

## Meeting 10: Basing's Relations

### I. Recap: The Ontology of Bases

Recall some of the sentences we can use to pick out basing:

"She is $\phi$ -ing because ____."	"____ is a reason for which she is $\phi$ -ing."
"She believes that $q$ because ____."	"____ is a reason for which she believes that $q$ ."
"She hates him because ____."	"____ is a reason for which she hates him."

Let us assume that basing is a relation, so that the sentences on the right are more perspicuous ways of picking out its logical form. Then we can ask: what kind of entities go into the empty slot in those sentences? Some (but not all) of the options:

*psychologism*: Bases/reasons-for-which are psychological states or events.

*abstractionism*: Bases/reasons-for-which are (typically non-psychological) propositions.

*factualism*: Bases/reasons-for-which are (typically non-psychological) facts.

Why 'typically non-psychological'? Because perhaps in cases involving introspection, it can be the case that  $\langle S$  believes that  $p \rangle$  or  $[S$  believes that  $p]$  is the reason for which  $S$  believes that she believes that  $p$ .

### II. Dancy against Psychologism about Action's Bases

Dancy starts his case against psychologism about the bases of action by appealing to

*the explanatory constraint*: "[A]ny theory about the relation between normative and motivating reasons . . . [must] show that and how a normative reason is capable of contributing to the explanation of an action that is done for that reason" (p. 194).

Dancy thinks the natural way for psychologists to meet this constraint is to endorse

*the three-part story*: If  $[p]$  is a normative reason for  $S$  to  $\phi$ , it contributes to the explanation of  $S$ 's  $\phi$ -ing when both (a)  $S$  is  $\phi$ -ing on the basis of  $S$ 's believing that  $p$ , and (b)  $S$  believes that  $p$  because  $p$ , so that by the transitivity of explanation, (c)  $S$  is  $\phi$ -ing because  $p$ .

I find this proposal very perplexing. What sort of 'because' is featured in (b)?

If it is the 'because' of basing, we have two problems. First, then (b) implies that psychologism about *beliefs*' bases is false, so psychologism is not true of basing in general. Second, then the 'because' in (c) is presumably also the 'because' of basing, so psychologism is not even true of action's bases.

If it is the 'because' of causation, we have two different problems. First, that way of understanding (b) doesn't seem to get us the sort of explanatory connection between  $[p]$  and  $S$ 's  $\phi$ -ing that we wanted, as cases of deviant causation bring out. Second, then it is unclear why (c) follows from (a) and (b), unless we assume a causal account of basing for actions (and take (c) to concern the causal 'because').

Dancy's main objection to the three-part story rests on

*the normative constraint*: "[A] motivating reason, that in light of which one acts, must be the sort of thing that is capable of being among the reason in favor of so acting; it must, in this sense, be possible to act for a good reason [i.e. for a motivating reason that is also a normative reason]" (p. 195).

But motivating reasons are—according to the three-part story—psychological states or events (such as *my believing that she badly needs help*), whereas normative reasons are—according to Dancy—propositions or facts that typically do not concern psychological matters (such as *that she badly needs help*).

Can Dancy's argument be generalized to the bases of belief? Turri objects that it cannot, because there are plausible views on which the (epistemic) normative reasons that favor belief are always mental states, even though certain extra-mental factors must be in place in order for those mental states to favor a given belief, such as:

*simple reliabilism*: If your mental state  $M$  (such as: your seeming to see that  $p$ ) reliably indicates that  $p$ , then  $M$  is a normative reason for you to believe that  $p$ .

(So on this view, facts about reliable indication are enablers of a favoring relation?)

But, as Sylvan pointed out in a reading for our last session, it is much less plausible to hold that normative reasons for action are always mental states, even when certain enabling conditions are in place, so it is not clear Turri's response can be used to defend psychologism about action's bases.

Dancy takes his argument so far to refute psychologism but not yet to be an objection to a related view, viz.:

*psychologized abstractionism*: Bases/reasons-for-which are propositions about psychological matters, such as  $\langle S \text{ believes that } p \rangle$ .

An advantage of psychologized abstractionism: it holds that bases are "things that can be believed, things properly expressible using that-clauses" (p. 197).

Dancy's main objection to psychologized abstractionism:

There are cases where that I believe that  $p$  is my reason for  $\phi$ -ing, such as:

*case 1*: "[T]hat I believe that the cliff is crumbling is my reason for avoiding climbing it, because having that belief I am more likely to fall off (I get nervous)" (p. 198).

*case 2*: "Someone who believes that there are pink rats living in his shoes may take that he believes this as a reason to go to the doctor or perhaps a psychologist" (p. 199).

However, these are "unusual" situations and "[n]ormally we take our reasons to be grounded in objective features of the situation, and to disappear if those features disappear" (pp. 198, 199).

But why couldn't an advocate of psychologized abstractionism object that what disappears is our *normative* reasons, not our *motivating* reasons?

And why couldn't an advocate of psychologized abstractionism claim that, in case 1, Dancy's motivating reason is *that he believes that he believes that the wall is crumbling* (or this together with *that he believes that he is likely to fall off if he believes that the wall is crumbling*)?

### III. Dancy's Alternative to Psychologism

Dancy's alternative to psychologism about action's bases he calls *the normative story*, because it holds that motivating-reasons/reasons-for-which are the same sort of thing as normative-reasons/reasons-to.

I find it very difficult to interpret Dancy here: does he endorse abstractionism, factualism, or a form of disjunctivism that holds bases to be facts in the Good Case and propositions in the Bad Case?

Dancy develops the normative story by showing how it can respond to two powerful arguments for psychologized abstractionism (or maybe for psychologized factualism instead?):

- *first argument for psychologized abstractionism/factualism*: The statement "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that  $p$ " can only be true if S believes that  $p$ , so therefore that statement is shorthand for "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that S believes that  $p$ ."

(Note: more generally we might want to replace 'believes that  $p$ ' with 'takes it that  $p$ ' in this argument, where taking is a less demanding representation state than believing. So all uses of 'believes that' in what follows could be replaced with 'takes it that', if one prefers.)

*Dancy's reply:* There are two ways of developing the normative account that allow us to accept this argument's premise while rejecting the inference to its conclusion.

*the enabling account:* S's believing that  $p$  is an enabling condition for a basing relation between that  $p$  and S's  $\phi$ -ing.

(Interestingly, this ends up being the mirror image of Turri's proposal: whereas Turri holds that *something non-mental* enables *something mental* to be a *normative reason*, here Dancy holds that *something mental* enables *something non-mental* to be a *motivating reason*.)

*the appositional account:* "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that S believes that  $p$ " should be understood as a less accurate way of saying "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that  $p$ , as she believes."

At first Dancy suggests that an advantage of the appositional account is that it "is consistent with the . . . suggestion that belief is more a stance or a commitment than a [psychological] state," but then he concludes that the enabling account is consistent with that suggestion as well (p. 201).

So I read Dancy as eventually concluding that these two accounts are compatible with each other and perhaps just two different ways of getting at the same basic idea.

- *second argument for psychologized abstractionism/factualism:* When S falsely believes that  $p$ , "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that  $p$ " cannot be true and at most "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that S believes that  $p$ " is true. Moreover, as Bernard Williams taught us, "the true/false distinction should not be allowed to affect the form of the relevant explanation" (Dancy, p. 197). So that S believes that  $p$  must be S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing even when S truly believes that  $p$ .

*Dancy's reply:* "S's reason for  $\phi$ -ing is that  $p$ " is not factive with regard to " $p$ ": the statement can be true even when " $p$ " is false, as the felicity of sentences like the following shows:

- D<sub>1</sub>. His reason for doing it was that it would increase his pension, but in fact he was quite wrong about that.
- D<sub>2</sub>. The ground on which he acted was that she had lied to him, though in fact she had done nothing of the sort.

But this line is more difficult to hold for the following sentences, which are standardly taken to be synonymous with (1) and (2):

- D<sub>1</sub>\*. He did it because it would increase his pension, but in fact he was quite wrong about that.
- D<sub>2</sub>\*. He acted as he did because she had lied to him, though in fact she had done nothing of the sort.

Setiya's solution is to deny that (1)/(2) is synonymous (1\*)/(2\*). More generally, Setiya holds:

- S<sub>1</sub>. If S is  $\phi$ -ing because<sub>basing</sub>  $p$ , then S knows that  $p$ .
- S<sub>2</sub>. If S is  $\phi$ -ing on the ground that (or for the reason that)  $p$ , then S believes that  $p$ .

He motivates (S<sub>1</sub>) and (S<sub>2</sub>) by way of cases like the following (adapted from Hornsby):

"Edmund believes that the ice in the middle of the pond is dangerously thin, having been told so by a normally reliable friend, and he accordingly keeps to the edge. As it happens, the friend had no idea . . . whether or not the ice was thin [though in fact it was]" (p. 133).

Setiya's verdict: "Edmund's reason for keeping to the edge was that the ice in the middle was thin" and "The ground on which Edmund kept to the edge was that the ice in the middle was thin" are both true, but "Edmund kept to the edge because the ice in the middle was thin" is false.



## V. The Pure Logic of Basing

Is basing transitive, irreflexive, and asymmetric? How we formulate these theses will depend on what assumptions we make about the relation of the basing relation.

Let's start by assuming psychologism about both bases and what is based. Then our formulations are (where the variables range over the sorts of broadly psychological states/events that can serve as bases and be based):

*Asymmetry (of partial basing):*  $(\forall x)(\forall y)((x \text{ is partially based on } y) \supset \neg(y \text{ is partially based on } x))$

*Irreflexivity (of partial basing):*  $(\forall x)\neg(x \text{ is partially based on } x)$

*Transitivity (of full basing):*  $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z)((x \text{ is fully based on } y) \& (y \text{ is fully based on } z)) \supset (x \text{ is fully based on } z)$

*Cumulative Transitivity or Cut (for full basing):*  $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall y')( \forall z)((x \text{ is fully based on } y, y') \& (y' \text{ is fully based on } z)) \supset (x \text{ is fully based on } y, z)$

(I ignore here my disagreement with Fine, Rosen, etc. about how to properly formulate Cut.)

A few debates in epistemology where these principles matter:

- It is sometimes argued that *linear coherentists about doxastic justification* are committed to the falsity of Asymmetry (or, at least, are committed to loops of partial basing, if Transitivity doesn't hold), and for that reason their view should be rejected.
- It might seem that *epistemic conservatism* (the view that the fact that one believes that  $p$  provides one with a perhaps very small bit of default justification to believe that  $p$ ) requires the falsity of Irreflexivity when extended to a view about doxastic justification.

Some intuitive instances of Transitivity and Cut (translated into 'because'-talk, used to pick out full basing):

- T<sub>1</sub>. If S believes that  $p$  because S believes that  $q$ , and S believes that  $q$  because S believes that  $r$ , then S believes that  $p$  because S believes that  $r$ .
- T<sub>2</sub>. If S is  $\phi$ -ing because S wants to  $\psi$  and S believes that  $\phi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\psi$ -ing, and S wants to  $\psi$  because S wants to  $\chi$  and S believes that  $\psi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\chi$ -ing, then S is  $\phi$ -ing because S wants to  $\chi$ , S believes that  $\psi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\chi$ -ing, and S believes that  $\phi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\psi$ -ing.

A (perhaps) counterintuitive instance of Cut:

- T<sub>3</sub>. If S is  $\phi$ -ing because S wants to  $\psi$  and S believes that  $\phi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\psi$ -ing, and S believes that  $\phi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\psi$ -ing because S believes that reliable source R says that  $\phi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\psi$ -ing, then S is  $\phi$ -ing because S wants to  $\chi$  and S believes that reliable source R says that  $\phi$ -ing is a necessary means for  $\psi$ -ing.

If (T<sub>3</sub>) is indeed false, does that mean we need to distinguish the practical basing relation (when the thing based is an action) from the doxastic basing relation (when the thing based is a doxastic attitude)?

Interestingly, many existing accounts of doxastic and practical basing do not yield Transitivity or Cut.

For instance, standard representational theories of doxastic basing allow there to be exceptions to (T<sub>1</sub>), since  $\langle S \text{ takes } (S \text{'s believing}) \text{ that } q \text{ to be a normative reason for } S \text{ to believe that } p \rangle$  and  $\langle S \text{ takes } (S \text{'s believing}) \text{ that } r \text{ to be a normative reason for } S \text{ to believe that } q \rangle$  do not appear to together entail  $\langle S \text{ takes } (S \text{'s believing}) \text{ that } r \text{ to be a normative reason for } S \text{ to believe that } p \rangle$ .

Is this a problem with the existing theories of doxastic and practical basing, which perhaps have not been formulated with sufficient generality by just focusing on a restriction of the basing relation when it is applied to one particular type of thing that can be based, or is it a problem with Transitivity and Cut?

Maybe we need to reformulate Transitivity so that it yields the following as a particular instance (and need to reformulate Asymmetry, Irreflexivity, and Cut in similar ways):

- $T_1^*$ . S is rationally required to see to it that (if S believes that  $p$  because S believes that  $q$ , and S believes that  $q$  because S believes that  $r$ , then S believes that  $p$  because S believes that  $r$ ).

But let's put this complication to one side and go back to our original way of understanding these theses. How do we formulate them if we reject psychologism in favor of abstractionism or factualism?

If we assume that  $\langle S \text{ believes that } p \text{ because } q \rangle$  entails  $\langle S \text{ believes that } q \rangle$ , we can reformulate Transitivity so that the following is a particular instance of it:

- $T_1^{**}$ . If S believes that  $p$  because  $q$ , and S believes that  $q$  because  $r$ , then S believes that  $p$  because  $r$ .

It is much less clear what the analogous instance of  $(T_2)$  would be—but that's just because abstractionists and factualists face a version of Turri's problem of withholding, except with regard to desires and other psychological states that are not belief. What proposition or fact does an abstractionist or factualist use to replace the desires (and other non-belief states) that psychologists posit in a given basing structure?

## VI. Mixed Transitivity for Basing and Grounding?

Let us suppose that either  $(T_1)$  or  $(T_1^{**})$  holds, depending on our views about the relata of the basing relation. Then can we weave basing and grounding together via a mixed transitivity principle?

There are four possibilities to consider. If we assume that psychologism is true and hence  $(T_1)$  holds, the relevant mixed transitivity principles are:

- $M_1$ . If S believes that  $p$  because<sub>basing</sub> S believes that  $q$ , and S believes that  $q$  because<sub>grounding</sub>  $r$ , then (in some non-rigged up sense of 'because') S believes that  $p$  because  $r$ .
- $M_2$ . If  $p$  because<sub>grounding</sub> S believes that  $q$ , and S believes that  $q$  because<sub>basing</sub> S believe that  $r$ , then (in some non-rigged up sense of 'because')  $p$  because S believes that  $r$ .

On the other hand, if we instead accept  $(T_1^{**})$ , the relevant mixed transitivity principles are:

- $M_3$ . If S believes that  $p$  because<sub>basing</sub>  $q$ , and  $q$  because<sub>grounding</sub>  $r$ , then (in some non-rigged up sense of 'because') S believes that  $p$  because  $r$ .
- $M_4$ . If  $p$  because<sub>grounding</sub> S believes that  $q$ , and S believes that  $q$  because<sub>basing</sub>  $r$ , then (in some non-rigged up sense of 'because')  $p$  because  $r$ .

$(M_4)$ —or something close to it—is sometimes assumed in philosophical arguments.

For instance, on way of interpreting the Euthyphro dilemma, we make the following inference on the horn in which we assume that an act is pious because all the gods love it: if the gods love act A because  $r$ , then that's the real reason why act A is pious.

But  $(M_4)$  strikes me as very questionable.

Suppose I believe that eliminative materialism (on which there are no propositional attitudes) is false because<sub>basing</sub> I have at least one belief. Then I have at least one belief because<sub>grounding</sub> I believe that eliminative materialism is false. But is there a sense of 'because' such that I have at least one belief because I have at least one belief?

$(M_3)$  also seems dubious.

Suppose Aristotle (before the advent of modern chemistry) believes the liquid will quench his thirst because<sub>basing</sub> the liquid is water. And suppose the liquid is water because<sub>grounding</sub> the liquid is  $H_2O$ . Is there a sense of 'because' such that Aristotle believes the liquid will quench his thirst because the liquid is  $H_2O$ ?