"The Explanatory Argument for Factualism"[1]

Abstract. I argue for Factualism: the view that all of a subject's reasons for belief are facts. Her reasons are not her mental states or the propositional contents of her mental states. Factualism follows from two claims. First, all reasons are explanatory in this sense: whenever S believes that *p* for a reason, one can say that S believes that *p* because *q*, where "*q*" refers to S's reason. Second, it always follows from this schema that it is a fact that *q* and that the fact that *q* is S's reason. I show that philosophers have been led to deny either of these premises because they have misinterpreted linguistic evidence or because they have attempted to defend Factualism in the wrong way (by denying the factivity of "because"). I then argue that the most plausible version of Factualism holds that non-psychological facts can be among one's reasons. It follows that theories of justification that deny that contingent considerations of the world around one can determine how well one's beliefs are justified, such as traditional forms of epistemic internalism, are wrong.

The metaphysics of reasons includes an ontological question: are a subject's reasons for belief facts, mental states, or propositions? And a qualification question: which facts, mental states, or propositions qualify as reasons? Just facts about one's own psychology, or also non-psychological facts? Just one's own non-factive mental states (or, their contents), or also one's factive mental states (or, their contents)?[2]

Both questions have critical importance for epistemology. If justification is partly determined by one's reasons, and one's reasons include non-psychological facts of the world around one, then *prima facie* justification is partly determined by how things stand in the world around one, not just by one's own non-factive psychology.[3]

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[1] I would like to thank [acknowledgements omitted for anonymity].

[2] Advocates of facts include Dancy (2000), and perhaps McDowell (1994, 2008) and Stampe (1987); advocates of mental states include Conee and Feldman (2001) and Turri (2009); advocates of propositions include Audi (1986, 1993), Fumerton (1995) and Williamson (1997, 2000, 2009). Dancy (2000), McDowell (1994, 2008) and Stampe (1987) include non-psychological facts, while Chisholm on the "directly evident" (1977) and Ginet (1975) count just facts about one's own psychology. Conee and Feldman (2001) and Turri (2009) count just one's non-factive mental states. Williamson (2000, 2009) counts the contents of one's factive mental states.

[3] Thus epistemic internalism would be false, understood as the thesis that justification is determined just by one's non-factive mental states (what Conee and Feldman (2001) call "mentalism", the view they advocate themselves). Epistemic internalism understood in terms of access ("accessibilism") is the thesis that justification is determined entirely by considerations the subject has reflective access

Recent work on the metaphysics of reasons has been critical of the view that one's reasons for belief are facts: Turri (2009) rejects that view in favor of holding that one's reasons are one's mental states; Pryor (2007) argues that linguistic evidence for thinking that reasons are facts is specious.

My aim is to redress this imbalance. In Section 1 I clarify the notion of reasons I am interested in. In Section 2 first I present the Explanatory Argument for Factualism (the view that all of a subject's reasons for belief are facts). Then I argue that the most plausible version of Factualism holds that non-psychological facts can be among the subject's reasons. In Section 3 I respond to objections.

1. Epistemic reasons

By **epistemic reasons** I mean the considerations that one bases one's belief on; the considerations that thereby justify the belief, as long as they are sufficiently good.[4] Epistemic reasons are *the subject's* reasons for belief. They are not merely reasons why the subject believes as she does, and they are not merely reasons that there are to hold a belief (but not "possessed" by the subject).[5]

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to (as in BonJour 1985 and Ginet 1975). Since accessibilist internalists have traditionally held that the contingent considerations we have reflective access to include no more than our non-factive mental states, their views are also *prima facie* incompatible with one's reasons including facts of the world around one.

[4] Thus all epistemic reasons need not be good. I will not distinguish between the reason, the basis, and the grounds of belief. Philosophers often use the term "evidence" for this same notion, so I will also treat at least some uses of "evidence" as equivalent with "reasons". Whether that is always how philosophers use "evidence", though, I will not speculate, and thus I make no assumptions about the equivalence of "reasons" and "evidence" in general. I also do not assume that beliefs based on reasons in this sense are always the result of conscious inference or deliberation. Nor do I make any claims about the meaning of the word "reason". I am following Turri's (2009) use of "epistemic reasons".

[5] Discussion of reasons-for and reasons-why can be found in many places, e.g., Audi (1986, 1993) and Ginsborg (2006). Not every reason *why* a subject holds a belief is a reason *for* which she holds it. E.g., the fact that the fire hydrant burst is the reason why the streets are wet, and thus a reason

As I understand them, epistemic reasons will sometimes be considerations about which one deliberates, and then for which one forms a belief. For example, Byron is wondering whether it rained. He deliberates over the consideration that the streets are wet, and forms his belief that it rained on the basis of that consideration. There is *prima facie* evidence that such considerations are facts.[6] As Byron deliberates, for example, he says to himself:

> Well, it is the case that the streets are wet, and the fact that the streets are wet suggests that it rained.

He is deliberating about a fact. Furthermore, if a bystander were asked what Byron's reason is for believing that the streets are wet, she would naturally say:

(1) The fact that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained.

Philosophers have questioned, however, whether we can take this evidence at face value.[7] And even if we can take it at face value, we might also worry that it only shows that *some* epistemic reasons are facts, not that *all* epistemic reasons are facts. We thus need more conclusive grounds in order to advocate Factualism.

2. The Explanatory Argument

The Explanatory Argument for Factualism is this.

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why Byron believes that it rained. But Byron does not take the fact that the fire hydrant burst to be a reason for believing that it rained (his reason is that the streets are wet; he is totally unaware of the fire hydrant). Epistemic reasons also need to be "possessed" by the subject. For example, it might be true that the consideration that the streets are wet is a reason (generically, for one) to believe that it rained; but that generic reason only counts as an epistemic reason when some subject "possesses" it and bases her belief on it. I do not deny that generic reasons can be epistemic reasons, but generic reasons must meet a basing or possession requirement in order to be among a subject's reasons and thus epistemic reasons. The difficulty of spelling out the basing or possession relation is well known; see Feldman (1988) and Korcz (1997, 2010).

[6] I am neutral here about the metaphysics of facts. My arguments below are compatible both with substantive conceptions of facts (Dancy 2000; Harman 2003) as well as views that identify facts and true propositions (Frege 1918; King 1995, 2002).

[7] E.g., Pryor (2007). For a response to Pryor see my "Justification and the Metaphysics of Reasons" (ms).

The Explanatory Argument for Factualism

1. All epistemic reasons are explanatory.
2. All explanatory epistemic reasons are facts.

Therefore:

3. All epistemic reasons are facts.

Premise 1 holds that all epistemic reasons are **explanatory reasons**: they are all reasons why subjects believe as they do. One can always say that S believes that *p* because *q*, where *q* refers to the subject's reason. For example, say we asked Byron why he believes that it rained. He replies, "Because the streets are wet." That the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained, and what premise 1 claims is that it follows that Byron believes that it rained because the streets are wet. If that consideration did not explain why he believes as he does, then it couldn't be his reason.

Premise 2 then holds that for every instance in premise 1 of "S believes that *p* because *q*" we can infer: it is a fact that *q*; the consideration referred to by "*q*" is a fact. But since from premise 1 the consideration referred to by "*q*" is the subject's reason, it follows that the fact that *q* is S's reason for belief. E.g., from premise 1 we know that Byron believes that it rained because the streets are wet, where "the streets are wet" refers to his reason. By premise 2 we know that it is a fact that the streets are wet. That the streets are wet is his reason, and that the streets are wet is a fact.[8]

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[8] More precisely, the structure of the argument is this:

1. For all x, if x is an epistemic reason then there is a true statement of the form "S believes that *p* because *q*", in which "*q*" refers to x.
2. For all x, if there is a true statement of the form "S believes that *p* because *q*", in which "*q*" refers to x, then x is a fact.

Thus,

3. For all x, if x is an epistemic reason, then x is a fact.

Which has the valid form:

1. $\forall x(F(x) \rightarrow \exists yG(x,y))$
2. $\forall x(\exists yG(x,y) \rightarrow H(x))$

Thus,

3. $\forall x(F(x) \rightarrow H(x))$

I consider responses to the argument in the next section.[9] If the argument is correct, though, we would also like an answer to the qualification question: which facts qualify as epistemic reasons? Just facts about one's own psychology, or also non-psychological facts? Here lies the importance of the evidence from Section 1: (i) when Byron deliberates, he seems to deliberate about non-psychological facts (the fact that the streets are wet), and (ii) linguistic evidence of the form

(1) The fact that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained
(2) The fact that the lights are on is a reason for believing that the neighbors are home
(3) The fact that the Red Sox lost is my reason for believing that Justin will be unhappy
(4) The fact that the baby is crying is John's reason for believing that it is hungry

indicates that non-psychological facts can be reasons.

The most promising way to resist this evidence is to claim that facts aren't epistemic reasons at all. For example, Pryor (2007) admits that statements like (1) are true, but he denies that the truth of (1) shows that Byron's reason is a fact, because it is not compulsory to read the "is" in (1) as identity. Pryor does not argue, however, that (1) should *not* be read as identifying a reason and a fact, but only that certain semantic considerations do not make it obligatory to do so. If it has already been established that epistemic reasons are facts, however, it is quite hard to deny that the "is" in (1) is identity. Additionally, philosophers who advocate Factualism but maintain that only psychological facts about oneself can be one's reasons (I call this package of views Psychologistic Factualism) treat the "is" as identity in psychological cases:

(5) Roderick's reason for believing that he believes that there can be no life on the moon is the fact that he believes that there can be no life on the moon.[10]

But it is implausible to read the "is" in (5) as identity without reading the "is" in (1) – (4) in the same way. The defender of Psychologistic Factualism would then have to deny the truth of non-

[9] Note that the argument does not entail that all explanatory reasons are epistemic reasons. Nor does it entail that every explanatory reason is a fact, since it is consistent with the argument that one explanatory reason of Byron's belief is this: Byron believes as he does because of the wet streets. The argument does entail that any explanatory reason, *q*, in the schema "S believes that *p* because *q*," is a fact.

[10] See Chisholm (1977: 21), as well as Ginet (1975).

psychological claims like (1) – (4) as well as Byron's understanding of his own deliberations. Since it has to deny the most intuitive understanding of first-person deliberations, it is even inconsistent with the understanding of epistemic reasons that motivates many theories of justification:

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

If epistemic reasons are facts, I conclude then that it is rather unappealing to hold that only psychological facts qualify.[11] Thus Non-Psychologistic Factualism is true.

3. Objections and replies

In this section I respond to the five most common objections to the Explanatory Argument.

3.1 Non-causal reasons

The first objection rejects premise 1. Keith Lehrer[12] has provided putative examples of beliefs held for reasons but not caused by those reasons. In his best-known case, a gypsy lawyer believes that his client is innocent of one of eight murders because of his (the gypsy lawyer's) tarot cards. The lawyer then becomes aware of actually good evidence showing that the client is innocent of that murder, but because of his desire to find a culprit for all eight murders the actually good evidence is unable to motivate him; only his unwavering faith in the tarot cards is. Lehrer claims that the actually good evidence is therefore not a cause of the lawyer's belief. Yet his belief is intuitively justified, according to Lehrer, and if it is justified our intuitions must be guided by the

[11] Psychologistic Factualism might even have oddly skeptical implications about normal subjects' epistemological beliefs. Given the plethora of linguistic evidence of the form of (1) – (4), the result is that we have many mistaken beliefs about what our own (and others') reasons are, and thus lack knowledge of why we believe any of those things.

[12] Lehrer (1971: 311-313; 1974: 124-125; 1990: 169; 2000: 195-198). Also see the defense of Lehrer by Kvanvig (1985: 153-8).

thought that the actually good evidence is his reason (since if just the tarot cards were his reason we would not think his belief is justified).

One might argue on the basis of cases like this, next, that a consideration could be one's reason for belief without it being true that one holds the belief because of that consideration. Thus premise 1 is false. Objections to Lehrer's cases are well known[13], so I will restrict my contribution to their bearing on the Explanatory Argument. That argument does not claim that one's reasons must be causes of one's belief, only that they must be explanatory of one's belief (the "because" in premise 1 can include non-causal explanations). Since not all explanations are causal, a Lehrer-inspired objection would need the stronger claim that the lawyer's belief is justified by the actually good evidence, but the actually good evidence that justifies his belief does not in any way explain why he believes as he does. That claim simply strains credulity: putting aside the causal question, if the actually good evidence in no way even explains why the lawyer believes that his client is innocent, then how does it justify him? If the *only* explanation for why he believes as he does is that the tarot cards say so, then intuitively his belief is *un*justified. Thus objections of this kind to premise 1 do not seem convincing.

3.2 Non-factive "because"

The second objection rejects premise 2. The best-known defense of Factualism, that of Dancy (2000), utilizes the idea that certain "because" constructions are non-factive (Dancy does so in order to make sense of bad cases, cases in which subjects are mistaken about the facts).[14] Dancy's defense of Factualism is therefore inconsistent with mine: if he is right, the Explanatory

[13] See Audi (1983: 223-225), Goldman (1979: 22), Harman (1970: 841-855), Lemke (1986), and Swain (1981: ch. 3). Also see Korcz (1997, 2010).
[14] Discussed below; see Dancy (2000: ch. 6 – 8).

Argument fails. Dancy claims that evidence like the following might support a non-factive "because":

(6) He did this because, as he supposed, she had lied to him.

The idea is that one subject (he) thinks another subject (she) lied to him, and he did something in response because, supposedly, she had lied to him. The first subject's reason appears to be non-psychological: he would say his reason is that she had lied to him; he would not say his reason is that he supposed she had lied to him. But "because *q*" pragmatically commits the speaker to the truth of *q*, so if we don't want to commit ourselves to the truth of the claim that she had lied to him, we can't say that he did it because she had lied to him. Thus we insert the appositional "as he supposed" to block that pragmatic commitment. But, Dancy claims, the reason offered in (6) is still the non-psychological consideration (that she had lied to him) and not the psychological consideration (that he supposed that she had lied to him); and, on account of the appositional "as he supposed", that consideration might be his reason even if it is not true that she had lied to him. Thus not all "because" claims are factive.

Part of Dancy's general point here is convincing. Sometimes we want to avoid commitment to things being as the subject supposes them to be, but nonetheless we want to describe the subject's reasons in such a way that, if it is true that she had lied to him, his reason is that she had lied to him (and not that he merely supposed she had). But Dancy slides from that point to the dubious claim that even if things are not as the subject supposes, his reason is still that she had lied to him. If it is false that she had lied to him, it is false that he did this *because* she had lied to him; none of Dancy's evidence suggests otherwise. Contra Dancy's suggestion, in the bad case the appositional "as he supposed" in (6) can only be read psychologically: he did this because he supposed she had

lied to him. So although Dancy's cases reveal interesting facts about reasons attributions, the analysis in terms of a non-factive "because" is unconvincing.[15]

The unfortunate consequence, however, is that the best-known defense of Factualism is wedded to a problematic view of "because" constructions. Philosophers have then taken objections to the non-factive "because" to constitute objections to Factualism[16], while really the opposite is the case: the fact that all because constructions *are* factive is part of the best case for Factualism. Thus I consider objections to premise 2 based on the supposed non-factive "because" to be both unconvincing as well as pernicious to the case for Factualism.[17]

3.3 Event causation

This objection runs: only events are causes; reasons are causes; so only events are reasons. But facts are not events. Thus facts are not reasons. So if it is true, as premise 2 claims, that "*q*" in "S believes that *p* because *q*" refers to a fact, then "*q*" does not refer to S's reason (as premise 1 claims).[18]

I have two replies to this objection. First, if it is equally unpromising to reduce mental states and propositions to events (as it is to reducing facts to events), then this objection counts equally against the main competitors to Factualism. In a sense this objection creates a bigger problem for opponents of Factualism than for the Factualist, since a key aspect of the Factualist view I am

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[15] I therefore disagree with Turri's criticism of Dancy (Turri 2009: Section 5). Turri claims that the appositional (6) should always be read psychologically, but that is incorrect. What Dancy gets right is that sometimes an appositional construction is true because the subject's reason is non-psychological: in good cases his reason is that she had lied to him. What Turri gets right, though, is that in bad cases only the psychological reading is possible; Dancy provides no plausible alternative.

[16] Such as Turri (2009).

[17] The version of Factualism that I defend would then need a theory of bad cases different from Dancy's, which I provide in my "Reasoning from the Facts" (ms).

[18] This objection is inspired by Davidson (1983).

concerned with defending is that non-psychological considerations can be our reasons. If those considerations turn out to be events instead of facts, then that aspect would still be preserved.[19]

More importantly, however, this objection carries no force at all because the relation between reasons and causes need not be identity. The basic rationale for connecting reasons and causes is this.[20] Say a subject has several possible reasons (*q* and *r*) for believing that *p*. Intuitively it is possible that she believes that *p* for one of those reasons and not the other. But what makes it the case, e.g., that *q* is her reason rather than *r*? The simple answer is that *q* caused her belief rather than *r*. Equally good, however, is the sophisticated answer that the analogue-event to *q* caused her belief rather than the analogue-event to *r*. Define analogue-events as follows:

Analogue: The event of *a*'s φing is the analogue of the fact that *a* φs/φed/is φing.[21]

The sophisticated answer in terms of analogue-events disambiguates S's reason just as well as the simple answer in terms of events. Thus if it is true that only events are causes and that facts are not events, then it is false that reasons need be causes. Reasons only need analogues that are causes. Thus this objection carries no force.[22]

3.4 Reasons are mental states

The fourth objection claims that mental states can be reasons; thus not all reasons are facts. For example, we often say things like:

(7) Byron believes that it rained because he believes that the streets are wet.

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[19] Thus if "*q*" in the construction "S believes that *p* because *q*" refers to an event, I am happy to admit that events, including non-psychological events, are reasons.

[20] For a review of the literature see Korcz (1997, 2010).

[21] Whether the analogue fact is that *a* φs or φed or is φing will depend on whether the event is dynamic or static, past or continuous.

[22] Of course, it may be true that fact causation is possible (see Schaffer 2007) or that facts are identical to events (see Mulligan and Correia 2007), but this objection carries no force regardless of how those issues are settled.

The initial trouble with this suggestion, though, is that (7) seems to offer a fact as a reason rather than a belief: that he believes that the streets are wet is a fact. That is what explains why he believes that it rained. The Factualist can grant that in some cases the facts that are our reasons are psychological facts, so it is perfectly possible that in some cases the fact that he believes that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained. The clearest evidence (such as (7)) that some reasons are psychological considerations[23] is really evidence concerning the qualification question, not the ontological question: it should not be confused with evidence that reasons are mental states rather than facts.

The mental-state objector therefore needs to reject premise 1: she can agree that all reasons are explanatory, but not of the form "S believes that *p* because *q*." Rather some (or all) reasons are explanatory of the form "S believes that *p* because of X." For example:

(8) Byron believes that it rained because of his belief that the streets are wet.

So his reason is his belief. The trouble with this suggestion is that (8) does not seem to offer an explanation of Byron's belief independent of (7). Rather, it is parasitic on (7). First, compare another "because"/"because of" case:

(9) Albert reached out his hand because the child is drowning.

(10) Albert reached out his hand because of the child.

We can ask: what about the child explains why it is true that Albert reached out his hand because of the child? The answer is the fact that the child is drowning (not, e.g., the fact that the child is nine years old). That fact is more basic and explains why it is true that he reached out his hand because of the child. Secondly, evidence for thinking that reasons must be propositionally structured also suggests that "because of" constructions are merely parasitic on "because" constructions.[24] Thus evidence like (7) and (8) might support the idea that some of our reasons are psychological, but it

[23] See Ginsborg (2006) and Hornsby (2008).
[24] See Williamson (1997, 2000).

offers no clear case that those reasons are mental states and not facts (nor that *only* psychological considerations are reasons).

3.5 Reasons are propositions

The final objection is based on the idea that epistemic reasons are propositions (the view I will call Abstractionism[25]). Consider again the psychological evidence:

(7) Byron believes that it rained because he believes that the streets are wet.

This final objection admits that reasons are explanatory, not because Byron's reason is the fact that he believes that the streets are wet, but because Byron's reason is the content of his belief that the streets are wet. So Byron's reason is the proposition <the streets are wet>. One advantage of this view over the view that reasons are mental states is that the Abstractionist can admit that reasons are propositionally structured. Furthermore, if it is true that facts are identical to true propositions[26], then this view can also admit the original linguistic evidence like:

(1) The fact that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained.
(2) The fact that the lights are on is a reason for believing that the neighbors are home.
(3) The fact that the Red Sox lost is my reason for believing that Justin will be unhappy.

But the defender of Abstractionism maintains that false propositions can also be reasons and thus not all reasons are facts.

The first trouble with this objection is that it may be false that true propositions are identical to facts[27], in which case the Abstractionist would have a hard time making sense of evidence like (1) – (3) above. Secondly, there is no parallel linguistic evidence suggesting that false propositions can be reasons. All of the following are infelicitous:

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[25] Following Turri (2009).
[26] For arguments that facts are not identical to true propositions see Dancy (2000) and Harman (2003); for philosophers who identify facts and true propositions see Frege (1918) and King (1995, 2002).
[27] As argued in Dancy (2000) and Harman (2003).

(1*) #The proposition that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained.
(2*) #The proposition that the lights are on is a reason for believing that the neighbors are home.
(3*) #The proposition that the Red Sox lost is my reason for believing that Justin will be unhappy.

As are other constructions:

(1**) #The true proposition that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained.
(1***) #The false proposition that the streets are wet is Byron's reason for believing that it rained.[28]

Thirdly, and even more importantly, however, the Abstractionist has a hard time making sense of how we use "because" to refer to our reasons. One might think that first-person cases provide support to Abstractionism, since if we asked Byron why he believes that it rained he would say:

(8) Because the streets are wet.

The Abstractionist could claim that (8) suggests that his reason is the proposition <the streets are wet>. Furthermore, if Byron is wrong in thinking that the streets are wet, he would still answer with (8), so seemingly that proposition can be his reason even if it is false. The trouble, however, is that if Byron is in a bad case, and the streets are not in fact wet, then (8) is false because "because" is factive! So even though he would report his reason in the same way (in a good or bad case), no theory of reasons can take his answer in (8) at face value in bad cases. What the Abstractionist could take at face value is:

(9) #Because of the proposition <the streets are wet>.

But there is no commonsensical inertia to (9) like there is to (8). What seems to make Abstractionism attractive is that we use propositions to refer to our reasons, and we do so even when those propositions are false. But (i) it would be a use-mention confusion to think that therefore our reasons must be propositions, and (ii) only true propositions can be correctly used in

[28] For discussion of these sorts of examples see Dancy (2000: 114-117).

the explanatory "because" constructions in which reasons figure. It is true that the Abstractionist could note that once Byron learns that he is in a bad case he might explain why he believed that it rained by noting:

(10) Because I believed that the streets are wet.

But here what he is citing as a reason seems to be the fact that he believed that the streets are wet; I see no evidence at all for thinking that what Byron is saying here is that the reason is the proposition <the streets are wet>. Yes, that proposition is relevant, but it is the fact that he believed it that matters and is the reason. I therefore find criticisms of the Explanatory Argument based on Abstractionism to be unconvincing.

4. Conclusion

The three primary ontological views of epistemic reasons are facts, mental states, and propositions. Only the view that epistemic reasons are facts, however, can make sense of the explanatory role that reasons play. There is good reason, furthermore, to think that non-psychological facts are epistemic reasons. Since justification is partly determined by one's reasons, and one's reasons are partly determined by how things stand in the world around one, it follows that justification is partly determined by how things stand in the world around one. Epistemic internalists have advocated theories of justification inconsistent with that result either because they have ignored the metaphysics of reasons or because they have simply operated with mistaken views in the metaphysics of reasons. The world informs our beliefs in a very fundamental way: the facts, the ways that the world is, are our reasons. Our reasons in turn then partly constitute the world, since the world is everything that is the case.[29]

[29] Wittgenstein 1922: Propositions 1 and 1.1.

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