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A Disjunctive Conception of Acting for Reasons

Jennifer Hornsby

Bertrand Russell once said ‘There are reading parties and reading parties, and they are mainly the latter.’ I take it that Russell wanted to convey that not all of the things that pass as reading parties conform to a certain inflated conception that one might have of them. Someone of disjunctivist persuasion says that there are experiences and experiences. The message then is that not all experiences conform to the deflated conception that a philosopher might have of them. Some reading parties are constituted of tracts of intellectual excitement, but Russell wanted us to know that plenty are not. A proponent of disjunctivism wants us to recognize that, despite the fact that some of our experiences might not be constituted of facts being manifest to us, plenty actually are. This disjunctivism evidently makes a claim in the philosophy of perception.

What I want to promote here is a different disjunctivism, which belongs in the philosophy of action: it concerns acting for reasons. I shall suggest that it can play a rôle analogous to that of the disjunctive conception that John McDowell recommends in thinking about perception.¹ So I say that there are cases and cases of acting for reasons; and not all of them conform to the conception that philosophers have of them when they think of actions as explained by beliefs and desires. When this disjunctivist conception is treated as a sort of counterpart to the disjunctive conception of appearances, the two can be shown to have work to do in combination. And my hope is that McDowell’s disjunctive conception emerges in good standing when it is thought about alongside the disjunctive conception of acting for reasons.

The first thing I have to do is to show that a disjunctive claim about acting for reasons makes a point in its own right. I think that we need a view which gives a rôle to *knowledge*. In part 1 of what follows, I motivate and demonstrate the rôle of knowledge in acting for reasons, and I show that a disjunction can record its rôle. In part 2, I show why this might be a fitting way to record it. It is here that I make use of parallels between the two disjunctive conceptions. With the parallels in place, I return to questions about acting for reasons: in part 3, I suggest that a disjunctive conception safeguards the connection between considerations that move us to act in particular ways and considerations that favour our acting in particular ways.²

1

If you present a philosopher with the question ‘What is a reason for acting?’, then you may find you get different answers according as you ask it of a philosopher who specializes in ethics or of one who specializes in philosophy of mind. The two different answers need to be brought into harmony with one another. A satisfactory account of human agency ought to reveal human beings’ capacity to act for reasons as an aspect of both their ethical and their psychological nature.

1 McDowell (1982), and subsequent of his writings referred to in the bibliographies of other papers in the present volume. (In this context and for my purposes, there will be no need to cite chapter and verse.)

2 Thus I share one of the objectives of Dancy (2000). I respond to things in Dancy’s book in parts 1 and 3 below, although I have confined mention of specific disagreements to footnotes.

And that means that we need an understanding of reasons for acting which suits both ethics and philosophy of mind. My claim will be that we start to achieve such an understanding, when we see human agents as knowledgeable—when we take ourselves to know things.

The two different answers to ‘What is a reason for acting?’ correspond to two conceptions of such reasons (§1.1). I think that the two conceptions can happily co-exist, and I shall say something about that at the end of the paper. In the present part, I need to say something about how the two conceptions *cannot* be distinguished (§1.2) and something about how they are connected (§1.3). The aim is to show that a disjunctivist claim illuminates a connection between them (§1.4).

1.1 *The two conceptions of reasons for acting.* Jonathan Dancy gives expression to the idea of a reason for acting as it plays a part in ethics when he says ‘To be a reason for action is to stand in a certain relation to action, and the relation .. is that of favouring’.

The idea evidently has application beyond such reasons as one might be inclined to think of as ethical ones. Here are some examples. ‘Why is Jill heading south? She’s agreed to meet Jack down the road.’ ‘Why are you walking on the common? The dog needs a walk.’ ‘Why is Edna skating at the edge of the pond? The ice in the middle is very thin.’ In each case, we learn something which can be expressed in the language of reasons. The fact that Jill has agreed to meet Jack down the road is a reason she has for heading south. The fact that the dog needs a walk is a reason you have for walking on the common. And so on. In the presence of the relevant facts, one sees that there’s something to be said for some agent’s acting in a certain way—for Jill’s heading south, or whatever. One sees that a person’s acting in that way may be favoured. This conception of reasons can be set out schematically, thus:

(F) A reason for X to ϕ was [the fact] that p .

What about the philosophers of mind’s conception of a reason for acting? Well, many of them endorse a qualified version of a principle sometimes called the belief-desire-action principle—a principle which connects psychological states that lead to acting in a particular way with acting in that way. It can be stated as follows.

(BDA) If X desires something and believes that ϕ -ing will help secure it, then X will ϕ .

Nobody actually accepts (BDA) as it stands; it obviously needs massive qualification. But it can be used to convey the idea that underlies the claims of philosophers whom I shall call belief-desire theorists. They say that a belief-desire pair which is related to ϕ -ing in accordance with (BDA) *is* a reason for ϕ -ing.³ And

3 This conception of reasons is familiar from Davidson (1963): Davidson said there that a primary reason for action consists of a belief and a pro-attitude.

When a reason is thought of as a *pair* of a belief and a desire, reasons are individuated in relation to the goals or ends of action (to desired things). According to this mode of individuation, a person can properly be said to have ‘more than one’ reason to ϕ only if they are in a position to satisfy two different desires simultaneously by ϕ -ing (so that someone who had many reasons to ϕ could kill many birds with a single stone). I use ‘a reason’ differently: see next note.

they think that such reasons have a place in causal explanations. For illustration, take the case of Jill who was heading down the road. The reason Jill had for doing so, according to these theorists, is her belief that she'll find John at the bottom of the road combined with a desire to meet John, as agreed; and Jill heads where she does *because* she has this reason.

Often we mention *only* someone's belief in stating a reason they had for acting.⁴ (We might explain Jill's heading down the road by saying just that she thinks that she'll find John.) Here I'm going to confine myself to what can be brought under the head of *belief*: I shall be concerned only with the cognitive side of things.⁵ So I make use of a notion of reasons which can be summed up with schema (B).

(B) X had a reason to ϕ : X believed that p .

(B) can be glossed by saying that *beliefs* are reasons for acting. And it has to be so glossed if the conception of reasons for action which is at work in philosophy of mind is to be brought in. But if we do speak of beliefs as reasons, then we must be alert to what 'beliefs' now means. Many belief-desire theorists have a habit of talking as if the beliefs that are reasons for acting were states of people's mind. But in fact it is only relatively rarely that a belief in this sense constitutes a reason that someone has. Consider someone whose calling of the police is explained when it is said that she believes that she is constantly being followed. Her reason for calling the police is *not* her state of believing that she is being followed. The reason she has for calling the police is, as she would tell us, *that she is being followed*—which is something she believes. That this is so becomes amply clear if we contrast hers with a different sort of case, now of the relatively rare sort. It might be that a man has a reason to go to a *doctor* because he believes that he is constantly being followed: his believing this may be a symptom of paranoia. What now favours visiting the doctor—a reason he has for doing so—is *that he believes that he is being followed*. But by and large when someone has a reason by dint of believing something, their reason itself is not something psychological. Rather, their reason is given, as it is in the more usual case of the woman who called the police, when it is said what they believe.⁶

We now have the two answers to the question *What is a reason for acting?* Reasons for acting are given when *facts* are stated: let us call these '(F)-type reasons'. Reasons for acting are given when it is said what an agent *believes*: let us call these '(B)-type reasons'. No special reification of reasons is involved in

4 When we mention only a belief and speak of this as '*a* reason', the use of '*a* reason' is such that various things are reasons for an agent to ϕ on occasion, and something counts as a reason by virtue of being part of a reason in the sense of the previous note. I adopt this 'fine-grained' way of speaking of reasons throughout. What we speak of as a reason is much dependent upon contextual factors; and when we speak of '*the* reason', I think we usually mean something which, in context, is the most salient reason.

5 Questions about how much belongs 'on the cognitive side of things' would need to be addressed in a full account. But I needn't take sides on this here. In the hopes of showing that I don't prejudge those questions, despite my using (BDA) to arrive at one notion of a reason, I note (a) that the 'desire' of (BDA) can be understood as a generic pro-attitude, and (b) that facts (or beliefs) may themselves be reasons for having pro-attitudes of various sorts.

6 Although this point about what belongs in the category of reasons was made by Parfit (1997) (see also e.g. Dancy (2000) and Hyman (2001)), many philosophers of mind still pay no heed to it.

using these labels: there is commitment only to there being correct instances of the schemas, and to ordinary talk of things that are reasons and of things that people believe. In what follows I use the labels '(F)-type' and '(B)-type' regularly. I don't mean to commend the labels except insofar as they can be of use in keeping track of the occurrences of 'reason' deriving from the two schemas. Usually, of course, we just say 'reason', and usually it is clear enough what we mean.

Although (F)-type and (B)-type reasons are introduced here as belonging to two different branches of philosophy, each corresponds to a perfectly everyday conception. We saw various examples in which we state facts in saying what reasons there were. At least as plentiful can be examples in which we say what someone believed in saying what reason they had. Suppose that Ann told Sam that the café she would meet him at was on Beech Street, although it isn't there in fact. It dawns on Ann that she misinformed Sam. She takes steps to ensure that he knows where the café actually is. (Maybe she can reach him on his mobile 'phone.) Her thinking might be that Sam will soon be on his way to Beech Street: inasmuch as Sam believes that Ann will be there, he has a reason to be going there. In this example, Sam temporarily has a false belief, and Ann takes him therein to have a reason. But one's belief does not have to be false for one to have a (B)-type reason. Even if Sam was right about where the café is, we could still adduce his belief about its location in saying what reason he had for being on his way to Beech Street. Indeed an onlooker who was ignorant of where the café actually is could explain why Sam is headed towards Beech Street by supplying Sam's reason for heading there: Sam believes that the café at which he is meeting Ann is on Beech Street. This can be correct whether Sam is right or wrong about where the café is.

When true beliefs are seen to play the same sort of rôle in explanation as false ones do, we realize that, according to our ordinary understanding of reasons, (B)-type reasons are at least as ubiquitous as (F)-type ones. It is not at all surprising then that philosophers of mind should work with (B)-type reasons: one seems bound to think of beliefs as reasons if one's aim is to cover the ground with a single sweep and to account for action which springs from true and false belief alike.

The ubiquitousness of (B)-type reasons has led some people to speak sometimes as if people's having reasons for acting were (on the cognitive side) only ever a matter of their having beliefs. But we could not think of reasons for acting as all of the (B)-type. If you believe that the dog needs a walk, there may, or there may not, be an (F)-type reason for you to walk on the common. Perhaps unbeknownst to you, someone just took the dog for a long walk in the park, so that he doesn't need a walk and there is no reason for you to take him to the common now. Here there is a question about what reasons you have which isn't addressed when your (B)-type reasons are all taken into account.

1.2 *Distinguishing between conceptions of reasons.* Endorsing both conceptions of reasons for acting might appear to lead to a puzzle. For if we accept that whenever someone acts for an (F)-type reason, they act on a true belief, then we have to say that whenever there is an (F)-type reason for which a person acts, there is also a (B)-type reason for which they act. It could then seem as if someone who acted for an (F)-type reason had double the reason to do that which they did for that

reason. And that might seem puzzling: are our actions overdetermined somehow when we act for reasons?

Well, we must remember that the label '(B)-type reason' attaches to something only inasmuch as an instance of schema (B) is correct. And we have seen that, except in the relatively rare cases, someone's believing something does not *provide* them a reason. (The belief that he was being followed did provide the possibly paranoid man with a reason to go to the doctor. But it was not among the reasons of the woman who called the police that she believed that she was being followed; what provided her with a reason was the fact that she was being followed.) Thus (B)-type reasons need not to be thought of as, as it were, additional reasons—reasons beyond those that might be provided by the facts. Indeed if your belief is that things are a certain way, and in fact that things are that way, then what you believe (that *p*, say) can be said to be a fact (it's a fact that *p*). Still, this may not completely remove the puzzle. For even if there is no need to suppose that you might have two reasons for action just in truly believing something, there are nonetheless two different accounts of why you act when it is said that you acted for an (F)-type reason and that you acted for a (B)-type reason: you acted because *p*, and you acted because you believed that *p*.

In due course, we shall see that there really need be no puzzle here. But to be going on with, we need to rule out a way of avoiding the supposed puzzle. Someone might try to avoid saying that agents have 'double the reason' by denying that the agent who acts on a belief really has any reason at all for acting. Reasons for acting are all of them facts, this person says: when we know of an agent's (B)-type reasons, we simply know *reasons why* they act as they do; but (B)-type reasons are not reasons *for which* people act. The 'reason' of '(B)-type reason' is just the 'reason' of *explanation*.

But this is wrong. Of course (B)-type reasons do figure in reason-*why* explanations: an explanation is given, for instance, when it is said why Sam is going to Beech Street. And it is true that if Ann is not in the café on Beech Street, then there is actually no reason for Sam to be going there. But that doesn't show that Sam fails to *have* a reason to go there. The reason Sam has for going there is known by the ignorant onlooker, who tells us what reason Sam has in telling us what Sam believes. And the explanation given of Sam's going to Beech Street, when it is said what Sam believes, cannot be assimilated to any old reason-*why* explanation. Perhaps the reason why the bridge collapsed was that it had a structural flaw. Still, the bridge didn't have a reason to collapse. The explanation of Sam's behaviour and of the bridge's collapse are of different kinds: in the sense of 'have a reason' in which it could be made clear to all that Sam *had a reason* to go to Beech Street, bridges never have reasons to do anything. (Even within the class of explanations that adduce psychological facts about *X* in answering the question 'Why did *X* ϕ ?', we distinguish between those in which *X*'s *reasons* for ϕ -ing are given and those in which they aren't. 'Because he believed that she had noticed him' might tell us why he had blushed, for instance, even though there is no reason-explanation here: he had no reason to blush.)

We need then to think of a (B)-type reason as a reason an agent *has* for ϕ -ing, and *not* as a reason that there is for ϕ -ing. This is not to say, however, that a reason that there is for ϕ -ing cannot be a reason an agent has, and indeed a reason for which they ϕ . The crucial point is that the inference from 'x has a reason' to 'There is a reason x has' fails when (B)-type reasons are in question but

not when (F)-type reasons are. (This can be the key to understanding why one can wind up with the *prima facie* paradoxical ‘There was no reason to do what he did, even though he did it for a reason’. In my terms, this means that there was no (F)-type reason to do what he did even though his having a (B)-type reason explains his doing it.⁷)

Sometimes philosophers talk about ‘normative’ reasons and contrast them with ‘motivating’ reasons in order to separate the (F)-type from the (B)-type. But the label ‘normative’ cannot be an apt one if it is supposed to put reasons of the two types into different categories. For normative questions, about the justification of action, don’t lapse when one adverts to what the agent believes in saying what reason they had. When Ann saw Sam as having the reason which he had by dint of his having a false belief about her whereabouts, she treated him as someone who acts for reasons. Indeed the normativity which (B)-type reasons share with (F)-type ones shows why we do not think of the bridge as having had a reason to collapse: the bridges’ behaviour is not subject to the sort of assessment to which people’s conduct is.

When (B)-type reasons are seen to be normative in the manner of (F)-type reasons, it seems that they *inherit* the normativity of (F)-type reasons. We might say that if *X* has a reason to ϕ in believing that *p*, then—at least from *X*’s perspective—there would be an (F)-type reason for *X* to ϕ if *p* were true.⁸ So, for example, Sam believed that Ann was in a café on Beech Street, and he would have had an actual reason to go to Beech Street if that had been so. Here Sam’s having a *reason* in believing what he does is explained by allusion to (F)-type reasons: Sam’s having a reason is understood by reference to the idea that a fact can favour a way of acting.

1.3 *Connecting (F)’s instances with (B)’s.* In order to see how the two types of reasons for acting are related, we need to think about acting for reasons. We need to look into the two different accounts we saw of why someone acts—at two types of *reason-explanations*, that is. These can be represented with schemas.

(F.Exp) *X* ϕ -d because *p* (where ‘because’ can be glossed with ‘for the reason that’).

(B.Exp) *X* ϕ -d because they believed that *p* (where *X* had a reason to ϕ : they believed that *p*).

7 Compare Dancy (2000): 3, whose own diagnosis is different. Dancy thinks that the key is to recognize that ‘Some motivating reasons are not good reasons.’ He says ‘It is only when we have our eyes on the question .. whether there were any good reasons for so acting .. that we want to allow that a motivating reason can be no reason at all.’ We can grant to Dancy that ‘There was no reason for him to do it’ can be correct when he lacked any remotely good reason to do it (cp. next note). But Dancy’s diagnosis does not speak to the case in which (a) he did it because he believed that *p*, (b) it was false that *p*, (c) it is not question that there would have been a perfectly good reason for him to do the thing if it had been that *p*.

8 ‘At least from *X*’s perspective’ has plenty of work to do here. An agent’s having some belief may lead them to act in some way, which for all that the belief is true, is actually not a reason—i.e. now not a remotely *good* reason—for so acting. The agent then treats a consideration as favouring ϕ -ing, although it is not genuinely a reason, but can be seen as favouring ϕ -ing only by adopting their perspective on what favours what. A complete account of reasons for acting (which I don’t attempt here) would evidently need to speak to these cases.

The qualifications here ('where ..') rule out cases where the 'because', of 'because p ' and 'because they believed that p ', is not the 'because' of a reason-explanation.⁹

The obvious way to make a connection between these two would be to say that someone does something because p , if *both* they do it because they believe that p and p is actually a reason for them to do it. Thus:

- (P) X ϕ -d because (for the reason that) p if
- (i) X ϕ -d because they believed that p , and
 - (ii) A reason for X to ϕ was that p .

To see how (P) would work, think about the skater Edna who kept to the edge of the pond because the ice in the middle was thin. According to (P), Edna kept to the edge of the pond because she believed that the ice in the middle was thin, and the fact that the ice there was thin was a reason for her to keep to the edge.

But (P) cannot be right. What conjunct (i) tells us about the agent—that she believed that p —is independent of whether p is true. (Edna could have believed that the ice in the middle of the pond was thin, even if it wasn't.) Conjunct (ii) tells us something about a reason for the agent to ϕ which might obtain without registering with the agent. (There might be a reason for Edna to keep to the edge of the pond, even if Edna was not aware of it.) But if p was actually someone's reason for ϕ -ing, then the fact that p was something that registered with them. (The fact that the ice in the middle of the pond played a part in keeping Edna at the edge of the pond if she stayed at the edge because of the thin ice in the middle.) So we can agree that Edna's believing that the ice was thin ensured that she *had* a reason to keep to the edge (a (B)-type one). And we can agree that the thinness of the ice ensures that there *was* a reason for Edna to keep to the edge (an (F)-type one). Still, Edna's believing what she did cannot as such provide her with the actual reason that there was for her to keep to the edge.

Here now is a counterexample to (P), which will serve not only to bring out what is wrong with it, but also to suggest a remedy. The example concerns Edmund who believes that the ice in the middle of the pond is dangerously thin, having been told so by a normally reliable friend, and who accordingly keeps to the edge. But Edmund's friend didn't want Edmund to skate in the middle of the pond (never mind why), so that he had told Edmund that the ice there was thin despite having no view about whether or not it actually was thin. Edmund, then, did not keep to the edge *because* the ice in the middle was thin. Suppose now that, as it happened, the ice in the middle of the pond was thin. This makes no difference. Edmund still didn't keep to the edge *because* the ice was thin. The fact that the ice was thin does not explain Edmund's acting, even though Edmund did believe that it was thin, and even though the fact that it was thin actually was a reason for him to stay at the edge.

Edmund is a familiar sort of character in epistemology. Such characters are usually used to show that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. Edmund here is used to show that someone's having a true belief (even a justified one) which explains their acting is not sufficient for them to have acted for an (F)-

⁹ At this point I have to assume that we know what a reason-explanation is. Notice that even with the qualifications written in, cases in which a subject's believing something is itself a reason (see above, where n.6 was flagged) are not excluded: in those cases ' X believes that --' substitutes for ' p ' in (F) and in (B).

type reason. We saw that an (F)-type reason has to have registered with an agent if they are to have acted on it. We see now what this amounts to. A condition of φ -ing for the reason that p , when one believes that p , is that one *knows* that p . When people act for (F)-type reasons, they do so in virtue of knowing the relevant facts.¹⁰

1.4 A *disjunctive conception of acting for reasons*. We wanted to understand how the ethicists' ((F)-type) reasons and the philosophers of mind's ((B)-type) reasons are related. A connection between them is easy to make now that knowledge is on the scene. It can be recorded by giving an account of acting for reasons in which acting from knowledge belongs under the head of acting from belief—an account which might be formulated as follows:

(DisA) If X φ -d because X believed that p , then
EITHER X φ -d because X knew that p , so that X φ -d because p .
OR X φ -d because X merely believed that p .

Note that all the 'because's in (DisA) are to be so understood that (DisA) is concerned exclusively with reason-explanations. (Compare the qualifications in (F.Exp) and (B.Exp) above. For the sake of simplicity, I don't write the qualifications in explicitly here.)

'Merely believed that p ' here has to mean 'believed that p without knowing that p '. And this could make it seem that (DisA) relies on little more than that one either knows or doesn't know the things that one believes. Certainly (DisA), which has 'if' and not 'iff', is no sort of analysis.¹¹ What makes (DisA) less than trivial, despite an evident circularity, is the conjunct that belongs in the first disjunct—that X φ -d because p . Of course it's a fact that p if X knows that p ; but this conjunct assures us of more than this: it puts it on record that where there is a reason-explanation from X 's knowledge, the fact that p was a reason X had for φ -ing.

Thus (DisA) connects reasons of the two types. And it can serve to remind us that belief-desire theories lack the resources needed to say what it is to act for an (F)-type reason. If we are to say what it is to act for an (F)-type reason, we need the idea that knowledge is a spring of action.

2

I want to encourage an understanding of (DisA) on which it can complement John McDowell's disjunctive conception of appearances. I am going to assume that a disjunctivism of McDowell's sort is correct and can play the part McDowell gives it. My idea is to build upon it, and perhaps, indirectly, to lend it support. If (DisA)

¹⁰ For plenty of examples showing that one needs to know (relevant) things to do (related) things intentionally, see Gibbons (2001).

¹¹ To justify replacing the 'if' with 'iff' I should need at least to justify an assumption (which I take it most belief-desire theorists work with) that propositional knowledge requires belief. There are reasons to be doubtful about this. And it suits me that there is no need to settle whether the assumption is correct: one effect of my not going for 'iff' is that it can be very clear that there is no pretence at analysis. Something that I hope will emerge from part 2 is that a disjunctivist claim can play a dialectical rôle without having analytic pretensions.

does good clarificatory work when understood in parallel with McDowell's disjunctive conception, and if an attractive picture results when both disjunctive conceptions are in play, then a case of sorts may be made for accepting both.

I shall present McDowell's disjunctive conception as a counterpart to (DisA), so that we shall have (DisP), with 'P' for perception, where 'A' was for action. That puts me in a position to show that (DisA) can make a point analogous to McDowell's (§2.2). It can then be seen that the two disjunctive conceptions have work to do together (§2.3), and an underlying structure can be uncovered (§2.4).

2.1 *The disjunctive conception of appearances as an analogue of (DisA).* McDowell wants us to appreciate that someone to whom it appears that things are thus and so may actually be someone who perceives how things are. We appreciate this when we say that cases in which it appears to a subject that things are thus and so come in two kinds—cases of genuine perceptual experience, and cases of mere appearance. Cases of the two kinds might be indistinguishable from the point of view of the experiencing subject; but this should not interfere with recognizing their difference—a difference which becomes evident when it is allowed that it may be manifest to a subject in experience that things are thus and so.

Thus McDowell's disjunctive conception simultaneously brings together and distinguishes the experience of a perceiver and the experience of someone who has a mere experience. What the disjunctive conception of acting for reasons does is simultaneously to bring together and to distinguish acting from an actual reason and acting from mere belief. Cases in which an agent acts because they believe that *p* come in two kinds. Cases of the two kinds might be indistinguishable from the point of view of the agent or of an onlooker who is ignorant of the relevant facts; but this should not interfere with recognizing their difference—a difference which becomes evident when it is allowed that an agent may act from knowledge.

If McDowell's idea is formulated in parallel with (DisA), then the notion of knowledge will enter explicitly into its statement. So we have:¹²

(DisP) It appears to *X* as if things are thus and so if
EITHER it is manifest to *X* that things are thus and so, so that *X*
is well placed to know how things objectively are.¹³
OR it merely appears to *X* as if things are thus and so, so that *X* is
not in such a position.

This formulation highlights the fact that experiences in which things seem a certain way to a subject are not all on a par epistemologically speaking. Explicitness about this helps to make it clear that a subject's inability to distinguish between experiences of two sorts cannot be adduced in an argument purporting to show that their epistemic situation is the same whichever sort their experience is of. When an experience is recorded by saying that things are

12 As with (DisA), we have 'if' and not 'iff'. Some might say that this means that Disjunctivism proper is then not really at issue. But (DisP) may be worth considering if it can assist in conveying the point of adopting a disjunctive conception of appearances.

13 The qualified '*well placed to know*' allows for cases in which a subject (perhaps because they wrongly suppose that they are under some illusion) fails to take appearances at face value—a subject who, arguably, then fails to perceive how things are.

manifestly so to its subject, it can be clear that, whatever doubts a sceptic might induce in them, the subject, if they judge that things are actually some way, does not take a step beyond what their experience entitles them to judge. This at least can be clear if X 's being well placed to know how things objectively are is constituted by X 's having an experience of the sort they do in satisfying the first disjunct.

2.2 *(DisA) as parallel to the disjunctive conception of appearances.* The point so far, of (DisA), has been to show that, unless it is to be ruled out that people act for (F)-type reasons, it has to be allowed that knowledge sometimes explains people's acting. Some belief-desire theorists may think this of little moment. 'It can be allowed that a person's knowing something might come into an explanation of their doing what they did', these theorists may say. 'And when questions about an agent's (F)-type reasons are introduced, we need to ask whether the agent knows the things they believe. But this a separate matter—separate from the phenomenon which interests us belief-desire theorists.'

Knowledge cannot be so easily sidelined, however. Suppose that actually the reason for which a person Φ -s is that p . (Suppose, for instance, that in fact Sam is headed for Beech Street because [for the reason that] Ann is there.) The belief-desire theorists say that the person Φ -s because they believe that p ; and their explanation can be well and good. (Indeed Sam is headed for Beech Street because he believes that Ann is there.) But the person's acting as they do now depends upon their knowledge. (Something that Sam is doing is *heading for Beech Street because [for the reason that] Ann is there*, and unless he knew that she was there, he would not be doing this.) The person's knowing that p is hardly a separate matter, then.

It need not be at all puzzling now that (F)-type and (B)-type reasons should play their rôles in concert. I suggested that there could seem to be a puzzle posed by asking: 'Are our actions somehow overdetermined when we act for an (F)-type reason and a (B)-type reason?'. Well, the person who acts for a (B)-type reason is moved by believing things to be a certain way. If they act also for an (F)-type reason, then they are satisfactorily related to how things actually are, and the fact that things actually are the way they believe them to be weighs with them. Someone who Φ -s because they believe that p may actually be someone who Φ -s because p . Compare the claim which I used to introduce (DisP): someone to whom it appears that p may actually be someone who perceives that p .

2.3 *The two disjunctive conceptions brought together.* I turn now to an example in which perceptual experience leads to action. This is with a view to showing how the two disjunctive conceptions—of experience, and of acting for reasons—work together. The example consists of a pair of cases.¹⁴

Maja has seen a notice about a child who has lost his pet rabbit in the vicinity and wants it returned. She sees a rabbit and acquires the belief that there is a rabbit at a certain place, so that she has a reason to run in a certain direction. In the other case, Maja again is motivated to catch a rabbit if she sees one, and again she arrives at the belief that there is a rabbit at a certain place. But in this

¹⁴ The cases illustrate what Scott Sturgeon calls 'delusive Rational efficacy' (2000) Ch.1. I treat this phenomenon differently from Sturgeon, and speak to our disagreement in n.20 below.

case, Maja is hallucinating. Again she runs towards the place, but now it merely appears to Maja as if there were a rabbit there. There is an explanation of Maja's running as she does which is common to the two cases. Thus, in both cases: Maja comes to believe that there is a rabbit at a certain place because it appears to her as if there were a rabbit there; and she runs in the direction she does because she believes that there is a rabbit there.

No-one need quarrel with this common explanation, which makes use, as explanantia, of instances of what occurs on the left-hand-sides of (DisP) and of (DisA). But the disjunctive conception of acting for reasons directs us towards explanations which introduce an agent's (F)-type reasons. In the case in which Maja sees a rabbit, there is another explanation of her running in the direction she does: she runs because *a rabbit is present*. And when we take perceiving-Maja to be acting for this reason, we recognize that there is also another explanation of her acquiring her belief. This now is an explanation towards which a disjunctive conception of appearances might direct us: Maja believes that a rabbit is present because *she sees the rabbit there*.

(DisP) and (DisA) do work in tandem here. Given (DisP), beliefs which are got through experience are sometimes shaped by the facts. Given (DisA), actions which spring from beliefs are sometimes shaped by the facts. When Maja sees a rabbit and chases it, the fact that the rabbit is present plays a rôle throughout the process: Maja runs because there is a rabbit in her sights.

2.4 *The common structure.* Let me introduce some terminology, in order to set out the parallels. Say that a case shows up as 'good' when (an instance of) the *first* disjunct of (DisA) or (DisP) is used in its description.¹⁵ And say that a case is described 'neutrally' when (an instance of) the left hand side of (DisA) or (DisP) is used. So 'X ϕ -d because X believed that *p*' and 'It appears to X as if things are thus and so' give neutral descriptions of cases.¹⁶

We have just seen it to be characteristic of good cases that a distinctive sort of reason-explanation is available, one which shows the subject's or agent's connection with the facts. In the good case, Maja was aware of the fact that a rabbit was present, and her acting was then a matter of her responding to this fact. When a case is described neutrally, its goodness, supposing it actually to be a good one, is not apparent. Perceiving-Maja was suitably related to the facts, but is not seen to have been so related when her case is described neutrally. One might say that neutral descriptions of good cases suppress some of the truth.

We saw the limitations of explanations of action which are cast in neutral terms. I said that Edna's believing what she did could not *as such* provide her with the reason that there actually was for her to keep to the edge of the pond.

15 Just as the goodness of a case of X's ϕ -ing-because-X-believes-that-*p* does not consist merely in its being true that *p*, so the goodness of a case of experience does not consist simply in its veridicality. One could introduce some tricks, and construct an example in which Maja has a veridical hallucination as of a rabbit. Evidently the mere presence of a rabbit does not make for a good case.

16 (DisP) is formulated so as to allow for hallucination. To treat illusions, we should need to introduce different sorts and grades of neutrality, as it were. For instance: someone who says 'The book appeared to X to be green' gives a neutral description in one respect, even while showing X's case to be good so far as his perceiving the book is concerned. Obviously a great deal more would need to be said in a worked-out account.

The point is that when Edna is said to have acted because she believed something, it is left open whether she knew it: there is something else one has to know about her in order to know whether she acted for an (F)-type reason. Still, it may be true that Edna has acted for an (F)-type reason, even when this is left unsaid. If an agent has *p* as a reason for acting, then (in such circumstances, and whatever is said) nothing more than what *de facto* suffices for their believing that *p* may be needed for them to act for the reason that *p*. The parallel holds for the case of *experience*. When it is said only that things appeared some way to Maja, it is left open whether she perceived things to be that way: there is something else one needs to know about her in order to know whether her experience is such as to provide her with a reason for acting. Still, it may be true that Maja has seen a rabbit, even when this is left unsaid. If it appears to a subject that things are a certain way *and* they perceive them to be that way, then (in such circumstances, and whatever is said) nothing more than what *de facto* suffices for their having the experience they do may be needed for them to perceive things to be that way.¹⁷

In philosophy of perception, experience is sometimes thought about in its rôle of accounting for beliefs. When it comes to philosophy of action, experience must be allowed a rôle in providing reasons for acting. The factivity of experiences can then come into view, and there is a new point to conceiving of the good cases as a disjunctivist does. From the perspective of an account of agency, veridical perceptions are seen as fitted to explanations which have no use for neutral terms—to explanations of people’s acting for reasons that there actually are for them to act. Meanwhile neutral descriptions of experience are seen as relatively lacking in explanatory potential. (The fact that one is prevented from explaining very much when only neutral descriptions are available showed up in our needing to confine ourselves, when we stuck to the neutral, to descriptions of perceiving—Maja’s action that can strike us as artificial. For example, we had Maja running ‘in a certain direction’, where it would be natural to say that she ran *towards the rabbit*. And of course in a good case, someone in a position to demonstrate the rabbit can give an explanation of why she ran towards *that* rabbit [a demonstrated one].)¹⁸

Someone might wonder how explanations in which experiences are neutrally described can be supposed to work. The explanation of hallucinating-Maja’s

17 I say ‘*may be needed*’ because it is arguable that someone doesn’t perceive that *p* unless she takes it at face value that it appears as if *p*: cp. n.13 above.

18 Martin points out that, by making appeal to (to put the matter in my terms) features proper to good cases which perceptions alone can explain, ‘one can ... rebut the challenge that the disjunctivist’s conception of sensory experience is guaranteed to be explanatorily redundant’. (2004: 63–4). The features by reference to which Martin makes the point are the particulars in the subject’s environment and their properties. I take the point to have added force when the features in question are the facts. My hope then is that (DisA) and (DisP) combine to ensure that the ineluctably relational character of perceptual experience is writ large: a person’s involvement with the facts about how things outside them are may no longer seem to be a matter simply of how the person might be described.

There is much more that can be said about explanation in this area, as Martin (2004) and subsequent literature show. Relevant are examples, which Williamson has given, which show that an agent’s *knowing* something may belong in an account of their acting which is in one good sense the most explanatory powerful account (2000: 62). (I say ‘in one good sense’ because I think that we can have different purposes in explaining someone’s acting, so that explanatoriness might not be measured on a single dimension.)

running as she does can also be given in the case of perceiving-Maja, in whose case there are other, more illuminating, explanations. But if the explanations that are proprietary to good cases tell us more than explanations cast in neutral terms, then how can statements cast in neutral terms play the explanatory role that they do across the board?

Well, if we think that it is manifest to perceiving-Maja that a rabbit is present, then we may think of hallucinating-Maja as under the illusion that it is manifest that a rabbit is present. (Not that a mere appearance always puts someone under an illusion. 'I'm under no illusions' might be the words of someone who takes herself to be hallucinating, and who wants it to be known that she discounts her experience. But the hallucinating-Maja of our example, who comes to have a reason for acting, does not take herself to be hallucinating.) Now, to someone who is under an illusion of its being manifest that p , there seems to be a reason for believing that p .¹⁹ So hallucinating-Maja is understood when it is known both that it seems to her that there is a reason for believing a rabbit to be present, and that in acquiring the belief she gains a (B)-type reason upon which she acts. Perceiving-Maja, insofar as she is described in neutral terms, can then be exactly like hallucinating-Maja and understood in the same way. By virtue of her experience, there seems to her too to be a reason for a belief which she acquires and acts upon. There is no problem, then, about allowing that the explanatory work done when neutral descriptions of experience are given can be done both in cases which are not good ones and in cases which are.²⁰ This now is comparable to allowing that 'X ϕ -d because X believed that p ' can be true both when 'X ϕ -d because p ' isn't true and when it is.

3

I want it to be clear that there is no fault to be found with either of the two conceptions of reasons for acting from which we began. So I return here to the agenda of part 1. I said there that a story about acting for reasons ought to have room for reasons both of the (F)-type and of the (B)-type. I think that we are now in a position to see that such a story really must accommodate them both. It is not merely that reasons for acting could not all be of the (B)-type (cp. §1.1), but also that our idea of acting for reasons could not be got simply from instances of (B.Exp). I suggested that the normativity of (B)-type reasons is inherited from the

19 The 'seem' here is not the 'appear' I have used in descriptions of sensory states. Its appearing to someone that p might not result in their seeming to have a reason to believe that p ; whether or not it does so result depends (very roughly) upon their mindset – upon whether, for instance, they take themselves to be under an illusion.

20 Compare Martin on inherited, or dependent, explanatory potential (2004: 70), and his use of this idea in answering the question why properties which make for goodness aren't screened off.

In Sturgeon's book (2000), Disjunctivism fails as a theory of perception because it fails to provide an explanation of what he calls Scene immediacy. Sturgeon, then, will have an objection at this point. For here the Scene immediacy of hallucinations is adduced in accounting for their impact on belief; the delusive Rational efficacy of hallucinations (to continue with Sturgeon's terms) is explained only indirectly; and there is no account of Scene immediacy itself. Well, I suggest that a disjunctive conception of experience can do without the explanatory ambitions of the theory Sturgeon seeks. (Perhaps we understand Scene immediacy well enough as soon as we know what (DisP) is meant to tell us.) But of course there is more to be said, some of which is said in Sturgeon's contribution to the present volume.

normativity of (F)-type reasons (§1.2). And so too, I think, is the *cogency* of (B)-type reasons.

3.1 *Explanations from Belief.* I just gave an account of why there should be an explanation common to the cases of hallucinating- and perceiving-Maja. The key was to find a way to understand Maja's acquiring a belief which is indifferent to the question of whether things are indeed as they appear to her to be. We thought of Maja as seeming to have a reason for the relevant belief. In thinking of her thus in both cases, we rely upon our grasp of how things appear to be when they appear to someone to be the way they are. So the understanding we have of a hallucinating subject is rested in our understanding of a perceiving subject. Now when it comes to acting for reasons, we start out equipped with a way of understanding an agent which is indifferent to questions about how things actually are. In finding out what someone believes, we already have a way of rendering their acting explicable which is indifferent to such questions. (Ignorant onlookers, such as the one we encountered in §1.2, make this clear.) But here again we should allow a sort of derivativeness of understanding.

Often our aim in discovering why a person acted as they did is to reveal the favourable light in which they saw what they did. By adopting the perspective of the agent, so as to come to know what they treated as a reason, we can answer questions about their motivation. We may then arrive at an explanation of their acting which says what (B)-type reason they had. And then the question what (F)-type reasons were in play can lapse. (Compare: if we want only to know how it appeared to a subject as if things were, we have no need to be troubled with how things actually are in their environment.) Still, when one explains a person's acting by saying what they believe, one relies upon a grasp of what is actually a reason for acting, or of what might be treated as such.²¹ (Compare: when one is informed of how it appears to a subject as if things are, one relies upon a grasp of how things appear when they appear the way they are.) Thus a distinctive sort of explanatory interest is in play when (B)-type reasons are seen to be at work; but the understanding achieved by knowing someone's (B)-type reasons is rested in an understanding of the operation of (F)-type reasons.

The point here might be put by saying that (B)-type reasons inherit the explanatory character of (F)-type reasons. The point of the disjunctive conception of acting for reasons, meanwhile, is that acting for (F)-type reasons can be brought under the head of acting for (B)-type reasons. It then seems that reason-explanations on the patterns of (F.Exp) [*'because p'*] and of (B.Exp) [*'because x believed that p'*] must stand or fall together.

Let me finish by addressing in turn those who are dismissive of (F)-type reasons, and those who are dismissive of (B)-type reasons.

3.2 *Acting for reasons.* Belief-desire theorists who take *belief* to exhaust the cognitive states of mind needed in an account of acting for reasons have no place for instances of (F.Exp) in their account. (They may say that they are concerned with 'motivating' reasons, not with 'normative' ones (see §1.2). And they may think that knowledge can be sidelined (see §2.2).) Well, (F)-type reasons are given a place in an account when acting for reasons is conceived disjunctively. And the

²¹ N.8 above touches on the idea of 'treating' something as a reason.

fact that (B)-type reasons inherit their cogency from (F)-type reasons shows that (F)-type reasons can hardly be left out of account. To leave them out would be to forget that the understanding achieved by knowing someone's (B)-type reasons is rested in an understanding of the operation of (F)-type reasons.

Most of these belief-desire theorists, who think that an account of acting for reasons can make do with *belief* alone on the cognitive side, treat instances of (B.Exp) as belonging in a naturalistic account of the world's causal workings. But if instances of (B.Exp) are found illuminating only insofar as instances of (F.Exp) can be appreciated, then it is very far from obvious that instances of (B.Exp) are so much as concerned with the causal workings of the world at large.²² It may be then that the dismissal of (F.Exp) on the part of these theorists leads them to an erroneously naturalistic view of human agency. Or again, if these theorists adopt a naturalistic outlook from the outset, then they are predisposed to keep out of sight the idea which (DisA) brings into view—the idea of *reasons'* being at work. Their adherence to a kind of naturalism encumbers them with a conception of people's reasons for acting which loses any connection with the normative contexts in which the concept of reason belongs.

So much for those who would hope to make do without (F)-type reasons in an account of human agency. Recently there has been much suspicion of (B)-type reasons. Some say that the whole idea of a (B)-type reason is misguided.²³ Some say that a proper account of agency should make no appeal to the causal rôle of psychological states.²⁴ And some say that although it might appear that we explain people's acting when we say what they believed, if we then give reason-explanations, these cannot be genuine explanations of such a sort as causal explanations are.²⁵ All of these philosophers are hostile to the conception of reasons for acting that holds sway in philosophy of mind. It could be that some of their hostility is misplaced hostility to the naturalistic view of human agency I have just mentioned. But whatever the source of their wishing to make do with a conception of acting for reasons which leaves out instances of (B.Exp),²⁶ these philosophers face a problem. They fully appreciate the need to accommodate (F)-type reasons in an account of agency. And they think that in the face of (F)-type reasons, (B)-type reasons lose out. But given a conception of acting for reasons in which an understanding of (B.Exp) is rested in an understanding of (F.Exp), and in which (B.Exp) subsumes (F.Exp), (B)-type reasons could hardly lose out to (F)-type ones.

22 'Very far from obvious' puts it very mildly in my own view. For arguments against thinking that reason-explanations draw on naturalistic causal truths, see Hornsby 1993.

23 E.g. Stoutland (forthcoming).

24 E.g. Stout (2004).

25 E.g. Dancy (2000).

26 Some of the argument of §1.1 above was aimed against denying, what Stoutland and Stout deny, that one can say what reason someone had in saying what they believe.

I surmise that Dancy thinks that anyone who claims that reason-explanation is causal means to make appeal to a feature of reasons' cogency that is not already in evidence when it is known that someone's having a reason to do something has led them to do it. Thus Dancy seems to me to buy into an assumption of (though not the view of) those belief-desire theorists who take the idea that reason-explanation is causal to be part and parcel of treating instances of (B.Exp) as belonging within a naturalistic account of the world's causal workings.

If the argument here is right, both conceptions of reasons must be admitted. And a naturalistic view of human agency must not be allowed to stand in the way of endorsing them both. With *knowledge* in the picture, there can be a story of the kind we sought in attempting to combine the ethicists' and philosophers of mind's conceptions—a story in which the normative and the psychological come together.²⁷

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