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## An Essay on the Ontology of Reasons

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## Abstract

I argue that there are strong theoretical unity considerations for rejecting psychologistic theories of motivating reasons even though the theory has many virtues. However, many recent anti-psychologistic theories of motivating reasons are deeply problematic due to their inability to account properly for cases in which agents act on the basis of false beliefs. Thus, I defend and develop a novel anti-psychologistic theory of reasons, which is able to avoid these problems. I contend that reasons are propositions, regardless of their truth-values. I call the view *propositionalism*. I show that together with a novel theory of reason-explanation, propositionalism is able to preserve many of the virtues possessed by a psychologistic theory of motivating reasons. Moreover, as part of the development of propositionalism, I argue that there is an essential place for Russellian propositions, *qua* reasons, in a theory of motivating reasons against those who have argued otherwise. Finally, I argue that teleological theories of reasons fail for considerations related to an Aristotelian-inspired theory of practical reasoning.

**An Essay on the Ontology of Reasons**

by

Jeremy A. Dickinson

B.A. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, 2003

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy.

Syracuse University  
June 2012

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## Acknowledgments

This essay on the nature of reasons grew out of deep interest of mine regarding the metaphysics of agency. As I studied philosophers on the nature of agency, I kept reading about reasons influencing or determining agents to act as they do, but I did not know what, ontologically speaking, these reasons were. Thus, I set out to find out what reasons are. In the pages that follow, we will have much to say about the nature of reasons, but in what immediately follows I would like to write a bit on the topic of gratitude.

I had the good fortune of having Professor Mark Heller as the supervisor of this dissertation. In a sense, this project has its origins in several philosophical arguments we had back in 2008 while playing basketball together with other SU philosophy graduate students on Saturday mornings. We argued about issues within the metaphysics of agency, and his interest in my ideas and work impelled me to write a dissertation on such issues.

I am extremely grateful for all that Heller has given to this project—the countless hours reviewing, commenting, and meeting with me in order to improve it at every step. I am also grateful for his constant patience; Heller was always willing to work carefully through the work I submitted, paying very close attention to each philosophical move made, which always helped me to work out my ideas and saved me from making many mistakes. Most of all, it taught me how to do philosophy better.

I also received significant guidance from professors Thomas McKay and Ben Bradley. Their comments on earlier drafts of this project were very helpful, indeed. Both McKay and Bradley helped me to see where I was unclear or where I needed to develop stronger arguments for my positions. This helped me to see more clearly the nature of my project. I am grateful for what they gave to make this project better than it would have been without their help.

I also thank professor Laurence Thomas for reading a very early draft of the first chapters of my dissertation, as well as the later drafts. His encouraging feedback has meant very much to me and had a large role in sustaining the effort to keep moving forward with the dissertation process.

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I am grateful for the conversations I had with Deke Gould, Andrew Corsa, professor Pat Kenny, Brian Looper, and Daniel Fogal about various topics in this dissertation. Each of them helped me in one way or another in thinking about the nature of reasons.

Finally, a very large expression of gratitude goes to my brother, Devon Dickinson. I have spent many hours talking to him about this dissertation, from its earliest conceptions to some its latest written expressions. These conversations also helped me to get clearer on the nature of this project. However, it has been Devon's faithful encouragement and support that have been most significant to me during this process.

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For Devon and Benjamin.  
&  
In memory of Daniel, my dad.

# Chapter 1

## The Ontology of Motivating Reasons

### Introduction

#### **1.0 Brief Statement of Project**

The topic of this dissertation is reasons. In particular, the topic is the ontology of reasons for acting. I seek to discover an answer to the ontological question regarding reasons for which agents act: to what ontological kind do these reasons belong? More specifically, the question I am concerned with is whether reasons for which agents act are psychological or non-psychological entities. I will examine both possible answers, and, to anticipate, I argue that reasons for which agents act are non-psychological entities.

This dissertation responds almost exclusively to recent developments in the debate regarding the ontology of motivating reasons. The dominant position in literature on this debate has been, following the work of Donald Davidson, the thesis that motivating reasons are the psychological states of agents.<sup>1</sup> Maria Alvarez asserts that, “Davidson’s conception of reasons, or something close to it, became the orthodoxy and remains so to this day.”<sup>2</sup> This project can be seen as a contribution to the growing dissatisfaction with psychologistic theories of reasons. I join the philosophical ranks of philosophers like Maria Alvarez, Jonathan Dancy, and Constantine Sandis in the effort to develop anti-psychologism, which, as the name suggests, is the thesis that reasons are not psychological states. To be very clear

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<sup>1</sup> See Davidson (1963/1980).

<sup>2</sup> Alvarez (2010: 2).

from the outset, I intend to argue that *no* motivating reasons are psychological states.<sup>3</sup> Much of my work here can be seen as an effort to preserve some of the insights of Alvarez, Dancy, and Sandis, as well as an effort to improve upon their foundational work and what their work has established to challenge orthodoxy.

Working out the ontology of motivating reasons can be seen as part of a larger project of developing a theory of the metaphysics of agency. Traditionally conceived, reasons are among the things that influence agents to act, and are also often seen to have a role in guiding the actions of agents. It stands to reason, then, that it would be good to understand the nature of these things that have such a significant role in the metaphysics of agency. In connection with the issue of the ontological status of motivating reasons, we will also deal with the following questions: How do motivating reasons fit, ontologically speaking, within a larger theory of reasons? Do motivating reasons cause agents to act? What is their role in motivating agents to act, assuming they have one?

I note that a proper understanding of the nature of reasons does not appear to help us with the further project of figuring out whether agents are determined to act by the antecedents of action. This is an issue that I considered with a great deal of interest as this dissertation began. I came to realize that even if reasons themselves cannot determine actions, it might be the case that believing reasons (or reason-states) can.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the debate about the ontology of reasons does not appear

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<sup>3</sup> See Alvarez (2010), Dancy (2000), and Sandis (forthcoming, draft). Note, it is not always clear whether these anti-psychologists are arguing for the claim that *no* motivating reasons are psychological states. Dancy (2000) seems to argue for a weaker claim, namely, that most motivating reasons are not psychological states.

<sup>4</sup> Markus Schlosser (2011) also makes this claim.

to have a direct bearing on the issue of whether human actions can be caused or determined by reasons. Nevertheless, a proper understanding of reasons will help us to figure out whether reasons themselves, as those things that are typically among the antecedents of action, are causes or determiners of actions. The main project here is to find out the ontological kind to which reasons belong, and once this is accomplished we will be in a position to know whether reasons themselves have causal powers. To anticipate, the anti-psychological nature of reasons here denies the claim that reasons themselves have a causal or determining role in action. Though this conclusion will feature only in later chapters of this dissertation, it will be shown to follow almost directly from claims about the nature of reasons argued for.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most significantly in this introductory section, there are two underlying goals that motivate this entire project. The first general goal is to offer novel arguments against psychologism based on general considerations of theoretical unity. That is, I argue that psychologistic theories are false because if they were true they would lead to disjunctivistic theories of reasons, which are ultimately theoretically less unified than anti-disjunctivist theories. That is, once the anti-psychologistic nature of normative reasons is argued for, we see that we have very strong theoretical considerations that count against psychologism. The second goal is to develop an anti-psychologistic theory of motivating reasons that has the theoretical virtues of both psychologistic and anti-psychologistic theories. As will

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<sup>5</sup> I say that the noncausalist conclusion follows “almost directly” from the view developed here because the claim that abstract entities are causally inert must also be true for it to follow.

be shown in Chapter 2, psychologistic theories of motivating reasons have many virtues and that contemporary anti-psychologistic theories are at least partially deficient in some way or another when compared to psychologistic theories. The virtues of psychologism have most certainly contributed to its contemporary dominance. The correct and novel theory of reasons developed in this dissertation will preserve all of the virtues of psychologistic theories in addition to the virtues of anti-psychologistic theories.<sup>6</sup>

In Section 1.1 below I situate motivating reasons (also called ‘agential reasons’) within the realm of reasons in order to be clear about the kind of reasons this dissertation is about. In Section 1.2 I provide a sketch of the content of Chapters 2-5, and then in Section 1.3 below I lay out some of the assumptions of this project.

### **1.1 Kinds of Reasons: A Brief Sketch**

Most, if not all, of our actions are done for reasons. In fact, the intuitive difference between behaviors like blinking and other purely reflexive behaviors (call these *mere behaviors*) and behaviors like walking the dog or cooking a meal or ordering a cup of coffee is that the latter are done *for* reasons while the former are not. It is widely agreed that, generally speaking, behaviors done for reasons are *actions*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 2 below for these virtues.

<sup>7</sup> Some philosophers of action think that some actions are done without reasons. They have actions like purely expressive actions in mind. Anscombe (1971) has a famous example of someone who just feels like whistling, and Alvarez (2010) has an example of someone who just feels like doing a cartwheel. Also, some philosophers (Hacker, 2009) think that non-actions can be done for reasons. Alvarez & Hyman (1998) argue that omissions are not actions, yet they are performed for reasons.

This does not mean, however, that mere behaviors occur without reason. There may well be reasons why humans and other forms of animal life blink; it is likely that evolutionary biology will provide us with these reasons. But these reasons are different from the reasons for which we act. Evolutionary biology will not provide us with the reasons for which we *merely* blink because, presumably, there are no reasons *for* which we merely blink (though there may well be ones for which we exhibit identical behaviors via, say, winking). As other examples, surely there are reasons *why* the Earth is the third planet from the Sun in our solar system, or why Mount Vesuvius erupted when it did. However, that there is a reason why an event occurs or a state-of-affairs obtains does not imply that there is a reason for which the event occurs or the state-of-affairs obtains. These are good examples where this implication does not hold.

Of course, there are many behaviors we perform that seem quite unlike reflexive behaviors like blinking but which are also not done for reasons. Marija's polite behaviors are performed out of her psychological disposition to be kind to others. James' lack of eye contact in conversation is the result of his bashfulness. Dirk's making of a three-pointer in the basketball game is a function of many years of practicing that shot. Each of these behaviors is certainly less reflexive than blinking, but they are also not behaviors that we would ordinarily say are done for reasons. However, they are like reflexive behaviors in that we would typically explain them by citing the reasons why they occurred. In the Marija and James examples we cite the reason why they behave as they do by citing their

psychological dispositions. In the Dirk example we cite his years of practicing a certain kind of shot as the reason why he made the shot he did.

The reason our explanations cite reasons-why of Marija, James, and Dirk is that we were picking out features of their behaviors that are not done for reasons. In other words, the behaviors we wanted explanations for are not the kinds for which Marija, James, or Dirk did in response to—or out of sensitivity for—a reason. And this is true even though there could be other features of their behaviors that call for explanations involving the reasons they were sensitive to when they behaved as they did. Marija may have invited you to dinner, politely, for the reason that there is much for you to catch up on with her. James might bashfully avoid eye contact while talking with you, but he talks with you for the reason that you're his friend. And Dirk might make the three-pointer, but the reason for which he attempted it (not for his making it) is that he was left unguarded on the perimeter of the court.

The difference between the examples of reasons-why and the reasons-for seems to come to this: the reasons-for explanations we offered above necessarily involve agents, actions, and agents having reasons for acting, and the reasons-why explanations do not. Reasons-why explanations can also involve processes that do not obviously or directly involve agency. The crucial, and quite general, difference between reasons-why and reasons-for seems to come to this: only agents act for reasons; however, reasons-why can be attributed to agents and non-agents alike. Also, reasons-why seem to be the more general category of reasons, and reasons-for fall under reasons-why as a more specific kind of reason.

We call the reasons to which an agent was responsive or sensitive in her behaviors *motivating* or *agential* reasons. Thus Marija's motivating (or agential) reason for inviting you to dinner is to catch up on things with her. Motivating reasons are usually also contrasted, at least conceptually, with *normative* reasons. Normative reasons are reasons that agents have *to* behave in certain ways. One common form of normative reason is moral reasons. Moral reasons are reasons that agents have to  $\Phi$  (where ' $\Phi$ ' refers to an action-type) that have some kind of moral import. For example, Rich might have the moral reason to serve at the soup kitchen tonight because he made a promise to serve. His reason, then, might be something like *that he promised to serve dinner at the soup kitchen tonight*.<sup>8</sup> There are other kinds of normative reasons corresponding to other normative systems, e.g., prudence, aesthetics, etc.

We have looked briefly at three kinds of reasons: reasons-why, motivating reasons, and normative reasons. Each of these kinds of reasons has a role in this dissertation. However, motivating reasons—reasons for which agents  $\Phi$ —have the dominant role. The longstanding debate between those philosophers who think that motivating reasons are psychological entities and those who think that they are not psychological entities will occupy Chapters 2-7. There I argue for an anti-psychological ontology of motivating reasons.

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<sup>8</sup> For simplicity, I assume an anti-psychologistic conception of normative reasons. I argue for this claim in Chapter 3.



## **1.2 Sketch of the Project**

I begin Chapter 2 by introducing the debate between psychologists and anti-psychologists. I do so in part by examining the virtues of each view. Then I show that there are several serious problems for several anti-psychologistic theories of motivating reasons. In particular, there are problems for those who claim that motivating reasons are facts, obtaining states of affairs, or other such things necessarily, it seems, grounded in the way things are. The problem here is that there are countless cases in which agents act but are wrong about what they take to be the case. Error cases like these might pressure some anti-psychologists to deny that agents act for reasons in such cases.<sup>9</sup> This leads to significant problems, though. That is, we tend to think that agents do act for reasons in error cases, and that their actions are explainable in terms of the reasons for which they act in such cases. These problems might in turn pressure other anti-psychologists to claim that agents act for reasons in error cases, so their reasons are either propositions or states of affairs, more generally, rather than *true* propositions or *obtaining* states of affairs.<sup>10</sup> However, this leads to problems regarding the factivity of reason-explanations. Anti-psychologists claiming that reasons can be false propositions or states of affairs that do not obtain seem committed to denying that reason-explanations are factive contexts. Yet another problem surfaces if anti-psychologists deny the factivity of reason-explanations. When negations of the reasons for which agents act are conjoined to standard anti-psychologistic reason-explanations, paradoxical statements form. For example, if Jones is wrong about

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<sup>9</sup> Alvarez (2010), Stout (2009)

<sup>10</sup> Dancy (2000)

traffic being bad on highway 690, and he claims that is his reason for taking highway 481, then when he offers his reason for taking highway 481, namely, that traffic was bad on 690, when we conjoin that traffic was not bad on 690, Jones' explanation leads to paradox. These are serious problems indeed.

There is yet another problem for anti-psychologism that is not related to error cases. The problem is with providing an adequate explanation for the fact that there is a necessary connection between an agent's psychology and her acting for a reason. I examine two recent anti-psychologistic efforts to explain the necessary connection, and show that they both fail.<sup>11</sup> Given all the problems just presented, anti-psychologism seems in trouble as the correct theory of motivating reasons.

What adds insult to injury here for anti-psychologism is that psychologism is able to avoid each of these problems concerning error cases. If motivating reasons are psychological states, then while agents can be wrong about what they believe to be the case, they are not wrong about their believing it to be the case. And their believing it to be the case is their reason. Furthermore, psychologists seem to have a ready answer to the problem; namely, psychological states are identical to agents' reasons for acting. I take it that these are among the virtues had by a psychologistic theory of reasons.

In Chapter 3 I examine psychologism more carefully. (To be clear, psychologism is typically defined as the thesis that all motivating reasons are psychological states of agents.) Specifically, I look at two recent arguments in the

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<sup>11</sup> Alvarez (2010), Dancy (2000).

literature presented against psychologism and show that they both fail.<sup>12</sup> The first argument attempts to show that there are cases in which it seems clear that agents act for something non-psychological when they act. The second argument tries to saddle psychologistic theories with an error problem of its own. It does this by providing a case in which it seems that in error cases it seems that the agent's reason is not the case; but psychologistic reasons are always the case, so psychologism must be false.<sup>13</sup> I show that both arguments fail.

Next, I take an argument that has been offered in the literature against psychologism and both develop and defend it differently than it has been.<sup>14</sup> My approach is to spend more time dealing with potential psychologistic responses to it. This in turn enables me to get at what is deeply problematic about psychologistic theories of motivating reasons. More concretely, I argue that because motivating reasons are sometimes normative reasons, we have good reasons for denying the claim that motivating reasons are psychological entities. These reasons will include, among others, a more general argument against psychologism briefly described above based on considerations of theoretical unity that will not be complete until the end of Chapter 6.

Chapter 4 takes up the issue of developing an account of anti-psychologism. In particular, it takes up the problems we showed it had in Chapter 2. I argue for a propositionalist theory of motivating reasons. That is, I argue for a novel view that

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<sup>12</sup> The arguments are from Alvarez (2010).

<sup>13</sup> The expressions 'is the case' and 'is not the case' are admittedly not metaphysically neutral, but I use them here out of simplicity. If one prefers another metaphysical expression here instead of the ones used, feel free to substitute them accordingly.

<sup>14</sup> Versions of the argument can be found in Alvarez (2010) and Dancy (2000).

motivating reasons are propositions, regardless of their truth-value.<sup>15</sup> I argue for this view by developing a view of reason-explanation in line with the work of a current anti-psychologistic philosopher, Constantine Sandis.<sup>16</sup> I show that several of the serious problems with anti-psychologism have been the result of false presuppositions regarding reason-explanation. Specifically, if we think of reason-explanations as having agential beliefs as their explanantia, then the anti-psychologistic problems here can be solved. Agents can act for reasons in error cases, and the explanations of their actions can be true even though the reasons for which they act are false. This is because proper explanations, of the kind we are interested in when providing reason-explanations, must cite (or at least conventionally imply) agential psychologies (in particular, and usually, their beliefs), otherwise they do not explain actions.

This theory of reason-explanation puts us in a position to respond to the challenge against anti-psychologism to the effect that an explanation for why agential psychologies are necessarily connected to agential reasons has not been adequately forthcoming. On the view of agential reasons developed here, as is reflected in the account of reason-explanation, agents *believing* their reasons (that *p*) are a constitutive part of what it is to act for reasons. This should not be confused with the claim that agential beliefs are constitutive of agential reasons themselves.

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<sup>15</sup> I should note here that though I defend a propositionalist view of reasons, a view of reasons as states of affairs, regardless of whether they obtain, could also be the correct view of reasons. I take up the debate between propositionalists and state of affairs theories of motivating reasons here only insofar as I consider a recent argument against propositionalism by a state of affairs theorist (Dancy: 2000). See Chapter 5 for more on this.

<sup>16</sup> Sandis (forthcoming, draft)

Thus, the necessary connection can be explained by the manner in which agential psychologies are essential constituents of acting for reasons, which in turn explains the necessary connection between agential psychologies and their motivating reasons.

Chapter 5 deals with an objection to propositionalism. The objection is based on purported problem with reasons being identified with propositions. The first objection maintains that propositions are not metaphysically robust enough to be reasons.<sup>17</sup> I argue that this objection is vague, but when clear content is provided to it, it fails. Next, I deal with issues that arise for propositionalism regarding whether the correct theory of reasons is Russellian or Fregean.<sup>18</sup> In other words, does the correct theory also countenance Russellian propositions as reasons, or must all reasons be of the general Fregean kind? I argue that Russellian theories of reasons have an essential role in a theory of reasons. Next, I argue that a powerful *prima facie* objection to the Russellian theory fails. Then I argue further that there is a significant problem with Fregean reasons as the exclusive theory of reasons. Thus, I argue for Russellian propositionalism.

Then in Chapter 6 I deal with the objection that reasons cannot be propositions because if they were, then they could not be motivating. But surely, the objection goes, reasons can be motivating reasons. I argue that reasons are not themselves motivating but rather that the psychological states (typically beliefs) with reasons as their propositional contents are what motivate actions. Moreover, I

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<sup>17</sup> Dancy (2000)

<sup>18</sup> Everson (2009)

argue that we should understand motivation causally such that agents' psychological states have a causal-motivational role in the production of action.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in Chapter 6 I also argue that purposes are not reasons. Here I follow Alvarez' Aristotelian-inspired theory of practical reasoning to argue for the main claim in this section.<sup>20</sup> That is, I argue that agential reasons are the reasons we use to practically reason, and that purposes, or goals, are the things that stimulate us to reason, and are the things for the sake of which we reason. I also consider several attempts to show that purposes are reasons and show that they fail.

### **1.3 Three Assumptions**

Although I argue that reasons are propositions, I will by and large assume that reasons are *something*, that is, that they are entities belonging to some ontological kind or other. Some contemporary philosophers argue that reasons are not entities of any kind.<sup>21</sup> I have no knockdown argument against these deflationist theories of reasons, but I do have one simple line of argument against it. It is this: reasons *seem* to be something. The reason for this seeming is that they appear to have a significant role in action. Reasons at least appear to be metaphysically robust enough to guide our actions. This is not a powerful argument in the least, but I take it to have some force in the sense that we should endeavor to save the appearances

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<sup>19</sup> I do not say much about the causal-motivational role psychologies have in action. For recent work on these issues, see Aguilar, Jesus and Buckareff, Andrei (2010a), (2010b) and Aguilar, Jesus and Buckareff, Andrei and Frankish, Keith (2011). For a noncausal theory of action, see Ginet (1990).

<sup>20</sup> Alvarez (2010a)

<sup>21</sup> Sandis (forthcoming, draft), Davis (2005).

unless we are given good reasons not to. That said, the deflationist and I agree on something important, namely, that reasons are not psychological entities.

I assume, by and large, that the debate between the psychologist and anti-psychologist is not merely verbal. The psychologist claims that reasons are psychological states, and the anti-psychologist denies this. On the account developed here, reasons are the propositional contents of belief-states. But I also claim that believing the relevant reason is part of what it is to act for a reason. Psychologists claim, in part at least, that reasons are belief-states, which include their propositional contents.<sup>22</sup> Thus the same ontological pieces are in play in both theories; only the anti-psychologist denies that the psychological state minus the propositional content is a proper part of the agential reason. I take this to be a substantive ontological disagreement between the psychologist and anti-psychologist. In Chapter 7 I say a bit more about this issue, but for the majority of the project here I assume that the debate here is substantive.

Lastly, I think we should avoid, all things being equal, disjunctive theories, including disjunctive theories of reasons. There are theoretical simplicity or unity arguments to be given for this assumption, and I will say something more about them when they become pertinent in Chapters 3 and 6. However, I do not take up the arguments with the thoroughness that they would need, so I largely assume the theoretical simplicity and unity arguments for anti-disjunctivism are right.

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<sup>22</sup> I say that this is part of the psychologistic theory because they also typically claim that desire-states are reasons.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Ontology of Motivating Reasons The Debate & Problems with Anti-Psychologism**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

There are two main goals of this chapter. The first goal is to clarify the debate regarding the ontology of motivating reasons (the reasons for which agents  $\Phi$ , where ' $\Phi$ ' denotes an action-type). The debate is between those who adopt psychologistic ontologies of reasons and those who deny such ontologies. The second goal of this chapter is to show that recent prominent anti-psychologistic views of motivating reasons face serious problems.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, I briefly set the stage of the debate by introducing the relevant terminology (Section 2.1) and explaining in more detail the nature of psychologism and anti-psychologism (Section 2.2) with an eye to what's intuitive about them as theories of motivating reasons. Then I develop and consider several lines of argument against recent anti-psychologistic theories (Section 2.3).

#### **2.1 Setting the Stage**

There are some matters that need to be dealt with in order to avoid potential confusion. This chapter, as stated, is about motivating reasons. This means, among other things, that this chapter is about the reasons for which agents act (or upon which they will act or have acted, etc.). Thus, Stephane's action of mowing his



neighbor's lawn, or Katherine's action of driving to Napa Valley are performed for reasons that in some manner had a significant role in moving them, i.e., motivated them (or had a motivational role for them), to act as they did.

Motivating reasons are to be contrasted with reasons agents may have independently of those that motivate them.<sup>23</sup> These reasons are called *normative*, or sometimes *justifying*, reasons.<sup>24</sup> When, for example, it is said that Melli has a reason for getting a job at the local market despite the fact that she does not have a job there, we mean something like that it would be appropriate or good for her to get the job. The reason Melli may have for getting the job is that she has dependents that need her to provide for them, or perhaps she has goals that require she have a job that she can walk to, and the market is the only place where this could work for her. Some normative reasons also seem to be motivating reasons. Suppose Melli acts so as to get the job at the market for the reason that she has dependents for whom to provide. That is, this normative reason also has a role in what moves her to act. Then, it is also Melli's motivating reason.

When it is said that an agent A has a reason R to  $\Phi$  or that A has R to  $\Phi$ , these expressions can signal the offering of normative reasons for A to  $\Phi$ . Normative

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<sup>23</sup> In Chapter 3 I defend the claim that some motivating reasons are normative reasons. Here I simply assume this claim by appealing to the intuitiveness of the cases.

<sup>24</sup> Here I follow Dancy (2000: chapter 5). We think it is somewhat misleading to claim that normative reasons are the same as justifying reasons. It seems that in some contexts motivating reasons can have a justificatory dimension. For example, if we were find out that Jones' reason for playing the guitar so loudly this early morning is based on his false belief that nobody else was home, we would be inclined to mitigate some of our scorn at him for waking us up at dawn. That is, his reason for playing the guitar so early can be said, at least in part, to justify his doing so.

reasons need not be moral reasons. They need only good or even appropriate reasons.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, when it is said that A's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing is R, we express a motivating reason of A's for  $\Phi$ -ing. Moreover, there are expressions of motivating reasons that do not take this form. For example, sometimes it is said that A  $\Phi$ 's because R, or that A  $\Phi$ 's on the ground that R.<sup>26</sup> In these other instances we could say that the 'because' and 'ground' are intended as denoting the same thing as 'reason'. Of course, 'because' and 'ground' have other senses than 'reason' and so could come to denote something other than 'reason'. 'Because' is often used to express a purely causal relation, and 'ground' is often used in a similar way. I avoid ambiguity by referring to 'because' and 'ground' as 'because<sub>R</sub>' and 'ground<sub>R</sub>', respectively, when intending them to denote 'reason'. Otherwise, I mainly use the expression 'A  $\Phi$ -d for R' and its grammatical variants as the typical manner of expressing A's motivating reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing.

Finally, it should also be noted that one might hold psychologistic theory of motivating reasons and at the same time hold an anti-psychologistic view of normative reasons. It is much less plausible, though, to hold a view whereby motivating reasons are anti-psychologistic and normative reasons are psychologistic, but it does not seem logically impossible to do so. Finally, of course one's complete view of reasons might also be uniform. One might hold the view

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<sup>25</sup> I will leave 'good' and 'appropriate' intuitive here. Nothing of substance will turn on it.

<sup>26</sup> I leave out a common form of motivating reason-explanation: A  $\Phi$ -s in order to  $\Psi$ . I do not think this is a genuine reason-giving form. I provide my theory of reason-explanation in Chapter 4. And in Chapter 5 I argue that purposive-explanations are not reason-explanations, or at least are not the kind of reason-explanation that some [Sehon (2005), Davis (2005)] take them to be.

that all reasons *simpliciter* are anti-psychologistic; others might hold the view that all reasons *simpliciter* are psychologistic. The upshot here is simply that there are many logically possible combinations of positions regarding the ontological nature of reasons.

## **2.2 Psychologism & Anti-Psychologism**

In this section we will get clearer about the key positions in this project. Of particular significance here will be identifying the virtues of psychologism and anti-psychologism. This will put us in position, in later chapters, to try to develop a theory of reasons that has as many of the virtues as possible.

### **2.2.1 Psychologism**

*Psychologism* is the view that our reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing are psychological states. More specifically, I take it to be the claim that all motivating reasons are psychological states. Suppose James goes to the restaurant for a reason. According to some versions of psychologism, James' reason for going to the restaurant can be merely his psychological state of hunger. Moreover, hunger can be just one of James' reasons for going to the restaurant. Another reason could be that he *believes* that they serve good vegan food there. Other views claim that an agent's reason for

$\Phi$ -ing involves a belief-desire pair: agents want things, and they form means-end beliefs attempting to satisfy their desires.<sup>27</sup>

Donald Davidson's 1963 "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" is the *locus classicus* for psychologism.<sup>28</sup> Davidson writes:

R is a primary reason why an agent performed the action A under the description *d* only if R consists of a pro attitude of the agent towards actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that A, under the description *d*, has that property.

Here we see Davidson provides two necessary conditions for what he calls a 'primary reason', which is the reason that explains agents' actions.<sup>29</sup> They are (a) having a pro attitude, which is closely akin to a desire, about an action with a certain property, and (b) having a belief that the action desired, under a particular description, has the corresponding desired property. It might not ultimately be warranted to claim that Davidson's account commits him to psychologism regarding *motivating* reasons as it has been defined here. Nevertheless, it is fairly clear that

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<sup>27</sup> In Chapter 3 below I offer an argument inspired by Alvarez (2010) and Dancy (2000) for the conclusion that desires are not reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing. This explains why I almost always consider cases of involving belief.

<sup>28</sup> Davidson is often cited as the contemporary *locus classicus* of psychologism. Many believe David Hume to be the historical source of such the view. I do not wish to take a stance on the latter issue in this chapter.

<sup>29</sup> It may be dubious to claim that Davidson's notion of a primary reason is coextensive, or closely thereto, with the contemporary notion of a motivating reason. One reason in favor of this claim is that to provide the reason that motivated the agent seems also thereby to explain it, and Davidson's notion of a primary reason was clearly interested in explanation—or as he put it with 'rationalization'. Something interesting may turn on this issue; for now I will assume that nothing does.

Davidson's conditions go a way toward analyzing what a primary—or motivating—reason is. It is also fairly clear that beliefs and desires, at least in part, constitute primary reasons, so it is easily seen how his view is readily associated with psychologism.

Michael Smith is a current defender of psychologism. In his book, *The Moral Problem*, Smith claims the following:

By contrast with normative reasons, then, which seem to be the *truths* of the form 'It is desirable or required that I  $\Phi$ ', **motivating reasons would seem to be *psychological states, states that play a certain explanatory role in producing action.***"<sup>30</sup> (p. 96: bold added)

Here we see Smith not only state his philosophical allegiance to psychologism, but also claim that an interesting connection holds between motivating reasons, psychological states, and the explanation of action. Motivating reasons are connected by way of identity with psychological states, but which ones? This is where explanation comes in. The psychological states that explain action are the ones to be identified with motivating reasons. *Prima facie*, it seems right to claim that identity holds between motivating reasons and explanatorily adequate psychological states. If the motivating reason grounding<sub>R</sub> Deke's moving to Illinois is provided, then it seems right that his moving to Illinois has thereby been

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<sup>30</sup> Smith defends the view that motivating reasons are psychological states in chapter 4 of *The Moral Problem*. In chapter 4, Smith takes Davidson to be expressing a psychologistic theory of *motivating* reasons. For unmistakable evidence of this, see pp. 92-3.

explained. Conversely, if Deke's moving to Illinois can be explained in terms of the relevant psychological states he has (e.g., his desire to be there with his family; his belief that moving to Illinois will be the best way for him to be with his family), then the motivating reasons would seem to have been provided as well. Regardless of whether one accepts the identity in question here, one can agree with Smith that there exists a very tight relation between psychological states, explanation, and motivation.

Psychologism has intuitive pull as a theory of motivating reasons. First, motivating reasons are the reasons for which an agent does what she does, so it seems almost obvious that an agent's psychology is at least part of the story involved in her acting. In fact, it seems necessary that agents be at least aware of what they are acting for in order for their reason to be a motivating reason. If Heather is not aware of the (supposed) fact that she can fellowship with her friends, then it seems impossible that her believing that she can fellowship with her friends can serve as her motivating reason for going to church. There may be issues here determining the level of awareness one must have of a consideration for it to serve as a motivating reason, but suffice it to say, for now at least, that the awareness need not be explicit, or occurrent, in the agent's consciousness. Indeed Heather need only be minimally aware of her belief regarding fellowshipping with her friends in order for it to be a motivating reason for her.

Second, psychologism seems to get the cases where agents are motivated to act by false beliefs right. For example, what seems to motivate Jack to apply to medical school is his believing that his undergraduate science professors think of

him as a good student. Suppose, however, that Jack is mistaken about what his professors think of him. Suppose they find him to be only an average undergraduate student and have reservations about his attending medical school. In this case, it would appear that Jack applies to medical school for a (motivating) reason, but it would appear that the content of his belief is false. Cases like these seem ordinary; it is likely that we act on the basis of false beliefs all the time. The psychologistic account of reasons has the resources to deal with them. Jack's motivating reason for applying to medical school is, it seems, his believing that his undergraduate professors think highly of his abilities and not merely the content of his false belief.

Third, psychologism also seems to get right the nature of reason-explanations. Like many forms of explanation, reason-explanations seem to be factive.<sup>31</sup> That is,  $p$  explains  $q$  only if  $p$ . In thinking about error cases again, we seem able to provide reason-explanations for actions agents perform on the basis of false beliefs. In order to provide these explanations, the explanans will have to be true. However, if the content of the belief is false, then the latter cannot be the explanans. On the psychologistic theory this can be dealt with: the explanans cites as the agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing his believing that  $p$  not merely  $p$ . The reason-explanation for Jack's applying to medical school is that he believes that his professors think

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<sup>31</sup> Some deny the factivity of reason-explanations: see Dancy (2000), Davis (2005). As will be seen below (Section 2.3.2) and in Chapter 4, I will assume that, all things being equal, it is better for a theory of reason-explanation to be factive than non-factive.

highly of his academic abilities even though what he believes is false. Accordingly, psychologistic reason-explanations will turn out factive.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most intuitively, motivating reasons are things that motivate us to act, and since motivations, including motivating reasons, are necessarily connected to our psychologies, it seems plausible to think that at least part of what constitutes motivating reasons are our psychologies themselves. Another way of expressing this is to say that the best explanation for the fact that motivating reasons are necessarily connected to our psychologies is that our psychological states constitute, at least in part, motivating reasons.

### **Anti-Psychologism 2.2.2**

Anti-psychologistic theories of motivating reasons deny that motivating reasons consist, even in part, of the psychological states of agents. To be clear, I define anti-psychologism as the thesis that no motivating reasons are psychological states. Typical anti-psychologistic accounts of motivating reasons identify reasons with either true propositions or obtaining states of affairs or facts. For example, James' reason for going to the restaurant is the fact, supposing it is a fact, that the restaurant serves good vegan food. Less typical accounts of anti-psychologism might identify reasons with intentional objects, and depending on one's view of intentional objects, reasons might turn out to be anti-psychologistic because they

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<sup>32</sup> I have gone over some of these complex issues rather quickly in order to get the intuitive features of the views down. The issues concerning actions grounded<sub>R</sub> by false beliefs, the nature of reason explanation, the differences between motivations and motivating reasons, etc. will be discussed in much more detail in the sections discussing theoretical problems with anti-psychologism.



are not entities of any kind.<sup>33</sup> So, there is a range of anti-psychologistic theories one can have regarding the ontology of motivating reasons.

There has been somewhat of a movement against the Davidsonian psychologistic view of motivating reasons in recent times, even though, as Jonathan Dancy notes: “Psychologism has a large and enthusiastic following.”<sup>34</sup> Fellow anti-psychologist Maria Alvarez seconds Dancy’s claim: “... Davidson’s conception of reasons, or something close to it, became the orthodoxy and remains so to this day.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite having to compete against orthodoxy, the anti-psychologistic view of motivating reasons also has some intuitive appeal. According to many of these views, reasons are true propositions or facts or obtaining states of affairs. Accordingly, their views would usually have it that reasons have an abstract nature. This is intuitive because reasons seem to have a certain repeatability that is characteristic of abstract entities. e.g., propositions, properties, relations, etc. Assuming that the manner in which we use English provides us with some, albeit defeasible, evidence for our metaphysics, the anti-psychologistic theory has some support from how we use English. Suppose that Della’s son spots her out in the garden covering their tomato plants, and so he asks her the reasons for her actions. Suppose further that Della responds as follows, “Son, my reasons for covering the tomato plants are that it will be very cold tonight, and tomato plants cannot survive very cold weather.” Della’s motivating reasons in this case appear to be *that it will*

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<sup>33</sup> I have in mind here those that think intentional objects have intentional inexistence, and thus do not exist. See Sandis (forthcoming ms) and Crane (2001).

<sup>34</sup> Dancy (2000: 99)

<sup>35</sup> Alvarez (2010: 2)

*be very cold tonight and that tomato plants cannot survive very cold weather.* These reasons also appear to be repeatable. It seems possible that Agostino, who lives nowhere near Della, could also be asked for his reasons for covering *his* tomato plants by his (altogether) different son. Moreover, he could reply exactly as Della did. He could even use the same words in the same way to have the same meaning as they were used and intended by Della.<sup>36</sup>

So anti-psychologism is able to accommodate the intuitive claim that Della and Agostino can act for the same reason. Psychologists are unable to get this right because they argue that reasons are psychological states, which needs to be understood as instances of psychological states. They need the psychological states to be non-repeatable instances in order for them to have the causal roles they do in motivating agents to act. Accordingly, psychologism fails to capture an intuitive idea that anti-psychologism is able to, namely, that agents can act for the same reasons.

### **2.3 Problems with Anti-Psychologism**

There are several significant problems with some recent anti-psychologistic views. The problems are so significant that if anti-psychologism is to be the correct theory of motivating reasons, it will need to have proper solutions to them. Before sketching these problems it would be best to note that the problems sketched here will be shown in reality to be clusters of problems because their potential

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<sup>36</sup> Agostino need not utter the same English sentence as Della in order to express the same reason as her. I assume he does here just because it seems more obvious that he expresses the same reason when he utters the same sentence, intending by his sentence to express the same reason. Chapter 5 deals with issues that arise for motivating reasons conceived of as propositions, which are related to issues in the philosophy of language.

solutions—including some of the solutions we examine by philosophers in this section—lead to further problems.

The first problem is this. Suppose, for simplicity's sake, motivating reasons are facts. Suppose also that facts entail truth.<sup>37</sup> What, then, are we to say about cases where the motivating reason for an agent's  $\Phi$ -ing is false, and so is no fact at all? One option here is to say that agents do not act for reasons in error cases, but it seems that agents do act for reasons in them. This is the *No-Reason Problem*.

Of course, the anti-psychologist that goes this route needs to explain what it is that the agents are acting for in such cases without what they are acting for being a reason. Or they need to explain how it is that agents act for no reason in these cases.<sup>38</sup> As we will see below in Section 2.3.1, there are considerations involving paradoxical reason-explanations that might pressure anti-psychologists into a theory whereby they accept that agents do not act for reasons in error cases. This will add to the list of problems here.

A second, and closely related, problem concerns more directly the nature of reason-explanation itself. I assume that having a unified theory of reason-explanation is desirable, and is thus a virtue of a theory of reasons. It would be desirable, then, to have a theory of reason-explanation in which the nature of reason-explanation is the same whether or not an agent's action is grounded in truth, or whether or not it is grounded in something that is not the case. As will be

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<sup>37</sup> Perhaps facts entail truth because they are reducible to true propositions. In any case, it is Alvarez's view that reasons, which are facts, are true propositions. See Alvarez (2010).

<sup>38</sup> By the expression 'no reason' is not implied 'no good reason'. Sometimes in ordinary speak we utter the former while meaning the latter.

seen below (Section 2.3.1.), some anti-psychologistic theories claim that reason-explanations only sometimes cite agential reasons as explanantia of an agent's action, and that in error cases agential reasons are not cited as explanantia. I think disjunctive theories like this are problematic not only because they lack theoretical unity, but also (indeed more so) because they fail to get right a significant kind of agential rationalizability in error cases. To anticipate, this rationalizability essentially involves the explanatory role of the reasons to which an agent is sensitive when acting. Call this the *Rationalizability Problem*.

It should be noted that if anti-psychologists claim that agents' actions are rationalizable in the significant sense mentioned just above in error cases, then another potential problem arises with respect to reason-explanations. It would appear as if reason-explanations would be non-factive. (See Section 2.3.2 for more on this potential problem.) The first two problems (and the cluster of related problems) will be discussed in detail in Sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

The third problem is that motivating reasons are necessarily related to agents' psychologies, and the issue is whether anti-psychologism can explain this connection. It appears to be significant to explain this in order to have a theory with the fewest number of relevantly unexplained phenomena as possible. Call this the *Psychology Problem*. I examine this problem in more detail in Section 2.3.3.

### **2.3.1 Anti-Psychologism and Error Cases**

Let us examine the following cases that will help to bring out the no-reason problem. Terrie keeps a vigilant eye on her neighbor's lawn because the neighbor

sometimes neglects to water it. She regularly checks to see if the neighbor has watered it, and after doing this for several years she knows that he almost always waters the lawn in the morning between ten and eleven o'clock. One morning the neighbor slept in and did not water at the usual time, so when Terrie did her usual checking on her neighbor and found that he did not do it at the expected time she rushed over to her neighbor's house and watered the lawn for him. At the end of the watering, the neighbor noticed Terrie in his front yard watering his lawn, so he came out and asked her: "For what reason are you watering my lawn?"<sup>39</sup> Terrie responded: "You did not water your lawn this morning!" As the story goes, Terrie's reason for watering the lawn nicely hooks up with the fact she offers, namely, that the neighbor did not water it himself.

Now suppose that we alter the case in the following way. Let's suppose that the neighbor watered the lawn much earlier than usual (for whatever reason), and when Terrie is being her vigilant lawn-watering self she notices that he does not come out to water the lawn as expected at the usual time. If we keep the rest of the case the same, Terrie runs out and waters the neighbor's lawn. When the neighbor asks her reason for doing what she is doing she responds the in same way: "You did not water your lawn this morning!" At this time the neighbor corrects her, and tells her: "It is not the case that I did not water my lawn this morning!" If anti-psychologism is true, and if motivating reasons are facts, then it would appear that

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<sup>39</sup> Utterances of this type are admittedly rare when requesting someone's reasons. That is, we usually do not ask people their reasons for acting by asking them 'for what reason did you do what you did?' Instead, we typically ask them why they did what they did, which is vague to say that least. I want the cases I use to reflect the agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing, which are not necessarily the reasons why the agent  $\Phi$ -s.

in the altered case Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn could not be the content of her belief because the content is false.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, something very paradoxical would surface were Terrie, in an effort to explain her action, to juxtapose her alleged reason for watering the lawn with what is in fact the case. It would be something like this: "The reason for which I watered the neighbor's lawn is that he did not water it, yet he did water it."

In order to avoid any potential confusion, we can think of the altered case in the third person and in the present tense. Suppose Terrie tells me her reason for watering her neighbor's lawn, and suppose also that the neighbor is actually watering his lawn via a newly installed drip system that Terrie does not detect. Thus, the paradox mentioned just above is more straightforward: Terrie's reason for watering the lawn is that her neighbor is not watering it, but he is watering it. Error cases like these involving a theory of reasons as facts gives rise to another kind of problem, namely, it leads to paradoxical reason-explanations.<sup>41,42</sup> Call this the *Paradox Problem*.

I need to dispel another potential confusion here by identifying a common anti-psychologistic assumption, which leads to the paradox problem. Anti-psychologists typically believe that agential reasons are the explanantia of reason-

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<sup>40</sup> In much of what follows in this part of the chapter I assume for simplicity that facts are true propositions, and that the anti-psychologist in question assumes the same as well as holds.

<sup>41</sup> Alvarez likens this paradox to Moorean paradoxes regarding belief where believers believe the following: '*p*, but I do not believe *p*'. Alvarez's claim seems right, though I do not want to commit to the likening.

<sup>42</sup> The fact that the reason-explanation here provided by Terrie has her citing what she took her reason to be and what turns out to be the negation of the latter after she realizes that she made a mistake is a contingent feature of the case.

explanations.<sup>43,44</sup> Citing Terrie's reason, by itself, for watering her neighbor's lawn explains her watering the lawn. It is important to keep in mind that agential beliefs are not part of the anti-psychologistic reason-explanations under discussion here. That is, if Terrie comes to believe that her neighbor had watered the lawn, she would be speaking falsely if she claims that her reason is that she *believed* that the neighbor had not watered it. That cannot be her reason because it is a psychological state. Thus, the paradox results when we consider Terrie's anti-psychologistic reason and what is in fact the case.

Of course, the Terrie case is make-believe. However, it is not make-believe that people actually act on the basis of false beliefs. But according to the anti-psychologist who thinks reasons are facts or obtaining states of affairs, it cannot be that an agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing could be the content of a false belief or the state of affairs related to such content. That is, if the content of the belief serves as the motivating reason for an agent's  $\Phi$ -ing, then when we take that content and juxtapose it with what is the case, the content must represent what is the case. In cases where agents  $\Phi$  for something that is not a fact, then it simply could not be the case that they have acted for a fact. The anti-psychologist cannot resort to digging in her heels and claiming that despite the paradox agents could act for false beliefs. If the anti-psychologist is serious that reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing are facts, then she cannot consistently maintain that agents act for false beliefs. To put this in terms of the

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<sup>43</sup> See Alvarez (2010), Dancy (2000), and Stout (2009) for recent examples of adherents of this assumption.

<sup>44</sup> I examine this assumption in more detail, and I reject it in Chapter 4 below. I set it aside for now.

second error case above, Terrie case above, the anti-psychologist cannot claim that Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is the fact that the neighbor is not watering his lawn, and this is because the neighbor is watering his lawn.

The paradox problem therefore seems to help push anti-psychologists into denying that Terrie acts for reasons in such cases altogether.<sup>45</sup> We see that our reason-explanations (rationalizations) of Terrie's behavior (in error cases) are paradoxical. But there is another related, and perhaps more significant, reason some anti-psychologists deny agents act for reasons in error cases. In error cases we know that the propositional content of the agent's belief is false. Thus, if one were to claim that agential reasons are false propositions, one would seem to need to claim that false propositions can explain agential behavior. As we will see in Section 2.3.2 below, this is problematic. For now, though, the crucial issue here is that one possible move anti-psychologists can make in response to the problem of error cases is to deny that agents act for reasons in them.

However, this option, though better than countenancing paradox, has untoward consequences. One untoward consequence would be that we act without reasons far more than it would appear we do. Another even worse consequence is that far too many of our actions would be incapable of a significant kind of rationalization—rationalizations involving the reasons agents were sensitive to when acting as they did. This is the rationalization problem mentioned in Section 2.3 above. I will also call this the *reason-sensitive rationalization problem* in order to

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<sup>45</sup> This is Alvarez's preferred solution to the problem. She favors expressing her solution as entailing that in Terrie type cases agents act for *apparent* reasons. Regardless of this manner of expression, the fact is that agents in these cases, according to Alvarez, do not act for reasons.



be clear about the kind of rationalization problem it is. (Just below I distinguish between two kinds of rationalization.)

Now, assume for the sake of argument that we sometimes act without there being reasons for which we act. G.E.M. Anscombe argued that sometimes people whistle without having a reason for whistling.<sup>46</sup> Alvarez writes of a spontaneous cartwheeler.<sup>47</sup> Alfred Mele argues that sometimes people just want to sing a tune.<sup>48</sup> The list of cases like these could go on and on, but their upshot is supposed to be that human action need not be done for reasons. Suppose this is right. This would still not undermine or explain away the intuition that in the Terrie case, she is acting for a reason even though she falsely believes that her neighbor is not watering the lawn. The cases of whistling and cartwheeling, on the other hand, do elicit the intuition that they are not performed for reasons. I say more about this in what immediately follows.

Each of the actions allegedly done for no reason cited in the previous paragraph is an action where the agent is interested in expressing his internal state in some kind of way. They are, as Mele would call them, *wholly intrinsically motivated* actions.<sup>49</sup> These kinds of actions are much different from the kinds of actions that are performed by agents who are motivated to act on the basis of false beliefs. The latter do not seem necessarily to be expressions of the intrinsic states of

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<sup>46</sup> See Anscombe (1971).

<sup>47</sup> See Alvarez (2010).

<sup>48</sup> See Mele (2003).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, (2003: 73). I do not want to take a stand on whether wholly intrinsically motivated actions are performed without reasons. Rather, I commit myself to the conditional that if there are actions that are performed for no reason, then some of them are wholly intrinsically motivated actions.

agents.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in cases like Anscombe's whistler we could readily imagine asking the whistler the reason for which she whistles, and hearing this reply: "For no reason at all." Now imagine asking Terrie her reason for watering her neighbor's lawn after she has been told that she was mistaken. If she replied, "For no reason at all", we would rightly be puzzled by her reply because it seems that her action is very much unlike actions that are typically done without reasons, like spontaneously whistling or cartwheeling or singing a tune. And what makes the actions very dissimilar is that the Terrie case very much seems to involve action performed for a reason.<sup>51</sup> Of course, we would not be puzzled if the context allowed us to infer that Terrie's reply was elliptical for the claim that she had no *good* reason at all for doing what she did. In that case it would be true that she acted for no good reason, but even the anti-psychologist who insists that Terrie does act for reasons can accept this.

This is significant because if it is right that agents who act motivated by false beliefs act for no reason at all, then it would seem that the number of actions that are done for no reason would be significantly higher than we think. This is partly due to the fact that the class of actions done for no reason has expanded to include not only wholly intrinsically motivated actions. In fact, it could turn out that we rarely, if ever, act for reasons, depending on how many of our beliefs are true. We might be able to ignore the last point, but it is still an untoward consequence of the

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<sup>50</sup> I am probably sneaking in content externalist assumptions here.

<sup>51</sup> It isn't merely the linguistic evidence that I am appealing to here. The linguistic evidence points to the oddity of Terrie (a fairly normal agent) watering her neighbor's lawn without reason when she holds false beliefs about the lawn that she is watering. We'll get to the articulation of this oddity below.

option we are exploring that it could be committed to there being significantly more actions that are done without reasons than we would have thought.

The anti-psychologist might deny the assumption that agents who act on the basis of false beliefs are as dissimilar from agents who act based on wholly intrinsic factors as the argument suggested. Agents who act on the basis of false beliefs act for no reason, the argument goes, and so whatever is guiding these kinds of actions must be wholly intrinsic. The effort, therefore, to show a significant disanalogy between acting on the basis of false beliefs and acting from wholly intrinsic factors, fails, and this leaves open the viable explanation that acting on the basis of false beliefs is acting for no reason. This reply has some force to it, but the objection that the view seems to multiply actions done for no reasons beyond what seems to be the case would still hold.

The more significant problem with the option under discussion is that, as anticipated, it seems incapable of providing an adequate account of the rationalization of many of our actions. Here is what Davidson writes about rationalization:<sup>52</sup>

What is the relation between a reason and an action when the reason explains the action by giving the agent's reason for doing what he did? We may call such explanations rationalizations, and say that the reason *rationalizes* the action. ... A reason rationalizes as action only if it leads us to see something the agent saw, or thought he saw, in his action—

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<sup>52</sup>'Rationalization', I assume, can be understood, minimally, in "thin and subjective way", according to Mele (2003: 71). This is consonant with Davidson's account of rationalization (1963).

some feature, consequence, or aspect of the action the agent wanted, desired, prized, held dear, thought dutiful, beneficial, obligatory, or agreeable. We cannot explain why someone did what he did simply by saying the particular action appealed to him; we must indicate what it was about the action that appealed.<sup>53</sup>

This passage reveals a prominent account of what it means for an action to be rationalized. There seem to be two necessary conditions laid out for an action being rationalized. An action  $\Phi$  is rationalized only if (i) the reason the agent had for  $\Phi$ -ing is provided; (ii) the reason offered for the agent's  $\Phi$ -ing provides insight into what the agent found appealing about  $\Phi$ -ing. While (ii) seems to be more explicit in the passage above, condition (i) seems implicit. When we rationalize an agent's action we cite the reason for which the agent acted, which is condition (i). Moreover, condition (ii) seems to imply condition (i). The reason cited in (ii) reveals what the agent found appealing about acting as she does. In other words, the agent here was sensitive to a reason, which is that feature of the action that the agent found appealing such that she acted for that reason.

Alvarez's account cannot satisfy either of these conditions. It cannot satisfy (i) because there are no reasons for which the agent acts in the cases under discussion. It is for the same reason that (ii) cannot be satisfied. If Davidson's account is right, Alvarez's view that we do not act for reasons when we act on the basis of a false belief seems committed to the further conclusion that in these cases

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<sup>53</sup> Davidson (1963/1980: 1)

(which, as we have seen, could be many) agents' actions are not properly rationalizable.<sup>54</sup>

To make clear how this is so, consider the Terrie case again. *Prima facie*, it is intuitively plausible that her action is rationalizable even though she acts on the basis of a false belief. That is, even though it is false that the neighbor did not water his lawn, Terrie's action is rationalizable—at least in some sense. It is important to see the significance of this solution to the problem of acting on the basis of false propositions. The view in question has it that in cases like these there is no reason *for* acting. In other words, in these cases there is no motivating reason for which the actions were performed. The objection here is that this precludes properly rationalizing these kinds of actions.<sup>55</sup> The basic thought behind this objection is this: Terrie's action does not appear to be properly rationalizable if they are done for no motivating reasons at all.

Alvarez has a reply to this objection that is well worth examining. She argues that it is not the case that an agent's acting for no reason implies that her actions are not rationalizable.<sup>56</sup> She claims that this implication does not hold because there are also reasons *why* an agent acts as she does in cases when she acts for no reason.<sup>57</sup> So, Terrie may have acted for no reason when she watered her neighbor's

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<sup>54</sup> Of course, Alvarez denies Davidson's theory of rationalization in error cases, but she needs to preserve the rationalization of actions in error cases (2010: 135). I think that Alvarez' rejection of Davidson's account is wrong for reasons considered in this section.

<sup>55</sup> To be absolutely clear, if there are no reasons for which an agent  $\Phi$ -s, then there are no motivating reasons for which an agent  $\Phi$ -s.

<sup>56</sup> See Alvarez (2010: 135ff).

<sup>57</sup> Alvarez calls reasons-why 'explanatory reasons'.

lawn, but there was still a reason why she watered the lawn. Perhaps we could understand Alvarez's reply to the rationalization worry as a revision, in error cases at least, of Davidson's necessary conditions for rationalization. We need simply substitute the relation 'reason for' with the 'reason-why' relation. In order for an action to be rationalized (i\*) the reason why the agent  $\Phi$ 's is provided, and (ii\*) the reason why the agent  $\Phi$ -s provides insight into what the agent found appealing about  $\Phi$ -ing. Will this do the trick?

We should get a bit clearer on this move before answering this question. Alvarez argues that there are other reasons than just motivating and normative reasons. In addition, there are reasons *why* an agent  $\Phi$ 's.<sup>58</sup> An example of a reason why an agent  $\Phi$ 's would be Tom's sitting in the back of the class because he is shy.<sup>59</sup> Alvarez believes that Tom's being shy is not his reason for sitting in the back of the class, but it is the reason why he does. That is, Tom is not considering his own shyness when deliberating about what to do even though this psychological fact about Tom is relevant to explaining his action. Therefore, Alvarez's argument goes, Tom's sitting in back of the class is rationalizable even if there is no reason for which he is sitting there.<sup>60</sup>

Tom's apparent reason, according to Alvarez, could be something akin to that he will be less visible to the teacher by sitting in the back of the class. Suppose Tom

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<sup>58</sup> To be clear, Alvarez rightly believes that sometimes our reason for  $\Phi$ -ing will be the reason why we  $\Phi$ .

<sup>59</sup> See Alvarez (2010: 167-168).

<sup>60</sup> Of course, we could make up reasons for Tom's sitting in back of the class: he is less likely to be seen there; he likes sitting near his friends in the back of the class; he is far-sighted; etc. According to Alvarez each of these would be consistent with the reason why he sits in the back of the class, namely, that he is shy.

believes that by sitting in the back of the class he will be less visible to the teacher, but as it turns out the teacher instructs from the back of the class and would see Tom up close, as it were. Tom intended to act for a reason, but he came up short because it was based on a false belief. Alvarez would say that Tom acts for no reason in this case, but there can still be a reason why he acts. Reasons-why can serve the role of rationalizer (perhaps in the way mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph) in cases where agents act for no reason at all, and this is because in cases where agents act for no reason at all there can still be a reason why they act as they do. Thus, when Terrie waters her neighbor's lawn on the basis of a false belief, her action, according to Alvarez, is still rationalizable because there is a reason why she did what she did. This reason why could be, say, her believing that her neighbor had not watered his lawn, or some kind of explanation along these lines. In fact, Alvarez seems to think that all psychological explanations like the one just provided for Terrie are explanatory in the sense of being answers to the question of the reason why an action was performed.<sup>61</sup>

Alvarez's account here preserves our ability to provide rational explanations for why Terrie and Tom acted as they did even though they failed to have reasons for doing what they did. However, I would like to suggest that her account has not preserved what is needed for providing certain desired kinds of rationalizations for the actions of Terrie and Tom. The kind of explanation we are given by Alvarez's account is a kind of reason-explanation, and it does provide us with one important

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<sup>61</sup> Alvarez does not think that psychological explanations exhaust the class of explanatory explanations. They are simply the only relevant ones in the discussion here.

kind of reason-explanation. However, it is not the kind we often seek when requesting an explanation of action. That is, we often seek to know what reasons the agent was sensitive to when she acted as she did. We want to know what reasons she took herself to be acting for. In these circumstances, we seem not just to want to know things like the agent's psychological dispositions (e.g., shyness, etc.) or other features of her psychology, unless, of course, those features turn out to be her agential reasons, or might otherwise make an action of her explicable.

Perhaps Alvarez could try to defend her view by appealing to the fallibility of agents regarding knowing their reasons. Agents might be wrong about what their reason for acting is. This effort fails, at least initially, because it can be agreed that agents are fallible regarding knowing their reasons for acting. The claim here is that agents appear to act for reasons in error cases and so their actions should be explainable using standard forms of reason-explanation. Of course, agents can cite the wrong reasons when they explain their actions, but this does not count against the view that it seems that agents act for reasons in error cases.

Perhaps Alvarez could claim that agential fallibility in general lends skepticism on the claim that agents know that they act for reasons in error cases. I think we can suppose that this is right. It might be true that agents can be wrong about whether they acted for reasons. Nevertheless, this still does not count against the claim being made here. Even if agents are fallible regarding whether they are acting for reasons, this is not the relevant to whether in general agents act for reasons in error cases. The argument offered for the latter claim is not based on agential infallibility regarding knowing their reasons or whether they acted for



reasons. Thus, it does not follow from these claims of agential fallibility that agents, generally, do not act for reasons in error cases. And this is because someone who argues that agents do act for reasons in error cases can accept the fallibility.

In a sense, the suggestion here (*pace* Alvarez) can be seen as a defense of Davidson's necessary condition (i) for the rationalization of agents'  $\Phi$ -ing.<sup>62</sup> Here's the basic idea behind this suggestion: providing the *reasons for* which an agent  $\Phi$ s is necessary for properly rationalizing, in the manner indicated just above, her  $\Phi$ -ing because it shows the reasons the agent was sensitive, or responsive, to when behaving as she did.<sup>63</sup> Rowland Stout puts this point as follows (about a particular agent): "Her will must be able to *respond* to such reasons and be *sensitive* to them."<sup>64</sup> I believe this is a feature of agents that Alvarez's account of rationalization does not satisfy. When we rationalize Terrie's watering the lawn, we often do so by offering more than just why she did what she did. We do not, for example, just cite that she is psychologically peculiar about her neighbor's lawn. We also offer the consideration—the reason—she responded to in her behavior. The same is true of Tom. It is not enough for the rationalizations to which Davidson and Stout call attention to say that Tom has certain shy psychological dispositions. We need to say what it was that he rationally responded to when acting as he did. Moreover, it

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<sup>62</sup> It is important to note that I am not defending Davidson's psychologicistic account of motivating reasons. I take it that we can distinguish, conceptually at least, Davidson's psychologicistic account of rationalization from a broadly Davidsonian account of rationalization as given by conditions (i) and (ii) above.

<sup>63</sup> I leave the notion of 'sensitive to reasons' intuitive.

<sup>64</sup> See Stout (2009: 54).

seems that we can do this in cases where Terrie and Tom are wrong about what they take to be the case.

It should be noted that the account of reason-explanations defended here need only focus in condition (i). I take no stand here on the truth of condition (ii) because the primary focus is on showing the importance of the agent's sensitivity to reasons when acting for reasons. It may well turn out to be the case that motivating reasons are always seen in an appealing or favorable light from the agent's vantage point, but it makes little difference to the effort in this chapter whether the latter is true.

I suggest that we distinguish between these distinct reason-explanations (or kinds of rationalization). Reason-explanations that rationalize actions by way of providing psychological dispositions or features of agents will be labeled *psychological reason-explanations*. Reason-explanations that rationalize actions by way of making reference to the reasons to which agents are sensitive and act for when they act will be labeled, as anticipated just above, reason-sensitive reason-explanations (or reason-sensitive rationalizations). I follow both Davidson and Stout in thinking that agent-sensitive reason-explanations are significant forms of reason-explanations. The account here goes a bit further: even cases in which agents act for false reasons can be rationalized by providing reason-sensitive reason-explanations.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Davidson's theory of reasons appears consistent with the claim here. However, Stout (2009) ultimately denies that agents act for reasons in error cases. This might be seen as an advantage for psychologism. Even in error cases agential reasons would be things to which agents are sensitive when they act for them.

On Alvarez's account there are countless cases where an agent acts like Terrie or Tom, but because they act on the basis of false beliefs, their actions cannot be rationalized in the reason-sensitive manner because there simply are no reasons that the agent was sensitive or responsive to when they did as they did. But it seems that the actions of Terrie and Tom are perfectly rationalizable in this manner.

Alvarez cannot appeal to what she calls 'apparent reasons' because it would seem that she is violating our understanding of an important kind of rationalization we seek to provide. Rationalization involves being able to make sense of an agent's behavior in light of the reasons the agent acted on and for, which are the reasons the agent responded to in her deliberations and subsequent actions. To cite apparent reasons in an effort to rationalize an action would be to provide an apparent rationalization.

It might be thought that normative assumptions are making their way into the Davidsonian account of rationalization defended here. That is, according to the original Davidsonian conditions outlined above, it might be thought that rationalization requires identifying normative features underlying the agent's  $\Phi$ -ing. In the case of Davidson's conditions these features would most likely be found in condition (ii) where reasons reveal the features of  $\Phi$ -ing that appeal to the agent. One might claim that Davidson's account may well be right for a normative conception of rationalization, which necessarily involves an account of acting for reasons that one find one's actions appealing. However, in cases where an agent's motivating reasons are at issue (ii) need not hold.

So, this objection misfires because all that seems required to show that there are problems with Alvarez's account of error cases is that it cannot adequately satisfy (i). Even if condition (ii) has normative implications, it is far less clear that (i) does. Condition (i) simply has it that an action is rationalized only if the agent's reason for acting is provided. I contend that this condition need not be understood normatively.

It might be an option yet for anti-psychologists to argue that propositions or states of affairs *simpliciter* are motivating reasons. The idea here would be that reasons can be either true or false propositions, or they could be obtaining or non-obtaining states of affairs. In error cases like the one discussed above, Terrie's reason might be the proposition that the neighbor watered the lawn. If the proposition need not be true, then the problem of the Terrie case might seem to be resolved. However, before we can pursue this potential anti-psychologist reply, we should examine the kind of problem that it would bring about were it right.<sup>66</sup> We will examine this potential problem for anti-psychologism in Section 2.3.2 below.

In conclusion to this section, we would do well to summarize its results. We have seen that if we suppose anti-psychologism is true, then a reason-explanation could look like this: Terrie watered the neighbor's lawn for the reason that her neighbor had not watered it yet. One such general anti-psychologistic form of reason-explanation could be put thusly: for any agent A, reason *p*, and action  $\Phi$ , A's

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<sup>66</sup> We will examine this anti-psychologistic line of reply in section 2.3.2 below and even further in Chapter 4.

reason for  $\Phi$ -ing was that  $p$ .<sup>67</sup> Suppose it's false that Terrie's neighbor failed to water his lawn. It seems that something paradoxical results, and so the paradox problem presents itself: Terrie waters the neighbor's lawn for the reason that her neighbor had failed to water it, although he had not failed to water it.

We have seen one way out of the paradox by denying that Terrie has offered a reason for watering her neighbor's lawn. As we have seen, Alvarez can take this line of reply. Terrie acts for an apparent reason, which is no reason at all. The reason Terrie cites, namely, that her neighbor failed to water his lawn, only appears to Terrie to be a reason. While this move solves the problem of paradox, it does so only at the cost of inheriting the no-reason problem and the problem concerning reason-sensitive rationalization, i.e., the rationalization problem.

It should be noted that psychologism seems able to account for error cases as discussed above in Section 2.2). Agents' psychological states would be the same even if they were in error about what they believe. Accordingly, Terrie's reason for watering the neighbor's lawn is that she *believed* that her neighbor had watered the lawn. Her reason essentially consists of the psychological state of believing that her neighbor had watered the lawn. This would mean that we could rationalize Terrie's watering of the lawn in the reason-sensitive manner it seems we should be able to. Thus, it would appear, at this stage of the debate, that psychologism already has one clear advantage over anti-psychologism.

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<sup>67</sup> There are other equally good forms of reason-explanation: the reason for which A  $\Phi$ -d was that  $p$ ; A  $\Phi$ -ed because<sub>R</sub>  $p$ , etc. Some countenance teleological forms like A  $\Phi$ -ed in order to  $\Psi$ , where ' $\Psi$ ' refers to an agent's goal. In Chapter 6 it is argued that teleological explanations are not genuine reason-explanations, though they are genuine explanations of a different sort, as they are purposive explanations.

### **2.3.2 Anti-Psychologism and the Factivity Problem**

A closely related problem for anti-psychologism concerns what to say about the nature of reason-explanations as a result of error cases. Standard reason-explanations cite only agents' reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing. If we suppose that agents have anti-psychologistic motivating reasons in error cases, then clearly they cannot be facts or obtaining states of affairs—the propositions or states of affairs believed by agents are either false or do not obtain. Thus, another way one could go here is to claim that in error cases agential reasons are false propositions or non-obtaining states of affairs. But citing such falsities and non-obtainings as reasons in reason-explanations would seem to violate their factivity, which is a serious cost as well.

A few preliminary remarks are in order before moving forward. First, to be clear, the factivity of reason-explanation refers to the claim that explanantia must be true in order to explain. That is, if a reason-explanation is to explain at all that which is offered as the explanation (explanantia) has got to be true. Moreover, it is commonly believed that many forms of explanation are governed by the factivity principle that if  $p$  explains  $q$ , then  $p$  must be true.

Second, some philosophers have denied the factivity of explanation. In particular, philosophers of science, including Bas van Fraassen and Nancy Cartwright have argued that scientific explanations do not have to be true in order to explain.<sup>68</sup> In what follows, I assume that truth matters to reason-explanations,

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<sup>68</sup> See Cartwright (1980) and van Fraassen (1976).

and perhaps more importantly, I assume, all things being equal, that a theory that can preserve the factivity of explanation is better than a theory that does not.

This issue of factivity has led, in part, some anti-psychologists to the conclusion that agents do not act for reasons in error cases. If agential reasons were false propositions, the argument goes, then explanations consisting of agential reasons, as explanantia, would conflict with the factivity principle. Furthermore, it seems that the factivity problem for anti-psychologism is what ultimately leads to the paradox problem. That is, if anti-psychologists maintain that reason-explanations can be non-factive, then they find themselves committed to paradoxical reason-explanation statements. The paradox results, we recall, when the false explanans is conjoined to its true negation. So the factivity problem appears to be more fundamental than the paradox problem—at least in the sense that solving the factivity problem would also lead to a solution to the paradox problem.

Alvarez's anti-psychologistic theory of reason-explanation preserves the factivity of reason-explanations by denying that agents act for reasons in error cases. If agential reasons are what explain (are explanantia) in reason-explanations, then it appears that Alvarez's move is able to preserve the factivity principle. However, there have been other kinds of anti-psychologistic replies.

Jonathan Dancy's anti-psychologistic solution to the problem is to deny the factivity of reason-explanation. In other words, it is not the case that the agent's reason must be true for the reason to explain the agent's action. Thus, Terrie's watering the neighbor's lawn can be explained by the false reason that her neighbor

had not watered the lawn earlier. Dancy's solution to the factivity problem, therefore, is to embrace the claim that reason-explanations can have false explanantia. According to Dancy:

First, it is not required for the purposes of the sort of light that reasons-explanations cast on action that things should be as the agent supposed. Second, it seems perfectly possible to continue at least in some forms of reasons-explanation with a denial of the contained clause, thus: his reason for doing it was that *p*, a matter about which he was sadly mistaken.<sup>69</sup>

Dancy makes at least two related claims here. The first is that reason-explanation does not require that reasons be true in order for them to cast "the sort of light" on actions. I take this to mean that false reasons can explain agential behavior. The second is that there are appositional ways of dealing with the false contained clause in reason-explanation, which has the effect of offsetting the appearance of contradiction. With respect to the latter, Dancy suggests that after the reason is cited, a clause revealing that the reason was merely as the agent supposed is sufficient to show that the paradox is mere appearance. Another way this could be done is to provide the reason, and follow it with "as the agent supposed", or some other appositional qualification. So, in Terrie's case, we could claim that Terrie watered the neighbor's lawn for the reason that her neighbor had failed to, as she had supposed to be the case.

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<sup>69</sup> Dancy (2003: 426-7)



It is important to note that Dancy does not think that the appositional supposition clause is a proper part of the reason-explanation, even though it is necessary that agents suppose that  $p$  when they act for  $p$ .<sup>70</sup> Dancy agrees with the latter necessary connection, and it is what leads him to his appositional account here. Dancy argues that it does not follow from the necessary connection between the agential supposition and her acting for the supposition that the supposition itself is part of the explanation of the agent's  $\Phi$ -ing. On Dancy's view, the explanantia of reason-explanation are agential reasons only.<sup>71</sup> However, when the true appositional clause is conjoined to reason-explanations in error cases, it would appear to get Dancy out of the paradox that results from violating the factivity principle.

So it appears that Dancy has a solution to the paradox problem. Let us assume for the sake of argument that the account works. What about the general problem of factivity, though? Dancy needs to deny the factivity of reason-explanations because he maintains both that only agential reasons feature as the explanantia of reason-explanations, and that false reasons can explain. Therefore, in error case false reasons explain. We might be able to avoid paradoxes by citing agential suppositions appositionally to the reason-explanation, but strictly speaking false reasons can explain actions.

One might find Dancy's commitment to non-factivity counterintuitive on the grounds that explanations just are factive contexts. Paradigmatic kinds of

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<sup>70</sup> This issue is related to the psychology problem discussed below (and in more detail in Chapter 5).

<sup>71</sup> See Dancy (2000).

explanations are causal explanations, and other explanations from the physical sciences, e.g., those in which correlations between observed physical events are cited. One might argue that reason-explanations should be considered on a par with these kinds of explanations. In fact, psychologistic philosophers tend to argue that reason-explanations are especially on a par with causal explanations because the former just are a kind of causal explanation.<sup>72</sup> Of course, psychologistic philosophers also do not seem to have worries regarding the factivity problem because for them psychological states explain action, and even if, for example, agents' beliefs are false, their reasons—their beliefs—still explain.

However, perhaps someone like Dancy could be a disjunctivist about the nature of explanation: reason-explanations are not factive, while other kinds of explanations, including notably causal and scientific explanations, are factive. On these matters, though, one might side with the thoughts of Constantine Sandis:

If falsehoods were capable of providing real (one is tempted to say *true*) explanations we would care a lot less about the truth of our beliefs than we actually do. The debate between creationists and evolutionists, for instance, would be inconsequential if we were happy to grant genuine explanatory power to falsehoods. ... My complaint, rather, is that it is a basic *truism* that to have a genuine explanation of anything the explanandum must in some sense, however loose, result *because* of the explanans; and this can only happen in the latter is actually the case.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> This is a view made popular in the twentieth century by Davidson (1963).

<sup>73</sup> Sandis (forthcoming: 4).

Here Sandis identifies part of what seems problematic with non-factive explanations.<sup>74</sup> We care about the truth of our beliefs, and once we are willing to provide explanatory power to falsehoods, then we open the door to allowing falsehoods to provide explanations for opposing positions in many of our central intellectual debates. One way of understanding the cash value of this is to see that giving up on factivity seems to strip us of a very powerful means of deciding between competing theories. This standard means is truth. It is a truism, according to Sandis, that only true propositions explain. If we can no longer depend on this, then we are in a quagmire of muddle trying to arbitrate between the sides of debates, e.g., the quarrel between creationists and evolutionists. Likewise, non-factivity of this sort would seem likely to spill over into cases involving reason-explanations.

One initial reply here is that the case Sandis cites is a theoretical debate, and Dancy, and any other non-factivist about reason-explanation, need not deny that standard theoretical explanations are factive. In other words, Dancy need not deny that the explanations of the physical sciences or of metaphysics are factive.<sup>75</sup> One can consistently remain a non-factivist about reason-explanations while remaining factivist about theoretical explanations. Non-factivists about reason-explanations might be able to claim that some practical explanations, which are generally

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<sup>74</sup> I assume that Sandis has more than just causal explanations in mind in this passage. Nothing he says in the passage even implies that it does, so it might be somewhat safe to assume that the problem Sandis outlines here is a problem for non-factive explanations generally. Moreover, even if he only has in mind causal explanations, the kind of reason-explanation to be developed in Chapter 4 could be viewed as a species of causal explanation.

<sup>75</sup> I do not take a stance on demarcating theoretical explanations from reason-explanations, assuming there is such a demarcation to be found.

concerned with explaining action, are less attached to the truth of the explanans of the relevant explanations than are theoretical explanations.<sup>76</sup> I explain this claim.

Paradigm cases of theoretical explanation, as we have seen, are causal explanations. Explanations of this kind include explaining the occurrence of B, where B is typically understood as an event. We offer a causal explanation of B when we provide the cause of B. Suppose A (typically also thought to be an event) is the cause of B, then we explain B's occurrence by citing the occurrence of A: A causes B. This seems to be true: A causes B only if A. Likewise, A explains B only if A. It might be the case that proper explanations require that the occurrence of A be cited in the expression of a truth-evaluable claim, *p*, such that if A occurs, then the explanation of the occurrence of B can be said to be true.<sup>77</sup> Non-factivists about reason-explanations, as a kind of practical explanation, seem committed to saying that the truth of explanantia can be irrelevant to the soundness of explanation. Explanations citing agential reasons that fail to obtain (or are false), but, it is believed, still explain actions, are cases in point. This is what it might mean to claim that truth is less attached to the truth of the relevant explanantia of some kinds of practical explanation. It would appear as if Dancy as well as other non-factivists regarding reason-explanations are committed to this result.

In general, I think disjunctivist theories should be avoided if at all possible, and that non-disjunctivist theories, all things being equal, are to be preferred over

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<sup>76</sup> One prominent function of practical explanation is the explanation of action. Reason-explanations can be seen as a species of practical explanations.

<sup>77</sup> It might turn out that rigorous explanations of any kind require at least that explanantia be expressed by complete sentences or propositions. In that case, A would be expressed in terms of a proposition. See Peter Achinstein (1983:102) for someone who holds this view regarding explanations.

disjunctivist theories.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, by examining cases in which agents learn that they have acted on the basis of a false belief we learn one thing wrong with the version of disjunctivism on offer. Suppose Terrie finds out that her neighbor had watered the lawn, and so when she seeks to provide her reason for watering the lawn, fully aware that she was wrong, she might naturally claim that she believed her neighbor had failed to water his lawn. That is, in this error case she might naturally respond to a request for her reason for watering the lawn claim that she had believed that her neighbor had not watered it. Not only might Terrie's response here push us toward a psychologist account of reasons, but it—and many cases just like it in form—show us that we have a tendency to offer *true* explanantia when offering explanations. This point comes out more clearly if we suppose that Terrie had originally provided an anti-psychologistic explanation for her behavior. However, when the neighbor explained to her that he had watered the lawn, she restates her reason so as to make it true. Again, the point here is that the truth seems to matter with respect to our reason-explanations. Sandis' claim in the above passage seems to ring true, namely, that it seems to be a truism that only truths can explain.

We should note that Alvarez has an anti-psychologistic interpretation available of this error case involving Terrie. Alvarez could maintain, as we have seen, that Terrie does not act for reasons in this case, so we cannot provide a reason-sensitive reason-explanation for her behavior. Nevertheless, we can provide a psychological explanation of it. In fact, Alvarez might take a case like this to

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<sup>78</sup> As will be seen, this is a common theme in this project: disjunctivist theories are avoided.

support her view of error cases. That is, she could argue that once Terrie realizes that she was wrong about what she thought was the case that she naturally offers an explanation in terms of her psychology instead of her reasons because she realized that she did not act for a reason after all.

There is some initial plausibility to this line of reasoning. However, in light of the fact that it seems that agents act for reasons in error cases like the Terrie case, anti-psychologists should seek to account for that seeming rather than do away with reasons in such cases. Dancy's view that agents act for reasons in error cases seems correct, but what he struggles with is then accounting for the factivity of the explanations involving reason-sensitive rationalizations. It is difficult to determine which problem is more substantial here, but they both count in a serious way against these recent anti-psychologistic attempts.

The arguments in this section are not conclusive. It seems to be the case that if anti-psychologism is to be true, then it will have to have a proper response to the factivity issues concerning reason-explanations. Dancy's response seems to fail. We've seen Alvarez's view, which has its serious problems. Indeed, they seem to represent the two main ways anti-psychologism could go with respect to dealing with reason-explanations and error cases: either deny that we act for reasons (in error cases) and affirm factivity, or affirm that we act for reasons and deny factivity.

It seems that most, if not all, explanations should adhere to the factivity principle. Moreover, any theory of (motivating) reason-explanations does better if it can align itself with this claim. We have seen, in yet another way, that error cases provide, in the words of James Lenman, "the biggest headache for anti-

psychologism".<sup>79</sup> These cases would need a proper resolution before anti-psychologism can be accepted with any manner of confidence.

Again, psychologism does not have trouble with either of these issues. In error cases agents act for reasons, and the explanantia of reason-explanations will always adhere to the factivity principle.

### **2.3.3 Anti-Psychologism and the Psychology Problem**

It seems undeniably true that it is necessary that agents are at least minimally aware of the reasons for which they  $\Phi$ . Otherwise, how could these reasons be *motivating* reasons? Here's the claim that I am going to take to be true of motivating reasons:

**B:** If R is a reason for which agent A  $\Phi$ -s, then necessarily R is related to A's psychology.

The antecedent of B is clear enough, but the consequent needs some explication. First, the psychological relation is probably at least the awareness relation, and in some instances it will be some level of minimal awareness. This is true even though the belief relation is probably the most common relation R has to an agent such that R is an agential reason for A. Second, the sense of necessity I have in mind is metaphysical necessity. Thus, it seems that in every metaphysically possible world, A has at least some level of minimal awareness of R if R is a reason for which A  $\Phi$ -s.

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<sup>79</sup> Lenman (2009)

The relation between R and A's psychology is in many cases belief. However, perhaps it need not be belief. An agent might act for R in cases where she only believes that she believes R, but in fact she does not believe R. For example, Lara might celebrate Christmas on the basis of her belief that she believes that which the holiday stands for. It could turn out, however, that Lara does not actually have the first-order beliefs about Christmas. So she celebrates Christmas without having the beliefs she believed herself to possess regarding Christmas. Because of cases like this I weaken the psychological relation to the more general "awareness" of R, where awareness needs only to be understood in some minimal sense or other.<sup>80</sup>

The goal of this section is to show that anti-psychologists have not yet accounted properly for B. That is, anti-psychologists have not yet resolved the psychology problem. Moreover, since psychologistic accounts can account for B, anti-psychologists do well to have an explanation of the truth of B.

In order to proceed, let us have a look at what Maria Alvarez says about B:

After all, it is obvious why my being aware of the reason is necessary for *the reason* to explain my action. ... [U]nless I am aware of the fact that p, the fact that p cannot be the reason that motivates me to act. And unless the fact that p is the reason that motivates me to fail him [Alvarez's example of a  $\Phi$ -ing], the fact that p cannot be a 'reason why' which is *also* a 'reason for which' I acted. Hence, in order for the fact that p to be the explanans of a reason explanation, I must have been aware of the fact that p. But this does not compel us

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<sup>80</sup> Others use the generic belief as the required relation between reasons and an agent's psychology. See Alvarez (2010), Setiya (2007), Dancy (2000).



to conclude that what really explains my action [failing a student] is my being aware of the fact that  $p$ .<sup>81</sup>

Alvarez countenances the truth of B, or something close to B, but she does not believe that it compels us to the conclusion that what explains an action done for a reason is being aware of the fact that  $p$ . I agree with Alvarez's line of argument here. That is, it is true that B does not *compel* anyone to the truth of a version of psychologism, namely, that motivating reasons consist in the awareness of the fact the  $p$ . However, the issue here is explaining the truth of B, or perhaps more modestly, is the issue of what best explains the truth of B. In this passage Alvarez is not attempting to explain B, but what she does is challenge the claim that accepting B logically commits one to psychologism. What is important to take from this is two points: (c) Alvarez accepts B, and (d) Alvarez rightly argues that accepting B does not commit one to psychologism.

Perhaps Alvarez has provided a strong initial anti-psychologist response to B. However, one might want something more from the anti-psychologist than what she has provided. Noted anti-psychologist Dancy shows the significance of explaining B in the following passage:

How should we explain the fact that, where the agent's reason for acting is that  $p$ , the agent must believe that  $p$ , if not by saying that the agent's reason for acting is 'really' that he believes that  $p$ ?<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

Dancy's subsequent answer to this question is to claim that the necessity of the believing that  $p$  serves as an enabling condition:

There is a difference between a consideration that is a proper part of an explanation, and a consideration that is required for an explanation to go through, but which is not itself a part of that explanation. I call the latter 'enabling conditions'. For instance, that England is not sinking beneath the waves today is a consideration in the absence of which what explains my actions would be incapable of doing so. But that does nothing to show that England's not submerging today is part of the explanation of why I do what I do.<sup>83</sup>

His claim here is that enabling conditions, which are necessary conditions, do not have a role in explanations. Dancy's example of an enabling condition for his  $\Phi$ -ing is the fact that the Atlantic Ocean has not engulfed England. Intuitively, were we to explain Dancy's  $\Phi$ -ing, we would not cite this enabling condition for his  $\Phi$ -ing. We are to infer from this that agential psychologies, as enabling conditions, likewise do not have a role in reason-explanations. If we consider Dancy's answer has some intuitive plausibility, and his notion of an enabling condition, in particular, seems potentially promising. I wonder, though, whether an example involving a more proximal necessary condition would elicit the same intuition here.

Suppose Jason is practicing reciting a poem prior his friend's wedding because he is to read it aloud at the wedding. We could say that Jason's practicing is

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<sup>82</sup> Dancy 2000, p. 126

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 127

a necessary condition for his reciting the poem when the time comes. And, it seems plausible that the practicing is not itself a proper part of the recitation at the wedding. Thus, the explanation for Jason's reciting the poem at the wedding need not involve his practicing as a proper part. Moreover, the argument continues, the necessary condition here (practicing reciting a poem), like belief or awareness of a reason, need not feature in a reason-explanation of Jason's behavior because they are not thereby proper parts of the reason he had for  $\Phi$ -ing.

It seems that even in this case, the more proximal necessary condition for Jason's recitation need not be part of his reason-explanation for the recitation. Dancy's claim about agential psychologies being enabling conditions is not threatened by this case.

According to Dancy, it appears as if reason-explanations need only cite agential reasons because those are the proximally relevant conditions of agents' (reason-sensitive) rationalizable behaviors. Features of agential psychologies, then, are not proximal enough to serve as proper parts of reason-explanations, even though they are necessary for agents' actions. We will come back to this issue below. First, let's briefly examine an objection to Dancy's theory of the necessary connection stated in B.

Wayne Davis argues that Dancy's reply fails to explain B.<sup>84</sup> Davis argues that Dancy's appeal to enabling conditions just amounts to claiming that psychological features of agents are necessary conditions for S's  $\Phi$ -ing. Thus, if being aware of R is an enabling condition for R to be a reason for an agent's  $\Phi$ -ing, being aware of R just

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<sup>84</sup> Davis (2005)

is a necessary condition. But this is precisely what is in need of explanation. If this is right, then Dancy, or a Dancy-inspired view, would need to flesh out, or add to, the notion of an enabling condition in such a way that it amounts to more than simply a necessary condition.

The question here is whether Dancy's theory can offer more than a restatement of what was in need of explanation. This will involve the task of taking a closer look at the notion of an enabling condition to see whether it is guilty of being merely a restatement of what is in need to explanation. We will take up this task in more detail in Chapter 4. Until then, suffice it to say that there is something unsatisfactory about Dancy's view. Intuitively, there appears to be a great difference between a condition for an agent's  $\Phi$ -ing like the Atlantic Ocean not engulfing England and a condition like relevant features of one's psychology.

Thus it would appear as if two prominent anti-psychologistic accounts have not said enough to resolve the psychology problem. Alvarez simply denies that countenancing B logically commits one to psychologism, and Dancy claims that accepting B amounts to accepting that agential psychologies are enabling conditions. We have seen that, intuitively, what Dancy has in mind for enabling conditions for  $\Phi$ -ing seems much too unlike agents' psychologies, which are also necessary for their  $\Phi$ -ing. According to Dancy, if agential psychologies are enabling conditions, then they are on a par with facts like the Atlantic not engulfing England. Moreover, it follows from this that psychological conditions do not feature in reason-explanations—even if they are not part of agential reasons. Enabling conditions seem too removed from agents'  $\Phi$ -ing to be considered relevant when explaining

their  $\Phi$ -ing. Thus, it appears that Dancy's account has yet to resolve the psychology problem—at least as it is stated here.

On the other hand, psychologism is able to provide an account of the necessary connection of agential reasons and their psychologies. The explanation is that an agent's reason consists in part of features of the agent's psychology. It appears again as if psychologism has the upper hand on anti-psychologism because it can solve yet another problem that anti-psychologists struggles with. The psychology problem may not be as pressing as the first two error case problems for anti-psychologism, but it does require a solution. Psychologism's theoretical virtues of being able to get the right results in error cases and being able to explain the necessary connection to agents' psychologies has been anticipated in section 2.2.1 above, and after elaborating on the problems for anti-psychologism, the virtues of psychologism seem even greater.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 2**

Of course, anti-psychologism has its virtues. As discussed in section 2.2.2 above, it can account for the apparent repeatability of reasons and for the fact that reasons provide rational guidance due to their apparent propositional nature. At this stage, however, it seems that psychologism has more of the virtues than anti-psychologism. But we need not be too quick here in establishing conclusions without a proper examination of psychologism. Moreover, we have yet to examine objections to psychologism. We will undertake a critical discussion of psychologism in Chapter 3.

Before turning to this project, we would do well to summarize the general results from this chapter.

We began by examining the two main sides of the debate regarding the ontology of motivating reasons. In particular, we looked at the virtues of psychologism and anti-psychologism. Then we spent the remainder of the chapter detailing the main problems facing anti-psychologistic theories. In particular, we looked at how error cases provided the most serious problems. It seems that anti-psychologistic theories need either to claim that agents act for no reasons in such cases, or they need to embrace the non-factivity of reason-explanation. If one accepts the first disjunct, one is faced with the no-reason and reason-sensitive rationalization problems. On the other hand, if one countenances the second disjunct, one is faced with the factivity and paradox problems. We also briefly examined the psychology problem, which is a problem for all anti-psychologistic theories.

Looking ahead to the next few chapters, we will see in the next chapter that psychologism has its share of problems. In fact, the problems will be so severe that it will be best to abandon it as the correct theory of motivating reasons. In Chapters 4-6 the goal will be to see if anti-psychologism can respond adequately to the many problems we have seen facing it.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Ontology of Motivating Reasons Arguments Against Psychologism**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

As we saw in Chapter 2, psychologism is able to account for the serious problems anti-psychologism faces. Since motivating reasons are psychological states, agents always act for reasons, even in error cases. This also means that actions are always reason-sensitive rationalizable. Moreover, this ontology of motivating reasons explains the necessity of agential reasons to their psychologies—the necessity holds in virtue of the identity of reasons and psychological states. As things stand now psychologism is the preferred view of motivating reasons.

In this chapter I consider three arguments from the literature against psychologism. I show that only one of them provides a serious challenge to psychologism.

#### **3.1 Psychologism: Pure Cognitivism Assumption**

I by and large assume a pure cognitivist account of psychologism in this chapter. Pure cognitivist accounts claim that our motivating reasons are only beliefs. This contrasts with standard psychologistic theories, which maintain that reasons are belief-desire pairs.<sup>85</sup> There are some considerations that might help make this assumption benign. Jonathan Dancy argues that the kinds of (non-

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<sup>85</sup> See Davidson (1963).

cognitive) desires that could be motivating reasons are themselves had for reasons.<sup>86</sup> (I think that this claim is only often true.) Moreover, because the reasons for which we have these desires often serve as our motivating reasons, the desires themselves do not add reasons for our acting. For example, suppose Connor desires to go golfing. Connor's reason for desiring to golf is that practicing it will make him a better golfer. According to Dancy, Connor's desire becomes the reason for which Connor goes golfing, but there is no good argument to think that the desire, by itself, provides an additional reason for Connor to go golfing. Of course, Dancy claims that the desire provides motivation for Connor, and that it provides content for his goals, but it need not thereby also be a motivating reason for him.<sup>87</sup>

I disagree with Dancy that all desires are had for reasons. There are tough cases where agents act because<sub>R</sub> they "just want to" without there being any further reason for their desiring as they do.<sup>88</sup> In these cases, if psychologism is true, then it is very tempting to say that the reasons for which these agents  $\Phi$  are their desires. On the other hand, in cases where agents truly have no further reason for their desires, meaning that there is no further consideration in light of which they  $\Phi$ , or there is nothing for them that speaks further in favor of their  $\Phi$ -ing, then perhaps it should be concluded that these agents do not  $\Phi$  for reasons. This conclusion would not be as extreme as it may appear to be. Consider the kinds of actions we would have in mind here. Angela whistles just because she wanted to. Toan jumps up and

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<sup>86</sup> See Dancy (2000: Chapter 2).

<sup>87</sup> In Chapter 6 below I discuss in a bit more detail the role of desires in the economy of action.

<sup>88</sup> See Alvarez (2010), Mele (2003), and Sehon (2005) for detailed discussion of this issue.



down because he wanted to. I sing a lyric from a song purely from desire, nothing else. One need not commit to the claim that all action is done for reasons in order to defend a view that has it that it is generally true that it is. Moreover, the cases above at least provide a *prima facie* challenge to the claim that all our action is done for reasons.

Of course, much more would need to be said here to decide this issue, but I will not take it up here. In fact, the main argument of this chapter does not rest on this cognitivist assumption except primarily for making the exposition simpler. Moreover, I will show that there are good reasons to think psychologism fails even if this assumption is false. If the argument offered is strong enough to show that pure cognitivist accounts of psychologism are false, then it will likewise be strong enough to show that non-cognitivist versions are false too.

Let us turn to the arguments against psychologism.

### **3.2 Cousin Arguments Against Psychologism**

Consider the following case by Maria Alvarez:

Suppose that I give my cousin some money because I believe what he tells me, namely, that he needs it to pay his rent. It would seem that what motivates me to give him the money is that he needs it: it is *that* that seems to me to make the action of giving him money right or appropriate and not *my believing* that he needs it. For, if my reason had been *my believing* that he needs the money, then, when deciding whether to give him the money, my concern

would be with how things are with *me*, in particular, with my own state of mind, rather than with how things are with *my cousin*, in particular, with his financial situation.<sup>89</sup>

Alvarez's case invites us to consider what my reason is for loaning my cousin money: is it his financial situation, or is it my believing what I do about his financial situation? If the answer is that it is my believing, as is consonant with psychologism, then it makes the reason my psychological state of believing what I do about my cousin.<sup>90</sup> The latter, the argument goes, cannot be right because it is my cousin's financial situation that serves as the reason for my loaning him money, not the state of my psychology. Just below is my formulation of the argument. I state the argument in the third person (by using Jones and his cousin as examples) in order to avoid potentially unnecessary complications by involving the first person.

### **Cousin in Financial Need Argument**

1. If psychologism is true, then Jones' reason for helping his cousin is his believing that he is in financial need.<sup>91</sup>
2. Jones' reason for helping his cousin is that he is in financial need, not Jones' believing that he is in financial need.

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3. Therefore, psychologism is false.

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<sup>89</sup> Alvarez (2010: 131)

<sup>90</sup> Alvarez leaves the argument at an intuitive level. I hope to articulate her insight and see whether it can succeed as an argument against psychologism.

<sup>91</sup> Alvarez's case also assumes a cognitivist psychologism would be the right one were it true.

Premise 1 seems uncontroversial, assuming that reasons are beliefs, because it is merely a statement of the psychologistic position. Premise 2 is the controversial premise here. Alvarez takes it to be intuitive that what motivates Jones to help his cousin is the financial situation his cousin is in, not Jones' believing what he does about his cousin's financial situation. So according to Alvarez, the key is to think about what we think Jones is motivated by when he helps his cousin—either some feature of Jones's psychology or some features of his cousin's financial situation. If we think that it is some feature of Jones' psychology, then his reason could well be his believing that his cousin is in financial need. On the other hand, if we think that it is some feature his cousin's financial situation, then the reason is that his cousin is in financial need.

Let's suppose that many have the intuition that Jones' reason is, as Alvarez believes, that his cousin is in financial need. I think the psychologist can explain away the anti-psychologistic intuition here. She can claim that Alvarez's case has an explicit normative dimension to it, which makes us think of the reason as a normative reason. This might explain why the reader has the intuition that Jones' reason is not psychological. That is, the normative dimension of the case is that a family member is in need, which the reader might associate with having obligations to help that family member. Thus the reason we have in mind in the case is the normative reason that Jones' cousin is in need, which is seen as a reason for Jones to help his cousin. The psychologist reminds us that Alvarez' claim is about motivating reasons. According to Alvarez, Jones' reason for helping his cousin is that he is in

financial need. The psychologist digs in her heels claiming that Jones' reason for helping his cousin is his believing that his cousin is in financial need. The psychologist can agree that Jones has a normative reason to help his cousin that is non-psychological, but if Jones is motivated by to act for that reason, the his reason for acting must be the state of his believing that normative content.<sup>92</sup> That is, it is Jones' believing the content that he does that serves as his reason for helping his cousin. So, even if it is conceded that many have the intuition that Jones' reason is not the case in the cousin case, it does not follow that this is because people are focusing on Jones' motivating reason.

To test this move against Alvarez we can consider a case that lacks normative considerations.<sup>93</sup> Suppose Janie is invited to go to the beach, and so she goes. Suppose further that Janie does not particularly like going to the beach, but that she believes that her brother, who was not invited, will be jealous if she goes. Let's assume that Janie's anti-psychologistic reason for going to the beach is that her brother will be jealous if she goes. The competing psychologistic reason is Janie's believing that her brother will be jealous if she goes. Thus, what motivates Janie is either some feature of her brother's emotional state, or it is some feature of her believing something about her brother's emotional state. Supposing Janie's belief is true, the question now is: is it intuitively clear that Janie's motivating reason is that her brother will be jealous if she goes rather than her believing that he will be jealous if she goes?

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<sup>92</sup> In Section 3.3 below I discuss the psychologistic option of normative reasons being the contents of psychological states when agents act for normative reasons.

<sup>93</sup> Here Alvarez and I likely disagree about the nature of reasons. Alvarez believes that reasons have an ineliminable normative dimension, which I disagree with.

I don't think it is clear that the intuition here is strongly in anti-psychologistic favor even if we agree that it is in its favor. It is certainly possible that the intuitions in cases where we avoid building normative considerations into them are going to depend at least somewhat on whether one has psychologistic or anti-psychologistic intuitions. We could readily imagine a psychologistic philosopher claim that she has the intuition that Janie's reason for going to the beach is that she believes that her brother will be jealous if she goes. I think the key thing to take from this is that even if there still is an anti-psychologistic advantage in this test case regarding intuitions, it is certainly not an overwhelming advantage. Moreover, it is not enough of an advantage to discredit psychologism. This is especially the case because if we were to alter the Janie case in such a way that it is false that her brother will be jealous if she goes to the beach, our intuitions now might seem to shift drastically toward Janie's reason being a psychologistic reason. Indeed, this revised Janie case also lacks the normativity of the Jones case above, so it seems that it could well serve as a potential test case.

In further support of this move to explain away the anti-psychologistic intuition of the Jones case, consider cases where it might seem initially intuitive that Joshua's reason is a psychological state. Suppose Joshua goes to the park, and we want to know his reason for going. Joshua claims that he wants to kick his soccer ball around.<sup>94</sup> Intuitively, it seems that his wanting to kick his soccer ball around is his reason for going to the park. Does this mean that we should think that Joshua's reason here is a psychological state? It doesn't seem that we should. Anti-

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<sup>94</sup> Set aside my cognitivist assumption for the purposes of this case.

psychologists can make the same kind of move here against the psychologist as the psychologist does above. She can explain away the intuition by claiming that we are focusing our attention on a motivating feature of Joshua's action, which is not his reason, and this explains why we are quick to form the intuition that Joshua's reason for going to the park is that he wants to kick his soccer ball around. That is, the anti-psychologist can claim that we need to distinguish things that motivate agents from things that are motivating reasons for agents.<sup>95</sup> It is clear that Joshua's desire to kick the soccer ball around motivates him to act, but it does not follow from this that his desire is also a motivating reason for him to act.

The upshot here is that we can have also have psychologistic intuitions about reasons for different cases that are sufficiently like the cousin case above, but this is not strong enough to support the denial of anti-psychologism. Both the psychologist and the anti-psychologist seem to be able to explain away many of the intuitions that challenge their views. Still, there may be some that are too strong to explain away, but the intuition elicited from the Jones case, assuming it is anti-psychologistic, does not appear to be one of them.

It seems thus far that the psychologist is on solid ground in her replies to the cousin argument. However, Alvarez provides further support for her cousin argument against psychologism here by altering the cousin case.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See Alvarez (2010) for a good discussion of this issue.

<sup>96</sup> Again, Alvarez for the most part seems to leave her arguments at an intuitive level. I develop it a bit more and show that this argument does not pose a significant challenge to psychologism.

... Suppose that he had deceived me and he didn't really need the money. Discovering that he had deceived me would be discovering, among other things, that I had been motivated to give him the money by something that was not the case. But what I would discover not to have been the case would be that he needed the money and not that *I believed* he did—for that *was* the case: I did indeed believe he needed it ... So it seems that we can conclude that a motivating reason is, typically, what the agent believes and not his believing it.<sup>97</sup>

We can take Alvarez's case to be defending the claim that Jones' reason for helping his cousin is that his cousin is in financial need, which is premise 2 above. In this new case Jones' cousin deceives him about his financial situation.<sup>98</sup> He is not in financial need after all. Jones would come to discover that his reason for loaning his cousin money is not the case.<sup>99</sup> However, this would not be right if Jones' reason for loaning his cousin money was his believing that my cousin was in financial need. Supposing Jones to have a psychologistic reason in this case, he would not discover that his reason is not the case because the reason is his believing certain things

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<sup>97</sup> Alvarez (2010: 132)

<sup>98</sup> Alvarez (2010: 132). Alvarez ultimately goes on to claim that she does not think that agents act for reasons in error cases. In presenting Alvarez's case, it would therefore be more accurate to say that in these deception-error cases that agents' *apparent* reasons turn out not to be the case. On my view, agents act for (real) reasons in error cases, including the deception cases Alvarez has in mind. I present the case and the argument with the assumption of my view in mind. If this assumption is rejected, then one could easily replace my use of 'reasons' with 'apparent reasons'.

<sup>99</sup> I use Alvarez' terminology here by using the expression 'is the not the case'. This is probably not neutral terminology, but I want to stick close to Alvarez's argument. If the terminology is too biased, then substitute it for whatever neutral terminology seems fit. Perhaps we can say that the reason is in some sense 'wrong'.

about my cousin's financial situation, and his believings are the case.<sup>100</sup> Here's my formulation of the argument:

### **Deceiving Cousin Argument**

4. If Jones' reason for helping his cousin is not the case when his cousin deceives him, then his reason is that his cousin is in financial need, not his believing that his cousin is in financial need.
  5. Jones' reason for helping his deceiving cousin is not the case when his cousin deceives him.
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6. Therefore, Jones' reason for helping his cousin is that he is in financial need, not his believing that his cousin is in financial need.<sup>101</sup>

Psychologists can accept premise 4 because psychological states as agential reasons are always going to be the case when agents act for them. Alvarez's case of the deceiving cousin is supposed to elicit the intuition that Jones' reason is not the case, which supports premise 5. Can the psychologist deny premise 5, though? I think they can, by denying that the intuition in the deceiving cousin case is that Jones' *reason* is not the case. They can claim that it is true that something is not the case in the error case, but it is not Jones' reason. Rather, the propositional content

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<sup>100</sup> Alvarez (2010: 132).

<sup>101</sup> It's important to note that at this point in Alvarez (2010) she has not yet argued that agents do not act for reasons in error cases. Thus, she is not trying to elicit an intuition that psychologists cannot account for agents not acting for reasons in error case here.



of Jones' belief about his cousin is false. So, they could claim that Alvarez is correct to claim that something is not the case in error cases, but she is wrong that what is not the case is the agent's reason.

This psychologistic move seems plausible because it is not clear that the intuition here really favors anti-psychologism. That is, in error cases we have the (correct) intuition that *something* is not the case, but it is not as if the content of the intuition is that the reason is not the case. So long as the psychologist can account for the intuition that something is not the case, her theory is doing fine on this score.

Moreover, even if the intuition of the deceiving cousin case favors anti-psychologism over psychologism (which might be dubious), the overall theoretical benefits of psychologism in dealing with error cases and the psychology problem seem to outweigh the anti-psychologistic intuition here. That is, because psychologistic theories are able to avoid all the major error case problems of anti-psychologism developed in Chapter 2, it would still be preferred, all things being equal, if the intuition in the deceiving cousin case favored anti-psychologism.<sup>102</sup>

I think these psychologistic responses work. It seems right for psychologists to claim that the intuition elicited in deception cases is that what the agent believes is false. On this matter both psychologists and anti-psychologists can agree. But, the psychologist can deny that this agreement does not entail that the intuition is thereby that the agent's reason is not the case. At the very least it is not clear that the intuition elicited is in favor of anti-psychologism. This means that the support

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<sup>102</sup> Of course, I will be arguing that psychologism is false (later in this chapter) and that anti-psychologism can overcome all the challenges that currently still favor psychologism (Chapters 4 and 6).

offered for premise 2 above is dubious at best, and that Alvarez's argument against psychologism here is likewise dubious.

In conclusion to this section, I sense that the arguments Alvarez offers, which I developed further for the sake of clarity, are more like statements of the anti-psychologistic view. Anti-psychologists need to say that Jones' reason for helping his cousin is a fact, say, about his cousin's financial situation; and when Jones is deceived, they need to say that his reason is not the case. But nothing about the cases compels the psychologist to accept that the intuitions are anti-psychologistic. The intuitions Alvarez thinks we have about the cases are certainly not decidedly anti-psychologistic. And even if they were, they would not thereby seem to be sufficiently robust to be decisive against psychologism.

### **3.3 The Normativity Argument**

I would like to consider a version of an argument against psychologism that has been developed in different ways in the literature.<sup>103</sup> I do not think this argument has been developed sufficiently or been considered in enough detail

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<sup>103</sup> Both Dancy (2001: chapter 5) and Alvarez (2010: chapter 1) offer similar arguments as the one offered here. Dancy's argument focuses on the general capability of normative reasons to be the kind of thing, ontologically speaking, to be a motivating reason. Alvarez focuses on motivating reasons also being normative reasons in some contexts, which has the ontological consequence that motivating reasons are not psychological states. Alvarez does not adequately deal with potential psychologistic challenges to the argument. (This is not necessarily a criticism; her project is somewhat different than mine.) On the other hand, Dancy's argument rules out a psychologistic reply that maintains that reasons are to be identified with psychological states and their contents. He does so on the grounds that doing so is "conceptual cookery". I am not sure why the psychologistic philosopher cannot try to develop a theory of reasons that include the contents of psychological states, and Dancy's claim here has not convinced me that they cannot.

regarding how psychologists might respond to it. The argument as I present it begins with the premise that no normative reasons are psychological states. If this is right, then because some normative reasons are motivating reasons, some motivating reasons are not psychological states. The conclusion that psychologism is false follows because it will be false that all reasons are psychological states.

Here is my formulation of the argument:

### **Normativity Argument Against Psychologism**

7. No normative reasons are the psychological states of the agent who acts.
8. Some normative reasons are motivating reasons of the agent who acts.

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9. Therefore, psychologism is false.

### **Premise 7**

Both sides of the psychologism/anti-psychologism debate can agree on premise 7, but they need not do so.<sup>104</sup> Even though one of my targets in this section is someone who can accept premise 7, I say something in defense of premise 7 against those who might disagree with it.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> For example, even Michael Smith (1998), who is a psychologist about motivating reasons, would accept premise 7. Indeed he seems to argue that all normative reasons are facts. I agree with this claim, though I argue for the weaker claim here. Even internalists about normative reasons such as Bernard Williams (1995) can accept premise 7.

<sup>105</sup> See Smith (1998).

Intuitively, many normative reasons, i.e., reasons agents have to  $\Phi$ , good reasons, and even appropriate reasons, are not psychological states. This provides some initial support for the claim that no normative reasons are psychological states. (From here on out I will often refer to normative reasons as ‘good reasons’.) The psychological states (by themselves) of an agent who acts are at least often not good reasons to  $\Phi$  for the agent who acts.<sup>106</sup> The following examples are intended to support this claim. Suppose Francie believes that the teacher is mean. Francie merely believing this does not seem to be a good reason for her to skip class. After all, Francie could be wrong about the teacher. Likewise, Neely’s believing that Sam doesn’t want to hang out is not a good reason for him not to ask Sam to hang out. Again, Neely could be wrong about Sam. Moreover, even in cases when agents’ beliefs are right, intuitively, it is not their believing what they do that makes a reason a good one. Suppose I believe that I will win the lottery, and it turns out true. It does not mean that my believing that I will win the lottery is a good reason for me to purchase a lottery ticket. There are countless examples where beliefs are true but suffice for showing that good reasons are not the psychological states of the agent who acts: Rodney believes that FDR served four terms as president, but merely his believing this does not make it a good reason for him to answer the exam question about the number of terms FDR served as president; Rachel believes that using DeMorgan’s will help her complete the proof, but (even supposing she is right)

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<sup>106</sup> Perhaps psychological have a kind of justificatory dimension in that sometime we mitigate responsibility when we learn the state someone is in. For example, we might think that Simon is less responsible for ignoring his cat’s cries for affection when we learn that he has been struggling with sadness.

merely her believing this does not make it a good reason for her to use it in the final step of the proof. Indeed, in each of the above examples it seems as if the good reasons are what the agents believe, supposing what they believe is true.

There is a straightforward Leibniz's Law type of argument that seems sufficient to motivate the claim that no good reasons are psychological states. Good reasons can be independent of the psychology of the agent who acts. However, psychological states cannot be independent of the psychology of the agent who acts. Therefore, good reasons are not the psychological states of the agent who acts. Support for the claim that good reasons can be independent of the psychology of the agent who acts can be provided by the list of examples provided in the previous paragraph. Other kinds of cases, though, are cases where agents have good reasons to act even though they are unaware of them. For example, we I have a good reason to protect my young child from getting hit by the door, but I have become distracted, and thus unaware, that my child is about to get hit by a door. Or, I am unaware that I have a serious physical health condition. Still, I have a reason to seek medical attention. In these cases, and in many cases just like them, it appears that agents have reasons to  $\Phi$  that are independent of their psychologies.<sup>107</sup>

These examples involving unawareness perhaps most clearly show that the independence of the psychologies of the person who acts from the good reason. But the independence need not be unawareness. In the examples provided two

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<sup>107</sup>The literature on the issue of normative reasons and whether (and how) they relate to agents' psychologies is significant. I cannot take up the issue here. Rather, I hope to settle on claims that are as independent as possible regarding the status of what are called internal reasons. See Setiya & Paakkunainen (2012) for a recent collection of essays on the internalism debate regarding normative reasons.

paragraphs above, even though the reasons were in fact related to the agent's psychology, they were still such that they would have been good reasons even if they hadn't been believed. That FDR served four terms is a good reason to answer the relevant question about FDR's presidency regardless of Rodney's believing it. Similarly, that DeMorgan's will complete the proof is a good reason for Rachel even if she had lacked the belief about DeMorgan's.

Finally, we know that the psychological states of the agent who acts cannot be independent of their psychological states. Thus, I think we have at least a very strong *prima facie* argument in support of premise 7. We can say more though.

If we keep in mind the nature of normative reasons and the connection they have to normativity we will be in an even better position to see that normative reasons are independent of the psychologies of agents who act. Here is an instructive passage by noted psychologist about normative reasons, Michael Smith, regarding normative reasons:

To say that someone has a normative reason to  $\Phi$  is to say that there is some normative requirement that she  $\Phi$ 's, and this to say that her  $\Phi$ -ing is justified from the perspective of the normative system that generates that requirement. As I see it ... normative reasons are thus best thought of as truths: that is, propositions of the general form 'A's  $\Phi$ -ing is desirable or required'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Smith (1998: 95)

Smith helps us keep in mind what a normative reason is. It is a true proposition expressing a reason that specifies a normative requirement or desirability condition from some normative system or other.<sup>109</sup> The system need not be moral. It could be prudential, rational, or some other normative system. As Smith states it, normative reasons do not seem to require relations to agents' psychologies because they are true propositions of the general form 'A's  $\Phi$ -ing is desirable or required'. The account here interprets Smith's general claim as 'A has a reason to  $\Phi$  because  $\Phi$ -ing is desirable for or required of A'. A few examples of normative reasons: Suppose it is required of me that I protect my child from danger to the best of my ability. Then I have a reason to protect my child that is specified in the requirement. Suppose I have a serious health condition. I would have at least a prudential reason to seek medical attention. If I enjoy reading books by a certain author who has just come out with a new book, then it is desirable that I purchase it—I have a reason to purchase the author's new book.

It is perfectly consistent with Smith's account of normative reasons that I have a reason to  $\Phi$  even if I am unaware that I have it. Suppose I am unaware of my serious health condition. In this case, even though I am unaware of the serious health condition, it is at least desirable for me to seek medical attention. The reason I have here might be something like the claim that serious health conditions can lead to qualitatively inferior life expectancies. If I were to come to know that I had the medical condition in an advanced stage, we could readily imagine my making both

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<sup>109</sup> I will assume that normative reasons are true propositions here just because Smith does. If another abstract thing is preferred here, feel free to insert that instead.

of the following claims: “It would have been desirable for me to have sought medical attention before I was aware that I had this condition,” and “It would have been good for me to have sought medical attention before I was aware that I had this condition.” The thought here is that things can be normatively desirable or good for me without my being aware that they are, and insofar as this is possible we seem to be in a position to say that we can therefore have reasons to do things even if we are unaware of the relevant facts for which the latter are reasons.

We need to keep in mind that just because I have a reason to seek medical attention need not mean that I am thereby obligated in any sense to do so. In this case, it is just that it is prudentially desirable that I do seek the attention given the fact that I have a serious medical condition. I am not even prudentially required to seek medical attention as the case has been stated. Since I am completely unaware of my health condition, I cannot be obligated to seek medical care.<sup>110</sup> However, it can still be desirable for me to do so, e.g., that it would be good for my quality of life and me to get the care needed before the condition worsens.

Consider a different kind of case that involves less-pressing interests than the case involving a serious medical condition. Brad is a huge Yankees fan, and they are playing in the World Series tonight. Brad does not have a television of his own, he does not like to go to pubs to watch games, and he does not have the means to pay for mlb.tv’s online access to the World Series. Unbeknownst to Brad, his good friend Thad is having a World Series gathering at his house tonight. Brad is available to go to the gathering, and Thad is going to invite him some time later in the day. It seems

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<sup>110</sup> I am assuming a deontic principle according to which one must be sufficiently aware of one’s obligation for it to be binding.



that Brad has a reason to go to Thad's gathering even though at the time we are considering he is completely unaware of the reason. It would be good (in some sense) for Brad to go to the gathering given his interests as a Yankees fan, and in this sense it is a normative reason for him to go—he has a prudentially desirable reason to go to the gathering.

One way that we can bring out that Brad has reason to go to Thad's despite his unawareness is to consider Vlad.<sup>111</sup> Vlad is also Thad's good friend, but Vlad does not like baseball in the least. He also finds going to World Series parties boring, so he never accepts invitations to attend them. Vlad, just like Brad, does not know that Thad is going to invite him to the gathering later, but it is clear that there being a Yankees World Series game on tonight is no reason at all for Vlad to attend Thad's party, before or after Thad's invitation. In this case both Brad and Vlad are both equally unaware of the gathering. However, it would be false to claim that the gathering thereby equally provides no reason for both Brad and Vlad prior to their knowing about it. Rather, it seems that Brad has a reason to go and that Vlad does not even though both are as of yet unaware of it. Given Brad's interests, it would be desirable for him to attend Thad's World Series party.

Moreover, even the cases of Rodney and Rachel above, if altered slightly, seem to show that the normative reasons are in some sense independent of their psychologies. That is, even if Rodney had a false belief about the number of terms FDR served as president we would think that the fact that FDR served four terms as

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<sup>111</sup> This case is like one by Mark Schroeder (2008: 59) involving Ronnie and Bradley. Unbeknownst to both Ronnie and Bradley there is going to be a dance party hosted by a mutual friend. Ronnie likes to dance, but Bradley dislikes dancing. Schroeder argues that there is a sense that Ronnie but not Bradley has a reason to go the party.

president is a good reason for him to answer a question about the number of terms FDR served as president with the number four. Likewise, even if Rachel falsely thinks she can complete the proof with hypothetical syllogism, she has a good reason to complete it by using DeMorgan's because it, by hypothesis, will complete the proof. Thus, Rodney and Rachel have these good reasons to act, but they are clearly in some sense independent of their psychologies. We think this because even if Rodney and Rachel don't believe the normative reasons, or aren't otherwise aware of them, that the reasons are still normative reasons.

As stated above, psychologists can accept premise 7 as well as the above defense of it. But suppose they were to reject the claim that no normative reasons are psychological. On what grounds could they do this? One way that they could do this is to adopt an internalist theory of normative reasons whereby, roughly, normative reasons, in order to be reasons for an agent to  $\Phi$ , must be related to an agent's psychology.<sup>112</sup>

Cases supporting the existence of necessary connections between normative reasons and agents' psychologies are ones where agents have obligations resulting from the relevant normative system. In these cases agents need to be sufficiently aware of their obligations. If Billy is obligated to look after his friend's dog over the weekend, then Billy must be aware that the obligation is binding, e.g., that he promised his neighbor that he would look after the dog while the neighbor is away.

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<sup>112</sup> See Williams (1980). There is a complicated debate surrounding what internalism is and its consequences for the nature of reasons that I cannot enter into here.

Everyone can agree that in these cases the normative reasons—the obligations—are necessarily related to agents' psychologies.

One initial issue here is to what this necessary connection amounts. One anti-psychologist, Jonathan Dancy, has provided a plausible understanding of this connection. He has argued that we could interpret this internalist constraint on normative reasons merely as a necessary relation between a normative reason and our being motivated by that reason.<sup>113</sup> However, this is a claim that both psychologists and anti-psychologists could accept without countenancing the identity of normative reasons as psychological states. Psychologists need the psychological relation (or the state itself) to be *constitutive* of the normative reason. That is, the normative reason consists, at least in part, of the relation some state of affairs, fact, or content has to the agent's psychology. Only then would it also become a reason for the agent to  $\Phi$ . But more would need to be said for it to be the case that the psychological relations constitute the reasons agents have to  $\Phi$  in obligatory contexts.

While it is no doubt true that some normative reasons have necessary relations to agents' psychologies as in the case of obligations, it is extremely dubious that all such reasons are so related. Indeed, in support of the argument above for the independence of normative reasons from psychologies, we have seen several examples in which agents have reasons to  $\Phi$  but the reasons are not even related to the agents' psychologies. All of these cases seemed to involve reasons the agent had based on desirability conditions, i.e., what the agents would find normatively

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<sup>113</sup> Dancy (2000: chapter 1)

desirable given their interests. Finally, even if it were conceded that normative reasons are necessarily related to psychologies, as some seem to be as in the case of obligation, this would not show that normative reasons are psychological.

A second way in which it might be argued that at least some normative reasons are psychological states is to cite examples where it appears that a normative reason is the psychological state of the agent who acts. For example, it might seem that my (painful) toothache is a reason for me to take the aspirin.<sup>114</sup> Cases like this might initially appear to show that my psychological state—the particular pain I am in—is a normative reason for me (to take the aspirin); however, I contend that the psychological state itself is not the normative reason and that the normative reason here should be understood as, for example, the fact that that I have a toothache, or my being in a state of pain as a result of the toothache.

### **Premise 8**

This premise has it that some good reasons to  $\Phi$  are also reasons for which we  $\Phi$ . If psychologists were to deny premise 8, they would have to claim that no normative reasons are also motivating reasons. This commits them to denying the claim that we act for good reasons, which appears counterintuitive to say the least.<sup>115</sup> Let's consider a case that seems to show that some good reasons are also

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<sup>114</sup> This example is an adaptation of an example given to me by Ben Bradley.

<sup>115</sup> If normative reasons are never also motivating reasons, then it seems to follow that we never act for good reasons.

motivating reasons.<sup>116</sup> Johan is writing a dissertation on the philosophy of emotions at Syracuse University. It turns out that Johan's dissertation advisor Michael Stocker is slated to teach a seminar on the philosophy of emotions next semester. It seems that the fact that Stocker is teaching a seminar on the philosophy of emotions at SU in the fall is at least an initial reason Johan has to sit in on the seminar. Now, it seems perfectly possible that the (supposed) fact about Stocker is not initially a *motivating* reason for Johan to sit in on the former's seminar. For instance, Johan might be unaware of the seminar's offering. Still, it seems to be a *normative* reason for him to take the seminar. It is a reason insofar as it in some sense desirable or good for Johan to sit in on it. Now it seems that we could easily alter the case just a bit. Suppose Johan becomes aware of the seminar offering and decides to sit in on it. It seems perfectly possible that the normative reason Johan had to sit in on the seminar became his motivating reason once he became aware of it and acted for it. If this is right, and it seems to be, some normative reasons are motivating reasons. It is important to note that this case highlights something that we take to be quite commonplace, namely, that Johan simply acted for a good reason. The case is intended to provide an example of an action that we see performed regularly in everyday life.

The Johan case seems to cohere with standard anti-psychologistic theories of reasons because the ontology of reasons is uniform across contexts. That is, if normative reasons are facts, then in some contexts facts are normative reasons and in motivating contexts these very same facts are motivating reasons. According to

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<sup>116</sup> The case will show the possibility of acting for good reasons, but because of its everydayness I will take it to also show that we *actually* act for good reasons.

the anti-psychologist, the Johan case and the following cases seem perfectly commonplace: suppose Della's unaware of the upcoming shift toward colder weather, and her son calls her to tell her that she has a reason to cover the tomato plants. The normative reason given to Della in this case is that tomato plants cannot survive very cold weather. Suppose now, in a motivating context, Della is seen out in her garden covering the tomato plants, and then later she is asked the reason for which she covered them. Suppose further that it is her curious, explanation-seeking son that asks her for her reason. And suppose yet again that she responds by telling him: "Son, my reason for covering the tomato plants is that tomato plants can't survive the very cold weather." The conclusion here is that it seems intuitive that the very same reason Della offered her son for covering the tomato plants could have been a normative (good) reason for her to do so. The context changed, but the reason did not.

Some anti-psychologists argue as if there is a stock of reasons (facts, say) and whether the reason is normative or motivating or both depends merely on the context of its use, as seen just above in the Della case.<sup>117</sup> Others argue that what matters is that normative and motivating reasons be the same kind of things such that, generally, the context of use determines whether the reason is normative or motivating or both.<sup>118</sup> Regardless of which view is right, if indeed one of these is, we can consider the Johan case in light of a more generic anti-psychologism. In that case, Johan has a reason to sit in on Stocker's seminar prior to it becoming a reason for him to sit in on the seminar. And once he becomes aware of the reason, it then

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<sup>117</sup> Alvarez (2010)

<sup>118</sup> Dancy (2000)

becomes a motivating reason—it became his reason for sitting in on Stocker’s seminar. The typical anti-psychologist maintains that the reason is the same in both cases. Supposing facts just are true propositions, then, Johan’s reason to sit in on Stocker’s seminar is the true proposition that Stocker is teaching a seminar on the philosophy of emotions at SU. And, this very same reason is Johan’s reason for sitting in on the seminar.

It should be kept in mind that it is intuitively plausible that good reasons are often the reasons for which we act. Indeed, the intuitive plausibility of the Johan case can be explained, in part, by the fact that we take ourselves sometimes to perform actions just like Johan’s. We have a normative reason to do something, and then we act on that very same reason; that is, we sometimes act for good reasons that are not psychological states.

However, psychologists might be able to reject premise 8 while providing some account of what it means to act for good reasons. That is, they might be able to deny that such normative reasons are reasons for which we act, yet find a way to countenance the claim that we can act for good reasons. That is, the psychologist might provide a psychologistic analysis of what it means to act for a normative reason. The analysis might go as follows: An agent S acts for a normative reason N just in case S acts for reason M, where M is a psychological state and N is the content of M.<sup>119</sup> Accordingly, Johan acts for a normative reason just in case he acts for the reason that he believes that Stocker is teaching a seminar on the philosophy of

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<sup>119</sup> This is what Dancy seems to reject in the psychologist’s account. He claims that normative reasons cannot be propositional contents because the latter are “too thin and insubstantial”. Accordingly, normative reasons are states of affairs. I discuss this issue more in Chapter 5.

emotions at SU in the fall, and the content of Johan's psychological state is the normative content that Stocker is teaching a seminar on the philosophy of emotions at SU in the fall.

It is important to keep in mind that, according to the psychologistic analysis, the reason Johan acts for is his psychological state, but the content of the state is identical to the good reason the agent has to act. Thus, the normative reason is not the reason for which we act, but it has a role in the economy of action nonetheless. It provides whatever role the content of psychological states have in action. And when the content is true, in normative circumstances, the content has a role such that the psychologist can claim that good reasons are our reasons for acting. Therefore, premise 8 can therefore be denied, but some sense of acting for good reasons can be accounted for nonetheless.

There are three problems with this psychologistic analysis. The first problem is that it does not seem to capture what it is to act for a good reason. According to their analysis agents are said to act for good reasons when the content of the agent's psychological state is a normative reason. But why should we accept this analysis? It doesn't seem to capture what it is to act for a good reason. As the Johan case elicits, he acts for the good reason itself not for a motivating reason, which has as its content a normative reason. The problem here is really that the normative reason is not at all acted for in the case; the psychological state is what is acted for.

Additionally, the analysis seems to fail in the other ordinary cases discussed above. For example, when Rachel believes that applying DeMorgan's to the last step of the proof will complete it, according to psychologists she acts for the



psychological state of believing what she does. Now, according to their analysis Rachel acts for the normative reason here because it is the content of her psychological state. But we thought that, according to the psychologistic theory, she acted for her believing what she does about DeMorgan's and the proof, not for the content of what she believes about DeMorgan's and the proof.

The psychologist might reply to this first problem by claiming that they have provided an *analysis* of agents' acting for good reasons on psychologistic grounds. Thus, this first challenge here to their analysis is claimed to be unfair. This charge of unfairness is not convincing. The problem with the analysis is that it does not capture an agent acting *for* a good reason, and this is because according to psychologistic theories agents can only act for reasons when they are psychological states. Moreover, it does not seem right that they can simply help themselves to the claim that agents act for good reasons when good reasons are contents of agents' motivating reasons. How are they acting for good reasons in virtue of their psychological states having certain contents? After all, psychologists claim that agents act for the state of believing what they do, not for what they believe. Thus, it seems misleading for psychologistic theories to claim that agents can act for good reasons. Perhaps the core of this first problem is that the analysis has the appearance of being *ad hoc*.

We see a second problem by considering a consequence of the analysis. It follows from the psychologistic analysis that every time an agent acts for a good reason there are two reasons present. There is the normative reason, which serves as the content of the agent's psychological state. There is also a new reason that

forms once the normative reason becomes the content of the agent's psychological state. This new reason is the motivating reason. The problem here is that psychologism has to posit two reasons instead of one when an agent acts for a good reason. Intuitively, when Johan acts for a good reason there is only one reason present. Thus, this seems to be another cost, which may not be too significant, but it is a cost nonetheless.

Suppose the psychologist attempts escaping this consequence that two reasons are present every time an agent acts for a good reason. The psychologist could try to claim that when the motivating reason forms as a result of the normative reason's psychological relation to an agent's psychology that the normative reason is no longer a reason. Accordingly, it is argued, that there really are not two reasons every time an agent acts for a good reason, and there are no reasons that have other reasons as contents. The problem, however, is making sense of a normative reason losing its ontological status as a reason. In particular, how could a normative reason fail to be a reason merely in virtue of coming to have an extrinsic relation to an agent's psychology?

The issue here is not whether things can undergo a change in virtue of their extrinsic relations. Of course they can. Moreover, the issue is also not that things cannot be what they are in virtue of extrinsic relations. Money is a good example of the latter. Rather, the issue here is how a normative reason loses its status as a reason when it comes to be believed by an agent. One might argue that we already think that whether or not something is a reason depends on its relation to agents, including their psychologies. After all, the argument goes, we recall that going to

Thad's gathering, which involved watching the World Series featuring the Yankees was a normative reason for Brad but not for Vlad.<sup>120</sup> It is concluded from this that normative reasons are reasons for some and not reasons for others, and it is in virtue of the extrinsic relations to Brad and Vlad whether or not the reason is a reason at all.

This argument fails. It is not the case that the normative reason in the case described is a reason in virtue of its extrinsic relations (to Brad) though not a reason in virtue of its lacking extrinsic relations (to Vlad). What is true is that the reason is not a reason *for* Vlad even though it is a reason *for* Brad. But this is consistent with the reason in question remaining a reason even if it is not a reason for Vlad. Indeed, even Vlad can identify it as a reason. It is simply not a reason for him to go to Thad's gathering. Therefore, it is invalid to argue from the premise that some reasons are reasons for some to  $\Phi$  but not for others to the conclusion that the things that are not reasons for others to  $\Phi$  are not thereby reasons. It is one thing for a reason to be a reason for some but not others and quite another thing for something to be a reason *at all* in relation to some and not a reason *at all* in relation to others. Thus, those who claim that extrinsic relations determine a reason's status as a reason need a different argument than the one offered so far.

The psychologist might reply here claiming that normative reasons just are reasons that stand in relation to agents' psychologies. That is, there are no such things as normative reasons *simpliciter*. Normative reasons, they might argue, are

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<sup>120</sup> The use of the 'reason for' in this case specifies a normative reason just as the case above (Section 3.2) specifies.

all reasons for an agent to  $\Phi$ , or reasons an agent has to  $\Phi$ , so that normative reasons require relations to agents in order to be reasons at all. One response to this is that some normative reasons seem to hold universally for agents so that the relation to agents is superfluous. Examples of these might include certain moral reasons. Some moral reasons might be reasons for everyone, so it would seem true to say that some moral reasons are true *simpliciter*. The psychologist could counter-reply by claiming that these moral cases are the exceptions to the rule. There are countless other normative reasons that seem only to be reasons insofar as they are reasons for someone. There is some intuitive pull to this counter-reply.

Accordingly, let's assume for argument's sake that the psychologist is right about normative reasons. Perhaps the relevant normative reasons are only the ones that are extrinsically related to agents. That is, a normative reason will be a reason R for agent S to  $\Phi$  only if R has an extrinsic relation to S. What now seems problematic is that psychologists need to claim that a normative reason typically *becomes* a reason for someone when it is extrinsically related to him. Why, then, in cases of acting for normative reasons, on the psychologistic defense we are considering here, is it the case that the normative reason loses its status as a reason for the agent to  $\Phi$  when he comes to believe it and that belief is his reason for  $\Phi$ -ing? Shouldn't the normative reason itself become a reason for him to  $\Phi$  in this case?

Recall the dialectic here. Psychologists are attempting to defend the claim that when normative reasons are the things for which agents act for they lose their status as reasons. The defense we are considering here on their behalf is that whether or not something is a reason depends on its extrinsic relations to agents;

thus it is not a problem, as was claimed by the anti-psychologistic objection here, for things to gain or lose their status as reasons. The anti-psychologistic counter-objection here is that even if the latter claim is true, it has the odd consequence that something can lose its status as a reason in virtue of an extrinsic relation to an agent. In this case the extrinsic relation is the relation the normative reason has to an agent such that the agent believes it and decides to act for it. The psychologistic claim here is that this extrinsic relation is what makes the normative reason no longer a reason. Indeed, what would be even more peculiar is that normative reasons could come to be believed by S and remain normative reasons, but once they become the reasons for which S  $\Phi$ 's, they lose their status as reasons. This shows further that a normative reason can gain extrinsic relations—this time to an agent's psychology via belief—and remain a normative reason. The psychologist, though, claims that once a normative reason is that for which an agent acts, it loses its status as a reason. This would be odd indeed. And this oddness seems to be the result of their being no independent or principled reason for thinking that a normative reason can lose its status as a reason in virtue of being acted for.

The issues that confront us here can be put more concretely. Suppose Thad invites Brad to the World Series gathering, and Brad accepts and then goes to the party. Normally, we assume that Brad acts for the normative reason that his friend is hosting a gathering to watch the Yankees in the World Series. However, we have been trying to accommodate the psychologist's continued efforts to account for acting for a good reason while avoiding the objection that there are two reasons present each time an agent acts for a good reason. By doing so, we consider

whether the normative reason can lose its status as a reason once Brad acts for the psychological state that has it as its content. The difficulty this poses for the psychologist is this: what could it be about becoming the belief that Brad acts for that could possibly make a normative reason no longer a reason at all? It appears that it should be the case that Brad's reason to go to Thad's gathering becomes a reason once it is related to his interests in the appropriate way. But, if the psychologistic line considered here is right, once Brad comes to act on the belief that has the content of the normative reason, the normative reason is no longer a reason at all. We want to know why this happened. After all, the normative reason gained an extrinsic relation to Brad. It was related to his interests, and to his psychology prior to his coming to act for it. It would seem to have thereby remained a reason for him to go to Thad's gathering even after Brad came to act for it. To claim otherwise seems to be another *ad hoc* move to salvage a theory. I think the effort here to avoid the claim that there are two reasons present in the Johan case fails.

There is a third problem with the psychologistic analysis. This cost is probably the most serious and is related to issues concerning theoretical unity and simplicity. In particular, the psychologistic analysis entails a theory of reasons that is less unified than a theory maintaining that reasons are one kind of thing. By claiming that motivating reasons are psychological states and normative reasons are not, they have a disjunctive theory of reasons. Thus, the problem of two reasons discussed above is really a consequence of a bigger problem. The analysis has to maintain that there are two reasons present every time an agent acts for good

reasons because the psychologistic analysis is itself a consequence of a disjunctivist theory of reasons.

A more unified theory of reasons will be able to avoid disjunctivism. The Johan case gives us reason to think that we should aim for a theory of motivating reasons in which motivating reasons and normative reasons are the same kind of thing. As theorists we seek to develop theories that are more unified and therefore less disjunctive. We assume that it is a virtue of theories that they unify the phenomena in question as much as possible. And we assume this because the theories then have the property of being theoretically simple. Here I assume the same with respect to reasons. A more unified, simple theory of reasons is to be preferred. Thus, the problem with the psychologistic analysis is that it presupposes a disjunctive theory of reasons from the start. I think it is better to avoid disjunctive theories unless it is impossible.

Of course, an anti-disjunctive theory of reasons has not been developed here. We are still unsure whether such a theory can succeed, so it may be that psychologism has as unified a theory of reasons as possible. What we need to decide this is a complete anti-disjunctivist anti-psychologistic theory of reasons. I take this up in Chapters 4-6 below and will return to this issue then to decide it. The Johan cases, and cases just like it, provide us with what appears to be a clear case where an agent's reason for acting is also his normative reason to act, and his normative reason is not a psychological state. Thus, in Chapters 4-6 I seek to develop that unified theory of reasons that begins with the Johan intuition.

There is still the first serious cost against the analysis. It does not seem to get right what it is to act for good reasons. This, in conjunction with the disjunctivist worry here, should suffice for now as objections to the psychologistic analysis of acting for good reasons. Again, we will come back to this second objection at the end of Chapter 6.

### **Back to Premise 7**

I come back to premise 7 briefly in order to consider another possible psychologistic objection to it in light of the problems just seen with denying premise 8. Suppose the psychologist insists that when we act for good reasons our good reasons become psychological states. Psychologists might claim that the normative reasons are psychological states when they become motivating reasons. Thus, they hope to be able to preserve the truth of premise 8 that sometimes we act for good reasons.

This response is deeply problematic as can be seen by thinking carefully about the Johan case. Johan seemed to have a normative reason to attend Stocker's seminar prior to its becoming a motivating reason for him. As we saw in our defense of premise 7 above, normative reasons seem to be truths having independent existence from agents' psychologies. Psychologists wish to maintain here that these truths become psychological states when they are also the reasons for which we act. If this psychologistic move were correct, then when Johan acted for the reason he did, his reason would have ontologically transformed from a true proposition into a motivating reason consisting of a psychological state. That is, the



motivating reason Johan has to sit in on Stocker's seminar becomes a psychological state. And this is supposed to be true even though Johan already had a normative reason—something non-psychological—to sit in on Stocker's seminar. The normative reason would seem to have to undergo a transformation of ontological kind, which would be incredible. In order to see why this transformation involves a transformation of ontological kind we would do well to say what ontological kinds are.

An ontological kind is an ontological category. For example, some claim that the most fundamental (most general) ontological category is being. Moreover, they claim that being divides into universal and particular things as the second most fundamental kinds of things. Still further, some claim that universal things are abstract things, and that particular things are concrete things. Among the abstract things might belong such things as propositions, properties, relations, facts, states of affairs. Among the concrete things there might belong organisms, tropes, minds, and psychological states. It is important to note that these are simply examples of what might fall under the categories. As could be imagined, ontologists differ on how to carve up the categories. Nevertheless, the basic idea to get from this is that psychological states, whatever kind they belong to, seem to be different in kind from propositions, states of affairs, etc. The key most notably involves the fact that psychological states are concrete things, whereas true propositions are abstract things.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Recall (Chapter 2) that psychologists think that motivating reasons themselves have causal powers, which motivate agents to act. This is why the psychological

It seems incredible, then, that the motivating reason would come to be something ontologically different than what it was before it was a motivating reason. This seems incredible because nothing seems able to transform ontologically from abstract things to concrete things. If normative reasons are abstract objects, and psychological states are concrete objects, then in order for normative reasons to become motivating reasons, abstract objects would have to transform ontologically into concrete objects. Thus, given that we have seen strong arguments for the conclusion that normative reasons are psychology-independent truths, we also see that if psychologists wish to deny premise 7 by claiming that normative reasons become psychological states, they are committed to an incredible ontological claim: normative reasons as abstract things become psychological states, which are concrete things. This move is therefore implausible.

Before moving on, it is important to note that this move is implausible because of the severe ontological costs it incurs. In accordance with the Normativity Argument it is true that normative reasons *become* motivating reasons. We saw this exemplified in the Johan case. It is just that this becoming does not require any ontological transformation whatsoever. Anti-psychologists who claim that all reasons are true propositions have no problem explaining, at a general level, how it is that a normative reason as a true proposition becomes a motivating reason, and this is because normative and motivating reasons are of the same ontological kind.

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states psychologists are interested in are to be understood as concrete instances and not abstract types.

## **Conclusion & More Anti-Disjunctivism**

The conclusion follows from the premises because psychologism is the thesis that all motivating reasons are psychological states. Since some motivating reasons are not psychological states in virtue of being normative reasons, then psychologism is false. However, this does not show that anti-psychologism, as I define it, is therefore true. I explain.

I define anti-psychologism as the thesis that no motivating reasons are psychological states. This means that the argument against psychologism above is consistent with a theory of motivating reasons whereby some reasons are psychological states and others are not psychological states. This theory of motivating reasons would be disjunctive. One way this disjunctivist view could go, in rough outline, is that motivating reasons are, for example, true propositions when agents  $\Phi$  on the basis of true beliefs, and in error cases motivating reasons are psychological states.<sup>122</sup>

I think disjunctivist theories of motivating reasons are to be avoided for considerations already stated. The disjunctivism is exclusive to the level of motivating reasons here, but it counts just the same against a theory of reasons. If disjunctivism regarding motivating reasons is true, then the theory of motivating reasons is less unified than a theory of reasons where reasons are all of the same kind. If these considerations are right, then anti-psychologism is to be seen as the correct theory of motivating reasons.

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<sup>122</sup> See Jennifer Hornsby (2007) for a disjunctivist account of motivating reasons. Of course, her view is much more refined than the view I merely sketched here.

Still, I need to argue that anti-psychologism can overcome the challenges we presented against it in Chapter 2 before we can proceed with confidence in anti-psychologism as the correct theory of motivating reasons.

### **3.4 Conclusion to Chapter 3**

Given the strength of the normativity argument above against psychologism, and the strength of the theoretical unity objections against all manner of theoretical disjunctivisms, it seems worthwhile to re-examine anti-psychologism with an eye toward seeking solutions to the problems haunting it. In Chapter 4, the goal is to see if anti-psychologism has the resources to prevail as the theory of motivating reasons. To anticipate, we will develop the beginnings of a tenable version of anti-psychologism.

## Chapter 4

### The Ontology of Motivating Reasons A Propositionalist Theory of Reasons

#### **4.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I show that anti-psychologism has the resources to resolve the outstanding problems if motivating reasons are understood as propositions.<sup>123</sup> Call this view *Propositional Anti-Psychologism* [*Propositionalism* for short]. According to propositionalism the truth-value of the proposition is not relevant to whether it is a reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. The consequences of this view are that in non-error cases the propositions will be true; however, in error cases they will be false. According to the latter claim, an agent's reason for acting can be a false proposition. This might seem problematic, but once a proper examination and reconsidering of the nature of reason-explanation has taken place, we see that the problems regarding error cases dissolve. This is because the primary obstacles to anti-psychologism are related to standard anti-psychologistic accounts of reason-explanation.

The plan for this chapter is as follows. In Section 4.1 I briefly set up how propositionalism will be needed to resolve the problems with anti-psychologism discussed in Chapter 2. Then in section 4.2 I examine current anti-psychologistic assumptions regarding the nature of reason-explanation with an eye to showing how they are wrong. Next, In Section 4.3 I will develop a theory of reason-

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<sup>123</sup> Another route to try is whether motivating reasons are states of affairs. It might turn out that both propositions and states of affairs are able to do the theoretical work needed for anti-psychologism.

explanations, which when combined with propositionalism will put us in a position to avoid the serious challenges to anti-psychologism.

Then in Section 4.4 I show how anti-psychologists can improve upon Dancy's account of what the necessary connection is between motivating reasons and agents' psychologies in order to explain B. B, we recall, is the claim that if an agent  $\Phi$ 's for reason R, then necessarily, R is related to an agent's psychology. The psychology problem will be shown to have an anti-psychologistic solution.

#### **4.1 Propositional Anti-Psychologism, Reason-Explanation, and Error Cases**

If motivating reasons are propositions, then even in error cases agents have reasons for their actions. This would mean that we would have a solution to the no-reason problem, which is the problem of accounting for how agents act for reasons in error cases given the truth of anti-psychologism. This would be significant because when we examined Alvarez's view in Chapter 2 denying that agents act for reasons in error cases, we saw that it clashed with our intuitions that agents do act for reasons in error cases. Recall the Terrie case from Chapter 2. When she waters her neighbor's lawn for a reason based on a false belief, it seemed that she nonetheless acted for a reason. We also saw that because of this Alvarez's view failed to account properly for a significant dimension of rationalization concerned with the reasons to which agents were sensitive when they act. In particular, it seems that referencing the reason for which agents act is central to the rationalization of actions. We called this 'reason-sensitive rationalization', and the problem here related to it the 'rationalization problem'. It will be shown that if

motivating reasons are propositions, and if the theory of reason-explanation developed here is right, then the no-reason and rationalization problems can be solved.<sup>124</sup>

In order, though, for propositionalism to be used to solve the no-reason and rationalization error case problems for anti-psychologism it must first resolve two other related error case problems. The first problem has it that if agents  $\Phi$  for false reasons, then their  $\Phi$ -ing would be explained by something false. This conflicts with a standard view of reason-explanation. According to this problem, reason-explanations seem unable to be factive because the latter typically involve reference to an agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. That is, if an agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing were a false proposition, then the explanation for  $\Phi$ -ing would seem to have a false explanans. For example, in considering the Terrie case again, it appears that Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is the false claim that her neighbor is not watering it. Thus, when we provide a typical reason-explanation we state that Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is that he is not watering it. However, the explanans of this explanation is that he is not watering it. Now, if a false reason were able to explain Terrie's action, then it would appear that reason-explanations are non-factive.

The second problem here is the paradox problem that results from claiming that agential reasons can be false propositions. If this were the case, then it would

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<sup>124</sup> As will be developed in this section, Constantine Sandis rejects the claim that reasons explain action. Nevertheless, I think there is a way to preserve that reasons still have an explanatory role in reason-explanations despite the fact that it is primarily the agent's belief that explains her action.

seem to result in paradox because Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn could be the false reason that he is not watering it when it turns out that he is. We would end up with the following paradoxical claim: Terrie watering her neighbor's lawn because<sub>R</sub> he did not water it, but he is watering it. In Chapter 2 we saw that considerations like these, in part, led some anti-psychologists, e.g., Alvarez, to the conclusion that we do not act for reasons when doing so on the basis of false beliefs. We also saw in Chapter 2 that Dancy was willing to accept that reason-explanations are non-factive and the results that follow from their non-factivity. I think it best to avoid Dancy's move. Thus, in order to solve the no-reason and rationalization problems we need to solve the factivity and paradox problems. Propositionalism countenances that motivating reasons can be false propositions, but unless we can show that reason-explanations can avoid the factivity and paradox problems, we do not have good enough reason to accept it.

In order to resolve the factivity and paradox problems we will need to examine and ultimately rethink the nature of reason-explanations.<sup>125</sup> In what immediately follows, I examine the standard understanding of reason-explanations, which will uncover assumptions about them that by and large have been taken for granted. It will be shown how these assumptions have led to the factivity and paradox problems, which have in turn led to the no-reason and rationalization problems for anti-psychologism. If it can be shown that anti-psychologistic reason-explanations are factive and do not lead to paradox, then we will have provided support for the propositionalist claims that we act for reasons in error cases, which

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<sup>125</sup> I will show that solving the factivity problem leads to the solution of the paradox problem.



in turn provides support for the claim that actions in error cases can be rationalized in a reason-sensitive manner.

In the account of reason-explanation developed below I argue that their structure must feature agential reasons in light of their relations to agents. That is, unless the explanantia of reason-explanations capture the manner in which the reason is related to agents, it has not adequately explained an agents' actions. This is because agents act for reasons, and for reasons to be reasons for acting, the reason must be related to agents. To anticipate, the relationship will be a psychological one—agents must be properly related psychologically to their reasons in order to act for them. Indeed, it will be argued that psychological relations are an essential part of what it is to act for reasons. It will also be shown how this form of explanation need not commit one to a psychologistic account of motivating reasons. Reason-explanations need only *feature* agents' reasons for acting in order to be the relevant kind of reason-explanations. However, in order to explain agents' actions in light of their reasons, reason-explanations must do more than cite agential reasons. This is because reasons, by themselves, and contrary to common philosophical opinion, do not explain action.

#### **4.2 Reason-explanation as Action-explanation**

Reason-explanations are forms of action-explanation. The goal of reason-explanation is to explain an agent's behavior in light of the reasons for which she behaves. Generally speaking, when agents behave in light of reasons that we say

that they have *acted* or have exercised their agency.<sup>126</sup> Here are a few standard examples that express reason-explanations as they are found in the literature, and as we might typically use them:<sup>127</sup>

**A. S's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing is that  $p$ .**

**B. S  $\Phi$ -ed for the reason that  $p$ .**

**C. S  $\Phi$ -ed because<sub>R</sub>  $p$**

A-C are typically understood to express anti-psychologistic reason-explanations.<sup>128</sup> They cite only the content of what S believes as S's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. The common explanation forms A and B appear to express explananda consisting of a call for S's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing which makes S's reason the explanantia of A and B. C has the same explananda, except that it is implicit in the 'because' connective, which is to be understood as the 'because' of providing an agential reason. Here is a common assumption of the explananda expressed by A-C:

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<sup>126</sup> This is consistent with some actions (of human agents) not being performed in light of reasons. Indeed, it seems that some actions are done, literally, for no reason at all, as when, for example, someone whistles while walking or gestures while speaking.

<sup>127</sup> Not included in the examples here are teleological explanations like 'S  $\Phi$ -ed in order to  $\Psi$ '. As will be argued in Chapter 6, teleological explanations are not, strictly speaking, reason-explanations. Nevertheless, they are an important kind of rational explanation that can accordingly be used to explain agential behavior.

<sup>128</sup> I assume that the results from Chapter 3 are successful and thus focus here only on anti-psychologistic forms of reason-explanation.

**Explanandum reason-only thesis: the explanandum of a reason-explanation calls only for agential reasons.<sup>129</sup>**

Moreover, the explanantia expressed by A-C typically are just S's reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing. Call this view regarding the nature of reason-explanation explanans the *explanans reason-only thesis*:

**Explanans reason-only thesis: the explanans of reason-explanation is only the agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing.**

The reason-only theses are by and large taken for granted by anti-psychologists.<sup>130</sup> (From here I mainly set aside the explanandum reason-only thesis and take up the explanans reason-only thesis. It is the latter that will have primary relevance to the discussion that follows.) Anti-psychologists by and large have assumed that the explanantia of reason-explanations are merely agential reasons. On my account, such reason statements are not explanations at all; rather, they are reason-citations. By 'reason-citation' I mean simply that the agential reason exclusively fills the role of the explanans of standard reason-explanation. Of course, in each of the explanans of forms A-C we see either explicitly or implicitly that S's reason *for*  $\Phi$ -ing is what the explanans will need to provide. However, anti-psychologists typically assume that reasons only are the explanantia of reason-explanations.

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<sup>129</sup> I leave the notion of the explanandum 'calling for' agential reasons intuitive here.

<sup>130</sup> See Dancy (2000), Stout (2009), Alvarez (2010). Notable exceptions include Wayne Davis (2003) and Constantine Sandis (forthcoming ms), both of whom seem to reject the explanans reason-only thesis.

Putting the standard view of the forms of reason-explanation, including the reason-only theses, to use in a concrete example, consider the Terrie case. Terrie waters her neighbor's lawn. Her reason for doing so is that her neighbor failed to water it.<sup>131</sup> Accordingly, consider explanation form A with the Terrie case as its content:

**A<sub>T</sub>: The reason for which Terrie watered her neighbor's lawn is that her neighbor had not watered it.**

If the standard view of reason-explanation is correct, and the reason-only thesis is true, then the explanandum calls only for the reason for which Terrie watered her neighbor's lawn, and the explanans is only Terrie's reason that her neighbor had not watered it. The same appears to hold for forms B and C when we apply the Terrie case to them:

**B<sub>T</sub>: Terrie watered her neighbor's lawn for the reason that her neighbor had not watered it.**

**C<sub>T</sub>: Terrie watered her neighbor's lawn because<sub>R</sub> her neighbor had not watered it.**

I contend that adherence to the explanans reason-only thesis contributes significantly to the factivity problem for error cases. It does so because even in

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<sup>131</sup> I consider only standard anti-psychologistic reason-explanation forms in what follows because my ultimate goal is to provide a satisfactory account of an anti-psychologistic theory of reason-explanation.

error cases what is supposed to explain an agent's action is her reason, so when Terrie's cited reason is false, the result is a false explanans. The explanans reason-only thesis has it that Terrie's reason, and nothing else, explains her action, and so the explanation of her action in error cases is false.

The goal here is to improve upon the anti-psychologistic theories of reason-explanation by Maria Alvarez<sup>132</sup> and Jonathan Dancy<sup>133</sup>. According to the former, we do not act for reasons in error cases, and according to the latter we act for reasons in error cases, but reason-explanations are non-factive and thus lead to paradox.

My view is closest to that of Constantine Sandis' theory of reason-explanation. His approach to the factivity problem is to accept the factivity of reason-explanation but to deny that agential reasons explain their actions. He writes:

None of this [the denial that agential reasons explain] is to say that agential reasons may not *feature* in action explanations (regardless of the truth of our beliefs), but only that their role within them is not that of explanans.<sup>134</sup>

By denying that agential reasons explain actions Sandis is able to resolve the factivity problem. By claiming that reason-explanations do not have reasons as their explanantia, Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn, namely, that her

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<sup>132</sup> Alvarez (2010)—see also Chapter 2 for more on her theory of reason-explanation.

<sup>133</sup> Dancy (2000) and (2009)—see also Chapter 2 for more on his theory of reason-explanation.

<sup>134</sup> Sandis (forthcoming: 5-6)

neighbor had not watered it, does not explain Terrie's watering the lawn. What, then, explains Terrie's action if not her reason for doing what she does? According to Sandis' view, typical anti-psychologistic reason-explanations provide just the agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing, but they conventionally imply more:

When we explain actions by *citing* one or more agential reasons, thereby implying strictly that (a) the agent took  $p$  and/or  $q$  to count in favor of her action and (b) acted accordingly.<sup>135</sup>

According to Sandis, a typical anti-psychologistic reason-explanation is more than the citation of a reason.<sup>136</sup> In addition what is said is that the agent believed the reason to count in favor of  $\Phi$ -ing, and then acted on this reason.<sup>137</sup> Thus when we explain Terrie's watering her neighbor's lawn by claiming that her neighbor had not, we are also claiming that Terrie took it that her neighbor's not watering the lawn counted in favor of watering his lawn, and that she acted on that very consideration.

Sandis' full account of reason-explanation preserves their factivity because even in error cases Terrie's believing that her neighbor had not watered his lawn when he had will be part of the reason-explanation offered. It would have to in order to for her reason to count in favor of her watering the lawn. This will be true

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<sup>135</sup> Sandis (forthcoming: 11)

<sup>136</sup> I say more about the distinction between a reason-citation and a reason-explanation below in Section 4.1.2.

<sup>137</sup> Sandis appears to be endorsing a theory of the guise of the good as it pertains to reasons. This thesis has it that agential reasons appear to agents in such a way as to count in favor of the particular  $\Phi$ -ing they have in mind. I do not wish to endorse this theory here. Rather, as will be seen, I wish only to endorse the claim that agents typically take (or believe) the reason to be the case.

even if the anti-psychologistic reason-explanation merely cites Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn. Additionally, because Sandis' view solves the factivity problem it also solves the paradox problem. If reason-explanations have true explanantia, then it follows that they will not fall prey to the kind of paradoxes that arise in non-factive contexts.

Sandis seems to reject two common assumptions regarding reason-explanations. He appears to deny the explanans reason-only thesis and that agential reasons explain action. It might be thought that denying that agential reasons explain actions is a huge cost to Sandis' theory of reason-explanations. This appears to imply that action explanation does not properly rationalize agential behavior, even in non-error cases. That is, if reasons do not explain, how are we to rationalize behavior in the reason-sensitive manner we are interested in? This is a new problem. Call it the *general reason-sensitive rationalization problem*.<sup>138</sup>

It would be ideal to develop a theory that encompassed the virtues of each of the above anti-psychologistic reason-explanations. This theory would accommodate the factivity of reason-explanation while providing for an explanatory role for reasons in such explanations. In making such accommodations we would solve the factivity problem, the no-reason problem, and the general rationalization problem. All that would be remaining would be to solve the paradox problem and the reason-sensitive rationalization problem. In Section 4.3 I develop an anti-

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<sup>138</sup> Sandis' theory of reason-explanation has the theoretical tools to deal with this problem, but he does not make them explicit. One of my contributions to a new manner of thinking about reason-explanations, in the spirit of Sandis' theory, is to show how reasons have an explanatory role in reason-explanation despite not featuring as explanantia.

psychologistic theory that can accommodate these virtues and solve each of these problems by developing an anti-psychologistic theory of reason-explanation.

### **4.3 The Contextualization Theory of Reason-Explanation**

The view of reason-explanation to be developed here begins with the rejection of the explanans reason-only thesis as it is typically understood. In particular, and on my view, explanantia say at least that the agent believes the reason in question, and that she acted for it.<sup>139</sup> In this section I am going to provide an explicit account of anti-psychologistic reason-explanation that distinguishes reason-explanations from what I call ‘reason-citations’. Then I reconsider error-cases again in light of the theory of reason-explanation developed here. Finally, I show how the account here can preserve all of the virtues of a good theory of reason-explanation. This will involve showing how agential reasons can be said to have an explanatory role in anti-psychologistic reason-explanations without countenancing the further claim that agential reasons thereby *explain* actions.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> I revise Sandis’ first condition above, which claims that reason-explanations assume that agents take their reason to count in favor of doing what they set out to do. I do not want to take a stand on whether agential reasons are such that agents always see them as favoring their courses of action. There is a substantial debate about this issue. What seems uncontroversial is that there is a psychological relation holding between agents and their reasons. For simplicity’s sake I assume that this relation is typically the belief relation.

<sup>140</sup> I take my theory here to be complementary to Sandis’. We do not seem to agree on the nature of agential reasons. I do not know whether he would agree with my account of reasons and explanation that follows below. Nor do I know whether he would agree with my account of where anti-psychologists have gone wrong in thinking about reason-explanations. In particular, I do not know what he would think about the reasons-only theses.



### **4.3.1 Reason-Explanations vs. Reason Citations**

Focusing only on the anti-psychologistic forms of reason-explanation above, we have at least three main kinds of explanation:

- A. S's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing is that  $p$ .**
- B. S  $\Phi$ -ed for the reason that  $p$ .**
- C. S  $\Phi$ -ed because<sub>R</sub>  $p$ .**

If the statements expressed by A-C are taken at face value, then it would appear as if citing motivating reasons are sufficient for explaining S's  $\Phi$ -ing. However, this seems false. Merely stating a reason cannot by itself explain S's  $\Phi$ -ing. It also needs to be stated that S acted for the reason she did, and in order for a reason to be one for which S acted, the reason must be appropriately related to S's psychology. Suppose we are seeking to understand Terrie's behavior. She is watering her neighbor's lawn. If someone tried to explain her behavior merely by citing a reason (without implying anything further), say, that her neighbor asked her to water it for him, we would not have explained Terrie's behavior at all. In order to explain Terrie's behavior the reason cited, i.e., that her neighbor had asked her to water his lawn for him, we would at least need to imply that this reason is the one for which she acted, which typically implies that she believed (or was otherwise aware of) the reason to be the case.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Sandis makes a similar claim (forthcoming: 18-19).

I think that philosophers are wrong to think that statements expressed by A-C—as they are explicitly stated—are genuine reason-explanations. Rather, they should be considered mere *reason-citations* if all they are taken to do is cite a reason without implying that the reason cited is the one for which the agent  $\Phi$ -ed. Since reasons *by themselves*—as explanantia—do not explain action, reason-citations where only reasons are claimed to feature do not explain action either. It is in this sense that it can be said that reasons do not explain action.

On the other hand, we can and do explain agential behavior via reason-explanations. This, of course, must mean that reason-explanations must involve more than citing agential reasons. As we have seen we must state the agential reason in the proper context. I agree with Sandis that unless it is implied that S took that  $p$  to be the case and acted for  $p$  the agent's behavior will not be properly explained. Moreover, I agree with Sandis that when we provide content for explanations of the forms A-C we conventionally imply an explanans consisting at least of the agent taking that  $p$  to be the case and then acting for  $p$ . It is important to note that these implicatures are essential parts of reason-explanations even though they are not proper parts of the agential reasons themselves. Thus the general picture here is of explanantia consisting of agential reasons, which imply that they are appropriately related to agents' psychologies, and was the reasons for which they acted.

The theory of reason-explanations here is only superficially the same as typical anti-psychologistic reason-explanations. That is, they only have the same surface grammar. When we provide reason-explanations we offer an agential

reason. However, at a deeper level the theory stands in stark contrast to typical anti-psychologistic theories.

Reason-explanations do not typically have the semantic structure that their surface grammar suggests. The underlying structure is more complex because what such explanations call for more than agential reasons, which in turn requires explanantia citing more than just agential reasons. Anti-psychologists have typically failed to keep this in mind, which has led them to fail to see that some of the most difficult problems for the view can be handled. We provide agential reasons in the context of wanting to explain behavior, which we have seen implies more than providing citations of reasons. In what follows I call the correct anti-psychologistic theory of reason-explanation the *Contextualization Theory of Reason-Explanation* (or the *Contextualization Theory* for short) for two reasons. I do so in order to keep it distinct from theories that assume a reason-citation theory of such explanations. Also, I call it this in order to highlight the fact that reasons require context in order to have an explanatory role in action.<sup>142</sup>

#### **4.3.2 Contextualization Theory & Error Cases**

Suppose we were to make explicit the ‘deep’ structure of the explanans of A. Typically, it would read something like the following:

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<sup>142</sup> I say more about this role in the next section.

**D. S's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing is that S believed that  $p$ .<sup>143</sup>**

In what immediately follows I would like to spend some time responding to how the deep structure expressed by D can help deal with error cases, and then provide some related support for contextualization theory.

If someone uttered D in the context of providing a reason-explanation, this would often sound redundant.<sup>144</sup> This is because the explanandum in D calls for the agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing, which is an agential reason, so it is implied that the reason offered was the one she believed and acted for. So suppose one were to provide the following reason-explanation for Terrie's watering of her neighbor's lawn: "Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is that she believed that her neighbor had not watered it". In contexts where it is true that Terrie's neighbor had not watered his lawn, this explanation would sound redundant because we usually only need to be explicit about believing our reason when we believe falsely. In contexts, for example, where Terrie is wrong about her neighbor's watering the lawn, it seems appropriate for us to offer the explanation including Terrie's believing that her

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<sup>143</sup> This is only one example, but it would hold in the other examples one the necessary changes were made. The explanantia of reason-explanations will typically imply the agent's believing that  $p$ . The reason they do not *always* have the latter form is that there are counterexamples involving cases where agents  $\Phi$  for a reason that they only believe that they believe that  $p$ . April might go to church for the reason that she believes that she believes in God. However, April has lost the first-order belief in God months ago. In these cases, the explanantia can have the form 'S has the psychological relation P to that  $p$ '.

<sup>144</sup> I am assuming that this would sound especially redundant to the anti-psychologists ears, but also to the psychologist's ears. [Note: even psychologists can claim that reason-explanations are often expressed using the form found in D. They claim that the necessary connection between reasons and psychologies is explained by their identity.]

neighbor had not watered his lawn. That is, someone might correct us when we claim that Terrie watered the lawn because the neighbor had not. In these kinds of cases involving correction, we might respond by claiming that Terrie believed that her neighbor had not watered the lawn in order to show (or remind) our audience that Terrie believed her reason for watering the lawn. In these cases we are showing our audience what already lies implicit in our reason-explanations. We are not providing or citing another reason—a psychologistic reason, say—in order to correct the reason for which Terrie acted. Rather, we are naturally seeking to explain Terrie’s action via speaking truths. We are not saying that we thought Terrie acted for one reason, but then came to realize that she had acted for another one altogether. We are simply uncovering the implicit presuppositions of what we had said when offering Terrie’s reason for watering her neighbor’s lawn in order to speak truly when explaining her action. Indeed, these considerations support the claim that explanatory contexts, even in our ordinary efforts to explain, are factive.<sup>145</sup>

Psychologistic philosophers have taken error cases involving correction to support their theories of reason-explanation. The account here is able to respond to this. For example, suppose I take the long route home for the reason that the shorter route is backed up with heavy traffic, so I take the back roads home. Suppose further that later my roommate asks me the reason for which I drove the back roads home. I reply by saying “The 690 was backed up with heavy traffic, so I took the back roads home.” At this point, we could imagine my roommate telling me

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<sup>145</sup> I say more about the factivity of explanation, and in particular about its relationship to speaking truly just below.

that he was on the 690 at the same time I was on the back roads, and traffic was not backed up. We could imagine further my response, “Well, I thought the 690 was backed up.”

In this case have I changed my reason from the claim that the 690 was backed up to the claim that I thought the 690 was backed up? Not according to the theory developed here. I argue that what I have done is contextualize my reason for driving the back roads home. I have made explicit that I believed my reason, and this goes toward explaining taking the route I did. Suppose, however, that another roommate asks me a bit later my reason for taking that route. I would probably reply by saying “I thought the 690 was backed up with heavy traffic” because I know now that the 690 was not backed up with heavy traffic. Does this mean that my reason for being late has changed? Again, not according to this theory. It is just that I know that my reason is false, so it must also be contextualized within the context of my believing it.

Indeed, I think the reason for the contextualization has to do with the fact that we are truth-speakers. That is, we typically follow the Gricean conversational norm of speaking only what we believe to be true.<sup>146</sup> Accordingly, we seek to explain our actions in terms of truth. And since my reason is false, I understand that I need to make explicit what is usually implicit in providing reason-explanations. Since it is implicitly true that I believe my reason for  $\Phi$ -ing, I state that I believe my reason in order to speak truly according to the Gricean conversational truth-maxim. It is worth pointing out that this truth norm governing our conversational expressions

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<sup>146</sup> Grice (1975: 46)

might be closely related to the norms governing the factivity of explanation, including reason-explanation. We provide explanations quite regularly in conversations, so it stands to reason that we are also to speak truly when providing explanations.

Let's reconsider the case where my second roommate asks me my reason for taking the back roads home after I came to realize that I was wrong about traffic being backed up on the 690. When I tell my roommate that I thought the 690 was backed up it seems to be quite natural for him to infer immediately that I had been wrong about the 690 being backed up. (Assume, if necessary, that I answer him matter-of-factly so as not to give away the falsehood by my tone or other such manner of expressing myself.) What best explains this data is that my roommate inferred that I discovered my agential reason (the one I acted for) to be false, and so in order to explain my behavior truly I needed to say that I believed that the 690 was backed up. My roommate does not think that my reason changed. Nor does he think that my reason was literally my thinking that the 690 is backed up. Rather, he thinks that I acted for a false reason, which I came to realize was false, which is why I had to make explicit my believing my reason. He sees that if the explanation I offered is explicitly to avoid falsehood that I need to include what was implied by acting for the false reason that I did.

Two final and related considerations provide support for the anti-psychologistic theory of reason-explanation defended here. It seems that we often provide reason-explanations without any explicit appeal whatsoever to agential psychologies. When we ask for Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn we

say things like “she did it because her neighbor had not”, or “her neighbor asked her to”, or that “she promised him that she would do so”. Similarly, if someone asks Della’s reasons for covering the tomato plants, we say things like “they will not survive the cold weather” or more simply, “it is going to be very cold tonight”. It is really only in error cases that we feel the need to provide a psychological feature to the explanation. These facts find some support for anti-psychologistic reason explanations insofar as it is typically perfectly fine not to mention psychological features when providing reason-explanations.

Psychologists will need to claim that even though we typically provide reason-explanations in terms of anti-psychologistic content, this overlooks the fact that the content cited was believed by (or otherwise psychologically related to) the agent. In fact, the psychologist will need to say that reason-explanations of the forms A-C have a deeper structure than what the surface grammar suggests. That is, in order to account for the linguistic data, psychologists have to say, for example, that *S*’s believing that *p* that serves as *S*’s reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. Psychologists might also claim that error cases help reveal this deeper semantic structure.

It is significant that anti-psychologists can agree that there is a deeper semantic structure to reason-explanations as they are typically provided. We can also agree with psychologists that error cases do in fact help reveal the deeper semantic structure of reason-explanations. However, psychologistic theories go wrong by claiming that the deeper structure consists of an essential constituent of agential reasons themselves. Instead, on the account here, the deeper structure consists of an essential constituent of what it is to act for reasons. It is essential to



acting for reasons that agents, for example, believe their reason, but it does not follow from this that the essential connection is one of essential constituency with the agential reason.<sup>147</sup> So the anti-psychologistic theory of reason-explanation developed here is not the only account of reason-explanation that recognizes a deeper semantic structure. Moreover, it is interesting that both accounts recognize the same implicit structure. The difference between the psychologist and the anti-psychologist concerns whether the implicit structure is a proper part of the agent's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. Nevertheless, that psychologistic philosophers have been forced to countenance the deep semantic structure of reason-explanations seems to be independent evidence for the theory here that argues for such structure.<sup>148</sup>

### **4.3.3 Theoretical Advantages of Contextualization Theory**

We are now in a position to show how it is that the contextualization theory is able to preserve each of the virtues of reason-explanations stated above. These virtues are accounting for the following: the factivity of reason-explanation, the fact that reason-explanations feature agential reasons in error cases, and that reasons have an explanatory role in reason-explanations. (To be clear: showing these

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<sup>147</sup> See Section 4.2 below where I provide an anti-psychologistic account of the necessary connection between agential reasons and agential psychologies. The answer is anticipated here: agential psychologies are essential to acting for reasons; indeed, they are part of what it is to act for reasons.

<sup>148</sup> In conversation and e-mail correspondence, psychologistically minded philosopher John Monteleone conceded that reason-explanations seem often to have anti-psychologistic forms, but that the form is actually psychologistic when the deeper structure is made explicit.

virtues hold will allow us in turn to solve the paradox and the reason-sensitive rationalization problems.)

The contextualization theory preserves the factivity of reason-explanations because the explanans conventionally imply the agent's taking that  $p$  to be true as what explains his  $\Phi$ -ing.<sup>149</sup> Thus even in cases where  $p$  (the agent's reason) is false, it will be true that  $S$  believed that  $p$ , and we all agree that a reason must be properly related to an agent's psychology for it to be that for which he  $\Phi$ 's. Thus the agent's belief has to be considered central to rationalizing his  $\Phi$ -ing. When we rationalize Terrie's behavior by claiming that she took her neighbor to have watered the lawn, this explanation will still hold if we find out that she was wrong. That is, supposing Terrie's belief is false, 'Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is that he had not watered it' has a true explanans even though her reason is false because it is implied that Terrie believed her reason to be the case.

A more difficult matter is whether the contextualization theory can account for the explanatory role of reasons in reason-explanations and thus solve the general reason-sensitive rationalization problem. I think it can. Sandis claims that reasons do not explain actions even though they rightly feature in reason-explanations. I agree with Sandis that reasons *by themselves* as they are provided in standard reason-explanations do not explain actions. However, it does not follow from this that agential reasons do not have an explanatory role in reason-

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<sup>149</sup> There will be exceptions to this form—see fn. 21 above. The key thing is that the psychological relation (whatever it is) is essential to the explanation.

explanations.<sup>150</sup> I suggest that we understand agential reasons as having more than just a featuring role in reason-explanation. More specifically, I suggest that agential reasons have an explanatory role, albeit an implicit one, in reason-explanations.

When we cite Terrie's belief that her neighbor had not watered his lawn, we have provided a reason-explanation for her action of watering her neighbor's lawn. In accordance with the view developed here so far it is the fact that Terrie's reason is an *agential* reason that explains her action. This means, as we have seen that it is typically Terrie's belief about the reason that does the explaining. Indeed, Terrie's belief seems to be sufficient for explaining her watering the lawn. Nevertheless, Terrie's reason does have an explanatory role in the reason-explanation. Terrie watered her neighbor's lawn, i.e., 'he had not watered it', is the content of Terrie's belief, so in citing Terrie's belief we are citing that content, which certainly has a role in explaining Terrie's action. So it is true that the reason does not add anything to the explanation that is not already provided by the belief of which it is the content—the belief is the particular belief it is in virtue of its content. Nevertheless, the reason contributes to the explanation of action by contributing to the belief that in turn explains the action. Again, the reason does not contribute anything that the belief already had not, but by contributing to the belief it thereby contributes to the explanation. More concretely, Terrie's believing *that* her neighbor had not watered his lawn contributes content to Terrie's belief. The explanation of Terrie's behavior is that she believes that her neighbor had not watered his lawn. Beliefs have their

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<sup>150</sup> I do not mean to imply that Sandis thinks that reasons cannot have an explanatory role in reason-explanations. He just does not say much about what their explanatory role is, if indeed they have an explanatory role on his account.

particular contents essentially, so by citing Terrie's belief, we also feature its content. So Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn has an explanatory role in reason-explanations, only her reason adds nothing to what her belief already does.

We can support the claim that reasons have an explanatory role in reason-explanations by considering the claim that beliefs have the explanatory role they do, at least in part, because of the contents they have. We can make this clear by considering Terrie's belief. She believes that her neighbor had not watered his lawn, and this belief explains her watering his lawn. However, if Terrie had believed otherwise, namely, that her neighbor had already watered his lawn, then her belief would not explain her action at all. What changed in the latter case is what she believed. The content of Terrie's belief is essential to explaining her action. Only the belief with the content that her neighbor had not watered the lawn can explain her watering it.

Now consider a case in which instead of watering her neighbor's lawn, Terrie mows it. In this case were we to cite her belief that her neighbor had not watered his lawn, we would be dumbfounded because the content of her belief does not seem to lead to her action, i.e., to her mowing the neighbor's lawn. Instead, if Terrie were to tell us that she was mowing her neighbor's lawn because<sub>R</sub> he had not mowed it, we would think that her belief that her neighbor had not mowed it explains her action. So it appears that the contents of agential beliefs have an explanatory role precisely because beliefs themselves partly have their explanatory

power in virtue of their contents. Beliefs with different contents would lead to different actions, which would in turn lead to different reason-explanations.

We are now in a position to explain how it is that agents can act for reasons in error cases and to solve the paradox problem. According to Alvarez, agents do not act for reasons in error cases because false propositions cannot explain action. She was led to this conclusion, it appears, because she holds two common assumptions, namely, reasons explain actions, and false propositions cannot explain.<sup>151</sup> We have seen that the former claim is false. Reasons have an explanatory role in reason-explanations, but by themselves they do not explain. Moreover, since reasons do not explain, reasons as false propositions do not explain in the relevant sense either. Thus, rationalizations consisting of beliefs with false propositional contents do not require that the contents explain because the belief does the explaining. And it is consistent with this that false agential reasons are still the reasons the agents acted for when they acted. That is, it is consistent with agential reasons not explaining that Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is the false proposition that he had not watered it. Moreover, this seems to capture what happens in ordinary cases involving error. We are sensitive and responsive to reasons for acting as we do, but it turns out that our reasons are false.

We see that contextualization theory paves the way for the theory of the ontology of motivating reasons developed here. Propositionalism has it that motivating reasons can be false propositions, like Terrie's reason for watering the neighbor's lawn when she was wrong about his watering it. Once it was rejected

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<sup>151</sup> It is important to note that since Alvarez thinks that reasons by themselves explain action that she rejects the deeper semantic structure of reason-explanations.

that motivating reasons are explanantia of reason-explanations, we were in a position to countenance the intuitive truth that agents act for reasons in error cases. This is because we were able to preserve the factivity of reason-explanation even if agents act for false propositions.

Contextualization theory can solve the paradox problem too. Proper reason-explanations will typically have a form, when made explicit, like D provided above. This form and others like it avoid the paradox problem because the explanantia typically consist of *S*'s believing that *p*. We have seen that the paradox problem results when we conjoin the negation of the false reason provided in a reason-citation: Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is that her neighbor had not watered it, but he had watered it. The result here is a contradiction. However, since reasons do not explain, i.e., are not explanantia in reason-explanations, they should not be cited as explanantia of Terrie's behavior. Instead, our contextualization theory reason-explanation, when made fully explicit, will be: Terrie's reason for watering her neighbor's lawn is that she believed that her neighbor had not watered it, but he had watered it. This is not contradictory because Terrie's belief that her neighbor had not watered his lawn is not inconsistent with the neighbor having watered it.

One might object that I have offered an account of psychological-explanation in place of an account of reason-explanation.<sup>152</sup> That is, it might be agreed that the contextualization theory is a kind of rational explanation; however, the objection

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<sup>152</sup> Alvarez (2001: 168) makes the distinction between reason-explanations and psychological-explanations. She claims that reason-explanations explain actions by citing reasons only, and that psychological-explanations explain actions by citing agential psychological states, which need not make reference to agential reasons.

goes, it is just a kind of psychological explanation insofar as it explains via beliefs. This would be bad because without an account of the latter it would seem that anti-psychologism would remain without an adequate theory of reason-explanations.

The counter-objection here is that contextualization theory may well be a kind of psychological explanation insofar as they essentially involve reference to psychologies. Nevertheless, the theory is anti-psychologistic because agents' reasons are not the psychological entities even though the latter do the explaining. This is in accord with the intuition that agential reasons need to be properly related to their psychologies, and that without this relation we cannot explain how it is that a reason had a motivating role in agents' actions.

Finally, I think we can say a bit more in response to those who think that contextualization theory is counterintuitive. On my view, when we say things like "Terrie's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing is R", we can be doing one of at least two things. We could literally be providing only Terrie's (motivating) reason for  $\Phi$ -ing, in which case we would be offering a reason-citation. However, in order for our reason-statement to explain, we need at least to assume that Terrie's reason is the reason that Terrie believed and that she acted on. Contextualization theory merely makes these implications explicit. This does not mean that we need to change the manner in which we speak. It is just that when we theorize, we need to keep these implications in mind lest we fall into serious errors.

#### **4.4 Anti-Psychologism & The Psychology Problem**

Recall the psychology problem from Chapter 2. It was claimed that anti-psychologism must explain B:

**B: If R is a reason for which agent S  $\Phi$ -s, then necessarily R is related to S's psychology.**

We examined two anti-psychologistic efforts to respond to the truth of B, both of which seemed unsatisfactory. Alvarez claimed that the truth of B does not entail the truth of psychologism, which it correct, but it would be good to provide an anti-psychologistic explanation of the truth of B.<sup>153</sup> Dancy claims that the explanation for R's necessary relation to A's psychology is that S's psychology is an enabling condition for R to be a reason for which S  $\Phi$ 's.<sup>154</sup> This allows Dancy to claim that psychological features of agents enable them to act for reasons without the psychological features thereby being proper parts of reason-explanations (as he construes reason-explanations). We recall that Dancy writes:

There is a difference between a consideration that is a proper part of an explanation, and a consideration that is required for an explanation to go through, but which is not itself a part of that explanation. I call the latter 'enabling conditions'. For instance, that England is not sinking beneath the waves today is a consideration in the absence of which what explains

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<sup>153</sup> Alvarez (2010: 175)

<sup>154</sup> Dancy (2005)



my actions would be incapable of doing so. But that does nothing to show that England's not submerging today is part of the explanation of why I do what I do.<sup>155</sup>

Dancy's claim here is aimed toward an account of B. Dancy considers an agent (himself) acting, and he claims that the following is an example of an enabling condition for his  $\Phi$ -ing: the fact that England is not submerged beneath the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. We can agree that this fact in some sense enables Dancy to  $\Phi$ . However, Dancy does not think that this fact about England and the Atlantic Ocean has a proper role in a reason-explanation. That is, the fact here would not be a proper part of a reason-explanation of his  $\Phi$ -ing. Dancy's theory of reason-explanation assumes that reasons explain, so the explanantia of reason-explanations are only agential reasons. He also accepts both reason-only theses outlined above, so it would follow that additional enabling facts are not proper parts of his theory of reason-explanations.

Wayne Davis has offered the following challenge to Dancy's view of enabling conditions:

Dancy's answer [to the necessary connection between psychologies and reasons] is that the belief is an enabling condition. Believing that p enables one to act for the reason that p. This is true, but it seems to be just a restatement of the fact that we wish to explain, namely, that we cannot act for the reason that p unless we believe that p.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Dancy (2000: 127)

<sup>156</sup> Davis (2005: 77)

Davis claims that Dancy has not really explained the necessary connection between his psychology (his believing that  $p$ ) and his acting for the reason that  $p$ . The reason for this is that Dancy has merely tried to explain the necessary connection in terms of enabling conditions, which, according to Davis, just are necessary conditions. If this is right, then it appears as if Dancy has offered an explanation of B by merely restating (or rephrasing) what stands in need of explanation.

It might be helpful to consider Dancy's case of enabling conditions in the passage just above in order to determine what he means by 'enabling conditions'. Dancy claims that the following fact is an enabling condition for his  $\Phi$ -ing: that England has not been engulfed by the Atlantic Ocean. It is certainly true that were England engulfed by the Atlantic Ocean, many actions would be (physically) impossible for Dancy to perform, so in this sense the fact Dancy cites here is necessary for his  $\Phi$ -ing. Thus on this score Davis' criticism seems sound. However, Dancy's concept of enabling conditions can be understood as being akin to the concept of background conditions, which are necessary conditions but which are usually not relevant to the context of explanation because of their generality. In thinking about Dancy's case more, the fact that England is not submerged is a necessary condition for Dancy's  $\Phi$ -ing, but it is also a necessary condition for just about everyone's  $\Phi$ -ing as they do in normal circumstances. Moreover, it is a necessary condition for many events that are not closely related to actions. Therefore, when we rationalize Dancy's  $\Phi$ -ing, we need not cite the fact that England is not submerged. This is because it is not directly relevant to his  $\Phi$ -ing, because, as a background condition, it makes possible so many other events (besides actions)

that citing it would not add to the explanation of his  $\Phi$ -ing. Suppose we were to explain Dancy's going for a walk by citing his reason, say, that it was nice out. Then if we added to our explanation that England was not engulfed with water at the time of his walking, we would think that the latter fact is quite irrelevant to explaining his going for walk even though it is necessary for his going for a walk.

Dancy's appeal to enabling conditions seems able to avoid Davis' objection that it is redundant.<sup>157</sup> That is, we can interpret Dancy as explaining the necessary connection between agential reasons and psychologies in the following way: agential psychologies are necessarily related to agential reasons because the former *enable* agential reasons to be agential reasons, where an enabling condition just is a kind of background condition. This means that citing an enabling condition should not be confused with the generic sense of 'necessary condition' that Davis seems to have in mind. That is, Dancy's explanation of the necessary connection can be seen as an effort to state what kind of necessary condition holds between agents' reasons and psychologies.<sup>158</sup>

Of course, there are different kinds of necessary connections. Some things are necessarily connected because of their logical relations to each other. For example, Mark Twain is necessarily related to Samuel Clemens because Mark Twain

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<sup>157</sup> The line of thought developed should not be attributed to Dancy. However, it seems Dancy could endorse this strategy of defending, in part, his theory of enabling conditions.

<sup>158</sup> *Prima facie*, we can distinguish at least two meanings of what is being asked for in an explanation of the necessary connection between reasons and psychologies. The first requests an explanation for why there is a necessary connection, and the second requests an explanation of the kind of necessity that connects reasons and psychologies. It seems Dancy's answer can be used to answer both kinds of request.

and Samuel Clemens are the same person. The necessary connection here is logical identity. There is also conceptual necessity. The concepts 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man' are conceptually related because they just mean the same thing. Moreover, there is physical necessity. For example, the claim that electrons are negatively charged is a physically necessary truth that holds between electrons and their negative charges.

With this in mind, Dancy's theory of enabling conditions could be understood as a distinct kind of necessary connections between things. In particular, we have seen that they seem to be akin to background conditions. That is, they are very general conditions for the possibility of things, but they are not proximally related to the things they make possible. As we have seen that England was not submerged into the Atlantic Ocean is not proximally related to Dancy's going for a walk such that it would make sense to include it in a reason-explanation of his behavior. Other examples of enabling condition on a par with Dancy's suggestion might be that the force of gravity keeps Dancy on the Earth's surface such that he can write at his desk, that the temperature of England during summer is necessary for him to be able to go swimming in the lake, or that severe famine has not overtaken the UK makes it possible for Dancy to eat a hearty noontime meal. At best, these enabling conditions are far removed, and thus only distally related, to Dancy's actions. Nevertheless, they are necessary enabling conditions for his actions. It would appear, then, that Dancy could escape Davis' criticisms of his efforts to explain B.

If this is right, then we can understand Dancy's theory of enabling conditions as providing at least a partial account of the kind of necessity that is relevant to B.

This would mean that B could be understood as the claim that if R is a reason for which S  $\Phi$ 's, then necessarily R is related to S's psychology, in the sense that S's psychology is a background condition for R to be S's reason for  $\Phi$ -ing. And this would mean that R's psychology in some distal sense makes it possible for S to  $\Phi$  for R. However, as an enabling condition, the psychological relation here it is not proximally enough related to S's  $\Phi$ -ing. Rather, it is a background condition.

Of course, the account I am developing on Dancy's behalf is imprecise—the notions of distal and proximal conditions, as presented, are admittedly quite vague. I assume we have an intuitive grasp of clear cases of distal background conditions to actions, e.g., the laws of nature, general socioeconomic conditions, etc. Clear examples of proximal condition for actions would be agential voluntariness and agential reasons, to name only a couple. This much, however, seems clear, Dancy is correct that background conditions are not relevant to reason-explanations. We may not be able to determine how distally related background conditions are to agents' actions, but we do have the sense that their direct relevance to particular actions is quite low; low enough, in fact, not to be part of what it is for an agent to act. The issue here is whether agential psychologies are on a par with enabling background conditions.

There are two significant and related problems with Dancy's account here. The first significant problem is that Dancy's account rests on a dubious analogy between conditions like England not being submerged in the Atlantic Ocean for his  $\Phi$ -ing, and conditions like his believing the reason he has for  $\Phi$ -ing. We can readily agree that the former condition is an enabling condition in the sense that it is a

distal background condition. However, it seems false that psychologies are so distally related to agents'  $\Phi$ -ing when they act for reasons. We have seen that mere citations of reasons do not explain agential behavior unless it is assumed that the reason for which the behavior was performed was appropriately related to the agent's psychology. Now consider mere background conditions. If I were to leave out of the explanation for Dancy's going for a walk today that the Atlantic Ocean did not submerge England yesterday, I could very well have an adequate explanation. However, if I leave out that Dancy *believed* that it is healthy to go for walks in explaining his behavior, I could not have adequately rationalized his behavior. And the latter is true even though it is also true that I could adequately explain Dancy's behavior without mentioning any background, or enabling, conditions.

The second problem with Dancy's account here is that it seems to imply that the psychological relations to reasons are not proper parts of acting for reasons. That is, if psychological relations are mere enabling conditions for acting for reasons, then they are not proper parts of acting for reasons. Enabling conditions are too distally related to actions to be proper parts of acting for reasons. It is true that we do not think that the fact that the Atlantic Ocean did not submerge England is a proper part of Dancy's going for a walk for a reason. But it does seem that psychological relations are proper parts of acting for reasons. The contextualization theory developed and defended in this chapter predicts this. We've seen that psychological relations are proper parts of acting for reasons, and this is why contextualization theory of reason-explanations insists that agential beliefs typically

explain actions. That Dancy's theory of acting for a reason does not predict that psychologies are proper parts of acting for a reason is a cost against it.

According to Dancy the fact that reasons are enabling conditions means that agential psychologies need not feature in reason-explanations. After all, we do not need to feature the fact that the Atlantic did not submerge England in order to explain Dancy's  $\Phi$ -ing. Analogously, then, we do not need to feature the fact, for example, that Terrie believes that her neighbor had not watered his lawn in order to explain Terrie's watering of the lawn. We need only feature her reason for doing what she does. It seems though that proper anti-psychologistic reason-explanations at least imply agential beliefs, which feature their contents as an agent's reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing. They typically do so implicitly via conventional implicature, but they can also be made explicit in the relevant contexts. Psychologies are essential to explaining their actions, because without the psychological relation to the belief, reasons would not be the reasons *for* which they act. Thus, Dancy appears to get the wrong theory of reason-explanation: he assumes that explanantia of reason-explanations are only agential reasons.

What all of this shows is that Dancy was wrong to think that psychologies are mere enabling conditions, where enabling conditions are understood as necessary background conditions. Psychologies explain agential behaviors, and when psychological relations to agential reasons are the explanations of actions, our explanations rationalize (in a reason-sensitive manner) such behavior. This is because the reasons for which agents  $\Phi$  are featured in such explanations. Thus

psychologies are necessary conditions for their reasons to be motivating reasons; however, they are more than mere enabling conditions.

Since agential psychologies are not mere enabling conditions, the question about the necessary connection between S's psychology and S's acting for R re-presents itself. That is, the question regarding explaining B is still in need of an answer.

What is the explanation for the necessary connection between an agent's psychology and the reason for which she  $\Phi$ 's? The most obvious answer here is that motivating reasons must have a *motivational* role in the economy of action. But the only way that reasons can have such a motivational role in action is if they are related appropriately to an agent's psychology. Thus, the necessary connection exists because of the role the reason has in motivating the agent to action.

This explanation seems uninformative. If we are seeking the answer to the question of why motivating reasons entail a necessary connection between agential reasons and their psychologies, then it seems trivial to say that psychologies make possible the motivational role reasons have in action. The reason it seems trivial is that motivating reasons just are reasons that stand in relation to agents' psychologies such that the former are able have a motivational role in action. This is just what it means for a reason to be a reason *for* which an agent  $\Phi$ 's.

However, I think this points us in the proper direction for thinking about an explanation for the necessary connection between psychologies and motivating reasons. The connection appears to be one of conceptual necessity. That is, if motivating reasons just are reasons that stand in relation to psychologies such that



the former can have a motivational role in action, then it follows as a matter of conceptual necessity that motivating reasons are related to agential psychologies. Thus, if what is sought is simply an explanation of the necessity in the antecedent of B, it just follows as a matter of conceptual truth that psychologies are related to reasons.<sup>159</sup> We see how this account is different from Dancy's in that the psychological relation here just is part of what it is to act for a reason.

This essential difference between Dancy's view and mine is also captured by the differences in our theories of reason-explanation. According to Dancy, reason-explanations consist of explanantia citing only motivating reasons—agential beliefs are mere enabling conditions lacking a role in the reason-explanations. Accordingly, the necessary connection between agents' psychologies and their reasons is not part of what it is for agents to act for reasons. As we have seen, I defend the view that beliefs are essential to reason-explanations, from which it follows that beliefs (psychologies) are part of what it means to act for reasons.

More can be said about the necessary connection between psychologies and reasons for acting than that it is conceptually true that the latter just involves, in part, the psychological relation. This is because reasons for action have a motivational role in the economy of acting for reasons. That is, without this motivational role it is unclear how these reasons could be said to be *motivating* reasons, or reasons for which agent's act.

Thus the question arises whether the motivational role reasons have implies that they have causal powers. On the propositionalist theory of reasons developed

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<sup>159</sup> Compare this with Davis (2005: 77): "...acting because one believes that p is part of what it is to act for the reason that p." Our views are very similar on this score.

here, reasons are conceived of as abstract objects. Accordingly, I assume that abstracta are incapable of causal interaction. Reasons are therefore incapable of causal interaction. So, if reasons have powers to motivate, then 'motivate' must be understood noncausally. On the other hand, if the concept of motivation has causal implications, then reasons themselves will not have the power to motivate. That is, the motivational role of acting for reasons would have to be explained in some other way.

On the view here reasons are not causes. Further related questions arise in relation to the issue of reason and causes. Are reason-explanations a species of causal explanations? How can reasons be motivating reasons in light of their causal inertness? The first question here I have nothing to say about. However, regarding the second question, I think there is an adequate answer to this question. I shall provide this answer in Chapter 6 below.

Before moving to the conclusion of this chapter, it should be noted that the main serious problems facing anti-psychologism have been solved by this propositionalist account. The final problem here was finding a solution to the necessary connection holding between agential psychologies and their reasons for acting. We have seen that the connection is a conceptual one because agents' psychologies—typically their beliefs—are part of what it is to act for reasons. It must be kept in mind that this does not entail psychologism. The claim here is not that agents' psychologies are part of agential reasons; rather, they are part of agents' acting for reasons.

#### **4.5 Conclusion to Chapter 4**

In this chapter I developed a propositionalist theory of anti-psychologistic reasons. Motivating reasons are propositions, regardless of whether they are true or false. We saw that we needed to rethink the standard theory of reason-explanations in order to resolve many of the apparent longstanding problems facing anti-psychologism in order to make propositionalism tenable. However, propositionalism has not been adequately developed and defended yet. There are a series of difficult objections that it still faces and that need solutions. In the following chapters I turn my attention to dealing with these objections and showing that propositionalism has the theoretical tools to respond properly to them.

## **Chapter 5: Propositional Anti-Psychologism: Problems with Propositions?**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter expands on the account of anti-psychologism developed in Chapter 4. In particular, I defend propositionalism against an objection to it by Jonathan Dancy. Then I consider both Russellian and Fregean theories of propositionalism. I respond to objections to both kind of theories and show that a Russellian theory is to be preferred to a Fregean theory. The reason for this preference is that a significant problem will be shown to exist to Fregean propositionalism.

### **5.1 Why Propositions?**

I have no knockdown argument for the claim that reasons are propositions. Another competing anti-psychologistic view has it that reasons are states of affairs.<sup>160</sup> I also have no knockdown argument against such theories.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, there is one consideration that has some persuasive force for the conclusion that reasons are propositions. The consideration is that reasons feature as premises in our practical reasoning. Moreover, these very same premises are our

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<sup>160</sup> Jonathan Dancy (2000).

<sup>161</sup> If it turned out that states of affairs are better candidates for being reasons, then I would adopt that view. See Stephen Everson (2009) for arguments against what he calls “state theorists” regarding reasons. His arguments all rest on the view that reasons would have to be obtaining states of affairs. I deny that this would have to be the case for a state theorist, so I reject his arguments.

reasons for acting, and the premises of practical reasoning are, of course, propositions.<sup>162</sup>

No matter which theory of practical reasoning one prefers, it is usually understood as a form of means-end reasoning. We have certain ends or goals, and we reason about how to achieve those ends. Psychologists claim that practical reasoning begins with desires, and so they include them in the premises of their practical reasoning.<sup>163</sup> For example, Caleb might want to go to the movies, and this desire leads him to reason practically about how to get to the movies. His reasoning on the standard psychologicistic model might look like this: (iii) I want to go to the movies; (iv) I believe that driving to the theater is the best way to get to the movies; so (v) I decide to drive to the movies. Psychologicistic philosophers take this form of practical reasoning to support the thesis that reasons are psychological states because psychological states are represented in propositions (iii) and (iv). We have seen (Chapter 3) that psychologism faces severe problems, so we deny this form of practical reasoning.

Some anti-psychologists claim that the content of our desires serve as our ends in practical reasoning because they are goals we want to attain.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, they claim, desires do not figure directly in our practical reasoning. Instead, they motivate us to act and provide content to the directions toward which

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<sup>162</sup> Not every action we perform for a reason is done as a result of practical reasoning, but the premises of a line of practical reasoning are the same kind of thing as the reasons we act for when they are not results of practical reasoning. Our actions are the results of practical reasoning when they involve some kind of means-end reasoning.

<sup>163</sup> See Davidson 1963 for a proto-typical account of psychologicistic practical reasoning.

<sup>164</sup> See Alvarez (2010b).

our actions tend.<sup>165</sup> A standard case of this second kind of practical reasoning might begin with the desire to get healthier. Suppose Dorothy has gone to her doctor and has been told that her cholesterol levels are too high, so the doctor tells her to eat less saturated fat. A premise in Dorothy's practical reasoning could be something like: (vi) my (Dorothy's) doctor has recommended that I eat less saturated fat. But since Dorothy's practical reasoning tends to lead to action directed at satisfying her desires, we need another premise here. That premise could be (vii) fruits and vegetables have much less saturated fat than meat and dairy foods. And from this Dorothy could conclude that (viii) therefore, I (Dorothy) will eat more fruits and vegetables and less meat and dairy foods. The conclusion (here at least) is a decision, and it is in line with the content of Dorothy's desire—it is how Dorothy has decided to meet her goal of improving her health.<sup>166</sup>

Of course, these are very simple sketches of examples of practical reasoning, but I think they are paradigmatic of how we often do (and perhaps should) practically reason. When Dorothy eats more fruits and vegetables she will, presumably, begin to achieve her desire of improved health, and the reasons for which she will have eaten more fruits and vegetables will be the claims expressed by sentences (vi) and (vii).<sup>167</sup> Likewise, when Caleb reasons (via practical reasoning)

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<sup>165</sup> Consider Aristotle's claim from *De Anima* that the object of our desire is the "stimulant of practical thought" even though it is not part of practical reasoning itself. See this quoted passage in Chapter 6, section 6.2.

<sup>166</sup> There is substantial debate about the nature of the conclusion of practical reasoning. Here I assume that conclusions of practical reasoning are typically decisions. See Alvarez (2010a) for a defense of this claim.

<sup>167</sup> In Section 5.4 below I say more about the role of desires in the economy of action. To anticipate, desires provide our goals (ends) with content. Desires are intimately related to our purposes.

about how to get himself to the movies, he puts himself in position to satisfy that desire.

Now, there are many debates regarding the nature of practical reasoning including the natures of both the premises and conclusion and even how the premises relate to conclusions. I cannot get into these difficult debates here. What I wanted to show is that the premises in practical reasoning are propositions, and if this is the case, then our reasons for acting could also very well be propositions. I take it that there is *prima facie* support for the claim that reasons just are the premises offered in our practical deliberations. This appearance of reasons as propositions is a starting point for my defense of propositionalism.

I should note here that those philosophers who think agential reasons are to be identified with states of affairs could claim that the premises of practical reasoning represent the states of affairs that are our reasons for acting, assuming propositions represent states of affairs. Or perhaps they could claim that there is some other intimate relationship between the premises of practical reasoning and the states of affairs that serve as our reasons for acting. For example, the state of affairs theorist could claim that Dorothy's reason for deciding to eat more fruits and vegetables is not the proposition that Dorothy's doctor recommends that she eat less saturated fat. Rather it is the state of affairs of her doctor recommending that she eat less saturated fat that is her reason for deciding to eat more fruits and vegetables. I do not have a knockdown argument against the state of affairs theorist here. I am simply going to assume that it is plausible that agential reasons are the premises of our practical reasoning, which I take to be the propositional contents of

agential beliefs. I do not wish to engage here in a debate with state of affairs theorist by claiming that states of affairs cannot be agential reasons.

However, some state of affairs theorists think that reasons cannot be propositions.<sup>168</sup> In what immediately follows I would like to consider and challenge an argument for this claim.

## **5.2 The Insubstantiality of Propositions?**

Jonathan Dancy has argued that propositions are not the right kind of thing to be normative reasons. If true, this would be bad, because on the propositionalist theory of reasons developed here some normative reasons are also motivating reasons. He writes:

Now the question is whether ... propositions are the right sort of thing to be good reasons for action. It seems just obvious that they are not. ... [Propositions] are, as we might say, too thin or insubstantial to be able to make an action wrong. They are the wrong sort of beast. Reasons for action are things like his self-satisfaction, her distress, yesterday's bad weather, and the current state of the dollar.<sup>169</sup>

According to Dancy, things that are the case—obtaining states of affairs—are the right kind of things to be normative reasons. However, propositions are “the wrong sort of beast”. Likewise, they are too “thin or insubstantial” to be good reasons. It is

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<sup>168</sup> See Dancy (2000) for an example. We will examine his arguments in Section 5.2 below.

<sup>169</sup> Dancy (2000: 115)



important to keep in mind that Dancy also has true propositions in mind here—they are just one of the general kinds of propositions, the other being false propositions. Dancy argues that propositions are either structured abstract objects or sets of possible worlds, and it is “obvious” that both of these kinds of things are not candidates for good reasons.<sup>170</sup>

It is unlikely that Dancy thinks that the abstract nature of propositions is what accounts for its thin insubstantiality because states of affairs are presumably abstract things as well.<sup>171</sup> So it is unclear what it means for propositions to be too thin and insubstantial.<sup>172</sup> Perhaps by examining how Dancy supports his claim here we will be able to get clearer. He writes:

One consideration that supports this claim is that anything that has a truth value must be in some way representational, since for something to be true things must be as it represents them as being. But no representation can as such be a good reason for anything ... No representation is the case, and no representation can be a good reason.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Dancy considers only these two views of propositions. I assume in what follows that propositions are not sets of possible worlds for standard reasons involving the fine-grained nature of propositions. That is, if possible worlds are sets of possible worlds, then all metaphysically necessary truths would express the same proposition. Intuitively, the proposition encoded in the sentence ‘ $2+2=4$ ’ is distinct from the proposition encoded in the sentence ‘It is wrong to torture people for fun’. Propositions do not seem to be so coarse-grained. As will be seen below in Section 5.3.1, I think propositions are structured abstract entities.

<sup>171</sup> See Thomas Wetzel’s article “States of Affairs” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/states-of-affairs/>

<sup>172</sup> For a different but related discussion of this point, see Stephen Everson (2009: 29-30). Everson also claims to be unclear about the meaning of Dancy’s remarks.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p. 117

Dancy's claim about the representational nature of propositions might provide us some direction with respect to clarifying his argument against propositionalism. Dancy's argument here might be that representations, even when true, are too thin and insubstantial to serve as good reasons. Thus, the (true) representation that Miles is in distress is too thin and insubstantial to serve as a good reason for providing him relief. If we take Dancy's view, which is that obtaining states of affairs are good reasons, then we might be able to understand Dancy's argument as this: obtaining states of affairs, like Miles' distress, are metaphysically more robust than true propositions like that Miles is in distress. And once the obvious difference between obtaining states of affairs and true representations is made clear, we see that only the former can be good reasons. In fact, Dancy claims to agree with Alvin Plantinga on the issue of the difference between states of affairs and propositions.<sup>174</sup> Again, he writes:

In general there seems to be a great distinction between the sorts of things that are capable of being the case and those that are capable of being true. Plantinga (1974) argues that a possible world is a maximal state of affairs, which may or may not obtain (only the actual world obtains). For each such world there is a set of propositions or *book* for that world, which things are true if the world obtains, each proposition being made true by a state of affairs that obtains or is the case there. Like Plantinga, I see an ontological gulf between things capable of being the case (i.e. states of affairs) and things capable of being true

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<sup>174</sup> See Plantinga (1974).

(either propositions or sentences). And only those capable of being the case are capable of being a good reason.<sup>175</sup>

Dancy assumes that states of affairs are things that are capable of being the case, and propositions are the things that are capable of being true.<sup>176</sup> It can be agreed that Dancy and Plantinga articulate an intuitive distinction here such that there is a significant ontological difference between states of affairs and propositions. Nevertheless, it is unclear how this distinction is supposed to establish the ontological robustness of states of affairs over propositions, even if it is assumed that the ontological difference is significant. Dancy's Plantinga-inspired passage above does not tell us what the significance is supposed to amount to, and neither does Plantinga. (This is not Plantinga's fault. His project was the metaphysics of modality, not the metaphysics of reasons.) In fact, Plantinga, in the 1974 book Dancy cites, says very little about the difference other than what Dancy claims he does above.<sup>177</sup>

We should keep in mind that Dancy couldn't mean by the claim that propositions are too thin and insubstantial that they lack causal powers. This is because even states of affairs would appear to lack causal powers in virtue of their abstract nature.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Dancy (2000: 116-117)

<sup>176</sup> For a view that identifies states of affairs with propositions, see Roderick Chisholm (1970, 1971).

<sup>177</sup> See Plantinga (1974), especially Chapter 4.

<sup>178</sup> I take it that a mark of the concrete is its ability to cause, and a mark of the abstract that it cannot. Nevertheless, I do not take either mark as sufficient for definitions.

Perhaps there is an argument from analogy we can appeal to in an effort to continue trying to understand Dancy's claim about the thinness and insubstantiality of propositions. Consider a case involving not reasons for acting, but instead evidence for believing. Suppose you are provided a photograph of your friend at the soccer match. Someone might argue that the evidence you have for believing that he was at the match is not the photograph itself but what the photograph depicts. Analogously, it may be argued that our reasons are not the propositions (the representing thing) but rather are the things the propositions represent. My reason for helping someone is not the representation I have of someone in distress but rather the person's distress. Therefore, perhaps what it means for a proposition to be too insubstantial to be a good reason is that propositions by themselves are like photos. They provide us with a representation of something. And just as mere representations of things are not sources of evidence, mere propositions or states of affairs are not sources of good reasons.

At least at first glance, this argument from analogy fails. It seems false that photographs themselves are not sources of evidence. And if this is right, then it does not follow from this that propositions cannot be good reasons. Of course, it might be true that what photographs depict are in some sense "closer" to the circumstances than the photograph itself. In the situation involving your friend at the soccer match, the photograph might depict him sitting in some bleachers with a field of players in front of him chasing a soccer ball. Maybe it is thought that we could say that what the photos depict has more evidentiary value than the photos (the things that depict) themselves. However, even if this claim is right, it does not show that

photos do not have significant evidentiary value themselves. Analogously, even if it were assumed that states of affairs are in some sense more thick and substantial, it would not follow that propositions are not thick and substantial enough to be good reasons. As it stands, the constructed argument from analogy appears to fail.

Still, maybe we can take something away from the analogy between the evidence for belief and the substantiality of being good a reason. Maybe Dancy has something like this in mind when he claims that propositions are not substantial enough to be good reasons: good reasons must be things that are closer to the things that happen rather than mere depictions of them. Depictions, we might say, are too far removed to be robust enough to be good reasons for acting. Of course, this language is far too metaphorical to be precise, but the goal here is to see if we can get precise about Dancy's claims by first thinking about things in a more metaphorical manner. So, the idea being proposed here is that good reasons have to be the things that propositions represent because they are closer to the real things that occur. Conversely, good reasons cannot be things like propositions because they are too removed from the real things that occur.

Assuming we are clear enough regarding Dancy's claims here, we have a *tu quoque* argument against them that speak against his claiming that propositions are too thin and insubstantial. Dancy believes that reason-explanations are non-factive, which for him means that reason-explanations citing non-obtaining states of affairs can still be explanatory even though the reason does not obtain.<sup>179</sup> These reasons can serve as motivating reasons, i.e., they can be the reasons for which agents act.

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<sup>179</sup> Dancy (2001), Chapter 6.

Non-obtaining states of affairs, no matter one's ontology of states of affairs, would seem to be "thin" and "insubstantial" precisely because they are non-obtaining. For example, suppose Miles is not really in distress—he's pretending, but you falsely believe that he is in distress. You come to Miles' apparent aid. Did Miles' distress cause you to come to his aid? How could it have?

One might attempt to claim that Miles' playing around caused it though, and that was an obtaining state of affairs. The counter-response here is that this might well be true, but it was not your reason for helping Miles. According to Dancy, your reason was Miles' distress, which did not obtain. Nevertheless, according to Dancy this non-obtaining state of affairs was effective (in some manner or other) in serving as a reason for acting. Sure, it was a motivating reason, but motivating reasons seem to have substantial roles in the economy of action, whatever is meant by 'substantial' here. One thing it might mean is that false or non-obtaining motivating propositions are related in some way to the psychologies of agents, and that such propositions can have a proper role in their actions, including being the reasons for which it is said agents act. Much more would need to be said about this proper role. But it seems fairly safe to say that the role the reason, as a non-obtaining state of affairs, has in the economy of action could be just as thin and insubstantial as the role that a proposition itself has.<sup>180</sup>

We still need to tie this line of objection to Dancy's claim that propositions are not the right kind of thing to be good reasons. According to Dancy, motivating reasons have to be the kinds of thing that can be good reasons. He does not mean by

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<sup>180</sup> See Section 5.4 below for more on this issue of reasons and causes.

this that every motivating reason can be a good reason.<sup>181</sup> Rather, motivating reasons need to be the right kinds of things in terms of their *ontological* status to be good reasons. That is, they need to be of the right ontological kind in order to be candidates for good reasons. Dancy argues that reasons need to be states of affairs for this to be the case. Consider a case where an agent acts for a reason that does not obtain: you come to the aid of Miles for the non-obtaining state of affairs of him being in distress. Now, even though non-obtaining states of affairs cannot be good reasons when they are the reasons for which agents act, those very states of affairs can be good reasons for acting in situations where they obtain. Thus, the state of affairs of Miles being in distress could be a good reason to come to his aid so long as the state of affairs obtains.

We are now in a position to state the *tu quoque* argument against Dancy. Non-obtaining states of affairs are of the same ontological kind as obtaining states of affairs. But Dancy claims that states of affairs are robust enough to be good reasons because of the ontological kind to which they belong. This explains why, according to Dancy, there is a sense in which non-obtaining states of affairs can be good reasons—they belong to the right ontological kind. So, this means that non-obtaining states of affairs are in some sense robust enough to be good reasons. But, the argument continues, how much more robust can non-obtaining states of affairs be than propositions? The thought here is that there does not appear to be much difference at all in terms of ontological robustness. Non-obtaining states of affairs seem to be just as ontologically thin (or robust) and insubstantial (or substantial) as

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<sup>181</sup> Dancy (2000: 107-108)

propositions. And even if the former are more robust, it couldn't be by much. Thus, it seems false that their robustness over propositions makes them better candidates for being good reasons. Therefore, it appears wrong to claim propositions are not robust enough to be good reasons.

It is important to note that this argument against Dancy teaches us that any anti-psychologist who claims that motivating reasons can be false or non-obtaining must have a theory of the ontology of reasons that can accommodate this claim. Perhaps we could put this in Dancy's terminology: reasons need to be thin and insubstantial enough to be such that they can be reasons even if they are false or do not obtain. In fact, views claiming that reasons are intentional objects, or even views countenancing apparent reasons will have to account for how it is that such thin entities could have a substantive role in the economy of action.<sup>182</sup> Thus, it seems that any anti-psychologistic view must have a theory according to which the reasons (or apparent reasons) are thin entities, but also according to which these entities are able to have a motivational role in action.

It seems that we are at a loss regarding Dancy's strategy to argue against propositionalism. Dancy's claims were difficult to figure out with precision, and so much of the discussion and argumentation in this section is much less precise than I would have preferred. Nevertheless, I think the debate between Dancy and the propositionalist has been advanced here. We learned that some strategies to account for the ontological difference between states of affairs and propositions fail, and that if Dancy's argument against propositionalism is to succeed then it must

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<sup>182</sup> I have Alvarez (2010) and Stout (2009) in mind here.



first make sense of the ontological question concerning the metaphysical gulf between propositions and states of affairs.

### **5.3 Other Problems with Propositions?**

Propositionalism requires the existence of propositions. The project here cannot provide a comprehensive defense of their existence. Nevertheless, some of the standard reasons offered for the existence of propositions are provided.<sup>183</sup> It is assumed that this will be sufficient for our purposes here. After a very brief defense of propositions, the effort will consider objections to particular propositionalist theories.

#### **5.3.1 Propositions**

It seems that sentences encode information. For example, the sentence ‘The man speaks’ seems to encode information. So does the distinct sentence ‘El hombre habla’. In fact, these distinct sentences seem to encode the same information, which could be said to be their meaning. If this is right, then it does not seem that the meaning of these sentences are the linguistic items with which we are presented because the linguistic items are distinct. These bits of encoded information—these meanings—are, to use contemporary parlance, the *propositions* expressed by the sentences.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, it seems that propositions are true or false depending on

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<sup>183</sup> I am indebted to Jeffrey King’s (2007) work on propositions for the section 5.3.2 of this chapter.

<sup>184</sup> I am going to assume, for clarity’s sake, that propositions are to be identified with the information encoded by sentences.

their relation to the world. Propositions are true if and only if the world agrees with the information expressed by them, and they are false otherwise.

A second consideration is that there are things that we believe, wish for, doubt, claim, assume, etc. And it seems that these are the very things that we take to be true and false. Jordan believes that Canada has the coldest climate in North America. What Jordan seems to believe is the proposition expressed by the sentence 'Canada has the coldest climate in North America'. And both the sentence and belief appear to be either true or false depending on what is the case in North America. So, we seem to have *propositional attitudes* that have propositions as their objects. The propositions of our attitudes can likewise be possibly or necessarily true or false as the case may be.

There may be many other considerations for thinking that propositions exist, including considerations for working out a theory of semantics for natural languages that have modal locutions and verbs of propositional attitudes as discussed just above. Having propositions available to the semanticist could make for a tidy semantics for such natural languages. Surely even more considerations may exist, but hopefully the several provided are sufficient to move forward with saying more about a theory of reasons that has it that the latter are propositions.

Propositions seem to have constituents. Moreover, these constituents are reflected in the sentences to which the propositions are intimately related. The sentence 'Tim is hungry' expresses a proposition (relative to a context of utterance), and according to those who think propositions have constituents, this proposition is a structured entity of some sort. That is, the internal structure of the proposition

itself consists of entities. In what follows, the structured view of propositions is assumed to be the correct one.

Structuralists about propositions disagree about what make up the structure of propositions. The Russellian view has it that individuals, properties, and relations make up propositions.<sup>185</sup> On a very basic Russellian view, the proposition that Tim is hungry has at least the individual Tim and the property of being hungry. On the other hand, on a very simple Fregean view propositions are constituted by senses. Frege argued that names, descriptions, and other terms have more than just referents; they also express senses, which are, roughly, distinct ways of conceiving of the referents of the terms. Thus, the proposition that Tim is hungry is constituted by some sense expressed by the name 'Tim'. The name 'Tim' might, for example, express the sense *the son of Tom* or *the man who works at the bank*, as these are various possible ways of conceiving the individual Tim who is the referent of the name 'Tim'.<sup>186</sup> The other part of the Fregean sentence here would be constituted by the predicate 'is hungry', which has the property of being hungry as its referent, but the proposition consists of the sense expressed by the predicate 'is hungry'.

So far I have provided but simple versions of Russellian and Fregean theories. As complete theories of propositions they are much more complicated than could be covered here. However, I think that some of the most significant

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<sup>185</sup> Some (King 2007) call the view the Neo-Russellian view. Others (Salmon 1980) call it the 'naïve theory'. Moreover, for the purposes of this chapter I will only need to distinguish between two main kinds of structuralist positions.

<sup>186</sup> A way of understanding what senses are is by considering the two senses expressed by the proper name 'Tim'. *The son of Tom* and *the man who works at the bank* are expressions of 'Tim' that have different descriptive content. Below I will sometimes refer to senses as descriptive contents of names and descriptions.

features have been provided for what is to follow. As will be seen, the problems for propositionalism that have been considered in the literature depend only on some of the fundamental features of Fregeanism and Russellianism.

Just a bit more should be said about the versions of Russellianism and Fregeanism to be supposed. First, I assume that the constituents of propositions correspond in some way to the parts of the sentences of which they are expressions. So, constituents of the proposition that Tim is hungry correspond in some way to the parts of the sentence 'Tim is hungry'. What I mean by 'correspondence' here is something like the following. The simple subject-predicate sentence 'Tim is hungry' expresses a proposition. The proposition expressed here consists of things that relate back to the subject and predicate terms of the sentence. Second, I do not suppose a worked out view of the basic semantic units of sentences. Thus, I do not suppose a worked out view of what the basic constituents of propositions are. Third, I do not suppose that an exact isomorphic correspondence between terms in a sentence and its propositional constituents. There may well be one, but I do not need to take a stand on this. Third, I suppose an intuitive understanding of the expression 'term'. I do not mean anything technical when I use it. The relevant examples I use will involve terms like 'Oedipus', 'his fiancé', 'his mother', etc. Fourth, I take the latter expressions mentioned to be terms, but I take no stance on whether the expressions 'his fiancé' or 'his mother' (or other similar terms) correspond to one or more constituents of propositions. Fifth, I will only consider simple sentences with subject-predicate form. Complex sentences with other forms will not be needed to generate the problems against Russellianism or Fregeanism. As I

see it, these issues are all orthogonal to the issues to be discussed and responded to in this section. This is because the natures of the objections to propositionalism do not depend on the more sophisticated features of theories of propositions.

### **5.3.2 Russellian Propositionalism**

To be clear, a Russellian theory of propositionalism is one that countenances Russellian propositions in a theory of reasons. Indeed, it might be that reasons are very often Fregean in nature, but a Russellian theory of propositionalism seeks to accommodate Russellian reasons too. An initial problem for propositionalism arises if Russellianism is true. This is because reason contexts seem to be intensional. That is, expressions of reasons in contexts where reason-explanations are provided do not always permit substitution of their constitutive terms with co-referring terms such that truth-values are always preserved. Thus it appears that whether something is a reason for which someone  $\Phi$ -s depends on the descriptive content of the reason. By considering examples involving propositions with distinct descriptive contents we can clearly see this. For example, whether Oedipus has his mother or his fiancé in mind seems to make all the difference in what Oedipus' reason is for going to the church, even if Oedipus' mother and fiancé are the same person.<sup>187</sup> A candidate reason for Oedipus' going to the church is that his fiancé is

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<sup>187</sup> The Oedipus in mind here is the Oedipus of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. In this tragedy, Oedipus notoriously finds himself in circumstances in which he both kills his father and marries his mother, Queen Jocasta, without knowing that it is his father he is killing and his mother who he is marrying. Upon discovering what he had done, Oedipus tears his eyes out.

waiting there to marry him. But it seems false to claim that Oedipus went to the church for the reason that his mother was waiting there to marry him.

To examine this issue in a bit more detail, let us look at a passage by propositionalist philosopher Stephen Everson:

Thus whilst Oedipus should go to the church because his fiancée is waiting there to marry him, it is dubious that he should go because his mother is waiting there to marry him. If there are such cases, then this will be sufficient to motivate the claim that reasons are to be found in the realm of sense – even if many reasons will tolerate perfectly happily the substitution of co-referring terms.<sup>188</sup>

Everson argues that if there are cases in which proposition  $P_1$  is a reason for agent  $S$  to  $\Phi$ , yet proposition  $P_2$ , which is expressed by a sentence that is referentially equivalent to the sentence expressing  $P_1$ , is not a reason for agent  $S$  to  $\Phi$ , then there is motivation to think that reasons are to be found exclusively “in the realm of sense”. Another way of understanding the claim that reasons are to be found in the realm of sense is that that reasons are found at the level of the descriptive contents of propositions. The descriptive contents serve to determine the referents of the propositions. But, the argument here continues, since propositions expressed by co-

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<sup>188</sup> See Everson (2009: 40). Everson thinks that reasons for acting are facts, which he takes to be true propositions. He seems to think that reasons always have a normative role in the rational explanation of action. Thus he focuses on Oedipus’ normative reasons for going to the church. He and I disagree about the normative role of motivating reasons. This difference will be reflected in how I discuss Oedipus’ reasons for going to the church—they need not have a normative role in his actions. And as will be seen, we disagree regarding the truth of Russellian reasons.

referential sentences are not necessarily identical, reasons are not to be found at the level of reference—and the Russellian claims that sometimes reasons are found at the level of reference.

Everson's claims here might provide some initial reason for thinking that Russellian propositions do not have a place in a theory of motivating reasons, thus challenging a Russellian theory of propositionalism. The idea is that it's only general descriptive contents that motivate agents rather than propositions with particular individuals as constituents. Other related cases also speak in favor of thinking that Russellian propositions do not have a place in a theory of motivating reasons. Suppose Roy runs away, and he offers as his reason for doing so that *that* woman was there. This reason does not seem, by itself, sufficient to motivate Roy to run away. It seems that descriptive features of the woman are required in order for Roy to be motivated to run away from her. Indeed, it would seem very natural for us to ask Roy what it was about that woman that prompted his running away, and he could respond that she was pointing a gun at him. Thus, the related proposition that the woman was pointing a gun at him motivated Roy to run away from her. So, the argument goes, what motivates agents like Roy are not the Russellian propositions but rather the Fregean propositions to which the Russellian propositions are related.

I think these considerations against the Russellian theory of motivating reasons fail because sometimes agents act for Russellian propositions themselves. Moreover, this might be true even if there are general propositions to which the Russellian propositions are related. We can motivate this claim by looking at

examples involving proper names and indexicals because sentences involving them are thought to express Russellian propositions.

One common kind of action that is motivated by Russellian propositions involve cases where agents are indifferent to any of the possible descriptions related to the individuals in question yet act for the individual in question anyway. It seems perfectly possible that Devon takes Benjamin to the park for the reason that *Benjamin* loves to feed the ducks; or perhaps Devon takes *him* to the park for the reason that *he* (referring to Benjamin) loves to feed the ducks. Likewise it is possible that Ryann brings Destiny some hot tea for the reason that *she* (referring to Destiny) is not feeling well. In these everyday cases we imagine the agent acting for a reason that is to be identified with a Russellian proposition. We imagine Devon and Ryann acting for the individual in question and not for any of the descriptive properties associated with the individuals, because they were indifferent to such properties. In these cases it might be significant for our examples that, for example, Benjamin is Devon's son and Destiny is Ryann's daughter, but when Devon takes his son to the park or Ryann brings her daughter tea, again, they act for the individuals in question and are indifferent to the related descriptive contents associated with 'Benjamin' and 'Destiny'.

Indeed, we can think of other cases involving indexicals that reveal that agents act for Russellian propositions. Suppose the meeting with my advisor is at noon on May 17, 2012, which happens to be today, and it is about noon. I go to the meeting. My reason for driving to the coffee shop seems to be that I have a meeting with my advisor today at noon. Now, initially it might be thought that we can



describe my reason for acting by appealing to purely descriptive contents. That is, it might be said that my reason for driving to the coffee shop is, for example, that there is an advisement meeting at the coffee shop at noon on May 17, 2012. However, this cannot be the reason for which I act because I must believe when I am driving to the coffee shop that *now* it is just about noon (assuming that I am just minutes away) and that *today* is May 17, 2012. Moreover, it is not just any advisement meeting. It is *my* advisement meeting. If it were just someone's advisement meeting, that would not motivate me to go the coffee shop. So we see in this everyday kind of case that there are essential indexicals in the reasons for which I act. If this case is right, then it implies that Russellian propositions have a role in a theory of motivating reasons. Moreover, that some of our *de re* beliefs are essential to acting for a reason further supports the claim that Russellian propositions have a role in motivating action because that which is believed is my reason for acting.<sup>189</sup>

There is another problem for Russellian propositionalism that needs solving. We could imagine a case in which Saul is asked his reason for going to the bookshop. Saul explains that his reason is that Mark Twain is there giving out autographs. We could imagine further that Saul does not know that Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens, so he does not believe that he goes to the bookshop for the reason that Samuel Clemens is there giving out autographs. But according to Russellian propositionalism these reasons are the very same, so Saul had to act for the reason that Samuel Clemens is at the bookshop giving out autographs if he acted for the

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<sup>189</sup> The example of this paragraph is mine but it owes the philosophical points to the work of John Perry (1979) and Thomas McKay (1984). Perry's 1979 shows that there are cases of essential indexicality, and McKay's 1984 argues persuasively for the claim that *de re* belief is essential to a theory of intentional action.

reason that Mark Twain is at the bookshop giving out autographs. The Russellian propositionalist needs to solve this problem.<sup>190</sup>

To be clear, consider sentences (1a) and (1b).<sup>191</sup>

(1a) Mark Twain is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

(1b) Samuel Clemens is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

Suppose the proposition expressed by (1a) is taken, in a particular context, to be Saul's reason for going to the bookshop. If Russellianism is true, then the proposition expressed by (1b) is also Saul's reason for going to the bookshop. But keeping in mind the case developed above, Saul doesn't even believe that Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens. The intuition here is that while the proposition expressed by (1a) is Saul's reason for going to the bookshop, the proposition expressed by (1b) could not be. Saul believes that the proposition expressed by (1a) is his reason for going to the church, though he presumably does not believe the same for the proposition expressed by (1b). However, (1a) and (1b) are completely co-referential. It is tempting to conclude from this that an agent's reasons are not found at the level of reference, and so that Russellian propositions are not agential reasons. Furthermore, it would seem tempting to claim that even though the terms 'Mark Twain' and 'Samuel Clemens' refer to the same individual, (1a) and (1b)

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<sup>190</sup> A Russellian propositionalist is someone who is a Russellian about propositions and is a propositionalist about reasons.

<sup>191</sup> Here I switch to a discussion of motivating reasons that does not have the assumption that they are normative reasons. As I made clear in Chapter 3, I do think that some motivating reasons are normative. If one thinks, as does Everson, that all motivating reasons are normative, one can make the appropriate changes to (1a) and (1b).

express different propositions because of the different descriptive contents associated with the proper names. If (1a) and (1b) express different propositions, they express different reasons too. And if they express different reasons this is because of the different senses making up the propositions.

So if the Russellian theory of propositions is true, then it would appear as if (1a) and (1b) express the same proposition and are thus the same reason for which Saul went to the bookshop. In order to see what appears to be wrong with this, consider what would happen if Saul were told by the Russellian-propositionalist that he had gone to the bookshop because Samuel Clemens was there giving out autographs. Saul would, it seems rightly, emphatically claim that he did not act for that reason—he doesn't even believe that Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens. He would insist that it could not be a reason for which he acted. Thus, Fregean propositionalists would argue, Saul's reason for going to the bookshop must be one that is under a description that he takes to be his reason, e.g., Mark Twain, the author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is giving out autographs at the bookshop. This is why Saul would deny that his reason for going to the bookshop is that Samuel Clemens is there giving out autographs. The question arises as to whether we should take Saul's rejection of claim that he acted for the proposition expressed by (1b) as a strong argument against his actually doing so. I think we can answer this question negatively.

Following recent developments in Russellian theories of reference in intensional contexts, it is possible to account for the identity of propositions expressed by sentences (1a) and (1b) and thus the identity of reasons expressed by

them. These developments will in turn enable us to account for how it is that the proposition expressed by (1b) is also Saul's reason for going to the bookshop. The developments of interest here are by Nathan Salmon and Scott Soames.<sup>192</sup> Their insights can help to preserve Russellianism about reasons in light of the challenges expressed in the Saul case above. In what follows, I show how these insights can help to resolve these challenges. These insights are consistent, and could be looked at as complementing each other in an overall defense of the Russellian view of reasons as propositions.

For the first insight consider the following passage by Salmon:

What is important is to recognize that, whatever mode of acquaintance with an object is involved in a particular case of someone's entertaining a singular proposition about that object, that mode of acquaintance is part of the means by which one apprehends the singular proposition, for it is the means by which one is familiar with one of the main ingredients of the proposition. This generates something analogous to an "appearance" or a "guise" for singular propositions. ... This unorthodox conception of the nature of propositions and their apprehension thus allows for the possibility of a notion of "failing to recognize" a proposition by mistaking it for a new and different piece of information.<sup>193</sup>

This passage claims that there are modes by which we are acquainted with objects of singular propositions (Russellian propositions). Moreover, these modes of acquaintance are the means by which we apprehend (or grasp) the singular

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<sup>192</sup> See Salmon (1986) and Soames (2002).

<sup>193</sup> Salmon (1986: 109)

proposition, and they are the means (at least in part) because they are the means for grasping the “ingredients” of the proposition. Salmon goes on to argue from here that it is possible for propositions to be expressed via guises. This possibility leads to the further possibility that agents can make mistakes recognizing propositions. One way we can make a mistake is that sometimes we think that there are two propositions expressed by distinct sentences when in fact there is only one proposition expressed by them.

Salmon goes on to write:

There is no reason why the modified naïve theory [the Russellian theory] should hold that the grasping of a piece of information places one in a position to “see through” the information, so to speak, and to recognize it infallibly as the same information encountered earlier in different surroundings under quite different circumstances.<sup>194</sup>

Salmon calls his claims a challenge to the orthodox theory of propositions because the latter theory has it that one cannot make mistakes in grasping propositions.<sup>195</sup> If this challenge is correct, then this means that Saul could be making a mistake in thinking that he did not act for the reason expressed by (1b), namely, that Samuel Clemens is at the bookshop giving out autographs. The Russellian-propositionalist can in turn claim that reasons are determined exclusively by the referents of the corresponding sentences, so (1a) and (1b) express the same propositions. What leads us to think that (1a) and (1b) express different propositions is that we think

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<sup>194</sup> Salmon (1986: 109)

<sup>195</sup> Salmon (1986: 109)

that it is possible that Saul believe one but not the other. However, for the conclusion here that (1a) and (1b) express distinct propositions to follow another assumption would need to hold, namely, that propositions are infallibly grasped by agents like Saul. If this assumption were correct, then even though the senses determine the same referent, the propositions expressed would be distinct—otherwise Saul would have believed both (1a) and (1b) expressed reasons for him to go to the church.

Salmon's claim that we do not recognize the information content of a sentence infallibly seems right. Moreover, a committed Russellian about propositions can claim that (1a) and (1b) express the same proposition—the semantic contents of (1a) and (1b) are identical because, it is claimed, the semantic contents are composed exclusively of the referents of (1a) and (1b). This should lead us to rethink our initial intuitions regarding the Saul case—the intuitions that led us, with Everson's suggestion, to deny that a Russellian theory of propositionalism is possible. Saul's reason for going to the bookshop can be that Samuel Clemens is there giving out autographs. Surely Saul does not believe that this was his reason for going to the bookshop, but he is wrong about what he believes because of the guise in which the content of the belief is presented to him. We did not, at first, believe that this was Saul's reason for going to the bookshop, but likewise we were wrong. We falsely assumed that Saul infallibly recognizes the semantic contents of (1a) and (1b). This led Saul (and the Fregean) to conclude falsely that (1a) and (1b) express distinct propositions, and therefore express distinct reasons for which Saul went to the bookshop. Thus, Salmon's insight into

Saul's fallibility regarding knowing the propositions of which he is aware invites a solution to Everson's problem. Quite simply, Saul is wrong to deny that (1b) is his reason for going to the bookshop. (1a) and (1b) express the same proposition, so the Russellian theory of reasons predicts that (1a) and (1b) express the same reason for which Saul went to the bookshop.

We can say a bit more about the Russellian theory of propositionalism defended here. Both Scott Soames and Nathan Salmon argue that sentences have not only semantic contents, but they also *convey* other information depending on the contexts of their use.<sup>196</sup> For example, consider the following two sentences:

(2a) The esteemed university scholar has been nominated for teacher of the year.

(2b) The university's favorite lecturer has been nominated for teacher of the year.

(2a) and (2b) express the proposition that, Smith, say, has been nominated for teacher of the year, where 'Smith' refers to the very same person the descriptive phrases in (2a) and (2b) do. Nevertheless, (2a) and (2b) are used to convey other descriptive information. In the case of (2a) and (2b) the different descriptive information conveyed is about the university professor who has been nominated for teacher of the year. The key points to take from this example is that there is what, in certain contexts, is *semantically* expressed when one utters sentences like (2a) and (2b), but there is also what is *pragmatically* conveyed by such utterances. The

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<sup>196</sup> Scott Soames (2002: 217-220). Compare with Salmon (1986: 78-79). In what follows, I focus mainly on Soames' account of the view.

propositions pragmatically conveyed have different descriptive features associated with the referents they help to fix.

With the distinction between semantic content expressed and pragmatic information conveyed, and with Salmon's rejection of agential infallibility regarding the propositions they are aware of in mind, we are in a position to make more sense of Saul's denial that he went to the bookshop for the reason that Samuel Clemens is there giving out autographs. It will be true that the proposition expressed by (1b) is Saul's reason for going to the bookshop because of what (1b) semantically expresses: that very person picked out by 'Samuel Clemens' will be at the bookshop giving out autographs. However, (1b) pragmatically conveys that the person giving out autographs is also named Samuel Clemens, and this is a surprise to Saul. In Salmon's terminology, the guise (the appearance) in which the semantic content of (1b) is presented is one about which Saul is mistaken. This explains Saul's denying that he acted for that reason. He did not recognize that the semantic content of (1b) is the same as (1a). Therefore, he is wrong to think that he did not act for the reason in terms of the semantic content of (1b). As we have seen there is good reason to think that Saul is not in an infallible position regarding all ways of expressing what he believes. Moreover, agents like Saul are often not in positions to distinguish the difference between the semantic content of what they believe and the varied and various ways in which other sentences can also be used to convey that information.

I need to say something briefly about how it is that the reason expressed by (1b) can motivate Saul to go to the bookshop even though Saul would deny believing it. The general move here is that Saul can believe the reason expressed by (1b) and



at the same time be unaware of it. That is, in virtue of believing the reason expressed by (1a), Saul believes the reason expressed by (1b), and so the reason expressed by (1b) does motivate him. Finally, we have already dealt with the issue of Russellian propositions having a motivational role in agency above, so there are no other special problems for the Saul case in this regard. We have seen that Saul can be motivated to act by the Russellian proposition that Mark Twain is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

These efforts to defend Russellianism about motivating reasons are not decisive, but they do seem to move the debate forward. Typically, debates within anti-psychologism involve whether motivating reasons are states of affairs or propositions. Everson's challenges to Russellian propositionalism, as well as challenges to the latter theory's ability to account for acting for Russellian reasons, helped to move the debate in the right direction. We have been able to respond to each of the challenges with at least *prima facie* plausible solutions.

I would like to continue furthering the discussion. Everson has argued that we should understand reasons as Fregean propositions, but there is a problem with Fregean propositionalism as the theory of motivating reasons.

### **5.3.3 Fregean Propositionalism**

I begin with a brief introduction to Fregeanism. We saw above that Fregeans claim that propositions are not constituted by referents but rather by senses.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> This is one manner of presenting Fregeanism about propositions. I learned much about Frege's philosophy of language and its legacy from Soames (2010), especially Chapter 1.

Gottlob Frege (the founder of the view named after him) concluded that senses exist from considerations like the ones briefly sketched at the beginning of Section 5.3.1.

One main function of language is to represent the world, and we do this through using words and sentences to stand for objects in the world. However, it is argued that the meaning of sentences cannot simply be the referents of the words and sentences because there are puzzle cases that appear to show otherwise. These cases are instances of a puzzle known as Frege's Puzzle.

Consider the following sentences:

(3a) Hesperus is Hesperus.

(3b) Hesperus is Phosphorus.

Frege argued that if (3a) and (3b) express propositions with the same constituents, then they would have the same meaning. However, the proposition expressed by (3a) is trivially true, whereas the proposition expressed by (3b) appears to express a substantive empirical claim. Given this difference in cognitive significance, Frege argued, that (3a) and (3b) cannot have the same meaning. He then reasoned that the names 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' express distinct senses, and this is why (3a) and (3b) have distinct meanings. This solution to Frege's Puzzle is in part what led to the Fregean thesis that the constituents of propositions are senses and not the referents of the terms of sentences.

If all propositions are constituted by senses, then assuming propositionalism, reasons will also be constituted by senses. This is one way of understanding

Everson's claim that "reasons are to be found in the realm of sense". If competing theories of propositions are unable to resolve Frege's puzzle, then there may be good reason to adopt a Fregean view of reasons over their competitors.<sup>198</sup> In fact, the Fregean view predicts that the propositions expressed by (1a) and (1b) are distinct reasons for Saul's going to the bookshop:

(1a) Mark Twain is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

(1b) Samuel Clemens is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

If reasons are to be found in the realm of sense, then since the propositions expressed by (1a) and (1b) are constituted by different senses, they express different propositions. And if (1a) and (1b) express different propositions, then they express different reasons. One significant consequence of this is that Fregeans have a straightforward account of why it seems, at first glance anyway, that Saul acts for the proposition expressed by (1a) but not for the proposition expressed by (1b).<sup>199</sup>

According to Everson's Fregean version of reasons, reasons have an ineliminable normative dimension to them, which leads to a problem for Fregean propositionalism. Saul can act for a reason only if that reason is also a reason for

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<sup>198</sup> Even if there are Russellian solutions to Frege's puzzle cases (see Section 5.3.2 for solutions) it would be interesting whether both kinds of propositions could serve as theories of reasons. That is, perhaps both Russellianism and Fregeanism about reasons could be true. If this were the case, then propositionalism about reasons could be either Russellian or Fregean.

<sup>199</sup> We have seen (Section 5.3.2) that Russellians have an account of why we should think that Paul acts for both the reasons expressed by (1a) and (1b). However, some might find the Fregean theory more intuitive.

him to act. Accordingly, if Saul goes to the bookshop for the reason that Mark Twain is signing autographs there, then that reason is also a normative reason for him to go to the bookshop.

We could imagine another case in which Paul's reasons to go to the bookshop multiply because there are many distinct Fregean reasons for him to go. That is, we could imagine there being cases in which the author Paul goes to get an autograph from is known for having several different names, and each of these names have distinct senses. We could suppose that Paul knows that the author is known by several different names. Suppose John Steinbeck is the relevant author, and that he is also known by the following names: John Schmidt, Frank Garvey, and Jack Stargell. (Keep in mind that this is a fictional case involving an actual person, namely, John Steinbeck.) Then each of (1c)-(1f) would be reasons for Paul to go to the bookshop:

(1c) John Steinbeck is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

(1d) John Schmidt is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

(1e) Frank Garvey is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

(1f) Jack Stargell is at the bookshop giving out autographs.

According to the stipulation above that the names in (1c)-(1f) have distinct senses, the propositions expressed by (1c)-(1f) for the Fregean will be distinct. Thus, in this case, Fregean propositionalism implies that the reasons expressed here by (1c)-(1f) are distinct. The problem here is that typically having more reasons (count noun) to

$\Phi$  leads to having more reason (mass noun) to  $\Phi$ . But it does not seem that Paul's having all the different reasons to go to the bookshop leads to his having more reason to go. That is, it seems that that at most one of the reasons Paul has to go to the bookshop provide him with all the reason to go to bookshop, and that many of them simply will not contribute anything to his having more reason to go to the bookshop. Call this *the more reason problem*.

Everson's reply to this problem is this:

Certainly, when we decide how we should act, we will be concerned to determine what reasons there are for and against some course of action, but it would be a very crude mistake to think that if there are more reasons to  $\Phi$  than there are not to, this would provide even *prima facie* support for inferring that there is more reason to  $\Phi$  than not to  $\Phi$ .

Everson's claim here seems right. We can readily imagine cases where agents have many reasons to  $\Phi$  but have, for example, one moral reason not to  $\Phi$  that outweighs the many reasons to  $\Phi$ . For example, Max might have many reasons to take his family on vacation: his partner needs it; his children have not been on vacation since they were much younger; Max's vacation time from work is about to expire, etc. But he also has a strong countervailing reason not to take his family on vacation: he promised to donate what would be his vacation money to the local homeless shelter. In this case it appears that Max has more reasons to take his family on vacation, but he has more reason to donate to the homeless shelter.

Everson's claim that having more reasons to  $\Phi$  does not imply having more reason to  $\Phi$  is plausible. Nevertheless, it is still a bit counterintuitive that there will turn out to be many more cases than we would have thought in which someone's having more reasons to  $\Phi$  does not lead to their also having more reason to  $\Phi$ . This objection against Fregeanism is certainly not intended to be a decisive argument against the position. It is just that the more reason problem is a counterintuitive result that a theory of reasons does well to avoid.

Nevertheless, even if the problem of more reason does not count significantly against Fregeanism, there is another problem in the neighborhood that does. We know that according to Fregean propositionalism the reasons expressed by (1c)-(1f) are distinct reasons in virtue of being constituted by distinct senses. Imagine a case where Paul goes to the bookshop, and he has the reasons expressed by (1c)-(1f) in mind because he knows that each of the names in them refer to the same individual. Now, it seems false that Paul really is acting for distinct reasons in this case. Given that the reasons expressed by (1c)-(1f) are different (for the Fregean) because they are constituted by distinct senses, is it right to say that they are distinct reasons? If we are inclined to answer negatively here, which I think we should be, then Fregean propositionalism is in trouble because it predicts that these are distinct reasons. In fact, this case shows that Fregean propositionalism predicts that there are possible situations in which agents act for too many reasons. Call this *the problem of too many reasons*.

## **The Too Many Reasons Argument**

10. If Fregean propositionalism is true, then Paul acts for more than one reason in the case described.

11. Paul acts for only one reason in the case described.

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12. Therefore, Fregean propositionalism is false.

Support for the premise 10 is found in the Paul case. Supposing that Fregean propositionalism is true, Paul would have to act for the reasons expressed by (1c)-(1f) because he believes each of the propositions and has them in mind as he goes to the bookshop. But intuitively, Paul doesn't act for each of these reasons. Indeed, we can say more to defend the claim that there are possible situations in which Paul acts for too many reasons. Suppose Paul goes to the bookshop and is motivationally indifferent between the reasons expressed by (1c)-(1f). We can understand this claim about motivational indifference in terms of motivational force.<sup>200</sup> The basic idea here, though put sketchily, is that the things that motivate agents do so with a particular internal force. For example, being hungry motivates people to get food, and when we think about hunger as a motivation, there seems to be a kind of internal force—or something akin to an internal force—that it exerts pressure of some kind on our motivational systems. Indeed, it seems *prima facie* plausible to claim that motivating reasons work on our motivational systems in a very similar way; there is an internal motivational force that they somehow exert on us. To

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<sup>200</sup> I am speaking somewhat loosely here. In Section 6.1 in Chapter 6 below I argue that reasons do not have motivational properties. I argue that they do have a role in the motivation of action, though. My claims about reasons and motivation here should be interpreted ultimately in terms of what I say about the issue below.

claim, then, that Paul is motivationally indifferent between the reasons expressed by (1c)-(1f) is to claim that these reasons have the same motivational force for Paul in the sense that none of the reasons provide any motivational force over and above what the others provide. For example, Paul acts for the reason expressed by (1c), and if the Fregean is right he also acts for the reason expressed by (1d).<sup>201</sup> Paul is motivationally indifferent between the reasons expressed by (1c) and (1d) when the reason expressed by (1d) does not add any further motivational force for Paul's going to the bookshop.

Cases involving motivational indifference are easily imaginable. Paul is simply indifferent to the different ways in which the person John Steinbeck can be picked out via the different descriptive contents, even though he knows the various ways captured in sentences (1c)-(1f). Intuitively, these are not distinct reasons for Paul's going to the bookshop. But if Fregeanism is true, the propositions expressed by (1c)-(1f) are distinct reasons for Paul's going to the bookshop. Thus, if Fregean propositionalism is true, Paul goes to the bookshop for too many reasons.

Support for premise 11 is straightforward. It seems clear that Paul only acts for one reason when he goes to the bookshop given his motivational indifference to what is expressed by the other sentences.

The too many reasons argument seems to provide further support for the Russellian theory of propositionalism. In the Paul case involving going to the bookshop for John Steinbeck's autograph we see that he only seems to act for one reason despite the four different names in the subject place of sentences (1c)-(1f).

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<sup>201</sup> I consider the reasons expressed by (1c) and (1d) only here for the sake of simplicity.



Indeed, Russellianism about reasons rightly predicts that Paul acts for one reason in this case, and this is because it predicts that (1c)-(1f) express the very same reason.

It is important to note that this is a challenge to Fregean propositionalism is not a challenge to Fregean propositions. Rather it is a challenge to the claim that reasons are only Fregean propositions. Indeed, many agential reasons are, to be sure, Fregean propositions. It is just that the problems Fregean propositionalism faces gives us additional evidence for thinking that Russellian reasons are needed in a complete theory of reasons.

#### **5.3.4 Conclusion to Section 5.3**

At this point in the discussion I think it is safe to conclude that the Russellian theory of propositionalism is the more viable candidate of motivating reasons. The too many reasons problem for motivating reasons just examined appears to be a significant cost for Fregeanism. Moreover, the significant challenges to Russellian propositionalism seem to have plausible solutions, and Russellian propositions appear to be essential to a theory of motivating reasons.

#### **5.4 Conclusion to Chapter 5**

I began this chapter by citing the propositional nature of reasons in practical reasoning as supporting propositionalism over the thesis that reasons are states of affairs. Otherwise, I do not have a knockdown argument against the latter thesis. We saw that Dancy thinks that propositionalism is false, but we struggled to get

clear on exactly why he thinks this. Every effort we made to get clear on his argument failed to produce an argument against propositionalism.

Then I tried to determine whether the Russellian or Fregean theory of propositionalism is to be preferred. We saw that the Fregean theory has what appears to be a serious problem, and so Russellian propositionalism is the theory of reasons endorsed here.

## **Chapter 6: The Ontology of Reasons Reasons, Causes, and Purposes**

### **6.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I deal with two further issues for the theory of motivating reasons defended here. First, I argue that reasons are not motivating in virtue of having motivational properties. Rather, they are motivating in virtue of being believed by agents. The role reasons have in the motivational features of action is to provide the content to our beliefs, which are the things that have motivational properties.

Second, after clarifying the debate regarding whether purposes are reasons, I briefly argue that purposes are not reasons. I argue that the conception of practical reasoning preferred here is one whereby purposes are things for the sake of which we reason in the first place regarding our actions, and consequently are things for the sake of which we act. Strictly speaking, then, purposes are not reasons for which we act even though there are significant connections between reasons and purposes.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by looking back briefly at Chapter 3 in order to resolve the unfinished business regarding the Normativity Argument against psychologism. There I offered theoretical unity objections against psychologism, which can now be properly stated. Recall also that I argued for anti-psychologism regarding normative reasons, so if psychologism were true as a theory of motivating reasons, then it would mean that reasons are theoretically less unified than a theory

of reasons where all reasons are of the same ontological kind. As claimed in Chapter 3, I take this to be a serious cost to psychologism.

### **6.1 Propositionalism and Causes**

There is a causal objection to the theory of motivating reasons I would briefly like to respond to. The objection has it that if reasons are propositions, then reasons cannot have causal powers. And, if reasons cannot have causal powers, then they cannot motivate action.<sup>202</sup> This is supposed to be bad because it is thought that motivating reasons have the power to motivate action. In standard form:

#### **Causation Argument Against Propositionalism**

13. If propositionalism is true, then reasons cannot have causal powers.

14. If reasons cannot have causal powers, then they cannot motivate action.

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15. Therefore, if propositionalism is true, then reasons cannot motivate action.

On one reading of this argument, it appears sound, and thus propositionalism seems committed to the claim that reasons cannot motivate action. According to this reading, premise 13 and 14 would be more precisely formulated thusly:

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<sup>202</sup> The issue of whether or not reasons are causes has a longstanding history. I assume that reasons are not causes because of their abstract nature. However, in what follows in this section I deal with the issue of what implications this has for reasons as *motivating* reasons.

(13a) If propositionalism is true, then reasons *by themselves* cannot have causal powers.

(14a) If reasons *by themselves* cannot have causal powers, then *by themselves* they cannot motivate action.

It is important to keep in mind what propositionalism is committed to regarding the noncausal nature of reasons. Reasons are propositions, which are members of the kind *abstracta*, which means that they lack causal powers. Call this view *noncausalism*. So, keeping this in mind premise (13a) is true. Assuming motivation is a species of causation (14a) is also true. Thus (15a) follows:

(15a) Therefore, if propositionalism is true, then reasons *by themselves* cannot motivate action.

Should propositionalists accept (15a)? If we do, then this seems to mean that propositionalism is faced with a serious problem: how can a theory of motivating reasons *not* countenance the motivational efficacy of reasons? I don't think that this is a problem. It might be argued that an account of motivating reasons does not need an account whereby reasons themselves have motivational efficacy. In fact, it is an agent's accepting (or believing) her reason that has motivational efficacy and what accounts for why some reasons are motivating reasons.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, the

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<sup>203</sup> See Hilliard Aronovich (1979) for a similar line of reasoning for developing an account of motivating reasons. Aronovich argues that reasons are considerations, which lack causal powers, but agents' *having reasons* do have such powers. See also Robert Audi (1986), who argues that *reason-states* and not reasons proper have causal powers. Finally, Markus Schlosser (2011) also recognizes Audi's claim as a viable option.

argument continues, reasons are not motivating reasons because they motivate; instead, they are motivating reasons because they are appropriately related to agents' psychologies. For example, Oedipus' believing that his fiancé is waiting to marry him at the church, or the fact that he believes that his fiancé is waiting to marry him at the church, motivate him to go to the church. However, the reason here, namely, that Oedipus' fiancé is waiting at the church to marry him, by itself is causally and thus motivationally inert. Once Oedipus believes what he does, then the fact that he believes that his fiancé is waiting to marry him at the church is what has a causal role in getting Oedipus to go to the church.

Since noncausalism about motivating reasons appears correct, we see that it is a mistake to think that the technical philosophical term 'motivating reason' refers to a reason that has the property of motivating. On this view reasons do not have such properties. But being in a state of believing can have the property of being motivating. Thus, a motivating reason is (typically) a reason that the agent believes, where this psychological state (or the fact that the agent is in the psychological state, which consists of the reason) motivates agents.

It seems true that psychological states (including those with propositional contents) have causal properties. If the view defended here is right and reasons are propositions, then it would seem as if reasons themselves lack causal properties. However, some might argue that it seems manifestly false that reasons by themselves cannot motivate action. If these three seemings are correct, then (14a)

is false because reasons can be motivational even if they are not causal.<sup>204</sup> Some might argue that agents are motivated to action by reasons all the time, but this does not mean that their reasons cause their actions. Defenders of this thesis maintain that reasons by themselves motivate action without thereby causing action. Call this view *rational motivationism*. Let's look at a case where it might appear that agents are motivated by reasons themselves. I will show that this move ultimately fails, and that rational motivationism is false.

Leah listens to a documentary put together by activists on the killing of dolphins in the seas surrounding Japan. We can suppose that this documentary does not appeal to emotional language or violent descriptions. Instead, it is a sustained valid argument for the claim that dolphins are killed unnecessarily. She believes the argument's premises, so she agrees with the conclusion that dolphins are killed unnecessarily. Leah then becomes an activist for dolphins. Someone who argues that reasons themselves can motivate might claim that it was the argument for the conclusion that dolphins are killed unnecessarily that motivated her to become an activist for dolphins. The idea here is that the reasons (*qua* premises) motivated Leah to become an activist.

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<sup>204</sup> Sehon (2005: chapter 10) argues against those who take motivations to be causal on the basis of considerations involving statements we might make in ordinary language such as: her overwhelming desire to win motivated her to cheat. Sehon claims that he does not "hear" the term 'motivated' to imply anything causal, and then he claims that 'motivate' just originates from the French 'motif', which just means 'reason'. Of course, etymology will not decide this matter. It is important to note that Sehon thinks that desires can be agential reasons, which means that he thinks that mental states can be agential reasons. Nevertheless, he denies that agential reasons and mental states have causal powers.

However, opponents of rational motivationism have an objection to this argument. They might describe this case as Leah becoming *convinced* of the truth of the premises of the valid argument, and that it is Leah's being convinced that motivated her to become an activist. That is, it is, for example, the fact that Leah is convinced, in part, by the claim that we do not need to eat dolphins in order to be healthy that motivates her to be an activist. The basic idea here is that Leah's psychology has to be appropriately related to the abstract claims of the argument such that she can be motivated to act for them. Being convinced by a premise or argument is one way in which this psychological relation can be satisfied. If this is right, then we do not have an argument for the claim that reasons by themselves motivate action, because being convinced that we do not need to eat dolphins in order to be healthy is a psychological state.

The rational motivationist might object here by making the following distinction. It is one thing to claim that motivation depends on an agent's psychological states, and quite another to say that this thereby shows that reasons do not have a role in motivating agents. We should all agree with the claim that motivation depends on an agent's psychological states. But by agreeing to it, the argument goes, we are not compelled to accept the claim that reasons are motivationally impotent, even if they are causally inert. More positively, the counter-objection continues with an argument that goes like this: *what* Leah is convinced by has some role in her becoming a dolphin activist as opposed to becoming or doing something else. What role could this be except for a motivational one?



The opponent of the rational motivationist counter-replies here by claiming that the role reasons have in motivating action is to provide content for the beliefs we have which in turn have the power to motivate us. This means that beliefs motivate, and they motivate in the manners consistent with their propositional contents. Not all beliefs are the same, of course. They vary in accordance with their contents, and this is why the content of Leah's belief (her being convinced) that we do not need to eat dolphins in order to be healthy has a role in her becoming a dolphin activist. Therefore, the role reasons have is not motivational; rather, it is to provide the content to beliefs, and the beliefs in turn motivate us as they do in accordance with that content.

One further response to someone who wishes to argue for a conceptual disconnect between motivation and causation is that it is difficult to see what motivation would be were it not a species of causation. Perhaps those who think that motivation is not causation are led to this claim because they think that were it causal, then human action would be determined by our motivations. But this move seems wrong. Motivations can have the causal role of influencing agents without thereby determining their behaviors. What motivations might causally determine is the nature of the influence that will be had on an agent, but again this influence need not in turn causally determine what agents do.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> I have Timothy O'Connor's (2000, 2005) work on agent causation in mind here. O'Connor, rightly in my opinion, thinks that agents' actions are not wholly uncaused causes. Rather, they are partially caused by internal influences (reasons, intentions, motivations, etc.). Nevertheless, I assume here that agents as substances also have a causal role in their actions where 'agents' are to be understood in a non-reductive sense. I cannot take up a defense of these claims here, but they are part of my larger picture of the metaphysics of agency.

We are now in a position to say just a bit more about the necessary connection between agential psychologies and their reasons for acting. In Chapter 4 I solved the psychology problem for anti-psychologism by arguing that the necessary connection is due to the fact that acting for reasons consists, in part, of believing one's reasons. To add to this, the reason that acting for a reason just consists, in part, of believing one's reasons is that believing one's reason has a causal-motivational role in the production of action. Acting for a reason is being so motivated by one's believing a reason that one acts for it, and as we have seen this motivation has a causal role in the production of an action. Nevertheless, we have also seen that reasons themselves do not have motivational powers, but when reasons are properly related to agents' psychologies the resulting psychological states can be motivating. We see again where psychologists have gone wrong in their thinking about motivating reasons. They take reasons by themselves to be motivating, and in order for this to be the case reasons must themselves be psychological states. We have seen that they are wrong about this even though they are right that psychological states are the things with the power to motivate action.

We have one final issue here with which to contend. The results of this section appear to conflict with the Russellian theory of reasons supported in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3). If motivating reasons are reasons that motivate in virtue of being believed by agents, then what about Saul's denial that he believed that Samuel Clemens was signing autographs at the bookshop? How can the reason expressed by (1b) be said to be Saul's motivating reason for going to the bookshop? To remind the reader:

(1a) Mark Twain is signing autographs at the bookshop.

(1b) Samuel Clemens is signing autographs at the bookshop.

The Russellian propositionalist has the resources to deal with this apparent problem. Saul believes the reason expressed by (1a), so he also believes the reason expressed by (1b); only he fails to see that the latter expresses the same reason expressed by (1a). Thus, Saul actually believes the reason expressed by (1b) but only under the guise of the sentence (1a).

We can offset much of the counterintuitiveness of the Russellian move here. Since we are talking about the motivating reasons for which Saul went to the bookshop, we need to keep in mind that he believed a reason, and was thus able to act for that reason. When we think about the case it is natural to think that Saul went to the bookshop for reason that Mark Twain was there giving out autographs, and this is right; this was his reason. Now when we consider the claim that Saul went to the bookshop for the reason that Samuel Clemens is there signing autographs, we hesitate to think that this was also his reason for going. We do this because we are tempted (falsely) to think that this is a different reason than the reason that Samuel Clemens is at the bookshop giving out autographs. The Russellian maintains that these propositions are the same. Thus, according to the Russellian propositionalist, if Saul acted for the reason that Mark Twain was at the bookshop giving out autographs, he thereby acts for the very same reason that Samuel Clemens was at the bookshop giving out autographs.

The confusion here is partly based in already thinking that the claim that Samuel Clemens is giving out autographs at the bookshop is a different reason than the claim that Mark Twain is. We have seen that this is wrong. Saul's motivating reason for going to the bookshop is one proposition with two guises. We clear up the confusion here by maintaining that Saul does not think he believes the reason when it is expressed by the sentence with the name 'Samuel Clemens' in it. Nevertheless, he believes this very same reason when it is expressed by the sentence with the name 'Mark Twain' in it.

So we see that that Russellian theory of reasons defended in Section 5.3 is consistent with the theory of the motivational role reasons have in the economy of action. It is true that agents must believe a reason for it to have a motivational role in action. The Saul case does not count against this because he does believe the reason expressed by (1b); only he believes it under a different guise, namely as the claim that Mark Twain is at the bookshop giving out autographs, which is the reason expressed by (1a).

## **6.2 Propositionalism and Purposes**

The next issue of this chapter is teleology. There are teleological theories of reasons, which have it that agential reasons are purposes. Many seem to countenance the claim that agential reasons are purposes.<sup>206</sup> In what follows, I argue that the teleological theory of reasons is false and that the general claim that

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<sup>206</sup> See Schueler (2003), Sehon (2005), and Goetz (2010)

all purposes are reasons is false. Then, I sketch a brief argument against the more modest claim that some purposes are reasons.<sup>207</sup>

A teleological theory of reasons has it that reasons are the goals or purposes for which agents  $\Phi$ . Consider Katherine. Katherine's reason for driving to Napa Valley, it is claimed, is for the purpose of enjoying a wine-tasting vacation with her girlfriend. In other words, Katherine drives to Napa Valley *in order to* enjoy a wine-tasting vacation with her girlfriend. Additionally, Katherine saying "I drove to Napa Valley in order to enjoy a wine-tasting vacation with my girlfriend" would appear to be a very natural response to a query for Katherine's reason for going to Napa Valley.

There are other standard teleological expressions that we use to state what we take to be our reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing. Linda might claim that her reason for drinking an iced tea is *because* she is thirsty. Moreover, it would be natural for Daniel to claim that his reason for going to night school is *in order to* get his college degree while he works. In each of these cases, including the Katherine case above, the common feature of the explanation is the statement of the goal or purpose. The latter are frequently indicated by teleological connectives like 'in order to', 'because' or even 'to'.

In general, human actions are goal-oriented or end-seeking.<sup>208</sup> Katherine's goal is to enjoy a wine-tasting vacation. Linda's goal is to quench her thirst. Daniel's

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<sup>207</sup> I specify the relevant subset of purposes below.

<sup>208</sup> My discussion here will focus on instrumental purposes for  $\Phi$ -ing, though much of what I say in regard to them applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to intrinsic purposes for  $\Phi$ -ing.

goal is to earn his college degree. Very often our goals are present to us when we act, and if they are not present, they are easily retrievable. Moreover, sometimes our goals are made tacitly; we form them sometimes without conscious reflection on the process by which we form them. This does not imply that in these cases the goals are not themselves had for reasons. If some of our desires are had for reasons, then it seems likely that some of our goals are had for reasons too, provided desires determine the content of our goals. Daniel might have the desire to earn his college degree, and thereby have the goal of earning his college degree, for the reason that he believes it will help him find employment in line with his interests.

We also form goals on the basis of non-rational factors like bodily desires, e.g., hunger, thirst, and sex urges. The example above of Linda's goal to quench her thirst is an example of a non-rational goal. However, some goals based on bodily appetites or needs, as the case may be, can also be rational goals. Someone can desire to have sex for reasons, and insofar as this is possible a person can also have the goal to have sex but do so for reasons and not just the satisfaction of an urge.

We now have a decent sense of what purposes are and what the teleological theory is committed to. I have a straightforward argument against the claim that all agential reasons are purposes. At least some agential reasons are the propositional contents of agential beliefs. If at least some agential reasons are the propositional contents of agential beliefs, then it is not the case that all agential reasons are purposes because purposes are (at least sometimes) the contents of agential desires, and are never the content of agential beliefs. Therefore, it is not the case that all agential reasons are purposes. I take it to be indisputable that if some agential

reasons are not purposes, then it is not the case that agential reasons are always purposes. Support for the claim that at least some agential reasons are the contents of agential beliefs can be found in Chapters 3 and 4 above.

It would be best to continue by considering the teleological claim that some purposes are reasons instead of the claim that all reasons are purposes. That is, even if it is false that all agential reasons are to be identified with purposes, it might still be true that all purposes are reasons. Moreover, the claim that is of interest here is whether purposes are agential reasons—reasons for which agents  $\Phi$ , not the more generic claim that purposes are reasons *why* agents  $\Phi$ .<sup>209</sup> Also, the view that all purposes are reasons is false if we understand it to mean a universal claim about purposes, i.e., every purpose for which an agent acts is such that it is a reason for which agents act. When we think about some purposive things agents do, e.g., spiders spin webs in order to catch insects, dogs dig holes to bury bones, *et cetera*, it seems obvious that they are not acting from reasons at all. We will even see in the next paragraph that some things human agents do purposively do not appear to be done for reasons. Thus, even if someone thinks that some purposes are agential reasons because agents act for them, it is not the case that all actions that are done purposively are done as a result of agents performing their actions for their purposes. Let's turn to Alvarez's argument against the claim that all human purposes are reasons.

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<sup>209</sup> Even if purposes are not agential reasons, they could be among the things that are relevant to explaining why it is that agents  $\Phi$ .

Maria Alvarez offers the following line of argument against the teleological view now under consideration.<sup>210</sup> There are many things we do purposively (for purposes) that intuitively are not done for reasons. My goal is to protect my face from the oncoming baseball, but my behavior is reflexive. Shawn's purpose in reaching for her cigarettes is to smoke one, but her behavior is the result of habit upon hearing bad news. In neither case are we acting for reasons. Cases like these could be multiplied to show that the concepts of purpose and reason pull widely apart. Here we have only dealt with adult human behaviors. There are plenty of non-human cases that could be displayed or contrived to show even more variance between reasons and purposes, again, e.g., the spider spins its web to trap the fly.<sup>211</sup> The argumentative strategy here is straightforward: we are able to think of cases where agents act purposively but not for reasons; therefore, we conclude purposes are not reasons. The case of my protecting my face from an oncoming baseball appears to be one that is purposive: my goal is to protect my face. Yet I do not seem to act for reasons.

The teleologist might object to Alvarez's argument. They might challenge the case of my reflexive response to the baseball traveling toward my face (and cases like it) in the following way. It is agreed that I act purposively by lifting my arm and hands to protect my face from a baseball. But surely, it is argued, I also have the belief that a baseball is coming my way. The content of this belief is

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<sup>210</sup> Alvarez (2010: 191-194).

<sup>211</sup> The examples in the previous examples each show, at best, that acting purposively is not sufficient for acting for a reason. There may still be a necessary connection between acting for reasons and acting purposively. In fact, I suspect there is, but I do not want to take this issue up here.



presumably the proposition, say, that there is a baseball coming my way, which would in different circumstances be the reason for which I act to protect my face. So, the objection goes: it seems that the ingredients are in place here for claiming that I'm acting for a reason, so I appear to be acting for a reason; and, if I am acting for a reason in this case, then it would also appear to be possible for my purpose to be my reason in cases where I act reflexively. That is, I have the belief that the baseball is coming at my face, where the content of the belief in other cases would serve as my reason. And, if I am acting for a reason in this case, then it is false that I am acting purposively and not for a reason.

I'd like to consider two lines of reply to this objection. First, it seems false that I acted for a reason in the case of protecting my face from an oncoming baseball. It can be agreed that many of the same ingredients are present in this case as are present in cases where agents act for reasons. That is, the agent is present, the belief is present, and the propositional content of the belief is present. Nevertheless, acting for a reason involves more than just agents having beliefs with their propositional contents. What is also needed is that the proposition be part of a reasoning process that in some way contributes to an action. In the case of the baseball coming at my face, I believe the baseball is coming, but there is no reasoning about what I believe. I believe that the baseball threatens my well-being, and reflexive behavior takes over, so the proposition that I believe here is not part of some rational process that leads to the protection of my face. Thus, it seems false to claim that agents act for reasons in these kinds of cases just because some of the ingredients necessary for acting for reasons are present in them.

The second reply to the objection is that even if it were conceded that in cases involving reflexive (or habitual) behavior based on our beliefs were ones in which we acted for reasons, it would still not follow that some purposes are reasons. The strategy above used to show that reasons and purposes pull apart involved trying to provide examples of behaviors that are done purposively but which do not seem to be done for reasons. Now, I think these cases show this, but even if they don't it could still be the case that the action was performed for reasons and was done purposively. In fact, in these cases the purposiveness itself seems to be reflexive or habitual. The main point here is that even if it were true that every purposive action were also done for a reason, this would not show that reasons are purposes. It could turn out that reasons for action are contents of our beliefs and that purposes are contents of our desires. Indeed, in order for the claim that all purposes are human agents' reasons to be true, it needs to be the case that these purposes are reasons for which agents  $\Phi$ . It is insufficient to claim that we can conclude that all human purposes are reasons on the grounds that purposive actions are done for reasons. This is because it could well be that many purposive actions are done for reasons, and the reasons are distinct things altogether from the purposes.

I think Alvarez's argument does well to cast doubt on the view that all human purposes are reasons.<sup>212</sup> It seems that the reflexive nature of some of our purposive behavior speaks against the claim that all human purposes are reasons.

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<sup>212</sup> It should be noted that Alvarez may have hit her target when we she offered her argument against the claim that all human purposes are reasons. I go on to consider another claim here.

Nevertheless, there is a more modest claim about human purposes that could still be true, namely, that some human reasons are purposes. It might be argued that sometimes agents act purposively by having a purpose in mind for which they  $\Phi$ . Katherine goes to Napa Valley for the purpose of enjoying a wine-tasting vacation there. Katherine is not acting purposively out of instinct or reflex or habit. She has a purpose in mind and acts for it. Reasons, it is argued, are very similar. Agents have reasons in mind for  $\Phi$ -ing, and then they act for these reasons. Thus, it might be that the purposes for which agents  $\Phi$  are also among their reasons for  $\Phi$ -ing.

It might be argued that even though purposes are often things agents have in mind when they  $\Phi$ , and that they are also things for which they  $\Phi$ , it doesn't follow that they are to be identified with the reasons for which agents  $\Phi$ . We can see why this doesn't follow most clearly by considering a plausible manner of thinking about the nature of practical reasoning.<sup>213</sup> According to this view, agential purposes are often the starting point of our practical reasoning even though purposes do not feature as premises. Instead, the purposes are the things that our practical reasoning attempts to aim toward accomplishing. Katherine wants to go on a wine-tasting vacation, so she has the purpose of going on a wine-tasting vacation. Katherine then reasons practically about satisfying her desire and accomplishing her purpose. She reasons that Napa Valley is an excellent vacation place, that it boasts of very good wines, and that she can afford to take a vacation there. She concludes her practical reasoning with the conclusion that she will go to Napa

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<sup>213</sup> Alvarez (2010a). Alvarez's view has its origins in Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and G.E.M. Anscombe.

Valley. So Katherine's reasons here are for the action that will contribute to the satisfaction of her goal to go on vacation. There does not seem to be a reason to think that Katherine's purpose—her going on vacation—provides an additional reason for her going to Napa Valley.

Katherine's purposes for acting, like her reasons for acting, do have a motivational role in her actions. Aristotle says this about reasons and purposes:

Both of these [reasons and purposes] are capable of originating local movement, thought and appetite; thought, that is what calculates means to an end, i.e., practical thought (it differs from speculative thought in the character of its end); while appetite [desires and purposes] is in every form of it relative to an end; *for that which is the object of appetite [content of desires] is the stimulant of practical thought.*<sup>214</sup>

Aristotle claims here that reasons and purposes are both capable of “originating local movement”, i.e., getting us to act. But our purposes (the objects of our appetites) are in some sense prior to our reasons for acting because purposes themselves stimulate practical thought, or practical reasoning, to occur. Katherine's purpose of going on vacation stimulates her to use her reasoning to achieve her purpose.

The bottom line for why purposes do not appear to be reasons is precisely because of their distinct roles in practical reasoning and acting. We offer reasons for acting *because* we have purposes we wish to realize, and then we act for the sake of

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<sup>214</sup> Aristotle *De Anima*, Section 10; 433a, 14-18. My italics. Quoted in Alvarez (2010a).

our purposes. These roles are at least apparently distinct from the roles motivating reasons have in practical reasoning and action. Their roles typically include providing support (at least from the agent's vantage point) for the actions we are considering performing, and then being the reasons for which we act. The propositional content they have provides a kind of rational guidance for our actions. On the other hand, purposes are the things we strive to achieve; they are, according to Aristotle, the things that trigger our practical reasoning and move us to act.

It should be noted that there is a competing theory of practical reasoning (mentioned briefly in Section 5.1 above) that might pose a problem for the argument here against the claim that some purposes are reasons. That theory has it that the premises of practical reasoning are claims about agents' psychological states. In particular, there is a premise about an agent's desire to  $\Phi$ , as well as a premise about an agent's belief about how to satisfy her desire. However, this theory is typically thought to support a psychologistic account of reasons. Since we have good reason for thinking that psychologism is false, we have some reason to think this theory of practical reasoning is false. But even if this argument does not work, the desire premise is a premise about the agent's desires. A purpose is related to a desire in that the former is the content of the latter, but a purpose should not be confused with the psychological state. I take it that anti-psychologism is on firm footing, and that the premises of practical reasoning reflect this fact. Thus, we have enough reason to think that the psychologistic theory of practical reasoning is false.

We should return briefly to the issue concerning why it seems so plausible for Katherine to offer her purpose for going to Napa Valley when she is asked her

reason for doing so. The explanation for this is straightforward. In ordinary conversations we do not usually disambiguate between the reasons for which we do things and the reasons why we do them. Thus, when Katherine responds by saying that she is on vacation, or that she is in Napa Valley in order to satisfy her vacation goals, she is usually providing a reason why she is in Napa Valley. That is, she is providing an explanation for her behavior, but it is not a reason-explanation in the sense that she is providing the reason she was sensitive to when acting. Rather, she provides a purpose-explanation, which is one of the ways of explaining the reason why someone does something.<sup>215</sup> So long as we keep the different ways of explaining the reasons why agents do what they do properly distinct from each other, we see that when Katherine explains her behavior by citing her purpose, she is not citing her reason for being in Napa Valley.

Lastly, even if it were to turn out that purposes were reasons, the propositionalist theory here would not be affected too much. As I have stated above I take it that purposes are expressed by the contents of desires that we seek to realize. I assume that contents of desires are typically propositions, so the main addition to the theory developed here would be propositional contents of desires.<sup>216</sup> Nevertheless, I think it is false that some purposes are reasons. Finally, we see that

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<sup>215</sup> Of course, reason-sensitive reason-explanations are also a manner of providing the reasons why someone does something.

<sup>216</sup> I assume that many of the desires that attain to the status of purposes will have propositions as their objects. The claim that all our goals serve as reasons would also be false even if some purposes were reasons. This is because purposes can motivate us without being reasons. There is a general point here not to be overlooked, namely, not everything that motivates agents to act is thereby a reason for her to act.

the theory anti-psychologistic theory developed here is a cognitivist one: cognitivist propositionalism.

### **6.3 Conclusion to Chapter 6**

From Chapter 4 to the present one, I have developed and defended an anti-psychologistic theory of reasons that is not susceptible to the many serious problems we saw it was plagued with in Chapter 2. Moreover, we have seen that propositionalist anti-psychologism has all the virtues for which we extolled psychologism in Chapter 2. That is, it can account for: agents acting for reasons in error cases, factive reason-explanations, and agents' reasons having a motivational role in the economy of action.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, there is some unfinished business that we need to address. In Chapter 3 one of my arguments against psychologism's effort to account for agents acting for good reasons by claiming that it was committed to a disjunctivist theory of reasons. That psychologism struggled to account for agents acting for good reasons was taken to be a serious problem for it. Again, one of the serious problems with their effort is that it implied that motivating reasons are psychological states and normative reasons are not. However, unless the propositional anti-psychologistic theory of reasons argued for here is an anti-disjunctive theory, it would not necessarily have an advantage over psychologism on this score. Since we are at the end of the defense of propositionalism, which is the thesis that all reasons are propositions, it is appropriate to claim victory on this matter. Recall the reason an anti-disjunctive

theory is to be preferred to a disjunctive one, all things being equal, is that the former is more theoretically unified, which is a significant virtue of a theory. Thus, another challenge to psychologism as the theory of motivating reasons fails because it implies that reasons are at least of two ontological kinds, assuming my arguments for the claim that normative reasons are not psychological states is correct.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Concluding Remarks**

The goal of the project here has been to determine which theory of the ontology of reasons is correct, and then to develop and defend it further once it was determined. We showed that psychologistic theories of reasons fail because they cannot account properly for the plausible claim that we sometimes act for good reasons.

This led us to the conclusion that the correct theory is anti-psychologism, and the particular version of it defended here is cognitivist propositionalism: reasons are the propositional contents of agential beliefs. Much more would need to be said for a complete defense of cognitive propositionalism. Nevertheless, this dissertation has taken a significant step in the direction of defending the view of reasons I take to be correct.

My dissertation has helped to salvage two significant intuitions about acting for reasons. First, agents act for reasons even when they act on the basis of false beliefs—or when the propositional content of their belief that serves as their reason is false. And second, even if agents act for false propositions, the reason-explanations of their actions are still factive. Anti-psychologistic theories have struggled to preserve both intuitions, and so it is a virtue of this project that it is able to do so. Moreover, it does so without adding additional counterintuitive costs, and where there appeared to be counterintuitive costs, we were able to explain them away. Furthermore, my project was able to preserve the virtues (laid out in Chapter 2) of both psychologistic and anti-psychologistic theories of reasons.

I was also able to defend a particular theory of propositionalism, Russellianism, against significant challenges to it by Fregean propositionalist philosophers. Two further claims argued for allowed the theory of reasons here to be developed a bit more. First, reasons have a motivational role only insofar as they are believed. We saw that this means that reasons by themselves do not motivate action. (We also saw that reasons are not causes in virtue of being abstract things.) Second, it is not the case that reasons are to be identified with purposes, or purposes with reasons, or even some purposes with reasons. Reasons have a distinct role in action, and are typically the considerations in favor (from the agent's vantage point) an action, which are then acted for by the agent.

These developments put us in a better position in our theorizing about the metaphysics of agency. Philosophers often talk about agents' reasons having a role in agents' actions; now we are clearer about that role. In particular, if the theory of reasons here is correct, then we have solid considerations for thinking that reasons are not causes. This has been a hotly debated issue in history of twentieth century philosophy, and even in more recent times.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, cognitive propositionalism does not seem to settle the issue of whether agents' actions can be causally determined by other factors, e.g., mental states, intentions, etc.

Finally, there is one last important issue to address. The propositionalist theory of reasons developed here maintains that reasons are propositions, but as we

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<sup>217</sup> In the history of the twentieth century G.E.M. Anscombe (1971) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) argued that reasons were not causes. Then Donald Davidson (1963) led the charge in favor of the thesis that reasons are causes. Recently Alfred Mele (2003) has argued that reasons are causes, and Scott Sehon (2005) and Carl Ginet (1990) have rejected the causalist claims.

have seen it also maintains that acting for a reason essentially involves beliefs. Thus, the ontology of my view is the same as that of psychologism; only the psychologist identifies reasons themselves with the psychological states. This might lead some to think that the debate between the psychologist and the anti-psychologist is merely verbal—we are merely carving the stuff up differently.

Ultimately, I think that there is a substantive difference between anti-psychologistic propositionalism and psychologism, and it is reflected in the anti-disjunctive theory of reasons the former is able to develop. This means that there is but one ontological kind—propositions—as reasons, even if acting for reasons essentially involves psychological states. Nevertheless, if it turns out that I am wrong about these issues of substantiality, it should be noted that this in itself is an interesting conclusion. There are serious debates about the ontology of reasons. However, suppose it turns out that when we examine the correct anti-psychologistic theory of reasons (cognitive propositionalism) against a psychologistic theory, we learn that the difference is really merely verbal and not ontological. I contend that even then we would have learned something very interesting about the nature of the debate between the psychologists and anti-psychologists. This is because many participants in these debates are assuming that there is a substantive ontological debate here.

This is a topic that would require much more attention than can be devoted to it here. Suffice it to be said here that we have seen (Chapter 3) that there are strong considerations against psychologistic and other kinds of disjunctive theories of reasons generally. While the ontology of an anti-disjunctivist anti-psychologistic

theory of reasons for acting may well be same as a psychologicistic theory of reasons, there is more theoretical unity in a theory of reasons of the former kind. Indeed, one of the strengths of the propositionalist theory of reasons developed here is that it is able to capture the primary virtues of a psychologicistic account of reasons without incurring its major costs, i.e., not being able to account properly for how agents act for good reasons.

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