounds of P, what explains her  $\Phi$ ing is the fact that S believes that P. For the fact that S believes that P brings to light that S had P in mind, and P is the consideration that played the role of a ground. So, according to the Psychologist about Explanantia (and *pace* Dancy), believed considerations are not *themselves* explanantia. Rather, according to the Psychologist about Explanantia, believed considerations *figure* in explanantia.

Now, in part II, I said that believed considerations can motivate an agent to act only if, and because, she takes what she believes to be a fact that is a reason for her to so act. This has an interesting consequence: For if believed considerations motivate only if, and because, they are taken to be facts that are reasons, it follows that whatever motivational power believed considerations have is dependent on the motivational power of reasons. For given that believed considerations motivate only if, and because, they are taken to be reasons, it follows that if reasons could not motivate, then believed considerations taken to be reasons could not motivate either. As Raz nicely puts it:

[B]eliefs in the existence of reasons can ... motivate .... But the motivating power of these beliefs exists in the shadow of the motivating power of reasons. (Raz, 2011d, pp. 33–34; cf. also Hornsby, 2008, and McDowell, 2013)

If believed considerations can motivate only if reasons can motivate, then the idea of *believed considerations* motivating agents is not a self-standing idea, but

dependent on the idea of *reasons* motivating agents. And, thus, it seems that a theory of explanantia that focuses exclusively on believed considerations – like Psychologism about Explanantia – misses out on something it should not miss out on.

First, if reasons themselves can motivate, then reasons themselves can figure in explanantia (Heuer, 2004; Raz, 2011d; Williams, 1980). According to Psychologism about Explanantia, however, what figures in explanantia are only ever *believed considerations*. And although believed considerations, if they are true, can *be reasons*, they do not figure in the Psychologist about Explanantia's explanations *as reasons*. So the Psychologist about Explanantia seems to fail to have an existing type of explanantia in view.

Secondly, if believed considerations can motivate only because reasons can motivate, then the idea of an explanans in which believed considerations figure is dependent on an understanding of the idea of an explanans in which reasons themselves figure. Psychologism about Explanantia, however, focuses exclusively on the idea of an explanans in which believed considerations figure. And so the Psychologist about Explanantia seems to not only fail to have a type of explanantia in view. She seems to fail to have the type of explanantia in view on which the type of explanantia that she does have in view is *dependent* on. For these two reasons, Psychologism about Explanantia seems to be an incomplete account of explanantia.

**(b) The Insufficiency Complaint.** According to Psychologism about Explanantia, facts about the agent's beliefs explain her actions, in that those facts bring to light the consideration that played the role of a ground. If, say, Peter kept to the edge of the pond on grounds of the consideration that the ice

in the middle was too thin to support his weight, then – so holds the Psychologist about Explanantia – the fact that he believes that the ice in the middle is too thin explains his keeping to the edge, in that it reveals the consideration that played the role of a ground.

Yet do belief-facts really manage to explain actions? Consider the following situation: Sam picks up her umbrella on her way out. You are wondering why she is doing that. And a passing Psychologist about Explanantia, in an attempt to explain to you why Sam picks up her umbrella, informs you that Sam believes that it is raining. It might very well seem that you now know why Sam picked up her umbrella. For it is not unusual for people to pick up their umbrellas on grounds of considerations to the effect that it is raining. And so, you might think, that is exactly why Sam is picking up her umbrella. Now, however, a second Psychologist about Explanantia arrives on the scene, informing you that Sam believes that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella. That should make you hesitate. For it is true that it is not unusual for people to pick up their umbrellas on grounds of considerations to the effect that it is raining. But it is also true that it is not unusual for people to take those of their belongings with them which they fear would otherwise be stolen. So, given that Sam not only believes that it is raining, but also believes that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella, it might just as well be that the ground on which she picks up her umbrella on her way out is that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella, as it might be that she picks up her umbrella on the grounds that it is raining. Which belief-fact explains why Sam takes out her umbrella? Is it the fact that Sam believes that it is raining? Or the fact that Sam believes that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella? Let us stipulate that Sam's ground for picking up her umbrella is (for once!) not that it is raining, but rather, that

Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella. Does that make the fact that Sam believes that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella any better as explanans? No, it does not. For coming to see that Sam *believes* that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella is not coming to see that Sam's *ground* for picking up her umbrella is that Peter is out to steal her umbrella. It is only coming to see that that could be Sam's ground (a similar point is made by Sandis, 2012, pp. 48–50).<sup>62</sup>

This little story, I believe, brings out a problem for the Psychologist about Explanantia. But wherein exactly does the problem lie? In part II, I distinguished between (i) the role of a ground, and (ii) what plays the role of a ground. It is with the help of that distinction that we can pinpoint the problem that our little story brings out. I stipulated that Sam's ground for picking up her umbrella is that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella. Nevertheless, the fact that Sam believes that Peter is out to steal her precious umbrella does not explain why Sam picked up her umbrella. Why not? The fact that Sam believes that Peter is out to steal her umbrella brings into focus the consideration that *in fact* played the role of a ground. But it does not bring it into view *as consideration that played the role of a ground*. Rather, it brings it into view merely *as believed consideration*. That is why, upon learning that Sam believes that Peter is out to steal her umbrella, you merely learn that Sam was *in a*

---

<sup>62</sup> Above, I said that explanations are such as to render actions intelligible. Sandis however would say that belief-facts do not explain actions, but merely render them intelligible. But he is employing a different sense of the term 'intelligible'. To render an action intelligible, in his usage of the term, is to show that, as the agent saw it, there is a reason to do what she does, and, thus, to show that and why it would make sense for the agent to perform that action, but it is not to say that that supposed reason was her ground, i.e. it is not to explain her action.

*position* to act on that consideration, that is, that she *might have* acted upon that consideration, but not whether that consideration was the one she did in fact act upon. Even if the consideration that the belief-fact brings into view is the one that the agent in fact acted on, as the belief-fact does not present it as such, the belief-fact will only ever inform you about what the agent's ground *could be*, but not about what it *is* – even if what it informs you about happens to be her ground.

I will call this the *Problem of Insufficiency*, as the problem is that the fact that S believes that P is *insufficient* for casting on her  $\Phi$ ing the intelligibility of being *done* on the ground that P.

#### **4.3 Moving Beyond Psychologism About Explanantia**

I have just argued that there are two complaints that can be made against Psychologism about Explanantia: what I called the Incompleteness Complaint and the Insufficiency Complaint.

The Incompleteness Complaint is the complaint that the Psychologist about Explanantia fails to take into account that facts that constitute normative reasons can play a role in action-explanations, namely, in cases in which the action is done in appreciation of a normative reason to so act. Now, the Reasonist about Explanantia holds that under a certain condition, the considerations on grounds of which the agent acts are suited to explain her action, namely, under the condition that they are facts that she appreciates as normative reasons. Thereby, she makes room for the idea that facts that constitute normative reasons can play a role in action-explanations, and, thus, avoids the first complaint. However, in holding that under the condition that

the considerations on grounds of which someone acts are facts that she appreciates as normative reasons, *those facts themselves* are what explain her action, she does not avoid the second complaint. Remember, the second complaint was that the fact that S believes that P is not suited to explain S's  $\Phi$ ing in a case in which she  $\Phi$ 's on grounds of P, because while it specifies what consideration *played the role of her ground*, it does not specify that consideration *as playing the role of a ground*, and thereby merely displays S as *being in a position* to act on grounds of P, but does not display her as *in fact* acting on grounds of P. The suggestion that under certain conditions, facts that constitute normative reasons can explain actions fails on the same count. Merely specifying a reason there is for S to  $\Phi$  shows us that things were normatively speaking such that S could act for that reason, but does not display S as in fact acting in response to, or in appreciation of, that reason. Even in a case in which S  $\Phi$ s in response to a normative reason, what explains her  $\Phi$ ing is not the normative reason, but the fact that that normative reason played the role of a ground in S's motivational economy. So, Reasonism about Explanantia avoids the Incompleteness Complaint that plagues Psychologism about Explanantia, but like Psychologism about Explanantia, it is a target of the Insufficiency Complaint.

The converse is true of Motivationalism about Explanantia. The Motivationalist about Explanantia takes seriously the idea that the facts that explain are not just facts that specify what the relevant consideration was, but facts about those considerations playing the role of a ground. But like the Psychologist about Explanantia, the Motivationalist about Explanantia fails to make room for the idea that reasons themselves can figure in the explanantia. So, while the Motivationalist about Explanantia avoids the second complaint,

the first complaint can be directed against her, just as much as it can be directed against the Psychologist about Explanantia.

The upshot is that while both Motivationalism about Explanantia and Reasonism about Explanantia are in better shape than Psychologism about Explanantia, neither of them is completely satisfactory.

#### **4.4 Disjunctive Motivationalism About Explanantia**

So, both Motivationalism about Explanantia and Reasonism about Explanantia are in a better shape than Psychologism about Explanantia, but neither of them are completely satisfactory. Luckily, there is a solution at hand: We can modify Motivationalism about Explanantia in a way that avoids the Incompleteness Complaint; or, what in the end amounts to the same, we can modify Reasonism about Explanantia in a way that avoids the Insufficiency Complaint.

Call cases in which S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P is a case of her  $\Phi$ ing in appreciation of a normative reason for her to  $\Phi$  that is constituted by the fact that P 'good cases'; and call cases in which S's  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P is merely a case of her  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of the consideration that P, 'bad cases'. We can modify Motivationalism about Explanantia in a way that avoids the Incompleteness Complaint by going *Disjunctivist*. According to the Motivationalist about Explanantia, good cases and bad cases are explained in terms of the same kind of motivation-fact, namely, in terms of the fact that what the agent believed, i.e. P, was what played the role of her ground. In saying that, the Motivationalist about Explanantia does not make room for the idea that as the good case differs from the bad case, in that in the good case, what played the role of the agent's ground was a normative reason, this normative reason

itself can figure in the explanation. Giving Motivationalism about Explanantia a disjunctive rendering amounts to saying that there is more than one kind of motivation-fact. Specifically, it amounts to saying that we should distinguish between (a) the motivation-fact that something the agent *believed* was what played the role of her ground (call that an 'epistemic motivation-fact'), and (b) the motivation-fact that a normative reason was what played the role of a ground (call that a 'normative motivation-fact'). Note that (b) implies (a), but not *vice versa*. That is, also the good case can be explained in terms of an epistemic motivation-fact. It is just that it can also be explained in terms of a normative motivation-fact. By introducing normative motivation-facts, we can make room for the idea that as the good case differs from the bad case, in that in the good case, what played the role of the agent's ground was a normative reason, this normative reason itself can figure in the explanation.

Now, saying that in good cases, the fact that explains is the fact that a certain normative reason plays the role of a ground (i.e. that the fact that explains is a normative motivation-fact) is just what the Reasonist about Explanantia should say, if she takes the Insufficiency Complaint seriously and revises her account accordingly. Remember, Reasonism about Explanantia is the view that in good cases, what explains actions are normative reasons. This view is problematic, I said, because merely pointing out that there is a normative reason for the agent to do what she does is not sufficient to show that in acting as she did, she responded to that reason. But we can modify Reasonism about Explanantia in a way that avoids the second complaint by saying that what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing, in a good case, is not *that reason itself*, but the fact *that that reason played the role of a ground* for S (i.e. a normative motivation-fact). We can put it like this: the truth in Reasonism about



Explanantia is that in good cases, normative reasons can *play a role* in explanations. That truth is occluded, however, if one understands that as meaning that reasons *themselves* are what explain the action. According to the suggested revision, what explains the action, in good cases, is the fact that the reason in appreciation of which the agent acts plays the role of a ground.

I will call the variant of Motivationalism about Explanantia that respects the truth in Reasonism about Explanantia, i.e. that respects that normative reasons can play a role in explanations, 'Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia':

(Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia) what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing, in a case in which she  $\Phi$ s on grounds of P, is either (in both the good and the bad case) an epistemic motivation-fact, or (in the good case) a normative motivation-fact.

Take Sam. On her way out, she picks up an umbrella. What motivates her to do so is what she believes, namely, that it is raining. Now, according to Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia, *regardless* of whether what she believes is a fact that is a reason for her to pick up an umbrella on her way out, the fact that renders her picking up an umbrella on her way out intelligible is the fact that what she believes, namely, that it is raining, plays the role of her ground. However, if what she relevantly believes is a fact that is a *reason* for her to pick up an umbrella on her way out, then we can also render her picking up an umbrella on her way out intelligible in terms of the fact that the *reason* there was for her to pick up an umbrella played the role of her ground, and thereby portray her not only as acting in a way that is rationally motivated, but also as rationally motivated by reasons.

Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia is superior to Psychologism about Explanantia in that it avoids both the Incompleteness Complaint and Insufficiency Complaint. It is superior to (unrevised) Motivationalism about Explanantia, in that it avoids the Incompleteness Complaint. It is also superior to Reasonism about Explanantia in that it avoids the Insufficiency Complaint. Thus, I suggest that Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia is the theory that one should hold if one wants to hold onto both Non-Factivism about Grounds and Veridicalism about Explanantia.

#### **4.5 Replies to Some Objections**

I want to finish by discussing and dismissing some objections and worries. The first three worries are directed against the Motivationalistic aspect of Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia (a-c). The fourth one is directed against the Reasonist aspect (d). I will finish by considering whether the objections I formulated against some other disjunctivist theories considered above can be used against Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia (e).

(a) The first objection I want to discuss is directed against the Motivationalist aspect of Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia. Take the case in which Sam takes out an umbrella on grounds of what she believes, namely, that it is raining. According to Motivationalism about Explanantia, what explains Sam's taking out an umbrella is the motivation-fact that the believed consideration 'that it is raining' played the role of a ground.

But saying that what explains why Sam takes out an umbrella is that the consideration 'that it is raining' played the role of a ground seems to amount to

saying that what explains her taking out an umbrella is that she takes out an umbrella on grounds of the consideration 'that it is raining', or schematically, that

(1) what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing is the fact that S is  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P.

Here is a first worry about (1). Above (II.1.5), I said that that, at least under certain conditions,

(2) S is  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P

is tantamount to

(3) S is  $\Phi$ ing because P.

But surely,

(4) Y is what explains X

is also tantamount to

(5) X because Y.

So, it would seem that another way of putting (1) is the paradoxical-looking:

(6) S is  $\Phi$ ing because (S is  $\Phi$ ing because P)

However, we get this result only if the first 'because' (the one that also figures in 5) and the second 'because' (the one that also figures in 3) are to be interpreted in the same way. But I have already established that grounds cannot be explanantia. And so, the propositional component in (2) specifies the ground on which S  $\Phi$ 's, or what it is that motivates S to  $\Phi$ , and not the explanans of her  $\Phi$ ing. But if (3) is tantamount to (2), then it follows that the 'because' in (3) is not to be understood as a 'because' of explanation of the kind that figures in (5). It is to be understood as a 'because' of motivation. That is, (2) tells us that P was what rationally motivated S to  $\Phi$ . It does not tell us that P is what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing. And if (3) is tantamount to (2), then the 'because' in (3) relates S's  $\Phi$ ing and P as what motivates and what is motivated, and not as

explanans and explanandum. Therefore, (6) is to be understood as the non-paradoxical

(7) S is  $\Phi$ ing because<sub>explanantion</sub> (S is  $\Phi$ ing because<sub>motivation</sub> P).

Let me note, however, that (7) is an *analysis* of action-explanations. For of course, in everyday discourse, we do not express ourselves in such a circumspect manner. In everyday discourse, we can say things like

(8) "Sam is taking out her umbrella because it is raining"

in an explanatory spirit. Of course, we do not have to say

(9) "Sam is taking out her umbrella because<sub>explanantion</sub> she is taking out her umbrella because<sub>motivation</sub> it is raining"

when we attempt to explain why Sam is taking out an umbrella. But the Motivationalist about Explanantia does not insist otherwise. All she holds is that (9) captures the underlying structure of (8).

(b) Despite this first clarification, there might still be worries about the view that what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing is the fact that S is  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P, e.g. that

(1) what explains why Sam buys some potatoes is that Sam buys some potatoes on the ground that they are on special offer.

At one point, for instance, Dancy writes that he considered "[the] possibility ... that the *explanans* of his  $\Phi$ -ing is 'his reason for  $\Phi$ -ing was that p'." (Remember that according to our convention, 'reason' must here be read as 'ground'.) But he says that 'his reason for  $\Phi$ -ing was that p'

cannot be the *explanans*, because it contains the *explanandum*, his  $\Phi$ -ing.

After all, 'his reason for  $\Phi$ -ing was that p' is equivalent to 'he  $\Phi$ -ed for

the reason that  $p'$ , which contains his  $\Phi$ -ing as a part. (Dancy, 2003b, pp. 480–1)

The worry, that is, is that (1) is circular, in that what is to be explained also figures in what explains, and thus remains unexplained. To see the problem, consider the following putative explanation:

(2) What explains why Sam buys some potatoes is that she buys some potatoes and the moon is made of cheese.

(2) is clearly problematic. For contrary to what it purports, (2) does not explain why Sam buys some potatoes. It simply repeats that she buys some potatoes. But is (1) really like (2)? It is true that in (1), just like in (2), Sam's buying some potatoes figures both in the explanans and the explanandum. But the problem with (2) does not seem to be the mere fact that Sam's buying some potatoes figures both in the explanans and the explanandum. The problem with (2) seems to be that the explanans has the form of a conjunction, that is, that what additionally figures in the explanans, besides Sam's buying some potatoes, is in no way related to Sam's buying some potatoes. In general, we cannot explain P by stating some conjunction in which P figures. In (1), however, the explanans has the form not of a conjunction, but of a relation; specifically, a relation between action-motivator and motivated action, or between ground and action done on that ground. So, the explanans is such as to reveal the action to be a relata of some determinate motivation-relation. And so, other than (2), (1) does explain why Sam buys some potatoes, namely, in that it displays her buying some potatoes as motivated by something she believes.

(c) It is plausible that when someone does something on a ground, she has some sort of knowledge or awareness of her doing what she is doing on

grounds of whatever grounds she is doing it for, at least in normal cases. (Moreover, it is plausible that that knowledge or awareness is, in some sense, constitutive of her acting on grounds of whatever it is that she is acting on grounds of. Cf. Anscombe, 2000.) One might worry that Motivationalism about Explanantia does not do justice to this phenomenon. For one might worry that Motivationalism about Explanantia displays the agent as systematically mistaken about why she does what she does. Consider the following objection:

When S  $\Phi$ 's on grounds of P, and you ask her why she is  $\Phi$ ing, she will be able to tell you that she is  $\Phi$ ing because P, at least in normal cases. But if Motivationalism about Grounds were correct, she would not be  $\Phi$ ing because P, but because P plays the role of her ground. And that would imply that agents are systematically mistaken about why they do what they do: when they  $\Phi$  on grounds of P, they think that they  $\Phi$  because P, but actually, they  $\Phi$  because P plays the role of a ground. But it is absurd to think that we are systematically mistaken about why we do what we do. Therefore, Motivationalism about Grounds cannot be correct.

This objection trades on the ambiguity of 'because' that was brought to light in discussion of the first objection. When S tells you that she is  $\Phi$ ing because P, what she is saying is that P motivated her to  $\Phi$ , i.e. what she is saying is of the form:

I am  $\Phi$ ing because<sub>motivation</sub> P.

But when the Motivationalist about Grounds says that S is  $\Phi$ ing because P plays the role of her ground, she is saying that what explains S's  $\Phi$ ing is the fact that P plays the role of S's ground, i.e. what she says is of the form:

S is  $\Phi$ ing because<sub>explanation</sub> P plays the role of S's ground.

Thus, the Motivationalist about Grounds says nothing that challenges S's knowledge or awareness of what motivates her to what she does.

(d) I said above that the truth in Reasonism is the idea that normative reasons can play a role in explanations. I now want to discuss and dismiss an objection that is directed against that idea. For one might think that despite all that was said above, reasons themselves have no place in explanantia after all.

Consider the following case: Peter believes that the ice in the middle of the pond is too thin to support his weight, and on grounds of what he believes, he keeps to the edge whilst skating on the pond. Now, as I said, this might or might not be a case in which Peter is acting for a normative reason. It might be a case in which Peter is acting for a normative reason (call that the good case): For it might be that the ice in the middle of the pond really is too thin to support his weight, that that fact is a reason for Peter to keep to the edge, and that Peter's believing what he does, and taking what he believes to be a reason for him to do what he does, satisfies whatever requirements must be satisfied for his acting on grounds of what he believes to count as an acting for a normative reason (see II.1.1). On the other hand, it might be a case in which Peter's acting on grounds of what he believes is no more than that (call that the bad case): as, for instance, what Peter believes may be false. Does it make any difference whether Peter's case is a good case or a bad case? Does he not do exactly the same thing – keep to the edge of the pond – regardless of whether he is in the good case or the bad case? And if he does the exact same thing in the bad case and in the good case, do we not have to conclude that the normative reason, which is present in the good case, but not in the bad case, should not figure in the explanation of what he does in the good case? As Dancy puts it:

[T]hat the ice in the middle was (in fact) thin does nothing to explain his action. He would have acted in the same way had the ice not been thin. So that the ice was thin does not contribute to the explanation of his action (Dancy, 2014, p. 91)

Now, it is true that both in the good case and the bad case, Peter keeps to the edge of the pond. So there is a sense in which he does the exact same thing both in the good case and the bad case. That alone, however, should not lead us to think that in the good case, any mention of the reason Peter is responding to is explanatorily speaking superfluous. Consider the case in which Peter believes that the ice in the middle is too thin, and keeps to the edge of the pond, but does not do so on grounds of his belief about the thinness of the ice. Let us say that Peter also believes that if he keeps to the edge, Sam will see what a good ice-skater he is, and that he keeps to the edge on that ground. Here, there is a sense in which Peter does the exact same thing as he does when he keeps to the edge on the ground that the ice in the middle is thin. We can even say that had Peter not believed as he believed, namely, that if he keeps to the edge, Sam will see what a good ice-skater he is, he would nevertheless have kept to the edge. For then, surely, he would not disregard what he also believes, namely, that the ice in the middle of the pond is too thin. Although there is a sense in which he does the exact same thing in these two cases, it obviously does not mean that those two cases are to be explained in the same way. The cases are different in that Peter's grounds are different. And this difference is explanatorily speaking relevant. That we can construct the case so that "[h]e would have acted in the same way" is neither here nor there.

Now, in our original two cases – the good case and the bad case – Peter's grounds are the same. More precisely, they are the same with regard to their



*content*. So there is a sense in which we can say about the good case that Peter “would have acted in the same way had the ice not been thin”. Had the ice not been thin, but had Peter nevertheless believed that it was thin, his ground would have been no different. But in the good case, Peter’s ground is a normative reason. In the bad case, it is a mere consideration. Consequently, while there is no difference in *content* between the good case and the bad case, there is a difference in *status*. Had the ice not been thin, Peter would have acted in the same way. But what he would then have done would not have had the same status as what he in fact does. The absence of the reason would not have changed how Peter behaved, though his behavior would have *counted as something else*; it would not have counted as action for a reason, but merely as action done on a ground.

From Reasonism about Explanantia, Disjunctive Motivationalism takes the insistence that reasons are explanatorily-speaking relevant. The mere fact that there is a sense in which she who responds to a reason would act no differently, were the reason she responds to merely apparent, does not dislodge the fact that reasons are explanatorily-speaking relevant.

(e) Let me finish by considering whether the objections I formulated against some other disjunctivist theories considered above (see III.3) can be used against Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia. I considered two ways in which one might seek to deal with error-cases by way of giving them special treatment. I considered the option that in error-cases, grounds are considerations about one’s own mind (Disjunctivism about Grounds), and the option that in error-cases, agents do not act on grounds (Disjunctivism about Ground-Taking). I also showed why neither of those options will do. Disjunctive

Motivationalism about Explanantia is also a theory that holds that error-cases need different treatment than veridical cases. In what respect is it different?

Disjunctivism about Grounds fails because it gives an implausible account of what kinds of considerations play the role of a ground in error-cases. But Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia is not a disjunctive theory of grounds. It does not hold that we need a special treatment of grounds in error-cases. According to the Disjunctive Motivationalist about Explanantia, both in good cases and in bad cases it is the same thing that plays the role of a ground, namely, a proposition. Indeed, with regard to what plays the role of a ground, the good case and the bad case are on a par. The good case and the bad case are different, however, in that in the good case, but not in the bad case, what plays the role of a ground has the *status of a reason*, and accordingly, the agent's acting on grounds of whatever it is that she is acting on grounds of has the *status of a response to a reason*. So, unlike Disjunctivism about Grounds, Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia cannot be faulted for giving an implausible account of what kinds of considerations play the role of a ground in error-cases.

Disjunctivism about Ground-Taking fails because given that believed considerations play the role of a ground just in case, and because, they are taken to be normative reasons and motivate the agent on that account, there is simply no basis for disallowing false considerations to play that role. Nevertheless, as I explained, it is true that there is a sense in which those that act on grounds of false considerations are not acting for reasons; for contrary to what they think, what they are doing is not *a response to a reason*. Disjunctive Motivationalism about Explanantia caters for the difference between those cases in which someone's acting on a ground amounts to her responding to a

reason, and those cases in which someone's acting on a ground is no more than that. However, unlike Disjunctivism about Ground-Taking, it does not fall into the trap of conflating reasons and grounds.

## **5. Summary**

It is widely agreed upon that error-cases, i.e. cases in which the agent's relevant belief is false, pose a problem for the Non-Psychologist. I showed that such cases pose a problem for the Non-Psychologist only to the extent that grounds are taken to be explanantia. Thus, we can avoid the problem by giving up the presupposition that grounds are explanantia. If grounds are not explanantia, what explains actions that are done on grounds? What explains actions done on grounds are motivation-facts, i.e. facts to the effect that the action was motivated by whatever it is that it was motivated by, or done on grounds of whatever it was done on grounds of. As things that play the role of a ground can either be normative reasons themselves, or considerations merely taken to be normative reasons, it follows that motivation-facts come in two kinds: there are those that include normative reasons, and there are those that do not.

## Summary

I started out by asking: When someone does something for a reason, what are the reasons for which she does what she does? What is her 'motivating reason', as it is sometimes put? The simple answer is: it depends on what is meant by 'motivating reason'. Non-Psychologists hold that motivating reasons are what the agent believes. I have shown that given that we understand 'motivating reasons' as grounds, this is quite correct, as what we believe is what plays the role of a ground. However, we have to be careful not to confuse the role of a ground and the role of an explanans. For the conflation of those two roles can occlude the truth in Non-Psychologism. What the Non-Psychologist about Grounds should say is that what plays the role of an explanans, when someone acts on a ground, is a motivation-fact. She should also say that there are two kinds of motivation-facts: those that include normative reasons and those that do not. Let me summarize how I arrived at that result.

What we seek to take into account in deliberation and advice – what I called reasons – are facts (which I said we should understand as true propositions) that favor actions. For the most part, facts that favor actions are not facts about one's own mind, e.g. about beliefs or desires one has (cf. I.5). Rather, at least for the most part, they are ordinary empirical facts, like the fact that it is raining, or that the house is on fire, or that it is your mother's birthday today (cf. I.4). Notably, however, such ordinary empirical facts are the reasons they are only in certain circumstances; in other circumstances, they can be reasons to perform quite different actions, or no reasons at all (cf. I.1). I argued that in saying only so much, one can keep an open mind about what makes reason-claims of the form 'P, in C, is a reason for S to  $\Phi$ ' true. That is, one can

keep an open mind about whether such claims simply are primitive truths, or whether they are true because of primitive truths about, say, the value or goodness of  $\Phi$ ing, or whether such claims are true because an idealized alter-ego of S would treat P as a reason for her to  $\Phi$  (cf. I.3). I also argued that one can keep an open mind about whether a certain fact's being a reason for S to  $\Phi$  is dependent, in some way or another, on S's conative and/or cognitive situation. For instance, it might be that the fact that a certain drug will cure the patient's illness is a reason for you to give that patient said drug only if there is some way in which you can come to know that it cures her illness, or it might be that it is a reason regardless of whether there is some way in which you can come to know that it cures her illness. And it might be that, say, the fact that your friend is in trouble is a reason for you to help her out only given certain facts about your desires or interests, or it might be a reason no matter your conative condition. I said that one can keep an open mind on such issues. We can do that, because we can understand those options as differing views about what the relevant circumstances are in which a certain fact is the reason that it is (cf. I.2).

I employed this account of normative reasons in an argument to the effect that rational motivators, i.e. things that play what I called the role of a ground, are (believed) propositions, and, for the most part, not propositions about one's own mind. Something plays the role of a ground in S's  $\Phi$ ing, I said, just in case (a) S takes it to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing, (b) S is motivated by it to  $\Phi$ , where (a) and (b) are related in that (c) S is motivated by it to  $\Phi$  because she takes it to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing (cf. II.1). Given that what we take to be reasons are true propositions or facts, I argued that it follows that what plays the role of a ground can be a true proposition, but that the truth-value of a proposition is

not essential to its being able to play the role of a ground (cf. II.3). Moreover, I argued that while there are cases in which we take propositions about our own mind to be reasons, these cases are rare. In normal cases, the propositions we take to be reasons are propositions about the world around us (cf. II.4, I.5). So, what plays the role of a ground is Non-Psychologistic in two senses: it is not a psychological state, but a proposition, and the propositions that play the role of a ground are not restricted to propositions about psychological states.

In recent time, there has been much debate about whether so-called motivating reasons are to be conceived of as Psychologically, i.e. as psychological states, or propositions about such states, or Non-Psychologically, i.e. as propositions that are not constrained to a psychological matter (cf. II.2). But contributions to the Psychologism-Debate (as I called it) often lack proper clarification of the notion (or better: the notions) of a 'motivating reason'. I argued that when Non-Psychologists talk about 'motivating reasons', they are talking either about (i) grounds ('motivating reason' is then to be understood as 'motivator that motivates because it is taken to be a reason'), or about (ii) those grounds that are reasons ('motivating reason' is then to be understood as 'reason that motivates'). As grounds are propositions, and, for the most part, not propositions about one's own mind, Non-Psychologism about motivating reasons (where motivating reasons are understood as grounds) is correct. However, when Psychologists talk about 'motivating reasons', they usually are neither talking about *motivators that motivate because they taken to be a reasons*, nor about *normative reasons that motivate*. Rather, they are talking about (iii) what explains actions (i.e. explanantia), in the sense of what 'makes sense' of actions. Or they are offering a reductive account of acting on a ground, and what they

call 'motivating reasons' are (iv) psychological states that, according to their account, play some role in the production of behavior that counts as action done on a ground (cf. II.2.1, II.2.2).

Now, this clarification does not render the Psychologism-Debate merely verbal. For it is often presupposed that motivating reasons, understood as grounds, are explanantia. And if one's view is that something plays the role of S's motivating reason just in case (a) S takes it to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing, (b) is motivated by it to  $\Phi$ , (c) is motivated by it to  $\Phi$  because she takes it to speak in favor of  $\Phi$ ing, *and* (d) it explains why S  $\Phi$ s, and one holds that what plays that role is a non-psychological proposition, then one has a real issue with someone who holds that what explains actions are psychological states (cf. II.2.2-3).

However, there are good reasons for distinguishing between grounds and explanantia. It is often said that Non-Psychologists cannot properly deal with error-cases (cf. III.1). For the Non-Psychologist will say things like that in taking out her umbrella, Sam acted on grounds of what she believed, which is, say, that it is raining. But if Sam's belief that it is raining is false, it is thought, the Non-Psychologist will have to implausibly say that the falsehood 'that it is raining' is what explains why Sam takes out her umbrella. And while that bullet has been bitten (cf. III.2), doing so is certainly something that we should seek to avoid. As I put it, the problem at issue can be conceived of in terms of the following inconsistent triad (cf. III.1.2):

- (1) what plays the role of a ground are propositions (Propositionalism about Grounds)
- (2) what plays the role of a ground also plays the role of an explanantia (Explanatorism about Grounds)
- (3) falsehoods cannot explain (Veridicalism about Explanantia)

As (1) is true (cf. II.1.3), and (3) is true (cf. III.1, III.2), (2) must be false, that is, we should hold grounds and explanantia apart.

However, if what plays the role of a ground is not what plays the role of an explanantia, then what does play that role? I argued that when S  $\Phi$ s on grounds of P, what explains her  $\Phi$ ing is the fact that she is  $\Phi$ ing on grounds of P. To put it differently: that which plays the role of the explanans in an explanation of her  $\Phi$ ing is not what plays the role of a ground, i.e. P, but rather, a fact to the effect that P plays the role of a ground (a motivation-fact, as I put it). Furthermore, the considerations that play the role of a ground can have the status of a reason, but they can also have the status of a mere consideration. So, while actions can be explained in terms of facts to the effect that those actions were done on grounds of a certain consideration, quite regardless of what status that consideration has, in cases in which the consideration that played the role of a ground has the status of a reason, the action can be explained in terms of a fact to the effect that that reason played the role of a ground. That is to say, motivation-facts come in two sorts: there are those that involve and those that do not involve reasons, and those two kinds of motivation-facts differ in their explanatory power (cf. III.4.2, III.4.4-5).

So, to recapitulate, I have argued that what speaks in favor of someone's performing some particular course of action can be what rationally motivates her to so act, but that not all rational motivators are reasons. For something to be a rational motivator, it suffices that it is taken to be a normative reason, it need not in fact be one. Further, I have argued that one should distinguish motivation and explanation: motivators are not explanantia. Rather, explanantia are facts *about* motivators. On the one hand, this amounts to a defense of Non-Psychologism about motivating reasons, at least as long as



motivating reasons are understood as rational motivators, i.e. grounds. For explanantia are truths, while what rationally motivates someone can be a falsehood. On the other hand, however, it transpired that the Psychologism-Debate rests on the false assumption that grounds are explanantia, and that Non-Psychologism about motivating reasons lacks a satisfactory theory of action-explanation. I hope to have shown what such a theory must look like.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis was written as part of the SNSF-funded project ‘The Normative Mind’. Before I was working within that project, I received financial support from the Janggen-Pöhn-Stiftung and from the Freie Akademische Gesellschaft Basel. I would like to thank all three institutions for financially enabling my work.

I would like to especially and warmly thank my supervisor, Fabian Dorsch, for encouragement, advice, many enormously helpful comments and suggestions, and for getting me to finally bring some of my ideas into shape. His untimely death fills me with deep sadness. His generosity both in personal and in philosophical matters will not be forgotten.

I would also like to thank Gianfranco Soldati for agreeing to be my second supervisor. He has shown continuous interest in my work and I am happy to be able to submit it to his judgment. With Constantine Sandis, an expert in the field in which I but tinkered agreed to read and judge my work and I am glad about that.

A thanks is due to Davor Bodrožić for countless invaluable discussions over the last few years – and for some last minute proofreading of this manuscript. Also, I would like to thank Sebastian Rödl for getting me started with my thesis (which has since taken a very different track); Peter Schulthess for enabling me to spend an enjoyable year as his assistant at the University of Zurich; Candace Vogler for her kind invitation to Chicago, where I spent two thrilling (and quite chilly) quarters as Visiting Scholar; the members of the

EXRE-crowd in Fribourg, who have heard maybe more than they ever wanted to hear about reasons; Josephine Frei for additional proofreading; and Anton Ford, Rebekka Gersbach, Christian Kietzmann, Matthias Haase, Dominik Renner and especially Jonas Held for stimulating discussions – some of them have been going on for years, some of them (sadly) were a one-time event, some of them were way back in the past, others were just yesterday. I would also like to thank audiences at workshops and conferences in Barcelona, Basel, Budapest, Fribourg, Chicago, Poznan, and Zurich at which I had the opportunity to present earlier stages of this work.

I would like to thank my parents, Josephine and André Frei, for constant support and interest.

Most importantly, I would like to thank Corinne Weber and Filippa Frei. Without your love and laughter this would all make not half as much sense.

## Bibliography

- Alvarez, M. (2010). *Kinds of Reasons: An Essay in the Philosophy of Action*. Oxford University Press.
- Alvarez, M. (2016). Reasons for Action, Acting for Reasons, and Rationality. *Synthese*, 1–18.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. (1989). Von Wright on Practical Inference. In *The Philosophy of Georg Henrik von Wright* (pp. 377–404). Open Court.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. (2000). *Intention* (2nd ed). Harvard University Press.
- Baier, K. (1969). *The moral point of view: A rational basis of ethics*. Cornell University Press.
- Bittner, R. (2001). *Doing Things for Reasons*. Oxford University Press.
- Blackburn, S. (1998). *Ruling passions*. Oxford University Press.
- Boyle, M., & Lavin, D. (2010). Goodness and Desire. In S. Tenenbaum (Ed.), *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (pp. 161–201). Oxford University Press
- Broome, J. (2004). Reasons. In R. J. Wallace (Ed.), *Reason and Value: Themes From the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz* (pp. 204–28). Oxford University Press.
- Cuneo, T. (2007). *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism*. Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. (2002). *Practical Reality*. Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. (2003a). Précis of Practical Reality. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67 (2), 423–428.
- Dancy, J. (2003b). Replies. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67 (2), 468–490.

- Dancy, J. (2004a). *Ethics Without Principles*. Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. (2004b). Two Ways of Explaining Actions. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 55 (1), 25–42.
- Dancy, J. (2008). On How to Act : Disjunctively. In A. Haddock & F. Macpherson (Eds.), *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge* (pp. 262–282). Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. (2014). On Knowing One’s Reason. In C. Littlejohn & J. Turri (Eds.), *Epistemic Norms* (pp. 80–96). Oxford University Press.
- Darwall, S. (2003). Desires, Reasons, and Causes. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67 (2), 436–443.
- Darwall, S. L. (1983). *Impartial reason*. Cornell University Press.
- Davidson, D. (1980). Actions, Reasons, and Causes (1963). In *Essays on Actions and Events* (pp. 3–19). Clarendon Press.
- Davis, W. A. (2005). Reasons and Psychological Causes. *Philosophical Studies*, 122 (1), 51–101.
- Everson, S. (2009). What Are Reasons for Action? In C. Sandis (Ed.), *New Essays on the Explanation of Action*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Finlay, S. (2010). Recent Work on Normativity. *Analysis*, 70 (2), 331–346.
- Finlay, Stephen. (2009). The Obscurity of Internal Reasons. *Philosophers’ Imprint*, 9 (7), 1–22.
- Foot, P. (2001). *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Frege, G. (2003). Der Gedanke. In G. Patzig (Ed.), *Logische Untersuchungen*. Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht.
- Garrard, E., & McNaughton, D. (1998). Mapping Moral Motivation. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 1 (1), 45–59.

- Gibbons, J. (2010). Things That Make Things Reasonable. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 81 (2), 335–361.
- Gregory, A. (2013). The Guise of Reasons. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 50 (1), 63–72.
- Hacker, P. (2009). Agential Reasons and the Explanation of Human Behaviour. In C. Sandis (Ed.), *New Essays on the Explanation of Action*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haddock, A., & Macpherson, F. (2008). Introduction: Varieties of Disjunctivism. In A. Haddock & F. Macpherson (Eds.), *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge*. Oxford University Press.
- Heuer, U. (2004). Reasons for Actions and Desires. *Philosophical Studies*, 121 (1), 43–63.
- Heuer, Ulrike. (2006). Explaining Reasons: Where Does the Buck Stop? *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, 1 (3), 1–25.
- Hieronymi, P. (2011). Reasons for Action. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 111 (3pt3), 407–427.
- Hornsby, J. (2008). A Disjunctive Conception of Acting for Reasons. In A. Haddock & F. Macpherson (Eds.), *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge* (pp. 244–261). Oxford University Press.
- Hyman, J. (1999). How Knowledge Works. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 50 (197), 433–451.
- Hyman, J. (2015). *Action, Knowledge, and Will*. Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, F. (1991). Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection. *Ethics*, 101 (3), 461–482.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press.

- Kearns, S., & Star, D. (2009). Reasons as Evidence. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 4, 215–42.
- Kiesewetter, B. (forthcoming). How Reasons Are Sensitive to Available Evidence. In C. McHugh, J. Way, & D. Whiting (Eds.), *Normativity: Epistemic and Practical*. Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, C. M. (1986). Skepticism about Practical Reason. *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXIII (1), 5–25.
- Korsgaard, C. M. (1996). *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lavin, D. (2011). Problems of Intellectualism: Raz on Reason and Its Objects. *Jurisprudence* 2 (2): 367-378
- Lenman, J. (2011). Reasons for Action: Justification vs. Explanation. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011).
- Littlejohn, C. (2012). *Justification and the Truth-Connection*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lord, E. (2008). Dancy on Acting for the Right Reason. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, (3), 1–7.
- Mantel, S. (2014). No Reason for Identity: On the Relation Between Motivating and Normative Reasons. *Philosophical Explorations*, 17 (1), 49–62.
- Mantel, S. (2015). Worldly Reasons: An Ontological Inquiry Into Motivating Considerations and Normative Reasons. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 96 (4).
- Mantel, S. (2016). How to Be Psychologistic about Motivating but not about Normative Reasons. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 93, 80–105
- Mayr, E. (2011). *Understanding Human Agency*. Oxford University Press.
- McDowell, J. H. (1994). *Mind and World*. Harvard University Press.

- McDowell, J. (1982). Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68, 455–79.
- McDowell, J. (1986). Singular Thought and the Extent of “Inner Space.” In J. McDowell & P. Pettit (Eds.), *Subject, Thought, and Context*. Clarendon Press.
- McDowell, J. (1995). Might There Be External Reasons? In J. E. J. Altham & R. Harrison (Eds.), *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*. Cambridge University Press.
- McDowell, J. (2013). Acting in the Light of a Fact. *Thinking About Reasons: Themes From the Philosophy of Jonathan Dancy*, 13–28.
- Mele, A. (2007). Reasonology and False Beliefs. *Philosophical Papers*, 36 (1), 91–118.
- Miller, C. (2008). Motivation in Agents. *Noûs*, 42(2), 222–266.
- Nagel, T. (1986). *The View From Nowhere*. Oxford University Press.
- O’Brien, L. (2015). Beyond Psychologism and Anti-Psychologism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 18 (2), 281–295.
- Parfit, D. (2011). *On What Matters*. Oxford University Press.
- Pettit, P., & Smith, M. (1997). Parfit’s P. In J. Dancy (Ed.), *Reading Parfit* (pp. 71–95). Blackwell.
- Pryor, J. (2007). Reasons and That-Clauses. *Philosophical Issues*, 17 (1), 217–244.
- Raz, J. (1975). *Practical Reason and Norms*. Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (1978). *Practical Reasoning*. Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (1999). *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*. Oxford University Press.



- Raz, J. (2001). Incommensurability and Agency. In *Engaging Reason* (pp. 46-66). Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (2011a). Epistemic Modulations. In *From Normativity to Responsibility* (pp. 107–128). Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (2011b). *From Normativity to Responsibility*. Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (2011c). On the Guise of the Good. In *From Normativity to Responsibility* (pp. 59-84). Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (2011d). Reasons: Explanatory and Normative. In *From Normativity to Responsibility* (pp. 13–35). Oxford University Press.
- Roessler, J. (2014). Reason Explanation and the Second-Person Perspective. *Philosophical Explorations*, 17 (3), 346–357.
- Sandis, C. (2012). *The Things We Do and Why We Do Them*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sandis, C. (2013). Can Action Explanations Ever Be Non-Factive? In *Thinking About Reasons: Themes From the Philosophy of Jonathan Dancy* (pp. 29-46). Oxford University Press.
- Scanlon, T. (1998). *What We Owe to Each Other*. The Belknap Press.
- Scanlon, T. (2014). *Being Realistic About Reasons*. Oxford University Press.
- Schroeder, M. A. (2007). *Slaves of the Passions*. Oxford University Press.
- Sehon, S. R. (2005). *Teleological Realism: Mind, Agency, and Explanation*. MIT Press.
- Setiya, K. (2011). Reasons and Causes. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 19 (1), 129–157.
- Setiya, K. (2007). *Reasons Without Rationalism*. Princeton University Press.
- Setiya, K. (2010). Sympathy for the Devil. In *Tenenbaum (Ed.), Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (pp. 82-110). Oxford University Press.

- Setiya, K. (2014). What is a Reason to Act? *Philosophical Studies*, 167 (2), 221–235.
- Setiya, K. & Paakkunainen, H. (2012). *Internal Reasons: Contemporary Readings*. MIT Press.
- Skorupski, J. (2010). *The Domain of Reasons*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, M. A. (1995). Internal Reasons. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 55 (1), 109–131.
- Smith, M. A. (2003). Humeanism, Psychologism, and the Normative Story. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67 (2), 460–467.
- Smith, M. A. (1998). The Possibility of Philosophy of Action. In *Human Action, Deliberation and Causation*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Smith, M. A. (2000). *The Moral Problem*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stout, R. (2009). Was Sally's Reason for Running From the Bear That She Thought It Was Chasing Her? In C. Sandis (Ed.), *New Essays on the Explanation of Action* (pp. 48-61). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stoutland, F. (2007). Reasons for Action and Psychological States. In A. Leist (Ed.), *Action in Context* (pp. 75-94). Walter de Gruyter.
- Strawson, P. F. (1949). Truth. *Analysis*, 9 (6), 83–97.
- Thompson, M. (2008). *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*. Harvard University Press.
- Thomson, J. J. (2003). *Goodness and Advice*. Princeton University Press.
- Thomson, J. J. (2008). *Normativity*. Open Court.
- Turri, J. (2009). The Ontology of Epistemic Reasons. *Noûs*, 43 (3), 490–512.
- Velleman, J. D. (2000). *The possibility of practical reason*. Oxford University Press.
- Velleman, J. D. (1992). The Guise of the Good. *Noûs*, 26 (1), 3-26.

- Vogler, C. A. (2002). *Reasonably Vicious*. Harvard University Press.
- Wallace, R. J. (2003). Explanation, Deliberation, and Reasons. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67 (2), 429–435.
- Wedgwood, R. (2009). Intrinsic Values and Reasons for Action. In E. Sosa & E. Villanueva (Eds.), *Metaethics* (Vol. 19, pp. 342–363). Wiley.
- Whiting, D. (2014). Keep Things in Perspective: Reasons, Rationality, and the A Priori. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, 8, 1–22.
- Wiland, E. (2003). Psychologism, Practical Reason and the Possibility of Error. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 53 (210), 68–78.
- Wiland, E. (2012). *Reasons*. Continuum.
- Williams, B. (1980). Internal and External Reasons. In *Moral Luck* (pp. 101–113). Cambridge University Press.
- Zimmerman, M. J. (2008). *Living with Uncertainty: The Moral Significance of Ignorance*. Cambridge University Press.