On the Nature of Reasons

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1 Introduction

Of all the ideas that appear in our conceptual life, few are as important as the concept of *reason*. All humans by nature desire to know the reasons why things happen—children go through a *why* phase (and some lucky few never grow out of it). In this essay we analyse *reasons why*, as they appear, for example, in claims such as "The reason why the chicken crossed the road was to get to the other side" and "The government deregulating banks is a reason why the 2008 financial crash happened." We propose and defend the following analysis of *reasons why*, in terms of *because* and belief.

R is a reason why P just in case 'P because R' is true,
and optionally, the relevant agent believes that 'P because R' is true.

Who the relevant agent is context-dependent. If P involves an action, it may be the agent of the action, or it may be the speaker of the reason claim, or the collective beliefs of the conversational participants. We argue that the belief component is variable: when we evaluate a reason why, we may add or omit the belief component. Thus at the heart of reason claims lies some vagueness; vagueness in whether the belief component is present or absent.

1.1 Why reason about reasons why?

Reasons play a starring role in philosophy. According to Scholastic philosophers, they are central to our understanding of what it means to be human. Following Aristotle in *De anima* III.11, Scholastic philosophers defined that to be human is to be a rational animal. Descartes realised that this does not clarify much, given the difficulty of saying what it means to be a rational animal. In the Second Meditation he writes:

> What then did I formerly think I was? A man. But what is a man? Shall I say 'a rational animal'? No; for then I should have to inquire what an animal is, what rationality is, and in this way one question would lead me down the slope to other harder ones, and I do not now have the time to waste on subtleties of this kind.
>
> (Descartes 2017:25)

Rationality has in turn been analysed as responsiveness to reasons (Kiesewetter 2020). On such a theory, knowing that reasons are helps us better understand what it means to be rational, and in turn what it means to be human.

Reasons also figure in longstanding debates on free will. Reasons-responsive theories of free will analyse what it means to have free will in terms of an agent's responsiveness to reasons (McKenna 2022).

Reasons also appear in analyses of moral responsibility. Fischer and Ravizza (1998) argue that which an agent is morally responsible only if she is appropriately receptive to and reactive to reasons for action.

Reasons are also central to the philosophy of action, where reasons for actions are a main focus of analysis. Davidson (1963) influentially proposed that "a primary reason for an action is its cause." There Davidson was concerned with reasons for action. This analysis has a deep affinity with our own: here we argue that the *reasons why* are also a kind of cause; namely, a cause that is optionally believed to be a cause. More recently, reasons are fundamental to Scanlon's *What We Wwe to Each Other*, a theory of the nature of right and wrong.

1.2 Reasons versus reasoning

Here we will not discuss reasons in the sense of *reasoning*—a cognitive act. While reasons are reasoning have much in common, there are enough differences between them to think that they are really distinct concepts.

Firstly, not all reasoning is reasoning about reasons. It is hard to maintain, for example, that visual reasoning involves reasons. Rotating an image in one's imagination is a clear example of visual reasoning, but this act does not involve reasons (or at least does not necessarily involve reasons; one could ask for the reasons why one is rotating the image, but that is separate from the act of reasoning itself).

Secondly, the idea that reasons and reasoning are one and the same concept may be an artefact of philosophising in a handful of languages, such as English, that happen to use the same root for both words, the Latin *ratio*. In many other languages the words are distinct. For example, in German a reason why is a *Grund* but reasoning is *Vernunft*—as in Kant's *Critik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*].[1] Pascal writes in his *Pensées* that "*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*" ["The heart has its reasons that reason does not know"]. In German this could be translated as "*Das Herz hat seine Gründe, welche die Vernunft nicht kennt*", showing the separate words for reason and reasoning within a single sentence.

1.3 Previous work on reasons

There has been ample work in the philosophy of action on reasons (see Alvarez 2017). Work in the philosophy of action is primarily concerned with reasons for action. For

[1] Languages that use related words for reasons and reasoning include Czech (*důvod*, *zdůvodnit*), Dutch (*rede*, *rede*), Estonian (*põhjus*, *põhjenus*), French (*raison*, *raison*), Greek (*lógos*, *aitiologísei*), Indonesian (*alasan*, *bernalar/pernalaran*), and Portuguese (*razão*, *razão*). Languages that use unrelated words include Danish (*grund*, *fornuft*), Finnish (*syy*, *perustella*), German (*Grund*, *Vernunft*), Hungarian (*ok*, *érvelni*), Latvian (*iemesli*, *saprats*), Lithuanian (*priežastis*, *protingas*), Norwegian (*grunn*, *resonnere/fornuft*), Polish (*powody*, *rozum*), Romanian (*motiv*, *raționeze*), Russian (*prichina*, *razum*), and Turkish (*neden*, *muhakeme*).

example, Scanlon writes:

> Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favor of it. "Counts in favor how?" one might ask. "By providing a reason for it" seems to be the only answer. So I will presuppose the idea of a reason.
>
> (Scanlon 1998:17)

This differs from our present inquiry in two respects. Firstly, we are concerned with *reasons why*, rather than *reasons for*. These are clearly different. We may say that that an increase in fossil fuel emissions is the reason why there are more forest fires, but it would be incorrect to say that increased fossil fuel emissions "count in favour" of more forest fires. Secondly, we are concerned with reasons why in general, rather than specifically concerned with reasons why an action took place. If we confined our attention to reasons why one acted as one did, the worry would remain that we are looking at reasons through a distorted lends, importing features of actions—such as intention—into our analysis of reasons why.

There has been much work of the meaning of *why* questions in philosophy[2] and linguistics,[3] though with the exception of Skow (2016), no previous work offers an analysis of reasons why.

2 Reasons, causes, and *because*

The goal of this section is to argue that reasons express *because* statements, rather than *cause* statements. On our analysis, if R is a reason why P, then P *because* R is true. We do not require that if R is a reason why P, then R *cause* P is true.

Sometimes philosophers treat reasons and causes as if there were the same. Spinoza, for example, when stating the principle of sufficient reason, moves seamlessly between causes and reasons, writing that "Nothing exists of which it cannot be asked, what is the cause (or reason) [*causa (sive ratio)*], why it exists".[4] There is, however, a difference. As Skow (2016) observes, reasons have non-causal, grounding uses. For example, logical explanations such as (1), the reason claim patterns with *because* rather than *cause*.

(1) a. The reason the sentence "It is raining or snowing" is true is that it is raining.
b. The sentence "It is raining or snowing" is true because it is raining.
c. ??The fact that it is raining causes the sentence "It is raining or snowing" to be true.

Skow (2016) proposes that reasons why are either causes or grounds. Our main innovations in this paper compared to Skow's theory are that we apply a worked-out

[2]Discussions of *why* questions in philosophy include Bromberger (1966), Teller (1974), Sintonen (1984), Hintikka and Halonen (1995), Temple (1988), and Shaheen (2010).

[3]Discussions of *why* questions in linguistics include Oshima (2007), Abrusán (2014), and Schwarz and Simonenko (2018).

[4]*Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Part 1, Axiom 11.

semantics of *because* (McHugh 2023a), and argue for the optional belief component of reasons—something Skow does not consider.

Here is further evidence for a close affinity between reasons and *because*. The phrases "the reason is that *P*" and "the reason is because *P*" are synonymous.[5]

(2) a. The reason I went to Mtskheta is that I wanted to see the monastery.
b. The reason I went to Mtskheta is because I wanted to see the monastery.

Because and *that* are typically not interchangeable.

(3) a. The plan/idea/thought/claim/... is that we should go climbing.
b. ≠ The plan/idea/thought/claim... is because we should go climbing.

If reasons did not express *because* claims, we would expect some difference in meaning when *that* is replaced with *because*—as we find with *plan*, *idea*, *thought*, *claim*, and so on. But with reasons we find no such difference. This suggests the following principle.

> **The Because/That Principle.**
>
> When *that* can be replaced salva veritate by *because*, the statement expresses a *because*-relation. More precisely, if
>
> "the *X* (of/for/... *E*) is that *C*"
>
> is synonymous with
>
> "the *X* (of/for/... *E*) is because *C*",
>
> then "the *X* (of/for/... *E*) is that *C*" entails "*E* because *C*".

Note that, like *reason*, *cause* also allows *that* to be replaced by *because*. (4) is one of many naturally-occurring examples. Its meaning remains the same if we replace *because* with *that*.

(4) The supplier of the rendering system said the cause was because the product hadn't been applied correctly.[6]

As we saw in grounding statements such as (1), there are differences between *cause* and *because*. One can nonetheless maintain the Because/That Generalisation: *The cause of E is that C* entails *E because C*, but the converse does not hold. There are cases where *The cause of E is that C* are unacceptable but *E because C* is fine.

(5) a. #The cause of the sentence "It is raining or snowing" being true is that it is raining.

[5]Prescriptive grammarians have often complained that *the reason is because* is ungrammatical, though there is ample evidence of its use across centuries, such as in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

(i) Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes.

For further naturally-occurring examples, and arguments for the construction's grammaticality, see Mirriam-Webster (2024).

[6]Source: UK Financial Ombudsman Service https://web.archive.org/web/20240815202540/https://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/decision/DRN-4634712.pdf.

b. The sentence "It is raining or snowing" is true because it is raining.

Indeed, McHugh (2023a) proposes exactly this: *cause* claims are a species of *because* claims: *C cause E* entails *E because C*, while the converse does not hold since *cause* imposes restrictions beyond *because* on the relation between *C* and *E*. In particular, McHugh (2023a:181–183) proposes that *cause* requires the chain from cause to effect to move forward in time, while *because* imposes no such restriction.[7] On this account, *The cause of E is that C* entails *E because C*, thereby preserving the Because/That Principle.

Assuming the Because/That Principle, the observation that *because* and *that* are interchangeable in statements of reason, as in (2), is evidence for the *because* component of our analysis of reasons why: that reason claims express *because* claims.

3 Reasons and *because*

We adopt McHugh's analysis of *because* (McHugh 2023a,b). McHugh decomposes the meaning of *because* into three parts: sufficiency, difference-making, and production. Specifically, the analysis is that *E because C* is true just in case *C* is sufficient to produce *E* but *C*'s negation is not. The role of sufficiency and production in the analysis are clear; difference-making concerns the overall shape of the analysis, stating that what holds for the cause—being sufficient to produce the effect—does not hold for the cause's negation.

In the following sections we discuss each component in turn, showing that reasons why behave in exactly the same way as *because* for each component. This is evidence for the first part of our analysis of reasons why: that for *R* to be a reason why *P*, *P because R* must hold.

3.1 Sufficiency

An often overlooked aspect of the meaning of causal claims is that they imply that the cause was in some sense sufficient for the effect. To illustrate, consider the following examples, discussed by (McHugh 2022, 2023a).

(6) *Context: Alice was born in Ireland and has an Irish passport.*
   a. Alice got an Irish passport because she was born in Ireland.
   b. Alice got an Irish passport because she was born in Europe.

(7) *Context: The legal drinking age is 18. Bob is 30.*
   a. Bob was allowed to order wine because he is over 18.
   b. Bob was allowed to order wine because he is over 12.

There is a clear contrast between the (a)- and (b)-sentences, with the former much more acceptable than the latter. McHugh (2023a) does not discuss reasons why, but we see the exact same pattern as with *because*.

(8) a. The reason Alice got an Irish passport was that she was born in Ireland.

[7] The existence of such a chain is part of McHugh's semantics of *because*, specifically, via the production requirement (see section 3.3 below).

b. The reason Alice got an Irish passport was that she was born in Europe.

(9) a. The reason Bob was allowed to order wine is that he is over 18.
b. The reason Bob was allowed to order wine is that he is over 12.

The (a)-sentences are much more acceptable than the (b)-sentences.

Note that counterfactual dependence does not help account for these contrasts. For example, had Bob been under 18, he wouldn't have been allowed to order wine, but certainly, had Bob been under 12, he wouldn't have been allowed to order wine. If anything, under a simple counterfactual dependence test we would expect the (b)-sentences to be *better* than the (a)-sentences, which is not what we observe.

McHugh (2023a,b) proposes that *E because C* requires *C* to be sufficient for *E*, meaning that in all worlds in the relevant domain where *C* is true, *E* is true.[8] This sufficiency requirement accounts for the contrasts above provided that the relevant domain where Alice is born in Europe includes worlds where she does not receive an Irish passport (say, where she is born in Europe but outside Ireland), and the relevant domain where Bob is over 16 includes worlds where the bouncer does not let him in (say, where he is 17, 18, 19 or 20). In other words, the respective domains should include the various 'ways' for the cause to hold.[9]

3.2 Difference-making

Almost all analyses of causal claims involve some difference-making component. Lewis writes that, "We think of a cause as something that makes a difference, and the difference it makes must be a difference from what would have happened without it" (Lewis 1973:557). Hall's (2000) switching scenario, depicted in Figure 1, illustrates the role of difference-making.

> An engineer is standing by a switch in the railroad tracks. A train approaches in the distance. She flips the switch, so that the train travels down the right-hand track, instead of the left. Since the tracks reconverge up ahead, the train arrives at its destination all the same.
>
> (Hall 2000:205)

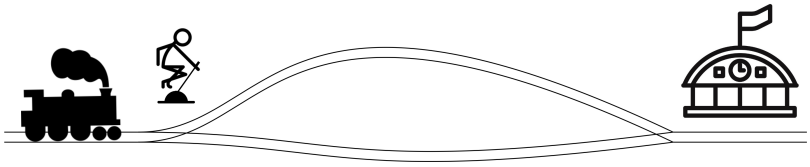

Figure 1: Hall's (2000) switching scenario.

Consider:

(10) The train reached the station because the engineer flipped the switch.

[8] McHugh further argues that this is not a merely pragmatic requirement in McHugh (2023a:§5.6.5).
[9] For an analysis of how we decide which cases are relevant, see McHugh (2022, 2023a:67ff.).

This is intuitively unacceptable. Now consider the corresponding *reason why* claim.

(11) The reason the train reached the station is that the engineer flipped the switch.

This is just as unacceptable as the *because* claim.

McHugh (2023a, 2024) provides a literal analysis of the difference-making idea: what it means to make a difference is that, when we compare the presence of the difference-maker with its absence, we find a difference: something is true when the difference-maker is present that is not true when it is absent. More precisely, x makes a difference to y just in case there is some suitable sentence $D(x, y)$, such that *if* x *holds,* $D(x, y)$ is true but *if* $\neg x$ *holds,* $D(\neg x, y)$ is false. Applying this analysis to causal relations, what it means for a cause to make a difference to its effect is that the presence and absence of the cause do not have the same relationship to the effect. Whatever relationship holds between the cause and the effect—that is, whatever $D(c, e)$ expresses—does not hold between the absence of the cause and its effect.

This analysis leaves open what exact relation $D(c, e)$ expresses. For instance, it could express that the effect occurs. This returns *if* c, e and $\neg$(*if* $\neg c$, e, very similar to Mackie's (1974) INUS condition and Wright's NESS test Wright (2011). Alternatively, McHugh (2023a) proposes, following Beckers (2016), that $D(c, e)$ expresses that the cause produced the effect.

Regardless of the exact implementation, it is clear that this analysis of difference-making makes the right prediction for the switching scenario. The structure of the scenario is entirely symmetric with respect to the cause and its absence. Whatever relationship holds between pulling the lever and the train reaching the station also holds between not pulling the lever and the train reaching the station.

3.3 Production

McHugh argues that sufficiency and difference-making are not enough to account for the meaning of *because*. The third component, production, is necessary to account for preemption cases, where a causal claim is true without counterfactual dependence: if the cause had not occurred, the effect would have occurred anyway. Here is a popular example of preemption introduced by Hall and Paul (Hall and Paul 2003:110, the following formulation is from Hall 2004:235).

> Suzy and Billy, expert rock-throwers, are engaged in a competition to see who can shatter a target bottle first. They both pick up rocks and throw them at the bottle, but Suzy throws hers before Billy. Consequently Suzy's rock gets there first, shattering the bottle. Since both throws are perfectly accurate, Billy's would have shattered the bottle if Suzy's had not occurred, so the shattering is overdetermined.

Consider:

(12) a. The bottle broke because Suzy threw her rock at it.
b. The bottle broke because Billy threw his rock at it.

Intuitively, the first is fine but the second is unacceptable. Again, we see exactly the same pattern with *reason why*.

(13) a. The reason the bottle broke is that Suzy threw her rock at it.
b. The reason the bottle broke is that Billy threw his rock at it.

The first is fine but the second is not.

The difference between Suzy and Billy is not a difference in sufficiency. Suzy throwing her rock is sufficient for the bottle to break, and Billy throwing his rock is sufficient for the bottle to break (given that they are both expert rock-throwers). Nor it is a difference in counterfactual dependence: if Suzy hadn't thrown, the bottle would still have broken, and if Billy hadn't thrown, it would still have broken. So if not sufficiency, and not counterfactual dependence either, where does the difference between Suzy and Billy come from?

Following ideas by Hall (2004) and Beckers (2016), McHugh proposes that for *E because C* to be true, *C* must produce *E*. There are a number of analyses of production available, for example in terms of causal processes (Salmon 1984, Dowe 2000), transmission of a force (Talmy 1988, Wolff 2007, Copley and Harley 2015), locality and quasi-Newtonian laws (Maudlin 2007), and chains of NESS tests (Beckers 2016). McHugh (2023a:175ff.) proposes that *C* produces *E* just in case there is a chain of fragile counterfactual dependence from *C* to *E* (the counterfactual dependence is fragile in the sense of requiring that if an element of the chain had not occurred when it did, the later element would not have occurred when it did). There is such a chain from Suzy throwing to the bottle breaking, while there is no such chain from Billy throwing to the bottle breaking. Hence the analysis predicts that Suzy throwing produced the bottle to break but Billy did not. Since *because* requires production, this accounts for the contrast between Billy and Suzy in (12). Adding to this our analysis of reasons why, we also predict the contrast in (13).

4 Reasons and belief

In the previous section we saw evidence for the *because* part of our analysis of reasons why: if *R* is a reason why *P*, then *R because P* holds. This section presents evidence for the optional belief part: the relevant agent believes that *P* because *R*.

From the perspective of semantic change, the subjective component of reasons is not that surprising. There is widespread evidence that meanings can become more subjective over time, a process known as subjectification (see Traugott 1989). This process may also be at work in adding a subjective component to reason claims.

In our analysis of reasons why, we have separated the *because* and belief compoenents. We will remain neutral on whether the optional belief component could be already part of the meaning of *because*, or is unique to reasons. What matters for present purposes is the clear contrast in terms of subjectivity between causes and reasons: causes lack a subjective component, while with reasons it is optional. Let us see evidence for the belief component now.

4.1 Belief-sensitivity in reason claims

Imagine Samara enters a bakery looking for a croissant. It turns out the baker has been sick and couldn't make any that day. Samara doesn't know this, but simply sees that there are no croissants. She orders a muffin instead. Compare:

(14) a. The baker being sick caused Samara to order a muffin.
b. Samara ordered a muffin because the baker was sick.
c. The reason Samara ordered a muffin was that the baker was sick.
d. Samara's reason for ordering a muffin was that the baker was sick.

In this context, where Samara does not know that the baker is sick, intuitively the first sound fine, the second and the third have an intermediate status, and the fourth is false.

Compare this with a context where Samara walks into the bakery and is then told that the baker is sick and could not make any croissants. She orders a muffin. In this context the first sentence sounds as good as in the first context, and the other three sound much better.

The two contexts form a minimal pair, with the only salient difference between them concerning Samara's beliefs: in the first she does not believe that the baker was sick, while in the second she does. The lack of contrast for the causal claim across the two contexts, and contrast for the reason claims is evidence that reasons claims can be sensitive to beliefs.

4.2 Possessing reasons

Our second piece of evidence for the belief component of belief comes from the fact that agents can have reasons, but cannot have causes.

We can have things in many ways. There is a clear difference in what it means to have a car, a partner, or an idea.[10] We can also have reasons.

(15) Alice has a reason why she works so hard.

However, we cannot have causes—neither with *cause why* nor *cause of*.

(16) a. #Alice has a cause why she works so hard.
b. #Alice has a cause of her working so hard.

This contrast is unexpected on a theory like Skow's (2016), where reasons are nothing more than causes or grounds.

However, on the present proposal it falls out automatically from the subjective componenet of reasons why. Having something—such as a car, partner, idea, cause or reason—requires a relationship between an agent and the thing. Since *cause* statements do not express a subjective component, they does not provide any relationship between an agent and the cause. This is unlike, say, ideas, where there is a clear re-

[10] Even the more limited concepts of possession or ownership are notoriously complex, as any copyright lawyer will tell you.

lationship to an agent; namely, the one whose mind contains the idea. With no agent expressed by *cause*, there is no agent to have the cause.

In contrast to *cause*, reasons why allow for a subjective component, and therefore provide a relationship between an agent and the reason. The subjective component is the one given in our analysis of reasons: if R is a reason why P, then optionally, the relevant agent believes that P because R. To have a reason why is to be that relevant agent who believes P *because* R.

This implies that when a reason is possessed, the subjective component of the reason is obligatory. This prediction is borne out. Scanlon points out that inanimate objects cannot have reasons for.

> It makes no sense to demand a reason, in this sense, for an event in the world that is unconnected with any intentional subject. I might ask, "Why is the volcano going to erupt?" But what I would be understood to be asking for is an explanation, a reason why the eruption is going to occur, and *this would not (at least among most contemporary people) take the form of giving the volcano's reason for erupting*.
>
> (Scanlon 1998:18, my emphais)

Like reasons for, inanimate objects also cannot have reasons why. Consider:

(17) a. The volcano's reason for erupting was that the tectonic plate below it shifted.
b. The volcano has a reason why it erupted.

To have a reason, one must also have a belief; namely, a belief that the proposition is true because of the reason. Thus (17) imply that the volcano believes something. Since volcanoes do not have beliefs, this explains why we would never give the "volcano's reason" for erupting, and why volcano's cannot have reasons why.

4.3 Hyperintensionality in reasons why

Our third piece of evidence for the belief component comes from the hyperintensional behaviour of reasons why. Frege (1948) observed that we can have different beliefs about the same object when its mode of presentation differs.

(18) a. Alice believes that the Evening Star is a body illuminated by the sun.
b. Alice believes that the Morning Star is a body illuminated by the sun.

Reasons why, unlike causes, exhibit sensitivity to beliefs. Since beliefs are hyperintensional, we expect reasons why to exhibit similar hyperintensional behaviour.

Suppose that one morning, the morning star was moving in an irregular way. Galileo gets his telescope to observe it. He believes that the morning star and the evening star are different planets—in fact they are both Venus. In particular, Galileo believes that the Morning Star was moving irregularly, and does not believe that the Evening Star was not moving irregularly; indeed, he believes he wasn't even observing the Evening Star.

Consider:

(19) a. The morning star's irregular movement caused Galileo to get his telescope.
b. The evening star's irregular movement caused Galileo to get his telescope.

These are both true. Now consider:

(20) a. The reason Galileo got his telescope was that the morning star was moving in a strange way irregular movement.
b. The reason Galileo got his telescope was the evening star's irregular movement.

(21) a. Galileo's reason for getting his telescope was that the morning star was moving in an irregular way.
b. Galileo's reason for getting his telescope was that the evening star was moving in an irregular way.

There is a subtle contrast between the sentences in (20), and a stark contrast between those in (21). This again points to the role of belief in reason why statements, optionally in (20) and obligatorily in (21).

5 Evidence that the belief component is optional

In our analysis of reasons why, the *because* component is obligatory but the belief component is optional. In this section we present two pieces of evidence for the optionality of the belief component.

One might argue for this on the basis of examples where beliefs do not seem to play a role. Take, for example.[11]

(22) The reason the bridge collapsed was that the bolts were rusty.

This is perfectly fine, even though bridges are inanimate: they do not have beliefs, intentions, and so on.

However, on our analysis the relevant agent is variable. In a sentence like (22), involving an inanimate object, one could argue that the relevant agent is the speaker or interpreter. Such examples are therefore not evidence for the optionality of the belief component.

Let us now give two arguments which, I propose, do point to the fact that the believe component is optional.

[11] Some naturally occurring examples:

(i) a. Research points to miscalculation of gusset plate width as the reason the bridge collapsed.
Source: https://hopeandpassion.org/what-fallen-bridges-tell-us-about-god/&ved=2ahUKEwjD_peg4o6IAxXMBBAIHYgpJA8QFnoECCgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2CwIjhUL5a_gdK9xblThdz
b. The reason the bridge collapsed was the toppling over of the flood barrier due to high-flow.
Source: https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com
c. corrosion or weather conditions could have been part of the reason the bridge collapsed.
Source: https://www.businessinsider.com/genoa-italy-bridge-collapse-dozens-reported-dead-2018-8

5.1 The variable acceptability of reason why claims

In section 4.1 above, we saw evidence that statements of reason why are sensitive to belief. Some data for this, repeated below, were:

(14) a. The baker being sick caused Samara to order a muffin.
b. Samara ordered a muffin because the baker was sick.
c. The reason Samara ordered a muffin was that the baker was sick.
d. Samara's reason for ordering a muffin was that the baker was sick.

Intuitively, the reason claim in (14c) has an intermediate status: not as good as the *cause* claim in (14a), not quite as bad as the possessed reason claim in (14d). If statements of reason why had no belief component, the first contrast—between (14a) and (14c)—would be unexpected. But equally, if the belief component were obligatory, the second contrast—between (14c) and (14d)—would be unexpected.

One might propose the following alternative explanation of the contrast between unpossessed reason claims like (14c) and possessed reason claims like (14d). Possessed reason claims require the one who has the reason to be the agent of the action. Indeed, when the come apart the sentence can sound very strange:

(23) ??My reason for the bridge collapsing is that the bolts were rusty.

However, in other cases the one who has the reason can differ from the agent, and the claim is perfectly fine:

(24) a. That's my reason why he is so faithful to God.https://myhero.com/what-is-a-hero-11
b. The following is my reason why he was the best and how he was robbed.https://www.threads.net/@raindovemodel/post/CuR9QZ5oeff?hl=en

These imply that the one who has the reason—the speaker—believes the relevant *because* claim; say, that he was the best because of the following. This suggests against the alternative explanation of the contrast between (14c) and (14d).

5.2 The ontology of reasons and beliefs

Imagine a universe where intelligent life has never evolved. That universe, let us suppose, it not an absolute void: events still happen in it. Planets collide, stars are born and die, and so on. But without intelligent life, nothing in that universe is capable of having beliefs.

Now answer the following two questions about that universe.

(25) a. Are there any beliefs in that universe?
b. Are there any reasons in that universe why things happen?

Here we find an fascinating contrast. Intuitively, there are no beliefs in a universe without intelligent life. Naturally we, from our universe, can have beliefs about such a universe, but there are no beliefs in that universe itself. However, intuitively there are still reasons in that universe why things happen. For example, if a star becomes a

supernova, there is a reason in what universe why the star became a supernova (say, because the star cools, its outward pressure decreases, allowing the star's gravity to collapse it, causing the explosion).

If the belief component of reasons were obligatory, we would expect reasons and beliefs to have a similar ontological status. In particular, we would expect that if there can be reasons in a universe without intelligent life, and the belief component of reasons is obligatory, then there can also be beliefs in that universe.

On the other hand, if the belief component is optional, we can explain the contrast. There cannot be beliefs in such an uninhabited universe since beliefs obligate the existence a believer, but there can be reasons in such a universe since reasons do not obligate the existence of a believer.

6 Conclusion

This paper presented an analysis of reasons why, the sense in which we say, for example, "The reason why the chicken crossed the road was to get to the other side". The analysis had two components: the *because* component and the belief component. R is a reason why P just in case 'P because R' is true, and optionally, the relevant agent believes that 'P because R' is true.

We applied McHugh's analysis of *because*, which involves three components: sufficiency, difference-making and production. For each component, we saw that reasons why behave in the exact same way as *because*. The *because* part of our analysis of reasons why accounts for their shared behaviour straightforwardly: for R is a reason why P, P because R must be true.

We have also seen two pieces of evidence for the belief component of reasons why, in comparison with *cause*, which clearly lacks a belief component. Firstly, the fact that reasons, unlike causes, can be possessed. The belief component is required for a reason to be possessed: since causes lack a belief component, they cannot be possessed. This further explains why inanimate objects cannot have reasons (as in the volcano examples). Secondly, that reasons are belief-sensitive (as in the Galileo examples).

This is the just the beginning of a more thorough study of the nature reasons. Here are two exciting avenues for future work. One can study statements of reason across languages; in particular, whether they vary with respect to the subjective compoenent of reasons. One can compare reasons why with reasons for or reasons to, as in "The fact that Alice will be there is a reason to go to the party." As discussed, reasons for/to have received much attention in the philosophy of action, but have yet to be thoroughly studied in connection with reasons why, and without the restriction to acts by intentional agents.

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