

## “Basic Factive Perceptual Reasons”

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**Abstract** Many epistemologists have recently defended views on which all evidence is true or perceptual reasons are facts (including McDowell, Pritchard, Williamson, and Littlejohn). On such views a common account of basic perceptual reasons is that the fact that one sees that  $p$  is one’s reason for believing that  $p$  (McDowell, Pritchard, Millar, Haddock). I argue that that account is wrong; rather, in the basic case the fact that  $p$  itself is one’s reason for believing that  $p$ . I show that my proposal is better motivated, solves a fundamental objection that the received view faces, and illuminates the nature of reasons for belief.

### 1. Introduction

Theories that maintain that all evidence is true (Williamson 2000; Littlejohn 2012) or that perceptual reasons are facts (McDowell 1993, 1995, 2002, 2006; Pritchard 2012) must tell us what the basic truths or facts are that justify one’s beliefs about the environment. Call these truths or facts one’s basic perceptual reasons—one’s perceptual reasons that don’t derive from other perceptual reasons.<sup>1</sup> The dominant view is that the fact that one sees that  $p$  is one’s basic perceptual reason for believing that  $p$  (see McDowell 1993: 428, 1995: 402, 2006: 238, 2011: 33; Pritchard 2012: 14–18; Millar 2010: 139; Haddock 2010: 199). In this paper I argue that that view is wrong. My positive proposal is that the fact that  $p$ , not the fact that one sees that  $p$ , is one’s basic perceptual reason for believing that  $p$ . I show that this view can be defended from the clearest objections to it, that it solves a key motivational problem for factive-reasons theories, and that it illuminates the nature of reasons for belief.

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<sup>1</sup> My use of “basic” is roughly that of Comesaña and McGrath (this volume): one’s basic perceptual reasons don’t derive by inference from other perceptual reasons. I elaborate on this notion in Section 2.

My plan is the following. In Section 2 I explain the relevant terminology. In Section 3 I consider the positive argument for the received view, based on reasons discourse, and I show that that argument fails to establish the view. In Section 4 I show that the doxastic element of “seeing-that” presents two related problems for the received view, but, furthermore, my proposal solves these problems. In Section 5 I defend my proposal from objections and explore its implications for the nature of reasons for belief.

## 2. Reasons and Entitlements

I am interested in a subject’s epistemic reasons for belief—her grounds for belief that render it justified or warranted. Sometimes “evidence” is used for the same notion. Sometimes both “evidence” and “reasons”, however, are used for more specific notions, which I should contrast with my use. For example, one might hold that a subject has reasons or evidence only when she has inferential knowledge or justification (see, e.g., Burge 2003). On such a view, a subject could have a non-reasons-based perceptual entitlement to a fundamental belief about the environment, an entitlement which provides the belief’s positive epistemic credentials.<sup>2</sup> The subject’s basic perceptual reasons (her perceptual reasons that don’t derive by inference from other perceptual reasons), then, would be epistemically grounded on these entitlements. A subject would have entitlement for her belief that an object is a piece of red fruit, e.g., which would give her a reason for believing that it is ripe.<sup>3</sup> The reason for thinking that it is ripe depends inferentially on the

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<sup>2</sup> Burge (2003) reserves the term “justification” for epistemic credentials that depend on reasons.

<sup>3</sup> I am taking the belief that an object is red fruit to be perceptually fundamental, but readers can substitute alternate examples. As I discuss below, I use the term “fundamental belief” distinctly from the term “basic belief”, in order to remain neutral on the question of

belief that it is a piece of red fruit (granting that the inference need not be consciously made).

This Burgian understanding of reasons, though, is not compulsory. On the alternative understanding that I adopt, a subject has reasons even for holding her fundamental perceptual beliefs (such as the belief that the object is a piece of red fruit). Here is why I adopt the alternative. First, perception gives the subject good grounds for belief, and it is quite plausible to call such grounds reasons. For example, it doesn't seem right to say that she has no reason for thinking that the object is red fruit.<sup>4</sup> If that is right then there is some basis for the broad, non-Burgian use of "reasons". Second, it is commonly thought that reasons must be propositionally structured items that can be modeled by an argument in premise-conclusion form (see, e.g., Williamson 2000). I will argue that this condition is met in the basic perceptual case on my view, because one's reason for thinking that the object is a piece of red fruit is the fact that the object is a piece of red fruit, which can be modeled by the following argument:

$$\frac{\text{The object is a piece of red fruit}}{\text{The object is a piece of red fruit}}$$

meeting the above constraints.<sup>5</sup> Perception presents one with objects bearing properties, which provides one with the structure one needs. For all I have said, the premise and conclusion of this argument could be of different ontological kinds (the premise is a fact;

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whether beliefs formed in perception depend on background beliefs, such as the belief that one's senses are reliable. Basic beliefs, on one common understanding, do not epistemically depend on any other beliefs that one holds. Whether there are any such beliefs is not my concern here. Fundamental beliefs, as I understand them, are minimally inferential, such as when one "directly" forms a belief in perception; they are those beliefs closest to the periphery in one's "web of belief" (if one is a friend of that image), leaving open whether they are genuinely basic or not.

<sup>4</sup> One could attempt to pragmatically explain this point away, but I don't find that plausible.

<sup>5</sup> The worry that this view is viciously circular I address in Section 5.

the conclusion a proposition one believes), but that is consistent with standard Williamsonian considerations. It is intelligible to talk of facts entailing certain considerations that one believes: the fact that the object is red entails that it is colored (which I believe).

This discussion, however, raises several additional complications, such as (i) whether reasons must be conceptually structured in some way and (ii) whether facts are true propositions. Regarding (i), I make no assumptions regarding the conceptuality of reasons or conceptual content of experience. For one thing, the answer to (i) depends on how one thinks of conceptual and propositional content, and adjudicating those matters is beyond my concern. McDowell, for example, holds that a subject's grounds for belief must have conceptual content, but in the basic case they have "intuitional" content and not propositional (or discursive) content (McDowell 2008: 260, 269).<sup>6</sup> Huemer, by contrast, distinguishes conceptual content and propositional content (the latter merely requires predicational structure that can be true or false, which non-conceptual<sup>7</sup> content is capable of) (Huemer 2001: 74).<sup>8</sup> These issues are largely tangential to my focus in this paper, so I set them aside. Concerning (ii), I am generally neutral about the metaphysical status of facts (in particular, whether facts are true propositions). If the above-mentioned considerations (concerning facts serving as premises in an argument that models one's

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<sup>6</sup> McDowell's 2008 is to some extent a revision to his previous view, made in response to worries about how perception can ground fundamental perceptual beliefs. By calling them conceptual non-propositional intuitional contents, however, McDowell does not take a Burgean view, on which basic perception gives us mere non-reasons entitlements. See McDowell's elaboration in 2011.

<sup>7</sup> On nonconceptual content see, e.g., Peacocke (1998, 2001), according to which perception can have a representational content, e.g., presenting one with a object being a certain way, even though one lacks the concepts needed to specify that content.

<sup>8</sup> For yet another perspective on this terrain see Travis (2013).

reasons) suggest that facts are true propositions, that result is fine with me. I do not take a stand on the metaphysics of facts here.

Even after setting these issues aside, however, there are two pressing objections to my understanding of reasons. First, fundamental perceptual beliefs are phenomenologically immediate or non-inferential, but calling their grounds reasons, one might argue, makes them inherently inferential in some sense. Let's assume that one doesn't always perform a conscious inference when one holds a belief for reasons; one might still worry that if one's reason is the fact that the object is a piece of red fruit, then that would require that there still be an inferential cognitive process occurring. The objection continues: one must have a grasp of the proposition that the object is a piece of red fruit, perhaps in a non-doxastic seeming, on the basis of which one comes to believe that it is a piece of red fruit, and the move from such a content to a belief is "too inferential" of a picture to capture the nature of the epistemic grounding provided by perception (cf. McDowell 2008). What is needed, then, to quell these worries is a view of reasons that does not require non-doxastic seemings to provide one's reasons and that entails that basic perceptual beliefs are phenomenologically immediate and inherently non-deliberative, such that one could not have engaged in a deliberative inferential processes across time. I argue in Section 5 that my view meets all of these requirements.

Second, what is perhaps the fundamental objection is that my understanding of reasons over-intellectualizes the cognitive processes at issue (see Burge 2003). Non-human animals don't have reasons, but they have perceptual systems that epistemically ground their fundamental perceptual beliefs. Call those epistemic bases that animals have non-reasons entitlements. Since we have much of the same cognitive architecture, we

seem to have the same epistemic entitlements. This objection is difficult to adjudicate because of the contentious state of research on animal cognition (see Andrews 2014). It is a disputed matter, for example, whether animals have beliefs (Carruthers 2004; Glock 2000, 2010), representational contents (Rescorla 2009), conceptual contents (Chater and Heyes 1994; Cheney and Seyfarth 2007), non-conceptual contents (Bermúdez 2003; Newen and Bartels 2007), imagistic contents (Camp 2007), rationality (Glock 2009; Hurley and Nudds 2006), etc. My take on the issue is this. Humans engage in the game of giving and asking for reasons (Brandom 1994), which in part makes the epistemic considerations at issue that ground our beliefs reasons. What it is to have reasons is partly constituted by these practices, and these practices apply to fundamental perceptual beliefs as well. Someone can challenge, for example, my grounds for thinking that the object is a piece of red fruit in the same ways that she can challenge my reasons for holding any belief. One can challenge my belief that the object is red fruit by asking “how do you know that?” or “why do you think that?”, to which I can reply by citing my grounds or by explaining how I have access to those grounds.<sup>9</sup> The considerations that ground our fundamental perceptual beliefs function as reasons in the game of giving and asking for reasons. It is true that not just any consideration that plays a role in a subject’s cognition counts as a reason; a subpersonal representation, for example, is not thereby a reason. But a propositionally structured consideration (like the fact that the object is a piece of red fruit), on the basis of which one forms the belief that the object is a piece of red fruit, does count as a reason. Naturally, then, one would like to know whether the same considerations that are reasons for us are available to animals as well, so that they would be reasons for animals if only

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<sup>9</sup> Caveat: do not take these remarks to indicate that I identify a belief’s justification with an act of justifying it.

animals could engage in the activity of giving and asking for reasons. The view I defend in this paper is independent of those questions, which depend on settling (1) the philosophical issues noted above concerning the relation between reasons and conceptual and propositional content and (2) the empirical issues concerning animal cognition.

Next, by “basic reasons” I mean reasons that do not depend, or only minimally depend, inferentially on other reasons. It might be the case that all perceptual beliefs depend on one’s having perceptual reasons for holding certain general beliefs, such as the belief that one’s senses are reliable.<sup>10</sup> If that is so, then by basic I mean reasons that minimally depend on one’s other reasons. Thus basic reasons, in my sense, need not lead to basic belief, as that term is commonly used. For example, one’s reason for thinking that the object is ready to eat is that it is ripe; one’s reason for thinking that it is ripe is that it is a piece of red fruit. That it is ripe is not a basic perceptual reason for one, for it depends inferentially on the perceptual reason that it is a piece of red fruit. That it is a piece of red fruit, however, is a basic perceptual reason that does not depend upon an inference from another perceptual reason in a similar way. Perhaps this whole chain of justification depends upon the general belief that one’s senses are reliable; nonetheless the contrast exists between the perceptually more basic and the perceptually less basic, or derived, reasons.

Finally, I need to clarify how I understand what I am calling the received view, on which (e.g.) one’s basic perceptual reason for believing that there is a piece of red fruit here

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<sup>10</sup> See Pryor (2014) and Comesaña (2014). A point about conceptual space: one could hold that one has *a priori* reason for believing that one’s senses are reliable, which is operative in all perceptual reasons, so that there are no basic perceptual *beliefs*; nonetheless there could be basic perceptual *reasons* that don’t depend on any other perceptual reasons but only on *a priori* reasons.

is that one sees that there is a piece of red fruit here.<sup>11</sup> My general concern in this paper is what basic perceptual reasons are according to views that hold that evidence is true or that reasons are facts. It should be pointed out, though, that proponents of epistemological disjunctivism, in Pritchard's (2012) sense<sup>12</sup>, are not committed as such to the claim that all reasons are facts or that all basic perceptual reasons are facts of the form "S sees that *p*." Rather, Pritchard's key claim is that in certain paradigmatic good cases one's reasons are facts of that form. I do not think that that more cautious position is more attractive, however: if my arguments below are successful—e.g., that the received view faces a basing problem—then they tell against the fact that one sees that *p* ever being one's basic perceptual reason. I therefore adopt the simplification of taking the received view to be the view that one's basic perceptual reasons are always of that form.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Reasons Discourse

Epistemologists generally assume that subjects have at least fairly good access to their reasons for belief. As Audi puts the point:

Far from being hard to discern, reasons for which we believe are usually what we first blurt out if asked, by someone with whom we are not guarded, why we believe whatever it is. (Audi 1986: 251)

What we often "blurt out" or cite, when asked about our reasons, however, is the facts (the literature on this point is large; see Stampe 1987, Dancy 2000 and Alvarez 2010). E.g.,

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<sup>11</sup> Thanks especially to Duncan Pritchard here.

<sup>12</sup> By epistemological disjunctivism Pritchard means the view that perceptual knowledge is (paradigmatically) grounded by factive and reflectively accessible support (Pritchard 2012: 2–3).

<sup>13</sup> Epistemological disjunctivism and the factivity of reasons are not exactly philosophical orthodoxy, so calling my target the "received view" is a bit strained; I retain the label because the view that in the basic case one's reason is that one sees that *p* is the primary view advocated in the literature in the factive reasons camp.



when asked (in a non-basic case) why I believe that it rained I might reply: “Because the streets are wet; the fact that the streets are wet is my reason for thinking that it rained.” Furthermore, according to the received view, when asked about our basic perceptual reasons we often cite facts concerning our factive psychological states. For example, when asked why I believe that there is a piece of red fruit here, I might reply: “Because I can see that there is a piece of red fruit here” (McDowell 1993: 428, 1995: 402, 2006: 238, 2011: 33; Pritchard 2012: 17; Millar 2010: 139; Haddock 2010: 199; cf. Brewer 1999: 19–20 and Neta and Pritchard 2007: 383–384). There is therefore *prima facie* support for the received view. Indeed, if part of the general case for factive-reasons theories is that they are a bit of common sense, and that we should take our reasons talk at face value, then the received view might seem compulsory (see discussion in McDowell 1995: 402; Pritchard 2012: 17–18).

That would be wrong. Even if we grant that we should take our reasons talk at face value, so that many instances of the schema “because *p*” cite the fact that *p* as one’s reason, it doesn’t follow that every instance of that schema does so (and thus it doesn’t follow, when *p* is the fact that one sees that *q*, that *p* is one’s reason). First, a routine point: some true answers of the form “because *p*” cite mere explanatory reasons, reasons why the subject holds a belief that are not the subject’s reasons for belief.<sup>14</sup> E.g., say that Neela believes that it rained because the streets are wet, but the reason why the streets are wet is that the fire hydrant burst. When asked why Neela believes that it rained, I might truly

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<sup>14</sup> On the reasons-for vs. reasons-why distinction see Audi (1986, 1993) and Ginsborg (2006). I will assume that all reasons-for are reasons-why, but not all reasons-why are reasons-for.

answer, “Because the fire hydrant burst,” but of course that fact is not her reason (it is not the consideration on which she based her belief).

This sort of counterexample, however, is insufficient to challenge the received view. The evidence for the received view (“Because I see that there is a piece of red fruit here”) does not cite a mere explanatory reason; rather, it cites a consideration that at least addresses the issue of what the subject’s reasons for belief are, the issue of the considerations from the subject’s perspective that were her grounds for forming the belief.

Let’s set mere explanatory reasons aside, then, and focus on “because *p*” answers that address the subject’s reasons for belief. Still, even if the subject’s reasons are specifically at issue, a “because *p*” answer that addresses the subject’s reasons does not necessarily cite the subject’s reason as the fact that *p*, even according to factive reasons theories. Here is an example. Say we ask Connor why Neela believes that it rained. Connor knows that Neela thinks that the streets are wet, and that that is why she thinks that it rained, but Connor isn’t sure himself whether the streets are wet. Connor would not reply, “Because the streets are wet.”<sup>15</sup> He might, however, naturally reply, “Because she thinks that the streets are wet.” For the factive-reasons theorist, it doesn’t follow from the truth and appropriateness of this reply that Neela’s reason is that she thinks that the streets are wet. If the streets are wet, the factive-reasons theorist would maintain (in a

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<sup>15</sup> There are two possible explanations for why he would not reply in this way. If “because” is factive, then he would not do so because it commits him to the truth of the streets’ being wet, which he is unwilling to commit to. Or, if “because” is non-factive (see discussion in Dancy 2000), he would not reply this way because of the conversational implicature it generates.

typical case) that her reason is the fact that they are wet, not the fact that she thinks that they are wet (or her belief that they are wet, etc.).<sup>16</sup>

This example reveals that, when we ask why a subject holds a belief, and when not just any old explanatory reason is at issue but rather the subject's reasons for belief, a true, appropriate and informative "because *p*" answer might still not mean that the fact that *p* is the subject's reason for belief. Instead, *p* might be an explanatory reason that bears significantly on the subject's reason, e.g., by citing a psychological enabling condition (that she believes that the streets are wet) that partly accounts for her reason (that the streets are wet).

Now consider basic factive perceptual reasons. I believe that there is a piece of red fruit here. If I am challenged and asked why I believe that, I cannot simply say, "Because there is a piece of red fruit here." For conversational reasons that answer would be inappropriate, as I am essentially repeating my claim.<sup>17</sup> But from conversational inappropriateness it does not follow that my answer is false (Grice 1975). By contrast, the answer "Because I see that there is a piece of red fruit here" is appropriate, because it explains how it is that I have access to the fact that there is a piece of red fruit here. On my

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<sup>16</sup> See discussion in Alvarez (2010), Dancy (2000), and Hornsby (2008). The point is not that it is impossible for her to believe that it rained for the reason that she thinks that the streets are wet, but rather that that kind of psychological fact about oneself is not typically a consideration one would take (according to factive-reasons theories) to count in favor of thinking that it rained. This point, however, does leave open a reply to Pritchard's epistemological disjunctivist: she can eschew concern with factualism about reasons in general and retreat to the claim that in paradigmatic good cases one's reason is the fact that one sees that *p*. I find such a reply unattractive both because of the plausibility of the factivist's account of such cases (e.g., Alvarez 2010) and because of some of the motivations of epistemological disjunctivism in particular: namely, the idea that justification secures an objective connection to truth via the factivity of reasons. That is, I would contend that the motivations of the epistemological disjunctivist do not allow her to take this reply, though I acknowledge that the point requires a full treatment of its own.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Williamson 2000: 187–188, 2009: 352.

proposal, then, the fact that there is a piece of red fruit here is my reason for believing that there is a piece of red fruit here, but it is perfectly understandable why subjects do not say as much in ordinary reasons discourse. The evidence for the received view, then, is equally compatible with my proposal; it therefore fails to establish the received view.

An important set of considerations, though, favors my proposal over the received view. First, factive-reasons theories are motivated in part by the idea that “we can have environmental facts directly available to us” (McDowell 2006: 229). My view captures this idea better than the received view. On my view, the environmental fact that  $p$  is directly available to one and is one’s fundamental grounds for believing that  $p$ . On the received view, what is most fundamentally one’s grounds for belief is a fact about oneself (that one sees that  $p$ ), rather than the way things stand in the environment. The proponent of the received view will object to my charge here, of course: McDowell, for example, will claim that “a perceptual state can consist in a subject’s having a feature of her environment perceptually present to her” (2011: 31), so in some sense the fact about oneself at issue *also* involves the way things stand in the environment. This reply, however, only dampens some, not all, of the force of my charge. Perception does not require self-consciousness, and basic perceptual reasons do not require self-consciousness either. The *way* the environment is directly available to us, then, is better accounted for on my view (on which one’s reason is an environmental fact) than the received view (on which one’s reason is a fact about oneself, even if it entails further facts about the environment). In the basic perceptual case it is the environmental facts simpliciter that are directly available to one to

ground one's beliefs, not the environmental facts self-consciously available by partly constituting one's experiences.<sup>18</sup>

Second, and relatedly, in paradigm cases one's reasons for belief are the considerations that one attends to and takes to be grounds for forming the belief. For example, take explicit deliberation: Neela reflects on the fact that the streets are wet and forms the belief that it rained. Applied to basic perceptual reasons, this conception of reasons favors my view over the received view. In perception, when one comes to believe that there is a piece of red fruit here, one reflects on or attends to the environment, the fact that there is a piece of red fruit here, not to oneself and the fact that one sees that there is a piece of red fruit here (if one prefers to think of attention as attention to objects and properties: one attends to the piece of fruit and the way things stand with it; one doesn't attend to oneself).

I don't take these remarks to be decisive, but they do show that the case for my proposal is at least as strong as the received view. I have argued that the evidence for the received view fails to establish it over my proposal and, furthermore, that independent considerations favor my proposal over it. In the next section I show that the received view additionally faces a significant problem that my proposal solves.

#### **4. Seeing That**

The received view holds that the fact that one sees that  $p$  is one's basic perceptual reason for believing that  $p$ . If seeing that  $p$  requires believing that  $p$ , however, then there

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<sup>18</sup> "When an exercise of a rational perceptual capacity puts a subject in a perceptual state that is her seeing something to be so, the perceptual state that is her seeing it to be so comes within the scope of her self-consciousness" (McDowell 2011: 33).

are two related problems for the received view.<sup>19</sup> The first problem concerns basing: if seeing that  $p$  already involves believing that  $p$ , then seeing that  $p$  could not be causally antecedent to one's belief and thus, if causal theories of basing are correct, it couldn't be the basis of one's belief.<sup>20</sup>

There are two replies to this objection. One is to maintain that seeing-that is non-doxastic, which I consider below. The other option is to posit another state, which I will call seeing\*that, which is by definition factive and non-doxastic, and to maintain that one's basic perceptual reason for believing that  $p$  is that one sees\*that  $p$ . Here arises the second problem for the received view: the evidence for the received view comes from standard reasons discourse regarding seeing-that, not seeing\*that, so this revised proposal is at odds with the fundamental motivation for the view.<sup>21</sup>

I therefore find that if seeing-that is doxastic, the received view unworkable. It isn't surprising, then, to find proponents of the received view, such as Pritchard and McDowell, arguing that seeing-that is non-doxastic (Pritchard 2012: 26–27; McDowell 2002: 277–8, 2003: 680–1). Unfortunately those arguments are unpersuasive. Pritchard and McDowell both appeal to the same kind of case, involving retrospective misleading defeaters. Say one sees a barn before one, but one has been told that it is a façade, so one doesn't believe that there is a barn there. Pritchard claims that one sees that there is a barn there, even though

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<sup>19</sup> In saying that seeing-that is doxastic, I am not claiming that fundamental perceptual experience is doxastic, because it isn't necessary that the English locution "S sees that  $p$ " captures fundamental perceptual experience. I make no assumptions at all on the issue of whether perception is belief independent (the topic of the belief independence of perception is discussed in many places, e.g., Huemer 2001 and Travis 2013).

<sup>20</sup> I am happy to assume basing is causal, but even if that is wrong because there are exceptions (see Korcz 1997, 2010), commonly proffered putative non-causal bases are still antecedent to the belief formed on their basis (e.g., see Lehrer's (1990) famous gypsy lawyer case) so that is no help to the received view.

<sup>21</sup> For other complications with this revised proposal see Ginsborg (2006).

one doesn't believe it, based on a retrospective evaluation. Say one later learns that the testimony was wrong; one could then say that one saw that there was a barn there (Pritchard 2012: 26–27). This argument is unpersuasive: even in the retrospective case it just isn't true that it would be "most natural" (Pritchard 2012: 26) to say that one saw that there was a barn there; it would be perfectly natural to say that one saw a barn, but that is unhelpful to the received view. The abiding trouble is that in non-retrospective cases both first-person and third-person data suggest that seeing-that is doxastic. It is unnatural to the point of incredible to imagine that a subject would say that she sees that there is a barn there if she doesn't believe it. The following, I submit, are contradictory:

(1) I see that there is a barn there, but there isn't a barn there.

(2) I see that there is a barn there, but I don't believe that there is a barn there.

(1) is contradictory because seeing-that is factive, and (2) is contradictory because seeing-that is doxastic. (2) recalls Moore's paradox ("It's raining, but I don't believe that it's raining"), but the problem with (2) persists in the third-person:

(3) Neela sees that there is a barn there, but she doesn't believe that there is a barn there.

The best case for thinking that seeing-that is non-doxastic, I would argue, isn't Pritchard and McDowell's retrospective cases, but the claim that (2) is more infelicitous than (3), so one might argue that (2) is merely Moore-paradoxical (on account of the factivity of seeing-that). I find that unconvincing, however, because the third-person version of Moore's paradox is not infelicitous at all ("It's raining, but Neela doesn't believe that it is raining"), whereas (3) is still infelicitous. Any tendency to imagine that (3) is natural, I contend, rests on conflating the claim that Neela sees that there is a barn there with the claim that Neela

sees a barn there. Similarly, retrospective cases are no more felicitous than third-person cases. Contra Pritchard and McDowell, just as infelicitous as (3) is

(4) I saw that there is a barn there, but I didn't believe that there is a barn there.

Any tendency to imagine that (4) is natural rests on the same conflation of the claim that I saw that there is a barn there with the claim that I saw a barn there (also notice the infelicity of reversing the conjuncts: "I didn't believe that there is a barn there, but I saw that there is a barn there.")

The received view therefore faces serious difficulties: since seeing-that is doxastic, either the received view cannot explain how our beliefs are based on our reasons or it loses its motivation from commonsense reasons discourse. On my proposal, however, there is no basing problem, since the fact that  $p$  will be causally antecedent to one's belief that  $p$ <sup>22</sup>, and, as explained in the previous section, standard reasons discourse of the form "because I see that  $p$ " explains how it is that one has access to the fact that  $p$  (e.g., visually, by seeing that it is so).

## 5. Two Objections

Two objections have been leveled against views like mine, one based on conversational inappropriateness and the other based on circularity and basing. I will argue that both objections fail, but, furthermore, the failure of the latter objection illuminates the nature of basic perceptual reasons.

The first objection is due to Chisholm. When asked to justify a claim about the world around us, Chisholm claimed that it would be "presumptuous and inappropriate" to

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<sup>22</sup> Whether my view faces other basing problems I discuss in the next section.



simply reiterate that claim, and he concluded that the inappropriate answer cannot cite one's reason (Chisholm 1977: 21).<sup>23</sup> This objection is unsuccessful: as I explained in Section 2, it would be conversationally inappropriate for one to cite that fact that *p* because doing so violates conversational norms (for example, Grice's norm of Quantity: one is not being as informative as required). It does not follow that that fact isn't one's reason.

The second objection is that it is problematically circular for the fact that *p* to be one's reason for believing that *p*. Here is one way to develop this idea. Many philosophers have thought that a consideration can be one's reason only if one believes that it is the case. As Brueckner puts the point regarding evidence:

It seems fairly clear that *e* can function as *S*'s justifying evidence for *P* *only if* *S* also believes *e*. If *e* is merely a proposition that *S* grasps but does not believe, or perhaps disbelieves, then why would *e* count as evidence that justifies *S*'s belief of *P*? (Brueckner 2009: 5)<sup>24</sup>

I will put the necessary condition on having some consideration as a reason this way:

**Endorsement:** *p* is a reason for *S* only if *S* believes that *p*.

If Endorsement is true, then my proposal faces the following problem. In order for *p* to be a reason for me to believe something, I must already believe that *p*. So *p* can't be the reason on which I deliberated and then formed the belief that *p*. And if it *post facto* becomes the reason once I do believe it, it seems I've done some illicit bootstrapping or circular reasoning. To put it another way: when *p* is my reason for believing that *p*, then my belief that *p* is justified in virtue of my reason *p*. But, by Endorsement, *p* is my reason only in virtue of my believing that *p*. As Brueckner explains the circularity:

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<sup>23</sup> Chisholm thinks that it is perfectly fine to answer in this way when asked about our beliefs themselves; he concludes that such beliefs about our own psychology are "directly evident" in a way that beliefs about the world around us are not.

<sup>24</sup> Also see Brueckner 2005: 437; BonJour 1985: 69, 2003: 10–21.

So now we have arrived at the following position: my belief of C [my cup is red] is justified in virtue of my belief of the evidential proposition that my cup is red. That is to say, my belief of the proposition that my cup is red is justified in virtue of my belief of the proposition that my cup is red! (Brueckner 2005: 441)<sup>25</sup>

Even if some beliefs could be self-justifying, but few philosophers would be happy with the conclusion that the belief that my cup is red is one of them.<sup>26</sup> Proponents of the received view might maintain, then, that my view faces basing and circularity problems.

I will next argue that that is incorrect. Endorsement merely says that believing that  $p$  is a necessary condition on  $p$ 's being a reason for  $S$ . It doesn't say that the justification conferred by  $p$  is thereby conferred by one's belief that  $p$ . Contrast:

**Strong Endorsement:**  $p$  is a reason for  $S$  only if  $S$  believes that  $p$ , and any belief justified on the basis of  $p$  is also justified on the basis of  $S$ 's belief that  $p$ .

What was a mere necessary condition in Endorsement (believing that  $p$ ) is now playing an operative role in any justification that is derived from one's reason  $p$ . Once we are careful to distinguish Endorsement from Strong Endorsement, however, it is clear that it does not follow from Endorsement that my proposal is problematically circular. Even if I can only have the fact that  $p$  as a reason if I believe that  $p$ , if the fact that  $p$  can be my reason without relying on the belief that  $p$ —for example, when that fact is my reason for believing that  $p$  itself—then there is room to hold that the fact  $p$  can be my reason for believing that  $p$  itself without vicious circularity or self-justification.<sup>27</sup>

One might worry, though, that I've missed the force of Endorsement. The point of Endorsement in the first place, one might think, is that believing that  $p$  is not just a

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<sup>25</sup> Also see Brueckner 2009: 6–7. Cf. Turri (2009), Klein (2007: 9), Markie (2005: 348–9), Brewer (1999: 167), Fumerton (1995: 56–60), and Bonjour (2003: 12; 1985: 18–23 and 90–91).

<sup>26</sup> See Chisholm (1977) again.

<sup>27</sup> Of course, temporal and causal issues loom: I would need to acquire  $p$  as a reason and the belief that  $p$  simultaneously; I discuss these issues below.

necessary condition on  $p$ 's being a reason for me; believing that  $p$ , in a sense, is what *makes*  $p$  a reason for me and thus is implicated in the justificatory efficacy of  $p$ . The belief is an essential part of the reason's package and thus one can't advocate Endorsement without sliding to Strong Endorsement. To put it another way: if one's reasons just are the contents of one's beliefs, then it seems that anything justified on the basis of the reason that  $p$  is justified on the basis of the belief that  $p$  (the content of an unjustified belief, after all, shouldn't be able to justify anything).

What my view owes us is an account of why Endorsement is true but Strong Endorsement isn't. Although I can only sketch such an account here, I take it that the foregoing remarks from Sections 2–4 demonstrate the importance of pursuing such a position. Instead of assuming that reasoning must be from the propositional content of one belief to the propositional content of another (as on the Burgian understanding of reasons rejected in Section 2), my proposed alternative is this: I am cognitively related to the fact that there is a piece of red fruit here and that fact is my reason for believing that there is a piece of red fruit here. The key issue for this type of view concerns the sort of "cognitive relation" I need to a fact in order for it to be my reason. One natural idea is that such a relation at least requires belief: the fact that the streets are wet can't be my reason unless I believe that the streets are wet.<sup>28</sup> Thus Endorsement could still be motivated on this understanding of reasons. But coming to be in the right cognitive relation does not require *antecedently* believing that  $p$  (more on this below).

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<sup>28</sup> Or see Williamson (2000) for arguments that the right sort of "cognitive relation" requires knowledge.

On this view basic perceptual reasons are in one sense circular and in another sense not.<sup>29</sup> When we translate one's reasoning into the form of an argument, **logical circularity** occurs when the conclusion (the proposition one believes) occurs among the premises (one's reasons). Basic perceptual reasons have just such an argumentative form,

$$\frac{P}{P}$$

and thus are logically circular. A second kind of circularity (which I will call **justificatory circularity**) occurs when one's justification for the premises depends on one's justification for the conclusion. But logical circularity does not imply justificatory circularity. In the basic case one does not reason from the belief that *p* to the belief that *p* (as Brueckner (2009: 7, 2005: 442) claims), which would be both logically and justificatorily circular. Perhaps circularity of that form would be vicious, but the logical circularity of basic perceptual reasons seems to be the opposite. On the view I defend, the logical circularity of basic perceptual reasons derives from believing that *p* because of the fact that *p* (for the reason that *p*). This logical circularity is epistemically virtuous rather than vicious because it manifests the epistemic virtue of believe that *p* because it is so.

The critical issue for this view, I submit, is therefore not circularity but temporality. If Endorsement is true, then *p* only becomes *my* reason, in a sense, once I come to believe that *p*. We might think then that my reason could not be the cause of my belief, but that does not follow. The thing which is my reason, the fact that *p*, still caused my belief. It just wasn't "my" reason at the previous time. The key question, then, which has not been given enough attention, is when does it matter that *p* counts as "my" reason? Two plausible constraints on when *p* must be "my" reason are: (i) for all times at which I actually hold the

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<sup>29</sup> See Sosa (2009) for further discussion of circularity in epistemology.

belief for that reason, it must be “mine”; and (ii) for all times at which I am deliberating about whether to believe something on the basis of  $p$ , then  $p$  must be “my” potential reason and thus possessed, in some sense, by me during the deliberations. Much of the motivation for Endorsement derives from (ii): it does not seem to make sense to deliberate over what to believe on the basis of  $p$  if I don’t think that  $p$  is true. I might hypothetically consider what to believe on the basis of something I know to be false, but such a thought process isn’t deliberation.

My defense of basic perceptual reasons is compatible with these constraints, however, with the following consequence: these reasons cannot derive from a process of extended deliberation, in which I mull over the fact that  $p$  and then come to believe that  $p$  on that basis. Mulling over the fact that  $p$ , and trying to figure out what one ought to believe on account of it, seems to require believing that  $p$ : that is the idea behind Endorsement. I might mull over whether  $p$  is the case, but its recognition as being the case, and its being my reason, must be simultaneous with my believing it (if Endorsement is true). This consequence, however, is precisely what our discussion in Section 2 required: basic perceptual reasons occur in cases in which we do not perform a conscious inference or deliberation; they are phenomenologically “immediate.” We should therefore not bow to the thought, seemingly endorsed by many, that all reasons are potentially deliberative, such that one always could have, so to speak, verbalized the process *sotto voce*. Some reasons are non-deliberative: forming the belief that  $p$  for the reason that  $p$  is a process that could not involve deliberation over time. Here we can see an additional advantage of my proposal over the received view: the received view does not explain why basic perceptual reasons are non-deliberative. The potentially deliberative inference, on the receive view,

conflicts with the phenomenology of the cases and caused McDowell concern (see McDowell 2008); my view provides the solution. The fact that reasons can be represented by an argument too easily leads to the incorrect thought that all reasons are inferential, in the sense that one could form a belief in the premises of the argument and then inferentially arrive at belief in the conclusion. In the basic case, on my view, the logically circular argument of the form

$$\frac{P}{P}$$

allows no such inference. Far from being an objection, that result is precisely what we should want. Views that hold that perception fundamentally provides one with reasons rather than mere entitlements (as discussed in Section 2) face the worry that reasons are “too inferential” to properly characterize the fundamental cognitive processes in perception. My view, in contrast to the standard view, provides the factive-reasons theorist with an answer to this worry, for it entails that some reasons are non-deliberative and hence not “inferential” in sense specified above.

## 6. Conclusion

The received view of basic factive perceptual reasons is that the fact that one sees that  $p$  is one’s basic perceptual reason for believing that  $p$ . Although this view is endorsed by many factive-reasons theorists, I have argued that my proposal has several advantages over it. Firstly, my proposal, on which the fact that  $p$  itself is one’s basic perceptual reason for believing that  $p$ , is compatible with the evidence for the received view, based on common reasons discourse. Secondly, my proposal solves a basing problem that the received view faces: the doxastic element of seeing-that means that the received view cannot account for

how one's beliefs are based on one's basic perceptual reasons. Thirdly, my view explains why basic perceptual reasons are non-deliberative and non-inferential. Finally, I have also argued that my proposal can be defended from the major objections that have been leveled against it, based on circularity and on conversational inappropriateness. It might seem odd that basic perceptual reasons are so blatantly circular, but the insight that there are circular reasons has significant epistemological payoff. Sometimes coherence theories of justification are characterized as allowing for circular reasons: circular reasons are okay as long as the circle is big enough! My view goes in the opposite direction: it is when the circle is small enough that circularity can be a virtue.<sup>30</sup>

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