Reasons and *Because*[⋆]

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Abstract. This paper proposes an analysis of explanatory reasons, as they appear, for example, in 'The reason why the chicken crossed the road was that it wanted to get to the other side' and 'The government deregulating banks is a reason why the economy crashed'. I propose that R is a reason why P just in case 'P because R' is true. I show that this equivalence predicts a wide range of interesting properties of explanatory reasons, including the difference between reasons and causes, the synonymy of 'the reason is that R' and 'the reason is because R', the subjective character of reasons, and the fact that reasons can be possessed (as in 'I have a reason why I did it') but causes cannot.

Keywords: Reasons · Explanation · Causation · Belief · Subjectivity.

1 Introduction

Philosophers traditionally distinguish two kinds of reasons.[1] On the one hand are explanatory reasons: reasons why things happen. The moon's gravity is the reason why the tides change, government deregulation a reason why the economy crashed. On the other are normative reasons: reasons for which one acts—in Scanlon's phrase, 'a consideration that counts in favour of' an action (Scanlon 1998:17). The desire to satisfy hunger is a reason to eat, the possibility of a car accident a reason to wear a seat belt, the drops rolling down the window a reason to believe that it is raining.

This article defends a simple analysis of explanatory reasons: what it is for R to be a reason why P. The analysis is given in terms of *because*.

The reason–because equivalence.
R is a reason why P just in case P *because* R is true.

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[1] See for example Scanlon (1998), Raz (2009), Alvarez (2010), and McNaughton and Rawling (2018).

That is, statements of explanatory reason are equivalent to *because* statements. (Since this article focuses on explanatory reasons, I will henceforth use 'reasons' to refer exclusively to explanatory reasons.)

While this equivalence may seem natural—even obvious, perhaps—the goal of this paper is to show that it predicts a wide range of interesting, underappreciated properties of reasons; in particular, the differences between reasons and causes, the equivalence of 'the reason is that' and 'the reason is because', the subjective character of reasons, and the fact that—unlike causes—one can 'have' a reason why one did something.

Of course, the equivalence is only illuminating given an independent grasp of what *because* means. (McHugh 2023a,b) offers a theory of *because* in terms of three components: sufficiency, difference-making, and production. Specifically, E *because* C is true just in case C is sufficient to produce E but C's negation is not.[2]

(1) E BECAUSE C is true just in case
   a. C is true
   b. C is sufficient for (C *produce* E)
   c. $\neg C$ is not sufficient for ($\neg C$ *produce* E)

McHugh (2023a) presents scenarios isolating the contribution of each component. The first goal of this paper is to show that, when we examine how reasons behave in these three key test cases for the meaning of *because*, we find reasons patterning in the same way as *because* statements. This provides direct empirical support for their equivalence, showing that we need not treat it as dogma or an axiom, something about the nature of reasons to be assumed without proof. I further show that in cases where *cause* and *because* diverge (for example, in cases of logical or mathematical explanation), reasons pattern with *because* rather than *cause*.

Secondly, the equivalence of reasons and *because* statements helps account for the complements reasons combine with. When giving a reason, we may formulate either as 'the reason is because...' or as 'the reason is that...', without any apparent difference in meaning. Most constructions do not allow this. With plans, for example, 'The plan is that we leave at noon' is fine, while 'The plan is because we leave at noon' is odd, and certainly not equivalent in meaning (similarly for ideas, thoughts, claims, beliefs, and so on). Nonetheless, as we will see below, *because* and *that* are synonymous not only for reasons, but also for causes, explanations, justifications, and motivations. This raises the question of what property unifies the class of expressions that allow *because* and *that* to be inter-substitutable salva veritate. I propose that they all entail the respective *because* claim. Given this generalisation, the equivalence of reasons and *because* statements correctly predicts *because* and *that* to be synonymous for reasons.

[2] Since sufficiency satisfies modus ponens (if C is true and sufficient for E, then E is true too) and production is factive (C produce E implies C and E), the analysis predicts that E BECAUSE C implies E too.

A third interesting property of reasons that the equivalence helps account for concerns the subjectivity of reasons. Charnavel (2019) argues that *because* clauses are interpreted from the perspective of some reasoning agent, which she calls the 'causal judge'. She argues that the causal judge is variable: while it must include the speaker, it may also include further agents, such as the participant of the event described by the *because* statement. The equivalence of reasons and *because* statements predicts that reasons are also evaluated with respect to a causal judge. This is exactly what we find. I present a range of data illustrating the subjectivity of because, including possessed reasons claims such as 'my/her reason', which I argue set the causal judge to the one who possesses the reason. In this way, thinking in terms of reasons is akin to reading Austen, Flaubert, or Joyce—writers known for their use of free indirect speech—in which the centre of consciousness is prone to wander.

I integrate subjectivity into the meaning of *because* by adding a belief component to the analysis of *because*. Let BECAUSE denote an objective meaning of because—here, adopting the analysis from McHugh (2023a)—and let *because* denote the subjective notion, interpreted from the perspective of the causal judge. Following Charnavel, I take the subjective notion *because* to be expressed by the English word 'because', and define the subjective notion in terms of the objective notion and belief as follows.

(2) E *because* C is true just in case
   (i) E BECAUSE C is true, and
   (ii) the causal judge believes that E BECAUSE C is true.

When the causal judge consists of multiple agents $A_1, A_2, \ldots$ (for example, both the speaker and the agent of the described event), let us define that causal judge believes P just in case *each* agent A_i believes P. I will call (i) the 'objective component' and (ii) the 'subjective component' of *because*.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 shows that reasons and *because* behave in the same way in three crucial test cases for the meaning of *because*, and that reasons pattern with *because* rather than *cause*. Section 3 demonstrates the subjectivity of reasons and analyses what it means for one to have a reason, making use of Charnavel's notion of the causal judge. Section 4 concludes.

2 Reasons and the Objective Component of *Because*

On our analysis, if R is a reason why P, then P BECAUSE R is true. Call this the *objective component*. In McHugh (2023a) I presented three scenarios, each designed to illustrate one of the components, but did not apply them to analysing reasons. This section shows that when we examine how reasons behave in these key test cases, we find that they behave in exactly the same way as BECAUSE.

2.1 The Many Similarities of Reasons and *Because*

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).

(3) *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.

(4) *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. Reasons exhibit the exact same behaviour with respect to sufficiency as *because*.[3]

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

(6) 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.

One might alternatively think that the contrast is due to the use of the definite 'the reason' as opposed to the indefinite 'a reason'. The thought is that the (b)-sentences above are strictly speaking true, but are unassertable since 'the' requires that one choose the uniquely most salient reason (which would plausibly be, respectively, being born in Ireland and being over 18). Note, however, the contrast persists with 'a reason' and 'one reason'. For example, suppose that, to get on the basketball team, one must be over 180cm tall and pass a fitness test. LeBron is 206cm tall and passed the test, so he was picked for the team. Compare:

(7) a. A/One reason LeBron was picked for the basketball team was that he is over 180cm tall.
   b. A/One reason LeBron was picked for the basketball team was that he is over 120cm tall.

[3] An anonymous reviewer helpfully points out that Mandarin Chinese has two reason constructions which differ in the extent to which they communicate sufficiency, writing that 'the "zhisuoyi... shi yinwei..." construction appears to more strongly assert sufficiency compared to the simple "yinwei... suoyi..." pattern. Specifically, "zhisuoyi P, shi yinwei R" seems to assert "R provides a sufficient explanation for P" more explicitly than "yinwei R, suoyi P" '. In future work, it would be worth examining the role of sufficiency cross-linguistically. For now we content ourselves with the observations above that *reason* in English expresses sufficiency.

Here again the (a)-sentence is much more acceptable than the (b)-sentence.

It's worth noting that sufficiency does not involve considering what would have happened had the reason been absent. 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. While counterfactual dependence looks at cases where the reason is absent, sufficiency looks at cases where it is present. Sufficiency has therefore a fundamentally different character than that of counterfactual dependence, and ought to be incorporated into the analysis of reasons over and above any appeal to counterfactual dependence.

McHugh (2023a) 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.[4] This sufficiency requirement accounts for the contrasts above provided that the relevant domain where Alice is born in Europe include 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 12 include worlds where the bouncer does not let him in (say, where he is 13, 14, ...). In other words, the respective domains should include the various 'ways' for the cause to hold.[5]

Difference-making. Almost all analyses of causal claims involve some difference-making component. Lewis writes, '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)

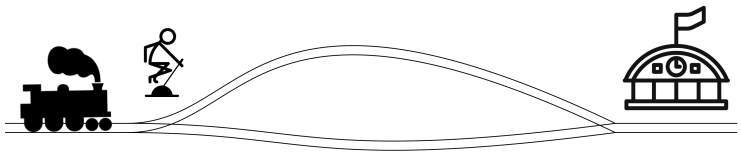

Fig. 1. Hall's (2000) switching scenario.

[4] McHugh (2023a:§5.6.5) further argues that this is not a merely pragmatic requirement.

[5] For an analysis of how we decide which worlds are relevant, see McHugh (2022, 2023a:67ff.).

Consider:

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

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

(9) 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) 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 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 (where $D(\neg x, y)$ is the result of replacing every occurrence of x in $D(x, y)$ with $\neg x$). Applying this analysis to causal relations, what it means for a cause to make a difference to its effect is for the cause's presence and absence to differ in their relationship to the effect. Whatever relationship holds between the cause c and effect e—that is, whatever $D(c, e)$ expresses—would not hold between the absence of the cause, $\neg c$, and e.

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. Given this symmetry, whatever relationship holds between pulling the lever and the train reaching the station would also hold between not pulling the lever and the train reaching the station. It is precisely this symmetry which difference-making forbids.

Production. Sufficiency and difference-making are not, by themselves, 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 even though the effect does not counterfactually depend on the cause: had the cause not occurred, the effect would have occurred anyway. Here is a popular example of preemption introduced by 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:

(10) 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*.

(11) 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 unacceptable.

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 also sufficient for the bottle to break (given that they are both expert rock-throwers, the bottle is guaranteed to break after Billy's throw). Nor is the difference one of counterfactual dependence: if Suzy hadn't thrown, the bottle would have still broken, and if Billy hadn't thrown, it would have still broken. So if not sufficiency, and not counterfactual dependence either, from where does the difference between Suzy and Billy come?

Following ideas by Hall (2004) and Beckers (2016), McHugh (2023a) 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 produced the bottle to break but Billy did not. Since *because* requires production, this accounts for the contrast between Billy and Suzy in (10). Adding to this our analysis of reasons, we also predict the contrast in (11).

2.2 Comparing *Cause* and *Because*

Our analysis of reasons does *not* require that if R is a reason why P, then R *cause* P is true. Why express our analysis in terms of *because* rather than *cause*?

Philosophers sometimes treat reasons and causes as if they 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'.[6] There is, however, a difference between them. As Skow (2016) observes, reasons have non-causal, grounding uses. For example, in logical explanations such as (12) and explications of meaning such as (13) and (14), the reason claim patterns with *because* rather than *cause*.

(12) 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.
d. ??The fact that it is raining is causing the sentence 'It is raining or snowing' to be true.

(13) a. John is a bachelor because he is an unmarried man.
b. ??The fact that John is an unmarried man is causing/causes him to be a bachelor.

(14) a. The reason 13 is prime is that it has no factors other than itself and 1.
b. 13 is prime because it has no factors other than itself and 1.
c. ??The fact that 13 has no factors other than itself and 1 causes it to be prime.
d. ??The fact that 13 has no factors other than itself and 1 is causing it to be prime.

Skow (2016) proposes that reasons are either causes or grounds. The main innovations in this paper compared to Skow's theory are twofold: (i) I apply a worked-out semantics of *because*, showing that reasons behave in the same way as *because* with respect to each component, and (ii) I argue for the subjective component of reasons, which Skow does not consider.

2.3 The Factivity of Reasons

A second benefit of the objective component is that it straightforwardly accounts for the factivity of reasons, that R *is a reason why* P implies both that R and P are true. As Unger (1975:208) observes, 'It is inconsistent to say "His reason was that the store was going to close, but it wasn't going to close"'. If the reason why Alice has her umbrella is that it is raining, then Alice has her umbrella and it is raining. Since the causal judge must include the speaker, P *because* R implies that P and R both hold. The objective component of our analysis captures the factivity of reasons automatically, without further need to stipulate it.

That being said, Nebel (2019) presents naturally-occurring examples where factivity appears to fail.

(15) a. [T]here exist good reasons why consent should be granted and good reasons why consent should be withheld.

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

b. Thus, subjects who were able to think of many reasons why an event would happen, and few reasons why it would not, judged that event to be likely.
c. This article presents four reasons why [Argentina] can [beat Uruguay], and four reasons why they can't.

For example, (15c) does not imply Argentina both can and cannot beat Uruguay.[7]

Nebel proposes that (15) are instances of multidimensionality.[8] For example, *worthwhile* is a multidimensional predicate since 'there are multiple ways or respects in which a thing can be worthwhile' (Nebel 2019:476). He nonetheless maintains that (15) show that reasons are not factive. However, I would like to propose a way to maintain factivity in light of (15), one Nebel does not himself consider: incorporate dimensions into the meaning of the predicate. Instead of one sentence P, we have one for each dimension in which P may hold. In cases where it seems that there is a reason why P holds and a reason why it does not hold, there is in fact a reason why P holds with respect to dimension D and a reason why P does not hold with respect to a different dimension D'. Since it is possible for a predicate to hold with respect to one dimension but not another, on this view (15) are compatible with the factivity of reasons.

An argument for this view is that we observe multidimensionality even in the absence of reasons (even if, admittedly, reason claims are particularly adept at bringing out the various respects in which things hold). This is shown in the following examples (I use N to indicate that the example is naturally-occurring; all sources may be found in the Appendix).

(16) a. It is good and bad news, say intellectuals on India becoming world's most populous country.[N]
b. Ozone is both beneficial and harmful to us.[N]
c. Life in the city is both interesting and boring.[N]
d. Can long distance relationships work? My personal experience is that like any other relationship they both can and cannot work.[N]
e. I both can and cannot believe I am just now posting this.[N]
f. The position that repression both can and cannot become conscious, depending upon different considerations, is then addressed.[N]

[7] Nebel further shows that non-factivity instances are not due to reinterpreting the properties in a gradable way—say, that *Argentina can beat Uruguay* covertly expresses some degree to which Argentina can beat Uruguay—in which case factivity would only imply that the proposition holds to a certain degree, rather than outright. Non-factive readings are much harder to access with known gradable adjectives like *heavy*.

(i) ?There are reasons why the box is heavy and reasons why the box isn't heavy.

The gradable reinterpretation strategy struggles to account for the contrast between (15) and (i).

[8] See D'Ambrosio and Hedden (2024) for a formal model of multidimensional adjectives.

The fact that such examples are not contradictory shows that multidimensionality is contributed by the predicate itself, even in the absence of reasons. Given this, examples like those in (15) are no obstacle to the factivity of reasons.

2.4 The Because/That Principle

A third and final benefit of the objective component of our analysis is that it helps account for the following fact: the phrases 'the reason is that P' and 'the reason is because P' are synonymous.[9] Take the following examples, from Hemingway and Shakespeare, respectively:

(17) a. The reason every one now tries to avoid it, to deny that it is important, to make it seem vain to try to do it, is because it is so difficult.[N]
b. Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes.[N]

Replacing *because* with *that* does not change the meaning:

(18) a. The reason every one now tries to avoid it, to deny that it is important, to make it seem vain to try to do it, is that it is so difficult.
b. Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but that thou hast hazel eyes.

This property is quite special. *Because* and *that* are typically not interchangeable.

(19) a. The plan/idea/thought/claim/... is that we should go climbing.
b. $\not\equiv$ 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. What property unifies the class of expressions that allow *that* to be freely replaced by *because*? I offer the following conjecture.

> **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'
>
> has the same meaning as
>
> 'the X (of/for/... E) is because C',

[9] Prescriptive grammarians have often complained that *the reason is because* is ungrammatical, though there is ample evidence of its use across centuries, as in the examples from Shakespeare and Hemingway above, as well as by Francis Bacon, John Adams, and Jonathan Swift. For examples and arguments for the construction's grammaticality, see Merriam-Webster (2024).

then 'the X (given by A, of/for/... E) is that C' entails that (according to A) 'E because C' is true.

I include the qualification 'given by A' to cover the case where the X—say, the reason—comes from someone other than the speaker, as in example (20a) below.

Beyond *reason*, a variety of words allow *that* to be replaced by *because* without change in meaning, including *explanation*, *justification*, and *motivation*.

(20) a. The explanation was because he did not hold a substantive post.[N]
b. ≡ The explanation was that he did not hold a substantive post.

(21) a. His justification was because Hüster had published her negative review of the premiere.[N]
b. ≡ His justification was that Hüster had published her negative review of the premiere.

(22) a. Their motivation for teaching through English was because it had been enforced by the school.[N]
b. ≡ Their motivation for teaching through English was that it had been enforced by the school.

Replacing *because* with *that* does not change the meaning. Then according to the Because/That Principle they entail the corresponding *because* claim; for example, that the teachers taught through English because it had been enforced by the school. These entailments seem intuitively correct, lending support to the Because/That Principle.

Another word allowing *that* and *because* to be used interchangeably is *cause*. The following examples, with *because*, can be equivalently expressed using *that*.

(23) a. The supplier of the rendering system said the cause was because the product hadn't been applied correctly.[N]
b. At first I thought the cause was because I am running an Insider Build of Windows 10.[N]
c. I've read before that the slower flow of the Thames was one of the reasons it used to freeze. I heard then that the cause was because the old London Bridge (and maybe others?) had a smaller amount of space for the water to flow through.[N]
d. In Matthew 27:3–10 it seems that the cause was because it commemorated the use of blood money to buy the field.[N]

As we saw in grounding statements such as (12), there are differences between *cause* and *because*. One can nonetheless maintain the Because/That Generalisation: *The cause of E is that C* entails *C cause E*, which in turn entails *E because C*. However, the converse does not hold. As we saw in (12) and (14), there are cases where *The cause of E is that C* is unacceptable but *E because C* is fine.

Indeed, McHugh (2023a) argued that *C cause E* entails *E because C*, while the converse does not hold since *cause* imposes restrictions beyond what *because* requires on the relation between C and E. Specifically, McHugh (2023a:181–183) proposes that *cause* requires that the chain from cause to effect move forward in

time, while *because* allows but does not require it. 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 (17), is evidence for the objective component of our analysis, that *R is a reason why E* entails *E because C*.

3 Reasons and the Subjective Component of *Because*

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

Many words express a subjective component, such as epistemic modals and speech act modifiers ('surprisingly', 'regrettably').[10] 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*, which Traugott defines as 'the mechanism by which ... meanings are recruited by the speaker to encode and regulate attitudes and beliefs' (Traugott 2010:35).[11]

3.1 Belief-sensitivity in Reason Claims

Reasons appear to be sensitive to belief in a way causes are not. To illustrate, suppose Alice, her partner Bob, and Carl are at a party.[12] While Alice is busy enjoying a conversation with some others, Carl insults Bob, making Bob angry. Alice notices that Bob is angry, but has no idea why. She is unaware that Carl insulted him. She feels that she is now required to comfort Bob, and is frustrated that she will have to leave her enjoyable conversation. In her frustration she stamps her foot, accidentally stamping on Carl's toe. Compare:

(24) a. Carl insulting Bob caused Alice to stamp on Carl's toe.

[10] By 'subjectivity' I have in mind here Lyons' characterisation. 'The term subjectivity refers to the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of himself and his own attitudes and beliefs' (Lyons 1982:102).

[11] Though note that, etymologically, '*Because* originated in the phrase *by cause*, which was directly modeled on the French *par cause*' (Ayto 1990:57). For example, in John Wycliffe's *The Last Age of the Church* (1356) we find 'Þe synnes bi cause of whiche suche persecucioun schal be in Goddis Chirche' [The sins because of which such persecutions shall be in God's Church]. And in the Franklin's Tale from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1395), we read 'By cause I am a burel man ... Have me excused of my rude speche' [Because I am an unlearned man ... excuse my rude speech] (see O'Conner and Kellerman 2014). Although *because* developed from *cause*, it seems that *because* developed a subjective component while cause remained objective.

[12] See Eidelson (2021:797–798) for a somewhat similar case.

b. Alice stamped on Carl's toe because he insulted Bob.
c. The reason Alice stamped on Carl's toe was that he insulted Bob.

In this context, where Alice does not know that Carl insulted Bob, intuitively the first sentence sounds fine, while the second and third seem to have both a true reading and a false reading. The true reading is brought out by expressions suggesting an objective interpretation, such as 'actually' and 'in fact'.

(25) a. Carl insulting Bob is what caused Alice to stamp on Carl's toe. So she stamped on Carl's toe because he insulted Bob.
b. Carl insulting Bob is what led to Alice stamping on Carl's toe. So in fact, the reason she stamped on his toe was that he insulted Bob.

The false reading is brought out by expressions suggesting a subjective reading, focusing on Alice's beliefs.

(26) a. Alice did not stamp on Carl's toe because he insulted Bob—she was not aware that Carl had insulted him.
b. Alice had no idea that Carl insulted Bob. So that was not the reason she stamped on Carl's toe.

The fact that both readings are available suggests that *because* and *reason* admit both subjective and objective readings. On this proposal, they are represented by the flexibility in whether or not Alice is taken to be part of the causal judge. If she is not, we get the objective reading on which (24b) and (24c) are true, while if she is, we get the subjective reading on which they are false.

3.2 Having Reasons

Our second piece of evidence for the subjective component of reasons 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 (the concepts of possession or ownership are, as any copyright lawyer knows, notoriously intricate). We can also have reasons.

(27) a. She has a reason why she does this.[N]
b. He has a reason why he can't see you.[N]
c. She has a reason why she needs to play those games.[N]
d. Rachel explains her reason why she signed up to the challenge.[N]
e. Here's my reason why I'm not a fan of the tradition of "Sweet Caroline" being played at Fenway Park.[N]

However, we cannot 'have' causes—at least not in the same way that we have reasons. This holds for every construction with *cause* one would consider, such as *cause why*, *cause of*, and *cause for*.[13]

[13] One can have a cause in the sense of a goal or purpose—as in 'I support her cause'—but this is clearly a different sense. Something can also have a cause in the sense of

(28) a. # She has a cause why she does this.
b. # She has a cause of her doing this.
c. # She has a cause for her to do this.
d. # She gave her cause why she does this.
e. # She gave her cause of her doing this.
f. # She gave her cause for her to do this.

This contrast falls out of our analysis from the subjective component of reasons. To have something, there must be a relationship between the thing had and the one who has it. Since *cause* statements do not supply any subjective component, they do not express any relationship between an agent and a cause which could provide that relationship.

This is unlike, say, beliefs, which we can have.

(29) a. I have a belief that a man's real relatives are scattered throughout the universe, and seldom if ever belong to his immediate kin.[N]
b. It is my belief that nearly any invented quotation, played with confidence, stands a good chance to deceive.[N]

The concept of belief supplies a clear relationship between an agent and a belief; namely, being one who holds the belief. But with no agent involved in the meaning of *cause*, causes do not provide any handle, so to speak, for an agent to hold onto them.

In contrast, the subjective component of reasons provides just that handle. The relationship is being an agent who believes that the proposition is true because of the reason: if R is a reason why P, then the causal judge believes that P BECAUSE R. Reason statements therefore provide a relationship between an agent and the reason. This allows agents to have reasons, in the same way they can have beliefs.

An immediate consequence of this proposal is that when a reason is possessed, the subjective component of the reason is obligatory. For without it, there would be no relation between the reason and the agent that would allow the agent to have the reason.[14] This prediction appears to be correct. Scanlon points out that inanimate objects cannot have reasons for what they do.

> 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)

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have something that brought it into being, as in 'the accident's cause'/'the cause of the accident', though this is not the sense in which one has a reason.

[14] Note that we still need the objective component: *R is A's reason why P* still implies *P because R*. Some evidence for this comes from factivity. The subjective component by itself does not guarantee the truth of P and R, but the objective component does.

Likewise, Skorupski (2010:53) observes that an inanimate object such as a bridge 'does not have reasons'. We see the same with the phrase *reason why*:

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

Our proposal predicts that for something to have a reason, it must also have a belief; namely, the belief that the proposition is true because of the reason. And indeed, (30) imply that the volcano believes something, which explains why they are unacceptable (at least without the anthropomorphism familiar from myth).

Ruling out an Alternative: Having Reasons via 'According to'. Let us address an alternative analysis of possessing reasons. One might propose that the role of possessive construction in *A's reason* is to contribute a meaning such as *according to A*.[15] On such an analysis, *R is A's reason why P* means *According to A, R is the reason why P*. This is a reasonable prediction, and unlike our analysis, importantly does not require reasons to contain a subjective component.

The problem for this proposal is that we can say exactly the same about causes. 'According to A, C is the cause of E' is just as acceptable as 'According to A, R is the reason why P'. On this alternative proposal, we would expect to be able to say 'A's cause of C is E' to mean 'According to A, C is the cause of E'—a perfectly fine meaning. This proposal therefore predicts that one can have causes just as one has reasons. The contrast between (27) and (28) shows us that this is incorrect. In contrast, on the present proposal, the subjective component is necessary for agents to have reasons. Since causes do not have a subjective component, agents cannot have causes.

3.3 The Hyperintensionality of Reasons

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

(31) a. Galileo believed that the Morning Star appears in the morning.
b. Galileo believed that the Evening Star appears in the morning.

Since beliefs are hyperintensional in this way, the subjective component of reasons leads us to expect that reasons can exhibit similar hyperintensional behaviour.

Suppose that one morning, the Morning Star was moving in an irregular way. Galileo gets his telescope to observe it. Suppose 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,

[15] For a proposal on the meaning of 'according to', see Semeijn (2024).

and does not believe that the Evening Star was moving irregularly; indeed, he believes he wasn't observing the Evening Star at all. Consider:

(32) 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. Given that the Morning Star and the Evening Star are one and the same, whatever one causes the other causes too. Now consider:

(33) a. The reason why Galileo got his telescope was that the Morning Star was moving irregularly.
b. The reason why Galileo got his telescope was that the Evening Star was moving irregularly.

(34) a. Galileo's reason why he got his telescope was that the Morning Star was moving irregularly.
b. Galileo's reason why he got his telescope was that the Evening Star was moving irregularly.

There is a subtle contrast between the sentences in (33), and a stark contrast between those in (34). This again points to the role of belief in reason why statements. The phrase *the reason why A P is R*, as in (33), allows but does not require the causal judge to include A, while the possessed reason *A's reason why P is R*, as in (34), requires the causal judge to include A.

On our analysis, *R is a reason why P* entails that the causal judge believes that P BECAUSE R. If we include the subjective component and take the causal judge to include Galileo, we have the following entailments. (33a) entails that Galileo believes that he got his telescope because the Morning Star was moving irregularly, and (33b) entails that Galileo believes that he got his telescope because the Evening Star was moving irregularly. The first belief claim is fine, but the second is false, which accounts for the optional contrast between (33a) and (33b). With (34) these entailments are obligatory. Given Galileo's beliefs, then, our analysis accounts for the fact that (34a) is acceptable but (34b) is not.

3.4 The Subjective Component: Belief or Knowledge?

On our analysis, the subjective component of reasons comes in the form of a belief; namely, the belief that the proposition is true because of the reason. Other notions also express subjectivity, a central one being knowledge. This section considers what would happen were we to replace belief with knowledge in the analysis of reasons; that is, if we proposed that for R to be a reason why P, the causal judge must *know* that P BECAUSE R holds.

There are many differences between knowledge and belief. Knowledge is factive but belief is not: *A knows P* implies P, but *A believes P* does not. Unfortunately, this test does not easily distinguish our analysis of reasons from the knowledge analysis, since the objective component is itself factive: *R is a reason*

why P implies P BECAUSE R, which in turn implies P. There are nonetheless ways to distinguish our analysis from the knowledge analysis. Here are two.

Argument 1: Being wrong about reasons. We can have false beliefs, but we cannot have false knowledge.

(35) a. I believe that Alice is at work, but I may be wrong.
b. # I know that Alice is at work, but I may be wrong.

Now consider (36).

(36) a. Here is my reason why he did it, but I may be wrong.
b. This is my reason, but I may be wrong.[N]

These are perfectly acceptable to say.

In section 3.2 we saw that R *is* A*'s reason why* P asserts that P BECAUSE R is true and that A (and perhaps others, such as the speaker) believes that P BECAUSE R is true. The speaker also asserts that this may be false, that is, they may be wrong that P BECAUSE R is true or that they do not believe that P BECAUSE R is true. Under the plausible assumption that A is an authority on their own mental state, their hedge in (36) cannot come from them being mistaken about their own beliefs. Thus we can safely conclude the former. The agent may be wrong that P BECAUSE R is true. In all, then, (36) asserts that A believes that P BECAUSE R is true but that they may be wrong about this—a reasonable thing to communicate.

Now replace belief with knowledge. Then for the same reasons as in section 3.2, (36) would instead imply that the agent knows that P because R is true. But one cannot assert that one's knowledge may be wrong. The knowledge analysis therefore incorrectly predicts (36) to be infelicitous.

Belief analysis	(36) $\Rightarrow$ I believe P because R, but I may be wrong.
Knowledge analysis	(36) $\Rightarrow$ I know P because R, but I may be wrong.

Argument 2: Gettier cases. A further difference between belief and knowledge is that knowledge requires a suitable connection between the belief and the believer. Stating what exactly that connection is has been the dream of epistemologists for millennia, but despite the challenge, we have some clear cases where the connection is absent, such as Gettier cases.

Here is an example from the eighth-century Indian philosopher Dharmottara, discussed by Stoltz (2007).

> There is a fire on which meat is being cooked. While the fire has not produced any smoke, the cooking meat has enticed a large number of flies to swarm above the fire. Some person, looking at this scene from a distance, but without perceiving the fire, glimpses the swarm of flies and forms the mistaken belief that it is smoke.
>
> (Stoltz 2007:398)

Due to believing that there is smoke, the person comes to believe that there's a fire. But they do not know that there is a fire.

The fire, let's say, is burning on a hill. Suppose that the person who saw the flies has been wandering in the forest, eager to find some food. Because she *believes* that there is a fire on the hill, she starts walking toward it. Consider (37).

(37) Her reason for walking toward the hill is that there's a fire burning there.

This sounds perfectly fine, despite the fact that she does not *know* that there's a fire burning on the hill. As we saw in section 3.2, when a reason is possessed—as it must be to be 'her reason'—the subjective component is obligatory. Thus according to the knowledge analysis, (37) implies that she knows that there is a fire burning there. This is incorrect, so the knowledge analysis predicts (37) to be false.

For a second Gettier case, consider Russell's stopped clock.

> There is the man who looks at a clock which is not going, though he thinks it is, and who happens to look at it at the moment when it is right; this man acquires a true belief as to the time of day, but cannot be said to have knowledge.
>
> (Russell 1948:170)

Suppose that the man was at home when he saw the clock read 12. He remembered that he had to catch a bus at 12:02, and so decided to run to the bus stop.

(38) His reason for running to the bus stop was that he left the house at 12 o'clock.

Again, this sentence is acceptable in this context, even though he does not know—but merely believes—that he left the house at 12 o'clock.

I conclude that Gettier cases provide a second body of evidence that the subjective component of reasons expresses belief rather than knowledge.

3.5 Cases where the Causal Judge is the Speaker

One might argue against the subjective component based on examples where beliefs do not seem to play a role, such as (39).

(39) a. Research points to miscalculation of gusset plate width as the reason the bridge collapsed.
b. The reason the bridge collapsed was the toppling over of the flood barrier due to high-flow.
c. Corrosion or weather conditions could have been part of the reason the bridge collapsed.

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

However, following Charnavel (2019), I propose that the causal judge is variable. In a sentence like (39), involving an inanimate object, the causal judge is the speaker. Such examples are therefore not evidence for the optionality of the subjective component.

Let us now give a stronger argument which seems to suggest that the subjective component is optional.

3.6 The Variable Acceptability of *Reason why* Claims

In section 3.1 above, we saw evidence that reason claims are believe-sensitive; in particular, example (24).

One might propose the following alternative explanation of the contrast between unpossessed reason claims like (24c). Possessed reason claims require the one who has the reason to be the agent of the action. Against this, note that in many cases the one who has the reason can differ from the agent, and the claim is perfectly fine.

(40) a. Would Ayn Rand wear an anti-virus face mask? ... Yes she would and here is my reason why.[N]
b. That's my reason why he is so faithful to God.[N]
c. The following is my reason why he was the best and how he was robbed.[N]

On our analysis, these imply that the one who has the reason—in these examples the speaker—believes the relevant *because* claim; say, that he was the best because of what follows the sentence. This suggests that one can possess a reason even when one is not the agent of the action in question.

3.7 The Ontology of Reasons and Beliefs

While I have added a belief-component to reasons, in this section I would like to point out an interesting difference between reasons and beliefs, concerning their ontology. They appear to differ in what is required for them to exist 'in' a world. For a world to contain a belief, it must contain the believer, whereas for a world to contain a reason, it need not contain a reasoner (or for our purposes, one who believes that the proposition is true because of the reason).

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

Now answer the following two questions about that universe.

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

Here we find an interesting contrast. Intuitively, there are no beliefs in a universe without intelligent life. This contrasts with reasons. Intuitively, there are still

reasons in that universe why things happen. For example, if a star becomes a supernova, there is a reason in that universe why the star became a supernova (say, because the star cooled, its outward pressure decreased, allowing the star's gravity to collapse it, leading to the explosion).

To account for this case on our analysis, we must say that for a reason to exist 'in' a world, the causal judge need not also exist in that world. In these cases, the causal judge is looking from their world with intelligent life, at a world without. In contrast, for a belief to exist 'in' a world, the believer must also exist in that world.

4 Conclusion

This paper presented an analysis of explanatory reasons, the sense in which we say, for example, 'The reason why the chicken crossed the road was that it wanted to get to the other side'. The analysis is that for R to be a reason why P is for P BECAUSE R to be true and for the causal judge to believe this.

I applied the analysis of BECAUSE from McHugh (2023a), which involves three components: sufficiency, difference-making and production. For each component, we saw that reasons behave in the same way as *because* statements. It also accounts for the differences between reasons and causes in cases of non-causal explanation, such as logical or mathematical explanation. To analyse the subjective component I adopted Charnavel's analysis of the causal judge (Charnavel 2019), according to which *because* clauses are interpreted from the perspective of a causal judge.

We saw two pieces of evidence for the subjective component of reasons, in comparison with *cause*, which lacks a subjective component. Firstly, the fact that reasons, unlike causes, can be possessed. This further explains why inanimate objects cannot have reasons, as in (30). Secondly, that reasons are belief-sensitive, as in (24) and (33).

This is just the beginning of a more thorough study on the nature of 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 component of reasons. Across languages, causal words appear to differ in their expression of subjectivity (see Wei et al. 2021, Xiao et al. 2021, Hu, Chen, Li, et al. 2022, Hu, Chen, Quené, et al. 2023, Savinova, Sanders, and Mak 2023 and note 3 above), making this fertile ground for future research. Secondly, one can study whether other causal words within one language, such as English *make* and *let*, might also contribute a subjective component.

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