



## FACTUALISM ABOUT PRACTICAL REASONS: A DEFENSE

### *Factualismo e Razões Práticas: uma defesa*

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**Abstract:** The paper aims to investigate if factualism about practical reasons can provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of error cases. Some philosophers have assumed that factualism is strongly threatened by the possibility of false belief. They claim that if the agent is mistaken about the relevant fact, then there is no fact to which she can appeal to justify and explain her action. So to assess the strength of the objection, I consider Jonathan Dancy's factualist response to the problem and I argue that, while quite convincing, it requires a commitment to the awkward idea that intentional explanation can be non-factive. Dancy's account implies denying the widely accepted thesis that a true explanation cannot have a falsehood as its explanans. But contrary to what one might think, I defend that factualism can deal with error cases without having to endorse Dancy's controversial idea. To show this, I develop a disjunctivist form of factualism that can solve the problem at stake by keeping what is most promising in this theory: that all because-constructions are factive. If my thesis succeeds, then I think there is no reason for us to give up factualism in the face of error cases.

**Keywords:** Reasons for action; factualism; error cases; Jonathan Dancy; disjunctivism.

**Resumo:** O artigo tem como objetivo investigar se o factualismo sobre razões práticas pode fornecer uma resposta satisfatória ao problema dos casos de erro. Alguns filósofos assumiram que o factualismo é fortemente ameaçado pela possibilidade de crença falsa. Eles afirmam que se o agente está enganado sobre o fato relevante, então não há fato ao qual ele possa apelar para justificar e explicar sua ação. Então, para avaliar a força da objeção, considero a resposta factualista de Jonathan Dancy ao problema e argumento que, embora bastante convincente, requer um comprometimento com a ideia estranha de que a explicação intencional pode ser não-factiva. O relato de Dancy implica negar a tese amplamente aceita de que uma explicação verdadeira não pode ter uma falsidade como seu explanans. Mas, ao contrário do que se poderia pensar, defendo que o factualismo pode lidar com casos de erro sem ter que endossar a ideia controversa de Dancy. Para mostrar isso, desenvolvo uma forma disjuntivista de factualismo que pode resolver o problema em jogo mantendo o que é mais promissor nesta teoria: que todas as construções porque são factivas. Se minha tese for bem-sucedida, então acho que não há razão para desistirmos do factualismo diante de casos de erro.

**Palavras-chave:** Razões para ação; factualismo; casos de erro; Jonathan Dancy; disjuntivismo.

### Introduction

Why should Andrew perform physical exercises? Why should Carla visit her sick friend in the hospital? Why should John care about poor people in Rwanda? Questions like these are among the commonest ones that we make in everyday life. They ask for reasons which may explain and justify why we acted as we did. In contemporary discussions on reasons for action, philosophers have tried to understand what sort of things reasons are. Some (see, e.g., DANCY, 2000; SCANLON, 2014) have advocated factualism by affirming that reasons are facts; others (see, e.g., HARMAN, 1975; WILLIAMS, 1981) have defended psychologism by asserting that reasons are

psychological states of the agent;<sup>1</sup> and still others (see, e.g., SMITH, 1994; PARFIT, 1997) have tried to reconcile these two distinct views by stating that while motivating reasons are psychological states of the agent, normative reasons are true propositions about what she would desire her idealized counterpart to do in conditions of full rationality.<sup>2</sup>

It is not breaking news that each of these views has trouble giving a full account of the main features that theories of practical reasons are commonly supposed to capture. It is said that factualism faces difficulties in accounting for the explanatory dimension of practical reason; that psychologism faces difficulties in accounting for the normative dimension of practical reasons; and that compatibilism faces difficulties in accounting for the idea that the reason that justifies an action can be the same that explains it.<sup>3</sup> I am not primarily interested in any of these problems but with a resulting one from the criticism of factualism. Widely known in the philosophical literature as *the problem of error cases* (PEC), the question posed by it transpires like this: if an agent has a false belief (say, that *p*) regarding the circumstances of a certain situation, it does not make sense to say that what motivates her to act and explains her action is that *p*, since *p* is not the case. Once the problem threatens the success of factualism delivering a satisfactory theory of practical reasons, in what follows I intend to investigate whether factualism stands in the face of error cases by taking Jonathan Dancy's theory as a case study. My argument will be that though PEC imposes serious difficulties on Dancy's account, it is possible to find a solution to the problem at stake without having to give up factualism altogether.

Below, I shall start by exposing the core idea of factualism about reasons for action (section 1) and outlining the problem of error cases (section 2). After that, I shall explore Dancy's response to this problem (section 3) and argue that it falls short of solving PEC by committing to the idea that intentional explanations can be non-factive (section 4). Then, I shall defend that factualism can escape unscathed from the threat of error cases by assuming a *disjunctivist* position on intentional explanations (section 5). Lastly, I shall draw some concluding remarks considering the argument made in this paper (section 6).

## 1. Factualism about reasons for action

One of the central issues in debates on practical reason concerns the question of whether a subject's reasons for action are facts or mental states. Among the views available in this discussion, factualism is the one that states that (i) the concept of a reason that we use in different contexts to explain and justify an action is a unified one and that (ii) both motivating and normative reasons are *typically* facts of the world. Of course, these two claims, especially the second, have divergent interpretations among the defenders of factualism, but this is a question for later. What interests me at this point is to provide a basic description of the theory that fits all its versions.

As just seen, there is no such a thing as different *sorts* of reasons for factualism. Reasons can be called *motivating* or *normative* because they address distinctive questions. The first way of using the concept of a reason focuses on the question of "what were the considerations in the light of which, or despite which, one acted as one did", which asks for those reasons that motivated one to act (DANCY, 2000, p. 1). When we speak of these reasons, we speak of what *persuaded* the agent to do what she did. The reasons for which she acts are not psychological attitudes to which she is subject, but facts that favor the performance of a certain action. That is to say, for

<sup>1</sup> Most varieties of psychologism are Humean like Bernard Williams'. But some Kantian theories seem to flirt with psychologism as well. Christine Korsgaard (2009), for example, thinks that an action can be rationally explained and justified by an agent's practical identity.

<sup>2</sup> This distinction is sometimes said to date back to Francis Hutcheson's (1971, p. 404) picture of exciting and justifying reasons. For a critical analysis about this point, see Jonathan Dancy (2000, p. 20-5).

<sup>3</sup> For an adequate discussion of this point, see Eric Wiland (2002, p. 452).

instance, that if I am hungry I will be motivated to go to the supermarket by the prospect of eating something, not by my present desire to eat; or if I am sick I will be motivated to see the doctor by the prospect of getting healthy again, not by my present desire to get healthy.

The second way of using the concept of a reason addresses the question of whether there was a *good* reason to act in that way, which asks for those reasons that make the action normatively required for one to do. When we speak of these reasons, we speak of the things that count in favor of the action (or against it). Normative reasons are not grounded in desires nor are they grounded in beliefs, but in facts. To put it another way, this means that what makes a reason to be good is that *p*, not my having believed that *p* or my having desired *p*. It is because people are in need that I ought to help them, not because I believe they are in need. It is because one is drowning that I ought to save one, not because I believe one is drowning. In such cases, the sorts of things that are normative reasons are those like the suffering of other people in need and the wrongness of letting one drown, both of which call for certain responses from us.

Still talking about motivating and normative reasons, a caveat is necessary. As mentioned above, factualists agree that reasons are typically facts of the world. If it were not so, people would act for good reasons in only a few cases.<sup>4</sup> This is why the clause ‘typically’ in claim (ii) plays a central role in the definition of factualism. However, there can be cases in which a subject’s motivating and normative reasons are facts about her psychology. Although these are exceptional cases, they certainly exist. For example, that I believe there are spies from a secret intelligence agency chasing me daily is a reason to see a psychiatrist. Once I realize I am hallucinating, what justifies and motivates me to seek medical help instead of running away or hiding from the spies is a psychological fact about my own condition. Be that as it may, these are not typical cases. Factualists are mainly interested in those cases where the motivating and normative reasons for our actions are, in general, considerations about the world and not considerations about our psychology.

Once this qualification has been made, the *factualist argument* takes the following form:

- (1) Normative reasons are typically facts of the world;
- (2) Motivating reasons can be identical to normative reasons;
- (3) So motivating reasons can be typically facts of the world;

## 2. The problem of error cases

Factualism is a very convincing theory. It helps us to make sense of what it means to act for reasons. But like any theory, it does not go unnoticed by the critical eye. It is generally assumed that factualism is vulnerable to an objection from the possibility of error cases, where this means those cases in which the subject takes something to be the case and it turns out not to be so.<sup>5</sup>

As the argument goes, if an agent is mistaken about the relevant fact, it is of no help saying that this putative (supposed) fact was what moved her to act. We could do a better job by saying that what moves her to act is that she so believes or her so believing. To see the point, suppose I want to drink some Chilean Sauvignon Blanc and *Socrates’ Liquor Store* is closed. In this scenario, we cannot properly explain my going there resorting to the features of the situation, since things are not as they appear to be to me. In fact, there was no reason for me to go there. It seems that what motivates me to go to *Socrates Liquor Store* is that I falsely believe it is open, which is not the case. From this,

<sup>4</sup> By ‘good reasons’ factualists mean that the reason that justifies an agent’s action is also the sort of thing that moves her to act in a certain way, and vice versa (WILAND, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> The same objection jeopardizes factualism about epistemic reasons (i.e., reasons for belief).

critics then conclude that the only solution to PEC lies in abandoning factualism and embracing psychologism at least about motivating reasons.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Dancy's factualist solution to PEC

Jonathan Dancy (2000; 2006; 2008), perhaps the most prominent defender of factualism, has been trying to offer a solution to this problem, which I shall explore in this section. But it is worth noting that I will not go into the details of his theory of practical reasons here, since this would take me too far from my purpose in this paper.

In line with factualism, Dancy (2000, p. 97) defends in his *Practical Reality* that motivating reasons can be identical to normative reasons, as stated in premise (2). His argument departs from what he calls *the normative constraint*, which claims that those things that constitute an agent's motivating reasons "should be capable of being a good reason."<sup>7</sup> It must be possible that the reason in the light of which an agent did what she did is also one that morally required the action that was undertaken. For instance, the considerations that count in favor of one helping people in need can be the same that move one to do so; or the considerations that count against one mistreating animal can be the same that move one not to do it. If Dancy's normative constraint stands, then one and the same reason can be both motivating and normative.<sup>8</sup>

So for Dancy (2000), motivating and normative reasons are typically facts of the world. On the one hand, the reason in the light of which an agent did what she did is thought to be a motivating one because it is a consideration that motivated her to perform a certain action. One will desire something only because one first believes that some consideration counts in favor of doing such a thing. And the sorts of considerations that motivate an agent to act are those she believes are features of the situations in which she finds herself. On the other hand, the reason that requires a certain action is thought to be a normative one because it is a consideration that morally favors an agent doing that action. A reason is a normative one because it picks the good-making features of the action in question (i.e., the content of the thing itself).<sup>9</sup>

In "Acting in the Light of the Appearances", Dancy (2006, p. 127) constructs the *error cases argument* in these terms:

- (4) When an agent falsely believes that *p*, we cannot say that his reason for action was that *p*, and must say that it was that he believed that *p*;
- (5) The true/false distinction should not affect the *form* of the relevant explanation;
- (6) So even when the agent's belief is true, his reason must be that he believes that *p*, not just that *p*;

As the error cases argument stands, Dancy's solution to the problem consists in denying premise (4), that is, denying the facticity of attributing motivating reasons. But before looking at this carefully, let me first say a few words about premise (5). Dancy accepts Bernard Williams' (1981, p. 102) principle that "the difference between false and true beliefs on the agent's part cannot alter the form of the explanation which will be

<sup>6</sup> This solution is convergent with both psychologism (see, e.g., HARMAN, 1975; WILLIAMS, 1981) and compatibilism (see, e.g., SMITH, 1994; PARFIT, 1997) about practical reasons.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Nagel (1986, p. 142) seems to make a similar point in stating that "the recognition of reasons as reasons [in the normative sense] is to be contrasted with their use purely as a form of psychological explanation [...]. The latter merely connects action with the agent's desires and beliefs, without touching the normative question whether he *had* an adequate reason for acting – whether he should have acted as he did. If this is all that can be said once we leave the point of view of the agent behind, then I think it would follow that we don't really act for reasons at all."

<sup>8</sup> Yet it is worth noting that such constraint should not be taken to mean that motivating and normative reasons can never come apart.

<sup>9</sup> Dancy's version of factualism says that reasons are non-representational, an account very similar to that advocated by John McDowell (1994) on epistemic reasons. Regarding this relationship, Dancy (2006, p. 121) recognizes that "the sorts of things that I want to say about the relation between reasons and action is almost entirely McDowellian in spirit".



appropriate to her action.”<sup>10</sup> The function of premise (5) is to ensure that what we say about error cases does not distort our understanding of the successful ones.

To deny premise (4), Dancy (2006) draws an important distinction between the reasons *why* we act and the reasons *for which* we act. Let us call the first group *explanatory reasons* and the second *motivating reasons* (in the same sense that I have been using the term so far). While explanatory reasons are those why people acted as they did, motivating reasons are those that people believe count in favor of an action. Typically, the latter will figure in our deliberation and will be used by us when asked why we did what we did.<sup>11</sup>

Having made this clarification, Dancy (2006) argues that even though many agree that in error cases what explains the subject’s action must be a fact about her psychology, this does not imply assuming that the same holds for the reason that moved her to act. One can act for the reason that *p* even when it is not the case that *p*. There is no need to appeal for an explanation that the reason *for which* one acted was merely one believed that *p*. Because if we take this route, the difference between acting for the reason that *p* and acting for the reason that one believes that *p* (as in my example of spies) will become blurred. And for Dancy (2006, p. 124), “the difference counts all in favor of saying that the ordinary case is the simpler case in which one’s reason is the (supposed) fact, not that one so supposes”.

Dancy’s next step then is to challenge the widely accepted thesis that intentional explanations are causal explanations (see, e.g., DAVIDSON, 1963). That thesis is quite demanding because it affirms that not only intentional explanations *could* be causal, but that they *must* be causal. The question that arises at this point of Dancy’s argumentation is: Are intentional explanations *reasons-why* (i.e., explanatory reasons) or *reasons-for-which* (i.e., motivating reasons)? Dancy (2006) claims that not all causal explanations are intentional (e.g., the reason why the TV control does not work is that the battery is dead) and that bringing into play elements of one’s psychology is not sufficient for intentionality either (e.g., we can explain why I stutter in a public speech by appealing to my shyness without my stuttering being an action). He suggests that intentional explanations are only those *reasons-why* explanations that can be converted into *reasons-for-which* explanations. Because “when an agent is mistaken, she acts in the light of something that is not the case” (DANCY, 2006, p. 126). The reason for which she acts is still that *p* (even when it is not the case that *p*), not that she so believes or her so believing.<sup>12</sup> And this finds support in the way we usually refer to errors when we add the ‘but not-*p*’ clause in a sentence without making it an incoherent statement (e.g., my reason for eating carbs was that it would make me lose weight, a matter about which I was sadly mistaken). Hence, providing an adequate account of error cases requires abandoning the idea that intentional explanations are factive.

There is one last important point in Dancy’s argument that deserves attention. In tune with premise (5) of the error cases argument, he states that if reasons-for-which explanations are not causal in error cases, by parity of reasoning they are not causal in successful cases as well.

“For the *style* of explanation does not change as we move from one case to the other. As Bernard Williams once said, we should not allow the distinction

<sup>10</sup> Dancy (1995, p. 13) himself acknowledges this.

<sup>11</sup> I think it is important to draw attention to the fact that there is much confusion in terminology concerning the relationship between reasons and actions. Pamela Hieronymi (2011, p. 408) says that “philosophers sometimes use the same terms to answer distinct questions about reasons for action.” In order to avoid this sort of misunderstanding, she offers a taxonomy of reasons with the following three contenders: normative, motivating, and explanatory.

<sup>12</sup> When an agent is mistaken about the fact, it is possible to account for her action by saying that “falsehoods (not the fact that something is false, but the falsehood itself) explain what happens” (HIERONYMI, 2011, p. 414).

between true and false to alter the nature of the relevant explanation. So if intentional explanations are not to be causal on one side of the true/false distinction, they are not causal at all" (DANCY, 2006, p. 128).

In sum, Dancy's (2006, p. 129) solution to PEC consists in arguing that the *explanans* in reasons-for-which explanations need not be causal, that is, they need not be intrinsically factive. Ordinarily, we explain an action "by citing *what* explains it, and what explains it in this case [i.e., an error case] is the reason for which it was done." But does this really solve the problem at hand? Well, this is the question that now needs to be addressed.

#### 4. An insufficient response to the problem

Michael Smith (2012) has held that we should respond to the above question negatively, for Dancy is committed to the awkward idea that intentional explanations can be non-factive. Smith contends that if an agent has a false belief (say, that *p*) about the circumstances of the situation, it does not make sense to say that what moves her to act is that *p*, given that *p* is not the case.<sup>13</sup> If one accepts Dancy's claim that something that is not the case can account for something that is, one will be denying the widely accepted philosophical thesis that explanations must be factual, where this means that a true explanation cannot have a falsehood as its *explanans*. On this ground, Smith argues that factualism should be abandoned and that another theory of practical reasons should take its place to solve PEC.<sup>14</sup>

I agree with Smith that we should reject Dancy's idea that intentional explanation can be non-factive. It strikes me it is more common to believe that *only* truths can properly explain something, given that people usually use 'explanation' as shorthand for 'true explanation'. Yet I also agree with Dancy that we should argue that factualism can solve PEC without having to give it up altogether. I think that factualism can escape unscathed from the threat of error cases by keeping what is most promising in it. This is the path I intend to take in this section and the next.

As just viewed, Dancy (2003, p. 427) argues that in error cases it is possible to explain an agent's action by appealing to a falsehood. And despite recognizing the oddity of such a claim, he asserts that this is something "that we can live with". Nonetheless, I disagree with him because I find this is something that we cannot live with. In maintaining that intentional explanations can be non-factive, Dancy is denying the 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 if the latter is actually the case" (SANDIS, 2013, p. 32). The idea behind the truism is that an agent cannot act for a reason that *p* unless she stands in some epistemic relation to *p*. So the cost of accepting Dancy's account is quite expensive, as it implies accepting a very counterintuitive claim that does not fit well with the way we normally conceive the world we live in to be. And this makes me think that a less demanding version of

<sup>13</sup> Smith has another objection to Dancy's factualist theory. According to Smith (2012, p. 393), the causal theory says that desires are just dispositions that, along with one's means-end beliefs, make one's body move in a certain way. Without these dispositions, one cannot be motivated because being motivated implies being disposed to move one's body in a certain way. The considerations that justify why one acted as one did cannot fix the content of one's motivating reasons in all cases. To show that this is the case, Smith takes Warren Quinn's (1993) example of Radioman. However, I will not look over this objection, since Ulrike Heuer (2004, p. 56) seems to me to have already answered it when she argues that "referring to a bare disposition does nothing to explain [what Radioman did]. Perhaps it can be understood as saying: there can be no specific explanation of the particular case, but the only thing we can explain is the pattern. [...] So my conclusion is that dispositions like the ones in the example don't explain." For more about this, see Heuer (2004, p. 56-9)

<sup>14</sup> From his perspective, a compatibilist theory of practical reasons.

factualism than Dancy's, one that does not deny the truism that explanations must be factive, can do a better job of solving PEC.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, one might say in defense of Dancy that we do not always use the term 'explanation' as a shorthand for 'true explanation'. Sometimes we use it to refer to something that the agent took to be true and it turned out not to be so. But I can fully agree with that and still assert that claiming this does not make the oddity of Dancy's account fade away. Because when we use the term 'explanation' not as a shorthand for 'true explanation' this means that we are giving a 'bad' explanation to the case, that is, one that does not *really* explain what was done (SANDIS, 2013). When using the term in this unqualified way we are giving a putative explanation, not a genuine one. To illustrate, if my reason for taking an umbrella when leaving home is because it was raining when that was not the case, appealing to the purported fact it was raining means offering a bad explanation for what I did. This putative explanation cannot offer any true and relevant information about my action, thereby not genuinely accounting for it.

Going one step further, my point here is that sentences like 'one did *p* because *q*' pragmatically commit the speaker to the truth of *q*. This is exactly what the truism affirms. If the speaker does not want to commit herself to the truth of what she said, then she cannot say that one did *p* because *q* (e.g., that I took the umbrella when leaving home because it was raining). There is something wrong with this way of speaking, and I think that by including the appositional 'as one supposed' in a sentence Dancy would not resolve the issue either.<sup>16</sup> Quite the opposite, he disregards precisely the sort of linguistic evidence where the strength of factualism resides. In affirming that 'the fact it is raining is a reason for taking an umbrella when leaving home' we take the relevant fact as providing a reason for action. Our reasons need not fall short of the facts, because, in general, they are the way things are. But since sentences like this speak in favor of factualism in successful cases, to say that something that is not the case could account for something that is would imply missing what is most promising in factualism, namely: that all *because-constructions* are factive. The question that then arises is: if in successful cases we resort to facts, why shouldn't we do the same in error cases? In my perspective, Dancy does not have a satisfactory answer to this.

In addition, there is a serious practical consequence that follows from the denial that intentional explanations must be factive. The consequence is that if falsehoods have the same explanatory powers as truths, we have no special reason to care more about the truth of our beliefs than about their falsehood (SANDIS, 2013). Particularly, I find that by granting that falsehoods can play this role in intentional explanations we would be opening the door to very dangerous statements, many of which can undermine core elements of the worldview we currently have. We would be making the difference between explanations based on truths and falsehoods inconsequential.

To see the danger I am talking about, let us imagine that in a pandemic context like ours we take on the burden of accepting the controversial thesis that falsehoods have genuinely explanatory powers. In this case, the debate between pro-vaccine and pro-hydroxychloroquine people about the reason for the decrease in Covid-19 contamination would be unimportant, because both truths and falsehoods would genuinely explain the relevant fact (i.e., the decrease in Covid-19 contamination). Similarly, in a different context the debate between creationists and evolutionists "would be inconsequential if we are happy to grant genuine explanatory power to falsehoods" (SANDIS, 2013, p. 32). Yet at least as we take things to be in the world, the distinction

<sup>15</sup> I will develop this idea in the next section.

<sup>16</sup> What I have in mind here is that Dancy might try to block the objection by glossing the above sentence that way: 'one did *p* because, as one supposed, *q* (e.g., that I took the umbrella when leaving home because, as I supposed, it was raining). However, I do not see how this answer would dispel the criticism I am pointing out.



between these two types of explanations is by no means unimportant. It matters to us whether the explanation we give about what happens is founded on a truth or a falsehood.

But a clarification needs to be made here. In saying this I am not denying that falsehoods may have an indirect role in explaining the action. I am just saying that it cannot by itself account for what happens, as Dancy supposes. The putative fact it was raining cannot properly explain my taking the umbrella when leaving home, although it can be part of the whole explanation of my action.<sup>17</sup> Put another way, it can do the explanatory work as a falsehood in my taking the umbrella without itself being the *explanans* of my taking the umbrella. As far as I can see, what successfully explains my taking the umbrella is not the falsehood it was raining, but the implied truth that I acted upon the belief it was.

So at the end of the day, I believe Dancy's solution to PEC is unconvincing. It strikes me that the burden that his theory implies assuming is too hard to take. But what comes next? Should we drop factualism and embrace psychologism or compatibilism about practical reasons? This is the issue on which I intend to dwell in the following.

## 5. Trying to keep factualism despite the threat

In response to the question just raised, I think we should keep factualism despite Dancy not offering an adequate answer to PEC. One might find this strange regarding what I have argued in section 4. But this is due to a misunderstanding of what is at stake in this debate. Dancy and his opponents take the problem of error cases as offering a decisive objection against factualism. They think that either we must accept the thesis that intentional explanations can be non-factive in order to maintain factualism, or we must sacrifice factualism in order to reject the thesis that intentional explanations can be non-factive. Unlike them, however, I believe it is possible to embrace factualism to solve error cases without having to endorse Dancy's controversial thesis.

As viewed before, Dancy's solution to PEC consists in denying premise (4) of the error cases argument. For him, when things are not as they appear to be to the agent, we should not resort to the psychological fact that she falsely believes that something is the case to explain what she did. We should instead resort to the putative (supposed) fact that the agent took as favoring the action that was undertaken. Nonetheless, if the argument I set out in the last section is cogent, then Dancy does not have the means to deny premise (4) of the argument so that the road for PEC triumphing over factualism is free. But it is too early to celebrate victory. In what follows, I intend to develop an argument in support of a *disjunctivist form* of factualism about reasons for action, one that is capable of solving the problem at hand by keeping what is most promising in factualism: that all because-constructions are factive.

For the most part, disjunctivism<sup>18</sup> goes hand in hand with Dancy's theory in successful cases in the sense that motivating reasons are typically facts of the world, as stated by (3) in the factualist argument back in section 1<sup>19</sup>. The reason for which I took

<sup>17</sup> I think the way falsehoods are related to the thing to be understood and the way they figure into the content of understanding it are separate questions.

<sup>18</sup> A few words must be said about what is disjunctivism. Disjunctivist approaches can be found in the theory of action, the theory of reasons, the theory of memory, the theory of knowledge, and the theory of perception. According to Paul Snowdon's (2008, p. 35) definition, "the idea is that in relation to each area (or domain) views are possible which share a single structure. 'Disjunctivism' then acts as a name for this recurring structure. There is something careless, or at least misleading, in such talk. It is not that, say, perception itself or knowledge itself is treated disjunctively, but rather that the more general categories which tend to be employed in analyzing such phenomena are treated disjunctively." A good collection of papers on disjunctivism in general can be found in Adrian Haddock and Fiona Macpherson (2008) and on epistemology and philosophy of perception in Marcus Willaschek (2012).

<sup>19</sup> It is implicated in this that disjunctivism safeguards the connection between motivating and normative reasons.



the umbrella when leaving home is that I saw it was raining. The fact *that it was raining* is what moved me to act and is what explains my action. Nothing more is needed to account for what I did. Disjunctivism and Dancy also agree that in rare cases we need to appeal to facts about one's psychology to explain one's actions. This is the case in my example of spies. But when we get to error cases, both find a crossroads on the way and each takes a different path from the other. We have already seen that the one Dancy takes do not go very far. So what would be the path to disjunctivism?

Jennifer Hornsby (2008) has developed a very compelling version of disjunctivism about reasons for action.<sup>20</sup> From the beginning, she assigns a central role in her account to *knowledge*<sup>21</sup> and argues that only when we see human agents as knowledgeable will it be possible to have an adequate understanding of their ethical and psychological nature. Hornsby (2008) then suggests us to classify reasons in two distinct groups: (F)-type reasons, which say that the reason for which one acted is a *fact*, and (B)-type reasons, which say that the reason for which one acted is a *belief*.<sup>22</sup>

This classification may seem puzzling but it helps to clarify things. On the one hand, in successful cases the agent was moved by a (F)-type reason, where this is the same as saying that 'one did *p* because *q*'. Yet this is true only when she *knows* that the relevant thing is the case. For it may happen that the agent acted because of something that is the case, but whose action was based on the testimony of a trusted friend who lied to her. In that scenario, despite the fact being the case, the agent was moved by a (B)-type reason and not by a (F)-type reason, since she *did not know* the relevant facts. As John McDowell (2013, p. 16) makes the point, the fact being the case "may be no more than a happy accident in relation to the agent's cognitive position".

What Hornsby bears in mind here is the famous cases of Edmund Gettier (1963), which attest that having a justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. According to her line of argument, my having a justified true belief that explains my action is not sufficient for me to have acted for a (F)-type reason. The condition of taking the umbrella when leaving home for the reason that *it was raining* was that I *knew* it was raining. "When people act for (F)-type reasons, they do so in virtue of knowing the relevant facts" (HORNSBY, 2008, p. 251).

On the other hand, in error cases the agent was moved by a (B)-type reason and not by a (F)-type reason, since the latter did not exist. We should think of (B)-type reason as a reason the agent *has* for doing something and not as a reason that *there is* for doing something. "The inference from 'x has a reason' to 'There is a reason x has' fails when (B)-type reasons are in question" (HORNSBY, 2008, p. 249). The distinction between (B)-type reasons and (F)-type reasons is what makes meaningful the ordinary statement that 'there was no reason to do what the agent did, even though she did it for a reason'. This sort of statement makes perfect sense to us. For instance, in case it was not raining there was no reason for me to take the umbrella when leaving home, even though I *had* a reason for doing it. The ignorant onlooker can account for my action by telling us what I believed in doing this. In Hornsby's terminology, there was no (F)-type reason for taking the umbrella when leaving home, even though my having a (B)-type reason explains my doing it.<sup>23</sup>

Once these elements are on the scene, Hornsby's (2008, p. 252) disjunctivist account can be represented by the following scheme concerning the explanation of action:

<sup>20</sup> Hornsby (2008) claims that her version of disjunctivism has a role analogous to that of McDowell's (1982) disjunctivism in the theory of perception.

<sup>21</sup> For clarity, I will ignore some of the epistemological complexities of her account given the scope of my paper.

<sup>22</sup> I take it that psychological facts do not have a different ontological ground from any other facts of the world (e.g., natural, economic, political), even if the things those facts are about do not belong to the same ontological category.

<sup>23</sup> That sort of explanation seems to be in tune with Davidson's (1963, p. 685) famous idea that "a reason rationalizes an action only if it leads us to see something the agent saw, or thought she saw, in her action."

(F. Exp) One did *p* because *q*.

(B. Exp) One did *p* because one believed that *q*.

I think it is worth noting that for disjunctivism the difference between successful and error cases is not that for the former reasons are facts of the world and for the latter are putative facts, as Dancy (2000) claims. The true distinction is that in successful cases the agent *knows* things are the case, whereas in error ones she *merely* believes things are thus and so. That is, things are *merely* appearances in the sense that the agent takes them to be so without *knowing* them to be so.<sup>24</sup> And mere appearances have the same explanatory powers as do those appearances that are manifestations of the relevant fact. Hornsby thus claims that the *agent's knowledge* of the relevant facts is the key to understanding what it means to act for reasons and explaining how (F)-type reasons are connected to (B)-type reasons. Although they address different philosophical issues, "each corresponds to a perfectly everyday conception"<sup>25</sup> (HORNSBY, 2008, p. 247).

Nonetheless, there may still be doubt as to whether the disjunctivist<sup>26</sup> path is really more successful than Dancy's. For me, it is because it maintains what is more promising in factualism, which is that all because-constructions are factive.<sup>27</sup> Critics of factualism (e.g., TURRI, 2009) have taken objections against the facticity of motivating reasons as being against factualism in general. Yet this is a complete misunderstanding of what is at stake. Although the best-known version of factualism goes in that direction, it is not necessary for factualism to always take this form. Instead, I think the idea that all because-constructions are factive is the best case for factualism. And this is because, if so understood, factualism can establish an appropriate link with a kind of naturalism without losing "any connection with the normative contexts in which the concept of a reason belongs" (HORNSBY, 2008, p. 259).

But at this point, one might be wondering "What about premise (5) of the error cases argument?" "Does the objection against factualism still stand?". From the critic's eye, my disjunctivist form of factualism seems to violate Williams' principle that false or true beliefs should not affect the way we explain action at all so that my account would fail to solve the problem at hand. However, I take it that this criticism misses the target, for, if properly understood, Williams' principle is fully compatible with the disjunctivist form of factualism for which I have argued. I think Dancy takes the principle to mean something that Williams himself did not mean by it.

The principle that the "true/false distinction should not alter the *form* of the relevant explanation" is presented by Williams (1981, p. 102) at the beginning of his article "Internal and External Reasons". When dealing with the gin/petrol case, Williams uses this principle to show that the "agent's reasons for action are *different* depending on whether the belief is true or false, although the *form* of the explanation is the same" (STOUT, 2009, p. 58). Thus, this means that what the principle requires is that the *form* of the explanation does not change whether the belief is true or false. In Williams' theory, intentional explanations take the *form* of causal explanations, and this is true of both successful and error cases. Whether the agent's belief that this stuff is gin is true or false does not alter the *causal form* of the explanation. And my claim is that this is in tune with the disjunctivist form of factualism just presented. Against Dancy, I have claimed that factualism need not assume the awkward idea that intentional explanations

<sup>24</sup> On this point, McDowell's (2013, p. 16) says that "Dancy's version of the idea of acting in the light of a fact is not sensitive to the difference between cases in which the obtaining of the fact is, and cases in which it is not, a mere happy accident in relation to the agent's cognitive position".

<sup>25</sup> This does not imply denying the important thesis for factualism that the concept of a reason we use in different contexts is a unified one. For Hornsby (2008), it just means that while (B)-type reasons aim to answer questions from the philosophy of mind, (F)-type reasons aim to answer questions from ethics.

<sup>26</sup> I can accept the claim that disjunctivism can be read as a *hybrid form* of factualism. I think it is plenty possible to read Hornsby's theory that way. But by no means should disjunctivism be confused with Smith's compatibilism about practical reasons, for example.

<sup>27</sup> This point is for not begging any question against Dancy's factualism.

can be non-factive, and I have also argued that the best case for factualism involves keeping the thought that all because-constructions are factive. As far as I can see, a disjunctivist form of factualism can fully meet Williams' requirement.

On Dancy's part, his reading of the principle goes in another direction in the sense that he is concerned with which reasons must figure into intentional explanations. According to Rowland Stout (2009, p. 58), Dancy takes Williams' principle to mean that "the true/false distinction should not be allowed to affect what actually count as reasons for action". Dancy hopes to prove that an agent's reason to act when something is the case is still her reason when the supposed thing is not the case. To use Williams' example, an agent's reason to drink this stuff when this is gin is still her reason to drink this stuff when this is not gin but petrol. However, this is not what Williams takes the principle to mean as I tried to demonstrate above.

Of course, Dancy can take this principle to mean something other than Williams did, but then something needs to be said in defense of a reinterpretation of this principle. Merely stating it proves nothing in its favor. So I claim that either, if understood in Dancy's terms, premise (5) of the error cases argument should not be accepted or, if understood in Williams' original terms, it can be accepted, but then the conclusion (6) does not follow directly from premises (4) and (5), since the move to (6) is based on a misinterpretation of (5). Regardless of the avenue we go, premise (5) does not pose a threat to factualism at all.

Be that as it may, if the argument developed in this section is sound, then we can resolve PEC without having to accept Dancy's controversial thesis that intentional explanations can be non-factive. And as a consequence of that, it strikes me that there is no decisive reason for us to give up factualism in the face of error cases.

## 6. Concluding remarks

To sum up, in this paper I have tried to offer a qualified defense of factualism in the face of the problem of error cases. The question investigated here is that some philosophers have assumed that factualism is at risk from the possibility of false belief. To get into the debate, I have considered Dancy's factualist response to the problem. Even though his theory is by and large convincing, I have argued it does not go very far because it denies the facticity of attributing motivating reasons. I have claimed that this conclusion should not be accepted, since a true and genuine explanation cannot have a falsehood as its *explanans*. Yet unlike critics, I have defended that factualism should not be abandoned, for a disjunctivist position on intentional explanations could solve PEC by keeping what is most promising in factualism: that all because-constructions are factive.

I do not think that my argument puts an end to further questioning in this debate. Several points deserve a thorough examination that I was not able to do on these pages. But I do think that if my argument works the way it is supposed to, then the conclusion that should follow is that at least some version of factualism can solve PEC.

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