

“Reasoning from the Facts”¹

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Abstract. I defend Factualism about reasons for belief: the view that facts and only facts, including facts of the world around us, are our reasons for belief. The greatest obstacle for such a view concerns cases in which subjects are mistaken about the facts, such as illusion and hallucination. It is natural to say, in a normal case, that John’s reason for believing that the baby is hungry is the fact that the baby is crying. But if John is merely suffering a non-veridical illusion as of his baby crying, the fact that the baby is crying can’t be his reason, since there is no such fact. I argue that in such cases subjects have a take-what-you-can-get attitude towards their reasons, and this allows the Factualist to make sense of bad cases in a way consistent with the motivations for the view. The result is that Factualism is well motivated and can be defended from the most obvious objections.

1. Introduction

We often talk of facts being someone’s reasons for belief. John, for example, can see his baby crying and forms the belief that the baby is hungry. It’s natural to say that John’s reason is the fact that the baby is crying. If we asked John why he believes that the baby is hungry, he would say, “Because it is crying,” where this “because” seems to cite both a reason and something that is the case. If we take this evidence at face value we might think that facts of the world around us can be our reasons for belief.²

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² Important discussions of facts and reasons can be found in Achinstein (2001), Bergman (2006), Collins (1997), Dancy (2000), Ginsborg (2006), Hornsby (2008), McDowell (1986, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2008), Shah (2008), Shah and Velleman (2005), Stampe (1987), and Turri (2009).

A major obstacle to doing so, however, is cases where subjects are in error about the facts. If John, in his sleep-deprived state, were suffering from a perfect hallucination of his baby crying, he would still form the belief that the baby is hungry. And if we asked him why he did so he would again say, “Because it is crying.” But the baby isn’t crying – it’s sound asleep in the crib – so we can’t take his response here at face value. It seems implausible to say that in this case John has no reason at all for his belief, but once we admit that something in the hallucination case is his reason (e.g., his experience as of the baby crying), then it seems that two considerations pressure us to hold that his reason in the normal case is the same thing.³

One of the considerations is causal. In both cases (hallucination and normal perception), let’s suppose, John’s belief has the same proximal causes. We might think, then, that his reasons must be the same. The other consideration is epistemic. In both cases, we might hold, John’s belief is justified. The best explanation for why it is justified in the two cases is that he has the same reasons in the two cases.⁴ If either of these considerations is probative then John’s reason can’t be the fact that the baby is crying even in the normal case.

In this paper I will focus just on challenge posed by the epistemic consideration. My aim is to develop a theory of reasons as facts that can overcome it. In Section 2 I present an argument for the view that facts can be a subject’s reasons for belief – the Argument from Factual Reasons. Then in Section 3 I consider several replies one might make to the argument. The best reply, I suggest, relies on a substantive metaphysical claim: that facts are identical to true propositions. I then argue that even if such an identification is true it is still only the facts, true propositions, that are our reasons. In Section 4 I use this argument and other considerations to explain and motivate a theory of reasons I call Factualism: the view that facts and only facts,

³ Cf. the arguments from illusion and hallucination in philosophy of perception; Smith (2002).

⁴ See Silins (2005) and Turri (2009) for statements of this sort of challenge.

including facts of the world around us, are a subject’s reasons for belief.⁵ Finally in Section 5 I consider an objection to this view based on cases of illusion and hallucination; in response I refine the theory and explain how it can meet the objection. The conclusion, I suggest, is that Factualism is well supported by the Argument from Factual Reasons and can be defended from the most obvious objections.

2. The Argument from Factual Reasons

Many philosophers are convinced that hallucinating subjects have the exact same reasons for belief as they would have had had they been perceiving normally.⁶ If that is right, then the world around the subject can have no effect on her reasons – her reasons are being fixed by considerations that are the same across hallucination and normal perception. Consequently philosophers have endorsed a view we can call Psychologism: the view that the subject’s reasons are determined entirely by her non-factive psychological states.⁷ On such a view a subject can never base her beliefs on the facts of the world around her, since doing so would make her reasons partly dependent on something other than her non-factive mental states.⁸

⁵ Note that my use of the term “Factualism” is not the same as Turri’s (2009). Turri uses the term of the view that *only* non-mental facts are reasons; I agree with Turri that such a view is wrong.

⁶ For the best recent defense of this idea see Silins (2005). Contemporary discussion dates from the “New Evil Demon” problem for epistemic externalism: Lehrer and Cohen (1983), Cohen (1984), and Luper-Foy (1985).

⁷ For a discussion of similar views of reasons in ethics see Dancy (2000) (to whom I owe a debt), though note my use of “Psychologism” is not exactly parallel to his. Also notice that Psychologism is not equivalent to epistemic internalism: if we understand epistemic internalism as the view that justification is determined by the subject’s non-factive mental states, one can both deny internalism and advocate Psychologism as long as one does not think justification is just a matter of the subject’s reasons for belief.

⁸ The “never” in this sentence overstates the point slightly. If content externalism is true (see Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979)), certain environmental conditions must be met in order for one’s beliefs to have the contents that they do. One could base one’s beliefs on these facts

One way to put pressure on Psychologism is to consider one of the common ways we talk about reasons for belief. Reasons for belief are considerations that count in favor of believing things. The fact that the knife was found in Jack’s apartment is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer. That fact is a consideration that speaks in favor of believing that Jack is the murderer. The fact that the gas gauge reads “E” is a reason for believing that the car is nearly out of gas. The fact that the baby is crying in a certain way is a reason for believing that it is hungry. All of these are perfectly intelligible claims of a sort that we encounter daily. When we talk about reasons in this way I will call them *factual reasons*.

The mere existence of factual reasons is not inconsistent with Psychologism. Psychologism is a view about what determines a *subject’s* reasons for belief, and it entails that the subject can’t base her beliefs on non-psychological facts. The mere existence of factual reasons does not jeopardize that consequence. If non-psychological facts are reasons, however, it is difficult to resist the further idea that these facts can be a subject’s reasons for belief. Factual reasons, after all, are reasons *for belief*: the fact that the baby is crying is a reason for believing that the baby is hungry. We ought to wonder, however, what it means to call something a reason for belief if it’s not possible for it to ever be a subject’s reason for belief. If something is a reason for belief then it must be possible, at least in some sense, for a subject to believe something for that reason. What else could it mean to say that it is a reason *for belief*? If that is right, we could make the following argument:

without violating Psychologism. I will assume, however, that such facts are too general to help the Psychologist with the problems presented below.

Argument from Factual Reasons

- (i) The fact that the baby is crying in a certain way is a reason for believing that it is hungry.
- (ii) If the fact that the baby is crying in a certain way is a reason for believing that it is hungry, then it is possible for John to believe that the baby is hungry for that reason (the reason that it is crying in a certain way).

Hence,

- (iii) It is possible for John to believe that the baby is hungry for the reason that it is crying in a certain way (i.e., that fact).

The conclusion (iii) entails that we can base our beliefs on the facts of the world around us, and thus it entails that Psychologism is false. The problem for those who want to resist this conclusion is that (i) and (ii) just seem obviously true. I’ve already claimed that (i) is an ordinary way of talking about reasons for belief that any normal epistemic subject can understand, so let’s look more closely at (ii).

The sense of “possibility” in (ii) clearly matters. On at least one sense of possibility, it makes perfect sense to say that there could be a reason for belief but it is not possible for that reason to be any subject’s reason for belief. In order for some consideration to be a subject’s reason, I will assume, she needs some kind of relation to it so that she can base her belief on it. Now we can suppose that there are facts that obtained before there were any subjects and whose traces no subject will ever become aware of. So there are factual reasons for believing some things that will never be anyone’s reasons. And hence there could be some reasons such that it’s not possible (as a matter of contingent fact) for them to be anyone’s reasons for belief. But Psychologism entails a much stronger claim than that it is not possible, as a matter of contingent fact, for subjects to base their beliefs on certain non-psychological considerations of the distant past. Psychologism entails that even mundane considerations in the world around us right now cannot be our reasons for holding beliefs, and that seems incompatible with holding that they are reasons *for belief*.

Notice that in this argument neither premise alone is inconsistent with Psychologism, and both premises are intuitively compelling: denying (i) just sounds like willful ignorance of a perfectly ordinary notion of reasons, while denying (ii) strains the idea of what it means to be a reason for belief. Since the advocate of Psychologism must deny (i) or (ii), this argument creates a dilemma for her. We therefore need to consider the important replies an advocate of Psychologism might make.

3. Replies to the Argument from Factual Reasons

Recall that Psychologism is the view that a subject’s reasons are determined entirely by her non-factive psychological states. As such it is not an ontological thesis about what those reasons are. There are two dominant ontological views of reasons defenders of Psychologism have advocated. One view holds that one’s reasons are one’s non-factive mental states themselves.⁹ The other view holds that one’s reasons are the propositional contents of one’s non-factive mental states.¹⁰ On either of these views one’s reasons are fixed by one’s non-factive psychological states. Let’s call the first view *state psychologism* and the second view *content psychologism*. How the defender of Psychologism will reply to the Argument depends on which ontological view of reasons she prefers.

Let’s start with state psychologism. The defender of state psychologism would say that John’s reason is his experience as of the baby crying. I am going to assume, however, that one’s reasons must be propositionally structured – by which I mean that they are the kind of thing referred to with that-clauses.¹¹ So saying that John’s experience is his reason means, for state

⁹ E.g., BonJour (1985, 2004), Conee and Feldman (2001), and Ginet (1975).

¹⁰ E.g., Audi (1986); also a plausible interpretation of Davidson – see Davidson (1983).

¹¹ For arguments see Williamson (2000) and Dancy (2000); cf. Hornsby (2008).

psychologism, that *that* John has an experience as of the baby crying is his reason. This that-clause cites something that is the case: it is a fact that John has an experience as of the baby crying, and that fact is a reason for him to believe that the baby is hungry. State psychologism as I understand it, then, is the view that a subject’s reasons are facts that concern her own psychology. This view therefore shares with Factualism the general idea that reasons for belief are facts. The difference is that the defender of state psychologism must deny either premise (i) or (ii). If she admits the truth of premise (i) and holds that all facts are reasons, then she must deny (ii) and hold that there are reasons for belief that could never be any subject’s reasons. If she admits the truth of premise (ii) and holds that all reasons for belief could possibly be a subject’s reasons, then she must deny (i) and maintain that the fact that the baby crying in a certain way is not a reason for believing that it is hungry.

Since state psychologism must accept one horn of this dilemma I think there is serious cost to the view. It is important to note that the defender of state psychologism might think that there is a principled reason for denying that subjects can base their beliefs on facts of the world. Consider, for example, epistemic internalism: which for our purposes we can understand as the view that justification is entirely determined by the subject’s non-factive psychological states. If the defender of state psychologism is an epistemic internalist she would hold that one’s justification cannot be even partly determined by contingent facts of the world around her, like the fact that the baby is crying, and consequently those facts can’t be her reasons. Thus one might think that internalism gives us a principled reason for favoring Psychologism.

Unfortunately I don’t have the space to examine arguments for internalism.¹² Notice, though, that even if there are such arguments the force of the Argument from Factual Reasons does not

¹² For discussion see my dissertation, “Justification, Reasons and Truth,” Chapters 2 and 4, in which I argue that arguments for internalism cannot be used to motivate Psychologism.

disappear. The defender of state psychologism would still have to deny premise (i) or (ii), and thus the motivation accrued by the arguments for internalism would have to be weighed against the cost of denying one of these premises.

Let’s now turn to content psychologism. There are two different responses the defender of content psychologism might make to the Argument from Factual Reasons. The difference turns on a substantive metaphysical issue – whether facts can be identified with true propositions. Some philosophers have argued that we should not make this identification.¹³ The basic idea is that we need a substantive, concrete conception of facts as ways that the world is; facts are things that obtain or fail to obtain, which make our beliefs true or false. Propositions, by contrast, are abstract entities that are made true or false by the facts. If the content psychologist subscribes to this picture, however, she will have a very difficult time responding to the Argument from Factual Reasons. According to this version of content psychologism facts cannot literally be a subject’s reasons for belief, since by definition only the representational contents of a subject’s psychological states can be her reasons – which are propositions and not facts. The defender of content psychologism, though, could try to tell a story about factual reasons is this way: the fact that the baby is crying in a certain way causes John’s experience as of the baby crying, and the content of that experience is then John’s reason for believing that the baby is hungry. She could then claim to respect the sense in which the fact that *p* is a reason, that is, premise (i), by holding that the fact that *p* can cause an instance of the representational content that *p*: which is, strictly speaking, the reason; and since this content could be a subject’s reason, it respects the sense in which the fact that *p* could be a subject’s reason.

¹³ E.g., Harman (2003) and Dancy (2000).

The problem with this response, however, is that it is not really a response at all. This version of content psychologism claims that facts cannot be a subject’s reasons for belief – only representational contents can. It doesn’t recover any sense at all in which a fact is a reason for belief to hold that a fact can’t possibly be a reason for belief but it can cause something else, a mental state, whose content is a reason for belief. Facts are simply metaphysically the wrong sort of thing to be reasons for belief – so it shouldn’t even make sense to say that the fact that the bloody knife was found in Jacks’ apartment is a reason for believing that Jack is guilty. All that content psychologism can make sense of is the idea that facts can *cause* things whose contents are reasons for belief. But I submit that that is not the ordinary notion of factual reasons that we all possess. I therefore consider this version of content psychologism unsatisfactory.

If the defender of content psychologism identifies facts and true propositions, however, she has a much stronger response to the argument.¹⁴ She can hold that propositions are our reasons, and they are our reasons only when they are the contents of our psychological states. Let’s assume, for example, that the content of John’s experience is that the baby is crying. Thus his reason is the proposition that the baby is crying. But when this proposition is true, his reason is also a fact, since facts just are true propositions. The conclusion of the Argument from Factual Reasons was that we can base our beliefs on the facts – and this version of content psychologism can simply agree. When our experiences are veridical, basing our beliefs on their contents *just is* basing our beliefs on the facts. What is critical to this response, however, is that the world around John is not making a difference to his reasons: John would have the exact same reason

¹⁴ Philosophers who endorse the metaphysical identification of facts and true propositions include Frege (1918) and King (1995, 2002).

for belief even if his experience were not veridical.¹⁵ We can base our beliefs on the facts but, firstly, we need not do so, since we can also base our beliefs on false propositions, and, secondly, when we do so, their being facts is irrelevant to our reasons. Thus this view is still a version of Psychologism, since John’s reasons are determined entirely by his non-factive mental states: John’s reason in the good case is a fact, but the fact that it is a fact is playing no role in determining what reasons he has.¹⁶ The challenge to Factualism, then, is that one could accept the Argument from Factual Reasons, and agree that facts are reasons, but hold that factivity is not relevant to our reasons even when we base our beliefs on the facts.¹⁷

Since state psychologism incurred the cost of having to deny premise (i) or (ii), and the first version of content psychologism could not make sense of facts being reasons at all, I think that this second version of content psychologism offers the strongest reply. If that is correct it is interesting in its own right that Psychologism would depend on a substantive and controversial metaphysical thesis. One way to pressure the defender Psychologism would thus be to argue against the identification of facts and true propositions. I don’t want my case for Factualism, however, to depend on the falsity of that metaphysical claim. Even if facts *are* true propositions I think we can see that this version of content psychologism is incorrect and Factualism is correct. The reason is that factivity does matter to our reasons: we talk of facts being reasons,

¹⁵ John will have the same reason only if we grant that his experience could have the same content. If the content is object dependent that may not be so, but I will put aside this sort of worry (see McDowell (1986)). Also note that I am assuming the content psychologist does not want to make the *goodness* of a subject’s reasons dependent on the world around her any more than she makes the reasons themselves dependent on the world around her. If she did wish to do so her view would become very similar to the spirit of Factualism (and consequently, I would argue, there would be no motivation for favoring content psychologism of that sort over Factualism).

¹⁶ No role other than how we describe it (since we can only call it a fact when it is true).

¹⁷ If one identifies facts and true propositions but also holds that just the facts (just the true propositions) can be our reasons, one’s view will be a version of Factualism, not Psychologism.

and we care about basing our beliefs on the facts, precisely *because* the fact that they are facts matters. Let me provide two observations in support of this claim.

First, it is a very natural thought that the facts justify us because they connect our belief to the world. According to the version of content psychologism under discussion, however, any connection between our reasons and the world is coincidental and irrelevant to our reasons. When the propositions we base our beliefs on are true the defender of content psychologism can call them facts, but in a sense that is a hollow victory: we do not have good reasons for belief *because* they are facts. That they are facts is irrelevant to our reasons and thus also irrelevant to the justification we have for our beliefs based on reasons. That seems contrary to the reason why we are concerned to base our beliefs on the facts in the first place: we want the world to inform our beliefs.¹⁸

Secondly, there is linguistic evidence that suggests that just the facts are reasons, contrary to what this version of content psychologism predicts. For example all of the following are felicitous:

- (a1) The fact that the bloody knife was found in Jack’s apartment is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer.
- (b1) The fact that the strangers have dark skin is Northrop’s reason for believing that they are terrorists.
- (c1) A reason to reach out your hand is the fact that the child is drowning.
- (d1) John based his belief on the fact that the baby is crying.

By contrast, I submit that none of the following is felicitous:

- (a2) #The proposition that the bloody knife was found in Jack’s apartment is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer.
- (b2) #The proposition that the strangers have dark skin is Northrop’s reason for believing that they are terrorists.
- (c2) #A reason to reach out your hand is the proposition that the child is drowning.
- (d2) #John based his belief on the proposition that the baby is crying.

¹⁸ Not just to be the cause of our beliefs, to invoke a theme from Sellars (1956) and McDowell (1994).

It is true that the defender of content psychologism could try to explain these infelicities on pragmatic grounds. For example, she could hold that I can *say* that something is a reason only if I think that it is true. It would then be misleading to say that a *proposition* is a reason – that would be like purposefully saying it’s a reason and leaving out my endorsement of it as true and thus a reason.¹⁹ This response, however, is problematic. Consider now (a3) and (a4): the problem is that it’s not any more felicitous to say:

- (a3) #The *true* proposition that the bloody knife was found in Jack’s apartment is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer.

Nor is it possible to cancel the potential implicature:

- (a4) #The proposition that the bloody knife was found in Jack’s apartment is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer, and it’s true!

Furthermore, what is felicitous, but unusual, is (a5):

- (a5) That the proposition that the bloody knife was found in Jack’s apartment is true is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer.²⁰

Notice, however, that (a5) does not support content psychologism. Rather, it supports

Factualism, for (a5) is still felicitous only when it is nominalized as:

- (a6) The fact that the proposition that the bloody knife was found in Jack’s apartment is true is a reason for believing that Jack is the murderer.

This discussion is far from conclusive, but it suggests that the identification of facts and true propositions, even if right, does not save content psychologism.²¹ Even if facts just are true

¹⁹ One could assimilate this pragmatic response into Grice’s view of conversational implicature (Grice (1975)). (The violated maxim would be Quantity.)

²⁰ I owe this sort of example to Dancy (2000: 114-117).

²¹ Note that as I am defending Factualism, Factualism is compatible with the metaphysical identification of facts and true propositions, and thus linguistic evidence for that identification is not evidence for content psychologism over Factualism. Additional linguistic evidence is raised in Pryor (2007), none of which, I would argue, casts doubt on the identification of facts and

propositions, just the facts are reasons. Thus when we base our beliefs on the facts, our reasons are partly determined by what the facts are. Thus they are not determined entirely by our non-factive mental states. That would mean that the strongest version of Psychologism still does not offer a viable understanding of how and why facts are reasons for belief.

Let’s step back and consider where this discussion leaves us. We have examined how three different versions of Psychologism might respond to the Argument from Factual Reasons. The first was state psychologism, the view that facts of our own psychology are our reasons for belief. This version of Psychologism faces a simple dilemma: either it admits that non-psychological facts are not reasons for belief, or it admits that there are reasons for belief that could never be a subject’s reasons. Either way the view incurs considerable cost. Even less satisfying, though, is the second version of Psychologism we considered: the form of content psychologism that distinguishes between facts and true propositions. This view, I claimed, can’t make sense of facts being reasons for belief at all, a consequence I think we should find very difficult to accept. The third version of Psychologism, however, avoids the problems of the first two. This version of content psychologism identifies facts and true propositions and thus is can agree both that facts are reasons for belief and that when they are the contents of the subject’s non-factive mental states they are the subject’s reasons for belief. The problem for this view is that it may be false to identify facts and true propositions, and even if we grant that identification, it is still just the facts that are our reasons. If just the facts are our reasons then whether something is a fact partly determines what our reasons are, and thus our reasons are not determined entirely by our non-factive mental states. Thus the identification of facts and true propositions does not save Psychologism.

reasons – on account of space, however, I must leave discussion of Pryor’s evidence to another occasion.

4. Factualism about reasons for belief

If we agree that what I’ve been claiming so far is right, then the Argument from Factual Reasons shows that facts can be our reasons for belief. The fact that the baby is crying in a certain way is a reason (factual) for believing that the baby is hungry; and the fact that the baby is crying in a certain way is *John’s reason* for believing that the baby is hungry. Note that the argument does not entail that our reasons are always facts of the world around us.²² It is consistent with the argument, for example, that some of our reasons are facts about our own psychology (for example, Ronnie’s reason for believing that he is mentally ill is the fact that he believes he is being stalked by leprechauns). It is also consistent with the argument that some of our reasons aren’t facts at all: for all the argument shows, perhaps there is a sense in which our beliefs and experiences themselves can also be our reasons, rather than the facts in which these beliefs and experiences figure.

The view I will defend, however, holds that facts and only facts are our reasons for belief (including facts of the world around us). That’s what I’ve been calling Factualism. The Argument from Factual Reasons does not entail Factualism, but it can motivate Factualism in the following way. Why do we think that the fact that the baby is crying in a certain way is a reason for believing that it is hungry? Because when the baby cries in that way it is almost always hungry (and John knows as much). The baby’s cry is a good indication of its hunger. On a natural understanding, that means that that fact makes it objectively likely that the baby is hungry. If John bases his belief on the fact that the baby is crying, then his reason makes his

²² In fact the argument itself doesn’t even entail that our reasons are actually facts of the world around us, only that they could be. I will assume, however, that anyone who endorses the argument also endorses that further claim.

belief objectively likely to be true.²³ If we hold that facts can be our reasons, then the goodness of factual reasons explains the goodness of a subject’s reasons and thereby the justification she has for her beliefs based on reasons.²⁴ If all and only facts are our reasons, then the goodness of those facts will provide a complete explanation of the goodness of our reasons for belief. If we think that something other than facts are also our reasons, though, we need an additional story about what makes them good.

It is important to note that Factualism does not entail that just any facts can be our reasons. If the baby is crying, and the fact that the baby is crying is a good reason for believing that it is hungry, but John is at a conference in another state and has no idea that the baby is crying, then that fact can’t be his reason for believing that it is hungry. John needs some *access* to the fact that the baby is crying in order for him to base his belief on it. I will not attempt to give an account of what this access consists of, but I will assume our familiarity with paradigm examples of it: if John can see that the baby is crying, then he has suitable access to the fact that the baby is crying to form his belief that the baby is hungry on the basis of it.²⁵ Thus the Factualism that I advocate will endorse a certain kind of accessibility constraint on one’s reasons.

I’ve claimed that the Argument from Factual Reasons helps motivate Factualism. That argument, however, isn’t the view’s only motivation. Two other important considerations stem from features of deliberation and perception. The first is a feature of deliberation I will call

²³ This example may suggest that objective probabilities can be understood as frequencies of some sort, but I do not believe that that is so. I will therefore assume an unanalyzed notion of objective epistemic probability. Cf. Achinstein (2001).

²⁴ I mean the goodness of reasons in a broad sense, including the relativity of reasons to background information, underminers and defeaters, etc.

²⁵ Cf. Williamson (2000).

Deliberative Transparency.²⁶ When we deliberate about what to believe, we deliberate about the facts of the world (as we take them to be). If we were to ask John why he believes that the baby is hungry (or what his reason is), he would say: “Because it is crying.” Or, if John were to ask himself in a deliberative spirit, “Is the baby hungry?”, he would try to answer that question by looking at considerations that speak for or against thinking that the baby is hungry. The considerations he would normally appeal to would be states of the world around him, not states of himself. He would say, e.g., “Well, the baby is crying in that certain way that she only does when she is hungry.” He would take that fact (that the baby is crying in a certain way) to speak in favor of holding the belief that the baby is hungry, and he would form his belief on the basis of it.

The other idea that motivates Factualism is that in perception we engage with and respond to the way the world is around us (I will call this phenomenon Perceptual Transparency).²⁷ John sees the baby crying and immediately forms the belief that it is hungry. He is attending to the world and treating it as the basis for his beliefs and actions. He is not self-consciously attending to himself and his own psychology. When he forms his belief on the basis of what he sees, then, he is forming it on the basis of the facts of the world that perception gives him access to.

²⁶ I owe a debt for my use of the term “transparency” to Moran (2001), but my use of the term should not be confused with his. Moran discusses the transparency of the question of whether I believe that p to the question of whether p . I am concerned with the transparency of whether p to the facts that bear on p , facts that are often not facts of our first-person psychology. A connection between transparency and deliberation also plays a role in Shah (2003), though Shah’s use of the term is different from both Moran’s and mine (also see Shah and Velleman (2005)). The common idea to all three is that there is an element in deliberation focused on the world, but none of what I claim relies on the truth of Moran’s or Shah’s views.

²⁷ This feature of perception resonates with a naïve realist understanding of perception (see Martin (2002, 2004)), but the epistemic claims I make are consistent with other views of perception as well (such as some versions of representationalism or what Byrne and Logue call the “moderate” view). See Byrne and Logue (2008, 2009).

Both Deliberative and Perceptual Transparency deserve more space than what I have here – in particular, opponents of Factualism could offer important re-descriptions of the phenomena that are more congenial to their views. Let me just consider one response concerning perception: the opponent of Factualism might admit that in perception we attend to the way the world is, but reply that our reasons are not necessarily the considerations we are attending to. This response illustrates an important virtue of Factualism. The subject’s reasons are the considerations she takes to speak in favor of her beliefs; they are the considerations that, from the first-person perspective, she was guided by when she formed her belief. From the first-person perspective, however, we are normally concerned with the world around us and not just with ourselves. This response admits that John can see the baby, and can see that the baby is crying, and can attend to the fact that the baby is crying (and unless it denies premise (i) it admits that the fact that the baby is crying is a good reason for believing that the baby is hungry). Why then *couldn’t* he base his belief on that fact? The virtue of Factualism is its prioritization of the first-person perspective: from that perspective we reason from the facts in deliberation and we base our beliefs on the facts in perception. It is an irony that many philosophers who endorse Psychologism, and thus hold that subjects cannot base their beliefs on the facts, claim that they are prioritizing the subject’s perspective. What we can see, I think, is that their theory of reasons greatly distorts that perspective.²⁸

I have thus far claimed that Factualism is an attractive view. First, it can account for our natural talk of facts as reasons and it can use those facts in a theory of justification (the goodness of those reasons contributes to an explanation of why our beliefs are justified). Second, I have suggested that features of deliberation and perception reveal that facts are our reasons for belief.

²⁸ For a helpful discussion of how reasons are constrained by considerations of deliberation and perception see Ginsborg (2006), who discusses a notion of reasons as facts.

This sketch of the issues does not amount to a conclusive case for the view, but it does, I think, show that the view deserves serious consideration. Many philosophers, however, are convinced that Factualism cannot be right, so next I will proceed on the principle that the best offense is a good defense. If I can dispel the most obvious worries about the view then perhaps it will get the consideration it deserves.

5. Reasons and bad cases

I have tried to indicate why Factualism is compelling. This support would come to naught, however, if there were insurmountable theoretical difficulties for the view. The greatest problem for the view concerns “bad cases”, cases where things are not as the subject takes them to be.²⁹ I have said that John’s reason is the fact that the baby is crying in a certain way. But what if there is no such fact; what if John is having an illusory or hallucinatory experience, or he just plain old isn’t paying attention closely? Does that mean that John has no reason for his belief? What does Factualism say about cases like these?

It is important to mention one possible Factualist response: John has no reason at all when he hallucinates (he just thinks he has a reason for belief).³⁰ There is something attractive about the austerity of this view of reasons, but I think it comes at significant cost. There are at least two reasons why it is counterintuitive to hold that hallucinating subjects have no reason at all for their beliefs. First, we can give important rational explanations of why they believe and act as they do. When John has a hallucination of the baby crying we can explain why he forms

²⁹ I am assuming bad cases are subjectively indistinguishable from good cases, though it is difficult to spell out fully what that comes to. Talk of “good cases” and “bad cases” is from Williamson (2000).

³⁰ Of course, there will be a reason *why* John believes as he does, but not all reasons why subjects believe things are the subjects’ reasons for believing them.

the belief that the baby is hungry and why he goes to the refrigerator to make up a bottle. These explanations aren't merely causal explanations of John's beliefs and actions – they seem to make his behavior intelligible to us on a rational, personal level. The most natural explanation of why they do so is that they involve reasons he has for believing and acting.³¹ Second, it seems that in at least many cases the beliefs that subjects form in hallucination are justified. It would be very difficult, however, for the no-reasons Factualist to agree. Perhaps not all of our beliefs are justified on the basis of reasons, but it seems that a belief like John's (that the baby is hungry) is the sort of belief that we need good reasons to hold in order to be justified. The Factualist, then, would simply have to accept the cost of denying John any justification.

At this point it is worth recalling the Argument from Factual Reasons. That argument held that we have a normal way of talking about reasons such that facts of the world around us are good reasons for belief. It would be a mark against any view that held that this ordinary notion of reasons is mistaken, but if Factualism also has significant intuitive costs (such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph), then the opponent of Factualism could simply argue that her view is no more, and maybe even less, costly than Factualism. Thus if the Factualist wishes to maintain the integrity of the Argument from Factual Reasons, this discussion highlights two constraints on her theory of bad cases (covering both illusion and hallucination): (1) in bad cases subjects actually have some reasons for belief, and (2) those reasons are good enough, at least in many cases, to justify their beliefs.

³¹ Although this explanation is the most natural, it is far from compulsory. Perhaps the norms of rationality are distinct from the norms of reason, or perhaps there are no norms of rationality and an error theory correctly explains why we think that subjects are violating the supposed norms of rationality. I will put these issues aside for the purposes of this paper; for discussion see Kolodny (2005, 2007 and 2008).

A second view of bad cases the Factualist might endorse is that one’s reasons in bad cases are always psychological. In the bad case, the Factualist might say that John’s reason is the fact that he is having an experience as of the baby crying. In effect, the Factualist might simply claim that in bad cases he adopts the exact same view of reasons as state psychologism, while in good cases he maintains that our reasons can be non-psychological facts. Let’s call this hybrid sort of view Mixed Factualism. I think this solution is also unsatisfactory for Factualism. Notice that the defender of state psychologism cannot object that the Factualist has identified the wrong thing in the bad case as John’s reason. The Factualist is just mirroring the view of state psychologism in bad cases, so that cannot be what is problematic about this solution according to his opponent. The real problem is that the mixed view of reasons seems inconsistent with the motivations for Factualism. Recall that part of the motivation for Factualism is that John in the good case does not attend to his own psychological states when he forms his belief – he attends to, and responds to, the way the world is as he forms his belief. John in the bad case, however, does – or at least attempts to do – the exact same thing. At least on the surface, John in the bad case no more attends to his psychological states than John in the good case. So (at least *prima facie*) if the fact that John in the good case does not attend to his psychological states is a good reason for thinking that his reason is not psychological, then the same should go for John in the bad case.³²

What this shows, I think, is that if the Factualist is to consistently capitalize on this motivation for his view, then he should hold that when subjects are in bad cases we should not automatically think that their reasons are psychological. I say “automatically” because in some cases we can’t avoid identifying one’s reasons with psychological facts: but let me first illustrate

³² Note that I am not claiming that this objection to Mixed Factualism is conclusive, for I have not ruled out the possibility that it has additional and better motivation.

how it is possible for one’s reasons to be non-psychological in a bad case. Say there is a pizza shop that only sells one kind of pizza each day. Rather infrequently the pizza has wild mushrooms on it. Our subject, Alice, loves wild mushroom pizza, and so does her friend Connor. Connor in fact will only eat pizza at this shop when it sells wild mushroom pizza, so whenever Connor is sitting in front of the pizza shop eating pizza it is a wild mushroom day (and Alice knows as much). Now let’s say Alice drives by the pizza shop and sees someone who looks just like Connor eating pizza out front. Alice thinks it is Connor, and Alice thinks that what she sees – Connor eating pizza, supposedly – is a good reason for believing that it’s a wild mushroom day. Unfortunately for Alice, she is in a bad case. In fact it isn’t Connor eating pizza – it’s Connor’s identical twin brother, whom Alice knows nothing about. So what she takes to be a consideration that speaks in favor of believing that it’s a wild mushroom day is no consideration at all. What is the Factualist to say about this case?

In order to meet our two constraints the Factualist must say that Alice has some reason for her belief and that that reason justifies her in believing that it’s a wild mushroom day. Mixed Factualism would hold that in this case Alice’s reason is psychological – the fact that she has an experience as of Connor eating pizza is her reason. What is unsatisfactory about that response, however, is that Alice really is attending to the way the world is when she forms her belief. It so happens that the world is not exactly as she takes it to be, but the world is *partly* as she takes it to be. For example, while it’s not the case that Connor is eating pizza out front, it is the case that there is a person qualitatively identical to Connor eating pizza out front. In a sense this latter fact, the fact that there is a person qualitatively identical to Connor eating pizza out front, is a

determinable fact of which the fact that Connor is eating pizza out front is one determinate.³³ So while the world is not determinately as she thinks it is, it is determinably so, and that gives us another answer that the Factualist might offer as to what her reason is. On this version, in the bad case her reason is the nearest determinable fact of what her reason would have been in the good case.³⁴ As such her reason is still non-psychological, so this version of Factualism does not face the objection leveled at the previous one. Alice is attending to the world, and the way the world is is her grounds for belief. It just so happens that the world is not exactly as she takes it to be, but her belief is still based on the way the world is inasmuch as it is the way she takes it to be.

Although this version of Factualism does not face the problem of the previous version, an opponent might still object to it on the following grounds. We are not supposing that Alice thinks about the fact that there is a person qualitatively identical to Connor eating pizza out front. That is, in a sense, too “guarded” of a thought. Alice just thinks about the putative fact that Connor is eating pizza out front, and she doesn’t worry (normally) about that not being so. The Factualist, then, has identified something as her grounds for belief that she isn’t even consciously considering, and that might seem implausible and again in tension with the motivations for Factualism. The reason it shouldn’t strike us as implausible and in tension with the motivations for Factualism, however, is that if we asked her whether she believes that there is a person qualitatively identical to Connor eating pizza out front, she would say, “Of course I do – I

³³ The determinate-determinable distinction is usually put in terms of properties: the property of being scarlet is a determinate of the determinable property of being red (see Martin (2004)). I am assuming that we can use this distinction between determinate and determinable properties to speak of determinate and determinable facts: the fact that a scarf is scarlet is a determinate of the determinable fact that the scarf is red.

³⁴ I will rely on the reader’s intuitive understanding of “nearness” here. My fully spelled-out account would be in terms of conditional epistemic probabilities for facts Alice has suitable access to.

believe that *Connor* is eating pizza out front.” The determinable belief dispositionally “goes along with” the more determinate belief. So even though she’s only consciously entertaining the content of the determinate belief, she does hold the determinable belief as well.³⁵ When Alice attends to the way the world is, in a sense she is aiming her process of belief formation at a target (the way the world is). In this case she overshoots the target, and takes the world to be a determinate way that it is not. But we give her credit for the determinable way the world actually is. When she shoots her reasons-arrow at the target, she doesn’t get a reason only if she hits the target exactly, in all its determinacy. Rather, she takes what she can get – she gets as a reason however determinate the world happens to be. We can call this the Take-What-You-Can-Get Principle. The fact that Connor is eating pizza out front is a conclusive reason for believing that it’s a wild mushroom day. The fact that there is a person qualitatively identical to Connor eating pizza out front is also a good reason for believing that it’s a wild mushroom day, though it’s not as good a reason as the former fact.³⁶ Thus Alice’s belief is still justified, but it is not as well justified as it would have been in the good case. Let’s call this the Take-Get version of Factualism.

It is important to note that in cases of total hallucination there will be no suitable determinable non-psychological fact. When John, in his sleep-deprived state, has an experience as of his baby crying, and there is simply no fact of the world around him that he is suitably

³⁵ Indeed, one could hold that she knows it, so if the access condition requires knowledge she can still meet it.

³⁶ I am assuming that the fact that there is a person qualitatively identical to Connor eating pizza out front is a reason for believing it is a wild mushroom day because it is also a reason for believing that Connor is eating pizza out front (not because the chef is independently prone to make wild mushroom pizza when someone with Connor’s look is around). Finally, even though Factualism itself does not require the commitment, I am assuming the Factualist wants to hold that facts in good cases are sometimes better reasons than facts in bad cases (and also that therefore subjects in good cases could be better justified in holding their beliefs than subjects in bad cases, even if both are justified *simpliciter*).

related to, then Take-Get Factualism will collapse into Mixed Factualism. The only available fact is a fact about John: the fact that he seems to see his baby crying is his reason for believing that it is hungry. This means that there may be cost to Take-Get Factualism, but I think the cost is much less than the cost to Mixed Factualism. Mixed Factualism is unsatisfactory because in Alice’s case the subject really is attending to the world around her and she bases her belief on the way the world is. In claiming that her reason is psychological the mixed view divorces the subject’s reasons from the considerations indicated by Deliberative and Perceptual Transparency. In cases of total hallucination, however, we are not attending to the world around us. Rather, we *think* we are attending to the world and basing our beliefs on it, but the tragedy of the situation is that that is a mistake. In such cases there is no world in view for us to base our beliefs on.³⁷ It is a consequence of Take-Get Factualism that we can thus be mistaken about our reasons, since John in the bad case thinks his reason is a consideration of the world around him. That may be a cost of the view, or it may just be the best description of the phenomenon.

The view I defend then can be stated in this way.

Take-Get Factualism: In bad cases one’s reasons (in general³⁸) are the best possible facts one is suitably related to.

Notice that the determinate-determinable mechanism isn’t built into the view as such. The reason is that the class of illusions (and hallucinations) is quite heterogeneous, and it is doubtful that a single mechanism can explain what considerations we are actually basing our beliefs on when we suffer from illusions (or hallucinations). The key to the view is not that specific mechanism, but rather the idea that one has the strongest possible reasons given one’s relation to

³⁷ McDowell (1982, 1986, 1994).

³⁸ This qualification makes room for cases where a subject’s cognitive economy is so structured that she is not willing to take what she can get: e.g., cases in which she would only take a conclusive reason to hold some belief (take-it-or-leave-it cases). I take it that such cases are possible but rare; in general we take what we can get.

the world. The “best” possible facts one is suitably related to, then, are the facts that offer the strongest support to one’s belief: a subject’s reasons are as good as possible given the facts.³⁹ Being “suitably related” just means that one must be related to the facts in such a way that one can base one’s belief on them.⁴⁰ Consider, e.g., a bad case in which John has an experience as of *p*. He thinks his reason is the fact that *p*, but since he is in the bad case it is not the case that *p*. If there is some non-psychological fact that he is suitably related to that is a better reason than the psychological fact that it seems to him as if *p*, then that non-psychological fact is his reason. If the psychological fact is the best reason he could have, then that is his reason. In cases of total hallucination the psychological fact will be all there is and will thus be his reason, but I have suggested that that consequence isn’t actually at odds with the motivations for Factualism.

Take-Get Factualism thus satisfies one of our two desiderata: it entails that hallucinating subjects have reasons for belief. It might seem compatible with the view, though, that these psychological facts are never good enough to justify the beliefs of hallucinating subjects. I will now show that on plausible assumptions that is not so. Take-Get Factualism entails that in many cases hallucinating subjects’ reasons are actually sufficiently good to justify their beliefs and thus the view also satisfies the second desideratum. One difficulty is that I think it is an open question whether hallucinating subjects are always justified in holding the beliefs they form (when their counterparts in good cases are justified in holding their beliefs). What the second desideratum requires is that at least sometimes their beliefs are justified, since I think that is (or should be) less controversial. Let’s therefore start with the clearest such case. Let’s say in two possible worlds John’s life has proceeded identically up until the present moment. In world W_1

³⁹ Perhaps the goodness of these facts, *qua* reasons, can be analyzed in terms of objective probabilities, though the view does not depend on such an analysis. Cf. Achinstein 2001.

⁴⁰ Different views about what counts as suitable are possible; for example, Williamson holds that one must know that *p* in order for *p* to be one’s reason. See Williamson 2000.

the baby starts crying; John hears it and forms the belief that the baby is hungry. In W_2 the baby stays asleep but John has a perfect hallucination of the baby crying, and he again forms the belief that the baby is hungry. In both cases, I think, we should say that John’s belief is justified.

The argument that Take-Get Factualism has that consequence starts from the assumption that we can often epistemically evaluate subjects’ suspension of belief: often one can have or lack sufficient reason to suspend belief about some subject matter. Next, for the case of the two Johns it seems reasonable to propose the following:

Suspension Principle_L: If John does not have sufficient reason to believe that p , and he does not have sufficient reason to believe that not- p , then he has sufficient reason to suspend judgment about p .⁴¹

The idea behind the principle is that in both cases John is a stable, competent epistemic agent; it thus seems right that when he considers whether p some correct “move” in the space of reasons is available to him. If he lacks sufficient reason to believe that p , then he ought not believe that p ; and if he lacks sufficient reason to believe that not- p , then he ought not believe that not- p . But if he ought not believe p or not- p , he ought to suspend judgment about p . If that is right, though, we can argue in the following way. In W_2 John has an experience as of the baby crying, and he has no reason to doubt that his experience is veridical.⁴² It therefore does not seem that he has sufficient reason to suspend judgment: after all, part of what it means to be in a bad case is that one doesn’t know that one is in it. John has no idea that he is hallucinating and thus he has no access to the facts that would give him reason to suspend judgment. Since he has no reason at all

⁴¹ I owe this principle as well as the idea behind this argument to Silins (2005). I use the subscript “L” in order to differentiate it from Silins’s principle: I claim only limited scope for mine (in this case, John); he does not claim limited scope for his (he also puts the principle in terms of justification, not reasons). I actually don’t believe the principle has unlimited scope, and thus I disagree with the use Silins makes of the principle.

⁴² Note that I’ve left out the bit about John being in a sleep-deprived state. If he were in such a state and such a state often led to him hallucinating then maybe he would have a reason to question his experience.

to doubt his experience, on what basis could he correctly suspend judgment? But it is also clearly the case that John does not have sufficient reason to believe that it is not the case that the baby is hungry. It then follows from the Suspension Principle_L that his hallucinatory experience is sufficiently good to justify his belief that the baby is hungry.⁴³

This sort of argument, however, doesn’t just work for John’s case. It will work for many cases of hallucination. Specifically, it will work for all cases (1) in which a form of the suspension principle holds and (2) in which subjects’ hallucinations would make suspension of belief unjustified. I think it is reasonable to suppose that these two conditions are widely satisfied by hallucinating subjects, though I don’t have the space to fully explore the issue here. It is important to note that the argument from the Suspension Principle_L does not show that John’s belief is equally justified in the good and bad cases. On the version of Factualism that I advocate the fact that the baby is crying is still a better reason for believing that it is hungry than the fact that it seems to John as if the baby is crying. I do not, however, take this consequence to be at odds with the second desideratum. The second desideratum holds that hallucinating subjects’ beliefs are sometimes justified; it does not hold that they have the exact same justification as normal subjects. The reason is that I find the latter, stronger claim counterintuitive: if we are better connected to the world in good cases, it seems right that we are better justified.⁴⁴

In this section I have been concerned with explaining how Factualism can make sense of bad cases. The Factualist should admit, I have claimed, both that subjects in bad cases have

⁴³ I am assuming that the “sufficiently good” reasons in the Suspension Principle_L are sufficiently good to justify us, and that as long as he bases his belief on them properly his belief is justified.

⁴⁴ An objection to holding that there is an asymmetry in reasons between good and bad cases is made by Silins (2005). Silins’s argument, however, relies on assumptions that the Factualist should reject – an issue I must leave, on account of space, for another occasion.

reasons for belief and that these reasons are often good enough to justify their beliefs. Then I argued that the best defense of Factualism subscribes to a take-what-you-can-get principle: subjects get the best possible reasons given their relation to the world. This view has the consequence that we do not always know what our reasons are, but I suggested that that fact is not at odds with the motivations for Factualism. One of the motivations is that we base our beliefs on how the world is (inasmuch as we are related to it) – it is consistent with that insight that we sometimes misdescribe how the world is but have good reasons nevertheless.

Furthermore, examination of how subjects react when they learn that they are in bad cases suggests they have a take-what-you-can-get attitude toward their own reasons. For example, if we pointed out to Alice that Connor was not eating pizza out front, she would defend herself by saying, “Well, I saw someone who looked just like him!” And if we pointed out to John (in the hallucination case) that the baby is not crying, he would say, “Well, it seemed like she was!” Both of these observations show, I think, that subjects in bad cases are willing to fall back on reasons that were not the reasons they originally thought they had. If that is right, then a take-what-you-can-get principle may be right and consequently bad cases might pose no problem at all for a Factualist theory of reasons for belief.

6. Conclusion

In ordinary life we talk of facts being reasons so frequently that it can just seem like a bit of common sense to hold that the fact that the streets are wet is a reason for believing that it rained, the fact that the Red Sox lost is a reason for believing that Justin will be unhappy, and the fact that the baby is crying is a reason for believing that it is hungry. There is a genuine worry, however, about whether we can take this common-sense talk at face value. If we just consider

subjects in good cases it might seem like facts are their reasons for belief, but if we attend to subjects in bad cases, the worry goes, we will see that that can't be so. In order to make sense of bad cases we must hold that our reasons are determined just by our non-factive psychology, and that means our reasons can't be affected by what is the case even in good cases. My goal in this paper has been to dissolve this worry while at the same time acknowledging what is right about it. What is right, firstly, is that subjects in bad cases have good reasons for belief and those reasons often justify their beliefs. Secondly, it is also true that in cases of total hallucination the only relevant facts are facts about the subject's own psychology. I have argued, though, that we can acknowledge both of these points and still hold onto the idea that facts and only facts are our reasons for belief – including facts of the world around us. Contrary to what Psychologism maintains, a subject's reasons are determined both by what psychological states she is in and by how the world is. A subject will need to be in certain psychological states that give her access to the facts, but still her reasons are the facts that she has access to. This view of reasons helps us understand how reasons justify our beliefs (they make our beliefs objectively likely to be true) and it provides a straightforward account of deliberation and perception. It is true that sometimes subjects will not be related to the facts that they think they are, and so subjects will sometimes lack a reflective awareness of what their reasons actually are, but that is a consequence I think we should be happy to accept. If you really want your beliefs to be better informed, you have to improve your relation to the world, not just your impression of how the world seems.

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