

HAVING FALSE REASONS

Juan Comesaña

Matthew McGrath

In some cases there is a reason for one to do or believe something, but because one has no inkling of this reason, it doesn't matter to the rationality of one's actions or beliefs.¹ To take a famous example from Bernard Williams (1981), if you are sitting in a building which has just caught fire, there is a very good reason for you to leave as quickly as possible; but if you have no idea that anything is unusual, you might be quite rational to stay put where you are. In this case there exists a reason for you to do something, but, because you do not "have" or "possess" that reason, it does not affect what you are rational to do. Williams' example thus shows that there can be reasons for one to do something which don't affect rationality because they are not "had."

The distinction between the reasons there are and the reasons one has for doing something raises the question of what is needed to convert a reason there is for someone to do something into a reason the person has to do it. This is an epistemological project insofar as it seems that the gap-fillers are the sorts of factors that have traditionally been taken to matter to knowledge, e.g., belief, justification, warrant.

One might think that if one can answer this question one has explained what it is to have reasons. Yet this thought depends on assuming a certain connection between there being reasons and one's having reasons, viz. that a consideration, p , cannot be a reason one has to do something unless p is a reason there is to do that thing.² This assumption guarantees that the reasons one has are facts, because reasons there are are facts: if there is a reason for you to leave the building, then there is a fact which is that reason (e.g., the fact

¹ In what follows we focus mainly on reasons for actions, but we believe that our arguments apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to reasons for belief.

² Mark Schroeder (2008) call this the "factoring account" of reasons, and argues against it.

that the building is on fire). Our target here is what we will call **factualism** about reasons-had, the claim that the reasons one has must be facts (i.e., must be true). Against factualism, we maintain that there are cases in which a consideration p is a reason one has to do something and yet p is false and so not a fact. We think, therefore, that one can have a reason to act or to believe even if there is no reason to so act or believe. Our argument for this conclusion depends on principles connecting having reasons to the rationality of action, which we develop in the first half of the paper.

In the second half of the paper, we examine two difficulties for the “false reasons” position. The first is that the best account of the semantics of simple ascriptions of reasons-had implies they are factive, i.e., that ‘ p is a reason S has to X ’ entails ‘ p ’. But if such ascriptions are factive, presumably the reasons one has must be true. The second, even more troubling difficulty, comes from a very simple and plausible argument for factualism: if p is a reason that one has to do something, then p is a reason to do that thing, and if p is a reason to do something, then of course *there is* a reason to do that thing, viz. p ; thus, reasons-had must be reasons-there-are; but reasons-there-are are facts, and so reasons-had, too, are facts. We argue that those two difficulties fail to undermine the false reasons view.

One final preliminary. In recent work (the terminology here is due to Scanlon (2003, 13)), the term ‘rational’ is often used for two different properties of an attitude or action, for *substantive* rationality on the one hand and *structural* rationality on the other. The distinction is clear from examples. Suppose one believes, against the evidence, that the earth is flat. And suppose one believes, further, that if the earth is flat then it is not round. In the substantive sense, the fact that one has these beliefs does not guarantee that one is rational to believe the earth is not round. The mere fact that one has beliefs the contents of which entail, and are known to entail, that p does not guarantee that one is substantively rational to believe that p . However, intuitively, one is in some sense rational to believe the earth isn’t round given that one has those other beliefs. This intuition picks up on the structural sense. One is rationally required to believe something in the structural sense only relative to other attitudes one possesses. In this sense, however, being rationally required to believe does not entail that one would be irrational not to believe, or

even that one has a reason to believe (cf. Broome 1999). Throughout, we use ‘rational’ to express substantive rationality.

I. An argument against factualism

Let us start by remembering the distinction between *ex ante* rational action from *ex post* rational action. This is the analogue in the practical sphere of the common distinction in epistemology between justifiably believing something (*ex post*, or “doxastic,” justification) and being justified *to* believe something (*ex ante*, or “propositional,” justification). An action is *ex ante* rational for a person iff it is rational for a person *to* do, whether the person does it or not. An action is *ex post* rational for a person iff the person performed the action rationally. Given this terminology, the first principle we endorse is:

(1) If one is rational to do something, then one has reasons to do that thing and those reasons make it rational for one to do it.

(1) takes *ex ante* rationality of action to depend on having reasons for that action. An action is rational for one to do only if one has a reason or reasons for doing it, and these reasons must make the action rational for one. There might be different accounts of what it takes for the “making rational” relation to obtain. Perhaps it is a matter of those reasons not being defeated; perhaps it is a matter of them not being defeated as well as their collectively having a certain weight.

What if someone falsely (but perhaps rationally) believes that she has most reason to do X? Might not she then be rational to do X, falsifying (1)? There are at least two ways of understanding this objection. The first one is to think of it as concerning structural rationality. We agree that if one believes one has most reason to do X and decides not to do X one’s attitudes clash. Thus, to use Broome’s terminology, believing that one has most reason to do X rationally requires one to do X. However, this fact by itself entails nothing about substantive rationality. The second interpretation of the objection takes it to affirm a claim about substantive rationality: if one rationally believes that one has most reason to

do X then it is rational for one to do X. Since one might rationally but falsely believe that one has most reason to do X, the truth of this claim leads to possible cases falsifying (1). However, this claim seems no more and no less intuitive than the following claim: if one rationally believes that one is rational to do X, then one is rational to do X. However, the only way the second claim could be true is if rational beliefs about what one is rational to do are infallible, which we take to be very implausible. In fact, the equal intuitiveness of these two (we think false) claims is itself predicted by (1). We return to these issues again below.

The second principle relates ex post rationality to ex ante rationality:

(2) One does something rationally only if one is rational to do it and one does it on the basis of factors that make it rational for one to do it.

Roughly, the core intuition behind (2) is that for one's action to be justified, it must be done for the "right reasons," where the right reason is any reason that makes the act justified in the relevant sense.

Putting these two plausible principles together we arrive at what we'll call the rationality-reasons principle or

(RR): One does something rationally only if one has reasons that make it reasonable for one to do it and one does it on the basis of some (sub-) set of those reasons, i.e., one does it "for" those reasons.

RR poses problems for factualism, as we will next show.

Let's start with the following case:

Thirsty Bernie: Bernie is at a party and is in the mood for a drink.

At the bartender's counter, there are glasses of gin and tonic and bottles of a good Belgian ale. Bernie reaches for a glass of gin and tonic, remembering the host's superb gin and tonics, and preferring them even over a good Belgian ale. The glass does indeed contain gin and tonic. All goes well.

In Thirsty Bernie, it is clear that Bernie has a reason to reach for the glass, viz. that the glass contains gin and tonic, and that this reason is a stronger one, at least for him, than the reason he has to reach for the bottle. Bernie is rational to reach for the glass, because he has this reason. Moreover, it's also clear that he reaches for the glass for this reason. So, Bernie meets the conditions for rational action specified by RR.

Consider now the following modification of Thirsty Bernie, which borrows from another example due to Bernard Williams (1979):

Deceived Bernie: Bernie is at a party and is in the mood for a drink. Everything is the same as in Thirsty Bernie except that on the bartender's counter the glasses are not filled with gin and tonic, but only tonic (the bartender forgot to add the gin). Bernie reaches for a glass, just as in Thirsty Bernie. In a moment, Bernie is disappointed.⁴

This pair of cases - Thirsty Bernie and Deceived Bernie - can form the basis of a challenge to factualism. The challenge rests on RR together with two further assumptions. The first assumption is that Bernie is rational in reaching for the glass rather than the bottle in both the Thirsty and Deceived cases. Call this the **rationality assumption**. The second assumption is that the psychological story about Bernie's basis for reaching for the glass is the same in the two cases: the same consideration moves Bernie to act in both cases. Call this the **sameness of psychological basis assumption**. For the moment, we simply assert these assumptions.

Given these assumptions, RR requires that whatever consideration moves Bernie in the two cases must be a reason Bernie has in both cases and must make him rational in reaching for the glass. Now, if we abandoned the factualist assumption, we could simply say that this reason was that *the glass contains gin and tonic*. However, for the factualist, only facts can be among the reasons one has. The challenge for the factualist, then, is to identify a fact with two features: it must be a reason on the basis of which Bernie acts in both cases

⁴ In Williams's original case, the glass contained petrol. But one may worry about whether the bad effects of drinking or even sipping petrol could make this a high stakes case, and so affect epistemic justification. That is why we modified it so that the glass contained a harmless liquid.

and it must also make his action rational in both cases. In this section, we consider and argue against the most plausible proposals for what this fact could be.⁵

Consider, first, the proposal that Bernie's reason in both cases is the fact that *he believes* that the glass contains gin and tonic. We do not deny that facts about beliefs can themselves *sometimes* be one's reasons for action or belief: that I believe *p* can be my reason for believing that someone believes *p* and it can be my reason for telling the doctor that the therapy isn't working ("I'm still believing *p*, so we need to try something else!"), for example. In these cases, the fact that one believes that *p* does make these beliefs/actions rational. However, these are rather special cases. In general, we don't base our actions and beliefs on facts about what we believe. Moreover, even if we did, these facts would not typically go far toward making those actions and beliefs rational.

Take Thirsty Bernie. What consideration moves Bernie to reach for the glass? The consideration that moves him is one that he takes to make his reaching for the glass rational, and this is not a fact about what he believes. If Bernie were to think aloud, we could imagine him saying this: "Hmmm, gin and tonic; let's have some" and then reaching for the glass. Compare this with: "Hmmm, I believe this is gin and tonic; let's have some" and then reaching. Even supposing Bernie is peculiar and does base his action on facts about what he believes, RR will still create troubles. For, according to RR, this fact on the basis of which Bernie acts must make him rational in reaching for the glass as opposed to the bottle, and the fact that he believes it contains gin and tonic doesn't seem like a particularly strong reason to reach for the glass. That the glass contains gin and tonic is a consideration that counts in favor of reaching, to use Scanlon's gloss on a reason,⁶ whereas that Ernie believes that the glass contains gin and tonic is not. Of course, that Bernie believes that the glass contains gin and tonic *together* with considerations about Bernie's reliability might indeed be a consideration in favor of reaching for the glass. But if we do not generally base our actions on facts about what we believe, much less so do we do it on

⁵ Our responses to the first two proposals are similar to those of Schroeder (2008) and Fantl and McGrath (2009).

⁶ See Scanlon (2000).

facts about our reliability. The factualist that goes the belief route must then face a dilemma: either give an implausible account of the bases of action in deceived cases or insist that actions in those cases are not rational after all.

Here we want to guard against a possible misunderstanding. We claim that facts about beliefs are not typically considerations we base our actions on (and, moreover, are not typically what makes our actions reasonable). However, we do not deny that facts about beliefs can help explain actions. In both cases Bernie's action is explained by his belief that it contains gin and tonic. The crucial thing is that the content of that belief is not itself about his beliefs but about gin and tonic. It is the content of the belief that is the consideration on the basis of which he acts. We freely grant that in order for a consideration to be the basis on which one acts the consideration has to be something one believes.⁷

Consider next, then, the proposal that Bernie's reason for acting as he does, in both cases, is that *it is probable* that the glass contains gin and tonic. Now, depending on the sort of probability involved, there might be an immediate problem: Bernie may not even have the required beliefs. We arguably don't have beliefs about objective probabilities, for instance, or at least not very specific beliefs. Perhaps the idea is that the probability in question is epistemic. Lacking further specification of this notion of probability, it is not clear that Bernie has the requisite beliefs any more than it is clear

⁷ Some philosophers (see, for instance, Turri (2009)) will insist that we have gone wrong in thinking that considerations are ever reasons a person has. Reasons must be capable of motivating, they will say, and so must be mental states. This inference can be challenged. The motivational requirement is most plausibly understood as a requirement on what it is to *have* a reason, not as a requirement on what it takes for there to *be* a reason. Assuming that reasons are propositions, a plausible requirement on having a reason is belief. So: the proposition that *p* is a reason *S* has for ϕ -ing only if *S* believes that *p*. Now, if propositions are had as reasons only if believed, then there is no contradiction in supposing that it is the propositions themselves that are the reasons, and that reasons had can motivate. The reasons that we have motivate us in virtue of the fact that we have them, not in virtue of the fact that they are reasons. Some philosophers may think that a subject can have a reason *r* in virtue of undergoing a certain experience as if *r* even if the subject doesn't believe *r*. But even in that case, the having of the experience will be able to motivate the subject in the required way, and we can let *r*, and not the experience, be the reason. But none of this matters for our purposes in this paper. We are arguing against the claim that having *p* as a reason requires that *p* is true. One can easily translate this claim into the preferred ontology of the mental state theorist. The factualist would claim that beliefs which are reasons one has must be true, and we would argue otherwise. The principle RR would then be recast so that it concerned the *contents* of reasons rather than reasons.

whether he has beliefs about objective probability or his own reliability. However, even apart from worries about whether we have the requisite beliefs, the probability proposal, like the belief proposal, seems to misrepresent Bernie's psychological basis and to predict, falsely, that Bernie would not be as rational to reach for the glass in Deceived Bernie as he is in Thirsty Bernie. First, consider the psychological basis. If Bernie were to think out loud, he would presumably not say *this is probably gin and tonic, so I'll go for it*, but rather *this is gin and tonic, so I'll go for it*. As for rationality, compare *this probably contains gin and tonic* vs. *this contains gin and tonic*. We can assume that the probabilistic qualification to the former reduces the weight of this reason, so that he is more rational to reach for the glass in Thirsty Bernie than he is in Deceived Bernie. These two considerations show Bernie's reason must not be a fact about the high probability of the glass containing gin and tonic.

Maybe the idea is not that Bernie's reason is *that it is epistemically probable that the glass contains gin and tonic*, but rather whatever propositions *make* it epistemically probable for Bernie that the glass contains gin and tonic.⁸ This is the third and final factualist proposal that we want to consider as to what Bernie's reason may be. In our case, among the propositions that make it probable that the glass contains gin and tonic we will find the proposition that the host implies that the glass contains gin and tonic, that the glass contains a clear liquid and has a slice of lemon perched on its rim and is being served alongside other alcoholic beverages, etc. We grant that these considerations are reasons for acting as Bernie does. Moreover, it is plausible that Bernie believes them. However, the same worries arise as before: the consideration on the basis of which Bernie acts isn't some fact about what the host implied or about a lemon on the rim of a glass—and even supposing it were, these reasons are not as strong as the consideration that the glass contains gin and tonic, from where it implausibly follows again that Bernie is more rational in Thirsty Bernie than he is in Deceived Bernie.⁹

⁸ John Hawthorne and Jason Stanley (2008) argue that sometimes propositions of this sort are our reasons for belief. Given that what we say about actions applies to belief as well, we are here arguing against Hawthorne and Stanley's position.

⁹ There are additional problems. What if it is a plastic "slice" rather than a real lemon slice? Or what if the host didn't imply that the glass contains gin and tonic, but Bernie misunderstood? Then the "reasons"

We conclude that none of these candidates (the most plausible ones we can think of) for Bernie's reason will do, given RR and our assumptions of rationality and sameness of psychological basis. The factualist must try a different tack: giving up either RR or one of these assumptions.

Consider the assumptions first. We take the sameness of psychological basis not to be subject to serious challenge. Bernie has the same belief leading him to action regardless of whether it's gin and tonic or just tonic in the glass. It's the content of this belief that is the consideration that moves him.¹⁰

One might hope to challenge the rationality assumption. One might argue that whereas Bernie is rational to reach for the glass in Thirsty Bernie he's not rational (or perhaps not *as* rational) to reach for it in Deceived Bernie. Of course, it certainly seems Bernie is being as rational as possible in reaching as he does. What would an ideally rational agent do in such a circumstance? Surely do just as Bernie does. Perhaps the response will come that there is a difference between rational action and excusable action. In Deceived Bernie, Bernie's action isn't rational but can seem so because it is easy to confuse rational action with excusable action. Following a number of philosophers,¹¹ one

would be false, and the factualist could not recognize them as relevant. Yet none of these possibilities seem to matter at all to the rationality of Bernie's reaching.

Now, to avoid this last problem, the proponent of this strategy can retreat further back, to those propositions that are Bernie's reasons for believing that the glass has a slice of lemon perched on its rim, that the host implied that the glass contained gin and tonic, etc. But, again, another case can be described where these propositions, whatever they are, are false, in which case they cannot constitute his reasons according to the factualist position. Defenders of factualism may of course claim that there must be an end to this process of constructing further cases where the propositions advanced as Bernie's reasons are not true. After all, even brains in vats and disembodied souls deceived by evil demons have *some* true beliefs, at least about how things appear. But never mind. The real problem is that, as argued before, these truths will not both be the subject's basis for action and make Bernie as reasonable as he is.

¹⁰ Williamson (2000) has argued that knowledge is a mental state and therefore that two subjects in different possible worlds with all the same non-factive mental states might not be mental duplicates if one knows *p* and the other believes *p* falsely. If Williamson is right, Bernie does not have the same mental states in Thirsty Bernie as he does in Deceived Bernie. (See also Gibbons (2001).) However, even if this is correct, it is not incompatible with the sameness of psychological basis assumption. It is the *same consideration* which Bernie acts on in these cases, viz. that the glass contains gin and tonic. In Thirsty Bernie, Bernie acts on this consideration in virtue of having a belief with that consideration as content. In Deceived Bernie, Bernie acts on this consideration in virtue of knowledge with that consideration as content.

¹¹ See DeRose (2002, 180), Williamson (2000, 262), and Hawthorne and Stanley (2008). These philosophers seem to allow that at least when the fundamental error is factual rather than normative, the act is excusable.

might propose that when one doesn't know that what one reasonably takes to be good reasons aren't reasons at all, one is excused in acting on them.

There may be some difficulty in ensuring that in every case like Deceived Bernie the subject does take the relevant consideration to be a good reason. To show this, we want to discuss briefly some interesting arguments concerning moral worth in ethics. Let us take morally worthy action to be action that amounts to doing the right thing for the right reasons (which in turn "speaks well" of the agent). Morally worthy action is *ex post* morally justified action. As Nomy Arpaly (2002) and others have argued, there appear to be cases in which an agent performs a morally worthy action but does not take the content of the belief on which she bases that action to provide a reason for the action. Huckleberry Finn might fail to turn Jim in because of a sense that Jim is a human being, even though he might think this is not a good reason not to turn him in. What counts for moral worth, for Arpaly, is that one's action be done for reasons that make the action right, and an action can be done for such reasons even when the agent fails to think these considerations are good reasons. Next, suppose we have a case, unlike Huck's, in which the relevant consideration which is the content of the belief on the basis of which the subject acts is false. Suppose, fancifully, that Jim is not in fact a human being, but rather a robot built by Martians to investigate humanity. Here the factualist will say that the action is not rational but is excusable, and yet the subject does not take the relevant consideration to be a reason at all, let alone *reasonably take* it to be so. The factualist might claim that all that matters is that the subject be *ex ante* reasonable to take the consideration to be a reason. But even this is too strong. We can imagine a case in which a subject has thoroughly incorrect views about reasons based on testimony from incompetent "authorities." Suppose the subject acts on the basis of a belief the content of which (p), if true, would count as a reason she had to perform the act. The subject is not even *ex ante* reasonable in thinking that p is a reason to perform the action. Yet the subject's action is "rationally worthy," i.e., is *ex post* rational.

A second source of worry about denying the rationality assumption comes from the implications for what the subject is rational to do. Suppose Deceived Bernie isn't rational

to reach for the glass; he's excusable for doing so, but not rational. What was he rational to do? He had good reasons for reaching for the bottle. It does contain ale, after all, and he knows it does.¹² Assuming that his desire for gin and tonic is only slightly greater than his desire for a good Belgian ale, presumably *this contains good Belgian ale* will outweigh *this looks like it contains gin and tonic* as a reason to select the bottle of ale. So, the rational thing to do is to reach for the bottle, it seems, given the denial of equal rationality. But this seems odd. Would a perfectly rational agent select the bottle in this situation? Would it make any sense for Bernie in Deceived Bernie to select the bottle?

The reply might come that although Bernie's mental states would clash if he did think in this way, this is only a case in which, by having an irrational belief to start with, one can set oneself up for structural irrationality by properly reasoning from those beliefs.¹⁴ So, if I irrationally believe P and know that if P is true, then Q is true, then if I consider the question of whether Q is true, it might seem I rationally shouldn't believe it and yet that unless I do believe it my beliefs will clash (*I would think: P, if P then Q, but hmm, perhaps not Q*). So, perhaps this is happening in the Deceived Bernie case. Perhaps in this case Bernie irrationally believes the glass contains gin and tonic, and this substantive irrationality puts Bernie in a situation in which he cannot help but have clashing mental states if he engages in reasoning *from* that belief in accord with the principles of good practical reasoning. If the factualist took this line, she would have a better account of what made Bernie's reaching for the glass excusable: he has an irrational (perhaps also excusable?) belief that the glass contains gin and tonic, and having this belief and preferring gin and tonic to Belgian ale requires (by principles of good practical reasoning) reaching for the glass.

Notice, though, what has to be accepted to take this line: Bernie is not even rational to believe it contains gin and tonic. But look at his reasons – it looks like gin and tonic (true); bartenders at parties hardly ever falsely say “this is a gin and tonic” (true), etc.

¹² If there is as worry about this, give him whatever very strong reasons are needed to think it contains ale. Perhaps he is an expert at spotting ale and distinguishing it from ale-look-alikes, etc.

¹⁴ Cf. Broome (2001) on rational requirements.

If it is possible to have rational belief without evidence entailing the truth of what one believes, this would seem to be a case of rational belief.

Could our opponent concede that the belief is rational but still insist that the action of reaching for the glass isn't rational? We ourselves admit that it is possible for one rationally to believe one has most reason to do X without being rational to do X. Why not think in Deceived Bernie that Bernie's rational belief that the glass contains gin and tonic, given his background knowledge and preferences, makes him rational to believe that he has most reason to reach for the glass, even though he doesn't and so isn't rational to reach for the glass? Our reply is that *the glass contains gin and tonic*, when rationally believed, contributes to the reasons one has concerning whether to reach for the bottle or the glass. By contrast *I have most reason to reach for the glass* does not contribute the reasons one has bearing on whether to reach for the glass or the bottle; it is not a consideration which helps to determine the balance of such reasons; rather it itself is determined by the balance of such reasons.

The last strategy is for the objectivist is to challenge RR itself, while holding on to the assumption of rationality. Challenging RR means challenging one or both of the principles (1) and (2) from which it is derived. Principle (1) explains ex ante rationality in terms of reasons-had. This *could* be given up as a general principle. One might think there are cases in which an action is simply rational by default or cases in which something that doesn't qualify as a reason-had – say an experience or a feeling – made an act rational. Perhaps there are such cases. But surely there are cases in which whether one is rational does depend on having reasons. We can simply choose a pair of cases in which this dependence holds, one in which the psychological basis is a true consideration and the other in which it is false. If the Bernie cases don't fit the bill, others will. So, this sort of ground for rejecting Principle (1) won't take the objectivist the full distance.

What of principle (2)? Principle (2) relates ex ante rationality to ex post rationality. Here it is again:

(2) One does something rationally only if one is rational to do it and one does

it on the basis of the factors that make it rational for one to do it.

One way to deny this is to allow that one can do something rationally while doing it, not on the basis of the factors that make it rational for one to do it, but on the basis of certain “upstream” factors. So, the idea would be that Bernie reasonably reaches in Deceived Bernie insofar as he is rational to reach for the glass and reaches for it on the basis of factors which don’t themselves make it rational for him to do so but which are appropriately related epistemically to those factors. It’s the appearance of gin and tonic, say, that makes reaching rational, and Bernie doesn’t reach on the basis of the appearance but rather of what the appearance justifies him in believing; and this is enough to make his reaching rational.

The proposal has a certain ad hoc air about it, but there are examples which help it seem at least somewhat plausible. In many cases, we “jump to conclusions” and act on the basis of the conclusion. It doesn’t really matter in many such cases – had we not jumped to conclusions we would have done the same thing. Suppose Jill is wearing a Niagara Falls tee shirt. This isn’t a good enough reason to conclude she has visited the falls. Maybe a friend gave her the shirt. It’s enough reason, though, to strike up a conversation about the falls. Suppose Jack concludes she has visited the falls and strikes up a conversation about the falls on the basis of that conclusion. One might say, here, that Jack rationally strikes up the conversation despite the fact that his basis for doing so is not a reason he has for doing so. It’s enough that there are some downstream reasons – so it might seem.

However, it remains problematic how Bernie could be rational to reach for the glass. If it’s the upstream reasons that make him rational, then because they are weaker than *it’s gin and tonic*, it isn’t clear why they wouldn’t be outweighed by the opposing reason to reach for the bottle, viz. *it’s good Belgian ale*. This would lead once again to a denial of the rationality assumption.

We conclude there is little hope for the factualist in denying either RR or the rationality and sameness of psychological basis or assumptions.

Finally, we want to supplement this argument by considering the implications of factualism for a class of emotive states that are sometimes called “emotive factives”: *being glad that p*, *being sad that p*, *being embarrassed that p*, *regretting that p*, etc. We want to argue, first, that factualism about these states – the claim that being in them entails the truth of the relevant proposition – is false.¹⁶ Second, we argue that if factualism about these states is false, then factualism about the reasons one has is also false.

Our argument against factualism about emotive “fatives” is similar to the argument we’ve developed in this section of the paper against factualism about reasons-had. Suppose we add to both the Thirsty Bernie and Deceived Bernie the stipulation that Bernie expresses his feelings by saying, sincerely, “I’m glad the glasses contain gin and tonic.” Now, in Thirsty Bernie, Bernie is glad that the glasses contain gin and tonic. In Deceived Bernie, Bernie is clearly expressing gladness. What is he glad about? Go through the factualist candidates: is he glad that he thinks the glass contains gin and tonic? Is he glad that it looks like it contains gin and tonic? He might be somewhat glad of these things, but not nearly as glad as he is in fact, and rationally so. If he is to be as glad as he is, and rationally so, he must be glad that the glass contains gin and tonic.^{17,18}

Note that not only does the above argument show that factualism is false for emotive factives, it also shows that it is false for rationally held such states. Bernie can be rationally glad that *p* without *p* being true. Now, how does the falsity of factualism for

¹⁶ Thus, we argue that these states are not factive in the sense philosophers typically have in mind: being in these states does not entail the truth of the relevant proposition. This is consistent with factivity in the linguists’ sense: attributions of such states might still presuppose the truth of the relevant proposition. We will discuss presupposition in the second part of the paper.

¹⁷ These issues are discussed in the comment section of post on *Pea Soup* (<http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2010/02/thoughts-as-motivating-reasons.html>) and in a manuscript by Jeremy Fantl. Fantl discusses and casts doubt upon the hypothesis that in cases like Deceived Bernie one has an object-less gladness. Fantl remarks that he knows what it is to have object-less gladness – one just feels glad or just feels happy. And it is not the same as the state one is in when in Deceived Bernie’s situation. We concur.

¹⁸ Notice that similar considerations do not show that knowing that *p* fails to entail *p*. In Deceived Bernie, Bernie might well say “I know that this is gin and tonic.” There is no intuition here that that he expresses in this statement some state of knowledge for which we have to find the right object. He doesn’t know. Ask him about it later, after he learns the truth, and he will concede that he didn’t know. Ask him whether he was glad about something later, and we predict he will insist he was!

rationally held emotive “factives” relate to factualism about reasons-had? Here is an argument. Suppose factualism is false for rationally being glad that *p* but is true for reasons-had. Then it is possible for someone to be rationally glad that *p* but for *p* not to be available as a reason the person has to act, believe, feel, etc. Now, being glad that *p* amounts to *p*'s being the reason for which one is glad. When one is *rationally* glad that *p*, this requires that the reason for which one is glad is one that makes that gladness rational, and since this reason is *p*, this requires that *p* be a reason one has to be glad. Putting all this together: because factualism fails for rational emotive “factives,” it fails for the reasons one has.

II. Problems with Denying Factualism

1. Attributions of reasons-had

In this section, we will assume that the semantics of attributions of reasons-had follows that of attributions of motivating reasons – “S’s reason for X-ing was that *p*” – at least in respect of factivity: both *appear* to be factive (more on this momentarily), and if one is factive, the other is. We will assume that the explanation of the appearance of factivity in attributions of reasons-had, if it is a mere appearance, is similar to the explanation of the appearance of factivity in attributions of motivating reasons, if this is a mere appearance. Thus, we will limit our investigation to attributions of motivating reasons. We do this because ordinary English attributions of motivating reasons are relatively more natural especially when embedded under operators – compare the naturalness of ‘It might be that S’s reason for X-ing was that *p*’ over and against ‘It might be that *p* is a reason S had to X’.

An immediate problem with our denial of factualism stems from the fact that it is difficult to communicate facts about a subject’s reasons without implying or presupposing that the reason was true. We agree that this is so. Suppose that Sally turned down a job based on her false belief that she had another offer. If your conversational partners don’t know about this, you will be misleading if you said

(1) Sally's reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer.

We can see why this would be misleading if such attributions were factive, i.e., if motivating reasons could only be facts. But on our view such reasons can be falsehoods and so if (1) attributes such reasons (and we assume it does), it cannot entail the truth of its sentential complement. Why, then, would it be misleading to assert (1) in a context in which the speaker knows Sally didn't have another offer but his conversational partners didn't? If there is no good explanation here, perhaps we should think twice about our denial of factualism.

Similar questions arise for sentences embedding (1) under negation, in the antecedent of a conditional and in modals. In each case it seems that, because we know Sally didn't have another offer, we will speak misleadingly if we say:

(2) Sally's reason for turning down the job wasn't that she had another offer.

(3) If Sally's reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer, then Sally's action makes sense.

(4) Maybe Sally's reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer.

We need to explain why these would be misleading to say in cases in which the speaker (but not the audience) knows that Sally didn't have another offer. Their truth – on our account – certainly doesn't require that Sally had another offer.

Of course, the truth of (2) – (4) on the factualist view wouldn't require that Sally had another offer either. But the factualist can offer a tidy explanation of the facts here. The factualist could hold that in saying (1) one *presupposes* that Sally had another offer. This is a presupposition associated with the meaning of the sentence. As is well known, presuppositions associated with parts of sentences can in some cases become presuppositions of the whole, and so if (1) presupposes that Sally had another offer this might explain why (2) – (4) also have this presupposition.¹⁹ Let's say the presuppositions of

¹⁹ Compare: 'it was Sally who rung the bell', 'if it was Sally who rung the bell, then...', 'Maybe it was Sally who rung the bell' – all of these presuppose someone rung the bell.

the whole can be *inherited* from those of their sentential parts. A non-factualist (like ourselves) can agree about inherited presuppositions. But the factualist will add: *when sentences have presuppositions but do not inherit them, they entail them*. Of course, the non-factualist needs exactly these uninherited non-entailed presuppositions.

The factualist might back up her claim that there are no uninherited non-entailed presuppositions by asking us to examine basic sentences containing well-known presupposition triggers, i.e., sentences containing the triggers and which have the presuppositions but not because of inheritance from some sentential part. So consider:

It was Sally who rung the bell. (clefts)

Sally knows that the party was canceled. (factive verbs)

John's bike is broken. (definite descriptions)

Maria went swimming, again (too). (iteratives)

Maria managed to stop smoking. (implicative verbs)

All of these *entail* their presuppositions.²⁰ We can understand why a noninherited presupposition should exist if we can see them as backgrounded entailments. However, if we think they are not entailments, why should there be a presupposition at all? Where do the uninherited presuppositions come from if not from entailments? This is the question that is supposed to be an embarrassment for the non-factualist.

We agree that in many circumstances, an assertion of something of the form 'S's reason for X-ing is that p' presupposes that p. If you assert such a sentence knowing that not-p you are using the sentence inappropriately because you are being misleading. Why would this be, though, if p isn't entailed by the reason-ascription? Before answering this question, we want to make two points, which if correct, show that there must be an adequate answer to the question.

²⁰ Frege claimed that sentences involving proper names (and definite descriptions) tend to presuppose that those names have referents. This is what Scott Soames (1981) calls "expressive presupposition." However, it is unclear whether such "presuppositions" even count as backgrounded information in the relevant sense.

First, there is good reason to think the presupposition lapses in certain cases, and so is at best defeasibly associated with reason-ascription sentences. If the background conversational context takes a certain shape, the reason-ascription doesn't presuppose its complement. Consider a conversation in which it's common knowledge that Sally didn't get another offer. We're trying to understand why she turned down the offer she got. Some people in the conversation are suggesting she is being silly or irrational. Someone else has just said:

Look, but Sally was told she had the other job. She thought she knew she had it.

In this context, one can say:

Right, her reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer.

This seems to us fine and it doesn't presuppose that she had another offer.²¹

Second, one can cancel the presupposition even if the conversational context does not make the presupposition lapse. Consider:

“Sally's reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer; and that made perfect sense; however, her source was lying – she never had the other offer.”

or

“Sally's reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer, but she was misinformed about the other offer – it was not a job offer after all but only a request for more materials.”

Or even the simpler

“Sally reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer. You see, she falsely believed she had another offer.”

²¹ In the case of attributions of motivating reasons, when it is clear that the subject is unreasonable, it is quite easy felicitously to assert motivating reason attributions with false sentential complements: “His reason for storing away a year's worth of provisions is that Obama and his minions are going to unleash a socialist reign of terror.” In the case of attributions of the reasons one has, we think there is a good case to be made that having a reason goes some distance toward justifying, and something can go some distance toward justifying only if is justified in believing it is the case.

In these cases, the hearer first makes the required presupposition but then abandons it in light of the material that follows. Here it seems not to result in any sense that the reasons-ascription is false or that the speaker is contradicting herself. By contrast, compare the following unacceptable sentences:

It was John who broke the vase but no one broke the vase.

Sally knows that John broke the vase, but no one broke the vase.

Sally's brother came to visit, but Sally doesn't have a brother.

Sally went to Arizona again, but she has not been there before.

Having established that there must be a way for reasons-ascriptions to presuppose their ascribed reasons without entailing them, we turn now to our conjecture as to how this happens. Reasons-ascriptions *do* entail something in the vicinity of their ascribed reasons: they entail that the subject of the ascription believes that p.²² Moreover, this is a backgrounded entailment, rather than foregrounded on-topic information. This is shown by the fact that embeddings of 'S's reason for X-ing is that p' tend to presuppose that S believes that p. Consider:

S's reason for X-ing is not that p.

If S's reason for X-ing is that p, then S is unlike S', whose reason is that q.

Maybe S's reason for X-ing is that p.

Each of these presupposes that S believes that p. In this respect this entailment resembles the backgrounded entailment in sentences ascribing bachelorhood:

The teacher is not a bachelor

If the teacher is a bachelor, then the teacher has extra time in the evenings.

Maybe the teacher is a bachelor

²² In the case of ascriptions of having reasons, we suspect the entailment is something like *justifiably believing* or *being justified to believe*. It's important here that we are understanding reasons-had as going some distance toward justifying the subject.

Each of these presupposes that the teacher is a man. None presuppose or imply that the teacher is unmarried.

Some linguists (Heim 1992, Kay 1992) have proposed explanations for how presuppositions associated with sentences embedded under 'believes' – which is normally considered a presupposition plug – manage to leak through to the whole. Thus consider:

Sally believes that John likes her sister.

This, without a special conversational background, does presuppose that Sally has a sister and not only that she believes she does. But a plausible suggestion here is that this sentence has as a backgrounded entailment that Sally believes she has a sister. Because it is backgrounded and is the sort of thing people tend not to get wrong, it is natural to think that this belief is true.²³

Now if the belief entailment is backgrounded, we can see how it might, given additional broadly Gricean principles, generate presuppositions that the sentential complement is true. Suppose a speaker claims that Sally's reason for turning down the job is that she has another offer. The conversational partners will take it as backgrounded that Sally believes that she has another offer; and since the speaker is backgrounding this belief rather than outright asserting that Sally has the belief, and since this is the sort of belief that people usually are correct about (as opposed to a religious or political belief, say), presumably Sally's belief is correct, and thus she must have another offer. Moreover, these parties will realize that the correctness of Sally's belief is not part of the main point of the utterance, and so will treat it in the way they treat other presuppositions. In sum, our suggested explanation for why (1) defeasibly presupposes that p is then the following: (1) backgrounds that S believes that p, and so implicates (via standard Gricean mechanisms) that p.

Our proposal also explains why simple cancelations for reasons ascriptions are problematic. Consider:

²³ Cf. Beaver and Geurts (2011).

“Sally’s reason for turning down the job was that she had another offer, but she didn’t have another offer.”

That *does* sound bad, uttered by itself, although it may be fine if the conversational context takes a certain shape. Why are such bald cancelations less successful than the ones we gave above? Our answer is that they are worse because they do not concern the source of the normal presupposition associated with reason-ascriptions. The source of that normal presupposition, we claim, is the backgrounded entailment that the subject believes that *p*, and simple cancelations just don’t address this source.

We have only offered first hints as to why reason-ascriptions normally presuppose the truth of their sentential complements without entailing them. The idea is that the presupposition is derived from another *entailed* presupposition, together with general Gricean principles. We think similar ideas are promising as the basis for an account of why so-called emotive factives normally presuppose the truth of their sentential complements even though they do not entail them. Normally, saying ‘Sally is glad that *p*’ presupposes the entailed proposition that Sally believes that *p*; if *p* is the sort of thing Sally might well be right about if she believes it and given that the speaker is backgrounding this belief, it becomes plausible for the conversational parties to take *p* to be true, and to treat it as something being presupposed.²⁴

2. The simple argument for factualism.

Consider the following argument:

1. *P* is a reason *S* has to *X*

²⁴ Clayton Littlejohn presses the following objections. If *p* is a reason for which one *Xs*, then one *X-ed* because *p*. But one can *X* because *p* only if *p* is the case, on account of the fact that *X-ing* because *p* implies *p*’s explaining why one *Xs*. In reply, we think that statements using ‘because’ to ascribe motivating reasons, i.e. of the form ‘*S X-ed* because *p*’, seem to show signs of presupposing the truth of ‘*p*’, rather than entailing it. The same considerations raised above apply here again. Consider: “Sally turned down the job because she had another offer. You see, she falsely believed she had another offer” is fine.” See also our considerations regarding explanation on the next section.

2. So, P is a reason for S to X
3. So, there is a reason for S to X, namely P.
4. So, P is true.

It is not enough to argue that (1) can be true in cases in which (4) is not, as we have done in Part I of this paper. We need to explain why this argument, which seems even *trivially* valid, is invalid.

Our explanation is that there are two readings for (3), one which is much more natural than the other. On one reading, which would be the natural one if (3) was asserted alone, without being preceded by (1) and (2), (3) entails the truth of P. But on this reading, (2) doesn't entail (3). On the other reading, which is more natural if (3) is preceded by (1) and (2), (3) follows from (2), but (3) doesn't entail the truth of P and so doesn't entail (4).

On our view, reasons are considerations – true or false – that favor or support a person doing (believing, feeling, etc.) something. Moreover, we are inclined to think that having P as a reason to X can be factored into P's being a reason for one to X and one's having P. So, we accept the inference to (2). The trouble is the inference to (3), if (3) is given the *strong* reading it would normally have if asserted alone. On this strong reading of (3) 'there is' is read so as to imply not merely being but obtaining. But a consideration can support you in X-ing even if it is false, and so can be a reason for you to X even if it is false and so even if it does not obtain. On the other hand, if 'there is' in (3) is given the weak reading, i.e., so that it merely says that there is such a thing (obtaining or not) as the consideration that supports one's X-ing, then the argument is valid; but this is no help to the factualist, as (3) doesn't entail the truth of P and so doesn't entail (4).²⁵

²⁵ Here we speak of there being two readings for the 'there is' in (3), suggesting that there is an ambiguity or at least polysemy in 'there is'. An alternative approach is to argue that 'there is' has only one reading, the weak reading, but that the strong reading is not an entailment but is often presupposed (especially when not preceded with the likes of (1) and (2)). If one took this approach, the assessment of (1) – (4) would be similar.

That's the story. If it is correct, there is an explanation of why the argument should look so good. The first part of the story is this: on the less natural, but still perfectly available, reading of (3), it does follow trivially from (1) and (2). The second part of the story aims at explaining why the more natural reading should be more natural.

One might worry that this explanation is invented just for this case. It is not. Consider the inference from

(5) S's explanation for the fact that P is that Q.

Therefore,

(6) There is an explanation for P, namely that Q.

Therefore,

(7) Q is true.

One should smell a rat, the same rat. As with (1) above, (5) fails to entail Q, even though ordinary assertions of it often presuppose Q. (This claim can be supported by the same arguments we have given to show that factualism is false about the reasons one has and the reasons for which one acts.) But if (5) fails to entail Q, how could it have (6) as a consequence, since (6) appears to entail (7)? Here, again, 'there is' in (6) seems to have two readings, *obtaining* and *mere being*. If (6) is given the former reading, it does not follow from (5). If (6) is given the latter reading, (6) does follow from (5) but fails to entail (7).

Consider how we think about explanations in theory choice. The picture is that there are many explanations out there, perhaps some true and some false. One is given by scientist X and another by scientist Y. They are all explanations, not just because a scientist gave them but because they, if known to be true would enable us to understand the facts in question. Of course, we care about finding the true ones. Still, the other ones are explanations, too. Something similar seems to capture our thinking about reasons. There are many, many considerations out there for and against any action. We care about finding out which are true, since those are the ones that will make our lives go best. Still,

the other ones are still reasons, and if someone acts on them, their life might not go best (better to have had the ale than the tonic water), but they will be acting rationally.

Bibliography

- Arpaly, Nomy (2002). "Moral Worth," *Journal of Philosophy* 99 (5): 223-245.
- Beaver, David I. and Bart Geurts (2011), "Presupposition," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/presupposition/>.
- Broome, John (2001). "Normative Practical Reasoning," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 75 (1):175-193.
- Broome, John (1999). "Normative Requirements," *Ratio* XII 4: 398-419.
- DeRose, Keith (2002). "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context." *The Philosophical Review* 111: 167-203.
- Fantl, Jeremy (manuscript). "How to be Happy Al Gore Won Florida."
- Fantl, Jeremy and Matthew McGrath, *Knowledge in an Uncertain World* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Gibbons, John (2001). "Knowledge in Action," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (3):579-600.
- [Hawthorne](#), John and [Jason Stanley](#) (2008), "Knowledge and Action," *Journal of Philosophy* 105 (10):571-90.
- Heim, Irene (1992). "Presupposition Projection and the Semantics of Attitude Verbs", *Journal of Semantics*, 9: 183-221.
- Kay, Paul (1992). "The inheritance of presuppositions", *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15: 333-381.
- Scanlon, T.M. (2003). "Metaphysics and Morals," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 77, No. 2(Nov., 2003), pp. 7-22.
- _____. (2000). *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Schroeder, Mark (2008). "Having Reasons," *Philosophical Studies*, 139, 1: pp. 57-71.
- Soames, Scott (1989). "Presupposition," in Gabbay, D. and Guenther, F. (eds.), *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, Dordrecht: Reidel, vol. IV, 553-616.
- Turri, John (2009). "The Ontology of Epistemic Reasons," *Noûs*, 43, 3: pp. 490-512.
- Williams, Bernard (1981). "Internal and External Reasons," in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 101-13).
- Williamson, Timothy (2000). *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).